

The Goddess Project Overview

My creative work began on this project when I became captivated with the nine basic human emotions or *rasas*, as defined in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, an ancient Indian treatise on the [performing arts](#), and the potential for the creation of character in a new way. The nine rasas are *adbhuta* (surprise, wonder), *sringara* (love, eros), *bhayanaka* (fear, shame), *bibhatsa* (disgust, revolt), *vira* (courage, the heroic), *hasya* (laughter, the comic), *karuna* (sadness, compassion), *raudra* (rage) and *santa* (peace, bliss). The idea of creating a series of characters out of a physical and vocal exploration of the *rasas* was something that captivated all my creative enthusiasm and intrigue. I began to conceptualize a performance piece that explored the ideas of choice and consequence as embodied in vivid characters.

My research started when I experienced a newly devised series of physical theatre-based exercises as part of the Rasaboxes™ work (created by Richard Schechner and the East Coast Artists). I participated in M.O.V.E. (Movement Observation Vision and Experimentation) at the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts at Arizona State University (January 2009) in order to better understand this unique performance approach. I was deeply inspired by the level of commitment, range, breath, athleticism, and joy present in the approach. As both an actor and teacher, I am continually intrigued by how to fully engage the artist's instrument in sharing and telling a story. As an actor, I began to envision a performance piece that explored various female archetypes (via the *rasas*) and their emerging stories and as a teacher, I was able to broaden my own approach to movement and voice training practices.

The actual devising process was about my own physical and vocal discoveries made during the exploration and utilization of the *rasas* in the studio. What emerged out of these experiments was that my initial compositions would become the templates for the characters. The very first showing of the work in progress was presented by students and myself with whom I was sharing this new way of working. This was part of a CHA Performance Friday (November 2009) showing where I both described and demonstrated the process, including some of my own initial character composites. It was at this first showing that I shared my own attempt at crafting the dialogue as it had emerged in the studio.

As I made discoveries either in my own rehearsals or by way of witnessing my students' profound experience of the work in class I took notes that eventually became ideas for lines of the characters. As it became clear to me that the physical work I was experiencing required a playwright's crafting of a verbal text to support those discoveries, I invited playwright, David Rush to join me in the process as the collaborating writer.

Another important part of my initial idea and creation of the piece was my interest and desire to use masks in performance and so I invited another collaborator to join the journey. I contacted a former colleague at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, Robbie Hayek, who received his mask training at Dell’Arte International, to make the masks. I shared with him my idea for creating an entire range of *rasa*-masks (18 total), something that was entirely new and unique to my approach to the process. Even prior to bringing the playwright aboard, I envisioned each of the nine characters having a distinct emotion-mask that would take the emphasis off of the face and place the story fully in the body and emergent, expressive sounds.

As I prepared for the first two public performances of the work at the Nebraska Repertory Theatre (WOMEN OF CHOICE) and the Boulder International Fringe Festival (THE GODDESS HERE), both summer 2010, I invited professional theatre director, Jane Page to join my collaborative “team” to assist in helping me shape a solo performance piece for an audience. It was through the course of that collaboration, experimentation with the masks in performance, and listening to the audience response during the post-show discussions that we decided to no longer use the masks in performance. Although the masks are no longer used in the performance piece, they are used in the workshops and master classes I lead on the composition of character and my approach to the embodiment of the *rasas*.

Throughout the process, I continued to develop the distinct breath, body and sound of each *rasa*-character and share my discoveries and ideas with my collaborators. When possible, the playwright would incorporate those experiences and the discoveries that the director and I were making in the rehearsal process, into his writing. During the collaborative process, we often shared, discussed, and continued to explore our mutual ideas of goddess, archetype, *rasa*, and women as a strong solo performance piece developed.

As with any performance piece, as I performed the work and had the opportunity to listen to audience members and fellow artists following performances, the piece continued to develop to its present day installation entitled, THE GREAT GODDESS BAZAAR. The title, no so unlike the piece, has evolved to better embrace my unique spirit as a solo performance artist, the staging, and textual organization of the solo performance itself. The complete collection of more than 30 monologues by David Rush, entitled WOMEN OF CHOICE, includes the full-length version of the monologues, however THE GREAT GODDESS BAZAAR is the official title of my solo performance of the work, including cuttings and selections from Rush’s completed work organized specifically by myself and my director for the distinct purpose of creating a tourable theatrical event crafted to showcase one actor on a relatively bare stage, playing a wide range of characters with whom an audience can relate.

It was clear throughout the process that the performance piece must focus on the actor, thus eliminating any scenery and reducing the use of props and costumes to a bare minimum. As the primary producer of the performance piece, I am continually networking and seeking those opportunities, theatres, and venues where the piece may resonate most. My original conception of the performance piece was that it would always be a performance that could easily live in various locations and showcase both the play and the creative process behind the creation of the characters. So the play could be performed in a 50-seat theatre at the Edinburgh International Fringe Festival (Paradise at the Vault, summer 2001), a 300-seat auditorium at the University of Nebraska Student Union, and a number of university black box or studio space settings. The most important aspect of the project all along has been the emphasis on the power of the acting instrument and how an audience might be fully engaged in that process. This is why I continue to market, promote, and seek for those opportunities to share the work, both through my performance of THE GREAT GODDESS BAZAAR and by providing my hosts accompanying workshops and classes that lead participants through my own process of creating character.

For more information visit www.goddesshere.com