

# Legends of war

Barbarians on the loose and a timely plea for peace in two new shows



REACH OUT AND TOUCH FAITH: Anil Natyaveda & Aparna Sindhoor (in red)

by AMY BARRATT

Of all theatrical forms, surely the collective creation is the most delicate: at its best combining diverse talents into something greater than the sum of its parts; at its worst evoking the phrase "too many cooks spoil the broth." Collective work can take many forms, as aptly illustrated by two shows currently playing.

Teesri Duniya Theatre has begun its "Staging Peace in Times of War" season with *A Leaf in a Whirlwind*, a dance-theatre piece that, refreshingly, tells a war story from a woman's perspective. As artistic director Rahul Varma—who has pointedly stepped aside to give women artists centre stage—puts it, "Why is it that in every war a woman's body becomes a battleground?"

*A Leaf in a Whirlwind* began as a short story by Indian feminist writer Lalithambika Antherjanam. Aparna Sindhoor, a Teesri Duniya

collaborator who incorporates classical Indian dance forms into contemporary dance, wanted to adapt it as a piece of dance-theatre. Playwright and former theatre critic Jodi Essery was brought on as writer, and Laurie Stevens as dramaturge. Finally, an ethnically diverse group of dancers was brought on board to back up Sindhoor's portrayal of a woman in an unidentified refugee camp telling the story of her daughter's violent origins. Reinforcing the universality of the story, the text is spoken in several languages. Percussionist Patrick Graham provides live music and soundscape.

Not all of the many dance segments advance the story as well as they should, but the duets between Sindhoor and Anil Natyaveda are riveting. Possessed of a haunting singing voice in addition to her other talents, Sindhoor is truly a wonder.

Through an image of war that is stripped of glamour or even honour, *A Leaf in a Whirlwind* delivers a timely plea for peace.

You'll probably never see a tragedy performed by Two by Four Productions, and that may make it hard for them to gain respect on the theatre scene. This troupe's origins are in comedy and improv, but their shows, including the latest, *Legend of the Barbarian*, put those talents to work within a solid dramatic structure.

Okay, maybe it's more of a video game structure, but still. It begins in a distant time and place, a world seemingly abandoned by the gods where the rich and powerful have enslaved everyone else. Slaves are at work building a monument to the goddess Viara when a couple of hired thugs murder the master builder and set fire to the temple.

Set free, our hero, Angor the Barbarian (Marc Rowland), becomes an unquestioning warrior for petulant general Nilus (Dan Beirne), but not before falling for the master builder's beautiful and educated daughter, Onora (Vanessa Matsui).

If the actual story of *Legend of the Barbarian* isn't terribly memorable, some of the performances are unforgettable. As the ineffectual man-child Nilus, Beirne's physical performance couldn't be better or funnier. Jenna Wright, who also created the astounding costumes, is a goddess of passive aggression and a genius of comic timing. Dan Jeannotte is inspired as Magus Heribus and several other characters.

Although *Legend of the Barbarian* dragged a little near the end, overall I'd rate it: STR(ength): 16, DEX(terity): 18, CON(stitution): 16, INT(elligence): 15, WIS(dom): 14, CHA(risma): Infinite. ■

*A LEAF IN A WHIRLWIND*, UNTIL OCT.

28 AT MAI, (514) 982-3386.

*LEGEND OF THE BARBARIAN*, TO OCT.

20 AT THÉÂTRE-STE-CATHERINE,

(514) 284-3939.