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BWW Reviews: Qurrat Ann Kadwani's THEY CALL ME Q at Capital Fringe is One to Remember

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by Jennifer Perry

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Let's face it. As many have pointed out, solo shows are a dime-a-dozen in most Fringe festivals and this year's Capital Fringe is certainly no exception. More often than not it's a performer sharing a personal story and, from there, the audience can (in the best cases) be entertained while potentially extrapolating lessons or ideas that apply to their own lives. Putting on a solo show can be the recipe for disaster (in the worst case) or more commonly a recipe for a mildly entertaining and somewhat thought-provoking evening. In some rare cases, a decision to share tales of one's past

can give the audience a theatrical experience that it will remember far after the last bow. Qurrat Ann Kadwani's solo piece *They Call Me Q* (with direction from **Obaid Kadwani** and Claudia Gasper and developed with Ellery Schaar) is one of those shows.

At first look, Kadwani's story is one that we've probably heard before in one form or another. Young girl moves to America (in this case the Bronx) from the developing world (in this case India) with her parents because they want her to have every educational and life opportunity possible. A classic immigrant tale is probably going to unfold, right? At this point in the proceedings, one might think what will follow is a chronologically organized tale of Qurrat's life from the time she moved to NY to now, as she is in her late 20s. Yet really it's more sophisticated than that.

Kadwani grapples with a complex question. How does one, especially in a city as culturally diverse as New York City, come to terms with multiple cultural influences and create a persona that's uniquely her? What's her identity and who should she strive to be? Indian? Muslim? Female? American? New Yorker? A 'tough' (or not-so-tough) girl from the Bronx who grew up among African Americans and Latinos? A girl with a hard-to-pronounce name? A driven perfectionist who was on her high school speech and debate team? A college graduate? A creative artist? Sister? Daughter? Friend? All of these things?

"Q" is a personal look at the experiences that have shaped who Qurrat has become and who she's striving to be that simultaneously and expertly addresses the complexities inherent to defining identity in our contemporary, messy world. As she takes on the role of younger Qurrat, present-day Qurrat, her parents, her brother, a teacher, local and international friends (16 characters in total) - all while displaying an undeniable talent for different accents, postures, and the like - we get a glimpse at not only her life, but in reality the melting pot that is this country, particularly in urban areas. Whether we are immigrants or not, it's highly likely that we all can all relate the notion that 'who we are' can't really be captured in a sound bite and that identity is largely contextually-based.

In each scene, Q captures the ordinary - going to school and dealing with bullies and wanting what a classmate might have, dealing with family pressure, learning to cook, going to a club, choosing a path in life (Career? Marriage? Both?) - to the less ordinary (a potentially perspective changing trip to India, the death of a friend to name a few). Though the range of situations she seeks to explore is wide - and a less accomplished writer and actor might not necessarily be able to relate them to one another and allow them to flow seamlessly one to another - Kadwani is exceedingly successful at weaving together a tale with a point, drawing the audience in as part of the conversation, and ultimately winning it over with charm and wit.

Although it's impossible to pinpoint the moments in the show that work the best - they all work really, really well - there are two moments that stood out as ones I will remember (and ones you should watch out for when you catch Qurrat at her next engagement). She perfectly captures the sights and sounds of New York nightlife in a vignette about going to a club as a teenager for the first time with a much more experienced NYC friend, Beenie. Her excitement and enthusiasm and hope over this new experience were palpable only for it to be seemingly destroyed a short time later when she realizes really how fleeting and ever-changing life is. Later on, Qurrat explores the sights,

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smells, and sounds of India when she returns there briefly for a trip as a young adult. Her rich, astute and culturally perceptive observations about 'otherness' and grappling with society-specific values and norms are a treat to hear for any social science geek like myself, but they're also delivered not to simply demonstrate Qurrat's obvious intellect, but ground her relatable experience.

If you have a chance to see this one, go...you won't be disappointed.

Running Time: 60 Minutes.

They Call Me Q played its final performance in the Capital Fringe Festival on July 21, 2013. For future performances - including upcoming ones in the NYC Fringe - visit the [artist's website](#).

Photo/Show Graphic: Courtesy of Artist/Capitalfringe.Org

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Jennifer Perry is the Senior Contributing Writer for BroadwayWorld.Com's DC page. She has been a DC resident since 2001 having moved from Upstate New York to attend graduate school at American University's School of International Service. When not attending countless theatre, concert, and cabaret performances in the area and in New York, she works for the US Government as an analyst. Jennifer previously covered the DC performing arts scene for Maryland Theatre Guide, DC Metro Theater Arts, and DC Theatre Scene.

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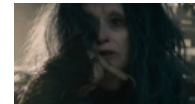
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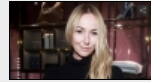
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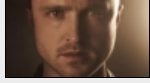
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