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Military.HyundaiCanada.com

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NEWS

Shamas' career in entertainment storied, diverse

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As a comedic actress in the mid-1980s looking to establish her career, Sandra Shamas's unique one-woman act initially didn't receive much recognition in the Canadian theatrical community.

The eldest of three daughters of Lebanese descent, Shamas at first was considered a standup comedian and wasn't even reviewed by media, when in fact her subsequent award-winning shows would later be referred to as different unto themselves.

Shama, who resides on a farm in Halton Hills, was among 23 people named as Order of Ontario recipients last week.

Her first show, *My Boyfriend's Back and There's Gonna Be Laundry*, launched in 1987 at an Edmonton festival to rave reviews, leading to a trilogy that was nominated for a Stephen Leacock Award for Humour.

She was also inspired after attending a Lily Tomlin show at the Plymouth Theatre in New York City - a ticket she received as a 30th birthday gift.

"That was the first time I'd seen a woman command an audience alone," said Shamas, who turned 60 last year.

"The one-man show had been established in America, but not in Canada under a theatrical umbrella. My

work was autobiographical and no one was mining their life and putting it on-stage, so I had to create a show for myself that was self-produced."

Shamas, who had earlier performed with the Second City theatre troupe and earned other credits, such as a puppeteer on the CBC Television series *Fraggle Rock*, was always encouraged by the largely positive response her two-hour performances received from audiences, despite the institutional indifference she experienced early on.

Over those three decades, Shamas has produced, written, directed and starred in seven shows, with the most recent being last year's *The Big "What Now?"* - sharing her cultural experiences of being a woman "on the other side" of age 50.

Among the accolades she's received during her career are a Gemini Award in 1991 for Best Performance in Comedy and the Best Theatre Award at the HBO U.S. Comedy Arts Festival in 2003.

Shamas explained that on average it requires about four years of development to bring the shows from the formative stages to fruition, not unlike the performance cycle pursued by Olympians.

"It's very much like being an athlete," she remarked.

"I write my own material and then direct it so it

takes a lot of time and then every four years I venture out with it. You're really preparing all day to do that one thing and if it looks effortless from the audience's perspective, then you're doing your job correctly. A lot of energy goes into making it look that relaxed."

Shamas was born in Sudbury but says she "didn't really grow up" until she bought the Greenbelt farm here in 1995 and now "plants most of my groceries," while keeping a close eye on rural and farmland protection issues.

She'll receive the Order of Canada on Feb. 27 in Toronto alongside Canadian comedic legend Dan Aykroyd and "might be emboldened enough to go over and say hello."

But her greatest satisfaction is to hear through social media that her fans from the beginning days who loved her work so much brought their daughters to the shows and are now bringing their granddaughters along as well.

"(The Order of Ontario) seems lofty, to be honest," she said.

"I don't live my life in a high-octane way and awards and ceremonies of a higher echelon just seem so like another level of life. I'm not saying I'm not worthy, but it was pleasantly surprising. My Facebook and Twitter blew up. The internet makes the world so much smaller."



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