

Dining/Entertainment



Forum theatre on racism

by Halk Azeez and Mayanthi de Silva are two students contesting for the position of Student Council President.

The cast and crew are youth between the ages of 18-27 and portray the best of teamwork that bring about an impressive performance. "The very tentative script is both easy and challenging that requires a lot of spontaneity and spirit. As a volunteer for the drama, I am quite impressed by the manner in which 'Elected' has turned around. We've been rehearsing for about one and a half months and it's very nice atmosphere to be around and the cast is cooperative and fun to be with," remarked Mayanthi.

This would be the third forum theatre to be staged in recent times by Beyond Borders who will bring the polling stations alive on May 22 at Nimali Malini Panchi Theatre, Borella at 5.00pm. For free tickets pre-register at www.beyondborders.lk

Cast: Mohan - Halk Azeez, Mihiri - Mayanthi de Silva, Professor Ananada - Megara Tegal, Sachithi Vidanapathirana, Deas - Bhagya Senarathne, Jaker - Yohan Denu.

gh with Tommiya

naesma resurrects the old time favourite Tommy or The latest instalment is ready to go on the boards at today and tomorrow. The Rotary club of Colombo will present the show on 15 May in aid of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects.

Man II brings solid entertainment

owing at Majestic Cinema

entertaining, perfectly summer blockbuster is just short of being Man. That release had less when it opened.



At the film's onset, Micky Rourke and his gold-plated teeth are seeking. Ivan Vanko, a Russian physicist that has served a time or two behind bars. He cranked near-to has press clippings showing Tony Stark's rise from teenage wunderkind to narcissistic entrepreneur. Vanko is plotting revenge on Stark, seeking to avenge his father's legacy while destroying another.

Robert Downey Jr. once again shows why he's perfect in the role of Tony Stark. With a natural charisma, he alone makes us forget about the faults in the storytelling. One of the best moments in the original was the chemistry between him and Gwyneth Paltrow. Sadly, they don't have many moments together. But when they

At times caustic but always empathic to his ideals the author of *Chuckling the Dragon* Mark Wild (pseudonym) discusses his ideas of the book, his personal demons and reflects on society at large.

Q: What inspired you to write *Chuckling the Dragon*?

A: Well the story is based on my own personal experiences between the ages of 17 to 21. For years I didn't want to talk about it because I like to keep things bottled up inside. But with each death of my friend in the last four years, due to drugs and violence and seeing new kids going down the path I felt that there was a need to talk about this and to make people feel that they are not alone and someone else has been through this before. I think it's a great feeling to realize that others have felt the same way you do, when you feel that you are totally isolated and have nothing in common with anyone around you. Over the years I found comfort in music and books and I hope *Chuckling the Dragon* will make someone feel the same way.

And although I have no illusions that this book will change the lives of thousands of street kids I hope that it would make a difference in the lives of some and hope that people who have never been junkies would have the chance of looking at their world through my eyes and maybe understand why some people turn to heroin.

Q: It seems like a very personal journey and yet it is the story of a generation too. Do you feel that these kids have any place in the larger world?

A: The story is mainly about heroin addiction but a lot of other things come into the novel, the social and political atmosphere of the ceasefire years, the student demonstrations and increasing unemployment, the tsunami and the NGOs. And I don't think anyone can escape these realities and not be deeply affected by them in some way or other.

Is it the story of a generation? I don't know, I wish that the readers can relate to some of the things that are discussed in the book and maybe take something positive out of this negative.

Sadly most of my junkie friends are dead and there are only a few guys who have made it to the mid 30s. And some of these guys have managed to find jobs and adjust to a 'normal' life but I know not talking about what happened eats them inside just like ignoring this part of my life eats me.

Q: The ending of the book was very positive. Why did you give it that ending?

A: Because that's what happened in real life. When I started the book I thought of ending it in May 17 2009, the day the LTTE was officially defeated. Because that is a new page to us. I have known nothing but war and I think it's the same for everyone reading this feature if they were living in Sri Lanka over the last three decades. I am not happy about the lives lost in Eelam war IV, both Sinhalese and Tamil but it is a new beginning.

But halfway down the line I thought of ending the book in mid 2006 because I didn't want to write a 300 page book. I wanted this to be a book that one can read in one go like Bret Easton Ellis's *Less Than Zero*.

I wanted someone reading this whether you are/was a junkie or never tried drugs to take something positive out of my experiences. It's like a Nirvana or Pearl Jam song or *Trainspotting* or *Fight Club* or *Hemingway*, there is always a positive to take out of anything negative. It may be not 'positive thinking' but I believe what detective William Somerset in David Fincher's *Seven* said "Hemingway once wrote 'the world is a fine place and worth fighting for.' I agree with the second part."



Reality redefined

Q: There is a message of hope in the book. Of life being given meaning through giving. (at least that was what I felt) is that so? What was your intention?

A: I agree with you. Life is only meaningful if you are willing to make sacrifices because without pain and sacrifice we are nothing. And that's the problem with our generation, we don't care and I'm not much different. But when things happen and when you see your friends die one at a time it becomes increasingly difficult not to care. But despite everything I still try to have hope and the belief that I may be able to do something to break the cycle is what keeps me going without turning back to junk again.

Q: The stark realities portrayed in the book (heroin, abortions, state suppressions etc) why did you highlight them as a social documentary? What is the purpose? What did you hope to achieve with the shock factor?

A: As you said it's the reality. It's what happens around us and it's not so uncommon as people like to believe. Don't you know anyone with a drug problem? Someone who had to go through an abortion? You are a journalist right, how many of your colleagues had to self censor or leave the country? How many kids join the army or the garments or get dead end jobs because they have no other option, because they want to send their younger brother/sister to school?

The shock factor, well I think that we have become so numb and the only way to get through the cocoon is to smash through it. It's like listening to a Sex Pistols song or the dialogues of Tyler Durden or reading a Bret Easton Ellis novel, the plan is not to be politically correct but to energize or tick people off and get them involved, make them think and maybe take something off when you keep the book down.

Q: Do you feel change is possible? Can it be done by an individual?

A: Change is always possible and the agent of change has always been a small band of individuals. Maybe one can't make a difference

but if you look hard enough you will find people who think like you and maybe if you join them you can do something. Or you can just philosophize and whine.

Q: Can a bloodless revolution fuel change?

A: A revolution may be bloodless but it will still be violent. Coz the essence of revolution is violence. I don't mean guns and bombs. Industrial revolution was pretty violent, a lot of people had to leave their villages and come to the city and live in slums right? It was a bloodless revolution but violent for those whose families were torn apart.

I don't think that you can change anything by patting people on the back and worrying about hurting their feelings. I don't buy into this postmodern ideas, this kind of thinking only isolates people more and more. I'm not a very non violent person. And the times I felt revolution was in the air was when I was throwing stones at the police when I was in university but I might be wrong, living in the Matrix might be the future.

Q: Upper middle class people have little political power and live almost in a social limbo with ideals limited to thought and incapable of action. They don't have the courage to make the ultimate sacrifice, know that in the depth of their hearts and therefore make excuses. This frustration in a sense makes Mark look for an outlet in drugs and later an escape from his meaningless life. What are your ideas on this statement?

A: I don't agree with you, the upper middle and upper class has a lot of political power. As you said we don't have the courage to make the ultimate sacrifice, know that in the depth of their hearts and therefore make excuses. But the upper middle and upper classes are forces trying to maintain the status quo for their own personal interest. I'm sure there are some against the status quo but that's a minority. And that's why revolutionaries always go for the working classes, people who are closer to hitting bottom and prepared to do more about breaking the cycle.

I think that the dilemma of Mark

is the dilemma of the upper middle class rebel and it's nothing new. If you read Lermontov's 'A Hero of Our Time' or Pushkin's 'Eugene Onegin' or Ellis 'Less than Zero' you will see others who are facing the same dilemma and it's also interesting to note how things have not changed over the centuries despite all the 'changes' in society.

Q: How has the response for the book been so far?

A: I have kept a very low profile and it's the publisher who handles stuff. And although its early days she has already forwarded me a lot of mails and texts that she has got from people who have read the book. And I am surprised by the positive reaction and that even book clubs are going to do readings with it. In one case a junkie rang the phone number on the front of the cover and told Juliet he has decided to kick drugs and do something with his life. But what makes me happy is that the book has made some people question certain things about themselves and about boundaries, and that's what I want.

Q: Why did you write under a pseudonym and why pick the name Mark Wild?

A: Because most of the things happened for real and putting my real name would not only affect me but also a lot of the characters in the book. Well the name proposed is a combination of two of our common heroes, Mark from Mark Renton of *Trainspotting* and Wilde from *Oscar Wilde*.

Q: Your book was not listed for the Gratian prize. What are your sentiments regarding this?

A: Who told you that? Well, yeah, it was not short listed but then again I'm not surprised when I heard who the judges were. But I plan to write a children's book next time so I'm sure I will win in 2010.

Q: What are your ideas about the English writers in Sri Lanka? Do you feel that they need to mature to write grittier books like yours? What about the overall talent pool?

A: Well I'm not the greatest fan of Sri Lankan writing in English and I try to avoid Sri Lankan writers as much as possible. But we have two guys who can write well, Shehan Karunathilake who won the Gratian in 2008 and Vihanga Perera.

Do you think my book is mature? That's cool anyway the problem with the guys who write in English is their life experience, most of the people who come from English speaking backgrounds are relatively well off. And we go to good schools, we get professional qualifications or go to university get a nice job, a car, a housing loan, insurance, we live and die like pigs on antibiotics. So what are we to write about?

Q: How were you assisted in writing the book published?

A: I wouldn't have written this book unless I met Juliet Coombe through a friend of mine. I had written a short story or two before but I knew no one would publish my stuff. But Juliet was willing to work with me and she put in a lot of effort into editing, photography, designing, the provocative cover and without her this book wouldn't be what it is.

Q: What is the biggest challenge that you faced?

A: The biggest challenge was to write this as objectively as possible, to tell the story the way it was. To strike a balance between what I felt about heroin, how not to glamorize it while not playing to the 'heroin is bad,' hysteria of the society. The point is not whether heroin is good or bad but what drives a lot of people to it. It's not that easy to call heroin addicts 'idiots' and disregard them because opiates have been the drug of choice for an astonishing number of the really talented people of the last few centuries, Coleridge, Dr. Quincey Poe, Novalis, Mary Shelley and her husband, Donald Goines, Jean Cocteau, William Burroughs, Jimi Hendrix, Scott Weiland and Kurt Cobain.