



ONE TO ONE

Keith Vaz MP with

Sheena Bhattessa

Sheena started training in performing arts at the age of 4 in dance, singing and acting. Her first theatre experience was at the age of 6 when she took part in local Christmas pantomimes and continued to do so until the age of 12. Sheena's performing arts training was ongoing throughout her school education, with London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. After studying Business Management with Law at King's College, London, Sheena decided to dedicate more time to acting and moved to New York for several months to train at the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute. She has worked across British TV and Theatre, and Bollywood and now works between London, India and America.



1) What inspired you to begin your career in acting?

It was actually by default! I never uttered the words 'The stage is for me!' as a 4-year old. Saying that, my parents did begin taking me to classes in acting, dancing and singing at a young age, and I rapidly grew extremely fond of it. Being a different character, enjoying a new script, dialect, language, working with a wonderful group of actors and directors always keeps things exciting.

2) What are your proudest achievements?

I have been asked, with 13 other cast members to return to Washington DC to do a 2-day special performance for The Pentagon. This production, The Great Game: Afghanistan, will be per-

formed for key decision makers, military and government officials, service members and veterans. This just shows that the arts as a medium has a voice and can make an impact. From the Pentagon's perspective, The Great Game is designed to draw what remains of the Americans' heart to the Afghan mind, in the hope of securing lasting peace and stability. This performance for the Pentagon has been a result of a 14-week tour of North America at the end of 2010.

3) Please tell us about your current role in The Great Game?

This play condenses 150 years of involvement in Afghanistan into 7 hours, which covers many notable characters and situations through history. So I play a vari-

ety of individuals, from Gohar-Shad Queen of Herat to 16 year-old Berukh who hopes to get an education, highlighting the demand for education and illuminating a world where school is a luxury.

4) What has been the biggest obstacle in your career?

I am in a career where unless you create your own theatre productions, TV shows or films, you are not in control of what roles you can get, other than working hard and giving it your best shot.

The work is slowly becoming more open minded culturally and ethnically, but this I find, is still very rigid and makes it difficult to break through.

5) Who has been the biggest influence on your career to date?

My family has always encouraged me to follow my dreams and to always aim high. Their support, and dedication in their own fields has influenced me above all else.

6) What is the best thing about being an actress?

I'm not sure there is just the one. The variety, the surprise, the learning, the people, the adrenalin, I could go on.

7) And the worst?

If anything, it would be the unpredictability. But this is also a good thing – it keeps you on your toes! Perhaps I won't continue as an actress if I stop enjoying it.

8) What are your long-term goals?

To keep enjoying the path I have chosen. I plan on producing theatre productions and films in the near future. It would be a good experience to be on the other side and drive a project from the start.

9) If you were Prime Minister, what one thing would you change?

There's a reason I didn't go into politics, I would much rather talk about films!

10) If you were marooned on a desert island, which historical figures would you like to spend your time with and why?

I'm currently reading Katherine Frank's Indira Gandhi, so Mahatma Gandhi would definitely be there for his inspiration; Harriet Tubman who could get out of any situation; and, for some added spice, Oscar Wilde, useless in a crisis but I imagine incredibly entertaining.