



TWO CENTS & TWO PENCE



MRS. KRISHNAN'S PARTY

The Cultch Presents Indian Ink Theatre, Culture Lab, until Feb 03



My Two Pence



My Two Cents

Tucked away beside the large Cultch Historic theatre space is a smaller studio space, the Culture Lab, which is perfectly fitting for this production. We are seated in the small back room of Mrs. Krishnan's convenience store, with stairs to her house above and the constant ringing of the front door opening to the store.

This is not a new concept, it is a well known and loved (and realistic) story and character, Mrs. Krishnan (Kalyani Nagarajan) works exceptionally hard in the hopes to create a better life for her family. We find out early on that her son has moved away and is a successful architect, and are instead introduced to her surrogate son (really, her boarder) James. James is a quintessentially modern university student, with all the unabashed confidence that can only come from a place of stupidity, but this is not overplayed by Justin Rogers; much like Michael Scott from The Office, his absolute ignorance leads often to you liking him more as it comes from a good place. And one thing James is not ignorant about? Real life connections, the 'wokeness' needed to learn and appreciate (and then teach) about other cultures. James leads most of the beginning of the story, inviting us into this Onam party, which he wants to surprise Mrs. Krishnan with. He certainly does.

What follows for the next hour is part cooking class, part religious history and culture sharing, and part forum theatre - with the audience often as involved in the action as the performers themselves. As the daal simmers away on the stove, very quickly you forget you are in a theatre, watching a performance, and instead are completely absorbed in this real-life experience.

Mrs. Krishnan's Party is a beautiful reminder that family can be found and made anywhere by being open and accepting of each other, happiness is fleeting but the joy that we can find together in a moment lasts much longer in our hearts.

- Charlie Upton

I went into Mrs. Krishnan's Party expecting to love it, and was not disappointed. From the moment you enter and are ushered to your seat by the enthusiastic James, played by Justin Rogers, you're immersed in the party and celebration of Onam.

What's Onam you ask? James and Mrs. Krishnan, Kalyani Nagarajan, will share the history behind this harvest festival with those of us who haven't heard of it before. Not only a show but a cultural experience, Mrs. Krishnan's Party will teach you the true meaning of Onam complete with music, dancing, and food.

Everything about this show is perfect. The decorations, which include garlands and scarves for the audience to wear as they participate in the party, are fun and festive. The set is interactive for actors and audience members alike, with light switches and running water. The smell of the daal cooking will make your mouth water and I swear you'll forget you're sitting in a theatre and not actually in Mrs. Krishnan's kitchen. Make sure there's room in your stomach, because after smelling the daal cooking throughout the show, you actually get to eat some!

Don't expect to just sit and observe passively because this is very much an audience participation show. The actors will have you shouting surprise as they turn on the lights, you may be asked to help cook or hand out decorations, and you might even find yourself seated at Mrs. Krishnan's table for the duration of the show.

Nagarajan and Rogers are excellent at dealing with audience interaction. From finding two single patrons and trying to set them up, to asking questions like what your favourite Indian food is (don't say butter chicken), they're prepared for anything. Be prepared to get up and dance, you will not want to stay seated during this show.

This play has been a work in progress for several years and it has definitely payed off. On the surface you get a light-hearted and fun show where you are the unexpected guests Mrs. Krishnan finds in the back of her convenience store. You'll dance, laugh like crazy, and become a part of the event. But beneath that, it addresses more serious topics such as what happiness is and how we can move past grief and failure. It addresses the issue of when your family lets you down, you turn to the family you choose.

So whether you've celebrated Onam or never even heard of it, this show is about bringing people from all walks of life together. It's about finding friendship and family with someone unexpected, perhaps even a complete stranger. It's beautiful in that it welcomes anyone and everyone to enjoy Mrs. Krishnan's celebration of Onam.

- Ash Tisdale