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### **Drama, without a word...**

Nikhil Raghavan



Saying a lot with action

*Special Arrangement*

**Mime artiste Marcus Schmid performed with his family in the city for Helen O'Grady International Drama Academy to drive home the pertinent message of water conservation**

The Helen O'Grady International Drama Academy began in Australia, where Helen O'Grady, a trained teacher, drama teacher and actor, hired a hall in a Perth suburb and commenced after-school drama classes for children, way back in 1979. Today, the Academy has spread across the globe. It has assigned Marcus Schmid, director of Cie Andrayas, to perform for school children in several parts of the world. Two years on the move, of which three months have been in India, with the last leg of the journey in Chennai, it has been one big adventure for Swiss nationals Marcus and Marie Schmid and their two children Felix and Leo.

Conserve our environment — that's the message sent out to the children of today by engaging them in activities that are fun and help them develop social skills and self-esteem. Interestingly, of the two topics presented in India, one was very relevant to Chennai — water scarcity.

### **The India connect**

"The goal is to create awareness about how you can express anything you want through non-verbal communication and body language. Mime transcends boundaries of language," says Arpita Mittal, head of the India branch of the Academy. "The Academy is present in 35 cities in India; each one has the responsibility to organise local events in schools and neighbourhood communities to spread relevant messages through artistic performances. In this case, it is mime and Marcus and Marie are masters of the art form."

Here's a quick look at the twin performances in the city.

*Enki, The Water Singer* revolved around Sumerian mythology in which Enki is the God of fresh water and prosperity. Without water, there is no life and no development. Through the eyes of Enki, this dreamlike tale invites you to discover the importance of water and on a larger scale, the significance of respect for Nature for survival. Marcus Schmid took on the characters — of a water carrier in a parched land, a farmer sowing seeds and praying for water, a fisherman looking for fish in polluted waters, sea life dying from water contamination and so on — with emotions, movements and special effects. With minimum commentary and maximum sound and light effects and unique props, Marcus drove home the message for the need to protect our environment so that the most precious of all natural resources — water, will never get depleted or polluted.

*The Man Who Planted Trees* is an allegorical tale by French author Jean Giono, published in 1953. It tells the story of a shepherd's long and successful single-handed effort to re-forest a desolate valley in the foothills of the Alps in Provence throughout the first half of the 20th Century. Besides deforestation, this tale highlights the importance of resilience, of having dreams and the courage to realise them.

### **The performers**

Marcus Schmid studied mime in Paris. Marcus Schmid founded his own company Cie Andrayas and conceptualised shows that use shadows, acrobatics, sculpture and manipulation of objects as guidelines. He won the Grand Prix of the International Festival of Mime of Périgueux -Mimos-/France in 2003, for his creation Le Coeur Suspendu.

The Schmid family has presented more than 150 shows in many contrasting and sometimes marginalised places — cities, mountain villages, jungles across South America, Europe, South Africa... Travelling together as a family has strengthened their bond and enriched their knowledge as they meet and interact with people from different cultures.

But it does disrupt family life to some extent, says Marie. “We have been giving home tutoring to both Felix and Leo. When we return home they will go back to regular school and I will go back to my job as a teacher of Biology,” says Marie. Meanwhile, Marcus will pursue his interest in theatre. “I love mime and try to incorporate different styles of performing arts to make the presentation more interesting. A bit of dance and music and drama will enhance the overall effect as well as help drive home the message. I plan to research and collect masks from different cultures, especially Indonesia to incorporate them in my programmes,” says Marcus.

Keywords: [Helen O’Grady International Drama Academy](#), [Marcus Schmid](#), [Enki](#), [The Water Singer](#), [The Man Who Planted Trees](#), [Chennai events](#)

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