



DAY'S DIARY

First female Prez

On this day in 1988, incumbent Vigdís Finnbogadóttir won over a female candidate in Iceland's presidential election for a 3rd four-year term

ELECTION WINS

Vigdís served for 16 years, making her the longest-serving elected female head of state to date. In 1984 and 1992, she ran uncontested. In 1988, she won with 94.6% of the vote



INSPIRATIONAL

She became the world's first woman President. Icelandic females grew up with her as a role model, encouraging to be involved in the country's politics



ONE OF A

Leading the currently the gender equality participation



Clowning around to Korean creativity

Giving an opportunity for city's children to witness world-class theatre in the form of a musical, and a non-verbal play, The Little Theatre is back with the 13th edition of The Little Festival

convey emotions with dialogues. But in a clown play, the maximum, even if you crunch the entire script of this play, is just about two pages. Conveying emotions without using dialogue is the toughest part."

On the other hand, *A Tree and a Boy* blooms in the backdrop of Korean aesthetics, weaving a tale where the lives of a tree and a boy intertwine across the seasons—from the awakening of spring through the stillness of winter and back to the rebirth of spring. Rathi Jafer, director, Inko Centre Chennai, says, "It unfolds themes of nature, portraying birth, growth, decay, death, and renewal. It underlines the relationship between man and nature and is done in a very visual way. We hope it will be something interesting for Chennaiites to watch."

Need for support

Emphasising that one of the important factors of human civilisation was the knowledge transfer that happened between different cultures and looking into the theatre with a more welcoming attitude is much necessary, KK says, "Artists are putting their hearts and souls into creating something incredible. People want a cultural influence but aren't willing to pay for it. It is high time we support our local artists."

Concurring, Aysa says, "For 12 years, I maintained the price of the tickets at ₹200. Since November last year, we increased it to ₹400 for schools because it's impossible to put the whole festival together at such a low cost. Everything has gone up in price, be it the renovation of the Museum Theatre, or light and sound arrangements. Schools like Chennai Public School, Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan, Abacus Montessori School, Hindustan International School, Bhavan's Rajaji Vidyalayam, and Prasanna Vidyamandir have welcomed us. I hope more schools understand the need for children to watch good theatre."

Inviting all the schools to support them in their vision of bringing class acts to our children, Aysa says, "We don't know if we will be able to bring out a show next year if we do not receive support from more schools this time."

The Little Festival will be held from July 5-10 at The Museum Theatre, Egmore. Donor passes: ₹400. To book, visit: <https://thelittletheatre.explara.com/events>. For bulk bookings schools can contact: 9840044983

DIYA MARIA GEORGE

HANGING on the brink of a frying pan is the fate of the world. A peculiar group of cooks now have to bring in a miraculous recipe to stave off the looming apocalypse. Their journey spans beyond the conventional realms, venturing into mystical worlds and alternate dimensions where otherworldly ingredients await discovery. With each step, they face the relentless tick of the clock, racing against time itself. Amid the chaos of stirring cauldrons and bubbling concoctions, a question lingers: can this team of cooks come up with the recipe?

The stage is set, and the ovens are fired up. The Little Theatre, Chennai urges us to step inside and witness this uproarious spectacle unfold as they present the one hour and 15 minutes-long musical *The Kooks: Sunny Side Up* at The Little Festival. The play is for children above five years of age and adults. The theatre also presents a non-verbal Korean production, *A Tree and a Boy* by the Befu company, South Korea. This 50-minute long play is for ages four years and above.

The festival was started in 2010 and this year marks its 13th edition with a pause during the two years of the pandemic. After more than a decade of conducting the festival and bringing world-class theatre production to Chennai, Aysa Rau, founder and managing trustee of The Little



Theatre, reflects on the aim of the festival. She says, "Not every child can fly out and see theatre shows in other countries when they want to. So we wanted to conduct a festival where children can understand different cultures through theatre. Regardless of where the ar-

tists or the stories come from, ultimately theatre speaks the same language. Our Children need to be given a chance to see quality theatre productions and appreciate that. It will also make them understand each other despite their differences. In a larger sense, we aim to

bring peace. There are already a lot of wars and violence, be it in Gaza or all around the world. I think we should introduce the young generation to art so that they will appreciate different people through it." It is with this thought that the team of The Little Theatre want the children of Chennai from across schools and age groups to attend The Little Festival.

Cultural connections

The theatre team is renowned for starting India's first Hospital Clown Group where they visit government hospitals and extend support to the patients through their art. *The Kooks: Sunny Side Up* is also a play including clowns. Describing the play, Krishnakumar Balasubramanian (KK), artistic director of The Little Theatre says, "Usually when people hear about clowning, they have preconceived notions about it. We wanted to create a show that breaks the idea of what people think clowning is. It is not just putting on a mask and, and acting goofy. It also has a philosophy. Clowning takes you back to your inner child. Actors like Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, Rowan Atkinson, and Sacha Baron Cohen are students of clowning."

The production, created by KK, is being staged for the second year. This time, it is being directed by M Santhosh Kumar. Explaining the challenges of directing a clown play Santhosh says, "In most other plays, there will be mostly dialogues and emotions and it is very easy to

TUESDAY

09.07.2024

City

Chennai
Express

Exhibit

Puppet mastery

The annual 'The Little Festival', is back in the city and is premiering a puppet theatre production, 'A Tree and a Boy', that is filled with poetic imagery and sounds that foreground a Korean aesthetic.



WHEN: Tomorrow, 11 am



WHERE: The Museum Theatre

Chennai | International theatre festival for children brings Korean puppet show and a musical

Chennai-based The Little Theatre's international theatre festival for children will host a Korean puppet production, and a musical based on clowning

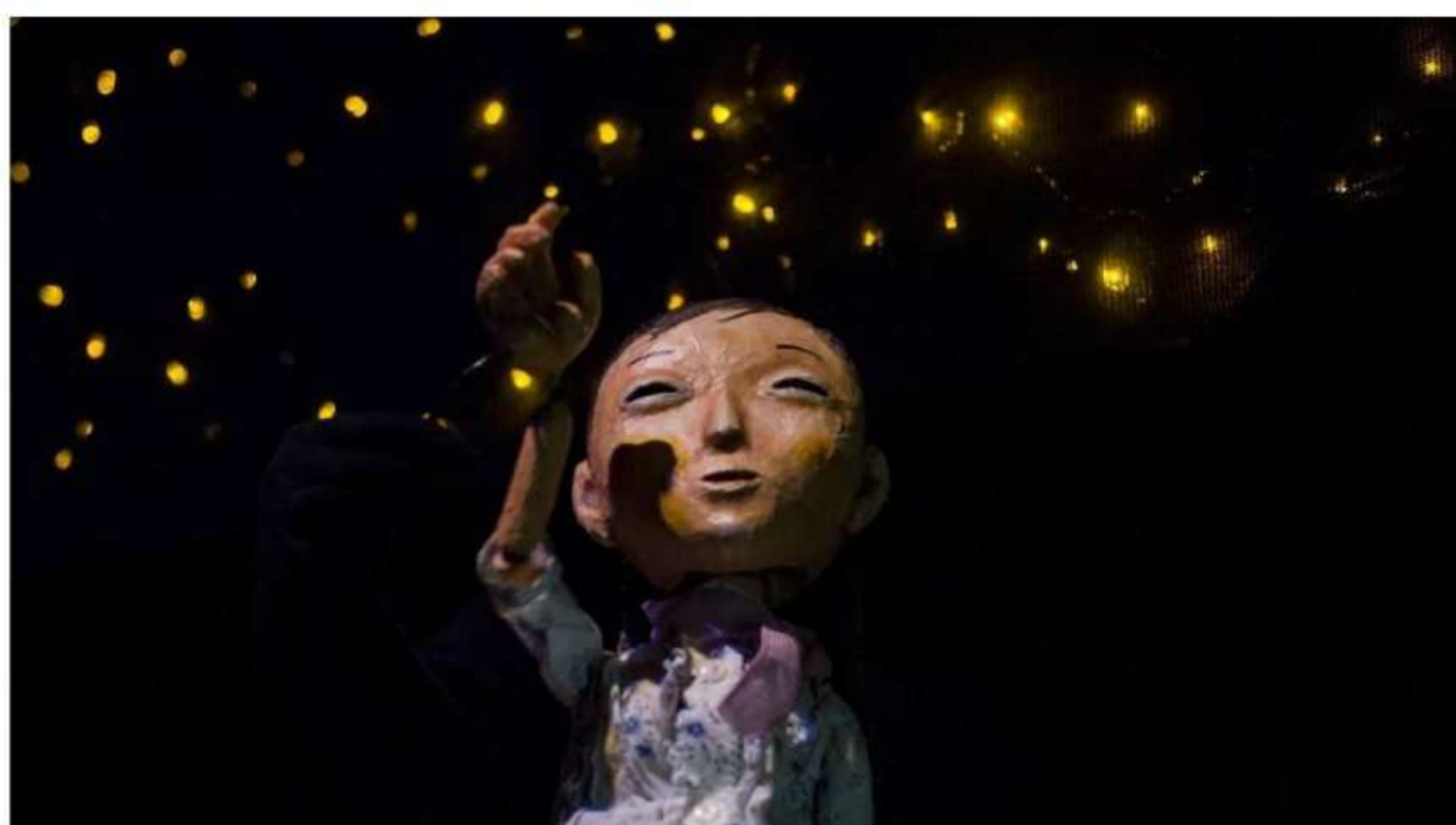
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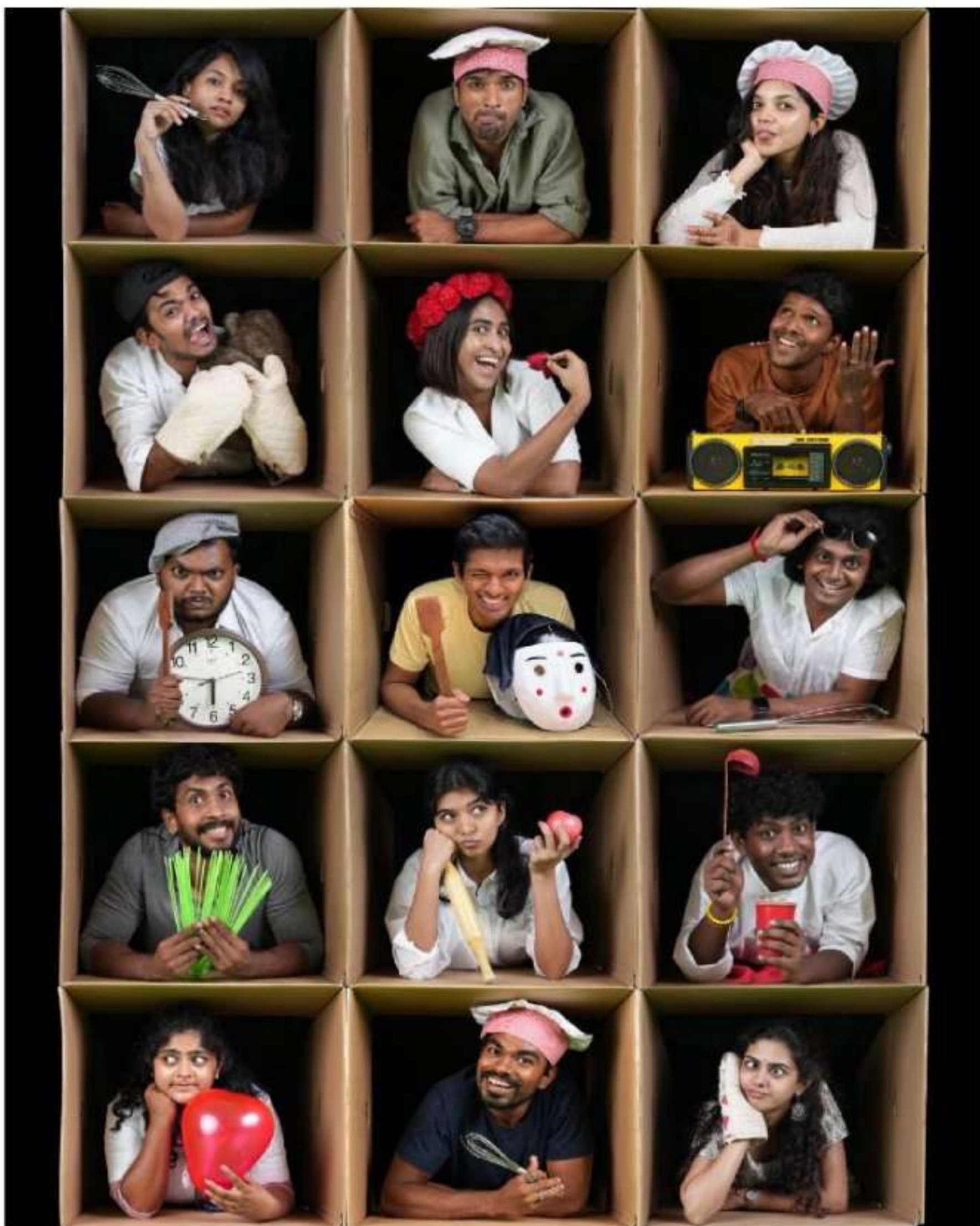
From A Tree and A Boy from South Korean theatre, theBEFU

A kitchen full of silly superheroes, with pots, pans and whisks in tow — sure sounds like a recipe for chaos and madness. Here, there are no rules. If you are underwater one minute, you will be part of the underworld the next. In a race against time, they are on a quest for otherworldly ingredients.

At the newly renovated Museum Theatre, the busy kitchen is slowly coming to life. One can spot funny-looking fish, the occasional dragon, and a group of chefs with bright red clown noses floating in the distance as the stage gets ready to host the 13th edition of The Little Festival, an international theatre festival for children. This year, apart from the chefs and their antics in a home production titled *The Kooks*, the city will also see a Korean puppet production, *A Tree and A Boy*.

Both plays are non verbal, and cater to young audiences with the aim of stretching their powers of imagination. This has been a running theme for The Little Theatre. Krishnakumar Balasubramanian (KK), artistic director, and creator of *The Kooks* says one of the easiest ways to tackle the perceived barrier of language in theatre is by using human physicality. This rings even more true when children are the audience.

"I have always been hugely inspired by anything that is physical when it comes to comedy. So we wanted to set this in an unusual setting. We also wanted it to reflect the idea of 'coming together' and what other than food brings people together? That's how the marriage of a kitchen and physical humour happened," says KK.



Cast and crew of The Kooks | Photo Credit: Abishek Thangamani

This year, the show is being directed by Santhosh Kumar. The play derives from the techniques of clowning and slapstick humour and leaves room for improvisation, in every iteration. "The script is two pages long, but the show is 1 hour and 15 minutes long! Every second counts. Every take on stage is different," says Santhosh.

A very minimal script and strong characters that are defined by the actors, is the key here. Solving, and in the same breath, creating problems are the characters' forte. "Just like every recipe needs certain ingredients to come out well, the characters realise that they need to come together for the magic to happen," describes Santhosh. KK adds, "In an era where children's imagination is being stunted by a very linear system of education and their dependency on gadgets, we want to remind them that the potential for imagination is boundless. That's what the kitchen stands for."

There's nothing else like puppetry that prods the scope for imagination in a child. South Korea's theBEFU theatre's *A Tree and A Boy* conceptualised in 1992 is a journey in imagery and sounds, and a masterclass on traditional Korean puppetry. Here, the lives of a boy and a tree are juxtaposed through the seasons; from spring to winter, and spring again.



From A Tree and A Boy | Photo Credit: special arrangement

Director Lee says, "The show is a story about life that everyone can relate to. The cycle of birth, growing up, loving, failing, dying, is a very natural and beautiful one. The magic of existence." Apart from the wooden puppets that are moved by the actors, shadow puppets too appear when the tragedy of the protagonist unfolds, says Lee. She points to a specific scene where the children from the neighbourhood join the boy for a game - "though seemingly simple, it is very different from India, and will likely be a lesson on cultural experience [for Indian audiences]." Lee says that there are more surprises in the store for the Chennai audiences (cue: music). The show is being brought to Chennai and other cities in India by InKo Centre.

Children are at the centre of both these experiences. And they sure are a tough audience to satisfy. Concludes KK, "Sometimes, they ask for some characters to remain on stage for longer. They want to connect with them. This time, we have made sure that happens."

The Kooks will be performed on July 5, 6 and 8 at 11am, and July 7 at 4pm. *A Tree and a Boy* will be held on July 9 and 10 at 11am. Passes are priced at ₹400 at explara.com.