



Nisha Ganatra, who plays Shanti

thought, If people are going to stare at me, I'll give them a reason. I'll go on screen. I'll go on stage. I'll perform in a forum. There's far more acceptance when you can accept yourself.

**Your physique is impressive. How much do you work out?**

I'm a physical trainer. I've always been in the fitness industry. I used to compete when I was in the military for four years, which is how I established my physique, and everything after that has just been maintaining. Gosh, I've been accused of using steroids and all that and I've never touched it in my life. Does my physicality define me? Absolutely not. Is it a part of me? Yes, it's a part of me and always will be.

**MÉLANGE LAVONNE**

**What are your character, Jaden's, motivations?**

Jaden is a butch lesbian who owns an apartment unit with her partner of four years, Melody, who happens to be a hermaphrodite. Jaden loves her woman and they've been living together for a while. Jaden's a strong-minded woman, rough around the edges, and she likes taking care of her woman, who's feminine. However, she has her pride, and when she finds out that she's pregnant...

**She's not too happy right away.**

Yeah, she feels betrayed. My character's pretty pissed off about it. I can relate to the character in real life because being a butch woman, you have this persona, or image, you have to maintain, and being pregnant is not something you would imagine happening to you. I wouldn't be opposed, in my real life, to being pregnant. It would be a blessing.

**Could it become a blessing for Jaden?**

They're in limbo trying to figure out: What's the next step? Her best friend, Bone, is real butch and Jaden doesn't want her to know how she got pregnant. I mean, if your girlfriend's a hermaphrodite, does that mean you like penetration?

**This was your first time acting. What was that like?**

Amber Sharp [the director] found me on MySpace. I'm a hip-hop musician and she ran across my music page and liked my image. She asked me to come down and try out. I brought my best friend [with me]. I've never been so nervous in my whole life. I tell my best friend, "I can't do this. Let's leave." So as I'm getting up, here comes the producer, who says, "OK, are you ready?" I decided, if I suck, I suck—at least I tried. I knew the gist of the story but was so involved in trying to memorize the lines. [Amber] knew it was memorized. You have that robotic character. So she says, "Mel, just come here for a second." I had the script in my hand and she threw it. She's like, "OK, now improv!" I improv-ed and it just felt right.

**What did you think about the script when you first read it?**

I thought, This is going to be something huge!

**Did you go to a few of the festivals where it screened?**

Yes, I think the best thing about it was seeing people's responses to the film and how much they supported it. Seeing yourself on the big screen still blows me away.

**NISHA GANATRA**

**Have there been any post-pilot episodes of *Don't Go*?**

No. Amber is running into that crazy problem where people are like, "Nobody wants a show with all black people." It's insane.

**That's what's refreshing about the show. It shows women of color who are queer in a realistic way, more so than anything that's been on TV.**

Amber's incredible...It has authenticity that's lacking [on TV].

**Describe your character to us a little bit.**

I play Shanti, who's Indian American and grew up in a very conservative family. She decides to just move out of the house. The place she rents, unbeknownst to her, is a lesbian *Melrose Place*-type building, so she gets a taste of different things and has feelings she never knew she had before. She's definitely coming out. I think she's the only one in the whole pilot who is not already gay.

**What did you think about when you were playing her?**

My life. I think that being an Indian American, you're already aware of living a dual existence. When I got to college, I realized, Oh, there are lesbian clubs, and I can go to them. I was already used to splitting up my identity, so it didn't seem hard or wrong. It's sad but kind of interesting because you've already dealt with it culturally, so it was like sexuality is just another aspect of my life that I can only express in these settings.

**Have you bridged that gap with your parents?**

*B-B-B-Bad to the Bone* continued on page 78



"Butch is sexy. It's when you come out as butch or genderqueer, however you feel most comfortable in your skin, when the world really accepts you."