

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Calligraphy Exhibition

Calligrapher: Najib Tareque
Venue: Impressions Gallery, 67, Gulshan Avenue
Date: August 19-September 19
Time: 9:30am-2:30pm and 4-5pm (Sunday-Thursday) and 10am-1pm (Saturday)



Photography Exhibition

Title: Ramadan in the Middle East
Photographer: Christel Becker-Rau
Venue: Goethe-Institut Bangladesh, H-10, Rd-9, Dhanmondi
Date: August 9-September 9
Time: 10am-8pm



21st Anniversary of Drik

Venue: Drik Gallery, H 58, Rd 15 A (new) Dhanmondi
Date: September 4



Photo Exhibition

To mark Int'l Day of Tourism
Title: Tourist Sights of Moscow and Moscow Region
Venue: Modern Language Institute, DU
Date: September 2-28



The theatre scenario in Chittagong: An insight

FAHMIM FERDOUS

There was a time when Chittagong's theatre scene was vibrant and was admired for its distinguishing characteristics and unique style throughout the country. Although it has lost some of its glory, theatre in Chittagong is still up and running. Group Theatre Federation has been in action in Chittagong since 1973. A total of 29 groups are currently registered with the federation, of which some 10/12 are more active than others.

Groups like Tirjok, Nandikar, Monchomukut Natya Shomproday, Shomikoron Theatre, Orindom Natya Shomproday, Uttoradhikar, and Kothok Natya Shomproday, are keeping the theatre tradition of the port city alive. Many of these groups have been active for decades, with at least 20 plays staged over a hundred times. Of the long-running plays, remarkable ones include Rabindranath Tagore's "Bishorjon", staged 198 times since 1985 and Bertolt Brecht's translated piece "Shomadhan" -- both by Tirjok. However, what sets Chittagong's theatre apart is the innovative approach and experimental styles.

Dominated heavily by young theatre activists, most of the current projects tend to offer something new for the audience. A good example of this trend is Orindom's production "Jolkonna", which premiered just before Ramadan. However, one major drawback seems to be lack of experience, according to theatre connoisseurs.

'Ritu-bhittik Natya Parishad', a collective that has been organising six festivals (aligned to the six seasons) across the calendar for a decade now, is a major inspiration for the Chittagong theatre troupes. The festivals are called 'Boishakhi Natyamela', 'Badol Shajher Natok', 'Sharod Natya Moncho', 'Haimontika', 'Magh Nisheetter Natok' and 'Boshonto Natya Utshab'.

Besides these, every group holds a festival at either the beginning or the end of the year. Theatre activists and enthusiasts of Chittagong,



A performance by Tirjok, one of the active theatre troupes of Chittagong.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

however, greatly miss the large-scale festival that was once organised annually by the Group Theatre Shommonoy Parishad.

Theatre Institute Chittagong (TIC) Auditorium is the centre of Chittagong's theatre activities. Apart from TIC, the Chittagong Zilla Shilpakala Academy Auditorium, and sometimes the Muslim Hall also host plays. Rehearsals are mostly Shilpakala-centred, but many groups, who have their own spaces, practice wherever convenient.

There was a time when many original plays were produced in Chittagong, a trend that, sadly, has waned somewhat recently. Chief of Tirjok Natya Dol and one of the seasoned theatre activists of the city, Ahmed Iqbal Haider accounted the trend as a combination of two factors: the progress of playwrights have failed to cope with the progression of theatre itself, and many have just stopped writing.

If there are aspects where the theatre of Chittagong is lagging behind Dhaka, it is glamour and publicity quotient. Electronic and print media are not always keen to focus on the cultural scenario of Chittagong, while the local media has ample space for improvement. Secondly, there are not many star actors involved in the theatre arena of Chittagong, which also remains liable for a greater fraction of the youth not being interested in this form of performing art.

Groups from Chittagong are regulars at theatre festivals in Dhaka, and as Ahmed Iqbal Haider put it, there's a group of audience in Dhaka who seem to enjoy productions of Chittagong troupes, especially for their unique flavours and sheer intent to break out of the box. The fraternity has undergone a "transition," and is right now at a stage where there's young blood, the tendency to take risks and experiment, but not a lot of experience. These young minds will hopefully mature and start producing great plays soon, which means the silver lining is getting brighter by the day for theatre-lovers of Chittagong.

Tannishtha, post "Brick Lane"

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Actress Tannishtha Chatterjee, who earned plaudits playing the role of a Bangladeshi woman in "Brick Lane", has become synonymous with arthouse cinema, but she is game for mainstream Bollywood films and wants more and more female directors to call the shots.

"Getting accepted on the international film festival circuit is fantastic. I am loved and celebrated there (in the West). But I would definitely want to work more in India with directors and independent filmmakers, especially with women. I think it is time to change

theatrical Shabana Azmi. Tannishtha plays Hafsat Abiola, daughter of the late Nigerian President-elect Moshood Abiola. She is a human rights and democracy activist and the play delineates her trials and tribulations after her father was jailed on the charge of treason and died in detention.

The play is called "Seven". 'Vital Voices', a leading international NGO, which aims to invest in and bring visibility to extraordinary women around the world by unleashing their leadership potential, has commissioned it as a part of its creative endeavour. All the seven stories are very powerful and about real women who have been

faces 'typecast problems' in his/her career.

"I am an actress...I have to fight against repetitiveness. I have been saying no to loads of such stuff but if the project turns out to be interesting in some way, I am on board. It is fabulous to know that audience is still reacting favourably to your performances," said Tannishtha.

About her current projects in Bollywood, she said, "I have just completed a film 'Dekh Circus' with Mangesh Hadawale. I have another untitled project which I cannot talk about right now."

On her film "Bhopal -- A Prayer for



Tannishtha's portrayal of a Bangladeshi woman in "Brick Lane" earned her much acclaim.

the male domination in Bollywood," Tannishtha, who recently performed a musical show at the Royal Opera House in London, said.

"Women are treated in a particular manner in Indian film industry. Today the fairer sex is empowered, armed with more purchasing power but she still faces an old bias when it comes to stories, direction. We need more scripts that relate and appeal to women...that give them an opportunity to do meaty and author-backed roles," she said.

The Bengali actress is also performing in a play based on seven monologues in Delhi this month with veteran

fighting for their space.

"I was thrilled when Shabana called me for the role," said the actress best remembered for her role of Nazneen in Sarah Gavron's "Brick Lane" in 2007.

On her work experience in theatre and with Shabana, she said "theatre has much more intimate space, which makes it very challenging. Shabana and I had a blast together. I have grown up watching her. I admire her body of work. She is one of my favourite actresses and we believe in the same kind of cinema."

For being associated with parallel cinema, Tannishtha says every actor

Rain", based on the 1984 gas leak tragedy, the world's worst industrial disaster that killed 15,000 people, the actress, who plays wife of a factory worker, said the story appealed to her as it delved into individual suffering and the emotional journey of a family struck by the incident and did not focus on the numbers (casualties) in the disaster.

The movie stars Hollywood actor Martin Sheen as Warren Anderson (then chairman and chief executive officer of Union Carbide, which is held responsible for the Bhopal disaster), and is directed by British filmmaker Ravi Kumar.

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