

THE MT SPACE FILLS A THEATRICAL VOID

By Declan Kelly

Aldous Huxley once mused that we participate in tragedy, but only look at comedy. It's a distinction that MT Space artistic director Majdi Bou-Matar hopes to illustrate with his company's inaugural performance of Nijinsky's *Through a Window*. However, it's not as though Matar wishes to dwell on misfortune, far from it. Instead, like any good artist, he simply wishes to engage his audience and provoke thought.

The piece itself is the culmination of an intensive eight week workshop and marks the arrival of the region's newest theatre company. And while the troupe's name — which stands for Multicultural Theatre — might be a play on words, they are serious about their mandate. "We chose the name MT Space because there is a sort of 'empty' space in the region," Matar explains. "We're taking about multicultural representation in both the performers and the audience in contemporary Canadian culture, and within theatre in particular. It's not about promoting multiculturalism on the folkloric level — we have lots of multicultural events and activities — but most of them tend to promote the folkloric aspect of cultures.

"The idea was to integrate all these elements of rich cultures within contemporary Canadian culture, in defining new Canadian theatre. We think that we should have a richer theatre scene that better reflects our multicultural society."

In choosing such a complex figure as Russian ballet great Vaslav Nijinsky, Matar feels the MT Space will start off on the right foot with such a moving exploration of human emotions.

"We wanted to start up with something that had universal themes and content, that could reflect upon personal issues and anxieties that might concern us as young performers from diverse backgrounds," Matar notes. "And Nijinsky's life was really turbulent. It included lots of issues regarding homosexuality, sexual identity, fame, religion, love and love/hate relationships, jealousy, obsession, and various other emotions. So we thought that would be a nice way to explore universal themes that we all care about."

With such a broad range of issues and emotions at play, Matar says it was important to allow for personal interpretation during the workshop.

"We tried to concentrate on the dancer himself and let the performers, the dramaturges, and everybody involved relate personally to those issues," Matar says. "We didn't want to put on a documentary or inform



people about Nijinsky. It was more to put on our own impressions of those universal themes."

As a result, Matar feels Saturday's performance will also offer audience members a chance to view the play on their own terms, rather than as a straight historical profile.

"If someone doesn't know much about Nijinsky, they aren't going to learn a lot in that sense," Matar cautions. "And there's no problem with that. The point is to take a personal trip during the show and relate and/or communicate with the performers through Nijinsky's personal issues and feelings."

Matar says the workshop was an ideal format to study such an involved character as Nijinsky, and hopes the audience brings the same creative outlook to the show. "You cannot cover all of Nijinsky's life," he says. "So we have focused on and chosen what concerns us and relates to each one of us personally. And we are hoping to communicate these impressions to an audience we would like to participate in the show, rather than being a passive audience.

"We'd like to trigger certain questions and concerns in the audience. And if we have 300 people watching the show, we would love to have 300 different readings of the show. It's not something that's static and rigid. It's open for all interpretations."

After Saturday's showing, Matar plans to incorporate audience feedback in finalizing the script and preparing the production for its official debut at Montreal's Festival Arabe du Monde later this fall.

"The script is still in progress, 'stage one' as we call it," Matar adds. "This means we have a script that can be evaluated with the feedback from the audience. This will then take us to stage two, where we premiere the production at Festival Arabe du Monde in November." Having come to Canada from Lebanon early last year, Matar is impressed with the initial support The MT Space has received from the community.

"I think the project has gotten huge community support," he says. "And I am really thankful for the community — both cities, Kitchener and Waterloo — because they are really active communities in terms of arts and culture. And I think this is a very fertile place, culturally speaking, for this project to grow and flourish."

Saturday's performance is free admission and open to the public, but comes with a mature content classification. For more on Nijinsky, *Through a Window*, or The MT Space itself, contact 585-7763 or themtspace@hotmail.com.