



# VIRTUAL GOLD

LOOK! PRESENTATION

## ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

New Play Reading of *90 Days* by Salim Rahemtulla

Directed by Melissa Oei

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### Salim Rahemtulla - Playwright

Salim was born in Kampala and moved to Canada in 1974, after graduation in Computer Science from the University of Manchester, England. Retired in 2019 and with encouragement from his children, he has found the time to pursue his passion for creative writing. His first foray into theatre was playing “Whale” in *Jonah and the Whale* at the Aga Khan School Kampala in the late 1960s.

Salim has just finished the script of his first play *90 Days* about the traumatic 90-day period in which all non-indigenous people of Uganda were expelled by dictator Idi Amin. It draws on Salim’s memories of growing up in Uganda in a modest family who became separated after the expulsion. He is currently writing short stories that he hopes to publish soon. Salim lives in Vancouver with his wife and four children.

### Salim’s Statement

My university degree is in computer science, a far cry from the arts world. The only reason *90 Days* has reached this stage is because of the encouragement and incredible persuasive powers of my children. This play is about the 1972 Ugandan exodus. It is loosely based on my own family’s sudden and painful departure from Kampala. Idi Amin, then President of Uganda, had a dream he should expel all Asians from the country, and he gave them 90 Days to leave. We were 11 in the family, and the aftermath of the expulsion was that most of us were flung far away from each other to various countries around the globe. This play reflects on my memories of growing up in Kampala.

Yusuf Rahim, a Kampala shopkeeper, doesn’t believe Amin’s order is real and refuses to uproot his wife and two children. He decides to stay. As the Rahim family navigates the uncertainties of the ninety days that follow, the dangers of staying in Kampala become too clear to ignore. As the family makes hard choices about whether to seek asylum in countries that do not want them, one of the largest expulsions of the twentieth century is brought to life through the lens of a modest Ismaili family tearing themselves away from what they thought was home.

Next year, it will be fifty years since the expulsion. I felt it was important to tell this story for the children and grandchildren of the first non-European refugees allowed into Canada. With the current wider migration crisis and upheaval around the world, it made even more sense to portray this story.

I am honored and grateful to Western Gold Theatre for making this possible.



### **Melissa Oei - Director/Asian Heritage Month Curator**

Melissa Oei is a theatre actor and director. She is a graduate of Studio 58's Conservatory Acting program, Langara College's Film Arts program, and Capilano University's Theatre Arts program. Melissa has performed with dozens of companies across Western Canada, most recently in the one-person show *The Twelve Dates of Christmas* with Arts Club Theatre. Melissa is a recipient of the Antony Holland scholarship from Studio 58, the Aida Broadbent Award from Theatre Under the Stars, the Best Performer award from Langara's Unlock the Vault film festival, an Ovation Award, and is a two-time Jessie Richardson Award nominee.

Melissa was born, raised, studied, works, and lives in Vancouver on the traditional and unceded territories of the x̱m̱əθkwəy̱əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.

### **Asian Heritage Month Curatorial Statement**

When Artistic Director of Western Gold Theatre Tanja Dixon-Warren approached me about curating programming for Western Gold Theatre's Virtual Gold series for Asian Heritage month, I felt a spark of excitement that I hadn't felt in a very long time. The next feeling was confusion—what was my job exactly? All Tanja said was, "Your job is to dream." Wow, and I thought I already had the best job in the world.

During a year when all jobs as a professional stage actor had disappeared, my opportunities for joy were few and far between. Though I had never curated anything before, besides my Instagram account, something about this project really spoke to me. I have had so many mentors during my professional career give me opportunities as an artist, and I was excited to do the same for others of both my artistic and cultural community. And in a year when anti-Asian sentiment and violence has been on a disturbing rise, it felt especially important to highlight the experiences of Asian artists and create Asian visibility.

Because I love plays, the first thing that came to mind was to present a script by an Asian playwright, and because part of Western Gold Theatre's mandate is to mentor emerging artists, I hoped that we could help a new playwright to workshop and present their work.

When considering an idea for a workshop, I was immediately struck by the idea of shadow puppetry. My father grew up in Jakarta, and I remember clearly two Javanese shadow puppets that used to hang on my grandmother's kitchen wall. I was always fascinated by their delicate and intricate forms. I was lucky enough to get in touch with Annie Rollins and procure her services to teach us more about this beautiful art form.

Lastly, but perhaps most profound for me, is the roundtable discussion. When the fatal attack of eight spa workers in Atlanta, six of whom were Asian, once again shed light on the rising incidents of Asian hate crimes over the past year, I knew that I wanted to hold a bold and honest discussion with Asian theatre artists from our community. And because of the Western Gold Theatre's mandate, I especially wanted to feature senior artists. I wanted not only to create visibility for our Asian artists but also highlight their stories and experiences, both the challenges and the victories. My hope is that by creating visibility and deepening understanding of our experiences, we can keep working towards more opportunities, appreciation, and equity for Asian artists in our community.

I hope that you enjoy this programming for the Virtual Gold Series this May as much as I have enjoyed dreaming it up!

## CAST LIST

Yusuf Rahim -----	Dhirendra
Parin Rahim -----	Nimet Kanji
Shamira Rahim -----	Sabrina Vellani
Nasser Rahim -----	Karthik Kadam
Munir Kassam -----	Munish Sharma

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### **Dhirendra - Yusuf Rahim\***

Known for the Gemini nominated *Jinnah on Crime* movies, Dhirendra's career spans 30+ years. His theatre credits include Raj in *Raj from Edmonton* (a one man show), Dr. Aziz in *A Passage to India*, Dean Rebel in *Totterdown Tanzi*, Bakha in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, Edgar in *King Lear* and Nitin in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Pariag in *Dragon Can't Dance* and Octavius/Lucius in *Julius Caesar* directed by Roger Rees.

Amongst his copious TV and film credits, Dhirendra has had lead roles in such films as *After Midnight*, *Binodini*, *Underfunded* and *Possession*.

He co-founded British Asian Theatre Co. and Star Productions Film/Video Collective in the UK.

He is the voice of Simon in the animation series *LEGO Jurassic World*, for which he received a Leo nomination in the best male voice performance category and also the UBCP/ACTRA Award for the best voice in an animated series.

Dhirendra is a Co-Chair on the UBCP/ACTRA BIPOC Committee and is a firm believer in giving back. He also serves on the Age Inclusion Working Group, Scholarship Committee, and Mentorship Committee.

An avid cook and sommelier, he lives with actress/writer wife Peri Allan, teen daughter Saloni Miyanger and Schn-oodle Hiro. An East African Asian, Dhirendra is honoured to bring the role of "Yusuf" to life.

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### **Nimet Kanji - Parin Rahim\***

Nimet was born in Nairobi, Kenya and began acting on stage with the local theatre company. She emigrated to Vancouver in 1989 where she continued to work on stage. She began her career in film and TV in 2001 and has had the pleasure of working with Edward James Olmos (*Battlestar Galactica*), Kevin Sorbo (*Paradox*), John Cusack (*Martian Child*), and Sitara Hewitt (*Little Mosque on the Prairie*), amongst other notable names. Her theatre credits include *Sultans of the Street* (Carousel Theatre), *9 Parts of Desire* (The Maggie Tree), *Bombay Black* (2017 Vancouver Fringe) and *Victim Impact* (Theatre Conspiracy).



**Sabrina Vellani - Shamira Rahim**

Sabrina is an Indo-Canadian actor, poet, and daughter of Tanzanian Ismaili immigrants. She graduated from UBC's BFA Theatre Acting program in 2018. She has been in productions such as Killjoy Theatre's *Burqa Boutique* (directed by Gavan Cheema & Jamie King) and Axis Theatre's co-production with Babelle Theatre entitled *All My Friends Are Animals* (directed by Marie Farsi). You can also find Sabrina's work in Five Cedar Films' short film *Speak* (directed by Shaheed Devji), which premiered in IFFSA's Virtual 2020 Festival.

Her poetry and essays have been published under her pen name in various magazines across North America and the UK. She is looking forward to reading the role of Shamira in Salim Rahemtulla's *90 Days*.

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**Karthik Kadam - Nasser Rahim**

Karthik, originally from Bangalore, India, is a recent graduate of UBC's BFA Acting Program. Theatre credits include United Players' *Silent Sky* (Peter Shaw); for UBC: *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again.* (Ensemble), *Red* (Mark Rothko), Timothy Findley's *The Wars* (Sergeant Rodwell), *GOLDRAUSCH* (Oskar), and *Silence* (King Ethelred). Film credits include Naked Cinema's *Refractions* (Moe) and Barefaced Greek's *Antigone* (Chorus).

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**Munish Sharma - Munir Kassam\***

Munish is an actor, writer, and dancer. Originally from Regina, SK, Munish has called Vancouver home for over a decade. His second show *Danceboy* was recently featured during the 2020 Tremors Festival presented by Rumble Theatre. He was also Pi Theatre's artist in residence in 2020 and has continued on as an artist associate. A few career highlights include a Jessie Nomination for his work in *The Invisible Hand* for Pi Theatre in 2016 and winning Pick of the Fringe at the Vancouver Fringe in 2015 for *Mrs. Singh and Me*, which was his first playwriting credit. Recent credits include *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (Arts Club), *The Orchard (After Chekhov)* (Arts Club), *The Matchmaker* (Arts Club), *All's Well that Ends Well* (Bard on the Beach), and *Victim Impact* (Theatre Conspiracy).  
Instagram @munisharma.com

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\*The participation of these artists is arranged by permission of Canadian Actors' Equity Association under the provisions of the Dance Opera Theatre Policy (DOT).