



Review: State of Denial

Description

State of Denial is powerful and timely

By Byron Toben

This year is the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. So it is timely that Teesri Duniya has revived its 2012 drama on that subject, penned by its founder Rahul Varma.

For those, like me, who viewed it at the McCord Museum at that time, it is essentially the same play but with some enhanced production values and re-arrangement of scenes, effectively directed by the petite dynamo, Liz Valdez.

For those who may not be conversant with the events in Turkey, as the Ottoman Empire collapsed during WWI, many foreign observers reported on the scale of Turkish deportation and treatment of its large Armenian population.

One notable example was Henry Morgenthau, Sr. the then neutral US ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. His protestations went ignored. This complex cauldron of Christian Armenians and Muslim Turks was further complicated by perceived income inequities, suspicion of Russia and mob rule.

The term “genocide” had not been invented yet. It was coined by Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin in 1944, referring to Nazi treatment of Jews and Gypsies but has since been applied to the Armenian events and more recently, Darfur, Rwanda and elsewhere.

Mr Varma cleverly uses the hook of a Rwandan landed immigrant to Canada (vividly played by Warona Setshwaelo) who seeks to make a documentary film of those times. Her research leads her to an elderly woman running a Muslim charity (Victoria Barkoff) who has a secret. With the reluctant help of a Canadian consular officer (Jimmy Blais), she uncovers a story of two young lovers caught up in this maelstrom (Saro Saroyan and Liana Bdéwi) all the while interacting with Eric Hausknost, who plays several different characters, some bad, one good.

The good one is an elderly Turkish neighbor of Sinam (Liana Bdéwi), who saves her from death and, together with his wife, Susan Bain, hides her. Just as in WWII, there were some righteous Gentiles who saved and hid Jewish survivors at risk to their own lives. What is the secret and how does it involve a young Canadian girl (Michaela De



Cesare)? You'll have to see this fine show to find out.

Unobtrusive, but lending texture to the whole is the music sound design by Devon Bate, with credits to three musicians on violin, daf (a Persian drum) and dudek (Armenian wood flute).

STATE OF DENIAL continues at the Segal Centre studio until Oct. 25
The October 18 matinee at 1 pm includes a talkback with an expert panel.
Tickets: 514 739-7944 or segalcentre.org

Images: Mateo H. Casis

Byron Toben is the immediate past-president of the Montreal Press Club.

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