

No Solo Mio and Stepmother in A Sari

Review By Brandie Fitzgerald

Sugarzine.com

The Jackson Repertory theatre...of Jackson Heights is in the heart of Queens. As a native I looked forward to the plays. To me, Jackson Heights was a neighborhood where people lived but not necessarily went to view theatre. It is fitting then, that these plays compliment this diverse and vibrant neighborhood. Both pieces feature interconnection between different types of people and the qualities that define us as human.

No Solo Mio is a one man improv show performed by the dynamic Carl Kissin. *No Solo Mio* is structured around twelve short skits that all engage the audience. At some points mass participation, at others a one on one with Kissin - no expense is spared gaining the audiences trust and enthusiasm. Particularly enjoyable is the first skit *In Da House* when audience members spontaneously throw out suggestions for a story that Kissin is crafting on the spot. Other skits include *Compliment Comic* where Kissin demonstrates that compliments can be just as wickedly funny as any insult, and the keenly observed *Yuppie Horror Story*. Kissin is a three -time Manhattan Monologue Slam champion and his writing for *Yuppie Horror Story* as well as *Cell, Cell* demonstrate why. *Yuppie Horror Story* tells the story of a yuppie couple who face the terrifying reality of... not being able to buy things! They discover that the worst thing imaginable to them paradoxically introduces them to the best things in life. The skit *Cell, Cell* tells the story of a man with approximately eight minutes to live. In his desperation, the man has all the parts of himself that are infected cut away until he is reduced to only two cells. In *Cell, Cell* the character makes the decision to not accept limits imposed on him by the situation. "You can't allow other people to give you limits because if you accept that as truth - you are limited". This is exactly the point of *No Solo Mio* for Kissin as a performer. The deliberate erosion of limits through the participation of the audience ultimately demonstrates the interconnection not only with Kissin but also between the audience members.

In ***Stepmother in a Sari*** Leslie Harrel Dillen is Winifred Logan Lighfoot an insecure but well meaning American who travels to India to attend her stepdaughter's engagement party. This is an intensely personal and poignant piece which is thoughtfully crafted by Dillen. Throughout the play Winnie's feeling of being an outsider in her family is parallel to her feeling of being an outsider in India. However, as Winnie becomes more at ease with her surroundings in India she also comes to realize that her feelings of being an outsider in her family may not be justified. What I liked about this piece was the gradual unfolding of this realization. At first dazzled by the sights and sounds of India, Winnie is shocked when their car is besieged by the poor of Delhi at a stoplight. The nature of everyday life in India creates a culture shock for Winnie that resonates throughout the play. At the sari shop, she struggles with her own insecurities as her husband lavishes compliments on his former wife. The sari itself however, helps to ease her insecurity as she starts to see herself in a new way. Winnie continues to struggle with her insecurities as the piece continues but the situation forces her to come to terms with her own feelings and she starts to make clearer observations. Presented is the paradox that the things that are most uncomfortable also inherently have the power to tell us

the most about ourselves. Being faced again and again with arch nemesis Nicole (her husband's ex-wife) Winnie comes to realize that she and Nicole both fear being outsiders equally. Likewise, the staggering poverty and harsher realities of life in India force her to admit that some of what consumes her thoughts is petty. As Winnie journeys through India side by side with Nicole and a colorful cast of characters, she finally comes full circle to a better understanding of herself.