

# Actress-playwright Adriana Sevan's career is *Taking Flight* triumphantly

by Lisa Kirazian

She is a passionate performer and has made a fine reputation as an actress in plays at South Coast Repertory Theater in Costa Mesa, American Conservatory Theater (ACT) in San Francisco, and the Public Theater in New York. She has also appeared in "Law and Order" and "Sex in the City" on television and in feature films.

She is also a playwright who cites writer Nilo Cruz, dancer Rudolf Nureyev, and actor/writer John Leguizamo as major influences.

She is a native New Yorker – born of an Armenian mother who was a dancer, and a Basque-Dominican father who was an opera singer. Her parents met and fell in love while performing in a show together.

So, as actress-playwright Adriana Sevan says, "I followed them into the family business."

According to Adriana Sevan, she began her artistic life as a dancer, but after an injury, she found her way into a theater improvisation class and was hooked. She received her BFA in theater from the City College of New York, and proceeded to work in critically

acclaimed theater productions across the country, as well as in television and film.

Her range as an actress is impressive. She received praise, for example, for her fine work in four South Coast Repertory

productions: Sarah Ruhl's *The Clean House*, Nilo Cruz's *Anna in the Tropics* and *Two Sisters and a Piano*, and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. She also performed *Two Sisters* at the Public Theater in New York. She also appeared in Tom Stoppard's *Indian Ink* at

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Taking Flight at LA Theatre Works in January 2007. Photo: Annie Appel.

Stage

Lisa Kirazian is a playwright and on the Advisory Board of the Armenian Dramatic Arts Alliance. Her play "The Blackstone Sessions," was part of the ADAA/Fountain Theatre Playreading Series in November, 2006.

in San Francisco, and Henry v at Shakespeare & Company. Sevan also won an award at The Denver International Film Festival for her portrayal of Priscilla in Patrice Johnson's critically acclaimed debut film, *King's County*.

But she did not start writing for theater until after September 11, 2001. Says Sevan: "I had always kept journals and enjoyed sounding things out on the page, but I never set out to write a play. In 2002, I was invited by INTAR, a theater in New York, to present a 15-minute piece within an evening called, 9/11: Writers Respond. I went into a studio with director Giovanna Sardelli, with nothing but pictures, grief, and a sweater that my friend, who was seriously injured in the attacks, had given me. I emerged several weeks later with a theater piece and the mustard seed of what would become the full-length play called *Taking Flight*."

*Taking Flight* is a one-woman show exploring the depth of friendship in the face of disaster, and the restorative power of forgiveness and redemption. The play was created in a workshop at the Mark Taper Forum and later developed at Robert Redford's prestigious Sundance Theatre Lab. *Taking Flight* had its world premiere in Los Angeles at Center Theatre Group's Kirk Douglas Theatre and was chosen at yearend as one of the ten best plays of 2006 by Evan Henderson of the *Los Angeles Daily News*.

On her dramatic opening night at the Douglas, Sevan accidentally hurt herself (she severed her anterior cruciate ligament) and writhed in pain onstage as the audience was ushered out and paramedics were ushered in. Sevan bravely decided to continue with the show, propped up with bandaging and ice packs. The audience was ushered back in, amazed by the courage and passion Sevan exhibited in performing through her inner and outer pain, telling the heartbreaking story of how



Adriana Sevan  
with Kirk Douglas.

the September 11 attack forever affected her friendship with a friend who was gravely injured that day. She received a standing ovation, including praise from the namesake of the theater, the actor Kirk Douglas himself, who was in the audience that night.

*Taking Flight* then aired nationwide on public radio on March 24 through the LA Theatre Works series, "The Play's the Thing." Sevan also performed the play live at the San Diego Repertory Theater, from March 15 to April 1, again to fine reviews and audiences who were deeply moved.

At the end of the San Diego run of her play, Adriana Sevan received an audience response unlike any other she has ever experienced. As she took her final bow at the closing show, her boyfriend took the stage and (with the help of the technicians), proposed to Adriana on bended knee, complete with lights and sound. She accepted and has been thrilled ever since. They have not yet set a date but, Sevan says, "it feels wonderful" to be engaged.

"It is my intention that we might all leave the theater inspired to love even more. I am grateful to my Armenian grandfather for teaching me this, for even after having lost everything during the Genocide, he never lost his capacity to love."

In fact, Sevan is now delving into the stories of her Armenian grandfather to explore how she might expand them into a play. She says: "I want very much to write about him and his extraordinary heart." Sevan also wishes to travel to Armenia soon to "experience his birthplace. I would be the first in my family to return since the Genocide."

Sevan is writing a collection of personal essays and a children's book. So she is quite a busy artist these days. Following the success of *Taking Flight* in San Diego, there are several regional theaters across the country that will be producing the play in the next year.

At this remarkable time, Adriana Sevan's life and career are taking flight, triumphantly. ■■■