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CULTURE Theater

THEATER REVIEW My Name Is Inanna

by **Mary Shen Barnidge**
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Maryam Abdi in My Name Is Inanna. Photo by Anna Gelman

Title: My Name Is Inanna. Playwright: Ezzat Goushegir

At: Red Tape Theatre at The Ready, 4546 N. Western Ave. Tickets: Free; http://RedTapeTheatre.org. Runs through: Dec. 11

Given the propensity of pre-Christian deities to behave as inconstantly as the natural world they explicated, it should come as no surprise that Inanna— one of the oldest in the divine pantheon, the arbiter of love AND war—emerges a goddess of many names, ancestors and contradictions. She is also the protector most frequently invoked by Muslim women—along with Dumuzi, her husband/lover/life partner (depending on the

translation) and Ereshkigal, her beloved sister now dwelling with the dead in the Underworld—to ennoble their suffering in times of adversity.

Among her namesakes in playwright Ezzat Goushegir's gallery of avatars are a prisoner in Iran, arrested for participating in a peace protest, and another detained in a North American jail after being targeted by DHS during an anti-war demonstration. Other present-day incarnations of Inanna include a lovesick teenager executed by vigilantes for the crime of flirting across tribal boundaries; an immigrant single mother employed as a department-store cosmetician chafing under the stress of sales deadlines; and a guerilla-theater actress who portrays Euripedes' Medea as a restaurant worker from Fallujah harassed by her boss. Dumuzi and Ereshkigal also appear in various earthly guises.

Goushegir freely admits to drawing on a number of sources in the compilation of her narrative's episodic content, so any confusion engendered by the nebulous progress of its heroine—who might be a solitary pilgrim on an individual journey, or a time-transcending global Everywoman—may be intentional. When a region's history is that of continuous strife (in one scene, a widow declares that her husband died in the war, only to have her interrogator reply "Which war?"), don't they eventually become simply ONE endless war? When a woman is repeatedly bullied by men, what does it matter who or where the deed occurs?

Playgoers viewing the dramatic action through a lens of international politics may busy themselves with identifying specific eras and locales referenced therein, as those of literary bent may ponder the author's extensive quoting of Jalal ad-Din Mohammad Rumi (the chief chronicler—and most erotic interpreter—of the Inanna myth). These are activities for later pursuit, however, since the experience dominating the minutes spent in the intimate confines of Red Tape Theatre's storefront stage is that of engagement generated by a multimedia collage of instrumental and vocal music, ethnic dance, spoken-word poetry, pre-recorded documentary footage and ingenious real-time hand-held video feed—all culminating in kaleidoscopic spectacle celebrating the eternal Inanna and showcasing the talents of the four-person ensemble led by Maryam Abdi.