



Called to the barre: Thomas Fonua.

young man running away. He stops, looks back and slowly swipes his nose with his finger." Jeremia demonstrates with great gusto. "They all turn around and chase him. It is hilarious."

"We forget as we move away from that part of our lives, but it is so real for them," Jeremia says. "You are instantly transported back 20-30 years. You can smell it all again, see it again."

A demonstration in the studio shows rugby deconstructed, frame by frame – bodies arching away from each other, combustive crunches, harnessed aggression, someone going down, everyone turning slowly towards each other.

Jeremia's soft-spoken voice barely reaches over the insistent clapping that keeps the young dancers in time. But when he talks to them about his experience with life's hard lessons, they are quiet.

"With Neil, when he teaches, everyone shuts up and listens," says Jahra Wasasala, 17. "He has taught us to learn about ourselves more and about other people. No matter what career we do after this, he has taught us that before we get there, we don't have to learn the hard way. It's really amazing to learn that kind of stuff."

Fonua says he's impressed, too, with the advice and encouragement Jeremia gives them. "He says everyone has their bad days and makes mistakes. He said one of his cousins says it is not how you fall, it's how you get up. This is important for us – if we make mistakes and it affects everyone else, we take responsibility for it."

Jeremia says: "I say to them, 'It's a two-way street. Don't come here and expect me to kick your backside around the room; you come here and you work as hard as you said you would when you auditioned.'"

And is it hard? Fonua, who plays rugby for Onehunga High School: "I think this is way harder than rugby. After our first rehearsals, I could hardly walk. Even just walking up those stairs is a mission," he says, grinning. They all laugh. ■
YOU BETTER RUN BOY!, Black Grace/
UrbanYOUTHmovement, Herald Theatre,
Auckland, September 8-12.

Theatre

BY FRANCES EDMOND

*Khoj -
The Search*



Squatters' rites

A comedy about the immigrant experience inspired by Rohinton Mistry and stories of Auckland's Indians.

Sitting in a theatre in Auckland among a predominantly Indian audience watching an Indian play in English is not a common experience. *Khoj - The Search* is inspired by and a tribute to Canadian-based expat Indian (more correctly Parsi) writer Rohinton Mistry, whose stories of the immigrant experience captured the imagination of the Prayas theatre group. Anecdotes and experiences researched among Auckland's immigrant community are woven around a central theme of cultural disorientation, humorously exemplified by the toilet habits of Jamshed "sit or squat" Balsara (Rahul Gandhi).

Leaving behind in Mumbai poverty those who love him – his devoted mother, Mehroo (Rashmi Pilapitiya), and irascible father, Homi (Bhavesh Soni) – Jamshed arrives in Auckland to "make it big" among the "gadgets and flashy motorcars". He finds a job, friends, even the possibility of love, but not peace of mind. His inability to adapt his toilet habits leads him into a multitude of complications at work, in his flat, in his relationships and with himself. The play tracks his journey through being fired, subsequent legal redress, therapy as he seeks to adjust to life in New Zealand and become a "Kiwi":

"Think like a Kiwi! Behave like a Kiwi! Be a Kiwi!" If only it were that simple.

Using gentle comedy and an often charming authenticity, *Khoj - The Search* tackles the complex issues around belonging, touching on racism, identity, how one finds a place to stand in a strange and inhospitable world. However, despite its engaging spirit, its episodic structure lets it down. The numerous scene changes are cumbersome and interrupt the action, leading to a lack of both tension and momentum, and a feeling that it is overly long and more a collection of vignettes than an integrated play. The use of the fable of the crow who tries to become a peacock by putting on peacock feathers is a strong underpinning metaphor for Jamshed's problems, but it sits uneasily alongside the other more absurd one of his toilet habits, which wears rather thin as the play progresses. Perhaps one metaphor would have sufficed or a better integration of the two ideas.

But there are many delightful moments. Gandhi is an engaging and persuasive Jamshed, and the scenes in Mumbai between his mother and father are genuinely convincing and excellently played. Despite some rawness and structural shapelessness on the journey, the audience clearly identified with the play, and the final moment – the dedication – is both heartfelt and moving as the sounds of John Lennon singing *Imagine* fill the auditorium. ■

KHOJ - THE SEARCH, by Amit Ohdedar, Sananda Chatterjee, Poorna Prakash, directed by Amit Ohdedar, Prayas at TAPAC, Auckland, August 27-30.