

Promiscuous diversity

Keith Gallasch

The title **Eat My Shorts** puts even a hardened Performance Space audience on notice and, for the most part, comes up with performative provocations that are defiant more in terms of form and cultural specificity than direct political content. The show begins with a deceptive air of the spiritual: Cicily Ponnor, neat, well-mannered, sari-clad, with a lotus made of coloured powders on the floor. She may well be dressed in tradition but it soon becomes clear that she is not altogether of it as Bollywood obsessions (the star, the singing, the dancing, the āwet sari sceneā), Bankstown teen dreams and realities and escalating rough language climax in the vacuum-cleaner obliteration of lotus harmony. Ponnor is funny and sharp; **Teenage Masala** left me wanting more of Indian-Australian life in the suburbs and the imagination.

Richard Lagarto and Angela Grima in **Cultural Frankenstein & Other Gourmet Delights** enter with the requisite suitcases and appear to mock community theatre cliches and demands for cultural specificity with a bizarre pan-Mediterraneanism where nothing much is what it seems—are those biscotti Scotch Fingers? What's Zorba the Greek got to do with being Portuguese or Maltese? And why has that dance turned hip-hop? In Australia the ingestion of other cultures has become a promiscuous gourmet activity. With scenes strung together like revue skits and looking decidedly under-rehearsed, Lagarto and Grima got away with their thesis by turning on chatty charm addressed directly to their audience.

Brian Fuata, a 23-year old New Zealander of Samoan extraction, on the other hand, offered rare precision in language and movement along with emotional intensity in his ongoing exploration of his mother, sexuality and cultures. Each time you see Fuata you experience another episode in a life unfolding as he muses over key incidents, some you've heard before (that's part of the adventure), and intones a litany of observations that are droll ("There is Mother in my madness") and mind-bendingly dialectical (where mother and son roles symbolically reverse to make perverse sense). Fuata locks into 3 demanding, animated poses standing in each of 3 trays of grass (installation artist, Haydn Fowler) tightly lit by Neil Simpson, throwing his young body into disturbing relief, making something of a monster of this obsessive ruminator.

The cultural and gender fantasia of De Quincey Co's **Seep** was hilariously delinquent and rudely non-specific, a sublimely unintelligible dance of self-obsession and flirtation that evoked bad heavily-bewigged opera ("3 counter tenors act as signifiers of Byzantine, Arabic and Chinese vocal traditions" says the program) and, with consummate control, bad dance. Seep it did, as cultural and gender identity bled in every direction in a gloriously promiscuous collaboration between Xu Feng Shan, Michael Demetris-Dale, Victoria Hunt, Kristina Harrison, Koon Fei Wang, Roger Hany, Francesca da Rimini, Virginia Barratt, John Gillies, Russell Emerson, Richard Manner (lighting) and Tess de Quincey (direction).

Like Fuata, Angel Boudjiba is an interesting writer and has the makings of an engaging performer as witnessed in Urban Theatre Projects' [Asylum](#). In **Thudarth—Survivor**, Boudjiba, an Algerian Berber, does a verbal Magritte, an act that includes transforming the onstage table into something other than that beheld. As he measures the furniture, this surreal act becomes political: "This desk is a home of crime, it looks like a desk, but it is a congress that hides truth...The desk made the white man superior in history, but what makes Jesus a white man?" A suit is similarly deployed—equipped with cyber-

terrorist devices "it can destroy me, if I try to think." Against the reductive powers of table and suit, Boudjiba invokes specificity, asking audience members to speak in their foreign languages as he sings a Berber song. Curated by Performance Space's Fiona Winning and Michaela Coventry as part of the 2001 Carnivale program, **Eat My Shorts** was evidence yet again that contemporary performance is a rich site of cross-cultural collaboration.

Eat My Shorts, Performance Space, Carnivale 2001, Sydney, Oct 12-14

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