



'I have always tried not to have the fear of failure'

Nandita Das speaks about her new play, *Between The Lines*

What makes the play special?

For me, it is often the content that drives the form. *Between the Lines* is set in contemporary India and explores the relationship between a lawyer couple, who have been married for 10 years. As they fight the case in the court, their personal lives are impacted and their own inequalities begin to surface. Many of my personal experiences and that of those that I have been privy to, have found their way into the script. As a real life couple it has been easy and difficult to work together on such a subject.

Our endeavour was to make the play soul-stirring without being preachy, and witty without being frivolous. In all our shows the response has been so encouraging, as the audience laughs its way through all its wit and irony and at the same time feels uncomfortable with all that resonates with them. The play raises many questions, answering only a few... and leaves the audiences with many lingering thoughts. So it is not a heavy depressing play and at the same time you will come out with lingering thoughts that will stay with you, hopefully much beyond the show.

How did the script evolve?

The idea came from a '60s film, which was adapted for the theatre by Purushottam Agarwal, an academician and writer. When I chanced upon the script, I felt it had the potential to be a powerful and engaging play.

I then worked on the script and got Divya Jagdale, an actor, who stumbled into writing, like me, to collaborate. The challenge for us was to ensure that the play struck an emotional chord without being preachy. While I have done a lot of work in the gender space, it is often about the underprivileged and the marginalised. We seldom talk about the inequalities that exist in our class of people. For me this was both cathartic and poignant, to deal with. Most working women, however educated, independent and outspoken they maybe, often are still dealing with guilt, juggling between home and work and the many roles they are expected to play. This play is about some of things that get left unsaid between the lines!

Having done some great films, what did you



Why didn't you opt for Hindi because that would've taken the play to a larger audience?

Theatre and film are very different mediums, and I realise this more and more after going through the writing and the rehearsal process. It is both challenging and exciting to explore a medium (theatre) that is comparatively new for me. I've always enjoyed doing new things without the fear of failure. For instance, I directed *Firaaq* without any formal training in film direction and learnt a lot in the process. But as I am more exposed to cinema, I needed to learn the language of the theatre, which is rather different. But sometimes not knowing the medium also frees you from its grammar and allows to explore it without any baggage. The best thing is that theatre is an "alive medium" and it will keep evolving with time. I think after 50 shows it will be where I really want it to be!

How is Subodh as an actor?

From the time I have known Subodh, I have seen how comfortable and creative he is when he narrates stories or mimics people. He has a natural flair for acting. But most importantly his passion and determination to his new life of creativity is what gave me the confidence, that he would be a great partner on stage. I saw him growing through the rehearsals with me. He has been an inherent part of our writing journey as well, and therefore feels close to the script. Every day I see him getting closer to the character he is playing! In fact I have had very little time focussing on my performance due to all the different hats I am wearing!

Expectations are high because your directorial venture, *Firaaq*, was very well received. Is that on your mind? Success, in a way, can be a burden!

While I have always tried not to have the fear of failure, I have to say, this project is making me a bit nervous. I have only done two professional plays and contrary to popular belief, I have not really come from theatre. But it is also exciting to explore a new medium and have the opportunity to play with it. To make my life difficult, I have embarked on a journey that has so many firsts. For the first time, I am writing and directing a play and Subodh is acting and producing it. Anonymity allows you to experiment with life more easily, but I don't want to get burdened by expectations and instead enjoy this experience.

What prompted you to form Chhoti Production Company with Subodh (Maskara)? And a company signifies that you are in for the long haul.

Chhoti Productions was conceived by my husband, Subodh and myself to provide an outlet for our creative ideas. Chhoti is the vehicle through which we hope to express ourselves through various forms of art. Our endeavour is to bring quality Performing Arts to audiences in the country and beyond, focussing on mediums like theatre and film. We are looking forward to working with a host of talented people, as well as each other on our future projects. We want to do work that is financially viable without making creative compromises. I am the creative head and Subodh looks after production and finances. Going forward, I will drive the film initiative and Subodh will drive the theatre initiatives, at least that's the plan as of now.

Life must have changed a lot after the birth of your son. Have you changed the criterion for selecting films?

Yes, my life has changed quite dramatically! For the first year I didn't do any films. Even refused *Midnight's Children* by Deepa Mehta as Vihaan was really small then. I have always been selective, but now want to be even more, as it means giving up precious time with Vihaan! But I think it is good for children to see both their parents work. Their images need to change, if we want them to grow as sensitive people.

What can we expect from you as far as films are concerned?

I recently completed work two films- one Tamil and one Hindi film. As my son Vihaan is only two years old, I consciously took only a week's commitment at a time, but both these projects had powerful stories and I play a pivotal character in the film, even though the screen time is not enormous. My last three years were very hectic, as a new mother and as the chairperson of CFSI. Direction requires a lot more time and focus, and is therefore something that I can look into only once *Between The Lines* has at least done its first run. But I hope to work on a film soon. I know an amazing story will come to me, when I am least expecting it!

At GD Birla Sabhaghar on 27 and 28 October 2012 at 7.30 pm.

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A SPACE OPERA



Movie: *Cloud Atlas*
Director: Tom Tykwer
Cast: Tom Hanks

Acting **** Direction ****
Script *** Verdict ****

A BOLD, ambitious and fun attempt to adapt David Mitchell's time-jumping novel, *Cloud Atlas* is a return to form for the Wachowskis. The novel contains the same big idea that commonly crops up in the Wachowski oeuvre, whether as director or producers, that humans should look beyond the physical realm and understand that space and time are malleable. Whether that's true or not is arguable, but one thing's for sure, it does make for fantastical movies - not even Terry Gilliam in his pomp was this grandiose. As with the work of Gilliam, the Wachowskis often have a problem with self-control.

The success of the original *Matrix* movie has been like a poisoned chalice as it gave them final cut on all their projects and left to their own filmmaking devices their work has often been self-indulgent and unintelligible.

Here they seem anchored by the use of Tom Tykwer as co-director, whose film *Run Lola Run* successfully told a tale from various perspectives and Mitchell's text. Six separate through-the-ages stories are conjoined: a sea adventure from the mid 19th century, a 1930s meeting of composers, a journalist investigating corrupt corporations in the 1970s, a present day tale of an author publicly murdering a critic, a futuristic tale of rebellion in a totalitarian society and an undefined post-apocalyptic dystopia. The common theme is that each tale is about a search for liberty and truth. The big difference from the novel is in the structure. While the book tells each story consecutively and then as stories within stories, the movie crisscrosses the tales jumping through space and time at will.

Tom Hanks, Halle Berry, Hugh Grant, Hugo Weaving, Jim Broadbent, Ben Whishaw, Susan Sarandon, Doona Bae, Jim Sturgess and Keith David all play multiple roles in the film. The action starts with a shot of the stars before focusing on a mumbleling man lost at sea.

Underneath all the prosthetics seems to be Tom Hanks? As a device, the multiple roles allow the viewer to immediately know which are the heroes and villains. Ultimately, this is a film about ideas rather than plot. It's a tricky marriage between blockbuster action and textbook philosophy.

Although the space opera is occasionally bumpy and disorientating, the end result is intoxicating.

Kaleem Aftab / the independent



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DEVOTIONAL FERVOR AT PLAY

REVERENCE

All classical arts, undoubtedly, are rooted in age old traditions of India's culture that is steeped in highest possible value system. Despite having been hugely eroded by changing times, the lingering aroma of those rich values still makes its presence felt in classical events like the one presented by Philharmony on 2 October at Triguna Sen Auditorium (Jadavpur University). Young and upcoming harmonium exponent Gourab Chatterjee, the spirit behind the organization, displayed his unflinching faith in olden tradition by gratefully felicitating his mentors and elders who guided him in his musical journey so far.

The day-long event saw veteran tabla maestro Laxminarayan Mishra inaugurate the morning session. A wonderful teacher of vocal music, especially thumri, in his hay-days Mishraji, magnanimously, guided numerous ITC SRA scholars, some of whom are reining the classical music's arena now. Apart from offering a special tribute to Pandit Ajoy Chakrabarty on his 60th birth anniversary (accepted by Kaushiki Desikan), Gourab, after presenting his own recital as a melodic tribute, felicitated Ustad Jainul Abedin and Mishraji who had trained him as a young student of vocal music at SRA. Students of Philharmony, obviously trained by Gourab now, sang a variety of songs that climaxed with Tagore's 'Labonye poorna prano'.

Pandit Arun Bhaduri, who inaugurated the evening session, was not only felicitated by usual gift items associated with such rituals, but also greeted by some of his own beautiful compositions, presented by Philharmony students. The evening's main attraction was the recital of Omkar Dadarkar, one of the most successful vocalists of his generation. He sang raga Bihag. I have heard him sing this raga many times but this time he took it to a different height by weaving the tapestry of the raga with beautiful meend-laden threads of melodic phrases that were clipped in varied colours of different moods. The clarity of taans in different speeds added the sparks at desired places.

This balance of emotion and skill was even more effective in his 'Radhe bina lage na mora jiya' - a beautiful kajri, penned and composed by Dr Girija Devi that, for a change, depicts the pangs of separa-

tion suffered by a man. Omkar's rendition made it soul-stirring. Apparently the team of young musicians, with Omkar in the centre, flanked by Sanjay Adhikary on the tabla and Gourab himself on his chosen musical instrument harmonium, was in its elements as numerous celebrated musicians, led by Pandit Ullas Kashalkar, the guru of Omkar, graced the audiences' seats. The evening came to an end with a Namdev bhajan in raga Bhairavi.

DHRUPAD, LITERATURE

Pandit Falguni Mitra, perhaps the sole representative of all the four Banis of dhrupad by virtue of his Bettiah Gharana, presented a few gems from his vast collection that were composed by such legends like Swami Haridas, Baiju Pandit, Tansen, his son Suratsen and the like. There was a time when ustads would not sing any of their precious compositions lest they get lifted by other erudite musician; but not anymore. The paradox lies here: neither the singers nor their listeners, now, are aware of the depth of these traditional bandishes that, actually, not only act as the keys to their respective ragas, but also open the windows to their times.

The government's apathy towards preservation and popularization of Sanskrit and vernacular languages has led Indians to a point where they read their own mother tongue in Roman script and remain ignorant of the rich literature reflecting social, philosophical or spiritual val-



Falguni Mitra, Meena, Alokparna

ues of yore! Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad, dedicated to popularize vernacular literature of India saw a point in bridging the gap with the treasure trove available in classical music's literature; and dhrupad-literature found the top rank in this - with compositions dating back to 13th century.

Kathak dancer Alokparna Guha added another dimension to this in-depth literary analysis of bandishes by the writer of this weekly column at Parishad Hall on October 5. The pain of a desolate nayika pining for Lord Krishna, the divine beauty of Mother Goddess Durga, and Her supreme power - all were portrayed by her neat, delicate, powerful movements and some inspiring footwork. Celebrated pakhawaj exponent Apurvalal Manna and tabla player Sidhartha Bhattacharya offered their unstinted support during this spontaneous and un-choreographed interpretation of literary verses - not an easy feat by any means! Pradip Palit (harmonium) was his usual self.

SWAMI ABHEDANANDA

The annual birth anniversary celebration of Swami Abhedananda at the Baranagar Kaanch Mandir premises always offers a day-long multi-dimensional cultural event. There is a reason to it. The way Tagore overshadowed all his contemporaries, Swami Vivekananda's powerful persona completely eclipsed his guru-bhai. Like Swami Vivekananda this favourite disciple of Ramakrishna Paramhansa too was erudite writer and brilliant orator with great command over English as well, and was a musician par excellence. He shouldered most of Swamiji's work-load in England and USA, but despite all remains an unsung hero. His disciple Sree Thakur Satyananda highlighted his works by penning books, songs and celebrating certain days with seminars, discourses and, of course, divine music.

The day-long celebration on October 9 saw, among others, Swami Jitmananda giving a heartwarming talk and upcoming vocalist Shanta Kundu offering devotional bhajans. After some songs hailing Abhed-Swami, the evening turned to Agamani songs to invoke the spirit of Durga puja.

While Debadrita Mukherjee, Poulomi Dey, Mamata Pal and Sanhita Basu, the young and brilliant disciples of Ustad Jainul Abedin (Agra ghara) excelled in their presentation of beautiful songs penned and

meena banerjee presents her weekly review of classical music programmes



Sanhita, Debadrita, Maata, Poulomi

composed by Archanapuri Maa, the frequent change in scale and lack of coordination marred the presentation of Sree Satyananda Sangeetpeeth, Jainul Abedin, who is a favourite vocalist of Maa, is sold out on her compositions steeped in literary and melodic beauty.

He feels that such songs will inspire the youngsters to love their language and culture; and inspired the disciples to sing on MahaShashthi at Satyananda Devayatan's Sarada-Durga Puja as well.

RHYTHM

The annual soiree organized by Rhythm came with a two-day spread this year that was dedicated to Swami Vivekananda. The opening day at Birla academy on 12 October began with a brilliant tabla-solo by Pandit Sujit Saha. He played teental and dhamar with amazing precision and clarity. In between the two tala-segments a CD containing these talas along with nasruk (nine beats) was formally released by Swami Somatmananda (Bhaskar Maharaj), vice president of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture. Later flautist Sudip Chattopadhyay played a short and sweet version of raga Rageshri with short alap, medium-paced ekta gatkari followed by drut teental gat and jhala. Accompanied by young and upcoming tabla player Surajit Saha, worthy son of Sujit Saha, Chattopadhyay concluded his recital with a Majh Khamaj dhun set to addha.

These brilliant presentations were marred by a hugely disappointing recital of a vocalist with a corporate background and incapable of straddling music with his job. One expected a careful selection and planning by Sujit Saha since he is a Top-graded artist himself and is the spirit behind the organization celebrating its 31st anniversary! This blunted patch forced to show my dissent by not attending the second day.

