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The Mixing of Heart and Mind as Haamid in Will Sniders' Strange Men

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

The Mixing of Heart and Mind as Haamid in Will Sniders' Strange Men

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Acting)

by

Yonatan Gebeyehu

Committee in charge:

Marc Barricelli, Chair  
Eva Barnes  
Ursula Meyer

2018

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The Thesis of Yonatan Gebeyehu is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2018

## DEDICATION

My Thesis is dedicated to my Parents, Gulilat Gebeyehu and Zenebework Teklu, my brothers , Beniam and Fasil Gebeyehu, and my fellow actors of color, DeLeon Dallas, Kimberly Monks, and Mo Rodvanich, who understand what it is to navigate and thrive in a field that was not made for them.

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## LIST OF SUPPLEMENTAL FILES

File 1. Strange Men Photograph

File 2. Strange Men Photograph

File 3. Strange Men Photograph

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank my core teachers, Marc Barricelli, Eva Barnes, Ursula Meyer, Kyle Donelley, Gregory Wallace, Charlie Oates, and Liam Clancey, for giving me the tools I need to express my truth in the best way possible.

I'd also like to thank the teachers that graced me with their tutledge later on in my journey, Deborah Stein, Jennifer Chang, and Richard Robichaux, who helped me understand that I did not need to erase myself to be a member of the American theater.

Lastly, I'd like to thank my classmates, DeLeon Dallas, Andrew Gallop, Kyle Hester, Kimberly Monks, Claire Roberson, and Mo Rodvanich for inspiring and challenging me throughout this experience.



## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Mixing of Heart and Mind as Haamid in Will Sniders' Strange Men

by

Yonatan Gebeyehu

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Acting)

University of California, San Diego, 2018

Professor Marc Barricelli, Chair

In my entire career as an actor, one association that has remained consistent with my work is that it is transformative . It seemed as if my work was adored best when it was without myself. While I always took this as a compliment, as the art itself is defined as telling a story truthfully under imaginary circumstances, there was always a part of me that felt like my acting was making me feel erased. When you always must transform simply to be included, and you are at your best when you are in no way present, the value of your own characteristics come into question. As I made my way through UCSD's graduate acting program, I found myself suddenly with new skills, a new sense of voice, speech, and movement, that allowed me to express myself in a much clearer and stronger way. The stories I was asked to tell, the parts I was asked to play,

continued to require me to transform. But, since I was collecting tools that allowed me to alter my physical and vocal shape, the creative part of my brain was becoming transfixed with the complicated notion of transformation. If I were leave myself behind in the next room and build a character, how specifically, how fully could I do it? Although I was not always in love with the stories I was asked to tell ( what actor of color is, truly), I was in love with the way I was able to tell it. But then, my training took a sharp turn when I was given the opportunity to play Haamid in “Strange Men” by Will Snider, a part that asked me to use all of myself, as I am, in this moment in time. For the first time, maybe ever in my career as an actor, so much of my own thoughts, desires, and struggles were of value to me for this production. To be a person of color, to be African, to be queer, these markers that have left scars of shame have now become the very foundation of my work. I was finally able tell a story that was close to my heart and my sleeve, and I had the tools I needed to express this story with simplicity and clarity. Ah, if only I could feel this way all the time! It was during this process that I realized something. It is important to be able to tell stories that are close to who you are, stories of marginalized people, of struggle and adversity, of love and triumph, that reflect a life that you understand. It is also important that no matter what stories we tell, the technique in which we tell them, the specificity, the clarity, the sharpness of mind, voice and body, must be immaculate. But it is the intersection of the two that makes it art.