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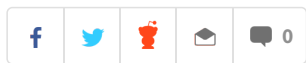
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Jessie Award winner Rohit Chokhani announces project to establish South Asian theatre network

by Holly McKenzie-Sutter on June 27th, 2017 at 2:58 PM



Jessie winner Rohit Chokhani's Project SAT aspires to bring theatre training, mentorship, and support networks to the next generation of South Asian artists.

Rohit Chokhani isn't slowing down after his [2017 Jessie Award win](#) for Significant Artistic Achievement. The producer, director, and cultural leader has just announced the launch of his new initiative, Project SAT (South Asian Theatre), to create a network that develops, produces, and showcases South Asian theatre projects in Canada.

In a press release, Chokhani said he wants to create opportunities and establish a new mainstream for up-and-coming South Asian artists.

To start off, Project SAT is bringing free workshops focused on grant writing and pitching project ideas to the new Jim Green House Studio this July.

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The workshops offered by Project SAT will be tailored to South Asian community members, with culturally-specific training and translators for Punjabi, Hindi, and ASL. The next few months will see workshops on producing, playwrighting, dramaturgy, and the Natya Shastra, an ancient Sanskrit text on the performing arts.

Chokhani took home his recent Jessie award for his work as programmer of Diwali Fest. Amongst other accomplishments, he has also served as an artistic associated for Bard on the Beach, artistic producer for South Asian Arts, and as producer-in-residence of English Theatre at the National Arts Centre for the 2015-16 season.

Project SAT is financially supported by Canada Council for the Arts, and is partnered with the Cultch for venue support and mentorship. In the upcoming pilot year, Project SAT will be partnering with the Monsoon Festival (August 6 to 13 at the York Theatre and Surrey Arts Centre) and the Performing Arts and South Asian Arts Society.

More information on Project SAT and workshop details can be found [here](#).

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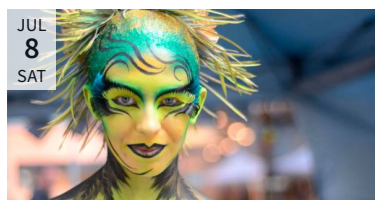
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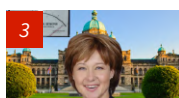
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An initiative aimed at creating a network for developing, touring, producing, and presenting national and international South Asian theatre projects in Canada

RECIPIENT OF THE VANCOUVER NOW REPRESENTATION AND INCLUSION AWARD AT THIS YEAR'S JESSIE RICHARDSON THEATRE AWARDS CEREMONY, ROHIT CHOKHANI ANNOUNCES 2018 PROGRAMMING FOR PROJECT SAT

WORKSHOP FACILITATORS INCLUDE INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS MEENA NATARAJAN AND DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE FROM PANGEA WORLD THEATER, AND INDO-CANADIAN AWARD-WINNING PLAYWRIGHT AND NOVELIST ANOSH IRANI

(Vancouver, BC) – Award-winning producer, director, and recipient of the Vancouver NOW Representation and Inclusion Award at the 2018 Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards for encouraging the inclusion of diverse voices in theatre and dance, and continuing to create works of theatre that communicate South Asian perspectives to a wider audience, Rohit Chokhani is pleased to announce the 2018 programming for Project SAT (South Asian Theatre).



An initiative aimed at creating a network for developing, touring, producing, and presenting national and international South Asian theatre projects in Canada, and supporting the next generation of South Asian artists, Project SAT will continue to represent the

unrepresented through a series of workshops. These workshops, which focus on producing, playwriting, dramaturgy and Natyashastra, will take a unique, culturally specific approach to training and will be tailored to those in the South Asian community who experience marginalization. Translators for Punjabi, Hindi, and ASL participants will be available upon request.

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Block SAT Series – in partnership with Playwrights Theatre Centre (PTC) | On now until August 1 at PTC

A series of six dramaturgy/writing discussion groups based on peer-to-peer learning with expert facilitators and writers in order to encourage, launch, and guide a new generation of South Asian dramaturgs and independent writers and producers. Facilitators include Rohit Chokhani, Heidi Taylor, and Kathleen Flaherty. Participants include Jasmine Chehil, Mannu Sandhu, Zahida Rahemtulla, Gavan Cheema, Ayush Kathuria, and Arno Kamolika. Details at <https://bit.ly/2JhI93j>.

BLOCK SAT 2018



Writing Workshop with Anosh Irani | September 7-9 at PTC

During the launch of Project SAT in 2016, Indo-Canadian novelist and playwright Anosh Irani delivered a day-long, hands-on workshop as an intro to playwriting to a group of 20 diverse artists. This workshop was a huge success and, based on popular demand, will return in 2018 from September 7-9 at PTC. In this second phase of the workshop, Anosh will present a more in-depth look at playwriting and work with both emerging and established playwrights on their projects. Anosh will teach the principles of playwriting through writing exercises, video-based examples, and one-to-one work sessions. This weekend-long workshop will accommodate up to 8 participants only. Application details will be posted online at www.projectsat.ca.



Natyashastra Workshop | Fall 2018

A four-day long creation workshop engaging in a comparative study of Eastern dramaturgy based on Bharata's Natyashastra (an ancient text on performing arts) and Western theatre forms based on Aristotelian poetics in order to invoke a praxis-based understanding of culturally specific traditions and teachings of the Natyashastra, which is rooted in the rich traditions of India. This work will revolve around topics of time, space, dramaturgy, and aesthetics. The process will demonstrate an alternate dramaturgy as this ancient text from India is explored, applying its relevance to modern times. Facilitated by Meena Natarajan and Dipankar Mukherjee. Details to be posted at www.projectsat.ca.



Introduction to Producing | Fall 2018

From developing Fringe and independent productions to working with existing organizations and presentations, this workshop will focus on the fundamentals of producing a theatrical production. Facilitated by Rohit Chokhani. Details to be posted at www.projectsat.ca.



“We live in a world full of cultural clashes and gender biases,” says Chokhani. “As cultural leaders, it’s our responsibility to do our best to ensure all voices and perspectives are heard. I am grateful for my work getting acknowledged and rewarded as a measure towards moving us forward in our efforts to understand each other better as humans and artists.”

In addition to his recent Jessie Richardson Theatre Award honour, Rohit Chokhani is also the recipient of the 2017 Shiamak Vancouver Community Award in recognition for outstanding achievement in the field of Entertainment and Theatre Arts, and the 2017 Jessie Award for Significant Artistic Achievement (Large Theatre) for his leadership as a founder and executor of numerous initiatives and activities reflecting an expanding vision of cultural diversity in Vancouver. His other roles in the industry include Artistic Director of Diwali in B.C. (2017-2018), Artistic Producer at South Asian Arts Society (2015-2018), Artistic Associate at Bard on the Beach (2017-2018), Artistic Producer at Diwali Fest (2013-2016),

Producer in Residence at the National Arts Centre – English Theatre (2015/2016), and General Manager at Touchstone Theatre (2013/2014) as well as Urban Ink Productions (2012/2013), to name a few.

Here’s what Project SAT participants are saying...

“Thanks for bringing voices out that are rarely heard.”

“Having spaces for racialized people of colour is so wonderful and vital to the artistic soul of an individual and to the collective.”

Project SAT is generously supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, along with venue support from The Cultch and PTC. Block SAT is in partnership with PTC.

For more information on Project SAT and workshop details, please visit www.projectsat.ca.

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2017 Jessie Award Winner Rohit Chokhani Launches Project SAT

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“With Project SAT, I want to help train and educate the next generation of South Asian artists,” says Chokhani. “It’s important to me to be able to create opportunities and establish a new mainstream for them. This is unlike anything being offered anywhere else in B.C. and Canada.”

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For more information on Project SAT and workshop registration details, please visit projectsat.ca.

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Q&A: Rohit Chokhani, director of *Bombay Black* 13 min read

7 September, 2017 | 0 comment



Rohit Chokhani is a go-getter. Charting his own path as a theatre director and producer, he strives to make space for South Asian artists through his initiative, [Project SAT](#) (South Asian Theatre), where they can receive support and mentorship in the theatre arts

With the premiere of Anosh Irani's *Bombay Black* at the Vancouver Fringe Festival, we spoke to the 2017 Jessie Award-winning director about his experiences in Mumbai and Canada, his transition from computer science in theatre, and being the first Mumbai-born director of Indian descent to direct *Bombay Black*.

What was your experience in the theatre community in Mumbai, and how does this compare to your experience in Vancouver?

I left Mumbai fourteen years ago, roughly coming on fifteen. I actually first went to the US, then back to India. I left India and move to Canada seven years ago, but that's after seven years of education in the US.

My professional [theatre] experience has been more in the Western world. As a kid, my exposure to the arts was as something that I did on the side. A lot of my [current] work focuses on the cultural barriers that artists of colour face in the mainstream theatre community, but also within our community. One of the things that I grew up with was a very stereotypical South Asian upbringing

where the societal pressure and philosophy was to be a doctor, engineer... all those highly-paid professional jobs, because there's nothing for the arts.

My parents are really good at encouraging me, and I'm grateful for that. It all changed for me when I moved out West because I saw a way to take what I was doing as extracurricular, saw a lot of potential in myself, and had that belief to be able to work that into a career. And here we are, a few years later, and I'm working full-time in the arts.

It's interesting that you say that most of your experience has been in the Western world, because this is something I can relate to as someone who moved from the Philippines to Canada, and having this longing to more closely connect with my country's cultural traditions. With Project SAT, what was the catalyst for you?

In Canada, given such high immigrant population, and also South Asians being one of the largest visible minorities... a lot of mixed-race artists, immigrant artists, indigenous artists... we all face the challenges and the barriers within our culture, but then there's also barriers in the mainstream where most of the artistic excellence or so-called "good products" in the arts are coming out of Eurocentric practices, even though there are lots of other ways of creating art. That was the impetus and personal inspiration in wanting to create something where people have the freedom to explore their own artistry and didn't have to face systemic barriers that exist currently in the professional arts world.

Given my background, I wanted to create a platform where there was support for future generations of South Asian artists. I didn't want them to go through what I've gone through for years in creating a space for myself. I know that a lot of people are going through that, and I don't want that to happen for our emerging artists. I want them to have more fluidity in their processes and more culturally-specific freedom to do work that they want to do.

I completely understand the motivations for this project, especially where racialized and oppressed artists of colour feel that their work is not recognized because of these barriers. How important is it to have mentorships that are tailored to the cultural backgrounds and traditions of marginalized groups?

I think it's very important to have mentors. I had many mentors both from within the culture and from outside the culture. In the artists' community in 2017, there is far more space for now than what it was like 30 years ago, 40 years ago.

Rahul Varma has been a big champion for me all these years. He was the first one who came and created a company called Teesri Duniya (Third World Theatre). His work is very political from the South Asian perspective, but also about many other cultures. He's a really great writer, and is a playwright for his own company. What he had to face when he immigrated here... cannot even imagine what I would've been able to do under those circumstances as a first-generation immigrant artist. But we move forward, and there is still a lot of work to do.

These folks have been really generous to me. They've passed on the torch. They continue doing their work, and they've supported us to light it. There needs to be something more formalized so we can do it in more quantities. From the mainstream perspective, when people talk about South Asian artists in their world, they can only count a few. But in my world, I have hundreds. And that needs to change.

The mentorship seems to be addressing subjects beyond craft, including grant writing and pitching projects. Was there any program of this sort when you were starting out your theatre career in Canada?

I never took formal theatre training or any other program; that does not mean I don't value what's out there. I am a go-getter. I design programs on my own terms through professional development grants or through individual relationships, and train myself in various areas.

I put myself in relationships and partnerships and organizations where I could learn how things are done despite it being Eurocentric. Once I understood the world and the picture and how to raise money and all of that, in parallel, I was training myself in culturally-specific work because I didn't have any formal training there. I started bringing in artists that I was interested in, and then by observing, I started learning. And I still am.

I feel like there are a few of us who have been successful now doing this, myself included, but we had to chart out our own paths without formalized training programs. I know a lot of South Asians who go to theatre programs like UBC and Studio 58, and those are valuable for people who are open to doing culturally-specific work as well as Eurocentric work, but if there is someone who is not interested in going through that kind of model, there should be something else like this that exists formally.

I'm surprised to learn about your background in computer science. How did you make the leap from that to being a theatre artist?

Theatre happened by chance. The art was always there... even though I was a computer geek as a kid, I was designing and taking animation classes on the side. I just didn't have the belief go against societal and familial pressure as a teenager. But as I became stronger as an adult, it was more of a mental and philosophical shift. Art in my life had already existed because my parents were very supportive of us performing and dancing as kids then.

I think the shift really happened because of my management skills and my ability to bring groups of people together and hold space for different perspectives. Even though I was traditionally very knowledgeable in the skill of computer science... I wanted to get out of there soon and get into the arts, so I started applying for management positions in video game companies and one such company picked me up and I went from being an intern to producer in a very short period of time. It was mainly because of my leadership and management skills.

Once you're in there, you just learn everything through your experience and you understand what the process is. And I personally think that once you understand how to produce in any one of the fields, whether it's film, video games, or theatre, I think the kind of decision-making and problem solving and critical skills that you need are kind of the same, you just need industry-specific knowledge. I immigrated to Canada, and through friends, I landed in theatre and after a few projects of my own, I was able to get the more discipline-specific knowledge theatre. The rest is history.

Are there any similarities with your approach to video games and directing theatre?

I'm a very visual guy. [*Bombay Black* has a] very interesting script because this is about a blind man wanting to hire an exotic dancer. With a blind man, you take away all the visuals. The whole concept of why would a blind man want go to an exotic dancer was a very interesting story.

Yeah, I think there's a commonality there. Even when I was in video games, I was dealing with visuals, and now in theatre, I'm still drawn to material that is visual. When I say visual, it does not always have to be the visuals that you see. In *Bombay Black*, a lot of visual things are going to be imagined in our heads. This play has been done many times before, but my re-imagining has a couple of things that I believe are unique to the way I am wanting to do this production.

One of them is that I want the audience to feel what it's like to be blind. Some portions of the script will be interpreted where the audience will be blind. The second thing is that *Bombay Black* has been produced many times, of course, in Canada, India... but in Canada, it's never been directed by someone who is of Indian descent and Mumbai-born. I am both of those, so I think just by those facts, there are some new things that will come out of this re-imagining of *Bombay Black*.

Could you clarify that? The fact that you would be the first Indian director for *Bombay Black* is a shock to me.

I think it's a disturbing fact and that kind of ties in to what I'm trying to do with Project SAT. I think the way directors get selected is a conversation on its own, but it kind of goes back to the sort of path that we were talking about earlier, where it is very Eurocentric. It becomes clearer that there is no space. First, how many South Asian plays get produced? Second, how many South Asian actors get the opportunity to be in plays? The third is, even if it is South Asian content, how much of it is actually led by producers who are South Asian, or led by an artistic vision which comes from a director who's South Asian? All of that is super-marginalized, and it doesn't exist. It's pretty daunting for someone to take on that.





Photo credit: Zahida Rahemtulla

In terms of what needs to happen in the theatre community at large, I think that's the shift we need to see. Project SAT wants to facilitate that, and I think it's great for me to get that opportunity and for Anosh Irani to trust in me, to give me an opportunity to direct a script that is going to be well-produced. It's really a favour from him to give me the rights to direct this. I'm really honoured and I look forward to delivering that vision.

How did you come to direct *Bombay Black*?

[Anosh Irani and I] both happened to be in Mumbai at the same time a couple of years ago, and we met there for coffee. We were close to the world where all this takes place. That time, there was nothing specific about what we were going to do. We spoke about all the things he has done: *Bombay Black*, *Matka King*, and a few upcoming things he was writing.

Anosh was one of the first ones who came on board [with Project SAT]. He did a Playwriting 101 workshop last year and it was a huge hit. We are working again on another workshop, this time for a slightly more advanced level where people have a script or project in progress. It was not so far-off for us to start talking about how to bring his work to the work that I do. One of the things I asked him was, *can you let me direct Bombay Black*?

I think I have a unique perspective given that we are from there, and have some connections over how we saw theatre in the country, and also how we saw Bombay. We have a lot of similarities. We both came here – in his case, he transitioned from an advertising background into writing; I transitioned from a computer science background into producing and directing. I think

really loved the idea because I had a unique take on it.

How has your experience been directing *Bombay Black* so far?

It's been a very eye-opening process. Not often is a play written with a character blind. It does involve rethinking some things in order to portray it correctly. We've had a lot of interesting people come on board [during the auditioning process]. It's always interesting to see the kind of people coming and their unique take on various things.

It's my first time directing at the Fringe, but I've been involved with two productions before in the Fringe, so I'm pretty familiar with that process. And both those productions were pretty well-received and well-awarded at the Fringe. This is a new hat I'm wearing as a director.

That transition that we spoke about where I came as an immigrant and didn't have that many opportunities to start with despite my background in video games... Fringe was a platform that launched me into the theatre world. That time, it launched me as a producer. Two years later, I come back as a very established producer, but also launching myself as a director now.

Going back to Project SAT, what do you want to see it become? What are your goals for it, ultimately?

Besides the formal goal of creating a network and having ongoing training for emerging South Asian artists, I would want it to expand. We already have all of our workshops [and they] have the option for participants to request any kind of access to the language that they would want. So in the past, we have had ASL (American Sign Language) for participants. Although it's South Asian, we don't want to keep it just under the South Asian spectrum. If there are other people outside of South Asian culture who have had similar experiences, [they] would be perfect for Project SAT.

My long term vision would be that it becomes sort of a huge incubator for new shows, and new artists, and there would be an event that happens annually where all of us come together and discuss what should be the next steps in moving the art form and the culturally-specific practices forward.

What's next for Rohit Chokhani?

My plate is pretty full at the moment. Immediately after *Bombay Black* is done, my partner Ashley Rose and I are writing a project that's based on intercultural dating and our specific experience, and that is getting professional reading at the Prismatic Arts Festival in Nova Scotia. After that, I will curate the Diwali Festival. Because the whole theme has been around Bombay, my parents [will come to Canada]. This Diwali is when they'll get to see one of my productions for the first time, so it's special.



Photo credit: Zahida Rahemtulla

See *Bombay Black* at the Vancouver Fringe Festival from September 9-16 at Vancity Culture Lab. Tickets are available on the Vancouver Fringe Festival [website](#). Schedules may vary.

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Rohit Chokhani launches "Project SAT" (South Asian Theatre)

By **posted by: Rattan Mall** - June 27, 2017



PRODUCER, director and recipient of the 2017 Jessie Award for Significant Artistic Achievement (Large Theatre), Rohit Chokhani, on Tuesday announced the launch of Project SAT (South Asian Theatre) – an initiative aimed at creating a network for developing, touring, producing, and presenting national and international South Asian theatre projects in Canada.

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Project SAT is supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, along with mentorship and venue support from The Cultch. Promotional partners for Project SAT's pilot year included the Monsoon Festival for Performing Arts and South Asian Arts Society.

For more information on Project SAT and workshop registration details, visit www.projectsat.ca.

Wednesday, July 18, 2018

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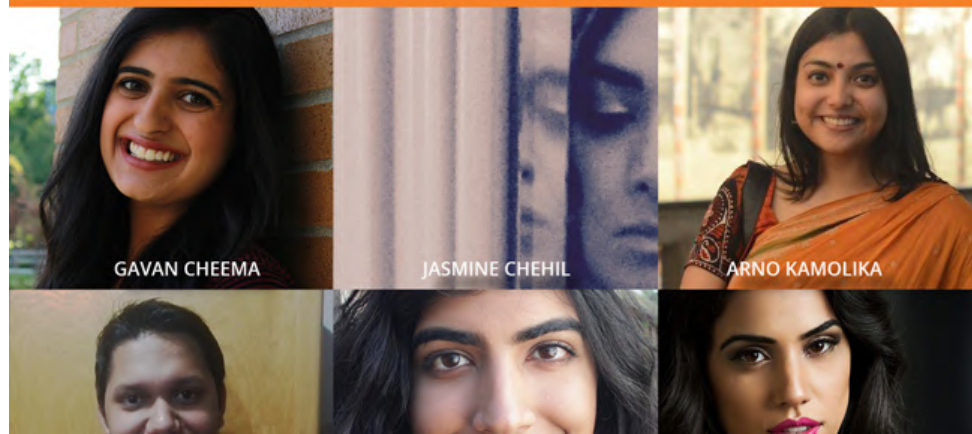
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Rohit Chokhani announces 2018 programming for Project SAT

Darpan News Desk, 18 Jul, 2018



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from September 7-9 at PTC. In this second phase of the workshop, Anosh will present a more in-depth look at playwriting and work with both emerging and established playwrights on their projects. Anosh will teach the principles of playwriting through writing exercises, video-based examples, and one-to-one work sessions. This weekend-long workshop will accommodate up to 8 participants only. Application details will be posted online at www.projectsatsat.ca.

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A four-day long creation workshop engaging in a comparative study of Eastern dramaturgy based on Bharata's Natyashastra (an ancient text on performing arts) and Western theatre forms based on Aristotelian poetics in order to invoke a praxis-based understanding of culturally specific traditions and teachings of the Natyashastra, which is rooted in the rich traditions of India. This work will revolve around topics of time, space, dramaturgy, and aesthetics. The process will demonstrate an alternate dramaturgy as this ancient text from India is explored, applying its relevance to modern times. Facilitated by Meena Natarajan and Dipankar Mukherjee. Details to be posted at www.projectsatsat.ca.

Introduction to Producing | Fall 2018

From developing Fringe and independent productions to working with existing organizations and presentations, this workshop will focus on the fundamentals of producing a theatrical production. Facilitated by Rohit Chokhani. Details to be posted at www.projectsatsat.ca.

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In addition to his recent Jessie Richardson Theatre Award honour, Rohit Chokhani is also the recipient of the 2017 Shiamak Vancouver Community Award in recognition for outstanding achievement in the field of Entertainment and Theatre Arts, and the 2017 Jessie Award for Significant Artistic Achievement (Large Theatre) for his leadership as a founder and executor of numerous initiatives and activities reflecting an expanding vision of cultural diversity in Vancouver. His other roles in the industry include Artistic Director of Diwali in B.C. (2017-2018), Artistic Producer at South Asian Arts Society (2015-2018), Artistic Associate at Bard on the Beach (2017-2018), Artistic Producer at Diwali Fest (2013-2016), Producer in Residence at the National Arts Centre - English Theatre (2015/2016), and General Manager at Touchstone Theatre (2013/2014) as well as Urban Ink Productions (2012/2013), to name a few.

For more information on Project SAT and workshop details, please visit www.projectsatsat.ca.

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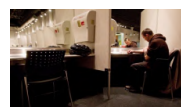
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Claiming space

Rohit Chokhani is blazing trails for South Asian artists

SABRINA FURMINGER
@sabinarnmf

How do you claim space in a sector that has been dominated and defined by white European settler culture for decades?

It's a pressing question when you're an artist of colour, determined to break through into a mainstream theatre world that doesn't seem to have space for you, and it's a question that has risen in volume and frequency in the Vancouver theatre scene over the last several years.

We've heard it when companies cast white actors to play characters of colour, or when they try their hand at non-traditional (sometimes called colour-blind) casting. For a question this pressing, no easy answers have emerged.

A tipping point of sorts did come in 2015, when more than 150 members of the Vancouver theatre community issued an open letter to the board of directors of the Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards, taking them to task for an apparent lack of diversity among Jessie nominees and recipients. The Jessies responded by inviting community consultation, subsequently instituting a diversity mandate and introducing the Vancouver Now Representation and Inclusion Award.

Rohit Chokhani was a signatory on that 2015 open letter. By that point, the dynamic cultural leader had been in Canada for five years, producing work for a long list of theatre companies, but not yet directing – and not because he lacked the skill.

"When I came [to Canada], I was as confident as I am right now as a director, but there was no space," says Chokhani in a recent interview in a West End coffee shop. "There was no space for people to give me the kind of opportunity that I wanted, and I don't like to wait around for things."

Chokhani says his work has always been about more than himself; it's about claiming space for his community. In this way, he considers himself a second-generation theatre artist, building on the work of trailblazing theatre artists such as Margo Kane from the Talking Stick Festival and Gateway Theatre's Jovanni Sy. "Their work allowed a little bit of space for folk like me to enter, and now we are claiming more and more

because of the work their generation did," he says.

Since arriving from India (by way of the USA) in 2010, Chokhani has been an artistic producer for the not-for-profit South Asian Arts organization and growing Diwali festival, an artistic associate at the Bard on the Beach Shakespeare festival, and producer-in-residence at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, leveraging his positions to claim more and more space for South Asian theatre artists in and beyond Vancouver.

"This doesn't mean seeing more South Asian stories done in a Eurocentric way."

—Rohit Chokhani

This year, Chokhani kicked that effort up a couple of notches by launching Project SAT, an initiative aimed at creating a network for developing, touring, producing and presenting national and international South Asian theatre projects in Canada. Meanwhile, he'll make his long-awaited directorial debut next week at the helm of *Bombay Black*, as part of the 2017 Vancouver Fringe Festival's Dramatic Works series.

All of this comes on the heels of his Jessie Award win in June for Significant Artistic Achievement (Large Theatre) for presenting Touchstone Theatre's hard-hitting sex slavery study *Brothel #9* (all while curating The Cultch's upcoming Diwali programming, too).

With Project SAT – SAT being both an acronym for South Asian Theatre and the Hindi word for truth and the inner essence – the primary goal is elevating South Asian artists. "There's only so much we can do as independent producers, because there are only a few of us who have actually claimed that space, so the quality is there but the quantity isn't," Chokhani says. His goals include aiding in the development of new work and building a globe-spanning touring network. "In order for the quality to happen, we need to create more things – and of course, we can produce things here, but they need to go elsewhere in Canada. They need to go globally."



Top: Project SAT founder and pioneering South Asian theatre artist Rohit Chokhani, pictured at his Hare Krishna temple in Burnaby. Dan Toulou photo Bottom: *Bombay Black* playwright Anosh Irani. Nirmal Shah photo

Project SAT launched in July with a series of culturally specific workshops focused on grant writing and pitching project ideas to presenters and producers, like Chokhani. Translators for Punjabi, Hindi and ASL participants are available upon request. Upcoming workshops will focus on producing, playwrighting, dramaturgy and Natya Shastra, an ancient South Asian text on the performing arts.

The aim of Project SAT isn't to teach people of colour how to adapt their voices to the mainstream, says Chokhani, nor is it to give them tools to contort their stories so that they're palatable according to European standards.

"This is continuing to

claim the space for South Asian artists, but this does not mean just seeing more South Asians on Eurocentric stages," he explains. "This doesn't mean seeing more South Asian stories done in a Eurocentric way. This actually means claiming a space to train individuals in their own ancestral way of doing things, and there are many different ancestral traditions in South Asia."

Meanwhile, buzz has been building for his debut. Chokhani is a Fringe veteran – he produced *Siddhartha: A Journey Home* and 2015's *Pick of the Fringe* two-hander *Mrs. Singh and Me* – and for his first go in the director's chair, he chose playwright Anosh Irani's searingly complex, award-winning

drama *Bombay Black* – which is set in present-day India and follows Padma, an iron-willed mother; her daughter Apsara, who performs erotic dances for men; and Kamal, a blind stranger with a shattering secret – because of how well it captures the searing complexities of Mumbai, the city of his birth.

"When you go to India, child marriage, classicism, casteism, uneducated mentality versus educated mentality, urbanism versus ruralism, all of that is thrown in your face, whether you're going for the first time or whether you're going every year like me, you're going to have to face that, and that's what *Bombay Black* does."

Irani is an Indo-Canadian playwright and novelist, and *Bombay Black* has been performed numerous times throughout Canada and India; Chokhani notes that this upcoming Fringe run will be the first time in Canada that the play will be directed by a Mumbai-born director of Indian descent.

Bombay Black's cast is comprised of established stand-out actors: Jessie Award nominee Nimet Kanji and Munish Sharma, who previously shared the stage in *Mrs. Singh and Me*, and Leo Award-winner Agam Darshi (*Sanctuary, Played*), who premiered her one-woman show, *Burning Point*, at the Rialto Town Actors Studio earlier this year.

At the time of our interview, Chokhani and his collaborators were still considering the techniques they could employ to thrust audiences into the whirlwind that is modern-day Mumbai, and also compel them to consider what it's like to maneuver through the world as a blind person. (He intends to remount the play in a few years, when time and budget permits him to conduct a global search and cast a blind South Asian actor in the role of Kamal).

Chokhani has respect for Irani because "he's written a play about male gazing, but then he's taken the eyes away of the person who is potentially male gazing. He's also given the audience an ability to male gaze; but I am taking it further and not letting the audience experience the male gaze all the time, so that itself is pretty loaded." **W**

Information about Project SAT's upcoming workshops can be found at projectsat.ca. *Bombay Black* runs Sept. 7-16 at the Vancity Culture Lab. Tickets at tickets.vancouverfringe.ca.

The East Van band



Amy Logan
Hidden City
@AmySnowLogan

On a recent sunny Thursday morning, the sound of trumpet notes climbing against a tuba backbeat filters out across Woodland Park in East Van. A disparate clutch of musicians, ranging from children to teens, under the direction of band leader Tim Sars, are warming up for an open-air concert under a tree. An audience begins to gather on the grass, drawn in by the rhythmic melodies.

The musicians are a part of the Greenhorn Project's Open Air Orchestra, a free, after-school program at the nearby Britannia Secondary School. Every Monday afternoon from 3:30-5 p.m., musicians of all ages meet up and play music games, New Orleans jazz and original music under Sars' direction. "It's a super fun bunch of folks, often inter-generational. We always play a game of tag halfway through the workshop," he says.

This is music at its most relaxed and loose, a place for young performers to develop confidence and spread their wings alongside more experienced elders. The Greenhorn Project is the brainchild of the Carnival Band, which Sars has been directing for over 10 years. And it runs in the family: along with his father, Ross Barrett, Sars has been closely involved with the grassroots band community scene on Commercial Drive for years.

At a time when many schools are cutting music programs, the Greenhorn Project aims to remove barriers for young or amateur musicians. For Sars, the most rewarding part of his involvement is "hanging out with these amazing youth and hearing them develop."

Greenhorn will be starting up again this September and following the school-year calendar (check Britannia Community Centre for dates). Donations in the form of instruments or money are always gratefully accepted.

Back at the park, a young man leaps up from the audience, trumpet in hand, and proceeds to captivate the audience with a New Orleans-inflected melody. By the time he starts singing, the savvy crew of teens has joined in through voice and instrument and the park fills with music.

These bands are "a huge part of our community, bringing people of so many different ages backgrounds and income levels together," Sars says. "With so many people with kids trying to make ends meet, it's so wonderful to offer a free space to bring people together and play music." **W**

Vancouver

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Rohit Chokhani Announces 2018 Programming For Project SAT

by BWW News Desk Jul. 18, 2018



Rohit Chokhani announces the 2018 programming for Project SAT (South Asian Theatre).

An initiative aimed at creating a network for developing, touring, producing, and presenting national and international South Asian theatre projects in Canada, and supporting the next generation of South Asian artists, Project SAT will continue to represent the unrepresented through a series of workshops. These workshops, which focus on producing, playwriting, dramaturgy and Natyashastra, will take a unique, culturally specific approach to training and will be tailored to those in the South Asian community who experience

marginalization. Translators for Punjabi, Hindi, and ASL participants will be available upon request.

The 2018 Project SAT programming is as follows:

Block SAT Series - in partnership with Playwrights Theatre Centre (PTC) | On now until August 1 at PTC

A series of six dramaturgy/writing discussion groups based on peer-to-peer learning with expert facilitators and writers in order to encourage, launch, and guide a new generation of South Asian dramaturgs and independent writers and producers.

Facilitators include Rohit Chokhani, Heidi Taylor, and Kathleen Flaherty. Participants include Jasmine Chehil, Mannu Sandhu, Zahida Rahemtulla, Gavan Cheema, Ayush

Kathuria, and Arno Kamolika. Details at <https://bit.ly/2Jh193j>.

Writing Workshop with Anosh Irani | September 7-9 at PTC

During the launch of Project SAT in 2016, Indo-Canadian novelist and playwright Anosh Irani delivered a day-long, hands-on workshop as an intro to playwriting to a group of 20 diverse artists. This workshop was a huge success and, based on popular demand, will return in 2018 from September 7-9 at PTC. In this second phase of the workshop, Anosh will present a more in-depth look at playwriting and work with both emerging and established playwrights on their projects. Anosh will teach the principles of playwriting through writing exercises, video-based examples, and one-to-one work sessions. This weekend-long workshop will accommodate up to 8 participants only. Application details will be posted online at www.projectsat.ca.

Natyashastra Workshop | Fall 2018

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(<http://surrey604.com>) – an initiative aimed at creating a network for developing, touring, producing, and presenting national and international South Asian theatre projects in Canada.

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These workshops will take a unique, culturally specific approach to training and will be tailored to those in the South Asian community who experience marginalization. Translators for Punjabi, Hindi, and ASL participants will be available upon request. Workshops on producing, playwriting, dramaturgy and Natya Shastra, an ancient South Asian text on the performing arts, will also take place in the upcoming months.

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Project SAT is generously supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, along with mentorship and venue support from The Cultch. Promotional partners for Project SAT's pilot year included the Monsoon Festival for Performing Arts and South Asian Arts Society.

For more information on Project SAT and workshop registration details, please visit www.projectsat.ca (<http://www.projectsat.ca>).

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Rohit Chokhani Announces 2018 Programming for Project SAT

JULY 24, 2018

BLOCK SAT 2018



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WORKSHOP FACILITATORS INCLUDE INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS MEENA NATARAJAN AND DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE FROM PANGEA WORLD THEATER, AND INDO-CANADIAN AWARD-WINNING PLAYWRIGHT AND NOVELIST ANOSH IRANI

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(Vancouver, BC) – Award-winning producer, director, and recipient of the Vancouver NOW Representation and Inclusion Award at the 2018 Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards for encouraging the inclusion of diverse voices in theatre and dance, and continuing to create works of theatre that communicate South Asian perspectives to a wider audience, Rohit Chokhani is pleased to announce the 2018 programming for Project SAT (South Asian Theatre).

An initiative aimed at creating a network for developing, touring, producing, and presenting national and international South Asian theatre projects in Canada, and supporting the next generation of South Asian artists, Project SAT will continue to represent the unrepresented through a series of workshops. These workshops, which focus on producing, playwriting, dramaturgy and Natyashastra, will take a unique, culturally specific approach to training and will be tailored to those in the South Asian community who experience marginalization. Translators for Punjabi, Hindi, and ASL participants will be available upon request.

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-
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"We live in a world full of cultural clashes and gender biases," says Chokhani. "As cultural leaders, it's our responsibility to do our best to ensure all voices and perspectives are heard. I am grateful for my work getting acknowledged and rewarded as a measure towards moving us forward in our efforts to understand each other better as humans and artists."

In addition to his recent Jessie Richardson Theatre Award honour, Rohit Chokhani is also the recipient of the 2017 Shiamak Vancouver Community Award in recognition for outstanding achievement in the field of Entertainment and Theatre Arts, and the 2017 Jessie Award for Significant Artistic Achievement (Large Theatre) for his leadership as a founder and executor of numerous initiatives and activities reflecting an expanding vision of cultural diversity in Vancouver. His other roles in the industry include Artistic Director of Diwali in B.C. (2017-2018), Artistic Producer at South Asian Arts Society (2015-2018), Artistic Associate at Bard on the Beach (2017-2018), Artistic Producer at Diwali Fest (2013-2016), Producer in Residence at the National Arts Centre – English Theatre (2015/2016), and General Manager at Touchstone Theatre

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Project SAT is generously supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, along with venue support from The Cultch and PTC. Block SAT is in partnership with PTC.

For more information on Project SAT and workshop details, please visit www.projectsat.ca.

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Award-winning producer, director, cultural leader and recipient of the 2017 Jessie Award for Significant Artistic Achievement (Large Theatre), Rohit Chokhani, has launched Project SAT (South Asian Theatre) - an initiative aimed at creating a network for developing, touring, producing, and presenting national and international South Asian theatre projects in Canada.

"With Project SAT, I want to help train and educate the next generation of South Asian artists," says Chokhani. "It's important to me to be able to create opportunities and establish a new mainstream for them. This is unlike anything being offered anywhere else in B.C. and Canada."

Project SAT kicks off in July 2017 at the new Jim Green House Studio with free workshops, which will focus on grant writing and how to pitch project ideas to presenters and producers. The Grant Writing workshop is scheduled for July 22 from 10am to 4pm and the Pitch Presentation workshops are scheduled for July 22, 25, 26, and August 1st from 6pm to 9pm.

These workshops will take a unique, culturally specific approach to training and will be tailored to those in the South Asian community who experience marginalization. Translators for Punjabi, Hindi, and ASL participants will be available upon request. Workshops on producing, playwriting, dramaturgy and Natya Shastra, an ancient South Asian text on the performing arts, will also take place in the upcoming months.

Rohit Chokhani was recently honoured with the award for Significant Artistic Achievement (Large Theatre) and nominated for the Vancouver NOW Representation and Inclusion Award at this year's Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards for his leadership as a founder and executor of numerous initiatives and activities reflecting an expanding vision of cultural diversity in Vancouver. His roles in the industry include Artistic Producer for South Asian Arts (2015-2017), Artistic Associate at Bard on the Beach (2017), Artistic Producer for Diwali Fest (2013-2016), Producer in Residence at the National Arts Centre - English Theatre (2015/2016), and General Manager at Touchstone Theatre (/people/Touchstone-Theatre/) (2013/2014) as well as Urban Ink Productions (2012/2013), to name a few.

Project SAT is generously supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, along with mentorship and venue support from The Cultch. Promotional partners for Project SAT's pilot year included the Monsoon Festival for Performing Arts and South Asian Arts Society.

For more information on Project SAT and workshop registration details, please visit www.projectsats.ca (<http://www.projectsats.ca/>).

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