

THEATREWORKS 93-94



A night of
story telling,
beautifully imagined.

Written by
John Clifford
Directed by
Ivan Heng



ਨਿੱਗੋਰ ਨੇ ਰੋਣ ਦੀ ਬਜਾਏ

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Light in the Village

Written by
John Clifford
Directed by
Ivan Heng

Original Music composition and performance
Rosita Ng
Mylene Ng
Rajakanth

Lighting and Set Design
Ivan Heng
Lim Yu-Beng

Costume Design
Vik Lim

Movement Trainer and Choreographer
Mrs Santha Bhasker

Production Manager
Tay Tong

Stage Manager
Caroline Smith-Laing

Flyer/Poster/Programme Design
Geraldine Koh

Programme Co-ordinator / Writer
Leslie Lee

Photographer
Jeannie Ho

Front-Of-House Manager
Benjamin Ng

Lighting Operator
Eric Lee

Featuring
Gerald Chew
Rose Eng
Janardan Menon
Vijai Parwani
Sandy Philips

27 January to 8 February 1994

8.00pm

The Black Box



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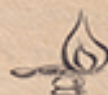
TheatreWorks welcomes Ivan back!

"We are very happy that Ivan, who has gone away, immersed and learnt from a foreign culture, returns to share his experiences. External influences will deepen our understanding of our own Asian culture. These influences can help provide different dimensions and act as catalysts for more exciting developments. It is important that such practitioners return to work as equals with their counterparts in Singapore to ensure a vibrant and meaningful theatre scene for Singaporeans.

This is reflected in our 1993/94 Season, - "Moving out to Enrich Ourselves". TheatreWorks is pleased to have provided Ivan the faith and space to work with us and to share his vision with Singapore.

Thank you, Ivan, for *Light In The Village*."

Tay Tong
General Manager



Ivan Heng
director

Ivan Heng was the BAT's first arts scholar to the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow.

He graduated last year, winning the Royal Lyceum Theatre Club Award, the Margaret Gordon Prize and The Dorothy Innes Prize.

He has acted in many of TheatreWorks' best known plays, which include *M Butterfly* (1990), *Beauty World* (1988) and *Army Daze* (1988). He also directed and acted in Ovidiu Yu's play, *The Woman In A Tree On The Hill* at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 1993, which won the Scotsman Fringe First Award and the Scottish Daily Express New Names of 1993 Award.

"I first saw *Light In The Village* at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 1991. I had been in Scotland for a year and had seen some one hundred and twenty plays by then; some good, some not so good. But in the darkened space of the Traverse Theatre that afternoon, I knew that this would be the first play that I would direct on my return to Singapore.

After the performance, my fourth show that day, I found myself eager to talk to the artists and well, anybody who would speak to me. I was on a bit of a high, and needed to talk, a lot. Good plays do that, I think. They make you think and talk a lot. And after one waxys (or bitches) about the actors, the direction, the set, the lighting, the costumes and in recent days the special 'EJX(!)', one ponders about being a human being.

Oh dear, you think, is this going to be one of those plays?!

Relax, Relax, Relax.

The person that I finally spoke to that afternoon, turned out to be John Clifford himself. And we talked. For about two hours. About our adventures in India, East and West, First World and Third World, men and women, Singapore, Scotland, England and America. The Earth. God. Electricity. TV. Damming. Progress and the price one pays. And many things besides.

Three years later, and actually working on the play in Singapore. I am convinced that there is something for Singapore audiences. I spoke to John recently and asked him what he wanted to say.

"Tell the story," he said, "tell the story."

So tonight, we tell the story.

I would like to thank Rose, Sallie, Vijal, Menon and Gerald for giving so much love; Mrs Bhaskar and Ambuja for being patient teachers; Caroline and Tay Tong for holding my hand; Yu-Beng for replisng our dreamstage; Vik for the costumes; Rosita, Mylene and Raj for transporting us to a different dimension, TheatreWorks, The British Council and BRT (Singapore) for believing; and you the audience for coming on this magic carpet ride.

Have wonderful adventures.



Ivan Heng



John Clifford playwright

John Clifford was born on 22nd March 1950 in Derby, England. He has been a resident in Scotland since 1968. He has an MA (First Class Honours) in Spanish and Arabic and a PhD (on The Playwriting Art of Calderon).

He has worked as a nurse, schoolteacher, lecturer, bus conductor, yoga instructor, critic, journalist and broadcaster, and has been a full time writer since 1981. Married to journalist and illustrator, Sue Innes, John has two daughters, Rebecca (13) and Katie (8).

He is author to some thirty plays, several of which have been seen all over the world. *Losing Venice* won a "Fringe First" when it opened in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 1985; it has since been seen in London, Sweden, Australia, Hong Kong, New York and Los Angeles. *Lucy's Play* was also produced in Aspen, Colorado and chosen as the inaugural production for the California Repertory Company. The first production of *Great Expectations* won the "Spirit of Mayfest" Award and subsequently toured Iraq, Egypt, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. It was produced by the Lyric Theatre, Belfast, in Spring 1993. *Ines de Castro* has had productions in London, Liverpool, Vancouver, South Carolina and Sydney. It has been filmed by Portuguese Television and BBC2, broadcast on BBC Radio 3, translated into Spanish and Portuguese, and is currently being turned into an opera for the composer James McMillan.

Light In The Village has been produced in Edinburgh at the Traverse Theatre for the Edinburgh Arts Festival in 1991, San Francisco at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, now in Singapore by TheatreWorks, and in Chicago in the later part of 1994.

"When I write a play, I have to begin by writing it for my audience. In Edinburgh: a small city in a small country. But I always hope and I always dream that I can reach out to the world beyond: and this production in Singapore excites me because it is that dream coming true.

"When I wrote this play, I wanted to write something about the divisions in our world. Between old ways and new ways. Between the west and the east. About the chasm between rich and poor. There's no denying there is terrible injustice and there are deep divisions in our world. But there needn't be divisions in our hearts. For in the end, we do belong together.

So I hope this play can reach across the world and speak to you."



हिंदूत में पुरुष और महिला

By John Clifford

I think of a woman I met in a village, 6 hours east of Calcutta. She was the health worker. She showed me the one cranky hand pump which was the only source of drinking water for forty families. It was inadequate; but the other pump had been broken for a year and there was no one able to repair it. There was no sanitation in the village. Its pond was fed by an open drain. The surface of the water was covered with slime. She told me it was the villagers' only other source of water. They had to use it to wash their clothes, to wash their cooking utensils, and to wash themselves. They used it for drinking, too; most knew they should boil it, but fuel was scarce.

There was no electricity. There was no school. The few students who attended school in the neighbouring village faced great difficulty: their labour was needed by their families. Also, because there was no electricity, and therefore no light, they could not study at night.

There was no road. The village was reached by a deeply rutted track impassable in the rainy season.

Most of the villagers own no land; they work as day labourers for the local landlords, when there is work. Otherwise, they scrape a living as best they can. The daily wage is around 17 rupees : 50 pence.

In December, it was harvest time. Everyone was out in the fields; only the older women and the children remain. After the harvest, the rats go out to the fields to feast on the left-over grains: the village boys were out hunting the rats. I saw them as I passed. If they catch one, they roast it this evening.

They need the protein: many children in the village suffer from deficiency.

The health worker and her colleagues explain that the women in the village want to improve the situation. They want to work: they want regular

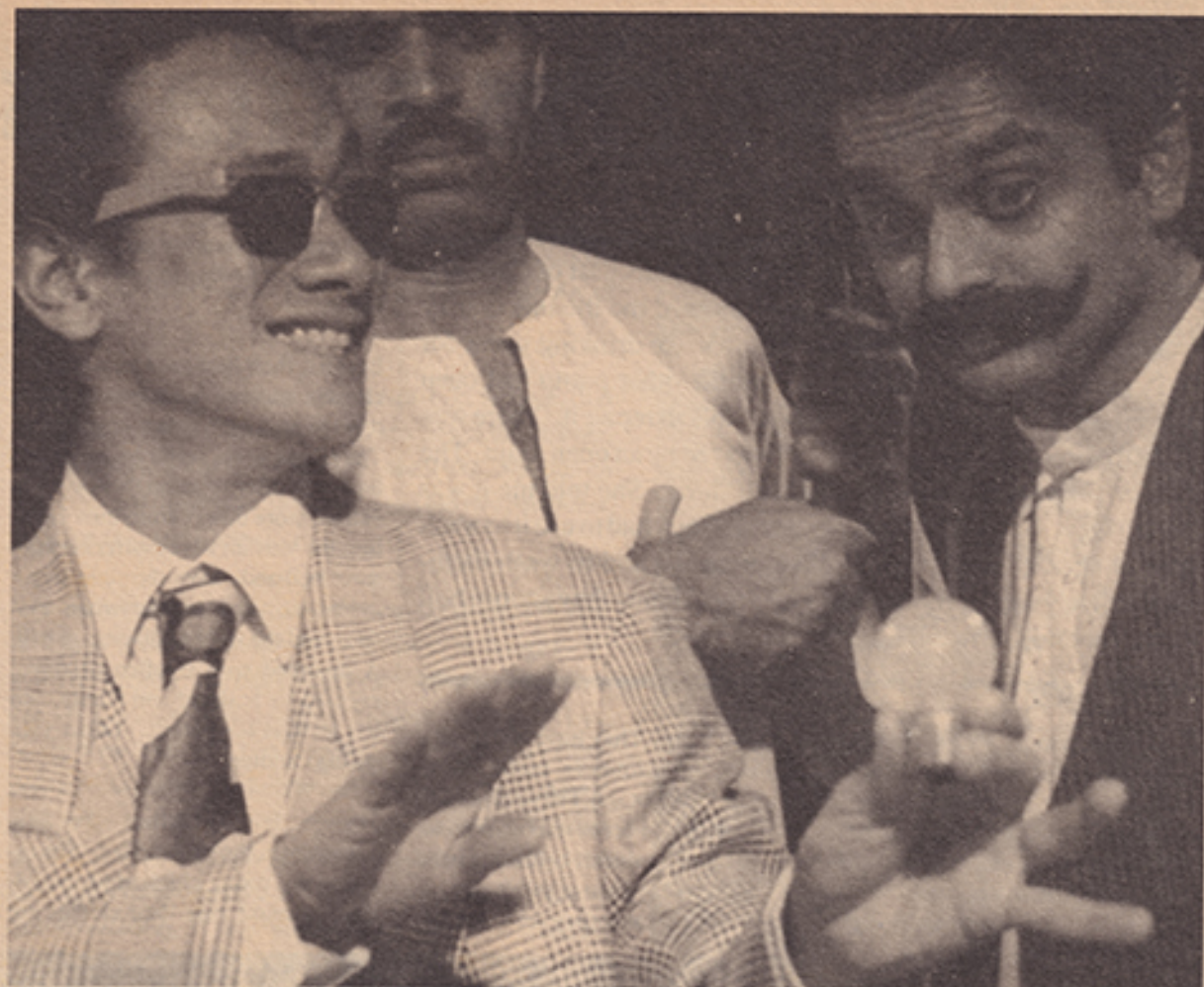
communications are so bad, they have no means of finding anyone who will buy it.

Besides, their husbands treat them as chattels and are reluctant to allow them to engage in independent work. The Hindu wives suffer because their husbands often mistreat them to try to extract more dowry from their families; the Muslim wives suffer because their husbands have the right to remarry, as many as four wives at a time, and the right to divorce at will. A divorced wife is often destitute: rejected by husband and family, and left to fend for herself. Often with young children.

My guide distributes the few government health supplies. She inspects the young children of the village: to make sure their clothes are

employment. They have skills. She shows me exquisite embroidery. But they cannot sell. They cannot sell it in the village because everyone can do it, no-one values it or has any need to buy it. They cannot sell it outside the village because they are so cut off,





washed, their hair is free of lice. To keep a check on their basic state of health. She runs classes for the children, and classes for the mothers, too. She wants her health centre to be a source of light in the village; and she wants it to be source of inspiration to others. The government has sent her some women from Bihar so she can train them and they can do the same for their villages when they return.

She shows me her health centre. It is a tiny hut. The floor is made of mud. There is one child's desk and a scrap of blackboard in the corner. There is nothing else.

Everyone gathers round. The Bihari women speak. They tell me that they want to make things better, they want to do all they can, but it is very hard. They feel helpless and afraid. They are so very far from home. What advice can I give them? What should I tell them?

Should I tell them that while their children suffer disease because they have not enough to eat while ours are ill because they eat too much? Should I tell them that while their villages are trapped in poverty because they have no road, our towns and villages are being choked and poisoned because they have too many roads? Should I tell them that we don't even care enough to give our own children decent schooling? That we have expended limitless millions to wage a war. A war not for justice, not for the world's children, but to try to safeguard the West's cheap oil supplies.


I want to have written something that would answer them. And that would speak also to our own overwhelming sense of helplessness and guilt. But would not simply reflect anger or despair. Despair is a luxury we cannot afford; to spread it seems to me a kind of crime.

It is also an inaccurate response; there is injustice and cruelty in our world, but also courage, dedication, and a profoundly moving kind of solidarity. There is also, in India and in Bangladesh, an immensely ancient and yet vibrant culture that has much to teach us.

And I want the play to reflect and to celebrate the multi-racialism of our own society. I want to take the audience on a journey: a journey through laughter and anger, and anger and grief. That will involve the audience on every level: theatrically, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually and sexually.

Four weeks rehearsal and thirty six drafts later, I still don't know if I've succeeded. In the end, that's not my business. But I want to dedicate it to those women. Those women in the empty room.

The light of the village.



Cast List

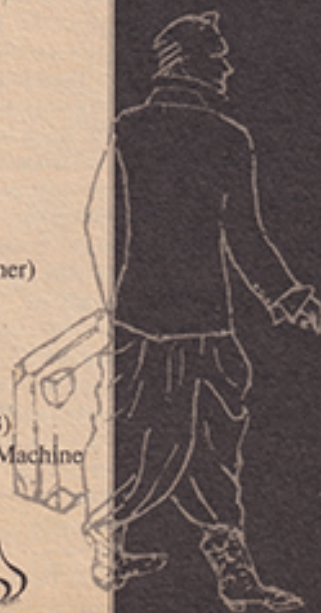
Janardan Menon
as Storyteller One ,
Mukherjee (The LandLord)
& a Lawyer
acted in
Bhoma
(Calcutta University , 1991)
Seduction
(XLRI University , 1991)
Witness for the Prosecution
(Calcutta University , 1990)

Rose Eng
as Storyteller Two
& Sita
acted in
Watching The Clouds Go By
(TheatreWorks' Directors' Lab , 1993)
Breaking Through
(SPH Young Playwrights' Series II , 1993)
Sammy Won't Go To School
(TheatreWorks' Directors' Lab, 1993)

Vijai Parwani
as Storyteller Three
& Muntu (Sita's husband)
acted in
Arsenic and Old Lace
(STARS, 1992)
Conference of the Birds
(Asia In Theatre Research Circus, 1991)
Death Trap
(Varsity Playhouse of Singapore, 1990)

Sandy Philips
as Storyteller Four ,
Meena (an old woman)
& Kali
acted in
Twelfth Night
(1992)
directed
Oliver!
(STARS, 1992)
acted and directed in
Chekov One Act Farces
(Actors' Theatre Circle, 1993)

Gerald Chew
as Storyteller Five
& Rhodes (The Landlord's younger brother)
acted in
Under The Bed
(TheatreWorks , 1993)
Mergers & Accusations
(SPH Young Playwrights Series II , 1993)
The Lady Of Soul and Her Ultimate 'S' Machine
(TheatreWorks , 1993)
Beauty World
(TheatreWorks , 1992)



ABOUT KALI



Kali, one of Hinduism's most popular divine beings. In Kali, her vision of the divine is perceived as frightening, awesome and terrible. Her terrifying appearance calls man's attention to the realities of pain, suffering and death.

Kali inhabits the fringes of society. She lurks in the mountains, the jungle, or the cremation grounds on the outskirts of towns and cities.

Kali, particularly in her later history, has a warm, voluptuous

appearance. She is naked, full breasted and heavy hipped.

Despite her destructive and terrible features, she is the Mother of All, and as such she reveals a sexually creative presence that is hot and thirsty. As the great mother of the world, she is portrayed as continually giving birth. Immodest in her nudity and aggressive in her sexuality, she represents the ever fertile womb from which springs the eternal throb of life.

Kali represents the unrefined, raw, primordial scream of the hungry infant, while at the same time representing the anguished laments of the dying who have exhausted themselves in nourishing and sustaining the next generation. She gives life, unceasingly and fully; she grants her devotee the boon of fertility and birth; but she demands at the

same time a continuous flow of fresh blood to sustain her in her ceaseless maternal efforts.

Kali's eternal dance of creation and destruction, often portrayed upon a cremation ground, reveals the world of samsara as fleeting, finite and painful, invites man to look beyond his temporal existence. She invites man to join in her mad dance in the cremation ground, she invites him to make of himself a cremation ground so that she may dance there, releasing him from the fetters of a bound existence.

source: *The Sword and The Flute: Kali and Krishna - Dark Visions, Visions of the Terrible and The Sublime in Hindu Mythology* Written by David R. Kinsley Published by University of California Press, 1975



CECIL (JOHN) RHODES

Born - July 5, 1853
Died - March 26, 1902

Cecil (John) Rhodes was born at Bishop's Stortford, England, the son of a clergyman. He was educated at a local English grammar school. Poor health prevented him from the professional career he had planned, and he was sent to South Africa to work on a cotton farm with his brother Herbert.

In 1871, the diamond fever overcame Rhodes and he moved to Kimberly, the centre of mining. There, he dreamed of reuniting the English speaking peoples, of developing Asia and Africa, and a world federation of which English speaking countries should be the lead-

ing nations. The grandeur of his dreams was tarnished by unscrupulous methods, however, and it was by these means that he acquired control of the Kimberly diamond fields. At the age of 35, he became one of the world's richest men.

Rhodes took a degree at Oxford in 1891. There, his eccentric habits, falsetto giggle, rambling monologues and his unusual background intrigued the younger students around him.

In 1891, Rhodes became Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, and Rhodesia was named after him. He died 11 years later of an incurable disease.

Rhodes is well known as the donor of the Rhodes Scholarships at Oxford. His will forbade disqualification on grounds of race and many non-white students from the colonies, the United States and Germany, have benefited from it. Some people, however, have doubted if it was Rhodes' intention as he once defined his policy for equal rights as being for "every white man south of the Zambezi" but later, under liberal pressure, amended "White" to "Civilised". But he probably regarded the possibility of native Africans becoming "civilised" as being so remote that the two expressions, in his mind, came to the same thing.

source: *The New Encyclopedia Britannica 15th Edition*

THE WEEKEND Fiji Ti TV OR

HOLI

Holi is the festival of Spring, and is celebrated in a riotous manner.

For the two or three days in February or March, particularly in northern India, it is unwise to travel, for the young and old, rich and poor alike are likely to be showered with coloured water or powder.

At Holi time, all is forgiven in an orgy of dancing and drum playing, the participants smeared with colour on clothes, face and body.

Holi is associated with Lord Shiva and commemorates his marriage procession, reflected in the noisy parades that wind through the streets, often culminating in a late evening bonfire.

Throughout northern and central India, Holi is celebrated in a multitude of ways. The most dramatic rituals occur in the settlements around Matbura and Vrindaban in Uttar Pradesh, the centres of Krishna worship. At Barsana, home of Krishna's consort Rahda, the men are beaten with sticks by their womenfolk in a unique moment of role reversal.

source: *Arts and Crafts of India*, Written by Nicholas Barnard Published by Conran Octopus Ltd, 1993.

es OT TV



SALYO

Jew!! Power-Up Dry Cells

IMAGERY USED IN THE PLAY

The imagery of the play is a rich, and perhaps disturbing, blend of Christian and Hindu images, a conscious device used to highlight the differences and conflicts between Eastern and Western cultures.

ELECTRICITY

Who discovered Electricity?

A Greek called Thales discovered electricity around 600BC when he found out that if he rubbed a piece of amber (a sort of natural plastic), he could make small objects stick to it.

Who named 'Electricity'?

Electricity was named by William Gilbert, a doctor in 1570 AD. He named the effects that he saw electricity after the Greek word for amber, elektron.

Further discoveries made about Electricity

In 1798, an Italian scientist, Alessandro Volta, invented an easier way to produce electricity - the battery.

In 1747, an American scientist, Benjamin Franklin, conducted an experiment by flying a kite during a thunderstorm. When lightning struck the line, an electricity charge flowed down the line and caused a spark on the key at the bottom of the string. This experiment proved that lightning is made of electricity and later enabled his invention of the light-

ning conductor. The next two people who tried this extremely dangerous experiment were killed!

At the same time in England, William Watson also came to the conclusion: that all materials possess a single kind of electrical "fluid" that can penetrate freely but that can be neither created nor destroyed.

The understanding of electricity has led to the invention of motors, generators, telephones, radio and television, X-ray devices, computers and energy systems.

The light bulb was invented simultaneously in 1878 by Thomas Edison in the United States and Joseph Swan in Britain.

Source: Let's Imagine: Electricity written by Tom Johnston (1986)

Some Of The Many "FIRSTS" IN SINGAPORE

Source: Singapore Facts and Pictures 1993
published by the Ministry of Information and the Arts

- The streets in Singapore were first lit on April 1 1824. Gas lamps were first used to light the streets on May 24, 1864. Electric lighting in the town was first introduced on March 6, 1906.
- The first Christmas light-up along Orchard Road was in 1984.
- The first bank in Singapore was the Union Bank of Calcutta, set up on December 1st, 1840.
- Singapore's first oil refinery was built in 1961 on Pulau Bukom.
- Singapore's first bridge across a river was built in about 1822.
- The telephone was first introduced in Singapore in 1879.
- The first "auto car" was imported into Singapore in 1896.
- The motor scooter first came on the scene around 1920.
- Trolley buses first appeared on August 14, 1926.
- The facsimile machine was first introduced in 1976.
- The handphone was first introduced to Singapore in August 1988.
- Singapore had its first radio station in 1914.
- Karaoke was first introduced into the entertainment scene in 1983.
- Singapore Broadcasting Corporation transmitted its first TV programmes in stereophonic sound on August 1, 1990.



Designers' PROFILES

Musicians

ROSITA NG

Plays the keyboards and percussion, vocals.

Performed in *Fried Rice Paradise* (TheatreWorks, 1991); *Beauty World* (TheatreWorks, 1992); *The Woman In A Tree On The Hill* (TheatreWorks, 1992); *Trojan Women* (TheatreWorks, 1991); *The Henen Advertising Musical*.

Composed music for *Triangles*; *Over The Hill*; *Glass Roots*; *Single*; *Charlie and The Chocolate Factory*; *The Woman In A Tree On The Hill* and *Cetacea*.

MYLENE NG

Plays the electric bass, flute, percussion and vocals.

Performed in *Full Circle* (1991) and *Swinging Sisters* (1993).
An interior designer, studied classical piano and classical guitar.
Presently playing with an all-girl jazz band called IVIIIIV.

RAJAKANTH

Plays percussion.

Performed with the ACS Band and studied traditional percussion in Malaysia.
A student.

Costume Designer

VIK LIM

Designed costumes for *Safe Sex* (TheatreWorks, 1989); *Oedipus* (Varsity Playhouse, 1987) and *Hayavadana* (Experimental Theatre Club, 1988).

Freelance designer and fashion stylist for many local publications, notably *The Straits Times*, *Female* and *8 Days*.

Lighting and Set Designers

IVAN HENG

Designed the sets for *Cupboards* and *The Waiting Room* (The Necessary Stage) and *The Woman In a Tree On the Hill* (The Wayang Wayang Theatre Company, 1993).
Actor/Director.

LIM YU-BENG

Technical director for *Theatre Carnival On the Hill* (TheatreWorks, 1992) and *Private Parts* (TheatreWorks, 1992).

Co-designed the lights for *Lao Jiu* (TheatreWorks, 1993) and *Under The Bed* (TheatreWorks, 1993).

TheatreWorks' Technical Manager.

Flyer / Poster / Programme

GERALDINE KOH

Designed the foyer display for *Ozone* (TheatreWorks, 1991).
Currently working as a Graphic Designer in a Design House.

Photography

JEANNIE HO

Took photographs for recent TheatreWorks' productions, which include *Lao Jiu*, *Under The Bed* and *Watching The Clouds Go By*.
Artist.

MRS SANTHA BHASKAR AND THE NRITYALAYA AESTHETICS SOCIETY

Mrs Santha Bhaskar is not a new face in the Singapore dance field. Winner of numerous awards including the 1990 Cultural Medalion for her contributions to the arts scene in Singapore, she is the teacher of many talented dancers in Singapore today.

As a teacher, she is a sensitive, quiet and unassuming person who inspires her students, gently nudging their inner talent into bloom, often surprising even the students themselves.

Mrs Santha Bhaskar is a talented and daring choreographer. She is known for her intricate compositions and sensitive character developments. Her much acclaimed AUM MURUGA, Kumara Sambhavam Part I - 1992 and Part II - 1993 have drawn an overwhelming reaction from the audience and her response is Part III - 1994 and a promise to continue every year.

Mrs Bhaskar and her husband, Mr K P Bhaskar lead the Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society.

The Society has a long history, dating back to 1948. It was established as Bhaskar's Academy of Dance in Bangalore, India and then in Singapore in 1952. In the late 1980s, the Academy combined with several independent learning centres to form Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society. Since then, the society has trained many students and put up numerous performances.

Nrityalaya has produced over 60 original dance dramas which included the classical/traditional epics of the Ramayana, the Mahabharatha, Kutrala Kuravanji as well as modern themes such as "Happy Family", "Fire Devil", "Artist Dream". The story of Liang Shan Po and Chu Ing Tai was also put up by the Academy in the 1960s. Numerous television and radio series on Classical Indian Dances have been scripted by its members.

The society now offers classes, conducts workshops and organises performances with the aim of providing an exposure for its students and the public. It also promotes local artistes whenever possible.

The Academy has trained hundreds of students in Indian Classical Dance (Bharatha Natyam, Kathakali, Mohini Attam and Kuchipudi) and Music (Sitar, Tabla, Veena, Violin and Vocals). Its graduates are teaching, choreographing and performing in Singapore, Malaysia, India, Australia, USA and Canada.



Acknowledgements

TheatreWorks would like to thank...

- ... Hazara North Indian Frontier Restaurant for sponsoring the reception on the Opening Night
- ... Emerald Hill Marketing Pte Ltd for donating Kingfisher Beer for the Opening Night reception and the run of the play
- ... Caroline Smith-Laing for the additional research materials
- ... Raj and Siva for helping to build the set
- ... all Front of House assistants
- and everyone who has helped out in this production.



Manifesto For Scottish Theatre

"If you wanted a sentence that would sum up the Scottish theatre, I would say: we get by. We keep going. We manage to survive. If you wanted a guided tour, I could take you round. Some parts we'd find turbid, others clear. Some are stagnant. Others pulsate with life. The smarter parts are so preoccupied with the dead they look suspiciously like graveyards.

I'd want to kick some theatres, hard: others I would want to praise. I'd certainly want to point out the hopeful signs: the continuing strength of the Traverse and the Tron. The sudden upsurge of commitment to new writing in places where that commitment was lacking before: places like the Byre, Eden Court and Cumbernauld. The fact that Scots plays are at last beginning to get published. The Winged Horse revival of "Elizabeth Gordon Quinn": all the signs of resistance to the destructive trend towards disposability of plays and disposability of playwrights. The continuing existence of groups like Clyde Unity, Pen Name and Annex: the refusal of young writers to submit to hostile times.

Almost everywhere I took you I could show you committed, dedicated individuals of immense talents, immense gifts. Individuals working in every branch of the theatre: actors, writers, stage crew, designers, administrators, directors. People who, no matter what their level of experience or skill, no matter what their capacity or role, are all working in conditions profoundly hostile to the creation of their art. And that is the crucial point. That, in spite of all the hopeful signs, good work has to be created against the prevailing trend. The trend towards safety. Keeping your head down. Not taking risks. Building on past success. Not investing in new work; but investing in foyers. Not supporting innovation: but supporting marketing. It is not simply a question of money. People are past complaining about money. No one listens, and there are more important things to do. Like getting on with the job. Like surviving.

Everyone has become so accustomed to chronic financial insecurity. No one can really imagine life without it. It is like a kind of tiredness we have lived with for so long that in the end we can hardly conceive of life without it.

So we live with inadequate rehearsal times because there seems no other option. We accept that plays will open not when they are ready, but when they are scheduled. We accept that these are not the same things: and, under present circumstances, never will be.

We accept all this, we put up with it: because the only alternative seems to be financial ruin. We put our heads down, we get on with the job. And in the process, I fear, little by little we accept the lowering of our aspirations. We have to live with smaller and smaller casts; we start to live with smaller and smaller ambitions. We become so desperate to create work that will be accessible, topical, immediate, in tune with whatever happens to be the current buzz words, that we forget our true purpose. We limit the scope of our imaginations. Little by little, we lose the strength to dream.

It is only now and again that we catch a glimpse of what we might have lost. Often these glimpses come from foreign theatre; which is why events like the "Off The Wall" season in the Royal Lyceum are so important. Not because they necessarily show us better theatre: but because they throw a new light on our own.

Recently, I saw a Peter Handke play in Amsterdam. It was called "Lieve Mensen". It was in Dutch. The theatre was about the size of the Traverse. It was full. There was an air of expectancy. The stage area was like a big red box. It soon became apparent that there was no story to this play, no characters as such, no dramatic action. The actors all carried skipping ropes. They skipped a lot. Not like children, but like boxers: with furious exertion. In between, they spoke to us directly: haranguing, exhorting, pleading, reproaching.

I was tempted to dismiss it as ridiculous, pretentious, obscure. But something held my attention; something to do with the feeling. Ignorance of the language spoken on stage often sharpens one's sense of it. And the feeling here was something completely unexpected, something almost unknown. It had to do with the stance the actors were taking up vis à vis the audience. Here, we mostly perform from a position of weakness. We are like supplicants. One way or another, we aim to please. We are desperate to be liked.

They weren't like that at all. It was as if they didn't need to. It wasn't "We hope you enjoy this"; it was more "Take it or leave it". "We've worked hard at this", they seemed to be saying, "And this is good. If you don't like it, then so much the worse for you."

In short, they were performing from a position of strength. It wasn't an arrogance, not the kind of arrogance that closes off communication, or the kind that patronises, that tells the audience, "This is culture, though I doubt you will understand it." It didn't talk down to us at all. If anything, it talked up to us, it expected great things of us. It assumed a fierce interest,

an informed commitment. It didn't shut off communication; it sharpened it.

And then I began to understand that the subject these actors were discussing with such passionate interest was not a burning social issue, not a fierce political controversy; but the theatre itself. Not the theatre as it is, but the theatre as it could be. As it should be. A theatre that speaks to the deepest part of ourselves. A theatre firmly grounded in the present, in the here and now, and which speaks to everyone. To everyone everywhere.

The whole piece seemed a passionate demand for such a theatre, a fierce attack at the obstacles, within us and in the world outside us, that prevent such a theatre coming to be. The actors seemed to be demanding of us, the audience, that we join with them in creating such a theatre; they reproached us bitterly for everything that stood in the way. Our cowardice. Our inhibitions. Our embarrassment. At one point they gave up on us altogether and started playing cards: and then they came back, as they had to, as we all must: because creating good theatre is not a little box on its own, separate from life. It is part of life itself, part of the struggle we must all engage in: the struggle to live a good life. To live well and die with dignity. And so the whole piece was a kind of letter from the Company to the audience, a programme, an outline of unfinished business. An invitation to act: a call to action.

And I finally understood the title: "Lieve Mensen". Dear people. Dear audience. We could never write such a letter here, not in Scotland. Not yet. For what makes the creation of that letter possible is a kind of basic strength we have forgotten. We lost it long ago. So long ago that we have forgotten we have forgotten it. Forgotten that we ever possessed it. A strength that comes from a set of shared assumptions. An assumption that theatre matters. Matters enough, for instance, that it is assumed a perfectly reasonable thing for an audience of over hundred people to come together and spend a couple of hours thinking about it.

The sad fact is that we do not rate theatre even that highly. Perhaps we did once, in the sixties; but not now. No theatre management could put on Handke's play because they know, or think they know, it would do so badly in the box office. And no one would dream of sponsoring it. "Offending the audience" would do nothing for a company's profile. And it seems as if we cannot think beyond the box office: beyond the high box office returns and the sponsorship deals that theatres are forced to produce, to justify their right to exist. And that has come about because, in the end, we do not give theatre any importance at all. Not in Scotland as it is now.

Neither in official policy or practice. We tolerate it as a sideline, a marginal activity that is reluctantly allowed to exist because it can play a minor part in a public relations programme. Because it is cheaper than buying advertising. Because it can raise the profile of a brewery company or do wonders to the image of a city. Because it can raise property values. Or promote tourism. Or provide employment.

We are still suffering from a mean vision of society, a profoundly destructive vision that sees society as nothing more than a loose collection of individuals motivated by nothing deeper than self-interested greed. A mean vision, feeding off mean energies. Built on lies.

Theatre, on the other hand, is a collective process: collective in the way it is created and in the way it is experienced. None of us in the theatre can create anything alone. On our own, all of us are helpless. We have to work together: and the result will be the sum of all of our energies, all our skills - together with the imaginative participation of the audience. For that affects and changes it every night. And though we have a right to earn a living, none of us is in it for the money. So we contradict the main currents of a greedy, individualistic society: and we do so just by existing.

That is why the government has quite instinctively created a climate so hostile to theatre. And why theatre is necessary: why it is more important than ever. Because it matters, desperately, that we constantly remind ourselves there is more to life than this. More than satellite dishes, junk bonds, insurance policies, deposit accounts, designer clothes, glossy magazines or compact discs. Microwave ovens or video recorders. More than mortgages or productivity agreements. None of that. But a different world. A far less easily quantifiable world, using far less easily quantifiable words. Embarrassing words. Vital words. Words like love. Hope. Heroism. Compassion. Those should be the mainsprings of our theatre, I think, as they should be of our lives. And, here in Scotland, we have the capacity to do it: to create a theatre that is rooted in our country, here, and yet which speaks to people everywhere. A theatre for the world. I have seen it. I have seen works created here resonating all over the world. In Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Cairo, Bangladesh. Yet we continually forget: we lose our vision in the struggle to survive, the panic to meet the next deadline.

So in the end, what I would wish for in our theatre is not more money - though that is necessary - because of itself, money solves nothing. Not more money, but more energy. A clearer, fiercer vision. More courage. More faith. Faith in the theatre. Faith in Scotland.

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(Information correct as at time of printing. TheatreWorks reserves the right to change the programming)

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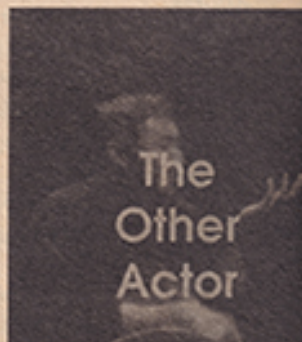
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