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Caitlyn, Wendy and Marty Quinn are not just the actors but also the creators of the show.

A mystical experience

Quinn family brings ageless 'Seven Valleys' to the stage

By Christine Hamm
For the Monitor

Sitting at their kitchen table and drinking tea one rainy afternoon this week, Marty and Wendy Quinn bore little resemblance to the mythical characters in *Odysseus*. Or, for that matter to those in *Hercules*, *Shakespeare*, or the Old Testament. Acting like the ex-computer specialist that he is, Marty printed out program sheets from his PC while Wendy talked about her years in Soho during the 1970's when she was involved in an avant garde dance movement. Now she working on a doctoral thesis in

clinical psychology. This couple seems in no danger of falling off the cusp of the millenium.

But if all goes as planned this Saturday night at the Annicchiarico Theatre in Concord, the Quinn's along with their 13- year old daughter, Caitlyn, will convince audiences that their original stage production, *The Seven Valleys*, is as ageless as the Greek masters, as lyrically resonant as Shakespeare, and as spiritually satisfying as the Bible.

A tall order, perhaps, but one they believe that, thanks to the words of a Persian nobleman, they can live up to. The text for *The Seven Valleys* comes

from Mirza Husayn Ali, known in the Baha'i faith as Baha'u'llah or "Glory of God."

Born in 1817, Husayn Ali lived during a period of serious religious upheaval. Eventually, he was stripped of his wealth and exiled to Iraq where he became known as a wise and holy man. When he was asked to explain his beliefs, he responded by writing *The Seven Valleys*.

In the century and a half since it was written, the text has become well known for its mysticism. It includes famous passages from such other

Persian poets, as Rumi, Hafiz and Faridu'd-Din'Attar's 12th-century Sufi poem, "The Conference of the Birds." It also makes reference to well-known Biblical tales.

Wendy Quinn calls it an allegory not unlike similar Greek legends.

"Like Ulysses and Hercules, it's about someone who has to undergo a series of trials before they can return to their homeland," says Wendy. "Its themes are universal."

In other ways, in the lyric beauty and density of its words, for example, Quinn believes the work can be compared to Shakespeare. And because its parables are laden with spiritual overtones, it also bears some parallels to the Bible.

The valleys themselves - Search, Love, Knowledge, Unity, Contentment, Wonderment - are analogies for the trials that the wayfarer passes through on his way to his goal. Eventually, he arrives in the last valleys, True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness. Here the wanderer is so transformed that he is sanctified from his attachments to the world and ready to live with God.

While the philosophy requires contemplation, the staging does not. Working with a director and choreographer, the Quinns have created a theatrical experience that includes Marty's mellifluous music, and kaleidoscopic sets and costumes which Wendy designed and Vermont artist Ellen Spring constructed.

"To do the show like this, surrounded by colors, music, lights and movement, is transformative," says Marty. "For me, *The Seven Valleys* are a kind of seventh heaven," an artistic heaven that seeps into you. When an actor is in that state, it's bound to be conveyed to

the audience."

In many ways the production seems the culmination of a lifetime of performing experience for Quinn.

Quinn was just ten years old when he made his debut in *life with Father* at the Cleveland Playhouse; in high school when he got the chance to be the percussionist and drummer for the first national touring company of *Godspell*. Later, he did a similar gig with *The Magic Show*. But he is probably best known to audiences for his work with the Do'ah World Music Ensemble. Between 1984 and 1991, Quinn was the pioneering group's percussionist/vocalist. With them, he spent seven years on another kind of odyssey, touring the continental United States, Alaska and India.

In this latest venture, Quinn has collaborated with not only his wife and daughter but also director Bill George and choreographer Ben Hatcher. In addition, to studying mime with the American Mime Theatre in New York and founding tow theatre groups himself, George is the recipient of an Edinburgh, Scotland Fringe Festival Award for new work. Hatcher is a demi-soloist with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens.

"Our goal is to provide audiences with an experience which is captivating, like a meditation," say the Quinns.

Those who have seen parts of the piece performed earlier in New York and Germany tell them they're reaching their goal.

Tickets to The Seven Valleys, which will be performed Saturday at 8 p.m. at the Annicchiarico Theatre, are \$10, \$8 for students, and may be purchased at the door or by calling 659-5239.