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Body of Faith

Drama by Luis Alfaro



Body of Faith

Recipient of the PEN Center USA West Playwriting Award Critic's Pick:

Playwright Luis Alfaro explores the dimensions of spiritual diversity in his poignant, evocative dramatization of stories from the gay and lesbian community ... Alfaro approaches the subject of faith with a humility and jocular skepticism that is clearly born of struggle, both personally and for the gay and lesbian community as a whole.

—*Backstage West*

Drama. By Luis Alfaro. *Cast: Flexible. As many as 19, as few as 8.* This play is part of Cornerstone Theater's Faith-Based Theater Cycle, a four-and-a-half-year series of projects exploring the question: How does faith unite and divide us? It is a theatrical celebration and examination of a lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender interfaith community, examining the complex and dynamic relationship between faith and identity. The story is told in a vignette, modern vaudeville-style, at once a choral assemblage and a presentation of monologues and scenes that chronicle a community in search of its authenticity. The play was created by the playwright and 19 participants whose life stories form the basis for this multidisciplinary theatre piece. *Flexible staging. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 20 minutes.*

Front cover photo: Cornerstone Theater Company, L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center, Los Angeles, Calif., featuring Ruben Marquez, Adina Porter and Pierre L. Chambers.

Photo: Craig Schwartz.

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Body of Faith

Luis Alfaro

Dramatic Publishing



BODY OF FAITH

By
LUIS ALFARO

This excerpt contains sexual



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Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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BODY OF FAITH was first presented by Cornerstone Theater Company and the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center (who first commissioned the playwright), at their Renberg Theater, Hollywood, Calif., February 20 - March 22, 2003. The production was directed by Christopher Liam Moore and included the following:

THE COMPANY

Abdulla Almuntheri	Stephanie Sarah
Donna Cassyd	Debra Pasquerette
Pierre L. Chambers	Ilya Pearlman
Nyra Constant	Adina Porter
Peter Howard	Bennett Schneider
Ebonie Hubbard	Loraine Sheilds
Audrey E. Lockwood	Leslie Sloan
Michael R. Mallory	Peter James Smith
Ruben Marquez	George Weiss Vando
Alejandra (Alex) Navarro	

PRODUCTION STAFF AND CREW

Nathan Birnbaum	Songs
Paula Donnelly	Management
Daniel Foster	Images
Rachel Hauck	Set
Lynn Jeffries	Costumes/Puppets
Younwha Kong	Lights
Geoff Korf	Lights
Ken Roht	Movement

ORDER OF PERFORMANCE

In the Beginning	Ensemble
The Book - One [Story of Sam] . Donna, Michael, Abdulla, Pierre, Nyra, Peter H, Alex, Ilya, Loraine, Leslie	
I Am My Own God	Ebonie
Broadway Babies	Ruben, Peter S, Bennett, George
Hindu Chant	Ensemble
Pole Dance . Audrey, Ruben, Adina, Pierre, Michael, Leslie	
The Book - Two [Sam Gets Wiser] . . . Abdulla, Stephanie, Pierre, Nyra, Peter H, Ruben, Alex, Ilya, Loraine, Leslie, Michael	
I Saw God	Bennett
The Circle Peter S, Stephanie, Abdulla, Pierre, Adina, Alex, Loraine, Ebonie, Ilya, Michael, Debra, Nyra, Leslie, George	
The Book - Three [Fundamentally Different]	George, Leslie
Womyn Only	Nyra, Donna
Me, Just Me	Debra, Stephanie
Ambiguous Girl	Stephanie, Debra, Peter S, Alex
Ch-Ch-Ch-Changes	Peter S, Ilya
The Book - Four [Lessons From the Quran]	Ensemble

Grief Peter H, Loraine
The Book - Five [Book of Lies]. Adina
The Book - Six [So It Says]. Ensemble
Book of Love [Who Wrote the...]. Ensemble

* * *

The juice is in what you don't know
In the mystery that draws you down deeper
Marilyn Sewell, *Resurrecting Grace*

Are ye listening to me?
We are, sir
And what's enough?
The gift of faith, sir
Good
Go home
Frank Mccourt, *Angela's Ashes*

BODY OF FAITH

A Play in One Act

For a flexible cast - as many as 19, as few as 8

CHARACTERS

AUDREY
BENNETT
DEBRA
STEPHANIE
PIERRE
RUBEN
ADINA
GEORGE
LORAINÉ
MICHAEL
ILYA
ALEX (ALEJANDRA)
EBONIE
PETER S.
NYRA
PETER H.
DONNA
ABDULLA
LESLIE

AUTHOR'S NOTES

A NEW BEGINNING

A white space.

In some ways this is a space for light to reflect, but also for images to be projected. A space that can be womb-like or to be shrouded in. It might even look like a canvas about to be filled. Empty, like an installation.

Hanging from the ceiling on long thin wires are simple colorful sleeveless dresses. Those early sixties/girl-group types that can easily be sewn from a *Simplicity* pattern. They float out there. They are in different colors with patterns. They hang like bodies in the space.

Upstage there is a row of chairs that the actors will sit in. The chairs are in a semi-circle and face the audience. The performers will act as a Greek chorus, of sorts. But maybe also witnesses to the testimony this evening. In front of the chairs is a strip of floor lights. This will give the performers a *Brechtian* glow. This (it's all assumption, folks) will also cast shadows of bodies against the walls.

The playing area is a simple deck that is maybe a foot tall. In front of the deck is another row of footlights. These will create the feeling that this is a vaudeville. No, not a vaudeville, a *neo-vaudeville*.

To each side of the stage there are interesting matching screens. Very crisp in their design. They will frame the actors in silhouette as they change costumes. It seems that the screens also present the possibility that the actor is always present. Even when she/he is just in shadow.

The body present in transformation. Do the bodies change shape and form? Do they change gender? Is there a sissy form? Is there a butch form? Do the bodies become puppets? Only the screens will tell...

CHARACTER NAMES:

Use the actual names of your actors, select new names for each, or use the names in the script (which are the names of the actors in the original production).

IN THE BEGINNING

(A score that becomes large and ambitious and almost orchestral. Maybe it's something like, well not like, ('cause we don't want it to sound at all like that) but energetically like—"Song for Shelter" from Fat Boy Slim's "Halfway Between the Gutter and the Stars." And it begins to build as the actors enter. Bodies without commentary. Wearing body stockings (or nude, if possible in your production). They stand facing the audience and they begin to look up one by one heavenward. In some sort of ecstasy, we think. As they do, and as the music builds, one by one, they reach out to the sky. Hands going up in space. The dresses begin to lower and they fit into each body. They all get a look, so to speak, or maybe a gender or personality.

The performance begins.

The actors sit on the chairs. There is a moment of acknowledgment and silence. Then the company, one by one, or in groups, begin to clap out with their palms, a rhythm. Something gypsy-like that could support a choral recitation. Perhaps manifesting in movement? A dance at the chairs while sitting? Bodies moving in space/through scrim? Who knows, I just write it.

And so it starts. A kind of tribal song/chant. And, so, this is one of the elements that will be present in the performance. A kind of song cycle that underscores or introduces monologues and scenes.

AUDREY

In the beginning.

ENSEMBLE

In the beginning...

BENNETT

In the beginning.

ENSEMBLE

In the beginning...

DEBRA

In the beginning.

ENSEMBLE

In the beginning...

DEBRA

There was the spirit.

STEPHANIE

And the spirit was good.

PIERRE

Because the spirit,

RUBEN

was holy.

ADINA

And divine.

GEORGE

And meaningful.

LORAINÉ

And profound.

ENSEMBLE

profound...

MICHAEL

And it meant something.

ILYA

It meant something.

ALEX

To be in the spirit.

EBONIE

The spirit.

PETER S

The presence of.

NYRA

A spirit.

(Beat.)

ENSEMBLE

And then came,

PETER H

And then came,

DONNA

And then came,

ENSEMBLE

the flesh.

ABDULLA

And the flesh was also good.

LESLIE

Because it was pure.

AUDREY

And full.

BENNETT

And it breathed.

DEBRA

And it gave a power.

STEPHANIE

Muscle.

PIERRE

Strength.

RUBEN

Movement.

ADINA

But it was also,

GEORGE (*moan*)

LORAINÉ

and,

MICHAEL (*thrust*)

ILYA

and,

ALEX (*orgasm*)

EBONIE

and it felt,

PETER S

really

NYRA

really

PETER H

really

DONNA

good...

ENSEMBLE

good...

ABDULLA

to be in the flesh.

LESLIE

No, the flesh,

AUDREY

was good.

ENSEMBLE

was good.

(Beat.)

BENNETT

But not everybody felt good about,

DEBRA *(moan)*

STEPHANIE *(thrust)*

PIERRE *(orgasm)*

RUBEN

And somebody,

ADINA

I don't know who.

GEORGE

I ain't saying.

LORAINÉ

No, no, not me.

MICHAEL

Separated the...

ILYA

spirit and the...

ALEX

flesh.

EBONIE

And they haven't been seen,

PETER S

together since.

ENSEMBLE

Until now...

(Beat.)

LORAINÉ

And we just jumped,

DEBRA

a few thousand years of history,

NYRA

to tell you a story.

PIERRE

A new story.

LESLIE

About this idea,

AUDREY

of connecting,

DONNA

the spirit,

ENSEMBLE

the spirit,

ADINA

and the flesh.

ENSEMBLE

The flesh.

ILYA

Out of necessity.

EBONIE

Out of survival.

LESLIE

Out of ignorance.

LORAINÉ

Or complete intellectual curiosity.

(Beat.)

ENSEMBLE

I have a story,

RUBEN

about separations,

ALEX

and connections,

ABDULLA

and desires

STEPHANIE

and commitments.

PETER H

Of moments.

BENNETT

Of having been,

MICHAEL

down on my knees.

PETER S

And not just to pray.

(Beat.)

GEORGE

I am the spirit.

LORAINÉ

I am the spirit.

DONNA

I am the spirit.

DEBRA

And I am the flesh.

EBONIE

The flesh.

AUDREY

The flesh.

ABDULLA

Stories.

ALEX

Sometimes separate.

PETER H

But tonight combined.

STEPHANIE

This is a...

ENSEMBLE

story.

AUDREY / BENNETT / DEBRA

Stories about...

STEPHANIE / PIERRE / RUBEN / ADINA

how people...

GEORGE / LORAINÉ / MICHAEL / ILYA

get by,

ALEX / EBONIE / PETER S / NYRA

In the world.

PETER H / DONNA / ABDULLA / LESLIE

Inside.

AUDREY / BENNETT / DEBRA

Outside of it.

STEPHANIE / PIERRE / RUBEN / ADINA

In one another.

GEORGE / LORAINÉ / MICHAEL / ILYA

In silence.

ALEX / EBONIE / PETER S / NYRA

With each other.

PETER H / DONNA / ABDULLA / LESLIE

In a group.

AUDREY / BENNETT / DEBRA

With a partner.

STEPHANIE / PIERRE / RUBEN / ADINA

With a lover.

GEORGE / LORAINNE / MICHAEL / ILYA

With a god.

ALEX / EBONIE / PETER S / NYRA

With a faith.

PETER H / DONNA / ABDULLA / LESLIE

With a spirit.

AUDREY / BENNETT / DEBRA

With a woman.

STEPHANIE / PIERRE / RUBEN / ADINA

With a man.

GEORGE / LORAINNE / MICHAEL / ILYA

With something more.

ALEX / EBONIE / PETER S / NYRA

Than just a gender.

PETER H / DONNA / ABDULLA / LESLIE

Just my sexuality.

AUDREY / BENNETT / DEBRA

The force of my identity.

STEPHANIE / PIERRE / RUBEN / ADINA

With the power of a body.

GEORGE / LORAINNE / MICHAEL / ILYA

With the shape of my arms.

ALEX / EBONIE / PETER S / NYRA

The strength of my hips.

PETER H / DONNA / ABDULLA / LESLIE

The curve of my spine.

AUDREY / BENNETT / DEBRA

The sweetness of my ass.

STEPHANIE / PIERRE / RUBEN / ADINA

All that.

GEORGE / LORAINNE / MICHAEL / ILYA

And more.

ALEX / EBONIE / PETER S / NYRA

Something bigger...

PETER H / DONNA / ABDULLA / LESLIE

than me.

STEPHANIE / PIERRE / RUBEN / ADINA

Nothing changes...

GEORGE / LORAINÉ / MICHAEL / ILYA
but the names.

ALEX / EBONIE / PETER S / NYRA
Everything changes...

PETER H / DONNA / ABDULLA / LESLIE
but time.

ENSEMBLE
Crossing bodies...

ENSEMBLE
crossing sex...

ENSEMBLE
crossing spirit...

ENSEMBLE
crossing flesh...

ENSEMBLE
crossing history...

ENSEMBLE
crossing time...

ENSEMBLE
crossing violence...

ENSEMBLE
crossing eras...

ENSEMBLE
crossing silence...

ENSEMBLE
crossing death...

ENSEMBLE
crossing faith...

ENSEMBLE
crossing over.

GEORGE
This is

LORAINE
a story...

MICHAEL
about desire.

ILYA
A search...

ALEX
for something...

EBONIE
bigger than me.

PETER S
Or me...

NYRA

bigger than something.

PETER H

Looking in the temple.

DONNA

On the edge of a knife.

ABDULLA

In the earth.

LESLIE

On the flesh.

AUDREY

Inside the heart.

BENNETT

In a spirit.

DEBRA

I am remembering a story I heard.

STEPHANIE

a poem I lived.

PIERRE

a cross I bore.

RUBEN

a god I had.

ADINA

a joint I lit.

GEORGE

a time in my life.

LORAINÉ

a prayer I screamed.

MICHAEL

a lover I felt.

ILYA

Some good times.

ALEX

Also bad.

EBONIE

Searching.

PETER S

For a poem.

NYRA

In the form of a person.

PETER H

A story that...

DONNA

became someone.

ABDULLA

This is a story about

LESLIE

story.

AUDREY

About.

BENNETT

How people...

BENNETT

get by.

DEBRA

In the world.

STEPHANIE

Inside.

PIERRE

Outside of it.

(Palms stop briefly. Palms start again. Rhythm quicker maybe.)

AUDREY / BENNETT / DEBRA / STEPHANIE

First I was afraid.

PIERRE / RUBEN / ADINA / GEORGE / LORAINÉ

I was petrified.

MICHAEL / ILYA / ALEX / EBONIE / PETER S

Thinking how I'd ever...

NYRA / PETER H / DONNA / ABDULLA / LESLIE

Live without you...

AUDREY / BENNETT / DEBRA / STEPHANIE

By my side.

PIERRE / RUBEN / ADINA / GEORGE / LORAINÉ

Then I spent...

MICHAEL / ILYA / ALEX / EBONIE / PETER S

so many nights...

NYRA / PETER H / DONNA / ABDULLA / LESLIE

Thinking how...

AUDREY / BENNETT / DEBRA / STEPHANIE

You did me wrong...

(Sound washes over palms...)

WHOLE ENSEMBLE

this is a story...
that is twisting.
and turning.
and shifting.
and changing.
and shaping.
and becoming...

(Actors begin to twirl and twirl and twirl. This could be a whole show that twirls and transforms. Maybe it can look like a Trisha Brown performance. An entire company in layered clothing that can become man, woman, transgendered, etc. Maybe have the women in the cast only play men and the men only play women. Okay, we'll see.)

THE BOOK - ONE [STORY OF SAM]

(Coming down from the sky is the spectacular entrance of a beautiful, but very simple, book. Someone in the company picks it up. When they open it they are illuminated from inside the book.)

ILYA

It's not a Bible.

PETER H

No, that would be too obvious.

LESLIE

And I am too young.

NYRA

In some ways, it's better.

PIERRE

I am on a journey.

ALEX

In search of a connection.

LORAINÉ

Between my knowledge

ABDULLA

And my spirit