

GREASE YAKA – PRESS REVIEWS AND PREVIEWS

This document is a collection of all material carried in the press on GREASE YAKA – for its Opening Show in Colombo, Lionel Wendt Theatre, 8TH and 9TH August 2014

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GREASE YAKA – PRESS REVIEWS

1. **Facebook, Mind Adventures Theatre Co. – Friday, 8th August, 2014**
(<https://www.facebook.com/mindadventures/posts/775090355867052>)

Ruwanthie de Chickera triumphs with 'Grease Yaka' which opened at the Wendt tonight. Audacious, timely and potent, seething with energy and biting satire. De Chickera's script serves to confirm and remind us why she is our pre-eminent playwright and she has crafted outstanding performances from the AnandaDrama cast. On for just one more night. The most vital, important piece of theatre I have witnessed this year. Exceptional work, Stages Theatre Group!

2. Daily News, Asuka Randeniya – Wednesday, 13th August, 2014

(<http://www.dailynews.lk/?q=entertainment/pukka-yakka>)

Who is the Grease Yaka? Is it him? Is it her? Or... is it you?

So said the stellar cast of Ruwanthie de Chickera's latest theatrical venture 'Grease Yaka' staged on August 9 at Lionel Wendt, Colombo. It was night of suspense, theatrics, mystery, but mostly... fear.

Following a non- traditional narrative plot, 'Grease Yaka' used bilingual (Sinhala and English) dialogue to address many social issues through the phenomenon of the Grease Yaka. The play started off with four friends who ask, "What is the next big fear?" and the play then proceeds to answer that question.

The grease yaka appears in many forms, as a social construct, an imaginary fiend, a rumour but also as a physical manifestation of the collective fear of the people. The Opportunists, who first dream up the concept, quickly turn the phenomenon into a media circus. This was cleverly captured in the 'Live News Report' format so popular in current news media.

They took the audience through several 'affected' people, each displaying their own form of social evil: The Fatties are an obese family of three, eating never- ending meals who "hears" the grease yaka outside their house; the Beauties are three friends obsessed with their appearance who "glimpses" the grease yaka during a blood massage (Yes, 'blood' massage); the Night- race driver and his mechanic obsess over grease and blood on the car; an over- protective mother "loses" her son to the grease yaka (but we later see the boy merrily going home from school) and finally, the Arm of the Law, Officer Jayatissa- variously called Jayapala, Jayasumana and even Tissa- is the ineffectual, bumbling yet abusive Cop who loves showing- off.

The minimalist set decor was fully optimized by the cast and crew, moving smoothly like a well-oiled machine (Yes, pun FULLY intended). A walkway on top of bare scaffolding ran the length of the stage.

This was connected to the stage by two slides on wheels, which were constantly moved around during the play to suit the scene. It made for a dynamic backdrop which complemented the fluidity of the concept they tried to portray.

Lighting and sounds were optimal for the mystery of the story. Sharp silhouettes, foggy spotlights and dim room lighting made for a dark and mysterious space, where the shadowy grease yaka could easily clamber in an out of scenes in ever more creepy acrobatic feats.

The complex ideology behind the play could easily have been lost but was brought spectacularly to life by clever dialogue and cleverer acting of the cast. The script was written by Rajitha Hettiarachchi, himself a member of the cast and directed by Ruwanthie de Chickera.

The cast was comprised of young thespians who participated in a series of workshops held by Ruwanthie de Chickera and two other artistes of the Stages Theatre Group from February 2014 on.

Members of the cast included many from AnandaDrama, a non-profit organization of past and present Anandians involved in English theatre and other young actors and actresses.

Although at times the dialogue was inaudible or unintelligible (mostly due to an uncooperative audience), the play posed a lot of food for thought. It ended with a classic controversy: the Opportunists ponder the Next Big Fear together, then watch inspired as a Muslim couple crosses the stage.

The gasp that rang out in the hall was testament to the talent behind the production. This is one play that the public was not gonna forget any time soon.

3. Daily FT, W.O.R.D'Smythe – Saturday, 16th August, 2014

[\(http://www.ft.lk/2014/08/16/the-return-of-the-greased-devils/\)](http://www.ft.lk/2014/08/16/the-return-of-the-greased-devils/)

You remember the phenom which gripped our psyche sometime back. It had the whole country by its cojones. In city, town, and village, fear spread like, well, like grease on gudgeon pins. No one was safe from these greasy scoundrels who would pull a heist here or cop a squeeze there. God only knew who they were behind their smeary disguises. God, and whoever else put these ghouls up to their mischief.

Speculation was rife. Terror was rifer. People everywhere were ripe to be plucked like chickens. Someone was pulling strings pizzicato behind the scenes, and the national psyche was overripe with rumours and allegations and counteraccusations.

Let bygones be bygones, and allow sleeping dogs to lie gently in their godless graves? No, not the players of Ananda Drama and their perverse if talented muse and amanuensis. On two edgy, energetic nights at the end of last week, they poked the ghosts with an annoying and inquisitive stick.

Grease Yaka: A devised theatre production presented by AnandaDrama in collaboration with Stages Theatre Group, directed by Ruwanthie De Chickera, on 8 and 9 August, from 7:30 p.m. onwards for an average of one hour and 15 minutes every night, at the Lionel Wendt Theatre.

Grease Yaka, as the program proclaimed, “is a play about fear”. It is also a play about paranoia and the politics of social manipulation.

The presentation tried very hard to perform investigative surgery on personal and corporate fears. And how they feed into galloping social phobias. It was a bold attempt to address in relatively private dramatic form an autopsy that appears to be un-doable by public institutions like the police. And it succeeded in some measure in awakening small but captive audiences to “the power, reach and depth of its [social phobias’] impact on people”.

The production was inquisitive to a fault, probing hidden agendas and vested interests with a vengeance. As the blurb said, “Grease Yaka charts the evolution of fears in our society and examines their impact on our collective psyche.” This was evidently the award-winning director’s forte. She wove a spell over us as we saw exploding on the stage a rich mix of raw psychology. Flawed individuals. And the volatile interplay of individuals with society driven by odious opportunism.

The players were amateurish in the best theatrical tradition of the word. Grease Yaka was clearly an experimental play. “Conceived, driven and devised entirely by young people,” it was “based on material developed by students and young alumni of Ananda College”. And with “input from guest actors at workshops”. And cobbled together “under the guidance of [the director] and other artistes from the Stages Theatre Group”.

This aspect of the play caused some cracks in the production. While the players themselves were confident, some lines were poorly articulated. And/or drowned out by the enthusiastic support (laughter, cheers) of their equally youthful friends and family members in the balcony.

At the end of a thought-provoking play, in response to the question ‘What’s the next big fear?’, the suggestion that a certain ethnic group would be made a scapegoat of was rather lamely depicted by a couple – clearly a certain ethnic group – strolling almost casually along a gantry-walkway.

The payoffs for the actors and the audience alike, however, were plentiful. The bold and courageous initiative of this dramatic combine to address controversial sociopolitical issues on a public platform is a welcome development.

The originality and inventiveness of the script and presentation augurs well for the contribution that begs to be made by a new, emerging generation of players. In tandem with older and more experienced stagehands. The interest and edge-of-your-seat participation of the mixed audience of senior diplomats and dismissive schoolboys demonstrates that theatre is still a viable and an appropriate tool for exploring the dark places of our collective consciousness.

The play’s the thing. But the play is not always the only thing. Colombo’s English-language theatre circuit is so small as to be nepotistic if not incestuous. Certainly there is rivalry but sometimes also closeness between players, producers, collaborators. On the acknowledgments page of the program, the cast and crew of Grease Yaka thank Mind Adventures: mentioned in some manner of thanksgiving for their contribution to this production? And then later in the same weekend the doyenne of Mind Adventures posts this on a social medium: “Ruwanthie De Chickera triumphs with ‘Grease Yaka’ which opened at the Wendt tonight. Audacious, timely and potent, seething with energy and biting satire. De Chickera’s script serves to confirm and remind us why she is our pre-eminent playwright and she has crafted outstanding performances from the AnandaDrama cast... The most vital, important piece of theatre I have witnessed this year. Exceptional work, Stages Theatre Group!”

We would beg to differ, at least in parts. Particularly that bit about this being “the most vital, important piece of theatre ... this year”. Have we forgotten Men Without Shadows? Mind Adventure’s own Paraya? It was a script with a difference, all right. And it got us thinking. But it got us thinking about the things we had been thinking about all along. Without adding a challenge or suggestion of its own.

We saw in the issues raised issues that bedevil our times. We felt in the themes dealt with a sense of the tragedy and terror that can descend like greased lightning on an unsuspecting and unprotected polity. We heard in the story so chillingly narrated an echo of the very exigencies to which we as a nation and a people had been subjected to, and continue to be at the mercy of.

But we left the theatre wondering whether snide asides about Four Opportunists who prey on vulnerable people was sufficient in our day and age. True we all laughed at the witticisms and wisecracks about 'fatty oils' cowering in fear while stuffing their faces. And 'beauty oils' pandering to their vanity while the world falls apart in fear. And we nodded knowingly at 'dog blood [and] beggar blood on the racing car'. There was that last twist of the knife missing, though.

If this combine devises that production again, let there be more than a mere description of reality satirically presented. Let the play have more bite than bark. Because we're still wondering who let the dogs out in the first place, and when and where they'll attack next? So desperate times call for desperate remedies. And not only cleverly constructed remembrances of horrors past. The play's only the beginning.

4. Daily Mirror, Marissa van Eyck – Monday, 18th August, 2014

(<http://life.dailymirror.lk/article/9304/grease-yaka-reviewed>)

Directed by Ruwanthie de Chickera and presented by AnandaDrama and Stages Theatre Group, 'Grease Yaka' sought to explore how fears and phobias grow in society, how they are cultivated and how they affect us all. It did so in a form of caricature so exaggerated that it mirrored the ridiculousness and fantastical quality of the fears themselves. The entire play was indirect commentary on the current situation in Sri Lanka, using the phenomenon of the Grease yaka to illustrate how utterly absurd these fears are, and how silly we are to buy in to them as well.

The play was devised, with Ruwanthie picking out the best parts of the scenes that the students and alumni of Ananda College as well as actors from Stages Theatre Group came up with. Around 30 scenes were whittled down to half of that to create what is at first a disjointed narrative that featured different types of people and their reactions to the fears, becoming a coherent story with a masterful ending.

The groups of people included the Fatties, played by Pemanthi Fernando, Rajitha Hettiarachchi and Ravin Hettiarachchi, who guzzled down food they sometimes couldn't identify and were more afraid of the invisible, vague presence of the grease yaka than of their unhealthy lifestyle. The Beauties, Miranga Ariyaratne, Eshani Seneviratne, Lakshitha Edirisinghe, were so concerned with their appearances that their extreme forms of beautification were nothing compared to the threat of the yaka. Dinoo Wickramage and Vidura Manoratne played a mother and son, with even the over-protective mother seeing her son's escape as a kidnapping, all of these incidents showing the blindness of people when it comes to irrational fears versus what they really should do something about. The Night Race Driver and his lackey the Mechanic, unambiguously symbolic, were played excellently by Tharkana Kulatunga and Gavin Ranasinghe, and his feeding off of the grease, its usefulness to him was obvious. They were all caricatured almost beyond belief but each represented more than what they did on the surface.

The four opportunists were brilliant, Nandun Dissanayake, Eraj Gunawardena, Thilina Udayaratne and Minul Muhandiramge were a wonderful team, with a stylised but realistic portrayal of the various groups of people who stand to benefit from such fears. Charith Dissanayake's policeman was amazing too, almost a sympathetic character, a victim, until the last scene when he puts the blame on someone else to save his own skin.

Scenes that stood out were the first one which featured the policeman and his various levels in society, being bossed around and bossing others as well. The Opportunists melded into media in a scene when all the characters were on the stage, each using their personal styles to blow the fear of the yaka out of proportion. A powerful scene was when the opportunists donned carefully arranged sheets to represent the four religions of the country, and how they stood to benefit as well. The last scene was the catalyst for the whole play, delivering a twist that I thought made the play required viewing for a second time.

Overall, 'Grease Yaka' was bold and subtle, satirised and layered, raucous and stimulating, provoking boisterous laughter and disturbing thoughts, the combination of which is rare and very, very entertaining.

Comments from the audience

I thought it was an interesting take on the whole issue and I loved the character Pemanthi played. –
Natasha

I thought it was interesting. I loved how they brought out religious and political issues. – Shamika

It was a brilliant performance which stressed on the real society that we live in. As a past member I could see the improvements of the individual actors. My favourite was Nandun Dissanayake – Rakitha

I really liked the play, I think it was amazing and totally worth it. I loved the ending and I liked the portrayal of the policemen. – Amana

It was very good, society needs this. It points out not to blindly believe what others say and do and that it was cool! Nandun was favourite character. – Dilini

I really got the fear behind the laughs vibe. Nice lighting and movement and levels. – Miriam

The drama was shockingly relevant to the current situation in Sri Lanka. I appreciate the bold decision of staging such a drama; quite timely! Portraying real life issues in such a way before our eyes put things into perspective. It depicts the exact situation people faced during the days of the "grease yaka." Stunning performance. Clearly a lot of effort has gone in. My favourite character was the policeman; such a realistic act. - Yehoshua

I thought it was an amazing performance and it was like, very controversial but also reality – Ruqaiyah

It was an impressive production. It was clever, bold, entertaining, disturbing, well-acted, and well executed. – Amanda

5. Sunday Observer, Dilshan Boange – Sunday, 31st August, 2014

(<http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2014/08/31/mon20.asp>)

TRACKING AN UNCATCHABLE ENIGMA:

Grease Yaka

By Dilshan Boange

Theatre not merely for the laughs, not solely as entertainment, seems to be the credo guiding the productions of the Stages Theatre Group over the course of their past works put on the boards for the pleasure of theatregoers. But how much of the 'food for thought' offered by this theatre company is actually 'digested' in the intended manner by the audiences who flock to watch the creative talents unfold as stimulating performances?

I wondered about this sitting in the gentle darkness recently at the Lionel Wendt as giggles audibly sparked from here and there as the Police Constable named Jayatissa as an interrogator tortured the hapless servant boy Manju by stamping one of his feet forcefully on the boy's 'genital area' while his other foot violently thrust at the boy's neck. Perhaps it was because someone's 'nuts' were being stomped on?

Perhaps there was something perverse in that? Those laughs were quite telling in some way for us to introspectively reflect as to who we are, and what sensitivities and sensibilities we are composed of, or not, when subtly tested before the 'mirror' of art. In that sense the Stages Theatre Group can be thought of as 'tastefully political'.

Victim

When I first saw the promotional material notifying theatregoers of Ruwanthie de Chickera's upcoming production I wondered in amusement whether she had at some point been a victim of the voyeuristic Grease yaka! But jokes aside, I knew she had broached a topic that could develop a contemporary socio-political criticism in the form of theatre. The Stages Theatre Group together with Anandadrama presented what was labelled as a work of 'devised theatre'.

At the very outset what cannot be expected is therefore a drama in the mould of the realist genre, or the classically stylised, or operatic genres. The stagecraft of this production showed 'space' was 'devised' to 'shift' in its 'utility' by means of the props which in turn allowed multiple meanings and significances to be read of the 'picture' being created through light, sound and movement.

A facet of the performance that must be noted was the level of agility and adroitness of the young men whose acrobatics on stage that happened from time to time were impressive.

The vigour and dynamism of this element of the performance added 'active ornamentation' to the 'storyline' effectively attracting the viewer's eye and attention.

Bilingualism

A significant facet of the performance which is integral to the work is that it cannot be understood by a viewer who is not conversant in Sinhala and English. Grease Yaka though I assumed it to be an English

medium play, is in fact a Sinhala- English bilingual play which can be, if I may venture to speculate, an emerging sub genre in contemporary Sri Lankan theatre in respect of language medium.

While I do wish to go into an extensive discussion about the academic standpoints as to how bilingual speech can be identified in respect of 'code mixing' and 'code switching', it may serve the layman reader to know that the insertion of an English word here and there, as done nowadays by many TV and radio broadcasters hosting essentially 'Sinhala medium' shows catering to the youth of today, is regarded by some academic standpoint as 'code mixing' and certainly does not demonstrate solid 'bilingual speech'.

The middleclass urbanism of contemporary Sri Lanka is very much characterised by bilingualism. It is a 'linguistic reality' which is yet, to the best of my knowledge to take firm root in the Sri Lankan arts practiced today as fiction, film, and theatre. In this respect one cannot classify 'Grease Yaka' as strictly an English play nor a Sinhala play, but for very practically self evident reasons a 'bilingual play', which may be a bold forerunner of a 'species in the making'.

What is noteworthy is even the title, composed of an English word and a Sinhala word that becomes what is called a 'hybrid word' in the likeness of the word 'egg roti', was presented as 'hybrid writing' in all promotional material and the admission ticket as well. The word Yaka is printed in Sinhala on the admission ticket, which has not a single other word written in Sinhala.

One may wonder if the subtext of the production carries an intention to state how the manifold significances of the word Yaka must be made to stand out and stand alone for its 'Sinhala' identity. And the connotations that will arise, if a proposition of that nature be an intention, then in relation to the context of the play, such statement has implications of significant political proportions.

Perhaps, if one thinks of the ending, where the 'meddlesome foursome' that form the grease yaka group, spot their newest subject for the next wave of fear psychosis is indicative of what kind of 'political critique' the production intends to deliver. I will not venture further along that avenue of discussion due to the sensitivity of the topic and the connected volatilities that have arisen, and, therefore, I feel it is best for viewers to arrive at their own conclusions.

Fear and power

An overarching argument portrayed in the play is that rulers depend on fear as a trump card over the people they rule. Since time immemorial, rulers of all nations found it vital that the people see a need to be protected from some force of violence and looked to the State to answer that need.

What the play argues is that fear psychoses can be manufactured, and once created can be controlled as desired by its creators. The media, the police, politicians and even religious establishments are shown to be the tiers that the public look towards in times of desperation for answers to the fear factor that cripples the normalcy in their daily lives.

A very important facet of the play is how the intense mediatisation of society is depicted as having come to the point where public opinion is manufactured and manipulated by the power holders in society, which includes mass media, which is trusted without question as being 'authoritative' and 'reliable' by the people.

The media purports to get public opinion which reflects the views of the people which are in fact engineered to obtain a particular result.

The prime example of this assertion made in the play was when TV broadcasters barged into the house of the gluttonous family of couch potatoes and barraged them with questions particularly the father who was marginally intelligible in his speech and clearly inept to answer.

The questions showed how the media wanted to enlarge the image of the grease yaka enigma speculating flight capability and even raising rumour that the grease yaka is the spawn of Mohini and Kalu kumaraya, two malefic sprits of Sinhala folklore, which I must say had me roaring with laughter.

But what the broadcasters depict is something very potent in terms of 'cultural criticism' of our times. The TV tells you what to do. It's as simple as that. Be a caller to a live panel discussion on air and speak to the 'experts' on the subject featured on the show on how to escape from the grease yaka.

But what was left undiscovered by the public in that play was that the very figures running the mass media segments were the miscreants who were playing grease yaka on a complacent public.

This play is in one sense about the masks of power. And along the story we see that sometimes the mask is a simple misdirection as a trail of stains of grease and blood; a combination that was emphasised on significantly in the play.

Orchestrations

The way in which widespread paranoia can be created leading to mass hysteria came out engagingly by characters as the fussy mother played very commendably by Dinoo Wickramage, and also the obese overeating woman who must be applauded for her performance.

The height of the fear psychosis over the grease yaka was drilled into the public by the line delivered in Sinhala by one of the broadcasters -"Are you the grease yaka?" This simple line suggests that the grease yaka could be amongst you.

It could be anyone at all!' and thus the public began shrieking in terror. Once public panic reaches its zenith and mass hysteria is unleashed as a result of the foursome of 'grease yakas' it was interesting to note how one of the four troublemakers slapped his slippers together and announced an end to their boisterous fear mongering. The signification is that it was all an act. An act meant to run within a particular timeframe.

Police Constable Jayatissa is a hapless victim in the wake of the grease yaka episode, just like the poor boy Manju. PC Jayatissa is not even fully recognised of his name, the most basic of 'identity markers' of a 'person'.

He is referred to and addressed as Jayaratne, Jayathunga and so on, indicating that he is inconsequential in the larger picture of power play. Interestingly the first part of his name -'Jaya' which means victory in Sinhala seems oxymoronic given his predicament.

Commendable

The phenomenon of the grease yaka is perhaps the first solid case of an 'urban legend' to develop in Sri Lanka. And the fact that Ruwanthie de Chickera focused on doing a creative work to mark it as a phenomenon of our times is commendable.

Perhaps this play will give the 'grease yaka' a lease of life as a possible urban legend which over time may produce an image, a metaphor with significance for interpretations on aspects of human behaviour.

It is important to note that the word Yaka in the Sinhala language does not actually serve as an analogy to the definitions and connotations of the English word 'devil' which finds its original signification in the biblical image of 'the devil' who is 'the fallen angel' Lucifer or Satan.

The word 'demon' on the other hand being associated more with western perceptions of the occult, denotes a malefic, supernatural being that is 'other-worldly'. It may surprise some to know that the word 'yaka' does not denote a patently negative or malefic connotation as one of 'negative value' in the context of Sinhala dialectics.

The yaka can be fearsome and malefic or helpful and benevolent. The word yaka is firstly a colloquially used shortened form of the word yakshaya which finds its origins steeped in history of pre Buddhist times not only in Sri Lanka but in India as well.

In Buddhist Sutras these beings are described as being on par with gods in power and strength. Perhaps the most significant sutra in this regard are the Aatanaatiya where the Buddha converses with the Yaksha King Vessavaana; who being a devout follower of the Buddha, is said to have attained the state of a 'Sotapanna', and thereby on the path to attain Nirvana.

The phraseology found in the Sinhala language of today which have the word yaka are so numerous that it is a topic of academic research all by itself. However, anyone familiar with how the word yaka becomes contextualised in conversation will know that it is an expression which signifies positive attributes at times as well as negative ones.

When someone is capable of accomplishing something in a very short span of time under adverse circumstances that would be above the capability of an average person such a person could be said, in a certain turn of phrase in Sinhala, to be a yaka.

There is an undeniable duality to the attributes denoted by the word 'yaka' where the significations vary depending on the speech context.

An example to this duality's symbolism can be found embodied in the forms of certain Sri Lankan deities such as god Kadawara and god Soonyam to take as examples. They while being titled as deviyo (god) are also titled as yaka when invoked to be wrathful avengers against injustice done to devotees. There is no doubt that the word yaka carries complexity in how its position of values can be adduced in Sinhala culture.

Pandemonium

The grease yaka as it became sensationalised when it first made the news in papers was 'positioned' as a 'peeping Tom' pursuing voyeuristic desires. There was a sexual depravity aspect involved in defining the 'entity'. Later on, theft of women's undergarments and even outright physical assaults on women were reported as developments of the character of the grease yaka.

Finally as paranoia led to pandemonium and people in grease yaka affected areas began hunting for young men likely to be playing the merry devil under coatings of grease; 'blood' came into the picture as panic stricken people took the law into their own hands.

The tragic culminating point of the 'grease yaka' episode was when an armed mob in Puttalam town set upon 29-year-old Police Constable Nawaratna Bandarage and mercilessly hacked him to death, driven by the unsubstantiated allegations that he was a grease yaka.

And as I watched from the very start how Ruwanthie de Chickera's play had a character of a police constable, the incident of the butchering of a policeman in broad daylight by a fanatical mob, struck a chord in me as how the grease yaka phenomenon -modern myth, or fact to be proven beyond doubt, did in fact claim its blood sacrifice.

The foursome who form the band of 'grease yaka' miscreants, to me were symbolic renditions of institutions and phenomena than being actual fixed personae as real people in the context of society. Their purpose to exist seemed to be for the pleasure of perpetuating fear.

Taking delight in causing human fear they are malefic entities who are other worldly and also representative of forces above the control of the average person. The young foursome of actors must be especially commended for the performance they delivered as young thespians, who proved they are actors with much promise for Sri Lankan theatre.

Blood and sex

The trio of characters Shane, Ally and Jagath brought out a facet related to the grease yaka in a very significant way when they unwound in a spa to get a 'blood massage', which was something of a trap to lure in victims.

To me the whole aspect of masochism and sexual derangement associated with the concept of the grease yaka phenomenon came out rather well through that segment.

Why was that trio, led by the acting talents of Miranga Ariyaratne playing Shane, indulging in a massage that involves having blood of the masseuse rubbed on the skin of the client? And what was the result of it?

The play is quite rightly a creative endeavour to capture some facets of the impressions and conceptual image of the enigma, with of course a wide array of creative and free thinking being built into delivering an engaging discourse through theatre.

It deals with a heady subject in heavy doses. An innovative endeavour which contributes much to contemporary Sri Lankan theatre.

GREASE YAKA – PRESS PREVIEWS

1. Daily Mirror, Marissa van Eyck – Friday, 1st August, 2014

<http://life.dailymirror.lk/article/9154/grease-yaka>

‘Grease Yaka’ is a devised play in Sinhala and English, directed by Ruwanthie de Chickera and presented by AnandaDrama in collaboration with Stages Theatre Group.

When – 8th and 9th August

Where – Lionel Wendt

Time – 7.30pm

Tickets – Rs.500 (balcony) to Rs.1500

The play was devised by the students and young alumni of Ananda College along with actors who were a part of a series of workshops held under the guidance of Ms. De Chickera and other artists from Stages Theatre Group. They discussed various issues, themes and stories, the play thus an amalgamation of what absorbed them the most, feeding on what they were most passionate about. ‘Grease Yaka’ employs the eponymous phenomenon as a tool and metaphor – providing insight into the fears of society: how they grow into widespread social phobias, how they affect society psychologically and their consequences. By exploring how opinions and fears are turned into stereotypes, stigmas and violence, the play will hold up a mirror to society and show us how things can be manipulated by those with vested interests who’d like such fears to exist for various reasons.

Ananda Drama is the English theatre group of Ananda College, composed of present and past students with a view to uplifting the standard of English in the school through drama. Their original satirical play ‘Alles in Wonderland’, which won them Drama Comp in 2013, was staged for a public performance in the same year, their first public endeavour. It was followed by a performance of Stuart Paterson’s adaptation of Michael Morpugo’s ‘Kensuke’s Kingdom’ that received critical acclaim for lyricism and skilful acting.

Stages Theatre Group is committed to producing original Sri Lankan plays, and their past productions have proven them to be a group that creates socially conscious plays of high artistic value. Their first 8 years of existence saw them perform nine original plays and one translated one, travel to nine cities overseas, contribute to seven international theatre festivals and two international theatre collaborations. Then followed a quiet hiatus from which they emerged in 2012 and reinvented themselves along a few new lines and a few old ones.

Ruwanthie de Chickera is a renowned Director and Script Writer in Sri Lanka, known for her simple but profound plays and experiments in language, form, character and subject matter. Each of her plays differ in tone and style, depending on what she wants each project to be. They tackle subjects such as psychology, individuals, and individuals in relation to society. Some of her most celebrated works are 'Middle of Silence', 'The Blind Poet', 'Checkpoint' and her script for the movie 'Machang'.

The play was quite brilliantly advertised at performances of one of Stage Theatre Group's other plays held recently, with a blackened grease yaka glaring out at people from behind a glass door in the lobby of Lionel Wendt. The reactions to noticing him fuelled the publicity really, as people were scared of the threatening face that lurked in the shadows. We can expect the actual play to be as ingenious and interesting!