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### From the Bronx to the Stage: Qurrat Ann Kadwani Tells Us About Her One-Woman Show

September 9, 2013

In many ways, actress Qurrat Ann Kadwani's new one-woman show is a tribute to her hometown, the Bronx.

Kadwani's family moved to the famed borough when she was just a baby. In *They Call Me Q!*, her off-Broadway show, Kadwani plays 13 different characters, each of whom is based on people who inspired her during her childhood. Discussions of identity are also central to the show, as the actress has said that the mispronunciation of a name affects "how we view ourselves and how we feel others view us." The Aerogram met up with Kadwani at one of her recent press days and asked her about her family, influences and, of course, the Bronx.

**Your play features many true stories about your family. Did you have to run the stories by your parents before writing it? How did they feel about the fact that you talk about them and your life?**

You know, they've said that they really love the play, they really enjoy it. I think that my mom — we just did an article for *India Abroad*, so she was telling the journalist there that it was very interesting to her to see what it like for me growing up because she didn't know. And I think she hasn't told me that. And, you know, I think that's the complexity between all of this, is that even to this day there is kind of a cultural gap.

I see my parents in a very specific way. They are my parents and they've raised me well and they've raised me to the best of their ability, in a situation that I can not possibly imagine, to immigrate to a country, so late in life, so to speak, with children. I can't even imagine this at all. It's just not tangible to me at all. So now in the last few years I've come to appreciate what that meant to them, what that must have been like to them. I can only imagine how difficult it was for them to leave. And I say this in my play — they left their family and friends for their children. That's real love right there — to better their lives, to better their children's lives, to give us opportunities that we may not have had there.

**That's great. And, you take a lot of pride in being from the Bronx, a place that's really stereotyped. If somebody who's never heard of the Bronx goes to see your show, what do you want them to think of your home town?**

Everybody's heard of the Bronx! I want to stress that because no matter where I go, when I say the line, "We moved to the Bronx" everybody knows exactly

what I mean. Everybody has a connotation associated with the Bronx. And that could mean South Bronx, to, like, gangs, to thug life. But when you say “the Bronx” everybody feels like it’s a dangerous place, immediately, that it must have been rough. That it’s unsafe.

And I don’t sugarcoat this in my play. I show the Bronx as being like a tough friend, you know — that friend who hates you one second and loves you the next. Because I had a lot of experiences of bullying from kids, from teachers all through growing up. But at the end of the day, I own that, by saying it gave me a thick skin. It made me who I am. I don’t put up with anything. I can see people play games from a mile away, and that is because I grew up in the Bronx. I may not have had that if I grew up in the suburbs.

**One of the people you mentioned was an influence is the actor John Leguizamo, who grew up in Queens and had very similar experiences. Can you talk about his influence? What other people have influenced you?**

John Leguizamo is so influential because he is, he’s written so many solo plays first and foremost, and he has that vulnerability on stage. He puts his life out there for the audience, and he shows you the good and the bad, and how he adjusted to it, and, you know, how he is as a person today.

Sara Jones is another solo performer that I just love so much because she inhabits the people that she plays on stage. She can play a Russian mother to a Pakistani cab driver. She can play any character, to a Mexican, to an Asian. Her technique is spot on and I feel like she truly studies.

I mean, one of the greats in solo performance is, of course, Anna Deavere Smith. And her technique is so amazing. She interviews people. She researches and watches, she records their thoughts and then when she goes to portray them she mimics their facial expressions, their hand gestures. It takes her years to work on a play. So these are all things that I just revel in and I look up to them as artists and creators of truly magical, beautiful pieces.

**Have you ever thought about taking this play to India? You were born in India, right?**

Yes, in Mumbai. Of course I would love to bring it to Mumbai. I think that that’s always a question that people ask, it’s like, and one that I ask myself. How would Indians in India view this play? How would their experience to it differ from Indians in America, or just Americans in general? Because truly the play comes from a very American standpoint. I mean, we’re talking about growing up in the Bronx and what it means to not fit in. And would Indians in India relate to this? Would they...And I don’t want to be stereotypical in even making that statement, you know. I know many people in India who are very, obviously educated and they know exactly what’s going on. They have more technology than us.

So I would love to perform there and see what their perspective would be on it.

*After a sold out run at the FringeNYC Festival, They Call Me Q is playing this Friday Sept 13 at 7pm and Saturday, Sept 14 at 1pm. You can [purchase tickets here](#).*

*This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.*

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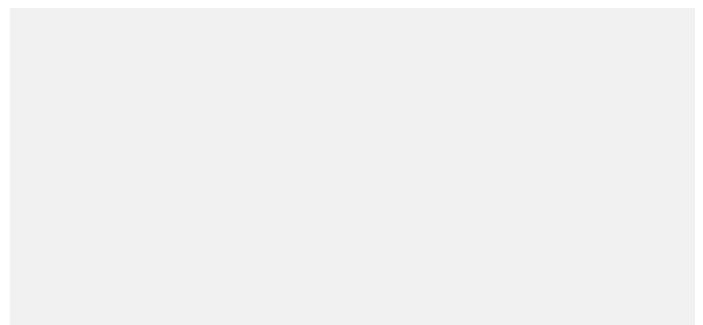
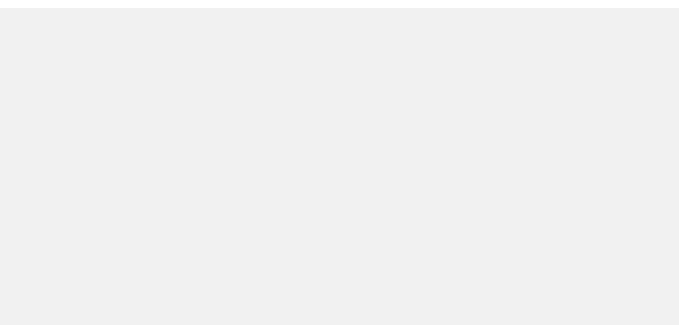
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