

ARTS

THEATER NOTEBOOK

'No Way Back' hits home

Story of escape from Middle East mirrors family history for star Jessica John; plus other theater news from around town

BY PAM KRAGEN

San Diego actor Jessica John swore she would never star in a one-woman show. Then she read the script for "No Way Back," which The Roustabouts Theatre Co. opened Saturday in a world-premiere filmed production.

The solo play by Mahshid Fashandi Hager is based on the true story of her family's desperate escape from Iran in the early 1980s when she was a young girl. Today, Hager is a marriage and family therapist in Rancho Bernardo who specializes in treating survivors of trauma. She began writing as a way to process her own trauma associated with her immigration experience.

John said that the script resonated with her deeply because it depicts an escape very similar to one that her family undertook to flee the Middle East many years ago. John's Assyrian grandmother, Hannah Hermiz, fled the Middle East when she was a young girl. She escaped, but her mother, brother and 21 of her relatives died in their efforts to reach the United States.

In recent years, the immigrant journey to America has become mired in politics, prejudice and misconceptions. John hopes this play offers viewers a way to understand the sacrifices immigrants make to come here.

"Out in the ether, there are preconceptions that immigrants come here poor and uneducated, struggling to find a better life," John said in an email. "But both Mashid's family and my own had been wealthy, educated and happy in their own countries. They had lived with wealth and joy until they literally had to flee for their survival."

"Once in America, my grandmother never got a job better than serving kids their lunches in a school cafeteria. Her challenge with the language and thick accent kept her at a disadvantage, and an arranged marriage with my Assyrian grandfather, who was much older, ultimately left her a single mother of five children when he passed. Despite that, she was grateful, grateful, grateful to this country and flew the American flag proudly," John said.

The film was directed by John's husband and actor/director, Fran Gercke, with scenery by Tony Cucuzzella and lighting by Joel Britt. It will be available for streaming (along with Roustabout's extended production of "Roosevelt: Charge the Bear") through Dec. 13. Tickets are \$25 at theroustabouts.org/nowayback.



Jessica John stars in The Roustabouts Theatre Co.'s world-premiere filmed production of "No Way Back," which began streaming Saturday.

DAREN SCOTT

'Unveiled' plays through today

San Diego Repertory Theatre will present the final performance today of a filmed production of Chicago playwright Rohina Malik in her solo play "Unveiled," about the racism and misunderstandings five Muslim women around the world face because they wear the hijab.

The play will be streamed at 2 p.m. today and followed by a live talk-back. Tickets are \$15 at sdrep.org.

Diversions Theatre premieres 'Clarkston'

Diversions Theatre has opened "Clarkston," the second half of its companion audio play series "Lewiston/Clarkston."

Being presented as part of the theater's fall AmeriQueer theater series, Samuel D. Hunter's two plays focus on two modern-day descendants of the

19th-century exploration team of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. One is set in Clarkston, Wash., and the other takes place in adjacent Lewiston, Idaho. Through the descendants' experiences, the plays explore how these former great American frontier towns now struggle with addiction and poverty.



COURTESY PHOTO

Actor-singer Tovah Feldshuh (above) and singer-songwriter Rebecca Jade will perform at the 19th annual Klezmer Summit.

"Lewiston" is no longer playing, but a free audio download of "Clarkston" is available through Nov. 26 at diversionary.org.

San Diego Rep's Klezmer Summit returns

San Diego Repertory is presenting its 19th annual Klezmer Summit this year as a streamed online concert at 7 p.m. Nov. 19. "Jews, Jazz and Justice" will star Yale Strom & Hot Pstromi and will feature Emmy-winning actor/singer Tovah Feldshuh, who will honor the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and singer/songwriter Rebecca Jade, the San Diego Music Awards' 2020 Artist of the Year. Tickets are \$18 and can be purchased at sdrep.org.

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COURTESY PHOTO

POEMS

GO BACK

By Leslie Hodge

Go back to your basement, Joe.
We need you safe and sound.
Coronavirus, Qanon —
the dangers still abound.

Stay safe in the basement, Joe.
Be the Trump-contrarian.
For all your jauntiness, you are
a near-octo-genarian.

Rest now in your basement, Joe,
and wear the gosh-darn mask.
Building us back better
is a daunting task.

So revel in the basement, Joe.
You are an inspiration.
Ignore the Tweets and rest assured
you're loved by half the nation.



GETTY IMAGES

Leslie Hodge is a writer and retired IT manager from Carmel Valley

HINDSIGHT AND FORESIGHT

By Susan J. Farese

No more suspended animation
Now it's time for some elation!

The people made their selections
And now the winner won the election!

Covid, race riots, fires galore
Say farewell to 2020
Leave through the revolving door

Bring the new team inside
Start anew beam with pride

Now's the time for breaths and healing
No more classless wheeling and dealing

One more thought I will release
My yearning for a world of peace!

Susan J. Farese, MSN, RN, veteran, writer/poet and educator, Carmel Valley