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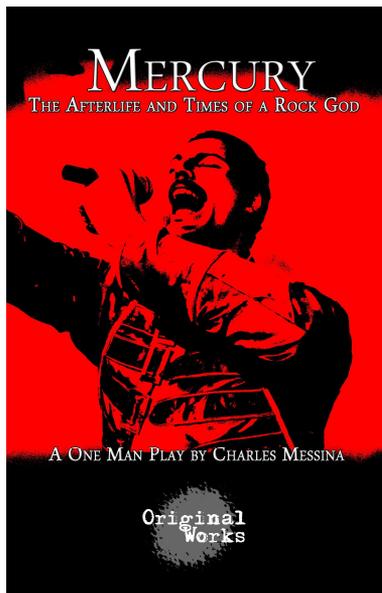
No Word in Guyanese For Me

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MERCURY
The Afterlife and
Times of a
Rock God

By Charles Messina

Synopsis: Farook Bulsara was a boy of Persian heritage who never quite fit in to his skin or his teeth. It wasn't until he became a young man that he discovered his talent and true nature, and was reborn as Freddie Mercury. After a brilliant career, with the arenas empty and the lights out, on the night of November 24, 1991, Freddie is forced to surrender his celebrity and face the frailty of his own humanity. As he succumbs to AIDS, the worldwide icon seeks redemption before a God unimpressed with celebrity. In his ultimate struggle to make sense of his grim fate, Mercury realizes that his fame, fortune, and talents are no longer enough to sustain him; that beyond the darkness of his fears, shines a light far brighter than the star he was on Earth.

Cast Size: 1 Male

**NO WORD IN
GUYANESE FOR ME**

By Wendy Graf



NO WORD IN GUYANESE FOR ME was first presented by Hatikva Productions at Sidewalk Studio Theater, Los Angeles, California, on May 14, 2011. It was directed by Anita Khanzadian. The cast was:

Hanna Jokhoe.....Anna Khaja

CHARACTERS

Hanna Jokhoe, 24, *Guyanese immigrant, a devout Muslim. She plays ten other characters as well.*

SETTING

New York City and the Caribbean country of Guyana

"NO WORD IN GUYANESE FOR ME"

The set should be simple and non literal. Panels of scarves fill the space, a few delicately hung within Hanna's easy reach. The Stage is bare except for a few small benches and a rolled up Turkish rug. A small table nearby, a box on the table. The only props used are a photo album and a variety of scarves, which will serve at times as *hijabs* (traditional head scarves), an *abaya* (traditional Muslim dress), or as the object of Hanna's loving caresses-her lover Miriyam.

MUSIC and LIGHTING are used to give emotional emphasis to the transitions and mark the passage of time, as do a few simple video projections, adding an element of place and the power of symbols with the moon and Hanna's beloved photos. Projected onto a back curtain, giving a fluid, non literal feeling, they serve both as a thread of connection and to underscore the emotional action. The soundscape reflects the changing geography of HANNA's life: first the musical Caribbean cadences and rhythms and then the vibrating sounds and intonations of New York. The adult HANNA speaks with a mild accent, which becomes more pronounced as she slips in and out of the past. As a child her accent is very strong, as it is when she becomes other characters.

NEW YORK CITY- 2010 (24 YEARS OLD)

AT RISE: HANNA JOKHOE (24), silhouetted against a projection of the moon. She wears jeans, loose shirt, denim jacket, knit cap. A LIGHT COMES UP on a box that sits atop a small table. HANNA gazes at the box for a moment, then goes to the table. She peeks inside the box, takes out a photograph album, and nostalgically runs her fingers over the word "HANNA" written across the front cover. She opens the album, turns the pages, looking at the photos.

At the same time PROJECTIONS of Hanna's life-what she sees in the photo album-flip through. WE SEE baby pictures, Guyana, and so on, then the PROJECTION rests on a photo of YOUNG HANNA, age 10, in a hijab and "I LOVE NY" tee shirt.

HANNA

I am ten.... I am.... ten. I am *ten*.

NEW YORK CITY - 1996 - (10 YEARS OLD)

"America is so high me no canna see da top of it. No sky eeder... just tiny liddle slice. Funny music too, in America, all de day, all da night...."

(She makes the sounds of a siren then puts her hands over her ears)

"Over and over and over! Me no canna sleep!"

"We live now in a place called "A Story of Queens". Me so happy to hear we come to place name Queens because me tink so many beautiful story queens here, maybe princesses even too...but no, me no canna see any queens here. No princesses eeder. But so many peoples and dey come in all de different colors. me no ever see so many colors before, all mixed up togeder. And me tink dat all dees so many colors so beautiful, like aaaaalllll de crayons in de big box! But all des colors, dey don't smile, dey don't sing... Dey don't look at me at all, just hurry, hurry, hurry by."

I didn't want to go when they told me.

"Me no wanna go to America."

"Is sooooo big" say me brudders. Buddy and Buddy dey say "America is thousand million trillion times bigger than Guyana!"

"But maybe me get lost dere. Maybe, if me go, old mumma in Paradise cry so bad and canna find me. Maybe she forget me even! Me tell Pa."

"I stay here in my Guyana. Not going!"

"Don't met yuh eyes pass me, *gyal!* No canna find job on sugar cane plantation no more in Guyana, no canna pay for tings. Wanna eat, don't you, *pagaly gyal?* Wanna buy shoes, eh? *Eh?*"

Shoes...

(She puts on shoes, shaking her head.)

"All da time? Every *day?*"

"Dey pinch and de rub me so vedy bad dat me bleed. Squash squash my toes. Cement in A Story of Queens dat burns on mi feet..."

"But everyone dey come...Pa and new wife family, Auntie Mamee and Uncle Mamoo family, of course Buddy and Buddy...now we all family to-geder. And Allah, he come, too. Auntie Mamee tell me not to worry so much because wherever we go, Allah follow and always with me. And big, high house we live in, so vedy big, it have so vedy many peoples from mi Guyana, who live dere now. So I tink okey-dokey, maybe a little like mi Guyana because all who live in here are *abedeze*-our people-and all are Muslim like me and brown like me, in this big house."

"Now you gotta talk really good English here, Hanna Banana. Have to be American."

"No, I Guyanese! (*then.:*) Them?"

"Not dem."

"Those?"

"Not does."

"Them, those, three....Them, those, three...mi tongue feels so *vedy* funny on mi teeth!"

"Got to practice, so you can be *Ah-meh-di-can.*"

"*Ah-mer-i-caaaaaan....!*"

LIGHT AND SOUND CHANGES.

HIGH SCHOOL - QUEENS - 2002

(*Hanna reads from a class catalogue:*)

"Beginning Photography and Darkroom Techniques-Claudia Martin, Instructor". There is an opening in my schedule....I've completed most of my credits toward graduation...I don't need another Study Hall...Why not? Why shouldn't I? Pa thinks it is "useless foolishness", but perhaps I could improve my technique. Perhaps I could even learn how to print my very own photos myself!

Miss Martin, my teacher, says "a photograph is like a secret about a secret".

I spend lunch hours and all my free time in the red light of the darkroom with Miss Martin, and we watch as the images magically rise up out of the water, bringing the faces, the trees, the buildings to life.

"What a miracle!"

The smell of the chemicals, the developing fluids become my perfume, Peterson's Creative Darkroom Techniques my bible...Miss Martin helps as I carefully thread the film onto the developing roll in the darkroom, holding my hands, my fingers...lining up the holes and the sprockets....guiding them in the darkness...

"You're a born photographer. You have real talent. If you work hard, you could even be a professional..."

Maybe.

Every weekend, after I go to mosque, Miss Martin takes me to a different gallery to see the work of real photographers. Black and white... colors... magical filters...

(as if turning to Miss Martin and commenting on a photograph)

"So many new ways of looking and seeing!"

Miss Martin thinks the sight of me in my *abaya* and *hijab* is beautiful and poetic.

"Why not set up the camera and tripod and photograph yourself?"

FLASHBACK. (1998 - 12 YEARS OLD)

Auntie Mamee tells me the time has come when now I must wear *abaya*. *Abaya* is traditional Muslim dress. It covers your whole body except face, feet, and hands.

"*Abaya* very special curtain to provide privacy and shelter for your womanhood. The *imam* say draw your *abaya* around you to be recognized as a believer, and no harm will come to you."

Some people they think "why you want to wear that thing?" But I must wear it. This is my religion and my roots. For other Muslim women it might be easy to take off *abaya* when they come to America, but we are Guyanese, and I must remember. Wearing *abaya* is like carrying history in my heart.

(HANNA'S face changes.)

At IS 43 I am *only abaya*-wearing student? All others are African, Spanish, Chinese.....some *tegli*, some *dugla*...but rilly black, not like me.

I have no friends. Other kids, they yell at me, call me "tarbaby!"... "popo!"...."towelhead!" Why they do that? They chase me and look under my *abaya* and say "Hey, who are you under there? What are you hiding, your cunt?"

Mostly they don't say anything at all. Mostly they don't talk to me.

Except Alisha.....

FLASHBACK ENDS.

It is to be a "photo essay". My first. Miss Martin stands behind me as we look into the camera's eye, setting up the shot....

"...now, adjust the lens....bring the world into focus...."

I am wrapped in the protection of my *hijab* but still I can feel Miss Martin's warm breath on my neck. Our arms bump, and I remember Alisha. My chest

grows tight. No! I force those thoughts aside and take my place in front of the camera.

PROJECTIONS: *Artistic shots of HANNA-her photo essay.*

FLASHBACK. (1998 - I.S. 43 - 12 YEARS OLD)

Sometimes, when no one else is around, when none of her people can see, Alisha will be my friend.

Slowly, slowly I peel back the sleeve of my *abaya*. How strange my bare arm looks and feels without its protection. Naked...cold.... Then Alisha and I put our arms out, side by side, next to each other. The hairs on our arms touch, and I can feel small crackles of electricity....my skin ripples with goosebumps....Alisha is so very black. "Like lico-rice", I whisper. She says I am "the coffee with one teeny tiny drop of cream." Then she quickly drops her arm. I can feel a special feeling in my *bako bako*....a ball of sun, buzzing, skipping, dancing around...*bah bum, bah bum, bah bum*.... And the sun, it grows bigger and bigger and begs to come out and shine!

FLASHBACK ENDS.

LIGHT AND SOUND CHANGES.

GUYANA - 1991 (5 YEARS OLD)

I am five...

In the land of my birth I run through the tall grasses...my toes go squish, squish, squishing through da clay, through the rich, red Guyanese dirt...*pit a pat, pit a pat*...frogs leap out of the way...

Here I come! Here...comes....Hanna!

"Me brush da mosquitos from mi face away as me run over da wet earth, skipping over da rocks, da pebbles, around holes and black bushes, under da ferns, up and down da summer path. And da wings of da flies glisten silver and blue and beautiful like da fairy wings in da sun as they circle da fruit, circle da plums, da oranges, da pears, da sticky tings dat drop from da trees...Me can smell da sweet of da fruit as me run, run, run. Swallows swoop and fly..."

"Is dat a hummingbird? Is it? *Is it?*"

"Den hop hop hop over da rotted nuts and berries and da vegetable thingy that me na like...."

"You can't catch me, you can't catch *me*, Buddy, Buddy!"

"We give you head start, Hanna Banana!"

"We collapse, laughing, breathing, panting so very hard at da edge of da stream, den dip our brown feet with da red mud into da cool, cool still watah....

Ahhhhhh....

Da mud swims away and wiggle de toes like little crabs, den kick, kick, kick, kick, kick!"

"Hanna, you make *hassa lookanannie* run away with your splashes!"

And we are happy, so happy that day in our Guyana, in our land of so many watahs....

That was before. Before Mumma die in the fire. Before "God rest da dead in da living and da looking", before Nine Night. Before "No sweeping da house. Cover da mirrors." Before the angel flies up, out of the flames....

(*plaintive cry*)

"Mumma!"

No answer.

LIGHT AND SOUND CHANGES.

NEW YORK CITY - 2001 (15 YEARS OLD)

Muslims attack New York City? They fly planes into the World Trade Center?

I cannot turn off the television even though it makes me feel sick. Over and over I watch as the plane crosses blue sky and disappears into the tower, the black clouds gather and rise, the second plane hits and flames erupt and billow, the sky becomes white soup and rains down ash...I imagine all the people trapped inside the burning buildings, trying to get out, their bodies blackened, twisted, stuck to one another.... I smell the smoke that hangs over the city and remember how my old mumma died, caught in the flames.

It is not a good time to be a Muslim in New York City. Everyone looks at us with such fear and hate. Buddy and Buddy, who always loved to joke and play, are angry all the time. They don't like that people think they are one of "Them" and always asking, "Is Osama your uncle?" They say the government targets Muslims and unfairly puts them in jail. They don't even feel sad for the people in the towers.

"Well, why should we? We feel like we are under attack ourselves!"

(*as Auntie Mamee*) "Now, we must try to stay quiet, measure our gestures...be good examples, *good* Muslims..."

I keep my eyes down all of the time. Everywhere we go they wave their magic wands over us, and instead of turning us into princes or princesses or even frogs, we are ordered to open our bags and "Please answer the questions!" And we must no longer use the subway, Auntie Mamee warns. Her son, Ibrahim, is stopped on his way to Columbia University one morning. He is searched and detained for six hours with no food, no water, he cannot go to the bathroom. He's pulled out of line, told to "get on your knees, Camel Jockey". "Please", he tells them, "I am not a terrorist, I am only a student. I support the U.S.!" But they do not care. They do not even want to know that there is a difference.

Being a taxicab driver is not the job it once was for Pa. The people get into the cab-his cab-that he was once so proud of, and they look at Pa, read his name-SADIQ JOKHOE-on the windshield...and their faces change. Some of the people refuse to get in at all.

(As Pa washes his cab:)

"The customers, they don't like to talk no more. They don't ask me the questions: what is way to Empire State Building, do I know where the Sex and the City is, what time do the museums open on Sundays... They just sit, mouths closed, or speak in only whispers to each other. The police stop me all the time...."Open the trunk, open the glove compartment, where is your registration?" I feel myself like a criminal. Business is bad, way, way down. I'm going to lose my cab.....People don't tip, sometimes don't pay.....Now it's just goodbye, go!"

Guards surround the mosque and people paint bad things on it in the night. A friend tells me "Stop wearing your *abaya* and *hijab*. It's too dangerous."

Still I keep wearing them.

Part of me does it just to spite everyone. Because they look at me and just want to hate me. I want to say "Fine, I will wear it, and wear it better than I did before!" But part of me does it for another reason. People at school-my classmates-don't know about Islam, and now they are talking to me all the time, asking me questions: "What's jihad, why do Muslims want to kill everybody?" I want to learn more, so I can answer them with the right answers and tell them that Islam is not just what you see on T.V.

LIGHT AND SOUND CHANGES.

NYC - MOSQUE - 2000 (14 YEARS OLD)

On the tenth day of the first month, the holy month of *Muharram*, we fast to have the sins of the past year pardoned. It's my first fast. I am hungry already! The mosque's narrow staircase is crowded with women and girls in a rainbow of *hijabs*, pushing, chattering, hurrying their way into the tiny room behind the curtain-the Women Only prayer section. Auntie Mamee finds me a seat in the second row, and I am squeezed in with the other girls, our bodies pressed up tightly against each other. My stomach growls loudly and I clutch it with embarrassment, looking to see if anyone else has heard. I needn't worry-there's a loud buzzing excitement as giddy girls on all sides of me whisper and giggle, pointing out the boys who are caught up in the sea of men praying on the main floor below.

I feel Auntie Mamee's eyes on me with a look of disapproval.

"Such behavior and attention to boys is not proper in Islam!"

I think only of my rumbling stomach and how long it has been since I last ate.

The *adhan* is given and the *imam* begins.

As his sermon drones on, the room becomes quite warm-Why is there no air conditioning in the women's section? The smell of women and girls is all around me, filling the moist air, invading my nostrils... It's not the smell of my brothers, I think...or my Pa after a day of work...no, it's a female smell...different...sweat, mingled with a sweetness?...maybe some kind of-Stop. I catch Auntie Mamee's eye. Okay, pay attention to what the *imam* is saying. Ask for forgiveness for all sins -past, present, and future, ask to receive blessings for health and wealth in the year ahead.

"...and a day of great significance and virtue..."

The imam's voice throbs over the P.A. system. I am growing light headed from the heat and not eating. I glance at the girl next to me and her face, too, glistens with a thin veil of perspiration. I can feel the warmth of her leg radiating from beneath her *abaya*.

FLASHBACK. GUYANA - (7 YEARS OLD)

(as Auntie Mamee) "All da *gyals* and womens have vedy special place in Islam.

Do you know who vedy first Muslim was? A *gyal*, just like *you*.

Mohammed had beautiful wife name Tahira. She had fiery red hair, like da flame. Tahira was only one who believe Mohammed at first. Da people was so selfish and evil...always fighting...Dey thought Mohammed, he was crazy. It took *woman*, Tahira, to believe. And when Mohammed talk she feel it all around her. And den she was free in da golden light of Allah's love. Wife of Mohammed, she was strong. And Mohammed now know dat *gyals* are most special part of Islam."

FLASHBACK ENDS.

I loved it when Auntie Mamee told me that story....

We rise. I am almost dizzy now. My body feels light and airy, a feather in the wind. An eyelash, drifting...I shut my eyes and concentrate on the Arabic, letting myself be lulled by its poetry. I am surprised to find the words of the prayers vibrating, singing throughout my body. I cannot resist joining in...."*Subhana Kalla Humma Wa Bee...*" The intoxicating poetry, the repetition of the chants....seventy times, one hundred times, one hundred and *eleven*....My heart swells. Eight *Ra-*

kats...four *Salaams*...We are one voice. Someone near me grabs my hand and, still chanting, still repeating, still praying, I long for this to never end. Twenty-five, seventy, *seventy*...I am soaring now, circling. Every smell, every breath, every magical sound-I feel as if I may pass out from the joy of it! I am in love with this, feeling my body, feeling alive, feeling Allah's love and the love of these women and girls all around me. I want to stay here forever.

LIGHT AND SOUND CHANGES.

NYC - 1999 (13 YEARS OLD)

Thirteen.....Auntie Mamee buys me a secondhand camera..."A real one? Not just disposable?"... and I fall in love. I take pictures of everything.... people (*CLICK*), buildings (*CLICK*), my family.... (*CLICK, CLICK*) Some of my family-the elders-are still so superstitious and won't let me take their picture.

"It will steal our souls!"

Now *I* take the photos I put in my album.

Thirteen also means the marriage broker begins to call. Offers are "discussed" over small glasses of jasmine tea and sweet *edo* cakes prepared especially by Auntie Mamee for this occasion.

"Marriage? But Pa.....!"

"No argument."

"But I have to go to school!"

"What does *gyal* like you need school for?"

"College, Pa, I want to go to college". I pray to Allah for Pa to allow me go to college.

"College for boys."

"This is American, not Guyana! Not some backward village! Things are different here!"

"Silly *gyal*, already promise you to cousin Sammy."

He laughs, and I hate him.

"I don't *want* an arranged marriage like old mumma had!"

"You argue I make you marry and drop out of school right now this vedy minute, worthless *gyal*."

He leaves me alone for now, and I think what's the point, why should I work so very hard and study if I am just to get married and have babies? If I am to have no hopes for college, or a career?

But I don't stop. I keep working anyway...

LIGHT AND SOUND CHANGES.

NYC - 2003 - (17 YEARS OLD)

"I am only seventeen!"

Pa is not well. He suffers from kidney problems. He wants to make sure I am taken care of before he goes to Paradise.

"*Gyal* like you no canna take care of heh-sef."

"Is now time to make good on my promise."

Auntie Mamee cannot contain her excitement.

(Hanna slowly takes down the red wedding veil.)

(As Auntie Mamee) "Marriage is a gift, dearest *gyal*, a special bond between a man and woman, a husband and a wife! There has not been created any institution in Islam which is more favoured

and dearer to Allah than marriage. The Holy Prophet say "A man who is not married, even though he may be wealthy, is surely poor and needy; and the same is true for a woman."

I am a proper *canyadan*...dark eyed virgin bride. Sammy is 18 year old Guyanese Muslim from *abedeze*, the son of a parakeet seller. His parents are considered rich-they own a small domestic bird shop in Queens. There are often tiny feathers flying about their shoulders, their sleeves, dusting the top of their heads. Sammy attends college. He's studying to be an engineer. He works afternoons at the bird shop. We are married in a traditional religious ceremony.

(She dons the wedding veil)

First Sammy is asked by the *mullah* if he indeed wants to enter into a marriage contract, and all is quiet for a moment before he thickly answers "Yes". Then I am asked if I accept this man as my husband. I can sense my family shifting in their seats. Auntie Mamee leans forward, Pa clears his throat..."I do". I look into the face of this boy, now to be my husband. Our eyes meet briefly and then slide away. Thin gold bands are exchanged, Sammy quickly forcing his over his knuckle and onto his finger, the same finger upon which the

birds alight and nibble at birdseed. I wiggle mine on with shaking hands. The wedding contract is signed, blessings are given, and we are declared to be husband and wife. A photograph of *dulahen* and *duhala* is posed for, taken, and the moment is forever recorded.

(CLICK, and then, as she rolls out the Turkish rug:)

The wedding night is spent in a small, cramped room in the home of Sammy's *aja* and *ajee*, where we now are to live.

Sammy, too, is a virgin. He has never touched a woman before, except for his mumma. I have never been touched by a man except for my brothers and my Pa. Sammy shyly assures me he has been told what to do, how to pleasure a wife. That night he seems almost relieved when I plead exhaustion.

I do everything a proper Muslim wife should do. While Sammy goes to college I clean our tiny room, I cook his favorite curries and basmati rice and egg-plant, and I try to push all thoughts and dreams of other lives aside. I stop taking pictures.

I visit Auntie Mamee and she asks about wedding night.

"You have not yet granted your husband his sexual reward?"

"I am not... *attracted* to my husband."

"Attraction will come. (*beat*) Endure".

(She takes off the wedding veil and loosens her hair, preparing herself for her husband.)

That night I lay dead in the darkness, beside my husband, and think "I can't".

At first husband is patient... the *Qu'ran* says he will be rewarded. But in the nights that follow, Sammy grows sweetly confused then frustrated as he slips his lean, bare body into the bed and I say "it is my time for bleeding", or I protest that "I am feeling ill from the richness of the food cooked by your *ajee*". I pretend to be asleep. Still, he perseveres, as if coached, tentatively stroking my back, my arm....slipping his hands between my legs and grazing his fingers near my *bako bako*.

Allah, please... Is there something wrong with me? ...Help me, help me to change it.

"Are you scared? Am I scaring you?"