

Review of The Seven Valleys performance at the Black Box Theatre at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada on Oct 23, 1999.

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The Seven Valleys is an inspirational journey

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The Quinn Arts presentation of The Seven Valleys by Mirzā Husayn `Alí (aka the prophet Bahá'u'lláh) was an inspiring journey into the Báha'i Faith. This poetic voyage through the seven mystical stages of the wayfarer's journey was artfully portrayed by the Quinn family.

Each family member brought their own unique personality and talent to the production. Marty Quinn composed the music for the piece and performed heartfelt drum solos during each scene, while his wife Wendy enthralled the audience with her dancing as choreographed by Ben Hatcher. The most amazing talent portrayed in this work was that of the 13-year-old Caitlyn, daughter to Marty and Wendy. Her intense voice and dance lent much inspiration to the tale and unequivocally matched the talent of her parents. Each actor gave a piece of themselves to the show which allowed the audience to gain a real sense of character though each of the valleys.

The basis behind the journey of the wayfarer is something like that of the knights of the Round Table seeking the Holy Grail. It has been said that the wayfarer who travels the seven stages from the "abode of dust to the heavenly homeland" must go through many spiritual trials until he may reach his goal. Mirzā Husayn `Alí refers to the seven stages as the valleys of search, love, knowledge, unity, contentment, wonderment, and true poverty and absolute nothingness. Each valley is portrayed through poetry, song, dance and a silkscreen backdrop representing the successful trial the wayfarer has completed. The quest for God is represented by metaphors of love at each stage. The author uses the famous Persian love story of Majnun and Layli to communicate the emotions and tribulations of the journeyer.

The soft lighting and deep musical tones bring the audience along for the trip. While engrossed in the action on stage one feels deeply for the wayfarer and his cause and experiences a mental journey of their own. Even if you have known nothing about the religion, The Seven Valleys will make you want to learn more.

The whole play transports the audience to Persia without the aid of excessive props. Seven simple double-sided silk screens lent to the imagery of the action performed by the players. On one side of each screen was a symbol of the valley it represented with a piece of Persian calligraphy in the centre. As the play progressed the other side of the screens were revealed displaying scenes from the tales explored at each stage in the journey. The costumes designed by Wendy Quinn remained simple yet effective in their use. Each player wore a robe fashioned in Persian style that was colourful and expressive. There were only subtle costume changes involving slippers for dancing purposes and the transformation of Wendy into a bird for the journey through the Valley of Wonderment. It all tied in very well with the tone of the play.

At the end of the play Marty and Wendy Quinn returned to the stage and discussed the audience's feelings and questions. This gave opportunity to those in the audience that may have been confused about this deep journey into a new religion. This, as well as the connection between the actors, show just how much work had been put into the production. The Quinn family has lived The Seven Valleys and their other current work, The Magic Bird, for the past seven years. Thankful that they finally obtained the completed work by Mirzā Husayn `Alí they were happy to perform The Seven Valley for only the third time in its entirety at the Black Box Theatre here in STU.