

THE ARTS

Rising above anguish and anger of Sept. 11 in 'Barriers'

Although the theme is separation, the writing and production of the play is a triumph of people coming together

By JYOTIRMOY DATTA

'Barriers,' billed as a play about an "untypical Asian-Muslim American household fighting against each other post 9/11," is a timely and yet a timeless play.

Written by a woman affected by Sept. 11 as a means of relieving her anguish and anger, it rises above the terror attacks, and the racial abuse the writer herself faced, to emerge as a moving piece about the breakdown of a family.

Although the theme is "barriers," the very writing and production of the play is a triumph of people coming together — people of varied color, talents and backgrounds. Written in agony and loneliness, it is being produced by a multicultural group and turned into a collective New York celebration of the arts, in part supported by community grants.

Members of the team were introduced at the Sundaram Tagore Gallery in SoHo on Aug. 27 by Gitesh Pandya, producer of the film 'American Desi,' whose comments in print and television on the economics of the entertainment industry has won plaudits from a critical and savvy audience.

Written by Rehana Mirza and directed by Ashok Sinha, this Desipina production is scheduled for 12 shows on consecutive weekends, Sept. 6-Sept. 22, at Here Arts Center on Sixth Avenue between Spring and Broome Streets.

Not all victims of big catastrophes are as lucky as Rehana. An accomplished playwright, she could transmute her experience into a play that her sister, Robi Mirza, thought cried out to be performed. And the sisters found some very talented people to support them.

Rehana is the writer in the sisterly duo. One



PHOTO ABOVE, members of the cast of 'Barriers' at a meeting with the media at Sundaram Tagore Gallery in SoHo, New York, on Aug. 27. From left, Deepa Purohit, Amit Patel, Krishen Mehta, B4U country representative Hari Srinivas (B4U is the official media sponsor of 'Barriers'), Jade Wu, and Debargo Sanyal.

PHOTO RIGHT, Rehana Mirza, writer of 'Barriers,' at the media reception at Sundaram Tagore Gallery. Mirza said, having been directly affected by Sept. 11, she wrote the play as a means of relieving her anguish and anger. (Photos: Jyotirmoy Datta)

of her feature-length screenplays — 'Far From Home' — was a finalist at Sundance Feature Film Lab Program.

She graduated with honors from NYU with a BFA in Dramatic Writing and Asian Pacific American Studies.

The inspiration for 'Barriers' came to her

when she was forced to keep indoors at their family home near Ground Zero for almost a week after the terrorist attacks because of the fumes and travel restrictions.

Robi completed her MBA with a specialization in entrepreneurship from the University of Colorado. She has produced short films such as

'After and dirty laundry,' as well as a feature-length DW documentary, 'Fillum Star: The Peter Patel Story.'

Robi formed with her writer sister Desipina (a form of slang dubbing a person of South Asian roots, 'Desi,' and Filipina, 'Pina') Productions to give meaning and draw attention to yet another colorful patch in America's cultural quilt.

The father of the Mirza sisters has a Pakistani, and the mother, a Filipina background. In 'Barriers,' Rehana deals with both the immediate consequences of Sept. 11 to her family, as also the submerged tensions within the family that surface due to deep and profound pressures created by the attacks.

The central figure is the Pakistani father, played by a former Bollywood actor, Krishen Mehta, who had so far kept the family together. The mother is of a Chinese background (played by Jade Wu). The play is about the breakdown of the central father figure.

Others in the cast are Amit Patel, Tyler Pierce, Deepa Purohit, David Sajadi, Debargo Sanyal, and Jade Wu. The production is designed by David Morris (set), Juliet Chia (light), Chris Webb (sound), Kirche Zeile (costume) and Isheetta Ganguly (music).

The scheduled performances were made possible in part by the Manhattan Community Arts Fund, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs administered by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council.

In addition, this production is being presented through Here's Supported Artist Program which provides artists with subsidized space and technical and administrative support.

