

Charity case

>> Theatre and social work mingle in Altera Vitae's first production, 'night Mother

by NEIL BOYCE

Carolyn-Fe Trinidad's day job is a place with a lot of "artistes manqué," apparently. Among her clients over the years, Trinidad has found a musical collaborator for her band, sponsors for her theatre company, and even a husband (who's also a photographer).

Trinidad sprang onto the Montreal arts scene as a ballet dancer in the '70s, but soon found that a girl from the Philippines wasn't anybody's idea of what a ballerina should look like. Disillusioned and bitter, Trinidad dropped out of dancing and immersed herself in the corporate world, where, for the past 20 years, she's found a niche as a headhunter for jobs in high-tech and science industries.

You can't keep a good woman down, though. In 2004, Trinidad returned to performance with the jazz-blues outfit DD Swank. She later caught the acting bug

when her kid sister convinced her to try out for a play with local company Teesri Duniya. The result, *Miss Orient(ed)*, was a hit, and Trinidad hasn't stopped since. She got great buzz playing Mae West at the Montreal Fringe, and was a delight as the offbeat servant in MainLine's recent *Hedda Gabbler*.



Last June, Trinidad put her considerable energies into founding a theatre company called Altera Vitae (it translates as "Another Life"). It starts with an innovative angle: each new production will join with a charitable

organization whose mandate is similar to themes in the play. The theatre will make a donation from production profits and assist the organization in its public awareness campaign.

Their first production, linked with the charity Family Survivors of Suicide, is Marsha Norman's Pulitzer-winning stunner *'night, Mother*. Jesse Corbeil directs the compelling story, a dialogue between a mother and her suicidal daughter over the course of a fateful evening.

Norman's 1983 play, which in this production highlights the tragedy of someone unable to listen to a person in crisis, has special significance for Trinidad. Years ago, at a point in her life when she herself was suicidal, a conversation with a passing acquaintance convinced Trinidad to keep on going, and to promise herself that she'd "pay it forward" someday.

"What I want," she says, "is a theatre company that is colour-blind and age-blind. A company where every show we do, we link ourselves into the community and donate something back."

Trinidad's found a balance between two distinct careers—getting coverage in both the business and arts sections of the newspaper. She says her corporate background made starting Altera Vitae a breeze: "For me, it was just logistics, a business proposal. I'm sorry... this 'poor artist' shit? I don't believe in it. If you really want it, you're going to work hard for it, get the money somehow and produce it.

"I don't want to be one of those people waking up saying I could've, should've done that. At this point, I'm happy. I'm doing it. And on my last day on Earth, I'll just close my eyes with a smile. That's how I want it."

**'night, Mother until March 30
at MainLine Theatre (3997
St-Laurent) (514) 823-8823, or
tickets@alteravitae.com
\$10 of every ticket sold
for March 25 will be donated to
Family Survivors of Suicide,
www.suicideaftermath.com**

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