

THE RICE BOY

By Renu Mehta

If you have some free time from now until May 10, take the time to go and see Rice Boy at the Berkeley Street Theatre, 26 Berkeley Street.

Sunil Kuruvilla's play is an interwoven tale between India and Canada. It's a skillfully woven story that revolves around 12 year old Tommy and his 16-year old cousin Tina who lives in India. Tommy's father, characterized by Sean T. Krishnan, is a first generation immigrant who has lived in Canada for many years, yet continues to yearn for India, his birth country. He is lonely, depressed and still grieving for his wife, who died several years ago. In India, he was a mathematics professor, but in Canada he has been unable to get a similar position and instead works in a Pizza place. His brother in India tells him to move back to India, but after living in Canada for several years, he feels he cannot go back as he has moved on. So he feels stuck in a bind, belonging neither here nor there.

Rice Boy is about two cultures and how the two lives of Tina and Tommy intertwine in a tale that touches your heart. On a visit to India, Tommy bonds with his severely disabled cousin Tina. Zaib Shaikh, who plays Tommy's role, portrays the character so well, taking the audience through his world of innocence and discovery. Tina's character, skillfully portrayed by Imali Perera, is of a young girl who has never ventured outside her home, while she waits to be locked in an arranged marriage to someone she has never met. While she sits in her house learning to weave intricate patterns from her grandmother, Tommy climbs trees and describes the outside world to Tina. Tommy satisfies Tina's curiosity by describing the trucks on the roads, the houses, the ocean, and the downtown area. When she finally ventures outside, she is struck with awe and wonder.

90-year old Zohra Segal as the grandmother, with her white hair tucked into a bun, continues to give a flawless performance. In fact, the whole cast including Sanjay Talwar as the Uncle, Deena Aziz as the Aunt, Pragna Desai as the Servant girl and Anand Rajaram as the fish seller deserve praise for their performances in the Rice Boy.

The play draws parallels on life in Canada and India showing that loneliness can be experienced in both cultures. The play concludes with the father and son coming together, leaving you emotionally moved and pleased that you took the time to view this performance.

This and more are very aptly portrayed by the characters in Rice Boy under the superb direction of Micheline Chevrier. Other members on the creative team include Set Designer, Deeter Schurig, Costume Designer, Judith Bowden and Lighting Designer, Elizabeth Asselstine.

Indeed a play worth going to!

The play runs from Monday through Saturday at 8 p.m. until May 10, 3003. Shows also

run Wednesday matinee at 1:30 p.m. and Saturday matinee at 2:00 p.m. For more information and tickets, you can call: 416-368-3110, or by calling Ticketmaster at 416-872-1111 or online at: www.canstage.com.

Original Publication Date: Saturday, April 19, 2003