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York student director has hopes that *A Man's A Man's* message will remain powerful in new production

By KEVIN PASQUINO

While most of us have probably had our fill of Bertolt Brecht this year, York theatre student Soheil Parsa feels his production of *A Man's A Man* will have something more to offer.

The play is the story of Galy Gay, a simple man who works as a porter in India. Galy is stripped of his identity and turned into a mindless fighting machine because of the horrors of war. As Galy Gay is brainwashed and loses all sense of self, the play illustrates the way war not only affects a culture but the way it destroys the inner peace of one man.

Director Parsa feels that the anti-war message that Brecht wrote more than 50 years ago, still works well in the '80s. The production has resisted the temptation to localize the play or force it into an East/West confrontational setting.

In other productions, attempts have been made to make *A Man's A Man* universal by using details in the

production like the costuming to reflect this goal. In this production, however, rather than model the soldier's uniforms on one country, the uniforms are instead recognizable multicultural symbols. No one country is being accused of loving war, and all nations are held suspect.

To further the Brechtian concept of a realistic set being secondary to the play's themes, the second year production will be presented in the round. Initially, this presented some staging difficulties for the actors that had to be overcome. "When put in a (circular setting) the actors have to be more theatrical," says Parsa, "therefore the reality breaks down." At first this was difficult for the actors to handle, but through early improvisation and group brainstorming, these problems were quickly resolved.

The creative efforts of Andy Stochansky and Colin Campbell (of Particle Zoo fame) added a more unique musical aspect to the play. Rather than relying on the tradi-

tional jazz music that accompanies the play's lyrics, Stochansky and Campbell wrote new music for the production using traditional music as a springboard for ideas.

Their role in the production has grown to the point where they not only supply live music but the sound effects as well.

Commenting on how their work was received by the theatre students, the two Particle Zoo members said that working with theatre students was no different than working with musicians because their creative attitudes and open-mindedness are very similar.

While Parsa and the cast are uncertain as to how the audience will react to the production's unique dramatic set design and atmosphere, they have approached *A Man's A Man* as a learning experience. It is viewed as an opportunity for the musicians and actors to combine their talents in order to develop a production that should make an interesting evening.

Theatre show shows talent

By WENDY QUINTON

In less than three months, York theatre students assembled an impressive collection of five short plays that were performed in last week's New Play Festival to sold-out audiences at Atkinson Theatre.

According to department Production Manager Grant Smith, "This is the first time we've had a directing option, due to a new directing course that is offered to students this year." (In past years, members of the theatre faculty have had minimal involvement with the student plays.)

A Little Death written by Ken Keobke, explores the psychic state of a convicted killer on death row. As the play unfolds, the mental instability of Michael (Michael Maclean) is explored as he lapses between fits of screaming hysteria and passive conversation. He cannot understand how his "accidental" murder of an old woman could result in his own death. Michael is locked in his cell for the night with Rose (Suzanne M. Belanger) who becomes the antagonist that provokes his sickened personality.

Although Keobke's theme of coming to terms with one's own death is somewhat cliché, the playwright is still able to create a fascinating play. However, Maclean's acting left *A Little Death* at a slight disadvantage. His performance was stiff and abrupt and did not effectively convey the emotional strife of his characters' desperate situation.

Belanger's performance as Rose was somewhat stilted by her feigned air of rigidity. From the narrative of the play Rose should have been cast as a low class, sleazy hooker, but instead the audience was presented with a beautiful young woman.

Breakout, written by Masani (Charmaine) Montague and directed by Shyam Selvadurai, was the most unique play in the series with its musical qualities. As with many musicals, the upbeat rhythm of the introduction immediately caught the audience's attention.

Johnny (Lowell Conrad), Chuckie (Maurice Wint), and Ras. T. (Ras Leon Saul) are recently jailed immigrants who fall victim to the inequalities of Canadian life. Jailed for a crime he didn't commit, Johnnie is torn between the spiritual ways of his sister Sheba (Vivian Scarlett) and his devious friends Chuckie and Ras. T., who are plotting to escape in the night.

The humorous lyrics of the songs and the actions of Chuckie and Ras T. combine to shed comic relief to

the intense subject matter. The only props used in the production were wooden boxes positioned to accommodate scene changes, and the sparsity of the set reflected the intensity of the play.

The dominant message of *Breakout* is very thought provoking as it deals with the discrimination encountered by recent immigrants. Issues such as religion, living arrangements, and employment barriers are addressed in a very insightful way.

On the second evening of the festival, three plays were presented, *Face Value* written by Dorothy Dickie and directed by Linda Woolven, *Shotgun Wedding* written by Victoria Ward and directed by Diane Roberts, and *On The President's Orgasm* written by David Borenstein and directed by Andrew Clark.

An aging fashion model competing with younger, more attractive girls is the scenario set in the play *Face Value*. In the end the older model realizes that she will never be young again, and must therefore look inside herself for true happiness.

Manuela Manguashca portrayed Sabina, the quickly fading model. Her incredible stage presence was created through vivid facial expressions and superb enunciation. Manguashca completely entranced the audience in her tale of distress as she stood in front of the mirror combing

her hair and examining her aging face.

The mirror, which was an empty frame, was suspended from the ceiling at the front of the stage and served to focus attention on Sabina's face as she soothed her tarnished ego. This technique encouraged the audience to sympathize with Sabina and realize that her entire life had rested on her "face value."

Maureen Cassidy (Chesire) and David Caron (Gamble) portrayed two loners who meet and live together in the play *Shotgun Wedding*.

While the play tends to drag in parts, on the whole it was well performed by both actors. Caron's enactment of the death scene was very realistic as the audience felt their churning alongside the dying Gamble's.

The final play, *On The President's Orgasm*, was described by production manager Grant Smith as "one of the (show's) most bizarre plays." The play by David Borenstein, explores such political issues as nuclear proliferation and the Canadian-U.S. relationship.

The four day New Play Festival presented five very interesting and creative plays, and York students will have another opportunity to see another theatrical work on March 31, when the theatre department presents a workshop entitled *Balms in Gilead* at the Atkinson Theatre.



FREE ME: Sheba (Vivian Scarlett) comforts Johnny (Lowell Conrad) after being refused his appeal, in a scene from the play *Breakout*.