

city



## Temperature

PUNE	31	13
LOHSGADH	31	16
PASHAN	30	13



## Relative Humidity

PUNE	LOHSGADH
62	60
PASHAN	63



# Breathtaking!

This is what **Saaz Aggarwal** said about **Aparna Sindhoor's** *The Story and Song* at **Amol Palekar's Theatre Beyond Words festival**

The stage was vibrant with youth, energy, colour and celebration. Aparna Sindhoor and her troupe of bare-chested, mundu-clad young men were performing at Amol Palekar's theatre festival at the Yashwantrao Chavan Auditorium on Friday.

A new production of this Boston-based dancer from Mysore, *The Story and the Song* is a mystic tale of women, environment and love, inspired by folktales from various sources. The result is a performance deeply, almost in-your-face Indian, but impressively international in its appeal and quality.

The performance starts with Aparna Sindhoor suspended in the centre of the stage from brightly coloured strips of cloth and chanting melodiously in her haunting voice. As the story unfolds, each member of the troupe takes on different roles – the young men are quite convincing as girls – and asound with their sheer energy and athleticism.

Sindhoor has been dancing all her life. Trained in Bharatnatyam, she felt that traditional stories were static and predictable – and perhaps just a bit tedious. So she wove in her special mix of fun and what we see has an unmistakable bharatnatyam base, but with other influences woven in. These include various forms of dance and music – kathak, jazz, aerobics, kalaripayatu, a hint of Arabian nights, the play dance rituals of the Indian school girl – and the story is sung, narrated and chanted in many languages.

The level of individual skill was high, and

the combination created an experience that stunned the audience with its complexity and beauty. At the end, swinging suspended upside down for several minutes – singing beautifully all the while! – Sindhoor was composed enough to climb back on stage and continue narrating and dancing without missing a beat. The boys, meanwhile, had swung round and round on the coloured strips until they were actually flying, and continued to strike statuesque dance mudras in mid-air. The show ended with a question-answer session – a unique and delightful format we are probably not yet mature enough to fully utilize.

When invited to interact with the previous performer, Irshad Panjatan, the audience was tongue-tied and the show hosts stepped in to warm things up. Unfortunately, they then lost control and hogged almost the entire chat time themselves. However, we did learn that, contrary to the PR blurb, Irshad Panjatan was never "the disciple of Marcello Mastroianni who pioneered pantomime as performing style in 1960s". In fact, it's a question whether this Marcello Mastroianni ever existed. It was Marcel Marceau, a French Jew gifted in gymnastics and acting, inspired by the comedy of Charlie Chaplin, who performed all over the world to spread the "art of silence" starting in mid-'50s. He had wide exposure through films and television and his influence can be seen even in India, in Raj Kapoor's *Mera Naam Joker*.

Irshad Panjatan specified that he had MET Marcel Marceau, and in fact Marceau clearly told him he had a unique style which he must develop independently. Other influences he acknowledged were Theo Lézrec,

kathakali master Guru Raghavan Nair, and Narendra Sharma of the Uday Shankar Company.

His performance was restricted to a circle of light on the stage, in a simple white costume and the traditional mime mask with not a single prop. Within that small circumference, Irshad Panjatan rode a bicycle – and fell off it, tried to repair it, and then walked home lugging it on his shoulder. He taught mathematics to a class of naughty schoolboys. He shivered under the shower till the water grew warmer, dropped his soap, struggled when the water stopped, and dried and dressed himself. When a button came undone, he sewed it back on.

He even dressed in a sari and preened while decking out in elaborate jewellery. Most deeply philosophical of all, he captured the fluttering of a butterfly – and then sank into sorrow as he watched it die. There's probably a good reason why Irshad Panjatan had not performed for 15 years before this. The spontaneous thunderous standing ovation was a tribute not just to this performance but to his age and experience, and his long years of practice and skill.

We in Pune are very lucky to have theatre of this quality brought to our door and it was really sad that the auditorium had so many empty seats. Sadder still was the fact that there were no children there! Next time – don't miss the opportunity to bring your kids along to a show they may one day be clamouring outside packed theatres in New York – or Bombay – longing but unable to see.

PUNE MIRROR  
REVIEW

