

Four Cases' Persian fable contains modern point

► theatre when • where

THE FOUR CASES. by Bahram Beyza'ie, directed by Soheil Parsa, with Viv Moore, Gordon Mackenzie, Peter Farbridge, J. Brian Macdonald and Randolph Swyer. Presented by Modern Times Stage Company at the Tarragon Extra Space (30 Bridgman). Runs through July 21, Tuesday-Saturday at 8 pm, Sunday at 2:30 pm. \$12-\$14, Sunday p.w.c. 531-1827.

By JON KAPLAN

Age-old Persian theatre infuses life into a contemporary production in *The Four Cases*, a play by Iranian playwright and filmmaker Bahram Beyza'ie.

Testimony to the work's clear insight into current politics and social interaction is the fact that, though based on a 700-year-old Persian fable, the 1964 work has been banned in Iran since it was written.

Four fearful individuals create a scarecrow to shield themselves from a hostile world, but find that their protector turns into their oppressor.

"The strength of the piece is that



The *Four Cases*, adapted by Soheil Parsa (left) and Peter Farbridge, puts the Persian fable of four fearful individuals who create a tyrant into the Canadian contexts of Oka and free trade.

its references aren't specific to any one culture," says artistic director Soheil Parsa. "Though the story is

rooted in Persian culture, its implications are universal. The results, rather than being cornered into any

one belief system, are open to any number of interpretations."

That open quality has allowed Parsa and company member Peter Farbridge to adapt the satiric piece and give it a Canadian context, while retaining the essential thematic and stylistic concerns of the original.

"The original had religious references that wouldn't apply to Canada, but the author's concern for the Americanization of Iran has its parallels in free trade here," says Farbridge, who's also acting in the show. "We've added references to Oka and to leaders giving away various freedoms belonging to the people.

"But for me the clearest parallel is the way we put leaders into power and then are unwilling to accept responsibility for what we've done. A major theme of the play is that it's time to stop blaming others, to take responsibility for our own government and ultimately our own fate."

Simple tale

Presentational style is as important to *The Four Cases* as are its themes. Parsa has retained the simplicity of the original tale as well as its emphasis on movement rather than text.

"The roots of the script are in Persian passion plays and marionette theatre," he notes. "With a simple fable-like tale such as this, we can go off track and spend five minutes exploring on our own. If this were traditional western theatre, we couldn't do that without confusing the audience or straying from narrative or character development.

"A good part of the play, in fact, is non-verbal and non-intellectual. That's typical of Persian folk theatre, which addresses the heart and emotions rather than the head. I've added further non-realistic and non-representational elements to the production."

The resulting stylization, with an emphasis on dance-like and puppet-like movement, has a specific effect on the acting, says Farbridge.

"We can't form our characters on a psychological basis, as we can in most western scripts," says the performer. "Instead, each character has to play a series of subjective roles that result in a collage of different positions that suggest a reality.

"The positions may not be totally unified, but that's true of life as well. We all play different roles for different people.

"That basis in reality extends to the stylized movement. Initially we have to find the truth behind an emotion such as fear or nervousness. When that emotion is physicalized on the stage it may be larger than usual, but it's still rooted in reality."

At the same time, Parsa is clear about not forcing the western-trained actors into a Persian style of performance. In *The Four Cases* as in other Modern Times productions — *The Conquest* and *Genet's The Balcony* — he's attempted a synthesis of western and eastern types of theatre.

"We've sought an equivalent with which the actors are comfortable, one which uses elements of *commedia dell'arte*. The result is something that's both Persian and universal." ●

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