

nytheatre.com
The New York Theatre Experience, Inc.

· connecting real audiences to real theatre in a virtual world ·

NOW PLAYING

WHAT TO SEE

FEATURES

OTHER INFO

HOME

show listings: plays

Tara's Crossing

THEATRE

[Tenement](#)

OPENED

June 2, 2005

CLOSED

June 26, 2005

PERFORMANCES

Thu - Sat at 8pm; Sun at 3pm

RUNNING TIME

2 hours, 10 minutes

TICKETS

\$15

\$12 students/seniors

800-965-4827

CAST

Aundré Chin, Emily Joy Weiner,
Nysheva-Starr, Ian Eaton

AUTHOR

Jeffrey Solomon

DIRECTOR

Steve Satta

PRODUCING COMPANY

Houses on the Moon & Lower
East Side Tenement Museum

Tara's Crossing is a new play by Jeffrey Solomon, described as being about "political asylum for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered refugees." It tells the story of a transgendered asylum seeker from Guyana, and her uphill battle to prove her claims of persecution from within the confines of U.S. Immigration Detention. The play was inspired by interviews with asylum seekers from around the world.

nytheatre.com review

David Pumo · June 3, 2005

Since 1994 the United States Board of Immigration Appeals has recognized persecution based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or HIV status as grounds for granting political asylum. *Tara's Crossing* is one of the first plays to address the issues faced by gay or trans refugees attempting to prove their claims of persecution while confined to U.S. immigration detention. Inspired by interviews with asylum-seekers from around the world, the play recounts the remarkable journey of an asylum seeker from Guyana who is male-to-female transgender—a woman who was born in a male's body. Playwright Jeffrey Solomon has written a moving piece that challenges our understanding of gender identity and sheds light on the awkward retreat the United States—a country whose greatest strength has always been its many immigrant communities—has made in recent years to a position of isolationism and fear.

But *Tara's Crossing* is not only an important piece of education at a time when both gay/transgender rights and immigration laws have been under serious attack. It is also quite captivating theatre, written with clever style and emotion, and seamlessly directed by Steve Satta, making the most of simple furnishings and sheer curtains that are pulled back to change time and location without losing a beat.

The story is largely told through the use of an external framing device: Tara (Aundré Chin), confined to the Detention Center in Elizabeth, New Jersey by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, is being interviewed by Judith Bright (Emily Joy Weiner), an American actress who wishes to produce and star in a movie based on Tara's ordeal. Through this device, Tara is able to step back and narrate parts of her own story as she brings the actress into her world to explore and learn for herself about its harsh realities. The actress, like Tara, experiences Tara's awakening to her gender identity and the treatment she would be destined to receive from the world because of it. Later, the actress experiences the brutality and violence that she, like Tara, was not expecting.

As a small child Tara, born Terrence, already knows that, though physically a boy, she is a girl born into the wrong body—she is emphatically clear that she is not gay; being gay is something quite different. When Tara's understanding mother leaves because of her husband's beatings, Tara is left to

be raised by her father, a working-class man like most in Guyana—like most in the U.S.—with little patience to understand or accept his “son’s” inability to behave like the other boys. As a teen, Tara goes to work in a video store where she is befriended by a coworker, Bibi (Nysheva-Starr, who also plays the mother), who becomes her understanding confidante. Tara seems to have found a friend and a place where she can be comfortable expressing her identity. But of course it is not long before trouble begins and the safety Tara has found is horribly shattered.

There is, of course, a second story here: the story of Tara’s re-victimization by the American immigration system where she is confined in detention for more than a year, despite the fact that she is a “low flight risk” because of family living near by. In prison she endures, day in and day out, the most common degradation faced by all transgender people: she is treated as—and expected to behave like—a man. She is attacked in the shower, and is often isolated for her own protection, as that is the best way the U.S. immigration and detention systems can come up with to keep her safe.

Audré Chin as Tara gives one of the finest and subtlest portrayals of a transgendered person I have seen (yes, I’ve seen quite a few). He is fluid and respectful, never the slightest bit “campy” or exaggerated. He has given Tara the strength to have survived this far. But he has also not neglected to give her vulnerability and pain in important places. The humiliation she feels at being treated like a man instead of a woman is a very real and important part of understanding Tara’s story, and of understanding transgenderism. Chin’s strength as an actor is even clearer when, for a brief time, he cleanly steps into the strikingly different role of the young man who seduces Tara—played at this moment by the film actress—and then brutally beats her.

Emily Joy Weiner as the actress is also strong. At first she seems to be just a clueless “Hollywood” type, fascinated by Tara’s story only because it would be a good part for her. But soon she slips into Tara’s world where she is attacked and abused, and we learn about much of Tara’s painful experience through Weiner’s emotional performance.

Nysheva-Starr plays several roles, principally Tara’s supportive mother and understanding friend, Bibi. Ian Eaton plays several roles as well, including Tara’s shamed father and the prison guard who slowly comes to understand who Tara really is. Both actors are striking, using different well-done accents and distinctive physical and movement qualities for each character. Writer Solomon appears in a few scenes as Tara’s lawyer. It’s a nice portrayal of an accurately drawn character, honestly concerned and trying to stretch his understanding, yet bound beyond his control by the slow and often cruel judicial system.

The mission of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum is “To promote tolerance and historical perspective through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan’s lower East Side, a gateway to America.” As co-producers of *Tara’s Crossing*, the Museum has made a bold step in achieving its goal.

Last Updated: June 26, 2005

[Home](#) | [About nytheatre.com](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#)

All material on this page is copyright © 1999-2004 The New York Theatre Experience, Inc. All rights reserved.