

Performances release inner turmoil

BY TANIA TREPANIER AND FARHAD DASTUR

THEATRE

Burning Skin/Avalanche/Scarlett Fever!
Tuesday, October 17.
Sir James Dunn Theatre

Burning Skin

Graceful violence. Constrained fluidity. Such words come to mind when experiencing Roger Sinha's "Burning Skin," a visceral, whirling dervish of a creation, conceived as a kinetic commentary on the power of racism to burn both the skin and the soul.

Roger Sinha is a Montreal dancer-choreographer and artistic director of MISRASENA. He is a master of methodical madness, eclectically fusing the classical dance vocabulary of Bharat Natyam with martial arts, modern dance, and ballet, all set against the post-Bhangraesque backdrop of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's "Mustt, Mustt" and Strauss' "Blue Danube." Interwoven into the music and dance is a condensed discourse revolving around Sinha's twin themes of racial conflict and multicultural identification. The fusion of the classical Indian style and modern dance works well to highlight these themes. The end, however, arrives somewhat abruptly—the production is only 25 minutes—and one is left wanting more.

Burning Skin is an intensely gestural narrative that expresses the internal conflict of growing up multicultural in a unicultural world. Sinha is intimately familiar with that conflict. Born in London of an Armenian mother and a South Asian father, he was raised in the identity-contorting environments of racist England and the rough hostility of Saskatchewan. *Burning Skin* came out of that lived experience and the inspiring resonances that came from reading the Pakistani-British writer Hanif Kureishi's dark autobiographical text, "The Rainbow Sign". As the piece unfolds, Sinha, in flowing Eastern-style saffron-coloured robes, performs a carefully poised but parodic tea ceremony. There are tea kettles steaming away in the background, portending Sinha's cultural confrontation with a certain Western nation's fascination with tea time. From there the progression follows from highly succinct articulations, like the pose of the dancing Shiva, to increasingly energetic whole-body movements—and drabber Western dress—that are provocative but never superfluous.

In Kureishi's book, a black youth, upon learning that scalded skin turns white, seeks to remove that which differentiates him from the crowd by burning himself in a boiling bath. With resonant symbolism, a beaten, self-hating, and self-destructive Sinha seeks to whiten himself by donning a white shirt that has been boiling in water. The act is unexpected and dramatic. It is a visceral close to an emotional creation that seeks, in these racially tense times, to make sense out of a social malady that is essentially senseless.



Burning skin... Roger Sinha confronts British kettle culture.

Avalanche

Avalanche, conceived and staged by the talented Halifax actor/singer Cliff Le Jeune, is an intensely personal interpretation of the songs of Leonard Cohen. Le Jeune is a deft practitioner of the art of emotional manipulation. From the opening, where he lies fallen and broken, to the heartfelt pain and yearning for love he brings to such pieces as "Tower of Song", "Joan of Arc", "Bird on a Wire", and "Everybody Knows", we are seduced by the sheer pathos of Le Jeune's emotional landscape. Although we prefer other artists' renditions of some of the songs—no one can quite do "Joan of Arc" like Jennifer Warnes—Le Jeune is sincere and effective in his efforts.

Scarlett Fever!

Scarlett Fever! is a veritable tour de force of song, dance and drama with the movie "Gone With the Wind" as its cohesive element. Like Sinha, racism is one of the central themes which Andrew Olewine addresses in his piece. As the performance unfolds, Olewine takes us through his revelations about the racism, homophobia and social injustice that surrounded him as he grew up in Georgia. Through insightful vignettes, mimed monologues, calculated clowning, and dancing medleys, he emphasizes the inevitable link between personal and political histories.

The piece is performed in drag: Olewine wears a frilly show-girl dress and high heels, while slipping in and out of a multitude of characters and personas, both male and female. He transforms with ease from playing himself to depicting the character of Scarlett, the heroine of "Gone With the Wind", back to himself as a boy growing up in Georgia, then to his frightening eighth grade history teacher, Mrs. Blitch, and then back again to himself. Perhaps he hopes to achieve a normalizing affect by wearing the dress even as he plays himself.

Over the course of the piece, Olewine exposes the homophobia and racism that was—and on some levels continues to be—rampant in Georgia and by extension, in North America. This insight was further underlined by his overwhelming adolescent adoration of anything and every-

thing that had to do with "Gone With the Wind". The book, the movie, the dolls, or the trivia; Olewine depicts his obsession with this culture comically and with exuberant creativity.

Yet, as he reveals the racist subtext of his adoration, he ultimately chooses to discard the regalia and the illusion surrounding the movie. He realizes he cannot admire "Gone with the

Wind" and the culture that produced it without being complicit to the denigration of other cultures; black voices, women's voices and homosexual voices.

By the end of the show, the viewers may find themselves completely saturated with information and stories. The production is perhaps too long; several sections could have been condensed without sacrificing content. Yet, the non-stop energy and astounding creativity partially compensates for the length of the piece. Overall, it was an entertaining history lesson on the last few decades of civil rights struggles in America, culminating in a touching tribute that honors black women's accomplishments and talents.

Roger Sinha will perform in *Ter-rains Vagues* as part of Sylvain Émard's dance group on Friday and Saturday of this week. Next week, Andy Jones performs his hilarious one-man show *Still Alive* on the 27th and 28th.

Sixties fashion and a hard-core bard

BY JAMES SULLIVAN

THEATRE

Confusions/Hamletmachine
Dalhousie Theatre Department
October 18-21 at 8 p.m. with
Saturday matinee at 2 p.m.
\$14 regular/\$12 student
(Phone 494-3820)

It was an interesting night in the David Mack, Murray Studio as the Dalhousie Theatre department opened its season with *Confusions* by Alan Ayckbourn and *Hamletmachine* by Heiner Müller.

Ayckbourn's play, which is directed by Judy Leigh-Johnson, is a set of four comedic interrelated scenes. Leigh-Johnson gives the piece a somewhat down to earth texture while Rebecca Hodgson's costumes inspired by the late 60's are completely outrageous. There are strong performances by Christopher Loane and Ginette St-Germain.

Unlike *Confusions*, which was quite entertaining, *Hamletmachine* will keep you thinking for days afterwards. Director Michael Hogan, a theatre student in his fourth year, shows us a different approach to perceiving contemporary theatre. This thought-provoking rendition of Shakespeare's tragedy sheds light on the inner complications of the man, and the exploitations of the woman. These two ideas are emphasized by the six male actors playing Hamlet and the eight



Hamletmachine with eight Ophelias in the background.

female actors portraying Ophelia. Fast moving and extremely hard-core, this mystifying production of *Hamletmachine* could be described as thought-provoking art. Matthew Witherly and Benjamin Stone were exceptional.

In the past, this year's graduating class has been described as weak, but I protest that conclusion. The class has been under-rated for too long, and both of

these performances set the record straight.

While *Confusions* could make you hold your stomach with laughter, *Hamletmachine* provides the audience with a unique artistic aesthetic. For any theatre goer who chooses only to see a show based on the price of the ticket, i.e. students, or the economically challenged, this double bill is for you.



GAZETTE MOVIE GIVEAWAY

Come to the Gazette office and tell Tim what Woody Ailen's last movie was, and you'll receive one of twenty double passes to Woody's "Mighty Aphrodite" on Thursday, October 26, 7 p.m.