



Robin Singh... bowing out with a classic Sanskrit drama.

Robin's final flight

Lorna Charles

DURBAN'S Robin Singh, noted actor, director and senior lecturer in the drama department of the Durban University of Technology (DUT), has put on his final director's hat for the university with the ancient drama *Shakuntala*.

The production, which opened on Sunday and runs until Friday, is nearly 2 000 years old. It is a work by Kalidasa, regarded as Sanskrit, the classical style of Indian theatre.

Singh is happy to end his eight-year career at the university on a high note. He retires from DUT in July.

"The interesting thing about this play is that it was originally done in a very stylised form, where the actors don't use sets but rather the dialogue carries descriptions of all locations and intentions of characters. We have done a trans-creation of the script and adapted it for a contemporary audience," says Singh.

The production has a semi-realistic style with rich and powerful language.

"The story is a dramatic love tale about a king who is hunting with his entourage and sees and falls in love with a beautiful hermit girl. The king woos her, gets her pregnant and promises to receive her as his wife, when she follows him at a later stage."

As good love stories go, Singh says, there is a spanner in the works as the young Shakuntala was lost in her dream of being in love and was not attentive to an ill-tempered hermit.

He is grumpy, old and curses her for ignoring him, saying whoever is stealing her thoughts will not remember her.

When the young Shakuntala finally gets to the palace, she has lost the ring the king had given her and he does not remember her.

"It's a good love story with a heroic king who is not only the romantic hero but a just leader who is also remorseful. It is perfect escapism to a land where good triumphs over adversity," Singh adds.

This production features DUT undergraduate drama students and has costumes by Singh and Vasugi Singh, who is a trained classical Indian dancer. She is also serving as cultural advisor for this production.

The set has been designed by Robin Singh and Debbie Lutge, and lighting design is by Mtandazo Mofokeng, an award-winning technician at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown.

"We at DUT generally do five or six major productions a year, together with approximately 30 student-directed projects. So, in the second half of the year, we can look forward to a Soyinka play (which is currently under consideration)."

Also on the cards are dance dramas by resident, as well as guest, choreographers and a festival of plays for young audiences... "and perhaps one more production, although that isn't confirmed yet. A busy year indeed!"

After retiring, Singh looks forward to pursuing an acting career again. He has acted in a variety of plays (especially Shakespearean) over the years as well as some films and television drama series, and is best known for his role as *Generations* villain Max Naidoo.

● *Shakuntala* is being staged nightly at 7pm at DUT's Courtyard Theatre, Steve Biko Road. Tickets cost R20. Book at 031 373 2194.