

## A tale of two generations

A Hindu *Pandit* (priest) sits on a small blanket, spread out on a lawn in a south Vancouver up-scale neighbourhood. His light, cotton clothing appears well-suited to the weather on this beautiful spring day, and at his side are an assortment of flowers, a clear bowl of water and a tray piled high with oranges, grapes, a pineapple and other fruit. Around him waits a television production crew and cast, along with a handful of other spectators.

He is here to bless the filming of Jon Stoddart Productions' half-hour drama, *A Different Dance*, and as soon as he completes the brief ceremony, the shoot begins.

Stoddart, producer of this first episode of the 13-part Family Pictures anthology series for CBC, says such blessings are common at the beginning of films made in India. "Since the essence of the story is to embrace the similarities of the two cultures [Canadian and Indian]," he explains, "we felt it would be appropriate."

*A Different Dance* is a contemporary generation gap story. Sandy (Sue Mathew), whose parents are from India, has grown up in Canada and wants to do the things other kids in her high school are doing. One of those activities is to take a part in the school's dance-musical "Drugs is Dirty."

The conflict centres around Sandy and her parents (played by Kavi Raz and Vicki G. Dhaliwal), who worry she might get into trouble. But the main tension is one between parents and teenagers, not so much the problem of reconciling two cultures.

"Sandy is a Canadian girl in high school," says director Harvey Crossland. "That's a Canadian experience." Crossland collaborated on the

script with Jiten Varma, a New Delhi filmmaker. Varma's participation in the project, here on location and in the writing, is vital to its integrity, Crossland claims.

And telling this particular story in the context of an anthology series as opposed to an episodic situation – that is, in one half-hour (actually about 23.5 minutes) – when the audience knows nothing about the characters beforehand, is especially challenging. It demands tight pacing and constant focus. "Every small bit counts," says Varma, "and anything we might lose or miss could be important."

Backing for the \$300,000 project came from Telefilm, B. C. Film, the Secretary of State for Multiculturalism, and from CBC (whose support consists of a licensing fee as well as some services and facilities).

On hand for the ceremony and the start of shooting are Brian O'Leary, head of CBC's regional drama production, and Jana Veverka, the series' story editor. Both are pleased with how the 13-week drama series is developing. "We've had a tremendous response," Veverka says, "over 300 proposals. Obviously there is a need for this type of programming, and there are a lot of good writers and producers in this country." O'Leary says the series was cut to 13 weeks from the originally-planned 26 because of the available network time slots. But he hopes this figure will expand.

Two days later the cast and crew have moved indoors to shoot the scenes in the house. Various people are in the livingroom, waiting – which is, one of the crew members points out, a major part of film and television production.

Quiet is called for and action begins upstairs. The moment of calm in the house is suddenly cut through by the argument being filmed.

Sandy's father has gone to the school to pick her up, and has there discovered her in rehearsal for the play and dressed in dance leotard. He is outraged. Back at home he loses control and begins to shout at his wife and daughter. He tells

Sandy, "You'll not get out of the home. No more school. And I'll get you married as soon as possible." It's not so unusual a situation – the parents think they know what's best for their child; the child feels misunderstood. One of the women on the crew (incidentally, not East Indian) says, "He sounds just like my father."

As the scene is shot and re-shot (and re-shot), the feeling is like visiting some friends' home and hearing them set into a loud and intense family fight. Almost as if you shouldn't be there but can't make a graceful exit.

When the final take is done and the actors come down to the kitchen, even they are visibly affected by the emotion in the previous scene.

But the real feeling on this location is one of enthusiasm. Even though the shooting schedule was cut from six days to five, and the shoots are running from midday until sunup, spirits are high. It's obvious these people are working hard and enjoying themselves. Maybe some element of the opening ceremony is carrying through production.

If the degree of co-operation (between the independents here and the CBC personnel) and the fervor of cast and crew translates into what gets seen on the television screen, this project should produce a wonderful half-hour. *A Different Dance* airs in January; watch for it. Calvin Wharton •

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Friendship is a blessing for Francine (Debbie Podowski) and Sandy (Sue Mathew) in *A Different Dance*