

PULLING THE RIGHT STRINGS

Master puppeteer Dadi Pudumjee is back with the 11th edition of Ishara International Puppet Festival that will bring together some of the renowned artists of the genre for the aficionados *By* **AYESHA SINGH**

RAVI CHOUDHARY

A large cup of extra strong coffee, every morning, is his antidote for all things challenging. It's been like that for a while now. From researching the subtext, writing scripts, working on the set design, background score, props, dialogue delivery and training, master puppeteer and pioneer of modern puppetry in India, Dadi Pudumjee does it all. Back with his 11th edition of Ishara International Puppet Festival 2013 (IIPF), he once again is showcasing a range of creative manipulations of modern and traditional forms in puppetry, ranging from rod, string and shadow puppets, to mixed performances with dance, theatre, music and more. "Since its inception in 2001, the IIPF has brought to India over 90 international puppetry companies and promoted numerous indigenous productions. Alongside Indian talents, various other countries like the US, Indonesia, Japan, Sweden, Norway, Ireland, Israel, Iran, Afghanistan, Germany, Switzerland Italy, Brazil, Turkey, Belgium, Spain and others have participated on the Ishara stage," says Pudumjee.

As a child, he was handed two -stringed toy puppets to play with. Those became his entire world. He would spend hours playing and building whimsical stories around them, enjoying each and every fantasy his little innocent mind



HIGHLIGHTS OF ISHARA INTERNATIONAL PUPPET FESTIVAL 2013

PROGRAMME	COUNTRY	DIRECTED BY	DATE AND VENUE
Masha And The Bear	RUSSIA	Rita S Grigoryan	8 April - Amphitheatre IHC; 10 April - Epicentre, Gurgaon; 13 April - Tagore Theatre, Chandigarh (7: 30 pm at all venues)
Dhola Maru	INDIA	Puran Bhat	9 April - Club Patio, Gurgaon, at 7:30 pm
The Pier Is Alive (Cais Vivo)	PORTUGAL	—	8 April - Epicentre, Gurgaon; 10 April - Amphitheatre IHC (7: 30 pm at all venues)
Nonso And Nonsa	ITALY	Valeria Bianchi	8 April - Club Patio, Gurgaon; 9 April - Amphitheatre IHC (7: 30 pm at all venues)
Garbage For Plums	BULGARIA	Peter Todorov	9 April - Epicentre, Gurgaon; 12 April - Amphitheatre IHC; 15 April - Tagore Theatre, Chandigarh (7: 30 pm at all venues)
The Cubes Circus	ISRAEL	Galia Levy-Grad	11 April - Amphitheatre IHC; 13 April - Club Patio, Gurgaon; 14 April - Tagore Theatre, Chandigarh (7: 30 pm at all venues)
A Musician Who Played The Moon	IRAN	Hossein Cheraghi	11 April - Epicentre, Gurgaon; 13 April - Amphitheatre IHC (7: 30 pm at all venues)
Ravan Chhaya	INDIA	Guru Khageswar Pradhan	11 April - Club Patio, Gurgaon; 15 April - Amphitheatre IHC (7: 30 pm at all venues)
Bernarda 'S Backstage	SPAIN	Alejandra Prieto	12 April - Club Patio, Gurgaon; 14 April - Amphitheatre IHC (7: 30 pm at all venues)
Heer Ke Waris	INDIA	Dadi D Pudumjee	13 April - Epicentre Gurgaon; 16 April - Amphitheatre IHC (7: 30 pm at all venues)

created. At that time, it was still just a hobby. The thought of it becoming a serious professional interest, made many of Pudumjee's well-wishers cringe. In the following years, with the support of his parents, he joined the Darpana Academy of Arts, Ahmedabad, in 1971. He then embarked on a 'never-look-back' journey to Swedish Marionette Theatre Institute, Stockholm, where he studied puppetry seriously, under famous puppeteer Michael Meschke for two years. He later went on to become the first non-European president of Union Internationale de la Marionnette (UNIMA), the worldwide puppetry organisation, and was honoured with the Padamshri in 2011. "According to historians, puppets are as old as our civilisation. Even in ancient dwellings of Harappa and Mohenjodaro that date back to 2,500 BC, terracotta bull with detachable head that could be manipulated by a string, in addition to other items have been found. Today, puppetry is popular mostly in Delhi, Hyderabad, Chennai and Kolkata where some good contemporary puppet theatres are situated," he says.

AT A GLANCE

Dates: April 8 to 16
Venues: India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road; Epicentre, Gurgaon; Club Patio, Gurgaon; and Tagore Theatre, Chandigarh.

While, according to him it is interesting to see various forms of entertainment flourishing in the city, Pudumjee sometimes feels disconsolate with the abysmal popular interest in puppetry. His shows

always manage to catch the fancy of his patrons, but sponsorship always seems to evade them. Ishara each year gives a concrete platform to the art of puppetry—both traditional and modern, and opens up peoples' mind and perception to this art form. Over the years, it has proven to be a forum wherein international companies can watch and learn more and provide financial impetus. "We need good training and workshop programmes. A school of puppetry could do wonders. Any kind of help can prove to be a catalyst. If nothing else, you can come and patronise this dying form of entertainment by viewing our presentations. An audience for any art form is as important as the art form itself, so come be a part of it in any which way," he says.