

plays. All the same, an entertaining evening, and an encouraging sign for amateur theater in Hyderabad that DCH has tapped new talent along with utilising the tried-and-tested ones.

BANGALORE

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Barefoot in the Park

Once again a theatre group has a splinter group forming. Among those like The Playhouse Guild breaking away from Theatre Arts, Bangalore now has The Bard, a slice from The Bangalore Theatre Guild. One hopes that it will not have the fate of the earlier ones and pack up after a couple of productions. For one thing the entire group consists of youngsters, in their early to mid twenties—the youngest of all being the director himself.

Choosing *Barefoot in the Park*, was a wise decision, considering comedies always go down well, especially those by Neil Simon—an established success. Those who had seen the film version, wished to see how the stage version—the local stage presentation, would measure up. They were not to be disappointed.

All action takes place in a tiny top floor apartment in a brownstone on East 48 Street, New York City. It concerns a newly married couple, Paul (a law graduate, about to begin his career) and Corrie Bratter the daughter of a well-to-do widow trying to set up house, on Paul's limited means, after an ecstatic six day honeymoon, at the Plaza.

Their 58 year old neighbour, in the attic above, is a gourmet cum skier cum mountain climber cum blue beard of 48th street, Corrie decides that he, Mr Victor Velasco, is the right person to "put make-up on her (mother—Ethel Banks) personality". So, she calls her mother up in West Orange, New Jersey,

and invites her for dinner (saying Paul's parents were invited as well) on a blind date with Velasco. The play continues on from there—with knichi (salted eel) hors d'oeuvres and poopla po pee . . .

Marital skirmishes between the couple keep the dialogues shuttling uproariously. Corrie's grouse about Paul is that "You're a watcher. There are watchers in this world and there are doers. And the watchers sit around watching the doers do. Well, tonight you watched and I did." She is annoyed that he is so proper and dignified. Even when he was drunk, he just sat there looking unhappy and not behaving like a drunk. "You're always dressed right, you always look right, you always say the right thing, you're very close to being perfect," Paul (hurt to the quick) "That's a rotten thing to say."

In a bid to prove himself not being a "stuffed shirt", Paul gets himself "lousy, stinking drunk," and of course, walks barefoot in the park.

Dilshad (Corrie) Thacker's dainty perkiness was well practised to the last punctuation mark. "Oh and your mother called from Philly . . . She and Dad will be up a week from Sunday. . . . And your sister has a new boyfriend from Rutgers. . . . He's got acne and they all hate him—including your sister." Both the women's outfits were appropriate. Krishna (Paul) Bhargava's costive one-liners and fuddy-duddy manner scored, Shernaz (Ethel) Thacker's coquetry played off against Neil (Velasco) Coelho's elderly brashness, Ajit Bhide as the telephone man had exaggerated facial movements.

Movement in the play directed by Krishna Bhargava, was like a guilloche pattern. A bit of the cavorting, (like when Velasco first meets Mrs Banks) moved into melodrama. The amber blow-up transparent Parisienne pouffe raised giggles, whenever anyone sat

on it, since the lights showed through and the person's outline was clear. Music between scenes was catchy; the lighting functional.

Tuglaq

For that I know I have to admit that I am wrong, But I am not wrong.—Tuglaq (according to Karnad).

I employ punishment and use the sword, so that a cure may be affected by suffering. The more the people resist the more I inflict chastisement.—Tuglaq (according to Barni).

Muhammed bin Tuglaq was learned. He knew philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, politics, poetry, and calligraphy. Yet, he was a misfit. He lived, thought of and did things that were centuries before his time, like abolishing sati and having a dual currency system. This experiment in token or copper coins in 1330 drained the treasury, churning thriving counterfeit industries; gaining the people's contempt; ere it was to gain him the name 'Prince of Moneyeres', given by numismatist E. Thomas, centuries later.

Councillors could not advise him, because he never sought their advice; making all decisions in solitary, stubborn pride. As a statesman, far removed from the populi, he was unable to adapt his policy to their sentiments, and vice versa.

A mixture of opposites, he was at times a magnanimous king, building hospitals, and giving free medicines. At other times, he was a bloodthirsty tyrant. His charriness of subversive elements made him keep the encounters with his closest men *sub rosa*. Karnad's lines point this out clearly. To a subject's statement, "I am God's most humble slave", Tuglaq replies: "And slaves are known to replace their masters." "Take heed Sultan, these verbal distinctions will rent us apart." The whimsical behavior of this idealist,

who believed in justice and a pantocracy, made his friends hate him more than his enemies. For in his anger, he would wreak his wrath on offenders, unable to keep pace with his imagination. His retributive measures would give Marquis de Sade third degree competition.

Karnad's play is a long drawn-out version of history, while bringing the king closer to posterity, through drama. Since there is much conversation, little action and the minimum of suspense, (for the historical background is common knowledge), it makes serious reading and analysis. Alternatively, all this plus the lack of romance and attractive, or rather distractive women, to alleviate the heavy male scene, makes it drag. Of course, there are some good lines. Like the time Azam (Stany Thekaekara), a *luffang* says, "It's too complicated for me"; his pal Aziz (Jayarajan) replies, "No, it's too subtle."

BLT staged this on the 19, 20 and 21 of June. Why is it that when they were selling the balcony tickets for Rs. 2/-, a real bargain rate, they did not advertise it? Another laudable thing they did was to present each party entering the auditorium with a triple folded sheet, giving information about the production, free of charge; instead of the usual expensive brochures.

As director, C.R. Simha had used geometric perspectives to construct the action diagrams; straight lines, triangles, parallel lines and obliques; the positioning of actors was a study in matrices. He had unearthed an entire cast of new faces. For this he should be given a pat on the back. Rarely do established actors or directors bother to give the lesser, untried talent a try-out in big roles, and in a major production.

Simha played out Tuglaq—from the start, dressed a la Henry VIII—to the crazy end. He provided insight into



Tuglaq, "My skin drips with blood, and I don't know how much of it is mine and how much of it is others." Never forgets for a moment that he is on stage. Playing out his fantasy, culled from private ruminations. Grandiose declamations and gestures planned, in devoted isolation. He throws witty lines with a knowledgeable pause. For instance, "I can't afford to cr-a-a-wl. (pause). I have to (pause) gallop!"

He dealt in expressions not feelings. At the battlement the hushed music and his hushed voice engendered a hushed audience; "Will my reign be no more than a tortured scream, stabbing the darkness, to melt away in the silence?" His ocular performance needed to be backed with all the visual trappings of a dictator's environment.

In keeping with the paterfamilias image, he was at a level far beyond the rest. It stands to reason that the rest was many, many notches below him. In spite of unwavering obedience to the chief, the production was moving at split-levels: Simha, as Tuglaq—and the others.

They spoke to each other, rather than to the audience. Their soft voices and local accents (which the elitist Bangalorean disqualifies as acting) were less audible with the fans on. The use of repetitive hand raising gestures was like high school players. Bhagirathi's (step-mother) toffee voice was lost, as she kept her face turned upstage and covered her downstage side with an apple green chiffon *duppata*.

Shahid Siddiqui (Shihabuddin) can show tension, veiled shock and awkwardness. He can also hold a pose. Every second on stage is used to match gesture, expression and voice towards building up the role. Did he need to keep his chin stuck to his chest?

Jayarajan and Thekakaera made a good pair of crafty and clot. Jayarajan was uninhibited, gave lines the right inflection but still was *kachha*. (Ratan

Singh) Shiv Kumar was lost in those ballooning churidars. He builds tension using a muted voice. Asghar was a real cruel-looking amir—with his aggressive hand on his knee, finger flutter dismissal and contemptuous expression. Sunil Sadanand (Ghiasuddin Abbasid) came across as a shaking girl, fine bones and thin ankles, swathed in white—instead of as a fearless saint. The drummerboy (Tilak Kumar) announced, but hardly drummed. With only a few men on stage at a time, and no sets to play-up the atmosphere, the production had no boom. A period play without period sets just does not strike as true. The panoply expected for such a legendary figure, wasn't there. The huge Kalakshetra stage was hardly used. A black curtain cut it quarter way. The bare stage had a few split level coral colored platforms. Triple black arches upstage disappeared after the interval. So, even that wasn't there when audience impatience set in.

If sets are minimum, then the lighting should be played up, to create the atmosphere. Focus for isolated characters. A snout for soliloquies. There was too much of light. The apron, not being in use, should have been blacked out. Beside, the coordination was not there. The lights came on and went off, too soon or too slow. Maybe more of that entrancing music (Rajkumar) would have filled in the gaps.

Karnad believes that it is not where a man begins which is important; but where he ends. In Tuglaq's case, it is his madness, his weltschmerz.

PATNA

MAHESH SINHA

Kala Sangam's third Drama Festival

Kala Sangam provided a sumptuous feast for the theatre lovers of Patna with three rather difficult plays. Prem-

chand's immortal *Godan*, Sharad Joshi's satire *Ek Tha Gadha* and finally Vijay Tendulkar's *Khamosh Adalat Jari Hai* were presented in a deft, accurate and breath-takingly realistic style.

The first phase of the Drama festival had an auspicious start in Premchand's *Godan*. Hori, the central figure of the novel is perhaps none other than Premchand himself. He is forced to become a landless labourer and ultimately gets *Godan* through the hard earned Twenty annas of his brave wife Dhanu. Satish Anand has understood Hori to the core. The psychoanalysis of the character and the sufferings of the kisan have been brought out in bold strokes, in the huts, the hanging earthenwares, the heap of straw and the limping figure of poor Hori himself. Maya Sinha as Dhanu was convincing. Suman Kumar was impressive as Gobar. Basant Kumar as Pateshwari and Thakur Aunkar as Datadin were well fitted. Ashok Pandey and Kanhiya provided good support as Nokheram and Shobha.

Satish Anand presented a genuine picture of a typical north Indian village—huts, dresses, mannerisms, speech rhythm—all were woven together artistically to evoke a realistic mood. He made good use of the crowd, very much in the tradition of the Greek chorus but adapted to the Indian context.

Ek Tha Gadha is a story of today. The political satire is searing. The dictator Nawab, in a bid to impose his puffed-up generosity on the people decides to offer himself as a pall-bearer of the coffin of one Alladad Khan, little knowing that the supposed dead Alladad is none other than Juggan Dhoobi's ass. The mass media of the dictator publicizes this so-called greatness of the Nawab. The Nawab is taken aback, but determined to put up the show. The administration should see that the ass is converted into a human being and the poor but law-abiding Alladad Khan is brutally

murdered for this purpose.

Satish Anand as Nawab was superb; with meaningless fast dialogues, idiotic behavior, lopping movements and drooping countenance he was truly a spoiled and unscrupulous dictator. Suman Kumar as the Kotwal also proved good particularly when crest-fallen with the idea of the Nawab's wrath. Ajay Kumar as Juggan and Reeta as Ramkali, the concubine of the Kotwal were equally good. The thinkers, courtiers and citizens and the radio comentator provided good flesh to the entire structure. Ashok Pandey as Alladad Khan and U.N. Pathak as Devilal Panwala were impressive in their roles. Chorus led by Neelash was lively.

Khamosh Adalat Jari Hai was a well-versed and polished production, which Satish has presented more than once in Patna in the past.

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