

SHORT BYTES

Manjari Mankijany has dabbled in all sorts of things, but directing is where her passion lies. **Rhea Dhanbhora** talks to her about her new short film, *The Corner Table*

>> Manjari finds short films more challenging because you have to make as big an impact as a feature in less than half the time



>> Tom Alter and Vinita Mankijany with Manjari (top), Vinita and Tom in a scene at The Pantry in Kala Ghoda (middle) and the cast in the midst of shooting for *The Corner Table* (bottom)



When you ask actor Tom Alter about his experience filming *The Corner Table*, he tells us that he loved the professionalism and emotional connect that Manjari and her sister (who acts in the film) have towards their work. But, Manjari is not new to praise as her last short film, *The Last Marble*, won Best Film at the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne, 2012 and Rochester International Film Festival, 2013. The daughter of Bollywood biggie Mac Mohan tells us more about her work and her inspirations.

Tell us about how you made the foray into short films?

I was an intern at Prahlad Kakkar's office while in college and assisted on features such as *Wake Up Sid*, *Saat Khoon Maaf*, *Gandhi of the Month*, *M14* and *The Dark Knight Rises*. I realised that if I want to be a director, I have to stop assisting and start directing. So, my first short film was literally a test for myself. It was a silent, 7-minute short film.

Why pick shorts?

As an assistant director, if you don't assist for a certain number of years with a big director, or if you don't have some big daddy to produce your first film, you have to create your own body of work to prove yourself. Short films were the best way for me to do this. But, they are not any less in my eyes. The script has to work and the film has to make an impact. This is more challenging, because in a limited amount of time you have to say what you need to say.

The Corner Table was shot at The Pantry in Kala Ghoda. Tell us what the film is about?

The film is about how two strangers become friends. It encompasses the complexities and the simplicities of human relationships. It is set in a café called The Pantry and the lead characters are a waitress and an old foreigner visiting India after 24 years.

You've got a pretty stellar cast!

My younger sister Vinita plays the café waitress and Tom Alter plays the foreigner. Tom was the first person to say yes to the film. Vinita is my best friend and my sister and to direct her is easy. We know each other's strengths and weaknesses. She was not only acting, but also handling the art department. Tom Alter is a gem of a person and a fine actor. He is so effortless that it made my job easy. His experience and standard of acting took the film to another level. I was honoured to work with him, especially since he has worked with my father too.

Tell us what's in the pipeline at Mac Productions.

Mac Productions was started by my father, (Mac Mohan) to produce films. We started by producing our own short films; we also do commercials and corporate videos and are going to be getting some young directors too. It is very close to my heart and we have great plans.

Do you think short films could be as popular as features?

Short films are becoming popular. See what they did with *Bombay Talkies*. Also, several great filmmakers started with shorts. It's a great medium of self expression but unfortunately there is no revenue model that is as appealing in shorts as it is in feature and that is why it hasn't got the kind of attention it deserves. This is why short film festivals are the best platform. The experience there is amazing. We need a film festival in Mumbai dedicated to shorts and in Mumbai everyone is on the run, so it might work very well considering the 'short' duration!

Where do you draw inspiration from?

I draw inspiration from everyday life, my experiences and experiences that others tell me about. I often try and put myself in another person's shoes and try and see the world from their perspective.

What short films do you think everyone should watch?

The list I have is dated; wait for this year's collection. In fact Pantry and Mac Productions are collaborating with Shamiana Shorts (by Cyrus Dastur) to bring some amazing shorts from around the world to India. Since Shamiana has a presence in a few cities in India and entry is free, I will be curating world short films for an event called The Pantry Nights along with films that are set and made in India. This is something that I'm excited about.

Being Mac Mohan's daughter must help in a field like this. Do you think you would have picked the same path even if you weren't?

Apart from having an amazing father, we had no extra perks or advantages having a filmy figure as a father. It did not mean that we could be lazy; it did not mean we could take things for granted. On the contrary, we had to work extra hard and make sure that we worked for what we deserved. We had a humble, strict upbringing and were never spoiled.

Have you always wanted to direct?

My father had told me I could be anything I wanted to be and I would be good at it. When he told me that, I was upset because he didn't tell me what he wanted me to do. In hindsight, I realise what an amazing thing he had said. If every parent said that to their child, every kid would be able to realise their true potential. I knew I wanted to make films from a young age. I also like photography, perfume making, stage lighting and writing.

Where can people watch this film?

Stay connected with our Facebook page for upcoming screenings. We will be notified about festivals in the coming weeks. People can log onto www.thecornertablefilm.com for more details.