

Metroscope

Searching for alien roots

FEW have been able to forge a philosophical unity between different genres. Stuart Lynch and Tess De Quincy, two well known exponents of 'Buto' theatre, are devoted to work out a synthesis between dance and drama. Their recent performance at Max Muller Bhavan brought a fresh current of air in the theatre-arena of this city.

While for a theatre-pundit, the theatre invites interpretation, they think it in terms of perception. They try to observe neutrally the different state of body, mind and habits attuning to the constant change inside and outside. These changes are their dance.

Lynch is a sculptor-dancer who went to Japan to live and work with Min Tanaka, one of the respected teachers in this discipline. Besides performing in his own country, England, he has toured different countries of Europe. He is now engaged in the task of popularizing this art-form in Europe and Australia by teaching, performing, and lecturing.

Tess De Quincy comes from Denmark. She is a student of Min Tanaka and has worked in Mai - Juku Company for a considerable length of time.

At present Lynch and De Quincy work in collaboration presenting duo performances all over the world. Both are now based partially in Denmark and partially in Australia. Before leaving for Australia they talked about their theatre and its possibilities.

What has brought you to Calcutta?

Stuart Lynch: We have been to many parts of the world. We have performed in Australia, Paris, London and Berlin. But it was essentially to look for the roots of British culture in India that we came to this city. Our performance is always enriched by meeting ... walking in alien streets... The space is new, so we have to explore the possibilities of working there. Of course, in the beginning there is a confrontation, but it leads to a series of adjustments, resulting in an exchange of ideas. In a way, every country has contributed to

the development of our theatre.

What was the theme of your performance at Max-Muller Bhavan ?

S L: Actually, there was no theme as such. We don't work with 'themes' and 'plots'. Instead we work with 'space'. A particular 'space' inspires us to imagine and create.

Then, how is the message conveyed to the people ?

Tess De Quincy : There is no single message in our theatre. Through our performance we urge the spectators to participate by exercising their imagination. As no 'illusion of reality' is built around our theatre, people are free to work with signs and symbols ... The meanings vary from person to person.

It seems that the philosophy of your theatre is close to the philosophy of Zen poetry.

SL Yes, you are right. Our theatre is more keen to throw a host of suggestions to the audi-

Face-to-face

ence. We feel that if messages are stated overtly, the impact gets lost in the alienation existing between the audience and the performer. We never 'execute' but we try to 'perform'... There may be some direct relationship to any incident or event, but that is not important. The main idea is to make the audience perceive the abstraction of dance - space and body harmonize in a rhythm.

How close is your theatre to pantomime ?

T D Q (Laughs) : Well, they are miles apart ... A mime-artist premeditates his role before performing, but we don't believe in such premeditation.

Are you opting for a non-proscenium theatre ?

S L: We are not bothered about the nature of the 'space' provided for performance. Every 'space' is different from the 'other'. We try to read into it and create. Both of us were students of painting and sculpture, so we know that 'forms' remain hidden in every space.

You have participated in a workshop for children conducted by the 'Calcutta Social

Project'. Would you narrate your experience?

S L: It's always a pleasure to work with children. Here, the response comes spontaneously and the children are always eager to learn something new. But we don't believe in teaching children. Learning is always a two-way process. Their enthusiasm and flexibility are something which will continue to inspire us.

Talking about 'respect' would you please state the difference between the audience response in different countries.

S L: One cannot generalize ... There are sensitive people everywhere. In my own country, U.K. a section of the press was critical for spreading anarchy in theatre. Unfortunately, the critics are sometimes not educated enough to admire and appreciate something new.

In Japan the response was whole-hearted. In our country too, the response was quite favourable. A lot of interest has been generated following our performances.

Have you seen any Indian dance recital ?

S L : Not much. A little bit of Kathakali

How do you rate the possibility of a fusion in this direction ?

TD Q: Between Indian dance and Western theatre?

S L : I am not a very competent person to speak on this subject. But I think that the possibility is rather remote. They belong to too distinct cultural traditions. However, Peter Brooke has done some interesting work in this sphere ... It is a process and it will take time before anything comes out of it.

Do you see television as a threat to your dance-theatre?

S L: Well, I am not pro-T.V. I agree that television is invading every domain of culture. But no one can think of discarding television outright. It is a medium with tremendous potential. One must think how to utilize this medium to open up new avenues ... There is a need to integrate television in our work.

■ Kaushik Guha