

Hand Me the Sword: A Modern Fairytale
A solo performance of my own design

Asialani Holman

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Committee:
Valerie Curtis-Newton
Jeffrey Fracé
Scott Hafso

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University of Washington

Abstract

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Chair of the Supervisory Committee: Jeffrey Fracé

School of Drama

Abstract: *Hand Me the Sword: A Modern Fairytale* follows Asialani, a young woman who has experienced a lot of trauma, while she learns that she is worthy of love and respect. So many women feel that they are defined by their trauma, and if someone has the mindset that she's "broken," it teaches those around her to treat her as such, which then reinforces that mindset. *Hand Me the Sword: A Modern Fairytale* shows how a little kindness and respect can help empower a woman to break that cycle.

Asialani Holman

Professional Actor Training Program

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Hand Me the Sword: A Modern Fairytale

During the creation of this show, my most important priority was to create something joyful. We are a year into a worldwide pandemic, and I simply didn't want to tell a sad story. I wanted to create something that brought me joy, with a happy ending. I didn't realize any of that until the middle of my process, though. At the beginning of my process, I was trying to write a play about my trauma. For some reason, that's what I thought solo shows were supposed to be. It was awful. As much as I've grown and healed and done the work in therapy, trying to relive though traumatic events in the middle of a pandemic was horrible for my mental health. I was completely blocked. In my frustration, I gave up trying to write for a while and dove back into research. I watched as many solo shows as I could get my hands on. I wrote down what worked and what didn't work in each of the solo shows I watched. There was definitely a pattern that I noticed. The shows that I loved, in this moment, were the ones that brought me joy.

In the Alexander Technique, one thing that we learn is that in order to do something, there must be the *desire* to do it, and without the desire, it causes tightening. If someone feels like they lack the choice and are being forced to do something, it messes up the coordination. This caused me to start asking the questions that put me on the path towards the solo show I have now created. What do I like to see onstage? What do I like to do onstage? What kind of shows do

I want to be in? What kind of characters do I want to play? What brings me joy? That question brought me back to an earlier writing exercise I had done. My fiancé, who is a writer, suggested that I just write down a story that I already know. That way, I'm at least getting words onto a page and it will hopefully help me get started. "It doesn't even have to be anything for your solo show!" he promised. That permission to write about something that could have nothing to do with my solo show helped. I wrote a story I already knew- the story of how we met. I was *finally* writing! The words came onto the page so quickly- I had written more in 10 minutes than I had in *four* weeks! It was a gushy, cheesy, adorable story, and I had so much fun writing it. But I didn't think I could use it for my solo show. One, there was no conflict, and two, how would I tell a love story with just one actor? I didn't think it was possible, so I shelved it. But when I started asking the question, "What brings me joy?" I brought out that little story again. Who would have thought that would end up as my solo show?

The other question I asked myself, "What do I like to do onstage" was easy to answer. I love musicals. I love singing onstage. I kept envisioning a way to squeeze a song into my show, and during many of my writing exercises I began the stories with "Once upon a time..." because in childhood, that's how so many stories began. One day I thought, "Wouldn't it be funny to start the show with 'Once upon a time there lived a beautiful princess' (an incredibly common and cliché way to start a story) but then immediately break expectations by having a super drunk girl stumble out? That would justify a song even if it wasn't a musical because she could be at a karaoke bar." And that's how I figured out what the opening of my show would be. I was able to use the skills I learned in Scott Hafso's singing class for both of the songs in the show.

Something else I love to do onstage/see onstage is stage combat. It was really challenging to create the fight in my show because I don't have any experience choreographing stage fights, and

on top of that, it was just me by myself. So, it really stretched my skills. I used what I learned in Geoffrey's stage combat class as well as what I learned from my scholarship at the International Stunt School which the School of Drama awarded to me.

Besides stage combat and singing, there were many other skills that I learned at my time at UW that I used in creating this show. When I had to switch back and forth between characters, I knew I had to make them all very distinct from each other in order for the audience to understand that they're all different characters. I used the different body centers that I learned in Bridget's Chekhov class to differentiate the characters' physicalities. For example, Grant's center is his pelvis. I also used the Linklater warmup that I learned in Bridget's class before every rehearsal and performance. In John's Acting for the Camera class we learn how to change the size of the performance depending on where the camera is, which was helpful since we had to film these performances. We also learned about story structure and how identifying it can be helpful for the actor, but that knowledge was also very useful for me as a writer. I used the skills I learned from coaching 251 students because I was directing my fiancé- who doesn't have any acting experience- in the Narrator role. Although coaching actors and directing actors is different, the skills I learned while teaching the basics of acting definitely translated well when I had to put the director hat on. Val's solo show class helped me in the most direct way. In her class, I learned how to create a solo show, and I used many of the exercises learned in that class to help build this show. One example of an exercise from Val's class that was very fruitful was creating a credo. This credo is where I listed all of the things that brought me joy. I've already talked about how Cathy's Alexander Technique class helped me develop this show, but I'd like to mention how using the Alexander Technique in every step of the process greatly helped me. I learned to recognize the "No messages" I was giving myself and translate them. I was able to

give myself permission to tell the story I wanted to tell, not the story I thought I was supposed to tell.

When I made this show, I wanted to bring some joy in the world, because that's what I desperately needed. Making art shouldn't have to be an agonizing, torturous process. Yes, sometimes the work is hard and it will suck but, isn't the whole point of being an artist because we love to create art? Creating this show reminded me of one of the main reasons I fell in love with this craft, and one of the biggest gifts the theatre can give us: joy.

Hand Me the Sword: A Modern Fairytale

Please note: The actress playing ASIALANI will also play KYLA, GRANT, SEAN, and THE PRINCE. Anything else is voice over.

Bright, happy "Fairytale music" swells

NARRATOR VO

Once upon a time there lived a beautiful princess...

ASIALANI, dressed in "slutty college party" attire, wearing a "Birthday bitch" sash and a tiara with a pink 21 on it, stumbles out of the curtain, clearly wasted. She is holding a drink in one hand then uses the other to balance herself with the mic stand.

NARRATOR VO

...who didn't believe in love.

Music changes to some karaoke track. ASIALANI is at a karaoke bar. She is shitfaced, but still nails the number.

ASIALANI

(Insert karaoke song that you can get the rights to. Something like Pat Benatar's "Hit Me With Your Best Shot." Something to show ASIALANI's tough "I don't believe in love" side.)

Applause from the crowd.

KARAOKE DJ

Let's give it up for the birthday girl, Aah-see-uh-lani.

ASIALANI

Oh, uh, it's Asialani-

KARAOKE DJ

Why don't you buy Aah-see-uh-lani a drink, it's her birthday!

ASIALANI

It's pronounced Asiala- fuck it.

KARAOKE DJ

Aaaand next up we have Grant singing Don't Stop Believing!

ASIALANI goes to find KYLA.

ASIALANI

Kyla- let's get the fuck out of here, this bar's full of losers-

ASIALANI notices that Kyla has been crying.

ASIALANI

Kyla! What's wrong?

ASIALANI

He dumped you? Again? Over a text message this time! Piece of shit. Oh honey come here. (comforts Kyla) Okay. Okay sweetie look. Here's what we're gonna do. We're gonna go back in there, we're gonna find some suckers to buy us free drinks, and we're gonna find someone for you to go home and have some revenge sex with. Okay? Okay, come on.

NARRATOR VO

The Princess filled the gaping hole in her heart with meaningless sex, drugs, and alcohol, and was maybe not the best influence on her friends. (this whole time ASIALANI is reacting- she can hear the narrator)

ASIALANI (to NARRATOR VO)

Okay I'll admit, not my best advice. But I was going through a phase! A Slutty McSlut Face phase! As one does, in their early 20s.

NARRATOR VO

But to be fair to the princess, men had never been good to her.

ASIALANI

I can hear you...

NARRATOR VO

The first boy she ever loved killed himself,

ASIALANI

Oh, we don't-

NARRATOR VO

the longest boyfriend she had was physically abusive,

ASIALANI

We don't have to get into that!

NARRATOR VO

and as a child she had an adult boyfriend who turned out to be a pedophile rapist.

ASIALANI

Okay, STOP! Stop. Jesus Christ, enough with the sob story. We get it. Terrible boyfriends, yadee yadda, wrap all that shit up into a cute little box, combine it with a pinch of daddy issues, one heaping cup of super-strict tiger mom, and you've got a recipe for a HOT FUCKING MESS, my middle name.

NARRATOR VO

The Princess had just moved into her new Castle, apartment 136 with her friends Kyla, Grant, and Sean. Grant and Sean had a prince over and they were smoking weed in the living room.

ASIALANI

I came home from class and I was on a mission, I had so much shit to do- typical. I came in, changed, grabbed my shit, took out the trash, and left for rehearsal. According to the boys, the next part of the story goes like:

THE PRINCE

(Stunned face) "Dang, who is she?"

GRANT

"Yo she's our new roommate".

THE PRINCE

She seems... She seems cool..

GRANT

HAHAHAHA Look at this motherfucker's face he looks like he just got hit by a door.

THE PRINCE

Dude shut up.

SEAN

Nah, man, you're like, totally into her.

THE PRINCE

So what if I am? Is she... is she single?

SEAN

Cha dude.

GRANT

Yeah bro you should totally come to the party tonight.

THE PRINCE

Dude I already told you I don't like parties.

GRANT

Yeah but what if Asialani's gonna be there? (wiggles eyebrows)

NARRATOR VO

And so the Prince went to the ball. Aaaaaand didn't even try to talk to the princess. He spent most of the party on the balcony smoking.

ASIALANI

Ugh such a sensitive type. I'm actually the one who approached him. The moment I first laid eyes on him, I knew...

Love at first sight music plays, abruptly gets cut off.

ASIALANI

I'm gonna fuck that guy tonight. I mean come on. Short blonde hair, scruffy, and wearing a shirt with cigarettes and a 40 on it. I pegged him for a douchey frat boy. Perfect for a one night stand. Won't fall in love or try to make anything serious. No mess. And besides, my roster was currently very low. I was only sleeping with like, three guys at the time!

ASIALANI pulls GRANT over

ASIALANI (to GRANT)

Hey Grant, (nods towards Dan) is your friend single?

GRANT

Who Dan? Yeah Dan's *totally* single. Well, I mean, not like, totally, he's not like- there's nothing *wrong* with him but I mean like yeah he's available, yeah.

ASIALANI

Perfect.

ASIALANI (to AUDIENCE)

I walk over to him and Sean on the balcony and I notice he has a huge, bright pink cast on his arm, all the way up to his shoulder. I go outside, light up a smoke, and ask him, so how'd you break your arm? Sean, and I'm not kidding, literally BOLTED so we'd have the balcony to ourselves. Very subtle Sean, very subtle. Dan told me:

THE PRINCE

Oh, I broke it snowboarding.

ASIALANI "geeks out" to AUDIENCE

ASIALANI (to AUDIENCE)

That's so cool!

ASIALANI (to THE PRINCE) (Very nonchalant)

Oh that's cool, so like, you snowboard?

THE PRINCE

Not really, that's why I broke my arm.

ASIALANI (to AUDIENCE)

(gush) And he's funny too! (beat) Maybe I'll sleep with him TWO times...

Anyway, we talk and somehow hours pass. Wow, I'm totally missing the party... Oh well! Grant and Sean are being a pair of total knuckleheads trying to "wingmen" us. When Dan and I were in the kitchen talking they literally were poking their heads around the corner behind his back giving me:

ASIALANI does "goofy grins and thumbs up"

ASIALANI

Anyway, at the end of the night the party was sort of petering out and he pulls me aside to say goodnight.

ASIALANI (to THE PRINCE)

You're leaving?? What? No! The night is still young! It's only (checks phone) 3 in the morning...

THE PRINCE

Yeah I have to go. But it was really great meeting you.

ASIALANI (to AUDIENCE)

And then he kissed me. A soft, sweet kiss. (She lingers in this moment) AND THEN HE LEFT. What the FUCK. He didn't even TRY to sleep with me. He didn't even like... feel me up or whatever! I was so confused. Maybe he didn't like me? But then... he kissed me...

NARRATOR VO

The next day the princess was trying to forget about the guy who didn't want to sleep with her when- (Text tone)

ASIALANI

He texted me. ...He texted me. Kyla, He texted me! Who fucking does that? Who texts someone the next day??? First he doesn't even TRY to sleep with me and then he... texts me??

KYLA

Well What does it say?

ASIALANI

(Checks phone) Oh my god... he's asking me out. He's asking me out on like, a real life date. Tomorrow.

KYLA

Well, are you gonna go??

ASIALANI

What, NO! I'm not gonna... I'm not gonna go on a date with this guy, like, what? This has gotta be some kinda trick..

KYLA

But come ooon, he was so cute!

ASIALANI

I mean yeah, but like,

KYLA

Come ON Asialani, when was the last time you were in a real relationship?

ASIALANI

Woah woah woah relationship?? I don't think that's what he's trying to-

KYLA

Well why not?

ASIALANI

Guys don't ever want to date me they just want to sleep with me.
Besides. Dating me would be like, a punishment for what a hot
mess I am.

KYLA

Asialani you shut your fucking mouth right now.

ASIALANI

What? I mean it's true!

KYLA

Asialani you are beautiful and a fucking catch. This nice man is
sweet to you and respectful and super cute and is asking you out
on a real life date? And you wanna run the other way? I ought to
slap you, you DUMB. BITCH.

ASIALANI

Thanks Kyla, I love you too.

NARRATOR VO

And so, against her better judgement she took Kyla's advice and
said yes.

ASIALANI (to AUDIENCE)

I mean, what's the worst that could happen.

We're on our first date. It's going surprisingly well. He shows
up with flowers,

INNER VOICE

You don't deserve that

ASIALANI

opens doors for me,

INNER VOICE

You don't deserve that

ASIALANI

and is being really sweet.

INNER VOICE

Who are you fucking kidding

ASIALANI

There's like a million signs that are saying "this guy is right
for you

INNER VOICE

You're not right for him

ASIALANI

Like, for example. I was looking at the menu thinking: damn,
those chicken strips look good. But who orders chicken strips at
a restaurant?

INNER VOICE

He's going to think you're a child.

ASIALANI

I'll just order a salad or something and act like a grown up.
Until the waitress comes to take our order... and he orders the
chicken strips. Wow, this guy is perfect.

INNER VOICE

Yeah, too perfect.

ASIALANI (to INNER VOICE)

Oh my god, please. Not now.

INNER VOICE

You don't deserve this guy, he's too good for you.

ASIALANI

Please, go away.

INNER VOICE

You really think you deserve to be treated like this? You
fucking trash go sleep with some douche who'll treat you the way
you deserve to be treated-

ASIALANI

Shut up shut UP!!!

THE PRINCE notices something's wrong

ASIALANI (to THE PRINCE)

Oh! Nothing. Sorry. Allergies, haha. Crazy that you got the chicken strips that's what I was thinking about getting.

ASIALANI (to AUDIENCE)

The next couple of weeks go really well. We even decide to go on a weekend trip to San Diego together, it's only a couple hour drive down the coast but still, a pretty big step! He takes me on the cutest dates. We go to the pier and arcades; he tries ramen for the first time. We go ziplining and walk along the beach at night... He always makes me feel like I deserve to be treated nicely, with respect.

NARRATOR VO

But there was always that nagging voice in the back of her head..

INNER VOICE

You're not worthy of love you're just a piece of shit hot mess bag of crazy. Who would wanna date you? You really think he's gonna love you once he finds out how fucking damaged you are? You are a broken, piece of shit slut. YOU DON'T DESERVE TO BE LOVED! (INNER VOICE builds and layers/overlaps until ASIALANI breaks)

ASIALANI (to the PRINCE)

I CAN'T BE WITH YOU ANYMORE!!!

I'm so sorry.

Because, I'm not worth it.

Because I'm broken. I'm damaged. I have too much baggage, I'm too difficult to love.

ASIALANI (to AUDIENCE)

And you know what he told me? He told me: "I don't think so."

ASIALANI Laughs to self.

ASIALANI

Prince Charming didn't swoop in and solve all my problems. But...
he did hand me the sword.

Cool fight sequence happens. ASIALANI fights off physicalized
versions of INNER VOICE with a sword.

NARRATOR VO

And so the princess learned how to love and be loved. And with
the power of love, a little help from her friends, and a lotta
therapy, the princess- and the prince- lived happily ever after.

ASIALANI

*(Insert song that you can get the rights to. Something like
Lizzo's "Cuz I Love You." Something joyful, triumphant, and
powerful. A love ballad.)*

The End.

Photos by Adam Fontana, Lighting by Samantha Davis:





