

Sheila Carrasco explores female identity in 'Anyone but Me'



Stage Page

By Shari Barrett

As a fellow Westsider, I decided to speak with Santa Monica resident Sheila Carrasco about her new solo show **ANYONE BUT ME**, filmed at the Pico Playhouse in West L.A. to be presented virtually March 21 through April 18.

First, I asked her to tell me a little about it. "My play is about women who struggle with self-identity, and why we create certain personas in order to get by, to survive, or even just to impress someone. In it, I play a variety of original characters - a grocery cashier, an executive, a

receptionist, a teenager, a performance artist, a cult leader, and a mom - to explore what they have in common; which is the desire to be someone they're not. Literally wanting to be 'Anyone but Me.'"

When asked about her connection to the characters, Sheila responded, "Most of the characters are inspired by someone I know. But there's definitely a little of me in each of them, and in some cases a lot of me. I had fun exploring their flaws and idiosyncrasies, but also how I can completely relate to them.

She continued, saying "I think most women, at some point in our lives, tend to wrap our identities around a single dominant aspect, be it a relationship, our job or work ethic, our perception of ourselves as artists, or even whoever we are hanging out with that day.

"This play is about accepting the nuance of everything that makes us who we are, and ultimately realizing we don't have to be just one thing and certainly don't have to be someone we are not."

When asked about how her bi-racial background contribute to the essence of the play, she said, "As a kid growing up on the South side of Chicago, I was one of only two Latinx kids in my private school, which made me feel isolated from anyone other than my family members. I'm the child of an immigrant who literally was born on a dirt

floor in a remote indigenous region of South America, and I'm also the child of a white working-class, Southern woman.

"I am many things, but at times I have felt as though I had to change or simplify my identity so that I could be more of a singular "type", especially in Hollywood where there's definitely pressure for white-passing artists to "accentuate" their diversity at a time when it feels very wrong to take space from BIPOC artists. 'Anyone but Me' very much addresses the challenges I've faced regarding my own identity. And I hope that while watching the show, the audience can at some point relate to at least one of the characters and find connection with me."

I asked Sheila about how her sketch comedy and character work contributed to the creation of the play. "When I thought

about doing a solo show, my first impulse was to just do a bunch of my best characters that may or may not have anything to do with me. And then I thought, why is my default always to hide behind wigs and characters? And why on Earth would I think a solo show didn't need to get personal?? So, this show is my way of using my favorite medium - characters - to explore all the different sides of myself and other women I've known that are deluded or insecure, or just plain awful and in denial. The real challenge is for me to make it fun while being vulnerable enough to explore the truth."

The other play streaming with yours is 'The Oxy Complex,' written and performed by Anna LaMadrid, which is a dark comedy set on the 500th day of quarantine, exploring love, sex, loneliness, trauma, and the hormone that affects it all - Oxytocin, also known as "the cuddle" or "love" hormone. Do you consider it a companion piece? Sheila surprised me when she said, "I actually don't know at all, because neither of us has any idea what the other wrote! Anna and I created our own shows completely independently and IAMA decided to put them in rep, so I really have no idea what they have in common other than exploring female identity."

I hope readers of my column, especially those struggling with their own identity during these trying times, will tune in for both shows, written and performed by two funny Latinx-American women, being presented by IAMA Theatre Company: 'Anyone but Me,' written and performed by Sheila Carrasco, directed by Margaux Susi; and 'The Oxy Complex,' written and performed by Anna LaMadrid, directed by Michelle Bossy.

While following strict COVID-19 guidelines, both were filmed live at West L.A.'s Pico Playhouse and will premiere virtually on March 21 at www.iamatheatre.com, where both will continue streaming through April 18. Tickets are \$15 for a single show or \$20 for both if purchased in a single transaction.



Photo by Shay Yamashita/TAKE Creative