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The Master of Silence

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Marcus Schmid, a mime artist from Switzerland along with his family, has recently been in Kochi as part of his world tour that spans August 2012 to August 2014. The world tour features the performance of his two latest creations 'Red Forest' and 'Enki, Singer Water'.

Marcus is the disciple of Marcel Marceau, who is considered as one of the greatest mime artists and fondly called 'Master of Silence'. Marcus has been to Argentina, Peru, Colombia, Costa Rica, South Africa etc, before coming to India. In an exclusive interview with Education Insider, he speaks about his career, journey, great teacher etc. Excerpts from the interview.

Being an ancient form of theatre, how relevant is mime today?

I think mime has its basis in everybody's expression. It depends more in the idea of the basic attraction-repulsion between two, three or hundred bodies. Objects can be alive; can come to a "living form", through rhythm and choreography. So the rules between two different bodies (attraction-repulsion) can be explored on the same way between a

body and an object. Objects become a loudspeaker of the human emotions in this way. A human emotion becomes visible for an audience, through different forms the body of the actor takes in the space, and specifically the rhythm, dissociation and intensity the actor order to some parts of his body. Actually, for me, mime acting is a complete "body-musical-language".

You had the luck to be trained under one of the greatest Mime artists in the world, Marcel Marceau. How was your experience with him?



When I studied with him, I was 22 years old. I was impressed by this very little and thin man. Because, when I saw him on stage in solo, I had the impression that his body was twice or three times bigger there. His aura on stage was incredible. He taught me how to sculpt space with your respiration, the importance of the eyes, the force you have to put in them. He also taught me the importance of the suspension, which means that every movement, trough precision and proportion knowledge should be suspended in the air along an invisible rope. The classic singers use the same dynamic to suspend their notes in the space. If a sound or a gesture is not suspended, it becomes "dry" and falls down on the stage, and will never get until the last spectator in the last file. Marceau asked us to think for these last spectators. Marceau was an exceptional comic actor. He knew the rules of the dramatic rhythm perfectly. I learned a lot with him. Chaplin was his greatest fan and

master. Marceau pushed us a lot to go and discover painters, sculptors and visual art. My study in Paris became a very intense art discovering period for me due to his presence.

How do you come to this less-tapped turf of mime? How was your beginning?

I got a chance to participate in a theater workshop held in my school when I was 16 years old. This was a speaking theater. I had a teacher there who taught us a lot about body language, all the important moments an actor has to be conscious about, including his body before speaking, and after speaking, or the way he has to walk on stage, turn, sit and to leave the stage, etc. I was totally impressed by this workshop. So I decided to learn more about that non-verbal language. I fell in love with this silent world soon. I came to know about the international school of mime in Paris, and went there. I spent around 6 years intensively studying mime, dance, and fencing. It was actually a tough time.

Then I worked in Holland for four years. I got influenced strongly by sculptors and drawers, people who worked with colors, images, films, etc. It was so strong that I never came back to speaking theater. I worked with people from circus and dance throughout these years. I was lucky enough to meet with different people coming from all kinds of visual arts there. I began to work with live musicians, as you have here in India like Kathak, Katakali or other kind of dances. My days with this music team were the best

time I got as an actor. Two of our musicians will be in India in April to play music alive!

You have been performing for youth and children widely. Why do you choose them as your target audiences?

In fact, we have been playing for every group of people throughout our journey. My ultimate target is the largest popular public. And my two shows are built on a way that everybody can enjoy. I love to create images in my play which are not 'closed' in themselves: I mean, everybody could put his own imagination in those images and see something different. This is the way how I make sure the active participation of the audiences.

Our prime concern in this journey is to use the tool of theater to hook the attention of the committed people around the world in four subject; culture, education, society and environment. Fortunately, we could perform in front of different communities including little villages in the mountains, jungles, big cities, slums as in prestigious theater festivals, national parks, schools, art galleries, etc. Our target audience was not children. We met with the organization "Helen O Grady" from South Africa who actually invited us to India. 'Helen O Grady' educates



children using the tool of drama, to liberate them from all kind of fears and make them confident to communicate on a simple and expressive way. Hence, we are here in India and perform for children as this organization supports us. In India, there seems a very strict and formal relation between teachers and students. In this context, these drama tools are very pertinent to be taught; it is actually a new way of thinking and feeling.

How can studying mime help children? How does it help the imagination?

Mime paves way to use all the physical possibilities of our body. What we see today is, our children simply sit and watches television or playing computer games. The natural instinct for children is different I think; to explore physically all what is around them like climbing on trees, jumping over rivers, falling down, shouldering friends and so on. Today's situation is but different. It is mainly because parents go for "risk zero" situation for their children (specially in Europe). The parents are much more scared than their children, and limit their choices.

The relevance of mime comes here. Mime is the instinct play with physical emotions. Through the living and exploration of these emotions the child increases his identity of normal feelings, which give him the knowledge and memory of pleasure. It can give our children wide choices and they can be true to their natural instincts.

You have been travelling worldwide with your mime performances. How do you see the response of your audiences worldwide?

The questions I asked myself before beginning the journey were these: "Are the human emotions the same every where? Can humor and poetry go over the borders? Is it possible to reach the heart of people irrespective of cultural differences? The answer I reached is certainly yes! And this is a gift of this journey. Our two environment themes of the shows; water related problems, forest-deforestation, are universal issues. So, we witnessed very strong reactions from persons in different countries where these issues are in direct link with their very lives.

Water, air, trees etc are important for every human being. These things should remain a public asset for the generations to come. It should not become a unique private business. It should remain a public "business". Because, it simply means LIFE! But the reality is not positive. Water pollution is a major problem in most of the countries we travelled across including India. And I cannot understand why the governments don't choose radically to invest in new technologies about water conservation, sanitation etc. India is incredibly "strong" with all its engineering technologies. It can become one of the world pioneers in that subject. Why not yet?

How do you see the responses you get in India?



The Indian public seems shyer than others. But the intensity of following a play is very strong. We had wonderful discussions with the children, teachers, principals and others everywhere in India, when we played in communities or schools. Sometimes adults were just crying at the end, I think, silence is one of the best ways to communicate. The intellect is avoided, so the emotions reach directly the heart. The Indian public seems to be very thankful, and this touched us a lot.

Can you point out some unforgettable moments from your world tour?

We played in the villages of Peru, at 4000 meters high, where people living from agricultures, honey, and cheese and never seen foreigners. In these cold regions the human feelings were very warm. We played also in Amazonia, in the jungle near Iquitos, at the border with Brazil and Colombia. The people live there seven months in water, with little boats, and then the river goes down, and the children can run again. The houses there are built on very high trees masts. During flood-hit period, dogs, hen, pigs, cows etc are also living in boats. The streets would be 4 meters under water. The audience had to come by boats to the shows. It was a different experience. In South Africa, the children gifted us with beautiful dances and gospels songs after our performance.

Can you speak a few words about your future plans?

When we reach back Switzerland, we will initiate a new show, certainly working with big

masks. I was impressed in Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand of the masks expressions. And for sure, I will come back in these countries, including India, to play there.

In this journey the reality of meeting beautiful persons with commitment, constructive and positive visions became much bigger as what we dreamed first some years ago. This is the magic of our journey!

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