

Dipti Mehta honours women as part of Diwali in B.C. celebrations

Dipti Mehta's one-woman play Honour: Confessions of a Mumbai Courtesan shines a light on the rights of women as part of Diwali, Hindu festival of lights



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Published on: October 17, 2017 | Last Updated: October 17, 2017 3:00 PM PDT



Dipti Mehta brings her one-woman play, *Honour: Confessions of a Mumbai Courtesan*, to Vancouver Oct. 20-Nov. 4 at Vancity Culture Lab. *JESSICA MENTIS / PNG*

Honour: Confessions of a Mumbai Courtesan

Oct. 20-Nov. 4 | *Vancity Culture Lab*

Tickets and info: from \$35, thecultch.com (<http://thecultch.com>)

One might not think there's not a lot of overlap between acting and medical research, but to theatre artist and cancer researcher Dipti Mehta, the two professions are more similar than they might appear.

Both require persistence and patience. And perfection is elusive.

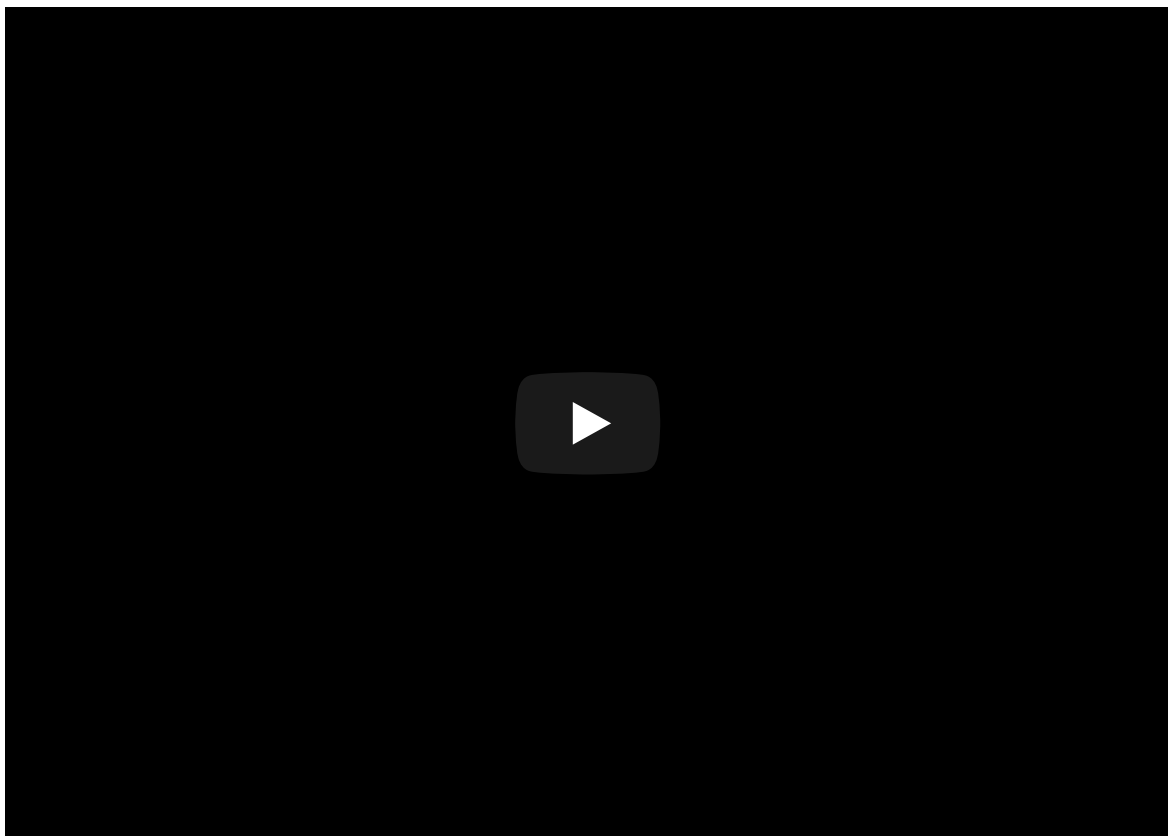
“As a scientist, you can never say ‘Okay, I’m done studying, and now I’m just going to work,’” said Mehta.

“You have to study and look at what’s new in the world. It’s the same thing as an artist. You have to keep training yourself.”

Honour: Confessions of a Mumbai Courtesan, the one-woman play she is bringing to Vancouver, is a case in point. The production has gone through a number of alterations since its 2009 premiere.

The latest is a change to the choreography. “We added an element in our set, and changed some of choreography to go with it,” she said.

“We have tied in a mythical Indian story with the show. The presence of that world has elevated the play to the next level.”



In 2018, Mehta will be adding projections, but has probably stopped making radical changes, she says. The most recent major shift occurred in 2015, when she dropped one character and added three.

“I used to tell the story via the lens of an American journalist,” she said. “We took her out, and I added the queen from the myths of the (ancient Sanskrit epic poem) Mahabharata. I also added an old priest, and the character of a eunuch.”

Mehta is bringing the production back to Vancouver as part of Diwali in B.C. (<https://rchokhani1981.wixsite.com/diwalibc>), a project by director and writer Rohit Chokhani (<http://rchokhani1981.wixsite.com/career/videos>) to make the Hindu festival of lights celebrations provincewide over the next five years. The new run follows two performances here with the 2016 Monsoon Arts Festival.



Along with tweaking and touring Honour, Mehta's acting work includes TV series and films. In the former, she's often cast as a doctor.

"When I was in India I would get cast as a reporter," she said. "Indians are stereotyped. I think I look like I could be a doctor. And I have a certain ease with the medical jargon."

Mehta was born and raised in Mumbai. When she was 12, a radio programming director saw her read at an elocution contest.

"She loved how I delivered my little speech," Mehta said. "She asked me to write something that was about 10 minutes long, and I wrote a piece about how women are ill-treated. They loved it, and it went on air. And that was the beginning of my creative journey."

Mehta was ambitious from an early age.

"I come from a community that's still pretty backwards," she said. "Very patriarchal, very orthodox. A woman's role was very defined as to be at home and have children and to take care of her husband and her in-laws and her children. The fact that I wanted an education was a huge problem. The fact that I wanted to be an actor was a disaster."

After seeing the suppression of her mother and the other women around her, Mehta knew she would have to fight for her rights.

With Honour, she's giving back. A portion of her proceeds will go to Apne Aap Women Worldwide, (<http://apneaap.org/>) an organization dedicated to the rescue and rehabilitation of sex trafficked victims and children in the brothels.

The piece didn't start out as activist theatre, Mehta says. "But it was always giving voice to people living in unfortunate circumstances. Over time it has become more than just a theatre show. It's become almost a calling for me, and a movement to make a difference."
