

Once upon a time-space...

By Prakash Belawadi

IN the days when summer holidays were long and you could still play cricket and soccer on the roads of Jayanagar, when grown-ups came out to watch and occasionally throw back a ball that flew into their compounds, a dozen of us kids would gather at dusk at my grandfather's small clinic for the next episode of *Ramayana*. It was a long time ago, but it seems to me he took all summer to tell the epic.

Our grandfather, a government doctor who had served in the remotest of Karnataka's villages, was a great storyteller. He did it with the same energy he brought to buying fruits and vegetables of the season when he would stop a vendor of sugarcane or mango or guava and buy off the whole cartload. Every kid playing in the street would get a share. He used to water plants in the neighbourhood in much the same way (but that's going way out of this story).

There was something in Junges Ensemble Stuttgart's *Minor Matters* that made me ache for those days when we believed the world was a big place and we all lived forever. Director Brigitte Dethier and storyteller and actor Peter Rinderknecht brought into little objects and shabby props a reality, life and wonder that art of theatre makes possible.

I went with my two daughters, aged 14 and 10, brought up on cartoon TV, largely unprepared for *Minor Matters*. To start with, it wasn't on the main stage of Ranga Shankara, but a small enclosed space in the basement. We were asked to take off our footwear. The children were making me feel guilty already, because they had those tests the next day, which kids these days seem to have all the time. And when we were

allowed into the enclosed space, I thought the children would get annoyed with me, like they do get when they are bored. But they were thrilled and I felt ashamed: It takes so little to please them, light their imaginative fire, make them wonder...

Peter Rinderknecht is a performer with the ease and confidence that many successful performances bring to good actors. He plays a sad little pavement dweller with his history of hope, possibility, successes and losses. He talks to the audience about, using silences - his and ours - to

evoke feelings and reconciliation. He plays an accordion, in brief phrases, for mood shifts. He uses little toys and props, all of which could go into a small metal box, to create the images, noises and life in a small farm.

The story itself is ordinary enough and not the point of it all, really. The gestures, pauses, use of props and interactive narrative method remind us that the art is really to make us feel again for someone, like someone himself does. It is for the performer to create that evocative time-space

for us that makes us see a world from the inside of our mind, crafted suddenly and surely from our own fuzzy, unsure memories.

The Junges Ensemble Stuttgart (JES), of Germany, which has a repertory for children and young adults, spoke to the children and the child in the adult simply and directly with the easy sophistication that only a living theatre culture could make possible. I wish I could go home switch off the TV and tell them a story. But we have forgotten too much, too quickly.

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