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Cover: A scene from Jason Sherman's *Reading Hebron*.
Directed by Wajdi Mouawad.
Actors: BL Joel Miller; L to R: Harry Standjolski, Rachelle Glait, Anna Fuerstenberg, Howard Rosenstein;
Photo: Zsolt Sandor



Editor: Russell Krackovitch

Editorial Board: Paul Lefebvre, Edward Little, Rahul Varma.

Contributors: Edward Little, Rahul Varma, Soraya Peerbaye, Lina de Guevara, Ken Smedley
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For inquiries and subscriptions, please write, email or fax Teesri Duniya Theatre.

TEESRI DUNIYA THEATRE

Address:

4324 St. Laurent Blvd.
 Montreal, QC H2W 1Z3
 Canada

Tel: (514) 848-0238

Fax: (514) 848-0267

Email: tduniya@aei.ca

Website: www.aei.ca/~tduniya



Teesri Duniya
 THEATRE

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Editorial:

To What End?

Striving to be Obsolete, or Struggling to Stay Significant

At a meeting I attended some time ago, a provocative thought was voiced in reference to the ultimate goal of *alt.theatre* and other such initiatives aimed at the celebration and promotion of culturally diverse theatre and/or other means of expression for ethnic artists. To paraphrase, the statement was that our efforts—as a group of people interested in promoting and supporting the work of ethnic artists—will cease to be necessary once our ultimate goal of equality for ethnic artists is reached. After all, in this person's view, if and when ethnic artists no longer need to struggle against political discrimination or fight to be heard over the loudspeaker that is the status quo, why would we invest time and effort into calling for rights of such ethnic artists? In other words, once ethnic artists are accepted into the mainstream or, better, seen as equally important as the mainstream, the fight will be over.

This revealing statement was at once alarming and thought-provoking. In my last editorial in the pages of *alt.theatre*, I outlined the difference between the mere acceptance of something and the celebration of that thing as special and invaluable. Now, I realize an equally important distinction must be drawn between having an ultimate goal as an end-point and having an ongoing goal as a mission statement and driving motivation. Put simply, the ongoing goal of *alt.theatre* and other such initiatives is to ensure that ethnic artists and their work receive the recognition and acknowledgement they deserve as such important parts of our rich Canadian culture. Understood properly in this way, this ongoing goal clearly cannot become obsolete if and when ethnic artists and their works are widely celebrated and acknowledged as equally important parts of the Canadian arts scene. This would, after all, be akin to the suggestion that education is no longer necessary after one has learned something, or that exploration is no longer necessary once something has been discovered.

In his article in this issue of *alt.theatre* (page 4), Rahul Varma writes, among other things, about the importance of properly defining and applying the concept of democratization of culture. He explains the need of struggling ethnic practitioners to have a true cultural democracy that offers training programs, resources and support with the goal of providing equality and a sense of stability. Certainly, the institutional policies of recognition Varma writes about could not simply cease to exist once ethnic artists become more appropriately acknowledged. To suggest this would undermine the very integrity with which Varma argues these policies must be carried out.

Another example of the necessarily ongoing nature of *alt.theatre's* goal can be found by examining Ted Little's article (page 8) focusing on Concordia University's new Drama for Human Development (DFHD) program. This specialization, Little writes, seeks to prepare students to participate in a wider range of social, cultural, intercultural and aesthetic contexts. A strong focus is on each student's recognition and understanding of their role as cultural workers, and of their role and function as artists in the community. It is clear that, based on such an understanding of artists as integral parts of a living, breathing cultural society, training in the arts must remain relevant, growing and changing with that culture in a symbiotic fashion. In other words, the DFHD program would do a disservice to past and future students by ceasing to offer insight into the intricate workings of its constantly changing surrounding culture. In much the same way, *alt.theatre* and other such initiatives would fail in their mission statements if they became inactive and out of touch with contemporary environments in which they function.

Similarly, the role of theatre as an opposition party to parties in governmental power, as described by Ken Smedley in his discussion of the late George Ryga's work (page 14), should not be forgotten or dismissed as ethnic artists achieve goals in the face of the status quo. In this light, it would obviously be irresponsible of alternative theatre (or the initiatives supporting it) to turn its back on up-and-coming practitioners seeking to carry the same strong voice for future generations. Nor could Lina de Guevara and PUENTE Theatre (page 12) stop representing the shared experiences of immigrants as long as people are leaving their homes to struggle and cope in a foreign and intimidating new home.

No worthwhile initiative ceases to be important once it achieves success, no matter the degree of that success. The celebration and promotion of ethnic artists and their work will remain of paramount importance for as long as these artists continue in their creative efforts. Their work will never be less special, and there will never be too much support for that work. Our struggle will never be obsolete.



Russell Krackovitch