

**BRIDGE AND TUNNEL
BERKELEY REP
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Took in the latest by Sarah Jones at the Berkeley Rep this evening. The work-in-progress was presented as a "Workshop" presentation in the smaller Berkeley Rep theatre next door to the main stage. Arrived late to find hundreds of people who -- on getting the "word" -- had bought tickets online and were waiting at WillCall to pickup their tix. The play was SRO to the astonishment of the managers.

The work is a solo performance in which Jones plays some 16 male and female characters who come to an annual Poetry reading hosted by a Pakistani immigrant named "Mohammed Ali" who introduces each character -- all of them

first generation immigrants -- with shy awkwardness and bad jokes. Jones then has each person relate a poem, a performance piece or simply a story in character with no more than a shawl, a sweater, or a jacket as a costume prop, save for one character who enters in a wheelchair.



The performance was an amazing tour-de-force in which Jones snaps within seconds from one character to the next and back to the Host with astonishing fluidity and persuasiveness. In succession, she presents an elderly Jewish woman from Lithuania, a Vietnamese boy who wins poetry slams, a hip-hop home-boy from the 'hood, a Chinese woman who learns to love her lesbian daughter, a burly Russian poet, an affected Australian performance artist, a slender Haitian woman who gives the best poem called "God Bless America -- but not because of You," a Lebanese woman recalling the lush erotic poetry of a 10th century Lebanese woman, and several others.

At the end of the 90 minute work, the audience -- itself a mixed bag of races and ethnicities -- stood up spontaneously as one and thundered applause for several minutes, bringing the performer out for three curtain calls.

The piece by the very talented Ms. Jones is a resoundingly positive, uplifting and quite moving portrait of modern America which nevertheless engages fully with the warty aspects of American intolerance, injustice and racism.

The show runs until February 20th, when it is slated for the main stage on Broadway. We think Jones has a hit monster in this one and we urge all of you to make haste to purchase tix.

Artistic Director, Tony Taccone

Set And Lighting Design : Alexander V. Nichols

Producer: Meryl Streep

Photography by David Berne

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