



# Where the Wild Things Are

Dipanita Nath , Dipanita Nath : Sat Jun 09 2012, 02:14 hrs



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The lines between children's plays and those for adults are firmly drawn — the former are sweet and light, packed with messages and morals, while violence and darkness are restricted to the adult world. But an ongoing production by the third-year students of the National School of Drama (NSD), *Tenderness*, challenges the notions of innocent childhood by confronting the pre-teen and teen years as an area of sexual confusion, aggression and even murder.

*Tenderness*, an hour-and-a-half-long play, is adapted from two stories — Christos Tsiolkas' *Ugly*, about a boy called Slim who kills a cabbie because "he is ugly", and Patricia Cornelius' *Slut*, about Lolita who respects no sexual bounds and is, consequently, the subject of gossip among her peers. "There's something wild about Lolita," says the chorus, with the universal pleasure of a person who knows a "BAD GIRL".

Slim is a misfit of a different sort — he drops out of school, gets into fights and is rejected by his girlfriend, Silk. Silk, who smokes on the sly, is afraid of her father and would never break the rules of the house. "Silk and Lolita are on two sides of the spectrum, and Silk was what Lolita could have been," explains director Amitesh Grover.

The chorus, who relates the story of Lolita, also have stories of their own to tell. One of these is their first experience of sexual touch. The boys talk about roving hands across their bodies, and the first puzzled questions of "This is being liked, is it?" and a girl talks about how her uncle tried to grope her. "Awareness of physical relationships begins even before puberty sets in. It's an ambiguous area for most pre-teens and they have to negotiate this space themselves," explains Grover.

The two stories, *Slut* and *Ugly*, proceed in disjointed, even jerky, lines and the director has made no attempt to soften the edges. The set itself is a skatepark — its sharp, undulating surfaces designed as obstacle courses to challenge teenage hormones. Significantly, no adult character enters the storyline and the teens are both unguarded and unguided. "Without the presence of adults, how does a teenager negotiate the notions of gender, love, hatred and physical urges with

morality and ethics?" says Grover. On this answer depends what kind of adults the teens grow up to become.

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The grim storyline would have needed more astute actors but the students of NSD have the advantage of looking the part, as they were teenagers a few years ago.

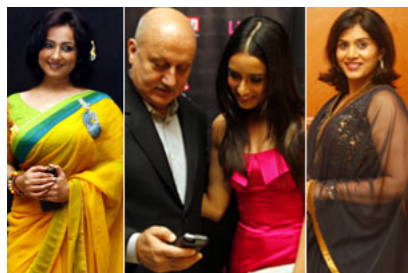
*Tenderness will be staged at the National School of Drama till June 10. Contact: 23382821*

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