



## Speaking in Tongues

Playwright: John Logan

Director: Sandhano Schultze

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### **Awards:**

Jessie Richardson award nomination:

Outstanding Lighting Design - Del Surjik

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### ***a review from our archives...***

WHO KILLED PIER PAOLO PASOLINI?

Play revives mystery, but can't connect us to enigmatic auteur

THEATRE

*Speaking in Tongues*

By John Logan. A Pink Ink Theatre production.

At the Vancouver Little Theatre until April 20

BY JO LEDINGHAM

On November 3, 1975, the almost unrecognizable body of Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini was discovered in an empty soccer field amidst wild grass and broken pavement. His brutal murder came only days after the release of *Salò* (based on de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*), a film containing scenes of explicit sadism and degradation that shocked even his most ardent supporters.

A complex and uncompromising artist, Pasolini raged in print and on film against fascism until he was finally silenced that November night. Mystery surrounds his death, despite the confession and conviction of an under-age male prostitute who claimed to have beaten Pasolini to death in a sexual encounter that went sour. The severity of the bludgeoning and the peculiar lack of injury to the attacker suggested that there was more than one assailant. Rumours at the time hinted at a conspiracy.

Stylistically, *Speaking in Tongues* resembles film-making, with many takes and retakes. Events are not chronological but continue to double back, with each repetition revealing more detail, more possibilities. Interviews with Pasolini's friends and colleagues are caught in the flickering white light of the film projector, and as a backdrop to the dramatic action huge reproductions of the 16th

century Italian painter Caravaggio's works slide into place. While the connection between Pasolini and Caravaggio is tenuous – both were homosexual and both were mysteriously and savagely beaten to death – the glowing paintings, with their sharply contrasting areas of light and shadow, add a visual element that is stunning. This production is Pink Ink's handsomest to date.

However, despite imaginative staging and some good performances, *Speaking in Tongues* is strangely unsatisfying and un-moving. There is a good deal of talk about art, politics, and responsibility – some of it quite interesting – but the main difficulty arises from this production's lack of success in balancing Pasolini's self-indulgence, pretentiousness, and increasing sexual needs with his uncompromising artistic and political agenda.

It is possible that the cinematic techniques of Logan's script make it difficult to connect with Pasolini; the playing and re-playing of his murder, for example, may serve to desensitize us. Logan's script portrays a man haunted by the past and caught in the political crossfire of the left and right. Director Sandhano Schultze and actor Russell J. Roberts battle bravely to overcome Pasolini's outrageous excesses to reveal an artist worthy of immortality, but there is little here to commend him except for the panache and courage with which he fought off his attacker, bloody-fisted, before bowing to the inevitable. Dying, the film-maker compares himself to Orpheus, whose severed head continues to sing throughout eternity.

Unfortunately, in this production, it is for the playwright alone that Pier Paolo Pasolini continues to sing.

**Cast:**

Pasolini: Russell J. Robert

Sub-Minister: Thomas Hunt

Nino / Priest: Brian Young

Lecturer / Vito: Marek Czuma

Film Student: Cindy Block

Mother / Agent: Sarah Hayward

Hustler: Todd Dulmage

Assistant Production Manager: Jill Moran

Stage Manager: Joel Johnson

Set Designer: Susan Madsen

Lighting Designer: Del Surjik

Technical Director: Bill Hurr

Costume Designer: Lana Krause

Sound Designer: Lowell Morris

Photographer: Stephen Mitchell

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