

# The Sydney Morning Herald

May 29-30, 2004

## First Night

The latest entertainment reviews

# Dhal flavoured dance of plenty

### DANCE

#### EMBRACE: AN IMMODEST GREEN

De Quincey Co  
Performance Space  
May 27

Jill Sykes

The Performance Space has been transformed again, this time into a microcosm of Indian experiences. Tess de Quincey and her team are deep in a project that began in Kolkata and has emerged, like a precious jewel, in Sydney.

Part installation, part performance, EMBRACE: an immodest green doesn't shy away from the less jewel-like aspects of Indian life, but its mood reflects the extraordinary resilience of the Indian people as it goes from celebration to suffering and back to celebration.

The scene is set before the performance begins with pools of light in the auditorium picking out market offerings of glowing fruit and vegetables, pyramids of spice, rows of tapers set on a square of ash for lighting later and lengths of brilliant fabrics. Video screens beam out vivid scenes of everyday India.

A woman is chopping tomatoes as the action begins. A man brings a giant pot onto the stage and lights a gas ring big enough to match it. In goes the ghee, followed by spices and lentils, the tomatoes, more spice and water. The smell is divine.

The three performers make their way forward, boldly stepping into a crowd that – often at the very last moment – makes way for them and moves on with them to stand or sit around the focal points of action. And so the event progresses in eight scenes based on the *Natyashastra*, with music and occasional words.

The EMBRACE workshops and performances began with a three-month residency in India last year. It is an exchange between Australian and Indian artists, aiming for a 12-hour dusk-to-dawn presentation in India

and Australia in 2006 and 2007.

Santanu Bose, director of Kolkata's Monirath Theatre, has come to Sydney for this second stage of the project. Bose is essentially an actor who has studied India's dance drama style of Kathakali. Slightly built and so light on his feet he seems to float, his physicality and way of moving are a striking contrast to his Australian colleagues, Kristina Harrison and Victoria Hunt.

Versed in Body Weather principles from East and West, they have a grounded approach that reveals elements of Japan's Butoh and America's modern dance.

One of de Quincey's aims as director and choreographer is to explore these ways of moving in relation to each other. It is interesting to trace influences from the cultures winding their way through the performance, often more in the detail than the basic body shapes and rhythms.

Each performer is distinctive. Harrison is tall with an elegant carriage and remarkable ability to exude ecstasy and deep grief. Hunt has an earthy grasp on tightly controlled action that adds intensity to what she does. Bose's expressive face and stylised movement – especially his arms and hands – are engrossing. He might appear to step out of his culture momentarily, but it is evocatively always with him.

Amid such visual plenty, I must admit to wishing occasionally for more inventive choreography.

But then this piece is less about creating movement than what the performers did with it: dancing up and down the stepped seating, involving their audience with fleet-footed vitality, taking us with them in tragedy and in celebration. And for that, which I greatly enjoyed, I must be content.

EMBRACE is an ambitious production, the many ingredients of which come together with as much warmth and flavour as the dhal that was cooked by the end and handed out to the audience. Until Sunday



Vivid scenes of everyday India . . . the De Quincey Co trio embrace their distinctive art. Photo: Russell Emerson