

## Theatre Against War

Let the 2007-2008 Season Begin!

by Rahul Varma, Artistic Director, Teesri Duniya Theatre

Teesri Duniya Theatre launched its 26<sup>th</sup> season on August 25, 2007 with a joint Teesri/Kabir Cultural Centre production, *A Story and a Song* by Aparna Sindhoo, at the D.B. Clarke Theatre. Aparna Sindhoo was accompanied by Anil Sukumara Pillai and Pratheesh Sivanandan, two of India's most highly accomplished artists. The launch consisted of performance and talks by artists, activists, and community members. Over 200 people attended the performance. What a wonderful and groundbreaking launch to the season!

Our 26<sup>th</sup> season marks the beginning of a two-production season—a historical first for the company. It includes the world premieres of *A Leaf in the Whirlwind*, a new dance-theatre rarely seen in Canada, and the Montreal premiere of *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, a controversial play other companies don't dare produce. And that is not all; the season also includes a series of play readings, various community-based activities, and the publication of our theatre quarterly, *alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage*.

Our current production, *A Leaf in the Whirlwind*, is an exceptional play introducing audiences to a rare style of dance-theatre that pushes the boundaries of theatrical imagination with a rare beauty. We are proud to be working with director/choreographer Aparna



***A Leaf in the Whirlwind***

Sindhoo. Since our formation over twenty-five years ago, it is the first time that a woman of colour is directing a major production for us—we couldn't give ourselves a better gift. What doubles our joy is that Aparna is accompanied by Anil Natyaveda and Pratheesh Sivanandan from India, along with talented local artists Marjolayne Auger, Tomomi Morimoto, Michelle Parent, designer Noush Anand, and musicians Patrick Graham and Jean-Francoise Garneau.

Equally, we couldn't have had a more supportive production team which includes Jody Burkholder, Jesse Ash, and Jon Rondeau, as well as Teesri's office staff, Louise Lapointe and Linda Levesque—what a team!

Finally, it is no accident that both plays this season are not only by and about women—and to be shared by all—our artistic leadership is stewarded, yet again, in the hands of women artists telling women's stories: Jodi Essery, Aparna Sindhoo, Sarah Stanley, and Adrienne Wong. We couldn't be more proud.

### Drumbeat

**Teesri Duniya Theatre**

4324 St. Laurent Blvd.  
Montreal, QC H2W 1Z3

Tel: 514.848.0238

Fax: 514.848.0267

Email: [tduniya@aei.ca](mailto:tduniya@aei.ca)

[www.teesriduniyatheatre.com](http://www.teesriduniyatheatre.com)

**Publisher**

Rahul Varma

**Editor**

Anurag Dhir

**Layout & Design:**

Alan Wong

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## Motion and Capture

A photographer's continuing journey to the essence of Indian dance

by Amar Khoday

In many creative and personal explorations, we are not only curious about the process, but demand transparency as an entitlement, for the process indelibly forms part of the entity that we seek to comprehend. Below I attempt to map out my developmental and creative process to dance photography.

I traversed into the world of dance photography by way of a gastronomic experience. Some years back, while eating at a well-known Montreal Indian restaurant, I was captivated by the numerous black and white images suspended on the wall around me. One in particular drew my attention more than the others: A monochromatic image of three Indian classical dancers dressed in informal wear in what appeared to be a rehearsal space. This “stripped down” tableau stayed with me for some time for it portrayed the dance in a much different light than what I had been

used to. Absent were the static expressions and poses; or theatrical formality of the make-up and costumes worn at the performance. What was left was another type of essence: a simpler, dynamic and less ornamental representation of the art form.

Having the privilege of knowing a variety of classically-trained Bharatanatyam dancers, I embarked on a process of capturing the dance through their movements, all the while hoping to somehow mime what I saw in those first images at the restaurant. As I

was working with film—and therefore paying for many rolls—I tried to capture as many “good” shots as I could. These earlier efforts resulted in a bevy of posed shots that—although dramatic in their own right—for me, lacked a certain gravitas. I wondered if perhaps

emotions are more convincingly captured when they are eased into, rather than by my inelegant proposals of: “now let’s try angry!”

Dance photography can be a very collaborative process. My creative process is often informed by the dialogues I have with my model/dancer collaborators and their voicing of ideas and their boundaries. Photography involves a certain level of trust. If this trust blossoms, it will very likely open new doors for exploration which the model and/or photographer may not have been willing to venture the first time around.

The move to the digital medium allowed me the freedom and time to better

discover the dancers’ inherent sense of motion, power and stillness. Rather than aiming for the perfect image captured during “take one” I became more interested in allowing the process to unfold naturally. To capture the progression of the dancer as s/he eased into an expression, and the various subtle nuances unleashed along the way. This movement toward capturing dynamic moments of stillness amongst the fluidity of dance has helped me ease into my own evolving expression as a dance photographer.



# Standing Up Against Everything

Rape, resistance and renewal in *A Leaf in the Whirlwind*

by Anurag Dhir

The human body is a mysterious and powerful medium through which various external stimuli and sensations can be absorbed, processed and projected back into the world as sound, movement, and stillness. First-hand accounts of the effects of war and torture on the body carry with it brutal and unimaginable memories, which provide the teller some form of catharsis and healing, and the viewer or reader a living testament to the body's resilience and the true spirit of resistance.

*A Leaf in the Whirlwind* is a work of dance-theatre based on the short story by Lalithambika Antherjanam. Adapted by director/choreographer Aparna Sindhoor and playwright Jodi Essery, the story combines first-hand accounts of women affected by war into the story of one woman who—bearing a child of rape that occurs during wartime—flees from an unnamed place and ends up in a refugee camp. Such complex subject matter challenged the body and spirit of the performers into creating a physical response to stories of war, rape, oppression, displacement, community and hope. It also challenges the audience to contemplate their own role as witness.

“Quietly witnessing what’s happening on stage is also being part of it,” says Sindhoor. “When we witness and keep quiet about the atrocities of war—in which rape plays a big part—that act of witnessing becomes very important. Bringing it so close to the audience—where the audience sees what the rapists see, and even the breathing is heard—it has to *do* something to them. Therefore I want to question that active witness, which is not only the audience, but includes myself.”

Sindhoor also questions the practice of resistance in the face of such atrocities. In the performance, the main character—as portrayed by Sindhoor and the other performers—grows up believing in fighting for freedom through political and revolutionary means. It's a resistance born from idealism and anger towards those who violently advance one group's political, economic, social, or religious position over another.

Once she herself becomes a victim and bears a child of rape, the question of resistance becomes a choice between destroying and removing that which symbolizes so much pain, to standing up and facing the truth of her situation everyday until she finds a way to live with it. For Sindhoor and Essery, this question of where inner strength lies in the face of injustice was answered less through artistic imaginings, but through the words of the very women upon which this story is based.

“People are constantly challenged in the face of horrible atrocities,” Sindhoor explains. “But when the main character says, ‘I was hungry, I washed, I ate, I slept,’ that’s a real woman saying that line. Neither Jodi nor myself made this up. For me that line is her standing up against everything.”

Essery adds, “I think it’s brave to say ‘I’m just going to continue to exist and see what the world says to me about that.’ It’s a very quiet resistance, it’s a very subtle resistance, but in fact it’s very powerful. Being the victim of rape and being pregnant, resistance might be to destroy that child and say, ‘No, you have no power over me and nobody knows.’ But to me, an almost stronger resistance is to say, ‘What if we say *yes* to this? What does that mean for everyone else for me to say ‘Here he is! Here is the baby!’ That exists now, and now we are responsible to answer the child when he asks ‘Where do I come from? Where do I belong? Where is my country?’”

The struggle between standing or crashing against what that the world throws at us finds a place in the heart of *A Leaf in the Whirlwind*. The promise of hope within the embrace of this struggle and amidst the horrors of war was, for Sindhoor, not only key to telling a good story; it becomes the promise of life itself. “It’s not about the character giving birth to a child, she gives birth to hope. For me it’s that. I can’t end it in a place where war is going to continue and we’re all going to die. I don’t want to go there. It’s hard for me.”

## Concrete Dreams Are Made of This...

### Imagining Montreal's Consciously Evolving Culture

By Anoushka Anand

Biking daily through the McGill campus towards downtown, I am constantly passing by the grandeur of gothic European architecture, stone statues of dead pioneers who founded this city, and monuments claiming to tell its history. All floating by in juxtaposition to the stories of human rights violations I heard occurring in the mostly South Asian neighbourhood of Parc Extension. Stories are the real stones building bridges between cultural communities, and so I wondered: where in this city are these culturally evolving stories told and heard, and by whom? I wondered too, if my own voice was recognized as Canadian, as a voice of Montreal, or if it would be heard only through a gauzy filter of "immigrant".

I am an Indian immigrant from Dubai, the United Arab Emirates of five years. I look convincingly Arab, have no noticeable trace of an Indian accent and am usually assumed to be a second generation Indo-Canadian. As an immigrant with permanent residency status, I identified myself without hesitation as 'Indian' when I first arrived. Now a Canadian citizen, I feel the political stakes increasing and my own cultural needs wanting.

Frustrated by a lack of stone heroes I feel I can identify with, I have become aware of the city's nooks and crannies filled with the alternative voices; the handful of marginalized spaces that are available to my own sense of aesthetics and political concerns. My position as a multi-lingual immigrant attached to an emerging community of strong alternative voices, fuels my vision of Montreal as a city in conscious evolution. This vision is of a city becoming conscious of and celebrating the wealth of diverse voices, languages, and emerging cultural "heroes" who lead by example and inspire us toward true self-expression and bridge building.

This past summer I was part of such bridge building through my work as production designer for a Parc Extension-based community performance called *The Rights Here! Project*. This fall I've had the opportunity to design for director and choreographer Aparna Sindhoor. First for her Montreal remount of *A Story and a Song*, and currently for *A Leaf in the Whirlwind*.

Boston-based, Mysore-born Sindhoor has breathed a new wave of evolution into the story-telling capacities of Bharathanatyam by freely blending dance, theatre, poetry, song and a plethora of languages into an innovatively emerging form of performance. For me, her work and her voice are concretely Montreal and Canada.

A community of individuals with shared visions of Montreal's evolving culture *is* growing, connecting and acting. A collective faith in the strength of stories exists. I've sensed the call for an evolving definition of multiculturalism that goes beyond the token presence of minorities and residual exoticising. Montreal is truly at the cusp of a paradigm shift in terms of the concept of "culture"- no longer as a fixed category for others to adapt into, but something that evolves as a result of input from a diverse mix of unique individuals.

I see it: Display of the exotic *will* evolve into dialogue about differences, boundaries, and shared spaces. An exchange of stories *will* dissolve fears of "losing" a culture. Representations of a single perspective, set in stone, *will* evolve into a consciousness of an emerging culture that freely swims with the waves of the individuals who create and nurture it. Montreal *will* celebrate her heroes: in stone, in the flesh, and in the dreams of those yet to emerge.

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