

The Theatre Fest: Edition 4

The fourth edition of the MetroPlus Theatre Fest features an eclectic mix of plays. SHONALI MUTHALALY on the extravaganza that begins on August 1



VARIED FARE eclip from Love Letters, Creeper

Some things change. Some things remain the same. Back in Chennai for the fourth consecutive year, the MetroPlus Theatre Fest is a mix of the familiar and the novel. Of course, there is the eclectic list of plays that Chennai has witnessed in previous years, from India and abroad. A string of productions — several in all — that promise to engage and entertain theatre addicts from the city and elsewhere. But the fourth edition of the Fest, like every other one before it, has plenty that is new. To begin with, we showcase an interesting intercultural experiment — performed by Project InDuACT, an Indo-German initiative with a Director from Berlin and cast drawn almost entirely from Chennai. Supported by the Goethe Institut, 'Electronic City' is a parable of the times, about a world dominated by technology and controlled by stocks. Directed by Johannes von Metzowich, Falk Richter's play, which has a hard experimental edge, is a result of a two-month effort of workshopping and rehearsing in Chennai.

Symposium

This year, we also host a symposium titled 'English Theatre in India: Challenge and Opportunity', held at the theatre venue, the Sri Matha Venkatasubba Rao Concert Hall, on August 6 at 6 p.m., the symposium is chaired/moderated by Bangalore-based writer and director Anshu Seltia. The speakers at the event are a mix of playwrights, directors and actors from around the country: Arun Mahesh Dattani, Poile Sengupta, Keval Anand, Shernaz Patel, P.C. Ramakrishna and Satina Jolly.



A Midsummer Night's Dream

On August 5, Even, our event manager, will run a workshop on how to start your own theatre group. For those who arrive early at the venue, there are a host of allied activities including bands playing everything from slow rock to world music. Also planned in association with DolohosChitra is a class on pottery and workshops on stone carving and glass blowing. We also have a short reading from 'Hastinapur High Street' which won the MetroPlus Playwright Award 2008. Participating in this will be the playwright, Abhishek Majumdar. More details about these activities in the coming days.

Two foreign plays

The line-up this year includes two foreign plays. There's the award-winning 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' by the Yohangae Theatre Company. An unusual adaptation of Shakespeare's well-loved play, this Korean version with subtitles follows an original and rather poetic script, incorporating themes from Korean culture and folklore. The play, which the Sixtymen called "wonderfully wicked, clever and magical" is currently on a world tour, and is being presented by the Indo Centre and the Korea Foundation, in association with AaleNow Productions. The other foreign play is equally unusual, 'The Whale', by Concrete Temple Theatre, New York, is told by one man, accomplished dancer Carlo Adorni. He uses his body, voice and an extraordinary collection of props to recreate the story of Moby Dick, featuring life on the ship and the great whale itself. Staged at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and in various places in the U.S., 'The Whale' is brought to Chennai, with the support of the United States Consulate General. Commenting its "laughter of humor" and "artistry", the Daily Mail's critic said it "deserves to be seen."



Electronic City, The Whale

A husband comes home to find his wife in bed with another man. So he punishes her by making her keep her lover's suit, and treat it like an honoured guest in their home. Till, it breaks her. The stunningly simple, yet haunting, story of 'The Suit', is shaped by one of the country's finest directors, Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry and staged by The Company (from Chandigarh). 'The Suit', which showed at the National School of Drama Festival earlier this year, is possibly one of the most intense and dramatic English plays produced in India recently. The ever-popular play 'Love Letters' is here this time, by Rago from Mumbai, starring two extremely well-known names — Shernaz Patel and Raji Kapoor. A sure winner with audiences, the play, which opened in 1993, has completed 250 performances, making it possibly India's longest running English Play. Q Theatre Productions from Mumbai, which performed at the festival before with 'Beyond Therapy' is back this year with another comedy, 'The President is Coming'. This fast-paced, satirical comedy, which guarantees many laughs, explores a reality-TV style situation where six candidates desperately vie with one another for a chance to meet the U.S. President.

Poignant play

And last but by no means the least, is 'Creeper'. Funny and poignant, the play is written and directed by the talented, young, Bengali-based film director Kamalini and presented by the Actor's Ensemble India Forum in Bangalore. With an innovative new script and five talented actors, the play effectively moves what is based on a folk tale to a contemporary urban setting, creating an atmosphere that is at once bizarre, funny and endearing.



The Suit and The President is coming.

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At a glance

August 1

A Midsummer Night's Dream

August 2

Love Letters

August 3

Electronic City

August 7

The Whale

August 8

The President is Coming

August 8

Creeper

August 10

The Suit

All plays start at 7.30 p.m.

At Sri Matha Venkatesa Subba Rao Concert Hall, Harrington Road