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## Sheetal Gandhi's One-Woman Show Combines Indian Music with Contemporary Dance

By Kellyn Kawaguchi

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Courtesy of CedarBough T. Saeji

Sheetal Gandhi performs in her one-woman show, *Bahu-Beti-Biwi*, a powerful piece that artfully examines the cross-cultural differences between Indian and American culture.

Sheetal Gandhi professes to dislike solos — an odd aversion for a woman who is currently starring in her own one-woman dance/theater show, *Bahu-Beti-Biwi*.

"This is the first solo I've ever made, and I'm glad I made it," says Gandhi. "It really pushed me. It was just a wonderful experience to see what would come out of me and how would I tell this story, just relying on me and my skill set."

In approximately 50 minutes, the Los Angeles resident weaves North Indian music traditions and nine unique characters into a contemporary dance performance that artfully balances the humorous with the serious. The characters she brings to life have been inspired from her family as well, as women in India who have trusted her with their stories.

"What I'm always trying to do in my work is to get people to feel like they're in someone else's shoes," Gandhi says in a phone interview. "Everyone knows what it feels like when there's something in your life that doesn't have the freedom it should have. And they all know what it feels like to want a bit more than what we have."

An interdisciplinary director, choreographer and performer, Gandhi grew up in Walnut Creek, California, which is near San Francisco, raised by parents who had immigrated from Mumbai, India, in the 1960s.

She attended college at UC Irvine, and after that earned a graduate degree at UCLA. Her show, here for one night on Feb. 6 at Théâtre Raymond Kabbaz, the performance space at Le Lycée Français de Los Angeles, began as her Master's thesis. She's since performed it in 15 U.S. cities, as well as in India and Europe.

A video titled "*Bahu-Beti-Biwi* (Daughter-in-Law, Daughter, Wife)" on Gandhi's Youtube channel features snippets from the show. Gandhi seamlessly takes up the mantle of several characters, slipping from one age to the next and speaking in different character's voices. Sometimes she sings in English, sometimes in Marvadi, a language from North India, in a voice both pure and strong. The choreography can be abstract at times, with certain characters acting as symbols, but the empathy that drives the performance is palpable.

"Her unique skill set has always made her a distinct artist," says composer Joseph Trapanese, who worked closely with Gandhi on the music. "Her voice, her movement, her ability to entertain and captivate an audience — these have always been there, but to me it wasn't until *Bahu-Beti-Biwi* that she was able to find a vehicle to bring all of them together."

At 29, Trapanese is an accomplished composer who has collaborated with Daft Punk and Moby on soundtracks including *Tron: Legacy* and *The Bourne Legacy*. He met Gandhi when they were both earning their graduate degrees at UCLA. Since then, Gandhi has grown more confident in her abilities, he says.

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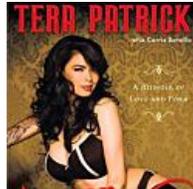
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