

For the first time Indian theatre and the performing arts will be invited abroad to take part in the prestigious Avignon theatre festival. *Gayatri Sinha reports*

Taking tradition overseas

There is a distinct possibility that the Festival d'Avignon, the French showcase of theatre and the largest single drama melting pot in the world is likely to host India as its theme next year. After the festivals of India and their curious cocktail of culture and diplomacy, this is the first time that Indian theatre will be invited abroad on such a massive scale.

Bernard Faivre D'arcier, director of the Avignon Festival recently concluded a rapid fire tour of the country, from Trivandrum to Imphal, to meet a clutch of directors and their troupes.

The problem before him is unique. In the month of July every year the small 14th century Provincial town of Avignon (which had its genesis and a short time residence of the Popes) starts filling up with Europe's theatre cognoscenti. Officially invited entries for the "on" (official) and the unofficial entries of the daring and the different at the "off" or fringe festival often amount to a staggering four to 500 performances in a period of 40 days.

The medieval Palace of the Popes, the city square, restaurants, reading rooms, old stone quarries even an apple orchard are all pressed into service as performances literally burst forth each night like fireworks in the sky.

Now at Paris, India's classical and folk performers perform with predictable regularity right through the year. Shiv Kumar Sharma, Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Madhavi Mudgal are all names familiar to the French. Moreover Arianne Mnouchkine, leading French director has in tandem with Rajiv Sethi presented scores of folk artists, like langas, manganiars, Bauls, gotipuas, and so on.

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establishment writer, the first Iranian music singers to perform in the west, post-Khomeini and so on. This year, for the first time its dominant theme is another country, Japan.

If the Japan experiment is a success, then India stands in with an equal chance for qualitative exposure. In India Faivre D'arcier's interest was to identify director's experimenting within tradition, but who present a strong recognizably Indian visual theatre, within a contemporary framework.

A major factor determining his choice is the audience. The Avignon audience is a critical, professional audience which is more concerned with the language of the theatre than dramatic narrative. "We don't have a language problem in Avignon. If the audiences can see plays in Ukrainian, then they can also see Marathi, Bengali and so on. But the mise en scene and the visual element should be well done," says Pierre Barroux, French cultural

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counsellor.

Ideally six or seven major events can make up the Indian section. From Avignon, the Indian groups can then travel to centres in France, several of whom have their own artistic festivals.

On this first exploratory trip Faivre D'arcier flew to Imphal where he witnessed Ratan Thiyam's well known production *Chakravayuh*. Thiyam, whose repertory works under stringent conditions has travelled to 35 countries but never to France. In Kerala, K N Pannikar sta-



Westward bound? : Ratan Thiyam's *Chakravayuh*

Madhyama Vyayog.

On a subsequent trip Faivre D'arcier will witness some more forms. However, the *Mahabharata* has been chosen as the basic theme and performances will revolve around this perennial spring of source material. It is noteworthy that both Thiyam and Panikkar have done some of their best work on *Mahabharata* themes.

The Avignon festival also posits the critical question of funding. The once high profile ICCR, the MEA's cultural wing is facing a considerable resource crunch as it goes about setting up a cultural centre each at Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in Central Asia. Thus a hitherto untapped source, private sponsors may be invited to supplement the support provided by Air India and the Ministry of Tourism.

vagant processions down the Trocadero, when artists of different hues travelled to the west en masse are over. What presentations go abroad must be now selectively made, to ensure that others follow in their wake. In this context the salient but unavoidable question that rises is that of modernity and tradition.

In the indigenous dance drama forms Yakshgana, Kathakali, in Kathak or Bharatanatyam, most dancers work within the tight frame of work of tradition. They add the quicksands of change and experimentation. In fact outside the known lexicon of Indian movements and presentations there is little to choose from. Obviously change for its own sake is not going to get us anywhere. But to contain creativity under the shroud of tradition may also be stultifying in the

Showcasing Indian art

Nineteen ninety five may well turn out to be a cultural red letter year. Ten years after the Festival of India in France, a series of different manifestations are being planned. The most significant one for contemporary Indian art is a massive show at Le Monde de L'Art curated by S H Raza, Paris-based Indian artist.

A period gallery that has been created out of artist Hypolyte Boulanger's vast, old pottery workshop, its avowed function is to give space to those countries and cultures whose artists are not recognized in the New York-Cologne-Tokyo fashionable art circuit.

Raza's selection of seven artists includes Manjit Bawa, Bal Chhabda, Tyeb Mehta, K G Subramanyam, Arpita Singh, Jogen Choudhury and his own work. The vast metallic interior of the gallery will house 10 to 15 paintings of each artist. Clearly such an impressive display is calculated to make a strong statement

on Indian art.

Additionally, theatre arts and film are going to receive a tremendous fillip. Through much of the year, Indian films will be shown at the Cinematheque in Paris. Then, Jean-Pierre Vincent, eminent theatre director who is based in the Paris suburb of Nanterre is planning three productions of Moliere's play *Amphitruon* in both India and France. These will be in the contemporary idiom, in Kathakali and in puppetry in which Indian talent will be involved.

Finally a major festival on Tagore is being planned by author Catherine Clement and Cherif Khaznadar. At a time when the popularity of Tagore's poetry and drama have been in a syncline in his homeland, his work will be represented by dance dramas, music, and the one film that he made. Tagore's most intimate and modern expression; his paintings are also likely to travel for the festival.

BRIEFINGS

MUSIC

TRIVENI AUDITORIUM:
Classical music by Singh
Bandhu; 6.30 pm; Tansen
Marg

DANCE

INDIA INTERNATIONAL
CENTRE: Kathak recital by
Hansh Gangani, disciple of
Pt Rajendra Gangani of the
Jaipur gharana; 6.30 pm;
Max Mueller Marg
IGNCA: Performance of
Bhramar Geet, music by Pre-
mlata Sharma, and kathak
by Rajana Srivastava; 5.30
pm; 3, Rajendra Prasad
Road

THEATRE

VIVEKANAND COLLEGE
AUDITORIUM: SKP's
theatre festival: Rangava-
sundhara presents Girish
Karnad's *Naagmandala*
directed by Satyavrata Rout;
7 pm; Vivek Vihar
AIRFORCE AUDITORIUM:
Umrao, by Vivadi, directed
by Anuradha Kapur; 7 pm;
Subroto Park
STUDIO THEATRE: NSD
Repertory presents Dharam-
vir Bharti's *Kanupriya*,
directed by Nikhilesh Shar-
ma; 7 pm; Rishindra Bhavan;
(till March 25)

FILMS

GANDHI AUDITORIUM:
Marathi film festival:
Choukat Raja directed by
Sanjay Sarkar; 6 pm;
Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg
SHAKUNTALAM
THEATRE: Festival of
French Documentary films:
Ceux de Chez Nous directed
by Sacha Guity; *Operation
Beton* directed by Jean-Luc



Singh Bandhu

Godard; *Les Statues Meurent Aussi* directed by Marker;