



Drumbeat

Teesri Duniya Theatre's
Periodic Newsletter
Fall 2005



A Word from Rahul Varma, Teesri's Artistic Director

Hello, friends of Teesri Duniya Theatre. *Drumbeat* is back and better than ever. We will do everything in our power to make this publication a regular part of your diet. Our aim is to keep you in the loop about developments at TD, celebrate our recent successes, tell you what the many partners of Teesri are up to, and occasionally comment on current events while simultaneously striving to bring smiles to your faces. We hope you have had a marvelous and joyous summer!

Next year marks 25 years of Teesri Duniya Theatre. Badal Siracar's famous Hindi play *Julus* launched Teesri in 1981. It was an all South Asian cast that differed in age, linguistic background, and theatre experience, but exhibited a unified passion with which they produced *Julus*. Today, Teesri has over 30 productions on its CV, a culturally sensitive play-development program called Fireworks, Canada's only theatre quarterly exclusively dedicated to the stage and cultural diversity called *alt.theatre*, and a multifaceted community program by, for, and about communities. Our productions are in Canada's both official languages as well as in other minority languages specific to particular cultural communities.

I take pride in telling you that today Teesri Duniya Theatre is one of a handful companies in the country where actors from all cultures, communities, and backgrounds work together on the same stage. I believe Teesri's work represents a complex interpretation of multiculturalism, one that rejects boutique-like exoticism of ethnic minorities in favour of creativity and aestheticism, whereby multicultural diversity leads to intercultural dialogue. The social relevance of our plays distinguishes our company from others.

I invite you to join our 25th anniversary celebration, which will involve a production of the play *Bhopal* in French at the Espace Libre, a presentation of Aparna Sindhoor and Laurie Stevens's dance project called *Leaf in the Whirlwind*, staged readings, and community activities. The Next issue of *Drumbeat* will provide a complete list of 25th anniversary activities.

As we head towards our 25th anniversary, we also remember the war-ravaged climate we live in today. We at Teesri stand in support of peace and in opposition to war. Peace doesn't only mean ending a war, but also ensuring justice for those affected by it. The thematic focus of our work through the next few seasons will be "waging peace through theatre in times of war."

I solicit your ideas and participation. Please join us in building peace and celebrating our 25th anniversary.

Miss Orient(ed) Picked Best Play of 2005!

Miss Orient(ed), the humour-packed play by writers **Nina Aquino** and **Nadine Villasin** that ran from March 8 to 27, 2005, was a major hit with the theatre-going public, garnering Best Play in the Montreal *Mirror's* Best of Montreal Readers' Poll. Readers also chose Emillee Veluz as second-best actress in Montreal! Congratulations to director **Sarah Stanley**, the actors, (**Ms. Veluz**, **Cecile Cristobal**, **Elizabeth Lofranco**, **Carolyn-Fe Trinidad**, and **Nadine Villasin**, the entire behind-the-scenes gang, and the writers of this comic gem.

Teesri Duniya was honoured to provide a stage for this play and its talented cast. The production was a testament to the importance and cultural and artistic vibrancy of Canada's Filipino community. It also showed that the key to a truly Canadian theatre scene lies in developing and promoting timely, topical plays that emerge from and speak to our diverse communities.

Not only was the audience enriched by the experience, but the cast also unanimously described their time on the production as unforgettable.

"It was the first time I really felt like, and proclaimed myself proudly as, a

woman of colour," explained Ms. Cristobel, who played the pageant MC. "For most of my life, I had denied the Filipina in me and here I was, face to face with her. I have learned so much about my cultural history, and have even taught the women of my family about their own history (*the story of the Babaylan*), which



was erased and denied them." With the play rekindling her passion for theatre, she looks forward to doing more dramatic work down the line.

With much the same burning spirit, Ms. Veluz, who played Twinkle, the lively, sincere, and wise woman who recently arrived from the Philippines, said: "This was the first time I had the privilege of working not only with an all-women cast, but also an all-

Filipina cast. I've never felt so proud to be a Filipina-Canadian."

Ms. Lofranco found the experience "enlightening" and "inspiring."

"Miss Orient(ed) was a fulfilling experience for me not only as an actor, but as a Filipina-Canadian," she explains. "Finding, learning and honouring my heritage through this play has proved to be a valuable life lesson for me. Being able to finally express some of my views on the different prejudices within and without the Filipino community to such a diverse audience was both cathartic and rewarding."

Ms. Trinidad confided that "it definitely brought me back to my roots as a Filipina woman of colour looking for ways to 'fit' and make her mark in a mainly Caucasian environment." She had special praise for Teesri Duniya: "From the moment I walked into the audition until the last hug at the wrap-up dinner, it wasn't a question of colour, language, or accent. It was so refreshing to be accepted just because I did a job to the best of my abilities."

Once again, congratulations and much thanks to all of you who took part as well as those who attended!

Fish Eyes: A Review

National Theatre School graduate Anita Majumdar played to sold-out houses in Toronto recently when she presented her one-woman play *Fish Eyes* for a two-week stint at Theatre Passe Muraille Backspace in June 2005. Adapted and expanded from *A Fish Called Meena*, a 12-minute piece she premiered in Montreal in January 2004, *Fish Eyes* showcased Ms. Majumdar's fabulous talents, incorporating not only superior acting skills, but also very demanding traditional Indian dance moves.

At the centre of *Fish Eyes* is Meena, a typical suburban Canadian teenager in many ways who also happens to be of Indian descent. Like many teens, Meena is concerned with all the superficialities of adolescent life, particularly the upcoming high



school prom and a boy at her school named Buddy, with whom she is absolutely infatuated.

Pulling her in an entirely different direction, however, is her Hindu heritage, which takes the form of Kalyani Aunty, her Indian dance teacher. With the impending Annual Lord Ganesh Festival occurring in India, Kalyani Aunty is pushing hard for her prize student to prepare herself for the all-important dance competition at the festival. As obsessed as she is with Buddy, Meena is equally obsessed with Bollywood superstar Aishwarya Rai, whom she uses as her guiding force through life.

Through her tour-de-force

performance, Ms. Majumdar deftly depicts the culture clash that takes place within Meena's life, showing the emotional and psychological intricacies of her psyche as she is flung between the different worlds she inhabits. Portraying Meena, Kalyani Aunty, and Buddy, Ms. Majumdar moves effortlessly from one character to the next, not merely switching accents, but full-bodied, 3-dimensional characters, all the while weaving in highly complex dance moves. One cannot help but feel amazement at how this young woman manages to do everything she does in this 75-minute play without taking a single break and yet bows for her curtain call without a single noticeable pant of breath.

Written by Ms. Majumdar and directed with a sure-hand by Gregory Prest, *Fish Eyes* is a must-see, and we in Montreal should count ourselves lucky if Ms. Majumdar returns to the city that gave birth to her play last year.

Alan Wong

Editorial

Dear Michaëlle Jean,

Congratulations on your appointment to the position of Governor General. We at *Drumbeat* are not alone in being excited about the news. The buzz we've heard on the street and in the workplace has been overwhelmingly positive. For many of us, the sigh of relief after a year of political gaffs and scandal that would make even Santa Claus a hardened cynic has been almost palpable.

The wonderful thing about you, Madame Jean, is that so many in this country will see their experiences in you. They will feel proud to see Canada reflected back to them and represented to the world by someone who they feel, in some small way, knows and is known to them.

Symbols have the power to influence the way a society sees and feels about itself. For example, the author of this humble editorial feels proud and optimistic because someone who embodies an inclusive and progressive vision of his country is representing his nation. So don't listen to the critics.

Don't listen to the voices insisting that it's a politically strategic move

by the Prime Minister. How often do our politicians not act from political motivations? All it means is that, for what may very well be politically strategic reasons, the Prime Minister has dared to make an excellent choice. It happens sometimes.

Don't listen to the editorialists of the *National Post* rail on about how appalling your appointment is, either. They don't know who you are. They even admit it. They do not know whether you are smart or—and this dates them to a time when men walked with their knuckles dragging on the ground (not that long ago, I'm afraid)—a “boob-tube bimbo.” This and similar comments disqualify them immediately from the category of competent journalism. They are appalling journalists.

And, finally, don't listen to certain reporters at *Le Devoir* decry your move to join the “Crown” and your decision to assume a role they, almost gleefully, link to British colonialism. The Governor General's Office long ceased to be seen or used in those terms. Anyway, what are they suggesting, that you're either a Quebecer or a Canadian? That you

are either with us or against us?

As you pointed out, the strength of Canada is that it changes. It is no longer a British colony and Britain no longer rules it through your office. It is a modern, progressive state where the Governor General, while technically still the Queen's representative, has evolved into a premier ambassador of Canadian culture and values. Canada has changed, *Le Devoir* has not.

It may well be, Madame Jean, that there will be things you would like to achieve that will not be possible from within the strict ceremonial confines of the Governor General's Office. However, your ideals and vision will shine through in the way you conduct yourself and the affairs of that office.

Mr. Duceppe says that the institution of the Governor General's Office is archaic and irrelevant today. But what makes an institution relevant if not the determination and good intentions of the people who are mandated to make it work? You have the right intentions and, looking at your past history, also the determination.

The Editors of *Drumbeat*

Remembering Moneeka Misra Tanvir

On May 28, Moneeka Misra Tanvir, theatre partner and wife of Habib Tanvir, director of India's renowned Naya Theatre, passed away.

News of Moneeka's passing sparked numerous tributes from those who had known and worked with her. Many described her as the backbone of Naya Theatre. Sameera Iyengar, who works at Prithvi Theatre in Mumbai, recalled her as "the person who made sure that Naya Theatre functioned, that the chaotic and rough and tumble family of actors and musicians stayed together and played together, that every show had everything it needed."

She goes on to say that Moneeka was "enthusiastic, warm, outspoken—a personality to be reckoned with, an individual with a tremendous sense of humour. At gatherings of friends and family, it was Moneeka-di who was the storyteller, while Habib puffed on his pipe, nodded in agreement, and inserted a word here and a sentence there. The adventures of Naya Theatre and the adventures of the Tanvir family came pouring out of her in a hilarious stream. She had the gift of seeing humour and absurdity in all situations."

According to Ms. Iyengar, "the Tanvirs lived drama offstage as well

as on—often high comedy. Conversations were always a huge source of laughter. Habib would be talking about something, Moneeka-di would pick up on some point and take off on a tangent, Nageen would enter the room at some later point, assume something completely different and add another layer of delightful confusion. Nobody would get too upset and everyone would burst out laughing, and yet there was communication and harmony."

On behalf of Teesri Duniya Theatre, we would like to extend our heartfelt condolences to our dear friend, Habib Tanvir, and the family and friends of Moneeka Tanvir.

When Opportunism Knocks: A Review

Some time back I witnessed a new theatre phenomenon: Spontaneous Theatre, a form of spectacle that makes the "Experiences" or "Happenings" of the 1960's look as dog-eared as a salon piece about a poodle and a toupee.

Spontaneous Theatre, for those unacquainted with the concept, involves an actor (or actors) inviting him or herself into the midst of non-thespian assemblages of people and delivering lines to which the unsuspecting non-actor conscripts are forced to react and, perchance, respond. One of the permissions of this kind of theatre is that the actor, technically known as the "politician," can commit his lines to memory—or a set of handsome chit cards—*ergo* conceptual spontaneity trumps the real McCoy.

Imagine, if you will, a Sikh temple. The people are gathered to listen to a sermon when a fellow coiffed like a BIC lighter ascends the podium. He appears wooden. A ripple of anticipation moves through the crowd: Will the head come into contact with the body and spontaneously combust? But then the wooden figure opens his mouth. As he does so, a light of recognition erupts on the faces of those in attendance. They have seen this actor before in other productions, including *Parliament*, *Question Period* and *Election 2004*.

His name is rumbling sleepily across their minds as a second figure, a Sikh, appears beside him, diminished, obedient, waiting for the pale matchstick of a speaker to signal his turn. Now *his* face they know! *Dial L for Liberal* and its sequel *Dial M for Embassy for Me and My Gal* were broadcast across the entire country. Stephen Harper and Grumant Grewal, like two angels of communal harmony, have come to honour the Sikh assembly with a message meant just for them. The air is laden with love.

"Where there is text," we insist, "there is subtext." And so we strain to tune into the words of Mr. Harper. Distinct sounds soon emerge from the languid hum of speech. The voice is the type of attempt at urgent and concerned that Harper is famous for. He warns that same-sex marriage is "a threat to any Canadian who supports multiculturalism" and "to a genuinely multicultural country."

We who get it are stunned into excited silence. What a brilliant contortionist, doing back-flips and still remaining perfectly upright! Surely he is winking at those of us who remember when he railed against multiculturalism, calling

it a waste of money and a Liberal ploy to buy the ethnic vote. But the wooden figure continues, betraying nothing of this irony and thereby making it all the more trenchant. He is on top of his game. Seeing a chance to get a piece of the "ethnic" vote for himself at the expense of the same-sex marriage bill, he panders shamelessly to a Sikh audience by posing as the defender of multiculturalism! *Quel coup de maître!*

And as we try to process Mr. Harper's avatar from dumper to defender of multiculturalism, the Conservative leader, joined by fellow straight man Mr. Grewal, tells the audience that minority religions, cultures, traditions, and social values will be threatened if the same-sex bill passes. Without recourse to the explicit image, they leave it to the audience to weave their own tapestry. Let us visualize how the post-same-sex-bill landscape looks through their eyes: social collapse, polygamous couples prancing on the shores of Lake Ontario as the fires of hell burn around them... Dante in the Garden of Eden, hiking up his trousers and heading for the tallest bush he can find...

When this fine example of Spontaneous Theatre ends, we are left reassured that irony is still a valued item in theatre's bag of tricks. A politician who once deplored multiculturalism now champions it. He announces to one minority his views concerning the constitutional rights of another that is struggling to achieve equal rights, as if same-sex marriage were not a minority right and same-sex couples did not exist within all cultures, races, and ethnic groups. The same man who, in previous performances, objected to Sikh RCMP officers wearing the turban tells a Sikh audience that the same-sex bill they detest so much is a threat to Sikhs, Sikh traditions and Sikh heritage.

The unplanned—and therefore *spontaneous*—brilliance of the spectacle is that the politician ends up, unwittingly, projecting light onto our diverse make-up and the fragile nature of the rights that protect us. We are made more sharply aware of the need to safeguard our common values and to make sure they are made and remain common to all Canadians, just in case opportunism comes a-calling.

Whence comes the title of the play: *When Opportunism Knocks*, *Stephen Harper Answers*.

Ken McDonough

Job Stealer at Mayworks! Montreal

At the invitation of organizers of the first annual Mayworks! Montreal: A Festival of Working Class Struggles, members of Teesri Duniya resurrected *Job Stealers* by Rahul Varma, Helen Vlachos, and Ian Lloyd-George for the Festival's Night Shift: Political Cabaret event on April 30, 2005 at *Maison de la culture Cote-des-Neiges*. Directed by James Douglas and featuring Douglas, Chastity Castro, Debora Militzer, Anurag Dhir, Asad Wasti, and Alan Wong in various roles, *Job Stealers* was met with a standing ovation by the audience, a fitting end to a fabulous evening of political theatre, poetry, dance, storytelling, and music.

Working with a minimalist set and an abbreviated script to match the Cabaret setting, the troupe highlighted the struggles of refugees to achieve meaningful employment in a racist and insensitive society. The energy and message of the piece captivated the crowd, who were all there in solidarity of workers' rights.

Closing out an evening that featured legendary local playwright and activist David Fennario as well as Gen'r Radical, UTIL, Dead Dollz Cabaret, *Mise au Jeu*, Tania Nesterovsky, Cheryl Neil, Anna Fuerstenberg, and Matt Jones, *Job Stealers* brought home the reality of refugees' struggles in Canada, giving voice to the thousands who continue to go unheard in this country as they fight for their very survival.

Playwrighting Workshop Offered

Lib Spry in conjunction with Teesri Duniya Theatre, is offering a free 7-week playwriting workshop in September and October. Participants will meet for 3 hours a week on Wednesdays from September 13th to October 26th, 2005 and will be expected to write regularly in between sessions. The aim of the workshop is to produce a series of 10-minute plays around a theme, with the possibility of production at a later date. Six to eight participants will be accepted. If you are interested please send a letter explaining why you want to take the workshop, a c.v., and a 5-page example of your writing. All writers are encouraged to apply regardless of whether or not they have written for theatre before.

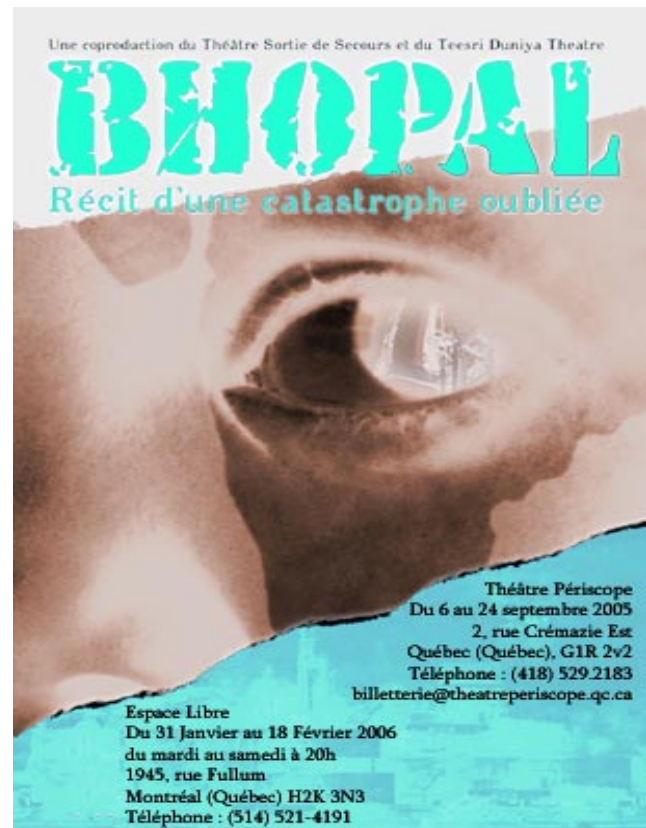
Lib Spry has worked in theatre for over 30 years as a director, writer, teacher, performer, translator and popular theatre worker. She is a specialist in popular theatre, theatre for young audiences and physical theatre. Her work has taken her to England, France, Canada, and the U.S. She is presently Literary Manager for Teesri Duniya Theatre.

Please send your applications to:

Teesri Duniya Theatre, 4324 St. Laurent Blvd., Montreal QC, H2W 1Z3

Deadline: Monday, Aug. 29 at the Teesri Office

For more information, please email Lib Spry at libspry@sympatico.ca



Calling all closet and out-of- the-closet political cartoonists!

Want to see your artwork published in *Drumbeat*? If you come up with a visual that you think cuts to the wick of a social or political event, send it along for us to see. If we like it, we'll publish it. Be sure to send only a copy, though, as we will not be able return work that is not selected.

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