Anasuya Subasinghe’s MY SWEET ROTTEN HERITANCE

Playwright & Director: Anasuya Subasinghe

Group: Salt Theatre Company, Sri Lanka

Language: English

Duration: 2 hr 30 mins

The Play

Welcome to the extraordinary world of Kōlam! The past meets the present and strangely familiar stories unfold in a patchwork of bittersweet encounters. Lǣli Kōlama, the man bearing a plank of wood, crosses the ocean to arrive on foreign shores with the hope of becoming a deity. In the wake of neo-nationalist ethos, Diyasēna Kōlama presents himself as a self-appointed saviour, equipped with a master plan to outplay the evil forces threatening his race and religion. Weighed down by her children and their children, Attamma Kōlama endures the adored burdens and fears of the archetypal Sri Lankan grandmother. Vanda Kōlama, the praying mantis, whose palms meet in habitual genuflection, has found a method of survival in the many interpretations of the namaskāra. Gandhabba Kōlama wanders between death and rebirth, seeking justice for those who have been disappeared through the troublesome history of the Island. Lǣeli Kōlama returns to the arena, still hopeful of becoming a god. But urged by the Narrator, he has little choice but to take on the role of the Garā Demon responsible for ‘mopping up’ the arena and concluding the performance.

Director’s Note

Kōlam, once a popular secular Sinhalese dance-theatre

tradition of Sri Lanka, was performed in the outdoors, incorporation a large repertoire of masks, traditional low-country dance, yak-bera percussion, song, satire, Buddhist cosmology, and the influence of exorcism rituals. Both didactic and entertaining in nature, the Kōlam practitioner was inspired by his social and political landscape in bringing narratives to life in the arena. My Sweet Rotten Heritance is a political satire that attempts to reimagine this moribund Kōlam practice beyond its 'fixed' repertoire, by introducing new masks and narratives familiar to the contemporary spectator. Inter lacing political, historical and mythological accounts, and reinterpreting them in today's context, the play explores the perform ability of Kōlamas a 'living', 'evolving' performance practice.

The Director & Playwright

Anasuya Subasinghe is a Sri Lankan academic in performance studies, a playwright, theatre practitioner, and film actor. She has received the award for Best Female Performance at the National Festival of Theatre in Sri Lanka and has won several national awards as Upcoming Female Actor for her role in the international award-winning Sri Lankan film, Ho Gānā Pokuna (The Singing Pond). Anasuya has worked in both the Sinhala and English language theatres of Sri Lanka over the past 20 years, and has interests ranging from masked theatre, physical theatre, solo performance, autobiographical performance and Sri Lankan traditional theatre and ritual performance. Anasuya completed her Doctoral degree in Performance Studies at Victoria University Melbourne Australia where she was awarded a Postgraduate Research Scholarship. She has since returned to her home country to continue her work as an academic and performance practitioner and is currently employed as a visiting lecturer at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts in Colombo.

The Group

Salt Theatre Company was established by playwright, director and actor Anasuya Subasinghe as an independent theatre ensemble that engages in practice as research. My Sweet Rotten Heritance, the debut theatrical Endeavour of the Company, was originally produced in 2017 as the performance component of Anasuya's Doctoral Degree. Well received by a multicultural audience, Salt Theatre returned to Melbourne in July 2018 for two more successful performances of the play. Composed of an ensemble of young, dynamic performers, Salt Theatre aims to present theatrical works of high standard that are socially and politically incisive, creatively challenging, and most certainly entertaining.

CAST AND CREDITS

Narrator: Anasuya Subasinghe

Lāli Kōlama: Jithendra Vidyapathy

Diyasēna Kōlama: Ishara Wickramasinghe

Attamma Kōlama: Stefan Thirimanne

Vanda Kōlama: Stefan Thirimanne

Gandhabba Kōlama : Dinupa Kodagoda

Musician: Nadika Weligodapola

Music: Nadika Weligodapola

Choreography: Jithendra Vidyapathy

Mask Design: Anasuya Subasinghe

Mask Illustrations: Trevor Stacpool, SujeewaWeerasinghe

Mask Design Development & Painting: Sirimal Sanjeewa Kumara, Sujeewa Weerasinghe

Mask Carving: Thuresh Manjula

Backdrop Art: Sirimal Sanjeewa Kumara

Costume Design: Dinushika Senevirathne

Puppet Mask Carving: Sumith Jayawarnana

Puppet Making: Tilaka Subasinghe

Set Design: Anasuya Subasinghe

Set Construction: Gamini Ranasinghe

Lights Design & Operation: Anuradha Mallawarachchi

Production Managers: Malith Hegoda, Sadhani Rajapakse

Playwright & Director: Anasuya Subasinghe

Discovering Cultural Unity in a Diverse Asia by Manohar Khushalani

The One Asia project which was born in Auroville, two years ago, held an exhibition and a series of performances in Mid December, at IIC. According to Jyoti Naoki Eri, its Founder Director, the aim was to present Asia's cultural richness and profound spirituality by underscoring the oneness of it's spiritual beliefs.
The entire event was bound together by' Ek Sutra' a Calligraphic exhibition created in collaboration with Qalamkaari Trust. Nineteen artists had presented their works at this exhibition. Some of the works were unusually

innovative. Qamar Dagar’s Peacock assembled with hindi alphabets and Irshad Farooqi’s Qoranic verses carved out of a wooden wheel attracted attention. As one Calligrapher put it, he turned to this art form, because people had stopped writing.

I attended one of the workshops conducted by a Dutch Performer, Grace Gitadelila, introducing a South Indian art form called Kolam, popularly known as Rangoli in North India. This form includes intricate rice-flour designs that are drawn on the floor outside homes. Kolam’s are considered auspicious and it is the believed that the rice-flour, which may be eaten by birds and insects, symbolise reverence for all life forms. Amongst other documentaries, there was the screening of a remarkable film, Koi Sunta Hai, which interwove the folk music of the mystic poet Kabir with the musical works of the late vocalist Kumar Gandharva. It traced out Kumar’s sources of inspiration – common folk singers such as an urban folklorist, a street fruit seller, a social activist and a Dalit folk singer.

In the end the audiences were regaled by a surprise live vocal performance by the Director of the Film, Shabnam Virmani, who was accompanied by one of the Singers from the film itself, Prahlad Tipanya