

# arts

## Yellow Fever a unique statement

By PAULETTE PEIROL

Stage left. A soft, amber light begins to glow, slowly illuminating the figure in the shadow. The trenchcoat and slouch-hat saunter onstage, revealing a Sam Spade/Humphrey Bogart character. All seems quiet on Powell Street, the Japanese strip of Vancouver. But for Sam Shikaze, Japanese-Canadian detective, silence spells trouble.

Rick Shiomi's play, *Yellow Fever*, is making its Canadian debut at Toronto Free Theatre. Its slouch-hat already holds critical acclaim from the U.S. off-Broadway circuit. Featuring a primarily Asian cast who are all members of Canasian (Canadian-Asian) Artists Group, *Yellow Fever* amplifies the silent anger of Asian-Canadians.

Throughout the first act the theme of burning racism is hidden beneath a thick blanket of humor and sarcasm. Even in the second, more dynamic act, playwright Shiomi is subtle—the surgeon operates with a clean scalpel, not an axe. The private-eye risks his life rather than surrender the key to enemies.

The plot is simple; so blatantly simple that one immediately sense *Yellow Fever* is more than a detective story. It is Sam Shikaze's duty to solve the mysterious disappearance of the Cherry Blossom Queen from a Vancouver Japanese community festival.

For a while, this holds the viewer's attention. But the captors are exposed early in the play; the

remainder of the plot is now the audience's to decipher.

The characters themselves provide valuable clues. Sam Shikaze, played by Harvey Chao, claims "Being a private eye doesn't give you that nine-to-five respectability, but you call your own shots and you don't have to smile for a living. And that's the way I like it." This epitomizes well the dream of Canadians of all origins. Don't we all have that propensity to smile when we most feel like scowling?

If Sam Shikaze can afford the luxury of "calling his own shots," it is clear that the average Canasian can't. Rosie (Brenda Kamino) is certainly one such victim of circumstance. The Japanese café glows with her humble naïveté and love of gossip. She is perhaps the richest character in the play, dancing to Japanese music in the fanciful solitude of night, then assuming the role of waitress and "everybody's friend" by day. She is the surrogate mother of all Japanese-Canadians.

Captain Kenji Kadota (Bob Lem) is the victim of nine-to-five respectability, the victim of North American aspirations in their sober reality. His ladder to prominence is missing a few rungs, and it seems that the Captain has nowhere to go but down. Enter Sam Shikaze to discover the possessors of the stolen rung. We are not surprised to find that Kadota's persecutors are his superiors who also happen to be Sons of the Western Guard.



The happy cast members of *Yellow Fever* in one of their big scenes. The play is at Toronto Free Theatre until Oct. 6

Mary Lee plays Chuck Chan, the suave and cocksure lawyer, and Shikaze's mentor. If Chuck seems a degree to cool, too efficient to be likeable, it is because this is the price of success. From the top, one dares not to look down, for fear of falling.

Nancy Wing, the passionately aggressive journalist, follows the trail of Shikaze's leads with ceaseless persistence. Played by Susan Jay, this character will not give up, for the stakes are too high: a prime scoop for the Vancouver *Sun* and an

inevitable love affair with the one and only independent man, Sam Shikaze.

Jim Knapp and Tom MacDonald are the two exceptions to the Japanese cast, both playing traitors. Typecast as Sons of the Western Guard, they fear the "Yellow Fever" epidemic penetrating Canadian politics. "This country is plagued by yellow fever and we are the saviors, the white blood cells," Superintendent Jameson proclaims with ardent fervor.

Sam Shikaze's clichéd one-liners grate on the audience's ears, becoming pedantic and mundane. The characters often lapse into mere chariactures; sometimes they simply try too hard at being funny.

But Shiomi's statement seems through nonetheless, in the subtle manner that it was intended to. Neither pure comedy, nor pure parody, *Yellow Fever* stands as a unique statement about the Canasian paradox, one that deserves Canadian attention. It's about time.

## Big watercolor wash

By NIGEL TURNER

Watercolor has been a largely ignored medium because of its believed impracticability, according to Glendon Art Gallery Director Laurie Milner. To counter this myth she has put together a show consisting of works by four different watercolor artists—Sandra Meigs, Mary Janitch, Ric Evans, and Harold Lunder—on display at the Glendon Gallery until Oct. 6. Each artist has tried to exploit the unique qualities of the paint.

Meigs is represented by 13 small scenes taken from her *Purgatorio, a Drinking Bout*, a series of 32 paintings which illustrate events in a smokey Berlin bar. The works are moody, dramatic, and varied. Each separate frame tells a story; together they progress through a multitude of symbols and statements. One sub-set of three begins with a bouquet of flowers wrapped in paper; it opens, then turns to blood.

Janitch also uses flower images in her "Study 1 & 2, spring cycle." Her works, however, show a completely different treatment and style. Her flowers are delicate and fragile. Her two large works are composed of many small painted sketches, glued onto a large white board. The sheets seem randomly placed about the large board, but are drawn together by sweeping strokes of crayon. The individual sheets of paper, which Milner described as "pages torn out of a diary," are thin and translucent, as is the paint. The effect of the sheets overlapping produces a ghost image of the painting below.

Evans, on the other hand, designs a general scene, by physically manipulating the paper. For example, he folds, and uses it and many paint washes which allows the color

to form its own subtle pattern of variation. The paint collects in the folds or around objects placed on the paper and forms edge lines. The washes are monotone, varying mostly at the edges and subtly throughout the broad surfaces. His work is done mostly in threes, almost identical except for one different tone.

The final artist, Klunder, has two large paintings on display, entitled "Brandenburg, 1 and 2." These works are fairly ordinary abstracts attempting to express his feeling towards music. The paintings are cluttered collections of colors, splashed, and sponged onto paper sheets.



PHOTO: NIGEL TURNER

Sandra Meigs' *Purgatorio, a Drinking Bout: Getting Closer*, a watercolor currently on display at Glendon Art Gallery.

## Chilean tapestries portray repression

By PAUL PIVATO

It is called the "art of resistance." For the Chilean people, the collage tapestries known as "arpilleras" are a testimony of suffering. Beginning Monday, Sept. 19, the arpilleras will be the highlight of an exhibition to be held in the Zacks Gallery at Stong.

Made mostly by women, the arpilleras portray scenes of repression: the torture, hunger and imprisonment that have marked Chilean society under the Pinochet military regime. In one arpillera, a man is being hunted by secret police. In another, women all over the city bang pots and pans, symbolizing hunger and the desire to return to democracy.

"They are the only means of expressing feelings of desperation," explains Alejandro Rojas, a former member of the Chilean parliament now living in exile in Toronto. To the Chileans, the arpilleras are a symbol of solidarity.

The exhibition will be opened by well-known Canadian folk singer

Nancy White, and will conclude with a lecture by Isabel Donoso, a former member of the Vicariate of Solidarity in Chile. The Vicariate is an organization created by the former Archbishop of Santiago which helps distribute the tapestries. It operates under the legal protection of the Catholic Church—which maintains a large degree of autonomy.

Peter Landstreet, Deputy Director of the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC), explains that the arpilleras are an art-form which evolved in the mid-1970s. Their three-dimensional nature makes them unique.

Landstreet insists the tapestries are not vehicles of propaganda: "They are more concerned with human rights and daily life. There is no political party being supported."

Many of the tapestries and handicrafts at the exhibition will be on sale, with proceeds going to the Vicariate of Solidarity. The Stong exhibition, the largest in Toronto, is expected to be carried over for a second week. Admission is free.

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