

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Photography Exhibition
Organiser: NSUPC
Venue: Drik Gallery, H-58, R-15A, Dhanmondi
Date: July 4-10
Time: 3pm-8pm



Theatre Workshop
Organiser: Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy and the Embassy of Switzerland
Venue: National Theatre Auditorium, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy
Date: July 3-8



Solo Art Exhibition
Painter: Samiran Chowdhury
Title: Connecting with Nature
Venue: Galleri Kaya H-20, R-16, Sector-4, Uttara,
Date: July 2-15
Time: 10am-8pm



Theatre
Play: The Communicator
Troupe: Centre for Asian Theatre
Venue: National Theatre Hall, Shilpakala Academy
Date: July 2
Time: 7pm



Theatre Review

"Khona": A legend revived!



A scene from Bot-Tola's production "Khona."

ALY ZAKER

'Bot-Tola' is a new theatre group. Some say it is a splinter group of an established theatre company. I don't know if it is or not. And I don't care. It's the quality of work that speaks for the group. Very often it has been seen that the so-called splinter group supersedes the 'original' in terms of artistic excellence. Our theatre arena is replete with such examples. Bot-Tola (under the banyan tree) is a familiar Bangla expression that goes beyond what it literally means. It transcends the literal meaning, and connotes... a shadow, a refuge, an assurance that gives people hope, security and, more importantly, courage. Watching the group perform at the Oxford International School, I thought that they really lived up to the connotation fully in their maiden production of "Khona."

My generation grew up hearing about legends of an extremely wise and erudite woman who, through very simple expressions, could make accurate predictions about day-to-day

lives. These sayings or 'bachans' as known in Bangla, have often been repeated by our elders whenever we were confronted by nature's endowment or calamities. I grew out of Khona's *bachan* with advancing age except when in my ancestral village or talking to fellow villagers. That there was such a fascinating myth around Khona that deserved more than a cursory interest was unknown to me until I had the opportunity to see the 'Bot-Tola' production of the play "Khona." The play, written by Samina Lutfa Nitra and directed by Mohammed Ali Hyder, was a feast for the eyes and the soul. More for the soul because it brought to the fore the things we have otherwise taken for granted.

The story of Khona is shrouded in mystery, which has been interpreted through various stories by people throughout the ages. All stories centring on Khona, however, indicate that she was an astrologer just as her husband Mihir and father-in-law Varaha Mihir. As an astrologer Khona was known to be more competent than the much-vaunted father-in-law of hers.

To prove that his deductions were wrong, Khona marries Varaha's son Mihir and arrives at his hub at Deul Nagar. She tries to correct the wrong deductions by her father-in-law and earns his wrath. A conflict ensues between the father-in-law and daughter-in-law. This gets to an extreme proportion whereupon Varaha Mihir is not able to withstand the sight of his daughter-in-law. His son, a simple guy, is at a bay. Much as he loves his wife, he does not have the courage to stand against his all-powerful father.

The interpretation of the playwright is that Khona's father-in-law felt threatened by the astrological prowess of his daughter-in-law and therefore the jealousy turned into a will to cut her down to size. Nitra, the playwright, also sees in this an archetypal male-female conflict in which the male wants to have the last word in a patriarchal society. At one point Varaha cannot take it anymore and lays a conspiracy to do away with his 'insolent' daughter-in-law. While watching the play, I thought that the strength of Khona was not intrinsic to

her astrological knowledge but her will to learn from the experiences of the common farmers and artisans of the society in those days. Therefore, whatever the interpretation, we see the playwright highlighting the aspects of relationship between Khona and the common people transcending their respective class character and her total devotion to knowledge. Indeed in one of the most important dialogues of this play she says in as many words that knowledge was above all. Knowledge ruled over emotion, relationship and all other worldly possessions.

Through this play we are reminded of the age-old sayings of Khona. Sayings such as "If it rains at the end of the month of Magh, the harvest promises affluence for the ruler" or "If it rains at the end of Falgun, one could bring home twice the yield" or "Do not cut banana leaves after planting of the saplings and that would ensure your food and clothing." At the end of the play Khona defies the dictates of her father-in-law and disregards the King's request to apologise to Varaha. Surrounded by the peasants of the village, she allows her tongue to be severed by the orders of Varaha Mihir. Her last message to her followers is that "knowledge is truth." This keeps ringing in our ears amidst the chanting of her followers, who seem to swell beyond the paltry numbers present on the stage to millions spread all over the world.

Khona, needless to say, is one of the finest plays that I have seen in years on the stages of Dhaka. The script was simply fantastic. Samina Lutfa Nitra, playing the protagonist, emerges to be one of the best actors of the day and was deftly supported by a band of dedicated actors, musicians and crew. The choreography was nearly perfect. The director, Ali Haider, did a good job though he could have checked the temptation of wanton gimmicks and the play would have been even more powerful. Hat's off to 'Bot-Tola'!

The writer is a renowned actor and director.

Joya's new role in "Chaita Pagol"

A CORRESPONDENT

Actress Joya Ahsan enjoys playing diverse roles. Most of her characters are unique and attract much attention from the viewers. Recently, she enacted the role of a jatra dancer in the much acclaimed play "Panjabiwala".

She is now busy with the TV serial "Chaita Pagal".

About her role in the serial, Alta, she says, "Alta is an impoverished village girl. She is introduced to a young man named Polash, whom she marries. After a few months, when they divorce, Alta become a domestic worker in the village. I felt comfortable working in the play. The serial has been shot in Bikrampur. Actor Mahfuz Ahmed is directing it."

By the end of the month, Joya will have her hands full with the film "Nishidhdho



Joya Ahsan

Loban." The script has been written by noted author Syed Shamsul Haq. Nasiruddin

Yousuff is directing the film. "I will don the role of Bilkis in the movie," says Joya.

TV play "Brazentina" on Rtv

A CORRESPONDENT

With the onset of World Cup Football, in Bangladesh we are clearly divided into two

groups supporters of Brazil and Argentina. We hoist flags of both the countries, though we don't belong to those countries. According to the constitution, however, we

cannot hoist the flags of any other country without hoisting our National Flag.

TV play, "Brazentina" on Rtv captures the euphoria of the game. Supporters of both teams are playing a football match in a local playground. Coincidentally, a local schoolteacher is selected as a commentator. However, one of his female students supports neither teams. She wears a jersey of Brazentina (Brazil + Argentina) and ties a Bangladeshi flag around her head. This Bangladeshi flag swiftly turns the outcome of the match upside down.

Written and directed by Noman Robil, the cast of the play includes Tisha, Rashed Mamun Opu, Maznun Mizan, Antu Karim and others. The play will be aired on Rtv on July 7 at 9pm.



Tisha (right) and co-actor in the play.

Movie Watch

"Last Airbender" seemingly another failure for Shyamalan



"The Last Airbender" is a live-action adaptation of a Nickelodeon Asian-anime-influenced cartoon series, "Avatar."

It had better be the last. How did M. Night Shyamalan go from being touted as heir apparent to Hitchcock and Spielberg (often by himself) after his trend-setting 1999 jack-in-the-box thriller "The Sixth Sense" to the writer-director of the murky, shapeless, retro-fitted, 3-D bomb "The Last Airbender"?

The film, which is a live-action adaptation of a Nickelodeon Asian-anime-influenced cartoon series, is supposed to be the start of a new movie franchise.

It begins bewilderingly with the brother-sister team of Katara (Nicola Peltz) and Sokka (Jackson Rathbone, also of "The Twilight Saga: Eclipse") hunting a tiger seal in some phoney-looking, murky, northern waste where the background keeps turning into foreground thanks to a poorly done 3-D conversion.

There they find Aang (Taekwondo whiz Noah Ringer in a role originally conceived as Asian), a boy with a

shaved head, arrow-shaped tattoo on his forehead, a burgundy cloak with a hood and yellow pants and shirt.

Aang is an avatar (the film was originally titled "Avatar"). That means he is capable of controlling not just one element -- air, water, fire, earth -- but all four, although not when the audience first meets him. Aang was raised by monks, although he might have said monkeys. The film's unlikely warrior trio sails around their world, on a furry, unaerodynamic creature that looks like a fugitive from "Where the Wild Things Are."

What follows is a derivative, often unwatchable hash of "Star Wars," "Dune," "The Chronicles of Narnia," "The Lord of the Rings" and "Kung Fu." Aang teams up with Katara and Sokka to foment rebellion against evil "Fire Lords" led by hissable Commander Zhao (Aasif Mandvi). In a parallel narrative, Prince Zuko (Dev Patel of "Slumdog Millionaire") must

prove his worthiness after being rebuked by his father Fire Lord Ozai (Cliff Curtis). To do this, he must capture the avatar.

Between computer-generated fights in which characters hurl water, earth, wind and fire at one another, everybody talks like Yoda. Someone kills the "moon spirit" and Aang takes meditative trips to a netherworld where he talks to a dragon.

There is another problem that needs addressing. The Nickelodeon series, created by Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzky, is wholly and inarguably centred on Asian (and Inuit) culture. But Shyamalan, who is of South Indian descent, for whatever reason chose to cast mostly white actors. Two fellow Indians (Dev Patel and Aasif Mandvi) play different kinds of villains, but otherwise this fantasy world is pretty white until you get to the extras.

Compiled by Correspondent

As the festival of Eid approaches, The Daily Star is putting together the Star Fashion- Eid Album 2010, right ahead of the country's largest shopping season.

If you wish to participate, send outfits and accessories you would like to feature in the album.

Last date for submission
July 07, 2010

ATTENTION
 Designers & Boutiques

Contact:

(For submission of products)

Selim S H Chowdhury
 Production & Events Manager
 email- selim@thedailystar.net
 Cell- 01675744501

Criteria for Participation:

1. Dresses, saris and accessories should express the mood of the festival.
2. Materials used should be locally produced.
3. All submissions must be accompanied with a short description of the product, including price.
4. Designs should be original and fabrics should suit the weather and environment.
5. The attires and accessories sent for the album are returnable.
6. Entry fee per entry is Tk 300 (minimum 3 entries for each participating house).

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