

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY
SOPHIYAA NAYAR

CHHAYA

"A NATIONALLY RISING DIRECTOR"
WINDY CITY TIMES



CHHAYA

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY **SOPHIYAA NAYAR**

STARRING

**TINA MUNOZ PANDYA, JESSE BHAMRAH, ROM BARKHORDAR,
SARAH PRICE, JORDAN DELL HARRIS**

LOG LINE

A seemingly ordinary doctor's appointment becomes a sexual assault survivor's over-the-top nightmare, bringing her face to face with the shadows she buried.

SYNOPSIS

At a gyno appointment, a woman, in denial of her own sexual assault, struggles to find levity in one uncomfortable interaction after another. The doctor mispronounces her name while medical students examine her privates— all while her world uncontrollably whips back to the moment of her assault. Tensions escalate and spin out of control, propelling Jiya into a nightmare in a desperate attempt to take back her power.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Survivors of sexual assault often talk about dissociation. This feeling of stepping out of our bodies to watch ourselves experience something painful. An incessant urge to return to the "scene of the crime" and alter it somehow. I wanted to explore this experience through a darkly comedic and surrealist lens. I grew up with films that depicted survivors as victims and assaults as plot points to create heightened emotions. When writing the film, I was curious about the cultural gaslighting that occurs surrounding conversations of sexual assault in both Indian and American communities. And how the split in identity, for an Indian-American character like Jiya, impacts a survivor's understanding of their own trauma.



CAST

Jesse Bhamrah is DEV – a smooth, charming gentleman, the life of a party, and the man that sexually assaults Jiya.

Jesse was in An Enemy of the People (Goodman Theater), Last Stop on Market Street (Chicago Children's Theater), plays at La Jolla Playhouse, Guthrie Theater, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Indiana Repertory Theater, First Stage, and Illinois Shakespeare Festival and on Chicago Fire (NBC), Hot Mess Holiday (Comedy Central).

Tina Munoz Pandya is JIYA MEHTA – a timid Indian-American woman who is struggling to come to terms with her sexual assault and would love to do anything in her power to run away from her reality.

Tina graduated from University of Michigan with a BA in Drama and Women's Studies, Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, and the School at Steppenwolf. She toured with the National Players, and performed in DC, New York, and LA as part of The Hypocrites' wildly popular Gilbert and Sullivan repertory.



Sarah Price is Vanessa – An eager medical student that would do anything to impress the doctor, even at the cost of losing empathy for her patient

TV credits: Chicago Fire (NBC/Universal). She plays Primavera Inkwyrm on Where the Stars Fell podcast and Augie Eckhardt on The Vanishing Act Podcast, for which she the won a 2020 Audio Verse Award for Best Performance of a Leading Role in a New Audio Play Production.

Rom Barkhordar is Dr. Gilbert – An overworked medical professional with good intentions that get lost in the rush of too many appointments.

Rom is a nationally known actor for productions including: The Who and the What (Victory Gardens Theater); In a Garden (A Red Orchid Theatre, Jeff Award nomination for Best Actor); Around the World in 80 Days (Lookingglass Theatre Company); The Elephant Man (Steppenwolf Theatre Company); Television credits include Chicago Justice, Chicago Fire, Mind Games, Boss and The Beast.

Jordan Dell Harris is Eugene – Well-intentioned and sweet but the complete opposite of Vanessa. A gyno exam is the last thing he wants to be witnessing.

Jordan is a multiple award-winning actor. His Second City debut was in QUEER EYE: The Musical Parody, he played Donald in The Boys in the Band (Windy City Playhouse; Joseph Jefferson Award Winner - Best Ensemble in a Play, Best Play). Other credits include (Actor's Express; Suzi Bass Award Nomination - Outstanding Acting Ensemble in a Musical).

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER: SOPHIYAA NAYAR

Sophiyaa Nayar is a New York-based, award-winning theatre director and filmmaker from New Delhi, India. As an Associate or Assistant Director, she has worked alongside Broadway's leading writers and directors, including Kenny Leon, Saheem Ali, Leigh Silverman on a show by Lily Tomlin and Jane Wagner, Jocelyn Bioh, May Adrales and Rajiv Joseph. And the film industry's Nana Mensah, Craig Quintero, Alyssa Nutting, Dean Bakopoulos, Bill Damashke and Cecily Strong.

She is a member of the WP Lab 2020-22, 3Arts Make a Wave Grantee, a Definition Theatre ensemble member, member of Director's Lab Chicago 2017 and a resident in Milwaukee Rep's 2017/18 season. She was part of the SDC Foundation's Observership Class, through which she worked on *Soft Power* at The Public.

Her production of *EthiopianAmerica* won Black Theatre Alliance Awards for Best Production, Best Lead Male and Lead Female along with a Jeff Award for Best Fight Choreography. Her feature film script of *Chhaya* was selected into the second round of Sundance's Feature Film Development Track and was a semi-finalist for the 1497 Screenwriters Lab.

Sophiyaa's theatre productions have received wide critical acclaim, including write ups in the SF Chronicle and Chicago Tribune. Here are some press quotes below:

"Sophiyaa Nayar, the acclaimed Indian Director" **San Francisco Chronicle**

".. superbly directed... I was knocked out.." **Chicago Tribune**

"A dynamic display of artistic excellence" **Rescripted**

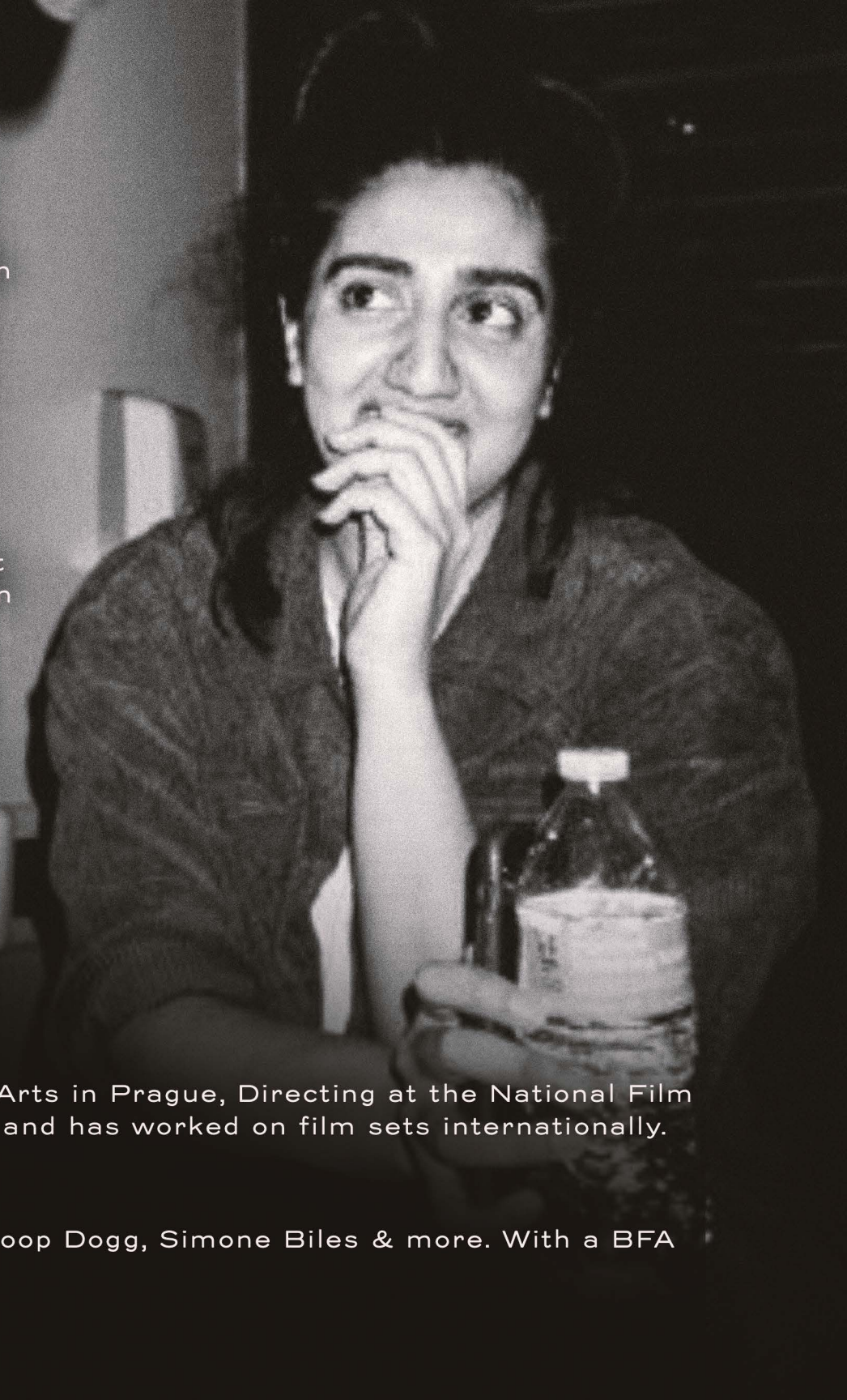
"challenges all preconceived notions" **Chicago Reader**

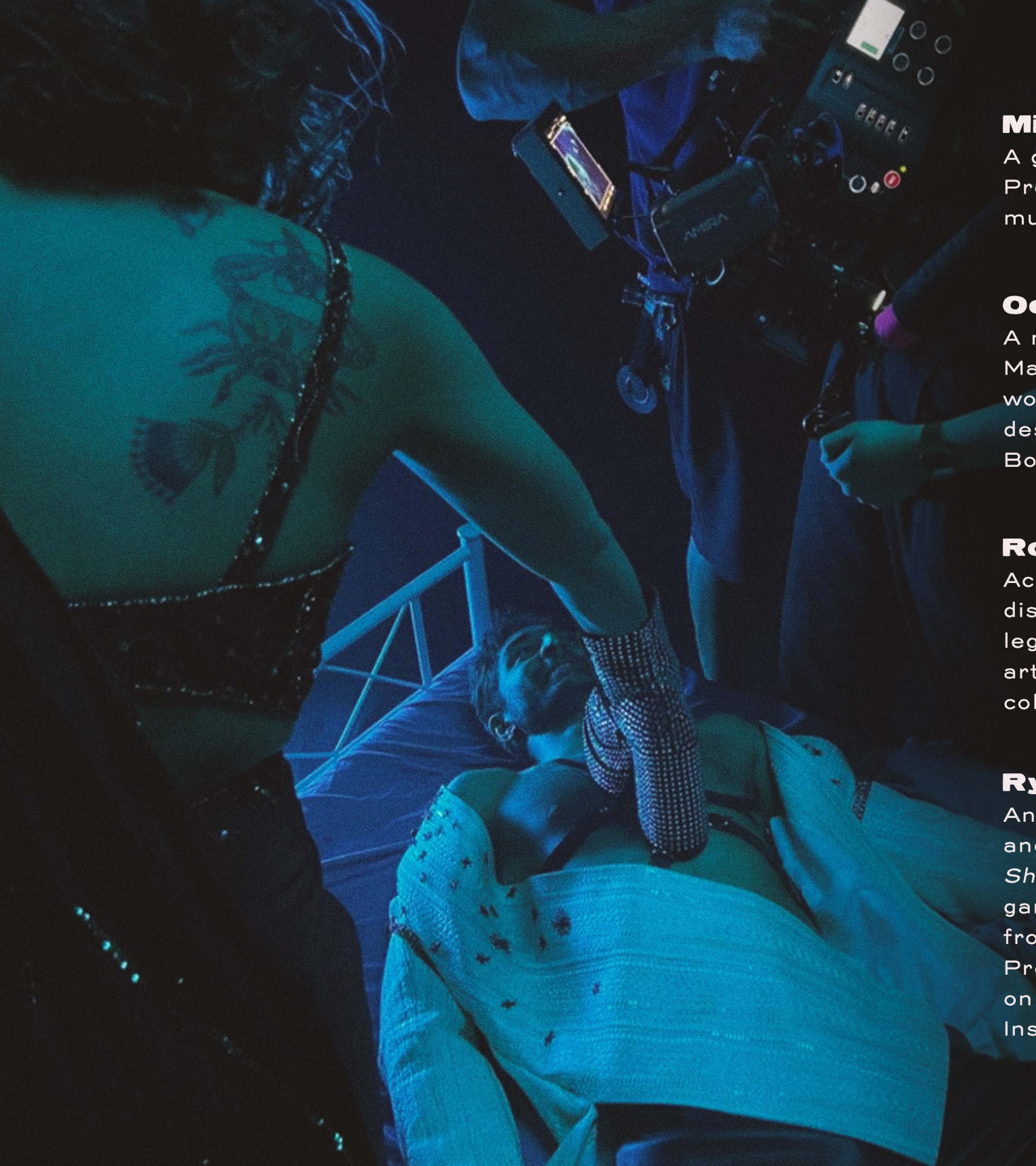
Helena Gruensteidl - Cinematographer

Helena studied Cinematography at the Film and Television Academy at the School of Performing Arts in Prague, Directing at the National Film and Television School in London, and Film, Communication, and Media Studies at Grinnell College and has worked on film sets internationally.

Lauren Jevnikar - Editor

An LA-based film editor who has worked on multiple Oscar-qualifiers. Clients include the NFL, Snoop Dogg, Simone Biles & more. With a BFA in Film from Syracuse University, they have studied at FAMU International in Prague, CZ.





Minolae Jain - Production Designer

A graduate student from American Film Institute, L.A. with her MFA in Production Design. Originally from India, she has Production Designed multiple award-winning short films, music videos and commercials.

Oona Natesan - Costume Designer

A multidisciplinary designer in costume and digital design, Oona has a Master's in Costume Design from Carnegie Mellon School of Drama and worked as Assistant Designer for Manish Malhotra, the iconic Indian designer known for his international couture & creations for the Bollywood glitterati.

Rohan Krishnamurthy - Co-Composer

Acclaimed a "musical ambassador" by The Times of India, Rohan is distinguished as a soloist and composer. Rohan has performed with legendary Indian classical musicians and Grammy Award-winning global artists. He leads The Alaya Project, the critically acclaimed Indo-jazz-funk collective and is the recipient of international awards and grants.

Ryan Andrews - Co-Composer

An award-winning composer whose music has been featured in movies, TV, and game media. Highlights: *SNL*, *Late Show*, *Black-ish*, *Money Heist*, *Sharkdog*, *Vikings* and movies from *Marvel* to *The Matrix*, as well as video game trailers for the *Call Of Duty* series. Ryan has received recognition from the Production Music Association, the Music+Sound Awards, the Production Music Awards, and the Clio Entertainment Awards. He worked on the production of *Eberhard*, which won a Grammy in 2022 for Best Instrumental Composition.



SOPHIYAA NAYAR ANSWERS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

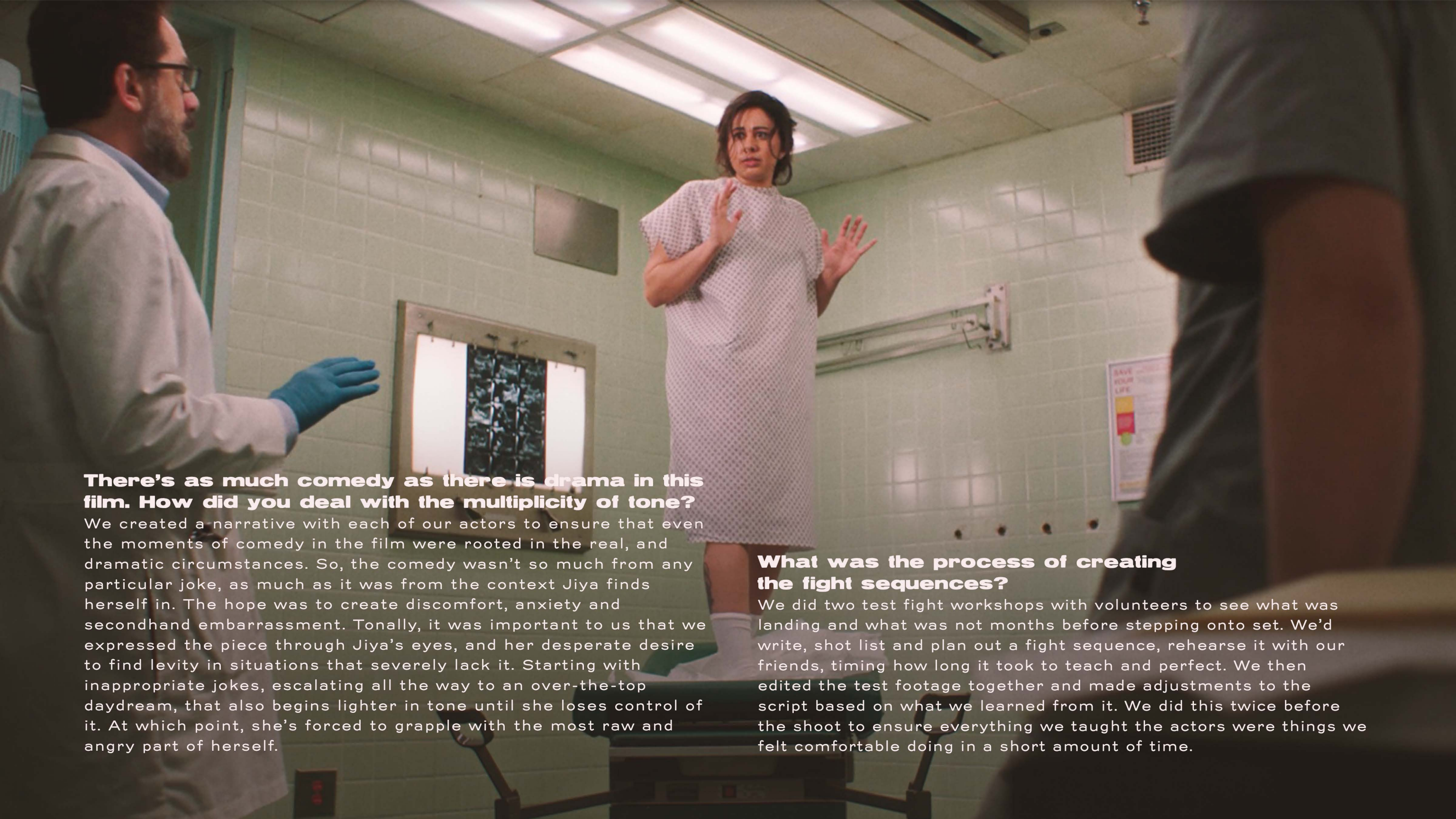
What is the significance of the title?

“Chhaya” directly translates to “shadow” in Hindi. The film explores our relationship with the most raw and unadulterated parts of ourselves, the shadows that lurk beneath the surface and hold onto pain that we bury. Chhaya is also often used in Hindi vernacular as “shade”-- the dual meaning of the title evokes the idea that, for our lead-- the darkest part of herself, her shadow, is also that which protects her and gives her strength.

Why is it important to tell this story?

Growing up, I spent afternoons on my grandmother’s lap, listening to stories about valiant men from the Mahabharata. One story that stuck out was how their wife, Draupadi was disrobed in front of an all-male court. How the men’s rage towards the assault triggered epic mythological wars. “What about her anger?” I asked, hoping Draupadi had a vengeful battle story too. “Swallowed it,” my grandmother said.

Is the best we can do, “swallow it?” Dissociate from the ways in which we have been wronged? Separate our memories from our bodies, almost so that it’s more convenient for the people around us. How far are we willing to go to undo painful memories? To reconstruct them to fit a more convenient narrative for the wrongdoer, the community or the culture. And how much of that habit of swallowing is part of our legacy? That, at this point, it’s second nature. Holding up the ceiling for our abusers is part of our reptilian brain.



There's as much comedy as there is drama in this film. How did you deal with the multiplicity of tone?

We created a narrative with each of our actors to ensure that even the moments of comedy in the film were rooted in the real, and dramatic circumstances. So, the comedy wasn't so much from any particular joke, as much as it was from the context Jiya finds herself in. The hope was to create discomfort, anxiety and secondhand embarrassment. Tonally, it was important to us that we expressed the piece through Jiya's eyes, and her desperate desire to find levity in situations that severely lack it. Starting with inappropriate jokes, escalating all the way to an over-the-top daydream, that also begins lighter in tone until she loses control of it. At which point, she's forced to grapple with the most raw and angry part of herself.

What was the process of creating the fight sequences?

We did two test fight workshops with volunteers to see what was landing and what was not months before stepping onto set. We'd write, shot list and plan out a fight sequence, rehearse it with our friends, timing how long it took to teach and perfect. We then edited the test footage together and made adjustments to the script based on what we learned from it. We did this twice before the shoot to ensure everything we taught the actors were things we felt comfortable doing in a short amount of time.

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WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY **SOPHIYAA NAYAR**

PRODUCED BY **CHEESE DOSA PRODUCTIONS**

EDITED BY **LAUREN JEVIKAR**

PRODUCTION DESIGN BY **MINOLAE JAIN**

COSTUME DESIGN BY **OONA NATESON**

CINEMATOGRAPHY BY **HELENA GRUENSTEIDL**

WATCH THE TRAILER [HERE](#)



RUNTIME: 7.31 MINS
LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICITY CONTACT: **CHEESEDOSAPRODUCTIONS@GMAIL.COM**