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Treya's Last Dance

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Treya's Last Dance

Tristan Bates Theatre, London

7th February 2016

Written & Performed by **Shyam Bhatt** | Directed by **Tiffany Nichole Green**Reviewed by **Ayndrilla Singharay**

In the darkness, the tinkling of ankle bells heralds the arrival of **Shyam Bhatt** onstage. An accomplished Indian dancer, she appears in resplendent bharatanatyam dress and is everything one would expect of a woman like her; polished, precise, eternally-smiling. As she dances, however, Bhatt's face begins to change. The flirtatious grin slowly gives way to discomfort and then - panic.

The young woman portrayed by Bhatt is Treya. Strong, funny and with plenty of South London swagger, Treya is a woman walking the line between tradition and modernity. As a little girl she desperately wanted to take up ballet but was pressured by her parents to take up bharatanatyam instead. It is on her parents' insistence that she is attending this evening of speed-dating, in the hope that she will find a 'life-partner.' Refreshingly, Treya manages to juggle these familial expectations whilst remaining an outspoken and sexually free woman who is not afraid to call out injustice and misogyny when she sees it. Recalling a memorable date with an 'genuine Asian rudeboy', she observes that 'he learned all his flirting from porn and Bollywood movies.'

During the course of the evening as a series of faceless 'dates' ask Treya probing questions about herself, she attempts to answer them with witty anecdotes and memories. But it soon becomes clear that something is terribly wrong, that Treya is not herself. She is doing her best to camouflage a raw and all-encompassing grief.

As the circumstances of the recent tragedy become clear, there are faster jumps between the comic, chatty Treya and the Treya who is still reeling, unable to articulate her anger and frustration. She is a person fragmented by grief and Bhatt demonstrates this beautifully through her thoughtful physical performance.

Bhatt's writing is consistently sharp and the pace is quick. The speed-dating format means that wherever Treya's musings take us, we are always at the mercy of that bell to jolt us back to reality. This is a largely effective device but the constant interruption prevents a more nuanced exploration of Treya's character as we move speedily from one anecdote to another. The effect is a little unsatisfying, as if we have only skimmed the surface of what lies beneath the hard armour of this character. But Bhatt is a captivating performer whose acrobatic facial expressions and humour make it hard not to warm to Treya. She excels at embodying diverse characters, memorably an Afro-Caribbean Evangelical preacher and a meddling Auntie who Treya berates for her over zealous matchmaking attempts - 'Pimp much?'. These comic moments certainly pull in the laughs but at times tend to veer into caricature. The simple staging works well to represent the disappointingly dingy speed-dating venue and the disarray of Treya's emotional state.

This is a clever, moving piece and Bhatt gives a dynamic performance of a woman in chaos, navigating her way between what is expected of her and the urgency of her own feelings.

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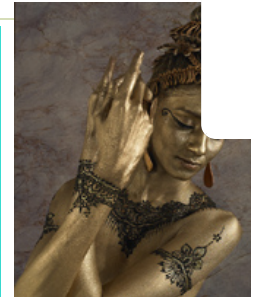
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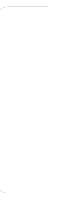
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