

Fair play

Aadyam Theatre's sixth season, which opens with Girish Karnad's modern classic Hayavadana, will showcase proscenium shows in a mix of genres and settings along with smaller experimental plays

SUCHETA CHAKRABORTY

GIRISH Karnad came at a time in Indian theatre when there was a search for identity," observes theatre director Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry, who is behind a new production of Karnad's classic text Hayavadana. "I think he represents a search for what it means to be a playwright who was rooted in a certain culture and value system and within that also, he was the first modernist."

The play tells the story of two friends—Devadatta and Kapila—in love with Padmini. While Devadatta and Padmini get married, all three of them live together until an unfortunate event leads to swapping of their heads on each other's bodies, putting Padmini in the spot—who is her husband now, the head that belongs to Devadatta or his body that fathered her child? Chowdhry admits

that the play's combination of modernity and contemporaneity with tradition, symbolism and myths of the past dovetailing into a cohesive text is challenging for any director.

At the same time, she recalls accepting the invitation to collaborate on the production with enthusiasm as it offered an opportunity to mount a play of a scale and infrastructure difficult for a smaller company to undertake. Moreover, for the Padma Shri and Sangeet Natak Akademi awardee, who has primarily worked in the past decade with devised productions (involving directing an idea and developing it through processes of improvisation), it was interesting to return to the format of what is known as a well-made play with a standard-



Late playwright Girish Karnad's Hayavadana blends modernity and the contemporary with tradition and myth. Actors seen rehearsing for the play directed by Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry



ised structure of a beginning, middle and end.

Even so, while working with well-made plays such as Yerma or Phaedra, Chowdhry says she has always tossed the script around, taking away its linearity and refusing to treat it as sacred. Hayavadana occupies a magical space far removed from the darkness of the present, says the director whose works have dealt with ideas of lost homelands and collective memories. But even within its

framework, she sought something that spoke to her and placed her characters in the context of people of today. Her Padmini, for instance, is not a shy, classical heroine. She is bold, aware of her body and sexuality, evident in her gestures, body language and positioning. Similarly, vehemently against the notion of representing the act of sati in her play, she has chosen to interpret its ending in her own way.

Chowdhry is working with com-

poser and director BV Karanth's Hindi translation of the original Kannada text and also with the music Karanth had composed for his own stage version of Hayavadana. "He designed the music for all my plays up until his death and his compositions gave me an understanding of rhythm, of structuring a scene and of interlocking music with situations.

He was a true master of the role of music in theatre," Chowdhry says. Her version is in the end "a homage to people I really admire: Karanth-ji and Girish Karnad".

Shernaz Patel, part of Aadyam's four-member curation committee this year and co-artistic director, says that apart from the promised spectacle of dance and fantastical elements, Hayavadana is the first time that Aadyam is hosting a play from another city. It also marks its first staging of an Indian modern classic. The season will also see other big proscenium shows directed by Atul Kumar, Anahita Oberoi and Swanand Kirkire, along with smaller experimental plays performed in both Mumbai and Delhi. "As with every season, we have tried to have a range of shows that will reflect our ethos, with theatre that appeals to a larger audience without compromising on the quality of the content," says Patel. There will also be theatre podcasts, workshops, a theatre club and a blog.

smdmail@mid-day.com



NEELAM MANSINGH CHOWDHRY

WHAT: Hayavadana

WHERE: St Andrews Auditorium, Bandra West

WHEN: February 4 and 5, 7.30 PM

FOR: ₹500 onwards



SHERNAZ PATEL

'I want to play for my own people'

Virtuoso percussionist Trilok Gurtu hopes his collaborative project with an Israeli orchestra will be liked enough for him to play in his home country more

NIDHI LODAYA

PERCUSSION maestro and composer Trilok Gurtu, hailed as one of percussion arts' greatest innovators of all time, is known for his work with jazz giants such as John McLaughlin, Don Cherry, Pharaoh Sanders, Dave Holland, Jan Garbarek, as well as Indian greats like Ustad Zakir Hussain, Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, Sultan Khan. He will perform in February with an Israeli orchestra for the first time in India.

Castles in Time, the Israeli orchestra was formed in 2015, and originally comprises 24 in-

strumentalists. In 2017, at the Mekudeshet Festival in Jerusalem, Gurtu and the orchestra collaborated for an improvisational jazz fusion set—Harmonies in Time. The 90-minute-long composition will now travel to the city, with 11 members of the orchestra. After performing in Mumbai, Gurtu and the orchestra will be travelling to Delhi. "Matan [Daskal, co-founder of the orchestra] knows my music quite well," says Gurtu, "and what I do, and asked me if I was interested. So I went to Israel a couple of times and it clicked." Naveen Deshpande, founder and director of the events agency

Mixtape, heard Harmonies in Time and collaborated with the Israeli Embassy to bring them here.

Harmonies in Time is a relationship between a soloist player (Gurtu) as an individual, and the tribe (the orchestra). "It researches different time forms, prehistory in music," says Daskal over an e-mail interview, "It translates Indian kaida compositions written for the human voice and the tabla into orchestral instruments. It contains complex polyrhythmic [simultaneous combination of two contrasting rhythms] sequences, electro-acoustic textures, and vast soundscapes."

The orchestra owes Gurtu the addition of live composition to their repertoire. "When we started our collaboration in 2017," continues Daskal, "it was clear to me that aside from the written notation scores, we must be able to interact through improvisation with Trilok, since he is such an improvisation



TRILOK GURTU

master." Adds Gurtu, "Improvisation is our Indian culture and heritage. It's not anything new. And, I always use percussion in context.

I can introduce an aarti or a bhajan while doing sounds or even electronic music. I am not limited or bound by anybody. I use sounds that I like and will play whatever is there in front of me. I am not limited to instruments, I will even use my voice. I have created drums, percussion instruments, and used water buckets—all five elements are used."

Gurtu, who is based in Germany, feels most Indians don't know him. "I'm grateful that I can play for the people of my country and I hope that they like this new experience," he says. "That will make me feel like returning and playing more."

nidhi.lodaya@mid-day.com

WHAT: Harmonies in Time

WHEN: February 9, 7.30 PM onwards

WHERE: Tata Theatre, NCPA

PRICE: ₹944 onwards

TO BOOK: ncpamumbai.com



Israeli orchestra, Castles in Time has 24 instrumentalists containing woodwinds, brass, strings, electric guitars, bass guitar, drum set, percussions, synthesisers, harp, singers working with analogue effects, a computer player, and a conductor

