



Sheetal Gandhi – “Bahu-Beti-Biwi”

Theater for the New City

Saturday, October 17, 2009

By Megan Kennedy

ExploreDance.com

Sheetal Gandhi's *Bahu-Beti-Biwi* elegantly combined dance, text and instrumentation. There was not a single wasted gesture or sound. Even the costume changes added to the story unfolding on stage. A thread of continuity and contradiction ran through the night.

Gandhi has crafted a work with touches of humor and sincerity that draw out the humanity of the people she portrays. Her seamless transition from one character to another gives cohesion to what could be multiple shorter works.

The exploration of combining traditional and modern, old and young, begins with an older woman sweeping away feathers. These feathers are of a bird that guides us through the lives of the women. The older woman transforms into the bird, looking like it's trying to find something and transitions back into a human. This time a woman needing to take care of everyone by feeding them, complaining they are “too thin”. She begins talking to a younger relative, saying they are the same, which seems strange to the young girl.

This young girl begins lamenting to her mother about why she cannot wear a tank top, not seeing what the problem is. This section is infused with humor, illustrating how strange it is for her to have clothing restrictions. Following is a more serious take with the girl wanting to blind others from seeing her so she can be free to dress as she chooses.

The old woman re-emerges to reflect on her granddaughters “modern” clothing and traditional Indian values, trying to explain the values of more traditional ways...especially when she discusses relationships. The old woman reflects on her own arranged marriage and lost love. Her tale of her lost love is especially moving. The audience sees her transform into her younger self as she remembers the man she could not have and sees the story from his point of view. Following this, the younger girl explains her doomed relationship with a man who preferred his cat. The contrast of the arranged marriage and searching for love treats both fairly.

Gandhi's portrayal of these two worlds – traditional Indian culture and contemporary Western culture – illustrates both their differences and similarities. Life and love have the same ups and downs, regardless of background. Gandhi's talent takes over the characters, stage and her audience and envelops them all in her tale. The music by Joseph Trapanese adds another rich layer to this already engaging piece of art.