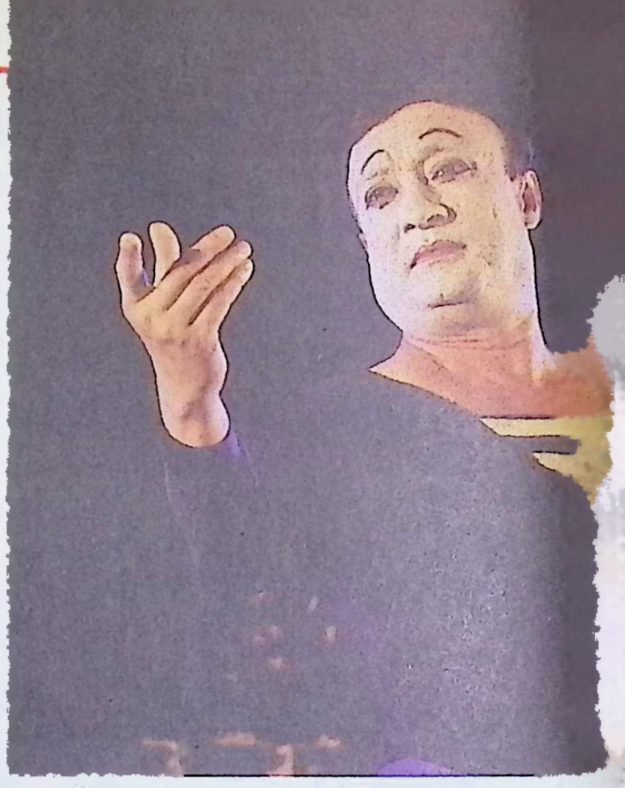


Speaking Without Words

A few days before his 60th birthday on January 18, the legendary mime artist talks about his passion and profession – mime- an art form that goes back to the very origins of human communication

SUBIR DAS

"Have you ever looked closely at butterfly-wings when they flutter? Have you ever visualised the mildest vibration of petals when a flower blooms? An artist must have his mind tuned to nature," says renowned mime artist Partha Pratim Majumder.

He then went on to act out what he had just said. One has to watch the maestro perform to understand how mesmerising simple movements can be when performed with grace and perfection. Be it the subtle changes of nature or the tragic story of unrequited love, Majumder is an expert at narrating stories to a captivated audience without uttering a word.

Currently living in France, Majumder was enamoured with art of mime from a very young age. Even as he approaches his 60th birthday, the master artist feels that mime is an indispensible part of his life. Mime, he says, is the mother of all performing arts.

Born on January 18, 1954 in Pabna, Partha Pratim Majumder received training in mime at the Jogesh Dutta Mime Academy in Kolkata for six years until 1972. Also a theatre activist, he was offered to do his first solo performance at the Shilpakala Academy in 1979.

"This was the turning point of my life. Impressed by my performance, Loic Moreau, the then French Ambassador to Dhaka, and Gerard Grousse, then director of Alliance Française, later offered me a scholarship to study mime in France under the tutelage of renowned mime artist Etienne Decoroux in 1981. There I came in contact with Etienne's student and mime artist, Marcel Marceau," says Majumder over Skype.

Majumder's dream to be a student at the school of Marceau – 'Ecole Internationale de Mimodrame de Paris-Marcel Marceau' - which offered training on pantomime, corporal mime, drama, ballet, modern dance, sword fighting, stick fighting, acrobatics and theatrical acrobatics under Marcel Marceau, was finally realised after he took some tests at the great mime master's studio.

Majumder was one of the chosen ones among a select group of Marceau's students who performed at a series of performances in Chicago and New York in 1984. This was the first of many successes which followed, as Majumder then went on to have solo performances in Canada and all over Europe. He was so good at his job that his performances were broadcast by different French and Canadian TV channels including the BBC. Majumder's solo performance 'Boatman of Padma', which he performed at the UNESCO headquarter in Paris was the first mime act to be performed at the World Heritage Centre.

"Over time, I was considered as a member of Marceau's family. He loved me like his son. It was a blessing and the happiest moment of my life when he declared me as his best student," says Majumder.

As we continued with our conversation, I asked him about the lengthy hours of practice that brought him to the attention of an international audience, earning him a reputation as one of the most talented mime artists across the globe.

"I didn't have time to see Paris, the city, which many say is half real and half imagination. But I couldn't enjoy her beauty, since all that mattered to me was mime," says Majumder.