

MAHABHARATA

whynot

SHAW 20
FESTIVAL 23



2023 Ensemble

AS OF JANUARY 2023

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*You see things; and you say
“Why?” But I dream things
that never were and I say
“Why Not?”*

BERNARD SHAW, *THE SERPENT,
IN BACK TO METHUSELAH*

THE PREMIERE OF WHY NOT'S PRODUCTION OF *MAHABHARATA* is the end of one journey and the beginning of another. The first journey began as soon as I took up the position of Artistic Director at The Shaw. One of the first people I called was Ravi Jain. It turned out, serendipitously, that both of us had already had the idea that it would be wonderful (and daunting) to try to stage a new version of the *Mahabharata*. We also agreed that it should be made by artists of the South Asian diaspora.

The road from there to here has been anything but easy. For a piece like this, which features an international cast, COVID was about the worst thing that could happen. But we made it. And now the second journey begins: after it plays here, *Mahabharata* will embark on a world tour which I am sure will bring its creators the praise and credit they deserve. They are a remarkable team, and I am proud that we are hosting this once-in-a-lifetime project.

TIM CARROLL, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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FOR FIRST AID please see the House Manager or the nearest usher. At least one staff member on duty is trained in First Aid and CPR.

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A LASTING IMPACT

Thank you, Leo!

"The Shaw was a major part of our theatre experience for me and my late partner, Denny. I fondly reflect on our many lively discussions after every performance.

It became obvious to Denny and me, that we wanted to leave a legacy to ensure that The Shaw will continue to encourage such conversations and provide inspiration - something that is so needed in our world. Thank you, Shaw Festival."

- Leo Maloney



Patrick Galligan, Leo Maloney and Kimberley Rampersad. Photo by David Cooper.

To find out more about becoming a part of The Doherty-Rand Legacy Circle, contact Kim White at kwhite@shawfest.com or call 289-783-1924.



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**SHAW 20
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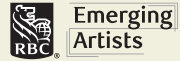
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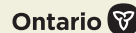
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A SCENE FROM *DHARMA*, WITH
HARMAGE SINGH KALIRAI AS
DHITARASHTRA.



FESTIVAL THEATRE, FEBRUARY 28 TO MARCH 26

SHAW 20 FESTIVAL 23

TIM CARROLL TIM JENNINGS
Artistic Director Executive Director

KIMBERLEY RAMPERSAD, Associate Artistic Director

MAHABHARATA

written and adapted by

RAVI JAIN and MIRIAM FERNANDES

using poetry from Carole Satyamurti's *Mahabharata: A Modern Retelling*
original concept developed with Jenny Koons

a Why Not Theatre Production

in association with Barbican, London, commissioned and presented by the Shaw Festival

with SHAWN AHMED, NEIL D'SOUZA, JAY EMMANUEL,
MIRIAM FERNANDES, VARUN GURU, KARTHIK KADAM,
HARMAGE SINGH KALIRAI, DARREN KUPPAN,
ANAKA MAHARAJ-SANDHU, GOLDY NOTAY, ELLORA PATNAIK,
MEHER PAVRI, ANAND RAJARAM, SAKUNTALA RAMANEE,
RONICA SAJNANI, ISHAN SANDHU, NAVTEJ SANDHU,
MUNISH SHARMA and SUKANIA VENUGOPAL

Directed by RAVI JAIN

with associate director MIRIAM FERNANDES

Set designed by LORENZO SAVOINI

Costumes designed by GILLIAN GALLOW

Lighting designed by KEVIN LAMOTTE

Projections designed by HANA S. KIM

with associate projections designer ANN SLOTE

Original music and sound designed by
JOHN GZOWSKI and SUBA SANKARAN

Traditional Music Consultant HASHEEL LODHIA

Choreographed by BRANDY LEARY

Khana storyteller and artistic associate SHARADA K ESWAR

Mahabharata Production Manager CRYSTAL LEE

Mahabharata Lead Producer KEVIN MATTHEW WONG

The videotaping or other video or audio recording of this production is strictly prohibited.

Mahabharata is generously sponsored, for The Shaw, by

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MIRIAM FERNANDES
AS THE STORYTELLER.



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The Cast

IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Yudhishtira / Shantanu | SHAWN AHMED |
| Krishna | NEIL D'SOUZA |
| Shiva / Amba / Drupada / Pandu | JAY EMMANUEL |
| Storyteller / Astika | MIRIAM FERNANDES |
| Understudy | VARUN GURU |
| Understudy | KARTHIK KADAM |
| Dhritarashtra | HARMAGE SINGH KALIRAI |
| Duryodhana | DARREN KUPPAN |
| Arjuna | ANAKA MAHARAJ-SANDHU |
| Gandhari / Draupadi | GOLDY NOTAY |
| Kunti / Drona | ELLORA PATNAIK |
| Opera Singer | MEHER PAVRI |
| Krishna Understudy | ANAND RAJARAM |
| Shakuni / Sanjaya | SAKUNTALA RAMANEE |
| Understudy | RONICA SAJNANI |
| Understudy | ISHAN SANDHU |
| Karna / Satyawati | NAVTEJ SANDHU |
| Bhima | MUNISH SHARMA |
| Bhishma | SUKANIA VENUGOPAL |
| Conductor / Guitar | JOHN GZOWSKI |
| Band Leader / Voice | SUBA SANKARAN |
| Bass / Keyboard / Music Contributions | DYLAN BELL |
| Percussion / Music Contributions | GURTEJ SINGH HUNJAN |
| Bansuri / Voice / Music Contributions | HASHEEL LODHIA |
| Tabla / Music Contributions | ZAHEER-ABBAS JANMOHAMED |
| Production Stage Manager | ALLAN TEICHMAN |
| Stage Manager | NEHA ROSS |
| Assistant Stage Managers | ASHLEY IRELAND, TAMARA PROTIĆ |
| Assistant Set and Costume Designer | ROSE TAVORMINA |
| Costume Consultation | SARENA PARMAR, JAY EMMANUEL, BRANDY LEARY |
| Associate Lighting Designer | MIKAEL KANGAS |
| Assistant Projections Designer | CAMERON FRASER |
| Video Engineers | DANIEL CARR, MATTHEW MELLINGER |
| Technical Director, Video | DANIEL BENNETT |
| Assistant Sound Designer | OLIVIA WHEELER |
| Opera Translation / Text Adaptation | SHARADA K ESWAR |



DARREN KUPPAN AS DURYODHANA, NAVTEJ SANDHU AS KARNA, SAKUNTALA RAMANEE AS SHAKUNI, HARMAGE SINGH KALIRAI AS DHRITARASHTRA, SUKANIA VENUGOPAL AS BHISHMA AND SHAWN AHMED AS YUDHISHTHIRA; NAVTEJ SANDHU AS KARNA AND NEIL D'SOUZA AS THE MASTER.

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| Opera Guest Recording Artist (mrdangam) | TRICHY SANKARAN |
| Kathakali Contributions | JAY EMMANUEL |
| Odissi Contributions | ELLORA PATNAIK |
| Dance Captain | JAY EMMANUEL |
| Fight Director | JOHN STEAD |
| Fight Captain | MUNISH SHARMA |
| Producer | MICHELLE YAGI |
| Assistant Producer / Company Manager | MATT EGER |
| Associate Production Manager | MAYA ROYER |
| Assistant Production Manager | JACOB DANSON-FARADAY |
| Why Not Theatre Executive Director | KAREN TISCH |

MAHABHARATA: KARMA (Part 1) The Life We Inherit

Running time is approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes with one intermission

KHANA COMMUNITY MEAL

served in the Jackie Maxwell Studio Theatre
between performances on two-show days

Running time is approximately 1 hour and 10 minutes

MAHABHARATA: DHARMA (Part 2) The Life We Choose

includes the *Bhagavad Gita* Opera

Running time is approximately 2 hours and 25 minutes with one intermission

whynot

WHY NOT THEATRE OFFERS SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Camellia Koo, Development Set and Costume Designer; Anita Rochon, Development Dramaturg; Leigh McClymont and Christopher Brackett, Development Stage Management; Michel Lestrehan, Kathakali Consultant to Jay Emmanuel; Praneet Akilla, Tanveer Alam, Nadine Bhabha, Sehar Bhojani, Adolyn H. Dar, Nithya Garg, Ed Hanley, Shaheen (Nushi) Khan, Michelle Mohammed, Harikrishnan S. Nair, Nadeem Philip, Puja Uppal, Divya Sarma, Suchiththa Wickremesooriya, Development Performing Artists; Kendra Bator, Consulting Producer

Mahabharata includes text from Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya, An Illustrated Retelling Of The Mahabharata*, published by Penguin Random House, India.

The assistantship of Jacob Danson-Faraday is supported by the CIRTC/ICTS In-House Assistantship Program, made possible in part by the Government of Canada through Canadian Heritage's Performing Arts Workers Resilience Fund.



Director's Note

BY RAVI JAIN

Mahabharata was a story that played in the background of my childhood. I caught glimpses of it through a popular television series, a set of comic books, and in the paintings and sculptures of ancient temples I'd visited in India. The characters infiltrated my imagination, but I never really knew the story – only pieces, episodes, the television theme song.

I also knew *Mahabharata* through different styles of traditional dance. I watched numerous friends' "dance graduations" where nine of ten dances would inevitably be stories from *Mahabharata*. For thousands of years, it has been told over and over, in many different ways. How could we tell *Mahabharata* today and have its messages resonate with modern audiences?

Our team felt that exploring how this story has been told over the centuries was just as important as the story's plot. Our telling blends traditional and modern, east and west, and includes various forms of Indian dance, storytelling, live music and even a Sanskrit opera! We've also tried to mimic many peoples' real-life experience – receiving these stories, through an interpretation and lesson, over a meal. Each of these forms of storytelling help to unlock *Mahabharata's* meanings – they help us reach beyond words and narrative to access its spiritual and philosophical underpinnings.

It's rare to experience *Mahabharata* from beginning to end in one day. It needs time. It requires perspective. Its stories stay with you – their contradictions become the subject of conversations and debates, and as we age those meanings change.

Miriam and I have sat with this story for eight years. A lot has happened since we began. The best advice I can give to you is a line from our play's Storyteller: "Don't be confused by plots. Within the river of stories flows infinite wisdom. That is your true inheritance."



OPPOSITE: THE ENSEMBLE IN A SCENE FROM KARMA; SAKUNTALA RAMANEE AS SHAKUNI, HARMAGE SINGH KALIRAI AS DHRITARASHTRA AND GOLDY NOTAY AS GANDHARI.

ELLORA PATNAIK AS KUNTI AND GOLDY NOTAY AS GANDHARI; NEIL D'SOUZA AS KRISHNA AND ANAKA MAHARAJ-SANDHU AS ARJUNA; MUNISH SHARMA AS BHIMA.



SHIVA BESTOWING A GIFT, DETAIL FROM A CARVING DEPICTING ARJUNA'S PENANCE FROM THE MAHABHARATA, PALLAVA DYNASTY, MAHABALIPURUM, TAMIL NADU, SEVENTH CENTURY AD; BATTLE OF GANGA AND JAMUNA FROM A SERIES OF PAINTINGS BASED ON THE MAHABHARATA, 1972, OIL ON CANVAS, BY MAQBOOL FIDA HUSAIN (BOTH BRIDGEMAN IMAGES).

The Mahabharata

BY SHARADA K ESWAR

Most Indians believe that one should not read the *Mahabharata* inside one's house, for reading it invites strife. This belief is a kind of 'imitative magic': the ability of stories, symbols and rituals to influence the surroundings.

Mahabharata is the story of a family feud that ultimately leads to division of property and a terrible war, whereas the other great epic, the *Ramayana*, narrates the tale of a family that struggles, and triumphs, over forces that seek to divide it. Naturally, a traditional Indian family terrified of any disruption of the family fabric prefers *Ramayana* over the *Mahabharata*.

Any study of the *Mahabharata* necessitates a reading of the *Ramayana*. The epics are two sides of the same coin. In one, the *Ramayana*, God is the rule-keeper. In the other, the *Mahabharata*, he is the rule-maker. In the one, he is king. In the other, he is kingmaker. In one, he is predictable and dependable. In the other, he is manipulative and mercurial. Yet both are concerned about Dharma. What is Dharma?

In the *Mahabharata* Bhishma tells a story to the Pandavas about King Nriga, who was cursed to be a lizard. Nriga was known for donating cows to the sages of his kingdom. One of the donated cows slipped out of her master's cowshed and returned to the royal cowshed. Since the royal cowshed had thousands of cows, none of the royal servants noticed her return. Nriga then gave the same cow to another sage. When this sage was returning to his hermitage with Nriga's gift, the first sage recognized his cow, claimed ownership over her, and accused the second sage of theft. When the second sage clarified that he had received it from Nriga himself, the first sage accused the king of theft.

"That cow was given to me. She is mine. Not the king's. How then can the king gift her to another? This means the king stole my cow." Nriga apologized to the first sage and offered to compensate him with a hundred cows. The sage refused. He wanted his cow back. Nriga then went to the second sage who refused

to return his gift. For this act of hurting his subjects, albeit unintentionally, Nriga was cursed to turn into a lizard, a punishment he accepted with grace.

A king is responsible for the happiness of his subjects. He is responsible for all the hurt he causes them, even without meaning to. We live in times where politicians talk of Dharma but refuse to take responsibility for failures of their own governance.

So what is Dharma? It is often translated to mean duty or righteous conduct. But at a fundamental level, Dharma is what distinguishes man from animals; it is what makes man human. All other living creatures subscribe to *matysa nyaya* or law of the fishes: might is right. But man is capable of reversing the law. In human society, might need not be right. The weak can have rights too. Even the feeble can thrive. An ideal human society is one based not on power and domination as in nature, but on the very opposite – love and generosity.

They say children inherit the sins of the father. The *Mahabharata* refers to this concept again and again – how crimes committed in an earlier generation end up affecting a later



generation. The epic begins with the story of Janamejaya, angry that his father has been killed by a snake, until he is told that his great-grandparents destroyed an entire forest that was home to thousands of snakes. Even the horrific war at Kurukshetra, like the World Wars, is not merely the fight of cousins, but the outburst of several generations of rage and denial and frustration and envy. That is why these stories look not at one generation but at several.

So long is the history and so deep is the wound that everyone assumes they are the victims and no one is prepared accept the role of the villain. Such is life. There are no heroes or villains, just people who choose to exploit, people who seek retribution, people who cannot forgive and people who shy away from responsibility but yearn for nobility.

The original epic was called *Jaya*, then it was called *Vijaya*, then *Bharata* and finally *Mahabharata*. *Jaya* was about spiritual victory, *Vijaya* was about material victory, *Bharata* was the story of a clan and *Mahabharata* included also the wisdom of the land called Bharat-varsha. Many modern scholars, writers and playwrights, exhausted and overwhelmed by the maze of stories of the final version of the epic, are convinced that the *Mahabharata* is only about the futility of war.

Jai means victory. *Vijay* also means victory. But there is a difference. *Jai* is used almost as a greeting in many parts of India or as an exclamation. But *Vijay* is used very specifically when one is setting out for a conflict, confrontation, duel or competition. What exactly is the difference?

The clue lies in the final chapter of *Mahabharata*, when Yudhishtira steps into heaven, and is horrified to find before him the Kauravas looking radiant and blissful. "How did these war-mongers reach the abode of the gods?", Yudhishtira asks angrily. The gods reply, "They were killed on the holy land of Kurukshetra. That has purified them of all misdeeds and earned the right to enter heaven." The explanation did not satisfy Yudhishtira. "What about my brothers and my wife? Where are they?"

In response, the gods lead Yudhishtira deep under the earth, to a realm that was dark and gloomy and miserable. There, Yudhishtira heard cries of pain and suffering. Tears welled up in his eyes. How could he return to heaven and leave his family here? He made a decision. "I will stay here and suffer with them. I refuse to enter heaven without them." Looking into Yudhishtira's eyes, the gods asked, "Oh! But we thought you had renounced everything?" "What do you mean?" asked Yudhishtira, suddenly uncomfortable. "Well, you certainly have given up your kingdom and your worldly wealth. But you have not given up your anger. Your anger for the Kauravas, despite killing them in battle and ruling the earth for thirty-six years. You cling to your hatred, Yudhishtira. You still begrudge the Kauravas. You have not forgiven them. You refuse to let go and move on."

At that moment, Yudhishtira realized he was not the great man he thought he was. Only when there is undiluted compassion for everyone, even our worst enemies, is ego truly conquered.

The epic thus ends not with the victory of the Pandavas over the Kauravas, but with Yudhishtira's triumph over himself. In *Vijay*, there are winners and losers. In *Jai*, there are no losers, no one is defeated, for one triumphs over oneself. If one strips out the excess fat, one realizes that the *Mahabharata* is not a preachy tale appealing for peace. It is a determined exploration of the root of conflict. It is a book yearning for peace, not war. True peace happens when no one is defeated. True peace happens when one conquers oneself.

SHARADA K ESWAR IS A PLAYWRIGHT, SINGER AND COMMUNITY-ENGAGED ARTIST AND FACILITATOR. HER ARTISTIC APPROACH IS EXPERIENTIAL, RESPONDING TO THE VISCERAL QUALITIES OF IDEAS AND THEMES AT HAND TO INVESTIGATE THE QUESTIONS AND STORIES THAT LIE BELOW THE SURFACE.

VIRAVARMAN, RAJA OF SARASVATA, FALLING TO THE GROUND AS HANUMAN OVERTURNS HIS CHARIOT WITH HIS TAIL, WATCHED BY KRISHNA, FROM THE 'RAZMNAMAH' (BOOK OF WAR), TRANSLATION FROM SANSKRIT INTO PERSIAN OF THE MAHABHARATA, BY NAQIB KHAN, 1598, INK AND GOLD ON VELLUM (BRITISH LIBRARY/ BRIDGEMAN IMAGES).



و لاجرا

بدون لودایه پیر پادشاه هندوستان و انداختن کشتن برای مدد این پیر پادشاه فرزند
 ابراهیم چهارم

Playwrights' Note

BY MIRIAM FERNANDES AND RAVI JAIN

Mahabharata was once described to us as a dense forest of stories that one needs to carve one's own path through. That act of carving, ploughing, and weeding, feels true to the journey we've been on over these past eight years. Which trees to start from? Which branches to trim so that others can enjoy the light? Do we take the most direct path through, or the winding scenic route?

At times, adapting this epic has felt equivalent to wrestling the wind. In one moment, the story is unbelievably powerful and clear in its intentions. In the next moment its intentions slip through your fingers, impossible to grasp. It is vast and complex, constantly surprising you and contradicting itself.

One of the greatest respites during our journey has been spending time with past tellers of the epic. For thousands of years before the story was written down, it was passed from generation to generation orally, and so, there are as many *Mahabharatas* as there are storytellers. Assembling this version has been an enormous task of compilation. In compiling *Mahabharata*, we turned to many *sutradhaars*, which translates from Sanskrit to "the person that weaves the threads". We want to express gratitude to a few key storytellers who have held up lanterns to help us see in the sometimes dark forest. Our love and respect to Sharada K Eswar, Devdutt Pattanaik, Rustom Bharucha, Peter Brook and Jean-Claude Carrière, Rabindranath Tagore, B.R. Chopra, Amar Chitra Katha, and our deepest thanks to Carole Satyamurti, whose poetry and imagination has anchored our journey.

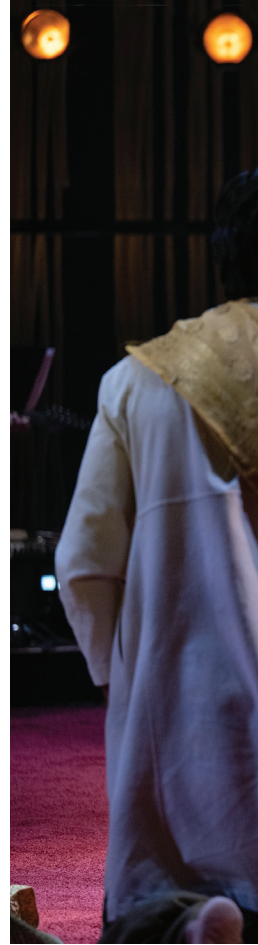
The revelation of the *Mahabharata* is to learn not to become distracted by the forest, or concerned with the wind, but to immerse oneself ever deeper into the earth, travelling deep into the labyrinth of its roots.



DARREN KUPPAN AS DURYODHANA AND HARMAGE SINGH KALIRAI AS DHRITARASHTRA. OPPOSITE: JAY EMMANUEL AS SHIVA; MEHER PAVRI AS THE OPERA SINGER WITH NEIL D'SOUZA AS KRISHNA AND ANAKA MAHARAJ-SANDHU AS ARJUNA.









CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: THE ENSEMBLE IN A SCENE FROM KARMA; DARREN KUPPAN AS DURYODHANA, GOLDY NOTAY AS DRAUPADI, HARMAGE SINGH KALIRAI AS DHRTITARASHTRA AND SUKANIA VENUGOPAL AS BHISHMA; ELLORA PATNAIK AS KUNTI; JAY EMMANUEL AS AMBA; SHAWN AHMED AS YUDHISHTHIRA AND SUKANIA VENUGOPAL AS BHISHMA.

Dharma, 2023





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JAY EMMANUEL AS SHIVA WITH THE ENSEMBLE; SHAWN AHMED AS YUDHISHTHIRA, GOLDY NOTAY AS DRAUPADI, MUNISH SHARMA AS BHIMA AND ANAKA MAHARAJ-SANDHU AS ARJUNA; ANAKA MAHARAJ-SANDHU AS ARJUNA, MUNISH SHARMA AS BHIMA AND SHAWN AHMED AS YUDHISHTHIRA WITH THE ENSEMBLE; MIRIAM FERNANDES AS THE STORYTELLER; DARREN KUPPAN AS DURYODHANA AND MUNISH SHARMA AS BHIMA.



Production History

Mahabharata is one of the foundational epics of India, first recorded over 2000 years ago. Its iconic characters, stories and lessons are revered, studied, and shared throughout the Indian subcontinent and among its diaspora. The *Mahabharata* has been told in temples, on stages, through music and dance, in books, cartoons, television and films since its origin.

In 1985, a theatrical adaptation by English director Peter Brook and playwright Jean-Claude Carrière made *Mahabharata* more widely known in the west. Lasting nine hours, the production toured the world in both French and English and was later adapted for television and film.

In 1988, Indian producer B.R. Chopra and director Ravi Chopra debuted a popular version on India's national television. From 1985-1989, a 1300-page comic, spread over forty-two issues, was published by Amar Chitra Katha.

This world premiere production is produced by Toronto's Why Not Theatre, in association with Barbican, London, commissioned and presented by the Shaw Festival.



The Authors

RAVI JAIN and MIRIAM FERNANDES are co-artistic directors of the internationally renowned Why Not Theatre. Both graduates of the Lecoq School in Paris, they are well known as deviser/collaborators who make work from the ground up. They are theatre makers, switching hats from acting to writing to directing. Together they collaborated on the theatre production and film *What You Won't Do For Love*, starring David Suzuki and Tara Cullis, and *Mahabharata*. Both scripts are published by Coach House Books.

Ravi's work has been seen on stages both big and small around the world. Published plays include *A Brimful of Asha*, *What You Won't Do For Love* and *Mahabharata*. Ravi often adapts classical texts including the celebrated English/ASL production of *Prince Hamlet* (with Dawn Jani Birley), and *R+J*, an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* for sighted, blind and low-vision audiences at the Stratford Festival (with Alex Bulmer and Christine Horne).

Miriam is currently developing a new adaptation of Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*, and collaborating on a Deaf/hearing production of *Lady Macbeth* (in partnership with 151 Collective). Her adaptation of Gogol's *The Nose (Nesen)* premiered at the MiniMidiMaxi Festival in Norway, and continued on to tour the country.

CAROLE SATYAMURTI (1939–2019) was a sociologist and prize-winning poet. Before *Mahabharata*, *A Modern Retelling* (published by W.W. Norton in 2015), she wrote five books of poetry and the collection *Stitching the Dark* (2005), followed by *Countdown* (2011). After her death in 2019, Bloodaxe Books published *The Hopeful Hat* in 2023. Her interest in Indian culture began during her first marriage to academic and teacher of politics T.V. Sathyamurthy. She believed that the *Mahabharata* should be told in a familiar verse form, in English as in its original Sanskrit, and in language that was engaging for a modern audience. This "retelling" is not a translation; it is drawn from the complete 5000 page, nineteenth-century version in English.



OPPOSITE: ANDRZEJ SEWERYN, MALLIKA SARAGHAI, MIRIAM GOLDSCHMIDT AND MAMADOU DIOUME IN PETER BROOK'S LEGENDARY PRODUCTION OF *THE MAHABHARATA*, PART OF BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC'S "NEXT WAVE" FESTIVAL. 1987 (PHOTO BY MARTHA SWOPE, NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS).

AKRAM KHAN IN *GNOSIS*, BASED ON THE STORY OF QUEEN GANDHARI IN *MAHABHARATA* WHO BLINDFOLDS HERSELF TO BECOME LIKE HER BLIND HUSBAND, PART OF THE 2009 SVAPNAGATA DANCE FESTIVAL AT SADLER'S WELLS THEATRE; LONDON (FRANCIS LONEY/ARENAPAL).

For full biographical information about our cast and creative team, please visit shawfest.com/ensemble.

RAVI JAIN Co-Writer / Director

SHAW 2023: Co-writer/director for *Mahabharata*. I didn't grow up going to "the" theatre. Stories happened in the kitchens and living rooms of my family or the families we would visit every weekend. I'd be surrounded by aunts and uncles singing songs, telling stories over top of each other – it was a chaos organized by only arrival, dinner and departure, none of which was scheduled, and everyone played to fill the time. We were all part of the event. Theatre isn't a place, it is what we do with the time we have when we get together in a space, and we all play a role. Thank you for playing with us tonight.



MIRIAM FERNANDES

Co-writer / Associate Director / Storyteller / Astika

SHAW 2023: Co-writer/associate director for and appearing in *Mahabharata*; 1st season. My first memories of performing were with my cousins in our living room. We would use the dining table and chairs as our set pieces, and the tablecloth and cushions became our props. A spoon became a magical wand, a cutting board became a door. There were no rules – if we believed it, it was true. Years later, that's still my favourite way to work. The living room has become a bit bigger and the audience is no longer just our parents, but the heart of the play is the same. I am humbled to be part of this team of actors, musicians, designers, production folks and producers who, together, have lifted a mountain (just like Krishna did!) to make this show happen. My biggest thanks to Mom, Dad, Josh, Julia and Sturla.



LORENZO SAVOINI Set Designer

SHAW 2023: Set designer for *Mahabharata*. I am originally from Thornhill, Ontario. My first time in the theatre was going to see a touring production of *Peter Pan* at the Elgin Theatre, and the grandness of the experience wasn't lost on me. What inspired me to become a designer was being exposed to the idea of "scenography" and the synthesizing of the many disciplines of theatre-making into a cohesive original staging language for each production. I was inspired early on in my training by witnessing theatre designs that were more poetic and expressionistic. I remember it was exciting to realize stage designs could express emotions and ideas, rather than just representing literal locations. My training was very practical and provided me a lot of opportunity for trial and error, and to find my aesthetic through taking risks and developing a process.

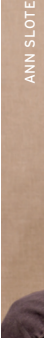


GILLIAN GALLOW Costume Designer

SHAW 2023: Costume designer for *Mahabharata*. I was born and raised in Oakville, Ontario. The first show I was ever in was during first grade when I played the Apple of Monday. In high school, my drama class included a design assignment for which we had to build a maquette. The set I designed ended up being used for our Sears Drama production that year, and after that I was hooked on designing. For the Shaw Festival, I've designed set and costumes for *An Octoroon*, *The Russian Play* and *Stage Kiss*; costumes for *The Devil's Disciple*; set for *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *The Doctor's Dilemma*.

KEVIN LAMOTTE Lighting Designer

SHAW 2023: Lighting designer for *Mahabharata*. One of my earliest experiences in theatre was watching *Cyrano de Bergerac* here at the Shaw Festival in 1982. I was considering a career in the arts, and possibly theatre design, which all seemed like a long shot as a teenager. The set and costumes by Cameron Porteous, as well as the lighting design by Robert Thomson, were so inspiring at the time. The design of the show has remained with me. In 1988, I returned to the Shaw Festival as a lighting designer and had the privilege of working with Artistic Director, Christopher Newton. He said, "I put creative people together and point them in the right direction", but he did a great deal more. Christopher's passion for all aspects of theatre and the arts continue to inspire. Memories of him and his work keep me pointed in the right direction!





HANA S. KIM

HANA S. KIM Projection Designer

SHAW 2023: Projection designer for *Mahabharata*. I grew up in Seoul, South Korea, with a filmmaker dad. I would often join screenings of his favourite art films unwillingly as he occupied our one and only TV. In this environment, unknowingly, I became familiar with visual storytelling. I studied graphic design in college but became thirsty for narrative art form. I realized all the movies that had a deep impact on me were hyper-theatrical films: Julie Taymor, Carlos Saura and Paul Schrader's works. In school, I fell in love with theatrical storytelling very quickly. My major was scenic design, but I got to take a class in projection design in my second year and this is when everything clicked. I was blown away by the infinite possibility of projection design. I started volunteering to design projections on school shows and kept going, and here I am, still doing it. I love bringing digital images into reality.

ANN SLOTE Associate Projection Designer

SHAW 2023: Associate projection designer for *Mahabharata*. I am from San Francisco, California. My first time in the theatre was a high school drama class, which I only signed up for to gain the required arts credits and didn't expect to enjoy. The wonderfully warm and weird community that this course grew into over the course of high school is what inspired me to continue in the field. All

my theatre teachers and design mentors have made the biggest impact in my training, and still continue to today. Why Not's *Mahabharata* has been my first production at The Shaw and I'm hoping to experience many more.



LORENZO SAVOINI

JOHN GZOWSKI Co-Composer / Sound Designer

SHAW 2023: Co-composer/sound designer for *Mahabharata*. Born and raised in Toronto, I originally planned to be a guitarist, but kept getting asked to write music for shows, which I fortunately learned is just as fun and interesting. My pandemic pivot has been going back for my masters in composition, studying the application of the predictive mind model to music and creativity. Here at Shaw, *The Divine*, *Dracula* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* are a few shows that I've worked on that have really made me proud.



SUBA SANKARAN



JOHN GZOWSKI

SUBA SANKARAN

Co-Composer / Sound Designer

SHAW 2023: Co-composer/sound designer for *Mahabharata*. Born and raised in North York, in Toronto, I apparently started singing as soon as I learned to speak, around the age of two, under my father, master drummer Trichy Sankaran. I embraced Indian classical singing and drumming, western choral music, piano, and many other instruments in my formative years. A few musical landmarks for me: 1) living the dream of starring in my own real-life version of *Fame* as a music major at Claude Watson School for the Arts; 2) conducting, directing vocal groups, and arranging music from high school to the present day; 3) jumping in the deep-end of musical theatre when asked to accompany *Godspell* on piano (as a sole accompanist) with only two days' notice; 4) my very first sound-design job in 2006, which led to great opportunities working with Deepa Mehta, the Stratford Festival, and now Shaw!



HASHEEL LODHIA

HASHEEL LODHIA

Traditional Music Consultant / Musician / Music Contributions

SHAW 2023: Traditional music consultant/musician/music contributions for *Mahabharata*. I began training in North Indian Classical music at the age of five, under my father. Later, I studied vocals under Shri Narendra Datar and bansuri under the guidance of Shri Jeetu Sharma. I am currently a senior flute student of the legendary Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia and vocal student of Pandit Ajay Pohankar. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to perform with Kailash Kher, Hariharan, Karthik, Shafqat Amanat Ali Khan, Karsh Kale, as well as for academy-award-winner A.R. Rahman. My recent work includes *Limca*, a music video series, and *RaagRani*, a documentary-style music video celebrating the union of my identities. I'm excited to be a part of the team bringing the *Mahabharata* to life.

BRANDY LEARY Choreographer

SHAW 2023: Choreographer for *Mahabharata*. I am a choreographer and dancer based in Toronto, but working regularly nationally and internationally. My dance training crosses two decades of practice in the south Indian martial art of kalarippayattu, chhau (Seraikella and Mayurbahnj styles), and contemporary approaches to dance and choreography. My choreographic approach examines structural questions on the body, space and audience. My works have been described as “phenomenological interventions” (*Canadian Theatre Review*), “soulful and sensuous” (*The New York Times*), and “embodying a hallucinatory, dreamlike state” (*now Magazine*). My choreography has been produced and performed in Canada, Europe, India, the Arctic, South Africa and USA, in theatres, urban environments, festivals, museums, art galleries and isolated landscapes. I am active as a performer, choreographer, curator and artistic director of ANANDAM. This is my first production for the Shaw Festival and Why Not Theatre.



SHARADA K ESWAR Khana Storyteller / Artistic Associate

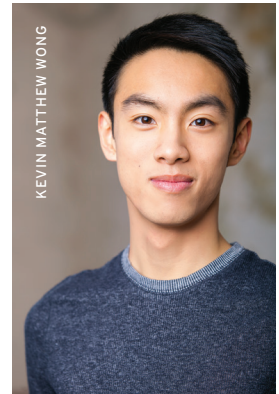
SHAW 2023: Khana storyteller/artistic associate for *Mahabharata*. My first performance on-stage was at age three. I was a teapot. In school I essayed the role of Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for a talent competition, sharing first place with a guy dressed as a ghost. For awhile I aspired to be an air hostess, secretly practicing at being poised by walking on tippy toes, in my mother's sari and balancing a textbook on my head. Alas... Instead, I meandered into the bad, mad ad world and scripted cheesy lines that Shahrukh Khan once spouted for an anti-dandruff shampoo! Thankfully, a chance encounter with the works of legendary theatre and filmmaker, Girish Karnad, led me to an unexpected, more serious career in theatre. And here I am, storytelling, playwriting (*The Draupadi Project*, *Abhimanyu*, *Butter Chicken*). For the *Mahabharata*, I have adapted and translated the verses of the *Bhagavad Gita*.



CRYSTAL LEE

Mahabharata Production Manager

SHAW 2023: Production manager for *Mahabharata*. I'm originally from northern New Brunswick – in a small community called Bathurst (aka, “no shore like the north shore”). My first exposure to theatre was in our local high school auditorium – a toured production of *The Velveteen Rabbit*. It was after that experience where I became so enthralled in how theatre was able to capture effective magic with simple sequences. Becoming an actor shortly after that seemed natural, but I always loved the structured chaos of backstage during tech week – all the co-ordination, the creativity that stays discreet throughout the process. I felt most comfortable helping to facilitate that creation of magic as a production manager. My formal training was at the National Theatre School of Canada, where I deepened my love for production. A colleague of mine would often remind me to not prep for perfection, but instead for spontaneity! I've held that piece of advice ever since.



KEVIN MATTHEW WONG

Mahabharata Lead Producer

SHAW 2023: Lead producer for *Mahabharata*. Two thousand years ago a group of families in the North of China began an epic series of migrations that continues to this day. Those people are known as Hakka – guest families. One of those families – my own – migrated to Tkaronto, Treaty 13 Territory. Thirty-ish years after they arrived, I'm lucky to be a theatre artist and producer on this land, and to be collaborating with the amazing Why Not and Shaw teams on *Mahabharata*. Aside from producing at Why Not, I've always been interested in merging my interests in social justice with my theatre practice. This fall I continue to tour *The Chemical Valley Project*, a show highlighting the activism of Aamjiwnaang First Nation Water Protectors Beze Gray and Vanessa Gray, and I'm currently creating and performing a new solo work called *Benevolence* that tells the story of the Hakka in Canada – our community's struggles and triumphs.





NEIL D'SOUZA

SHAWN AHMED Yudhishthira / Shantanu

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 2nd season. I first came to the Shaw Festival in 2018 as a strapping bachelor. My favourite chips were Miss Vickie's Sea Salt & Malt Vinegar. I fell head over heels for a gal, a "Shaw-mance", if you will. I'm now engaged and have (as my doctor says) "the back of a sixty-five-year-old." And my favourite chips are Miss Vickie's Original... Time changes you, man.

NEIL D'SOUZA Krishna

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 1st season. As an actor and writer, I have worked across all mediums. I studied theatre at the University of Ulster and trained at RADA before starting my career on-stage. Some of my earlier productions were with the Royal Court Theatre, National Theatre and Shakespeare's Globe; and my most recent screen appearances include *Diamonds* (Netflix), *The Ballad of Renegade* (Disney), and the BAFTA-winning BBC production *Alma's Not Normal*. I have also worked in film (*Filth*, *Still Life*, *Closed Circuit*, *Wild Target* and *Another Me*); and for radio, I have recently broadcast *Dear Harry Kane*, *Brick Lane* and *Recent Events at Collington House* with BBC Radio 4. Teaching has also become part of my practice, including RADA, East 15 and the University of Bath. This fall, I look forward to producing the next *Out of Season* with Hampstead Theatre.



JAY EMMANUEL

JAY EMMANUEL Shiva / Amba / Drupada / Pandu

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 1st season. I was born in Indore, India and grew up in the city of stunning sunsets and beaches – Perth, Australia. My first encounter with theatre was in the living room of our family home, where a lot of people gathered and shared stories with my dadi-jee (grandma) – our community elder. My younger brother and I would perform dance-dramas for them, performing eclectic characters and dances from the *Mahabharata* and '90s Bollywood films. It was this feeling of joy, of being able to become anyone/anything in our imaginations and sharing it with people that inspired me to be an artist. In

Mahabharata, the characters that I love the most are probably Amba and Shikhandi, who are two bodies and one soul. Their journey has been the most exciting to follow because it gives us an insight into the queer imagination that was alive thousands of years ago.



VARUN GURU



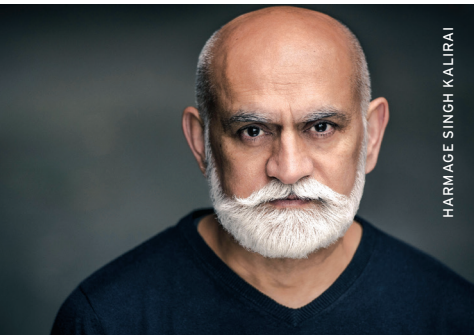
KARTHIK KADAM

VARUN GURU Understudy

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 1st season. I'm an actor, singer, musician, voice actor, writer, born and raised in India and based in Toronto. As long as I can remember, I've loved to create and tell stories. Early exposure to music and voice acting allowed me to quickly discern and appreciate various artistic mediums. Acting happened to me when my love for storytelling and desire to understand myself clashed. While in India, I trained and performed with Dr Vasudevan, who exposed me to the world of theatre and movement. In Canada, I trained with Gregory Prest, Leah Cherniak, Ins Choi and Ravi Jain as part of the Soulpepper Academy, and received mentorship under Philip Akin. Subsequently, I wrote and performed my solo show; appeared in *King Lear*, and as Frank in *Peggy Pickit Sees the Face of God*, after which an audience member commented: "funny, engaging, truthful, fascinating, and best of all – real human."

KARTHIK KADAM Understudy

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 1st season. How remarkable is it that we can gather in a space and exchange stories once again? To think we almost lost this feeling forever. A feeling we inherited from those warm faces who sat in a circle around a fire. I was born in Bangalore, India and lived there for the first nineteen years of my life. I have since had the honour of creating with some of the most inspiring people, here at the Shaw Festival. There is space to explore so much of our craft here, I am excited to share with you what we've all been working on. Come join our circle!



HARMAGE SINGH KALIRAI

HARMAGE SINGH KALIRAI Dhritrashtra

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 1st season. I am from The Punjab in India

and live in England. My first time in the theatre was during a class trip from my college in Lytham St Annes, in Lancashire (UK) – I fell asleep and snored, causing laughter among the classmates. Nothing inspired me to become an actor, I followed other students to audition for drama schools, got accepted and went to the furthest one away from the family business (to London then Paris, running away to join the "circus"). Mr James Dodding, our mime and movement teacher, made me see my potential. This is my first time performing in Canada. After the last performance of *Mahabharata*, I fly back to England to re-join the tour of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*; on the day I land, I open with the show at Grand Theatre in Wolverhampton.

DARREN KUPPAN Duryodhana

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 1st season. I'm from the UK and live just outside of Manchester. I got into the arts at an early age, starting with Ballroom/Latin American dancing and becoming a British champion. My first time in the theatre was actually performing in a production of *Puss in Boots*. I loved being on-stage and this gave me the confidence to pursue acting more seriously.



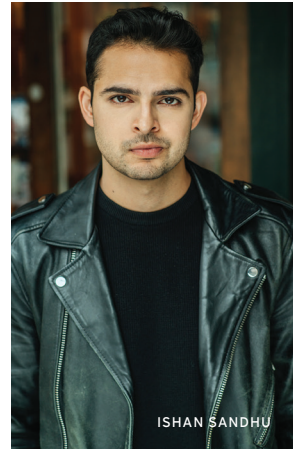
ANAKA MAHARAJ-SANDHU Arjuna

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 1st season. My name is Anaka (they/them), and I am an emerging artist born and raised in Treaty One Territory, Winnipeg, Manitoba. As someone with a deep love for human connection and a fascination with everyday life, I've always been inspired by the shared experience that is inherent to live theatre. The ability to shift a perspective, mirror someone else's complex feelings, or provide catharsis through laughter is a feeling of oneness that fuels me. I trained as an actor at the National Theatre School of Canada and studied political science and film at the University of Manitoba. This field of study often brings advocacy to the forefront of my artistic practice. As a gender-fluid IBPOC artist, I seek to create space for stories that have historically been erased. I'm especially interested in challenging the notion of Western "classics"; and reimagining said classics in a manner that reflects our ever-evolving world.



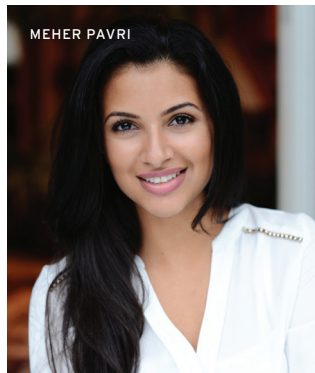
GOLDY NOTAY Gandhari / Draupadi

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 1st season. I'm a globe-trotting gastronome – born in India, sculpted in Canada and finessed in England. I have a penchant for all things Italian and an obsession with my doggy, Luna. As a child, I grew up in Stratford. My father used to drive us around the Festival Theatre, whilst I sat dreamily wide-eyed in the back seat. Two recent "pinch me" moments: one was being cast in *All of Us* at the National Theatre in London (UK). It was selected "Play of the Year" by the British Theatre Guide; and second, playing the iconic role of Beverly in Mike Leigh's *Abigail's Party*. Described as a "Hamlet in heels", I was the first South Asian woman to play this character and truly chuffed when South Asian girls said that seeing me don the role made them dream big. Everyone needs a horizon. Thank you, Dad!



ELLORA PATNAIK Kunti / Drona

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 1st season. I was born in Toronto, raised in Burlington, Ontario. I grew up on-stage as an Indian classical dancer. My first theatre performance was as an ass/donkey in a Nativity play in nursery school. Since then, I've acted and danced...and danced and acted...with some choreography and directing interspersed. I was inspired to act before I knew what the word "inspiration" meant. I come from a family of musicians and dancers. My mother was my first inspiration and guru; the full names of those who have inspired me would far exceed this word-count limit. You may have seen me in *A Christmas Carol* (Soulpepper), *Kim's Convenience* (CBC) and *Sort Of* (CBC/HBO Max). My favourite theatre roles were Maa in *Acha Bacha*, Laji in *Tapish*, and Catherine in *Standing on My Knees*. My favourite comment from an audience member was, "How do you make it look so easy?"





MEHER PAVRI Opera Singer

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 1st season. I have been in love with music for as long as I can remember. As a child, I would listen to music and sing non-stop. I remember the best gift I ever got was a waterproof speaker that I could take into the shower with me so that the music wouldn't stop! I can't imagine life without music, play, performance, and connecting to an audience, even if that audience was my two sisters and brother who were forced into watching me perform. When I was about ten years old, I saw Pavarotti on television singing with an orchestra, and that was when I knew instantly that I had to do this. I don't think I really knew what I was getting into, but with the passion and care from a wonderful teacher I started to find my own voice and have never looked back.

SAKUNTALA RAMANEE Shakuni / Sanjaya

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 1st season. I was born in London, England. Going to see theatre, my parents treated us to the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Measure for Measure* in Stratford-upon-Avon when I was about eleven years old, and I loved it. My first shows (decades ago now) were with the Bubble Theatre Company in London, taking theatre in a marquee to people who had no access to theatre. I was drawn to acting because I have particularly valued looking into the psychology of characters in plays. My A-level theatre studies teacher, John McNamara, always encouraging and inspiring, influenced my training. Pre-pandemic, I've appeared in the rsc's *Romeo and Juliet*; but, for the past year I've worked on *The Forest* at Hampstead Theatre, *Father of the Assassin* at National Theatre, and *Life of Pi* at Wyndhams Theatre. This is my first time at The Shaw and I'm very excited!



RONICA SAJJANI Understudy

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 1st season. I live in Toronto and am originally from India. My first experience in theatre was in school, at Loreto Convent in Lucknow, India. It was a production of *My Fair Lady*, in which I played Colonel Pickering. This was all thanks to my piano teacher, Mrs Vohra, who told all her students that she had worked with Danny Kaye. This did not convince me to pursue theatre. What did was a production of *Yerma* that I saw; I barely grasped it's meaning, but it sparked something which has stayed with me. Since then, my enthusiasm has been stoked by other teachers, and productions I have seen over the years.

Some of those productions were *Mother Courage*, *Into the Woods*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Chitrlekha*. My favourite show at Shaw has been the *Mythos* trilogy by Stephen Fry.

ISHAN SANDHU Understudy

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 1st season. Chandigarh, a small town in the north of India, designed by a French architect, is where I call home; and it was there where I first dreamt of a life in the performing arts. I've been acting for as long as I can remember, but most of that has been in service to escape my mother's chappal. Following my mother's retirement from chappal throwing, I pursued a BFA in Theatre from the University of British Columbia. I recently played Paris in *Romeo and Juliet* at Bard on the Beach, where Anita Rochon and Dean Paul Gibson were inspirational to my practice. Theatre is best enjoyed when we all invest and lose ourselves in the space, so are we ready...to lose ourselves?



NAVTEJ SANDHU Karna / Satyavati

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 1st season. I was born in Long Island, New York, raised in the GTA and began my acting career in 2018. Deciding to become an actor was not an easy decision, but once I was encouraged by my foster mother to pursue singing and the arts, the world opened up for me. My career took off quickly after graduating from the York University Acting Conservatory, as I made my debut in Canadian Stage's Shakespeare in High Park.

After my debut, I had the privilege of meeting Ravi Jain and collaborating on *Mahabharata* for the last five years. The rest is history.

MUNISH SHARMA Bhima

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 1st season. I'm originally from Regina, Saskatchewan, but now call Vancouver my home. While I love being on the stage, my introduction to theatre was late. It was in the middle high school when I saw *Miss Saigon*. I was already inspired to become an actor by the Bollywood legend Amitabh Bachchan, but it was my break-out role as Captain Hook in grade three that really solidified my want to be an actor. I am eternally grateful to my family, friends and mentors.



SUKANIA VENUGOPAL Bhishma

SHAW 2023: *Mahabharata*; 1st season. I was born in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and my inspiration for acting stemmed from the late Bosco D'Cruz, who was an established thespian, among other hats he wore. My first go at theatre was in 1976, as an undergraduate student at the University of Malaysia. The play was entitled *The Insect Play* and was a satire on human society via insects. A major influence in my training came from D'Cruz and also the late Mustafa Noor – a Malaysia actor who directed me in

a play entitled *The Misunderstanding*, by Albert Camus. Most recently, I've appeared in Marsha Mason's *Night, Mother and Counting and Cracking*, produced by Belvoir St Theatre in Australia. My favourite comment from an audience member was, "Your character reminded me of my mother and grandmother. It was like watching them on-stage!" *Mahabharata* is my first production at The Shaw.

DYLAN BELL Musician / Music Contributions

SHAW 2023: Musician/music contributions for *Mahabharata*; 1st season. My theatre debut occurred in my hometown of Orillia at the age of three, playing the Little Drummer Boy in my nursery school play. Years later I played the Major-General in my high school production of *The Pirates of Penzance*, after which I left the acting to the professionals and climbed into the orchestra pit. I was always musically curious and studied any type of music I could find, playing piano, violin, cello, guitar, bass, Chapman Stick and drums, as well as singing, arranging, producing and conducting. I never outgrew my curiosity, which has led to a varied and fun career performing around the world, producing records for some of my favourite artists, as well as writing, arranging and teaching music, and writing a music textbook. This is my first time at Shaw and I'm excited about this new production!



GURTEJ SINGH HUNJAN

Musician / Music Contributions

SHAW 2023: Musician/music contributions for *Mahabharata*; 1st season. I was born and raised in the greater Toronto area. My rhythm training in the North Indian classical style emphasized the entwined relationship with dance, so students of both disciplines practiced together. The dance style, Kathak, is rooted in storytelling, so playing for live theatre has been with me from the beginning; it always feels like home. My passion for music stayed with me and explorations in other musical traditions began shaping my live performances and original compositions. This versatility led to unique opportunities in theatre, dance and cirque, including Franco Dragone's *India Circus*, and Nova Bhattacharya's *Svāhā!*. Bringing my cultural heritage to an institution like the Shaw Festival has been a dream come true.



ZAHEER-ABBAS JANMOHAMED

Musician / Music Contributions

SHAW 2023: Musician/music contributions for *Mahabharata*; 1st season. I am a Toronto-based tabla player, and a student of Ustad Allarakha's senior disciple, Shri Prafulla Athalye. Having taken early interest in tabla, I moved to India twice between school years to pursue my study of the instrument. I aim to preserve the integrity of the classical repertoire I have studied while bringing the sound and tradition of tabla to new contexts in the Canadian music scene. I am inspired by the creativity, curiosity, and love of sound that I have witnessed in my gurus and teachers. I have performed with artists and musicians across the country in a variety of classical, semi-classical and jazz settings, and I explore and experiment with contemporary styles of electronic music production. In 2020, I was selected as a member of Small World Music's Emergence Program for newcomer and emerging artists in Toronto.

ALLAN TEICHMAN

Production Stage Manager

SHAW 2023: Production stage manager for *Mahabharata*; 37th season. As I write this, we have finished initial rehearsals on *Dharma*, and are just starting work on *Karma*, two of the three elements that make up this year's premiere production of *Mahabharata*. I first joined this project of Shaw and Why Not Theatre in 2018, and I have watched it grow from its foundation in Carole Satyamurti's verse retelling of the great epic into the absorbingly kinetic and musical story that you will soon experience. It was originally planned for the 2020 season, but, like so many things, fell victim to The Great Interruption. Featuring a cast from around the world, the challenges of getting together to resume work were greater than most. But we've finally done it! I trust you will agree it was worth the wait.



NEHA ROSS



NEHA ROSS Stage Manager

SHAW 2023: Stage manager for *Mahabharata*; 1st season. As a kid, I remember this one moment. It was an outdoor production of *Twelfth Night*. A scene change. From inside to outside. As we watched, the backdrop started to slowly illuminate with tiny dots. It felt like we were slowly being enveloped by thousands of bright little stars. It was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. In hindsight, it was a rather simple idea. The entire audience shifted slightly, as if we all inhaled at the same time. I felt something I'd never felt before: as if I belonged to something, something much larger than myself. My curiosity of wanting to know how that happened and why it happened has brought me to continuously show up to work as a stage manager.

ASHLEY IRELAND



ASHLEY IRELAND Assistant Stage Manager

SHAW 2023: Assistant stage manager for *Mahabharata*; 6th season. When I was a little girl, my Nana would take my sister and me to the theatre. Whether it was a large-scale production in Toronto or a small community theatre production I didn't know the difference, it was always so thrilling. On one of these occasions, while reading through a programme, we saw that my sister and I could volunteer backstage as crew members. Having no idea what we were getting into, my sister convinced me to sign up with her. Nervously we were assigned our off-stage roles and I quickly fell in love. As cast members, props and set pieces whirled around me backstage, I realized that this is where I had to be.

TAMARA PROTIC



TAMARA PROTIĆ Assistant Stage Manager

SHAW 2023: Assistant stage manager for *Mahabharata*; 1st season. I was born in Zrenjanin, Serbia, where putting on skits and plays with my friends in front of my apartment building was a regular occurrence. Back then the dream was to be on the stage. It took two weeks of pretending to be a koala bear at York University for me to realize that I was better suited for the backstage life, and I've never looked back!

KAREN TISCH Executive Director, Why Not Theatre

My family is from Latin America and came to Canada when I was very young. I was raised and currently live in Toronto. I grew up in the theatre as a student at Canada's National Ballet School. As an adult, I realized that I had passion for bringing artists and voices together, and amplifying unheard voices, which led me to arts programming and management. I have worked across multiple artistic disciplines in a variety of roles, including as Managing Director of the Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival and as President of the Toronto Arts Council. I am thrilled to have joined Why Not Theatre, a company operating at the intersection of innovation and social change, and to be part of this epic production of *Mahabharata* at the Shaw Festival.

KAREN TISCH



MICHELLE YAGI



MICHELLE YAGI Producer

I was born and raised in Toronto (Treaty 13 Territory) and trained as a producer in schools, theatres and meeting places across Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. I've loved storytelling ever since I can remember, but my favourite thing about theatre is the unique sense of community it creates, the village of brilliant artists, technicians and arts administrators who together grow and nurture new ideas that can move us, inspire us, make us laugh.

MATT EGER



MATT EGER Assistant Producer and Company Manager

I'm originally from Treaty 7 Territory in Calgary, Alberta. My theatre training started at Triangle Theatre School in Calgary, taught by the magnificent Margot McDermott, who taught me about discipline, and Lana Skauge, who taught me that feelings are good. Years later, after third year theatre school I was lost, feeling like I didn't belong, and I had the chance to spend two weeks in Edinburgh. One morning, sitting around a huge breakfast table full of theatre people commiserating about yesterday's work, I felt truly at home. It was my life's greatest epiphany. Rest in Peace Ian Watson and Peter Wyld. And I'll go see *Angels in America* wherever it's playing; I'm in love with spending the entire day at the theatre. I recommend *Mahabharata* currently playing at The Shaw.

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Executive Director
TIM JENNINGS

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MARTINE BELAND
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MATTHEW MacINNIS
ALLAN TEICHMAN
DORA TOMASSI

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MEGHAN FROEBELIUS
ASHLEY IRELAND
SANG SANG LEE
LEIGH McCLYMONT
ANNIE McWHINNIE
THÉA PEL

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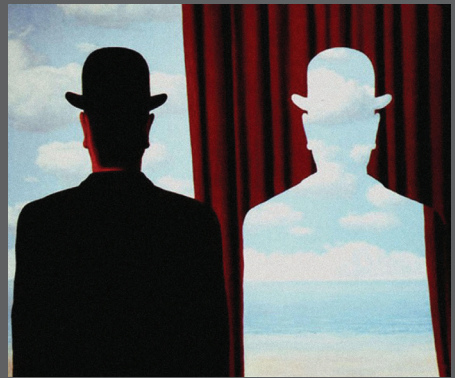
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