Double Edge Theatre’s “Shahrazad, a tale of love and magic,” features exotic beauty, poetry, mystery, and romance set against the sunset in the rolling hills of rural Ashfield.

Hard to imagine that creator Stacy Klein was thinking, in part, of the US Congress.

To Klein, the founder and artistic director of Double Edge, the master storyteller of the “Arabian Nights” represented a voice we need more of in today’s world: “We were looking at Shahrazad’s ability, through her imagination and her growing love of the king, [to] change him and his outlook. It’s like, we have to come up with different answers, and use our creativity that we’re not using as much as one would hope, to address the problems that exist.

“I think theater and art can do anything, and I think it’s really important that we realize now that we really need to tap those resources. I think there’s a lot of fixed answers, from our Congress to the whole world situation, where it’s just a ‘yes or no’ or fight. It’s about stubbornness, and there’s no dialogue, there’s no creative thinking that ‘Oh, maybe we can get together on this.’”
Founded in 1982, Double Edge offers training throughout the year as well as indoor performances in a converted barn at its 100-acre headquarters known as the Farm. But the company is perhaps best known for its “summer spectacles,” which take full advantage of the property with epic productions that the audience follows from place to place on foot. These have ranged from “The Three Musketeers” in 2006 to “The Odyssey” in 2011 and 2012. This year’s installment moves around from garden to stream to indoor theater to pond. It interweaves four different stories from the “Arabian Nights” as well as poetry from Rumi and Middle Eastern folk songs.

“There is a genie, and he is very magical,” Klein says. “He appears in the air, and he dives into the sea, and he stands at the edge of a rooftop. He does things that you and I would not be able to do. Not giving any secrets away here.”

The show, which has been running since July 24, is heading into its final weekend. How’s the summer weather been for this mostly outdoor production? “We had two totally surprise rains, and we were really bummed out about it, it wasn’t on the radar and we took all of our tarps off, and the seats got all wet and everything,” she says. But the show eventually went on. “The audience loved it, and I was like, after that I don’t care what happens, we can deal with it. It does make people realize it’s actually real, it’s not some fabrication, this is a walk-around real place with real elements, it’s not in a box.”

A couple of months ago, Klein was named a recipient of the 2013 Performing Artist Award from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, which includes a $225,000 grant
and a variety of professional development programs.

“It’s great so far,” Klein says. “I haven’t gotten it [yet]. But I have enjoyed the idea of it.”

Representatives of the Duke foundation came to a performance a couple of weeks ago, she said. Among other things she is hoping to use the award to take “Shahrazad” on tour, beginning in fall 2014.

For now, company member Amanda Miller is just happy to be in Ashfield.

“There’s plenty of magic in this place,” says Miller, 28, who first came to the Farm for a fall internship a couple of years ago. Then a sort of theater “hobbyist” in southern Indiana, where she grew up, she came back this summer for a full immersion.

“I am the princess in the ‘Ebony Horse’ story, and as the princess there’s a lot of ladders. I’m in a lot of high places, balconies and towers and things, because the magician kidnaps me and the prince has to come and save me,” Miller says, giggling. “But being locked in a tower, there’s quite a lot of singing I can do.”

Performing in the troupe is only part of it, she says: “I work on costume construction and some design. And at my parents’ house, we have a lot of animals, so I work with the animals on the Farm, and I also help out with the marketing department and their website things or T-shirts or whatever they need to do to get the word out.”

There are a lot of moving parts.

“It’s difficult and challenging in all the right ways,” Klein says. “I don’t think we should compromise on any difficulties. For our audience, we should go as far as we can and stretch ourselves as much as we can and fully embrace our imagination, which is what this project is.”
VONNEGUT GOES NUCLEAR

Get ready to carry a protest sign and laugh uneasily at our dystopian plight. Wellfleet playwright Kevin Rice invokes the spirit of the late Kurt Vonnegut and the specter of human annihilation in “(Enter Kurt Vonnegut),” having its world premiere at the Payomet Performing Arts Center in North Truro, where Rice is managing artistic director, through Aug. 27.

Rice connects trouble at the Pilgrim nuclear power plant in Plymouth to Vonnegut’s vision of the firebombing of Dresden, in a play he calls darkly comic. It’s the story of Barnstable single mom Joanna Phillips, her sons Will (a Pilgrim plant publicist) and Tommy (a Hyannis car salesman), and how they react to a potential meltdown in Plymouth. Years ago, Joanna may or may not have had a one-night stand with Vonnegut (1922-2007), himself once a Cape Cod car salesman, and things get weird when the writer turns up accompanied by sidekick Kilgore Trout.

Rice’s “Oblomov” had its American premiere last year at Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater. He says audience participation will be encouraged each night when “(Enter Kurt Vonnegut)” opens with a protest scene set at the gates of the Pilgrim plant, much like a real one he participated in in May. Theater staff will even hand out picket signs. Caitlin Langstaff directs a cast that includes WHAT executive director Jeffry George as Vonnegut.

Tickets, $18-$36, at 508-487-5400 or www.payomet.org.

‘CRUCIBLE’ AND MORE AT SALEM

Salem Theatre Company artistic director John Fogle promises “human trials, aspirations, and idiocy” in the three dramas and two comedies that will make up the

The company then celebrates the holidays with the “Greater Tuna” sequel “A Tuna Christmas” by Ed Howard, Joe Sears, and Jaston Williams (Nov. 29-Dec. 21). That will be followed in 2014 by: “The Elephant Man” by Bernard Pomerance (Jan. 23-Feb. 15); “Heroes,” adapted by Tom Stoppard from the French play “Le Vent de Peupliers” by Gerald Sibleyras (March 20-April 12); and the comedy “Shirley Valentine,” by Willy Russell (May 8-31).

Ticket for the company’s fourth full season at the STCTheater, 90 Lafayette St., Salem, are $25, although various discounts including multi-play passes are available. Tickets at 866-811-4111 or www.salemtheatre.com.

Joel Brown can be reached at jbnbpt@gmail.com.