

After all, this play wasn't just all cardboard



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'YOUR CHILDREN are not your children.. you may give them your love but not your thought... for they have their own thoughts.' Kahlil Gibran. Images too... But every now and then, their wonderful world of imagination finds a mirror image. As it did at Tagore Theatre, where a German show *'After all, it's just cardboard'* by Theatre Werkstatt Pilkentafel, Flensburg — brought to the City by Department of Cultural Affairs, Haryana, NSD, Max Mueller Bhavan — turned out to be quite the opposite of what the literal meaning hinted at. It wasn't just cardboard, in fact, anything but cardboard. Flowers, turban, a galloping horse.. now you are talking, ahem, watching sense. But then, the inanimate cardboard boxes, corrugated paper, paper rolls acquired a life of their own in the hands of Torseten Scuffle, the actor and Mathais Kaul, from whose fingers emanated the musical accompaniment in sync with action. From the word go, actually when Torsten rose from amongst the audiences which, in this case, comprised enthusiastic kids, students of Vivek High, River Dale and Ankur were in a state of ecstasy. Be it his stumbling all over, rolling on the paper rolls or handling of precariously balanced boxes, he mesmerised them all, a la Pied Piper with his innovative performance. Later, he confessed: "Since I am improving all the time on the stage itself, often the momentary hiatus after a high energy level sequence, can be very unsettling. Almost like what after the climax."

But what pushed them into playing around a child's feeling and responses to objects, which for adults connote something else. Revelation, it appears, unfolded, for Mathias could play for hours at a stretch upon cardboards. So they thought why not! Initially they experimented with clothes, puppets but cardboard it had to be. Elisabeth Bohde, director, claims: "When we go scrounging for materials in distant lands, it allows us a feel of another community's reality." But the reality they are actually fascinated by is a child's. For which they have observed them closely. Not as they ought to behave, aping adult behavior but as they are children.. since nothing is rehearsed, Torsten appears on the stage armed only with his agile ability to play around with materials, often the kids themselves act as trigger as he reminisces: "During one show, the kids said... ghost and I took the cue... so cardboards translated into ghosts." The absence of structured-format — the strength of their performance — however, often becomes their *bete noire* back home in Germany, where, as Mathias remarks: "They are only interested in scripted methods." Pips in Elisabeth: "When we say we are clueless about what will happen on stage, they have a problem. What about in India where they have been performing — as part of German Festival in India — since January 11? Smiles Tosten, the star of the show: "Well, teachers don't talk of us."

Elisabeth quips: "Ah, children are our real critics.. and the ones in Chandigarh wrote the adulatory appraisal with laughter, claps and cheers all the way."

