

WHAT'S IN A NAME

Dramaturgy and Press Packet



AT A GLANCE



TheatreFIRST presents *What's in a Name*, a hybrid, one-person film-play, based on true events in the life of entertainer and storyteller, Lady Zen. Born in Brazil and adopted by an American missionary couple, Zen chronicles how they overcame a lifetime's worth of emotional turmoil to find radical acceptance and become an international queer performing artist.

The film was shot on location in Guanajuato, Mexico by an international group of artists including director Jon Tracy, T1's Artistic Facilitator with a design by Sebastian Vallin and Ben Euphrat.

What's in a Name premieres with a live stream event on July 23rd at 8pm and can be rented through Sept. 1st.

CREATIVE TEAM



LADY ZEN (THEY/THEM) PLAYWRIGHT/PERFORMER

A non-binary, masculine presenting Vocalist and Writer whose undeniable voice has given Them privilege to travel and shine as a queer entertainment artist. Working in Paris, Amsterdam, Canada, Mexico, and the USA; Lady Zen is a published author, decorated academic, and social justice artist. Professionally, Lady Zen is a Fulbright Opera Vocal Performance winner; a storyteller, public speaker and poet; photographer, script writer, model, and actor. Living between Mexico and Maine enjoying life and forming collaborative alliances dedicated to change, inclusion, and the elevation of contemporary arts. 'I believe the arts are where acceptance stems from... in the power of language and the stories we share. Our difference is our strength.' The goal is to travel when the Pandemic ends with their favorite kitty, Minky, in tow. <http://www.ladyzen.world/>

JON TRACY (HE/HIM) DIRECTOR

Jon works internationally as a director, playwright, designer, educator and facilitator. He is the recipient of awards from the Kennedy Center Meritorious Achievement Award, North Bay Artys, Marquee Journalists, Ellys, Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle, and Theatre Bay Area, and has also been honored with the Solano College Theatre Alumni Award. He is a grant recipient from Theatre Bay Area, Shotgun Players' Bridging the Gap, SUI Generis, and the National Endowment for the Arts. He is the Artistic Facilitator for TheatreFirst, Co-Artistic Director of Groundswell: The International Theatre Intensive, Company Member of both Shotgun Players and PlayGround, as well as a proud member of SDC, the union for stage directors and choreographers. www.jontracyplays.com

SEBASTIAN VALLIN (HE/HIM) DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Sebastian is a filmmaker, photographer, actor, and writer. Born in 1996 in Mexico City, some highlights of his theater career include "Hamlet", "The Lion King", "Don Quijote" and some other UNAM based ventures. He's given motivational speeches at the Christel House School for economically challenged children, and taught Theatre and Art to children in rural zones in Guerrero, Michoacán, and Oaxaca. His short film "Por si te alejas" was Official Selection at the 2019 Best of Latin America Short Film Festival.

BEN EUPHRAT (HE/HIM) EDITOR, SOUND DESIGNER

Ben is a bunch of things. Video designer, audio designer, multi-instrumentalist, composer, and actor to name a few. His audio/visual work has been seen in TheatreFirst's The People's History of Next, Far Far Better Things and both of the Between Us series as well as a variety of ads and promos for T1. As an actor/musician he's performed all around the bay area at theaters such as ACT, Berkeley Rep, TheatreWorks, The Magic, Marin Theatre Company, Shotgun Players and a brief but mighty stint off-broadway in New York. His most recent solo album Portrait of Girl was released last year and is available on all the places where music is available. Check it out and check him out at beneuphrat.com

PEDRO BORGES PEREIRA GONCALVES (HE/HIM) CAMERA

Born and raised in Portugal, Pedro's road to filmmaking has many chapters. Inspired by his brother and father (both photographers) and armed with a technical degree in Electricity, he moved to England in his twenties (working in the restaurant industry as a bar manager) and ultimately making in to San Miguel de Allende, Mexico to pursue his dreams as a filmmaker. Says Pedro, "I always loved photography and cinematography for the ability to capture a moment but also to create and tell a story, with the use of lights and colors and sets and costumes etc. I think it is the most complex and extraordinary form of art as it is composed of so many different forms of art. Growing up I would go to the cinema every weekend and was my local Blockbuster's best customer watching a movie almost everyday." Pedro's film work includes promotional, music, and commercial videos, and is proud to have worked on his first feature, *What's in a Name*.

TAYLOR KOROBOW (SHE/HER) ACTING COACH

Says Taylor, international educator, theatre director, acting coach, former owner of The Voice Factory in San Francisco:

It was truly my pleasure and privilege to work with Lady Zen on this project. One would think it's the easiest thing in the world to tell one's own story when actually it's one of the hardest acting jobs an actor could ever have. I've worked with actors on gazillions of projects and it never ceases to amaze me how much courage it takes to let the honest emotion in...and then show it to the world. My job was to help guide the process, it was Zen who did all the work. Enjoy!

ARI RAMPY (SHE/HER) SCRIPT SUPERVISOR

Ari Rampy is a performer, creator, and teaching artist. She has an MFA in Devised Performance from Pig Iron Theatre Company/University of the Arts.

ALI AGUS ARDIE (HE/HIM) PRODUCER

Ali Agus Ardie was born in California and raised in Indonesia, where he fell in love with music, the performing arts and digital design. His professional career has spanned; performing as a stage musician, designing a large-scale art installations, cameraman for a TV series, special FX designer for a horror film, event producer for global music festivals, TV & stage actor, arts & marketing director for popular venues, score-composer, fire-performer, puppeteer and international DJ.

BEHIND THE SCENES



The process of creating *What's in a Name* has its own story. Hear from playwright and performer Lady Zen and director Jon Tracy about making movies in the desert.

And the scorpions.

And the lions...

T1: So... you made a movie in Mexico?

ZEN: It was a not a small feat.

JON: Shooting in Mexico was really the very final piece of an intricate puzzle. All of this started five years ago when I met Zen. My wife and I were with dear friends at a house party in Mexico... and Zen was doing an impromptu performance in the living room – a cabaret of their song-poems mixed with anecdotes about their life thus far. It was one of those life-changing moments for us. A promise was made. Let's tell Zen's story.

ZEN: I've always had a desire to write an autobiographical work that can be broadcast to an international audience and Jon Tracy and TheatreFIRST gave me that opportunity.

JON: It took awhile.

ZEN: It took a whole year of rewrites.

JON: And then a pandemic. And a shift to virtual storytelling.

ZEN: This virtual piece was formed in a global pandemic that forced us all to look at our stories through a different lens and gave us all a collective moment of silence. And from here, it made it more easy to hear our hearts' desire.

JON: Capturing the essence of a life, and finding how to give it real stakes in the telling... took time. Recalibration. Really deep consideration. We are still reworking moments as I write this.

T1: But... why did the film shoot in Mexico?

JON: Many reasons. The first was that Zen lives in San Miguel de Allende and had been assembling a brilliant international crew of Ali, Sebastian, Pedro, Gerrardo, and Taylor – throughout the year. I came down with editor Ben and script supervisor Ari and we shot the whole thing in a week. In some ways that week felt like an hour. In some ways it felt like a thousand years.

ZEN: It was a not a small feat.

JON: We shot on this compound. It was once a village many, many years ago but all that was left were two chapels. Based on the story of confinement we wanted to tell, the space created a glorious once in a lifetime context to the work. However, this compound also had animals. What type of animals you ask? A wild boar, wilder horses running past you in the dark of night, a goat named Figaro who hated movies (I think), and... lions. Three rescue lions. And scorpions. Lots of scorpions that, as I found out, like to hangout in unmarked pits for unsuspecting directors to almost fall into in the middle of night.

T1: Was it worth it?

ZEN: We worked hard on this and it has turned into a beautiful artistic work I don't think I could have imaged possible. It was alchemy at its finest.

JON: I'll never forget it. It was hard but it was truly special work with truly special people. And now that I have seen a cut of the final product, I can say that yes, it was very well worth it and am just so proud of the storytelling we achieved. I am so inspired that Zen's life thus far was captured in a way that lays bare the challenges of life but makes clear that their path is far from over. We created a piece that couldn't fit neatly into a film or a play or a poem and so manages to be all three and much, much more.

ZEN: There was true leadership from Jon as the director of this piece and genuine support through the whole process from everyone—I could not have done this without them and the audience that will see this, those who wanted to see this work happen, will be stunned at its beauty. When talents are curated like Jon Tracy knows how to do, magic happens and the audience gets to come along for the ride. In all, the experience for me shifted my perspective as a writer and artist. This is my finest work to date.



CREDITS

written and performed by

Lady Zen

directed by

Jon Tracy

director of photography

Sebastian Vallin

sound design and editing

Ben Euphrat

acting coach

Taylor Korobow

visual effects

Sebatian Vallin

camera

Pedro Gonçalves

script supervisor

Ari Rampy

produced by

Ali Agus

Lady Zen

Jon Tracy

The What's in a Name team would like to thank

Jose Blanco

Jennifer Clement

Gerardo Charreton

Fredric Dannen

Craig and Kathy Moody

San Miguel Playhouse

Filmed on location in Guanajuato, Mexico

in loving memory of our dear friend

Joseph Kent