

BASTIANO,

Or

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF RAFFI

A New Play by

Carey Perloff

Representation: Leah Hamos
The Gersh Agency
lhamos@gersh.com
212 634-8153

CHARACTERS:

The play is written for five actors who perform eleven roles. It's possible to forgo the doubling and change casts between past and present, but this seems less desirable.

RAFFI/RAFAELLO di SANTI/THE YOUNG MONK

- Raffi (Rafaella) is an 18-year-old first year art student from Chicago. She's Italian-American on her father's side and speaks good Italian. Precocious, articulate, complicated
- Rafaello (Raphael), the 16th century painter and architect, from Urbino. He is urbane and well-dressed, immensely charming and talented, a favorite of Pope Leo X and a lady's man
- The Young Monk (Fabio): servant to Cardinal Giulio de' Medici—his expertise is dressing the Cardinal. He is officious and highly efficient at his job

MICHAEL/MICHELANGELO

- Michael is an African-American art student in his mid to late-twenties, from the South Side of Chicago. Ironic, articulate, hungry to learn, always on the lookout for something new.
- Michelangelo: the 16th century sculptor, painter, poet architect—a brooding, explosive talent with a quick temper. Gay but secretive about it. Religious. Competitive.

SAM/SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO:

- Sam is a 20-something art student from Wyoming. This is the first time he's been away from home. He's slightly overweight, insecure, a videographer, quite religious, gay.
- Sebastiano del Piombo—an effusive Venetian colorist with a passion for mythology and good food, brought by Julius II to Rome, an early friend of Michelangelo's with whom he collaborated on many paintings. He is about to become a father and is always scrounging for money.

DONALD/CARDINAL GIULIO DE' MEDICI

- Donald, is Raffi's father, nee Donaldo, a Genovese doctor who emigrated to the US after medical school and married an American. He adores his only child, Raffi, and struggles to deal with the illness of his wife, who is manic depressive and often hospitalized. Kind and intelligent, 50's. Quite formal.
- Cardinal Giulio de' Medici—the powerful, arrogant second in command to Pope Leo X and later Pope himself (Clement VII). A self-satisfied, quixotic but brilliant man who relishes power and loves art. It is he who is responsible for many of the most important Papal commissions of the period, including

Sebastiano and Michelangelo's "The Raising of Lazarus" and Raphael's "The Transfiguration."

KEENAN/AGOSTINO CHIGI (can be cast as a man or a woman)

- Keenan is an art theorist and feminist critic, a tough intellectual woman with big glasses and high-style black clothes. Arrogant and self-assured.
- Agostino Chigi—the fabulously wealthy Renaissance banker and art patron who first pitted Raphael and Sebastiano against each other by commissioning them each to paint adjacent murals in his elegant Villa Farnesina in Rome. The banker of Pope Leo X and close friend of Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, he is a charming if inscrutable man who longs to have a child with his beautiful new wife, Francesca. Chigi is the inventor of "indulgences" by which the Catholic Church paid for the building of St. Peter's.

TIME AND PLACE:

The play takes place between 1516- 1520 (in Renaissance Rome) and in present day Chicago (in a freshman art class at the School of the Art Institute)

In Rome, there are various locations including: the studio of Sebastiano, an anteroom of Raphael's elegant house on the Borgo, and the Cardinal's dressing room.

In the Present, we are in a large classroom at the School of the Art Institute

SETTING:

Basically, the whole play can be done in large white room with high windows that might represent a contemporary classroom but could morph into other spaces. Perhaps there is a smaller corner room off to one side for the period scenes. The period locations might be defined simply by light or by a single piece of furniture or a window frame. The classroom needs an expansive projection surface to view the paintings, which should be blown up as large as possible. There is a video shown towards the end of the play that will have to be purpose-made for the production.

NOTES ON THE PLAY:

BASTIANO OR THE TRANSFIGURATION OF RAFFI was written during a Writer's Residency at the Bogliasco Foundation on the Ligurian coast of Italy. It was initially inspired by an exhibition at the National Gallery in London called "Michelangelo and

Sebastiano” that chronicled the strange friendship and collaboration between two artists who were radically different but eventually joined forces against a common enemy, Raphael. In 1516, Sebastiano and Raphael were each commissioned to create a painting for the altar of the Narbonne Cathedral in France. Sebastiano was assigned “The Raising of Lazarus”, Raphael “the Transfiguration.” The competition was fierce and intense. Sebastiano recruited his friend Michelangelo to create and paint the figure of Lazarus in his painting; Raphael waited until he had secretly seen their work before he completed his own painting. Both are extraordinary paintings containing many mysteries.

Rome under Pope Leo X was a complicated and dangerous place, in which great artists competed for lucrative commissions for the Papal palace, the tombs and villas of the wealthy, and church altarpieces. This was a period of immense change, as the winds of the Protestant Reformation were beginning to blow and the Vatican was under constant threat from French kings to the north and other Italian city states to the east. As Matthias Wivel notes in his catalogue for the exhibition, the tale takes place “in a period of war, schism and revolution, but also of philosophical renewal, radical theology and great artistic innovation.”

In exploring these artistic rivals, I was interested in how the aggressive and unavoidable competition for money and access has continued to shape art and artists from the Renaissance to our own time.

PROLOGUE

The Present. A classroom in art school.

A woman (RAFFI) has climbed up a ladder, in front of a huge blown up slide of Raphael's painting "The Transfiguration".



In the painting, a crowd of figures (the Apostles) is in the left foreground looking astonished and pointing at the sky. There is a possessed boy on the lower right side of the painting, also pointing up, with his eyes rolled back in his head. In the center of the painting is a beautiful woman in pink, her body twisted towards the Apostles in a serpentine pose. In the top third of the painting, Christ miraculously levitates, his white robes and long red curls blowing in the wind against bright white clouds. RAFFI, wearing a long curly wig, is shrouded in a white sheet that echoes the garb of Christ. SAM has positioned himself in front of the tall standing Apostle stage right wearing a long red robe and a wig with brown curls. He is pointing up to God.

RAFFI

Look! Look up, bitches! Dance, angels! Sing out, Voice of the Father! Fall to the ground, apostles, and cover your eyes! Do you see me? Do you know me? (*she opens her arms wide*) I am God! I am finally God! It has *happened!* I'm air! I'm divine! I'm floating! (*she triggers a ceiling fan, and her garments and hair begin to blow*) For this single moment, I am everywhere! Trans-world! Transcontinental! Transitory! Transcendent! Transmuted! Transplanted! Transnational! Transgender! Transcendental! (*she looks down at the "crowd", which is Sam, pointing up at her*) Why do you point but refuse to look? Don't you *believe?* I'm over the clouds! I'm ascending! I can hardly hear you anymore! I've blown your categories to smithereens! I'm everything you've never seen! I defy logic! You should've held on to me! You should've listened! You should've drawn a horizon line to keep me in your frame!

SAM

I did! I did draw a horizon line! Mine was first!

RAFFI

Don't speak! Just feel! *Awe!* You should be filled with awe!

SAM

You stole my drawings! You cheated!

RAFFI

I have risen above! I am transfigured! That's what this is, you suckers! For the first time in the history of the world! The *Transfiguration!* (*she shakes a tambourine or rings some chimes. The wind blows harder*)

SAM

You broke into the chapel, you creep! You looked at my painting! You deliberately undermined what I was doing—you humiliated me, in front of—

RAFFI

(*breaking character*) What are you doing, Sam? (*she turns off the fans. Her billowing garments wilt*)

SAM

I'm in character. I thought I was supposed to be in character!

RAFFI

As who?

SAM

Sebastiano del Piombo! Your rival and mortal enemy! That's what you told me--

RAFFI

Sebastiano would never have called Raphael a creep. Not to his face, anyway. Besides, I'm enacting *Christ* up here, not Raphael! *Christ* being transfigured!

SAM

It's totally confusing. Why is Christ talking about a horizon line?

RAFFI

It's a *metaphor*!

SAM

And who says He's "transgender"?

RAFFI

Look at him! The Christ in this painting encompasses all genders! He seems *pregnant*, don't you think? Look at those hips—totally female! And the hair! This painting means categories are *over*, Sam! It means the eternal female is rising again! I'm talking about *awe*!

SAM

I thought you were making a piece about artistic rivalry.

RAFFI

Transcending artistic rivalry. God you're literal. You need to stop coloring inside the lines.

SAM

I don't like performance. It's a feels like an excuse for not doing real art.

RAFFI

(incensed) Real art? Did you *actually* use the words "real art"?

SAM

(taking off his curly wig, parroting what she's told him) Okay, okay, forget it. I'm a hetero-normative patriarchal patronizing provincial asshole. You told me already.

RAFFI

That was a *compliment*! *(she smiles)* Come on, Sam. Open your mind or you'll never win this competition!

SAM

I'm not really the kind of person who wins things.

RAFFI

That's okay. Materiality is over. What's important is the *evanescent*!

SAM

The what?

RAFFI

When my piece is over, it will just *dissolve*! You see?

SAM

How can you make a living as an artist if your art dissolves?

RAFFI

It's *conceptual*. Don't they have that in Wyoming? I'm creating an *idea*! I have *vision*. I'm not tied to paint on a canvas!

SAM

Neither am I.

RAFFI

That's right, you do video. (*she looks at him, suddenly embarrassed*) What? You think it's dumb? What I'm doing?

SAM

Well...

RAFFI

She said, pick a painting and respond. But what am I supposed to respond to? The Renaissance paintings she's showed us are either men doing heroic deeds or women getting impregnated and holding babies.

SAM

Not just *any* babies! The *Christ* baby.

RAFFI

Whatever.

SAM

(*stung*) It's *not* whatever. Mary was the most important subject they could paint.

RAFFI

Why? I mean, aside from the fact that she's Christ's *mother*, what else did she ever accomplish? (*Sam looks shocked, dismayed*) I'm sorry. Are you ... like... *religious* or something? (*Sam doesn't respond. He is deeply embarrassed*) Wow. A religious videographer from Wyoming. That's the last thing I expected at art school. (*she smiles, undoing her robes*) Could you help me get down?

SAM

I thought you were God. (*he helps her down*)

RAFFI

Very funny. So what happened to Charlayne? She said she'd be Mary Magdalene.

SAM

Which one is she?

RAFFI

(*pointing to the middle figure*) The erotic one in pink. Isn't she great? Look how sexy she is—she totally trumps Jesus, in my opinion.

SAM

Well, yeah. That's sort of the point. If He could make *her* believe, then...

RAFFI

Right! Win over the whore and you've won the whole crowd! I wanted Charlayne to play it. Not that I think she's a whore or anything-- she's just really bendy. (*imitating the pose*) And she's got big shoulders like that.

SAM

I saw her throwing pots in the ceramic studio after lunch.

RAFFI

To what end?

SAM

To what *end*? I don't know. Maybe she just likes to throw pots.

RAFFI

God it's *infuriating*. You can't count on anyone around here. (*Jumps down, taking off her wig*) Gimme your wig. (*Sam hands her the wig and red robe*) Thanks for helping.

SAM

So who was I supposed to be? Judas?

RAFFI

No—(*she points to the figure on the far left in green and red with his back to us and face totally obscured*) That's Judas. He won't even show his face. He's getting ready to betray Jesus. You're James the Less. Jesus' brother. Same hair, see?

SAM

(*somewhat admiringly*) You've really got this figured out, haven't you?

RAFFI

Of course. I wanna win. *(beat)* So now you've seen my project... can I see yours?

SAM

It's not ready.

RAFFI

Neither was mine!

SAM

Yeah, but...

RAFFI

Don't you trust me?

SAM

Not really.

RAFFI

Why? You think I want to steal your ideas?

SAM

No. I don't really have ideas. I just kind of make it up as I go along.

RAFFI

If I get the funding, there are going to be twenty-nine people performing my piece, one for every figure on the canvas!

SAM

Mine has no people at all.

RAFFI

People are good, Sam. Or at least, *some* people...

SAM

I don't know what to do with people.

RAFFI

You like being alone? *(beat. Sam shrugs)* This is the first time I've ever lived by myself. I mean, in a dorm, but without... you know... my family.

SAM

It's the first time I've ever been out of Wyoming.