

THE HINDU

Breathtaking, graceful, and strangely hypnotic

Saturday, June 20, 2007

BY MANDIRA NAYAR

New Delhi: They are certainly the tallest performers that the Capital has seen.

Standing on stilts – it is a bit like watching Mary Poppins on a pole without her umbrella – six people seem to fly across the rather yellow lawns of Bahawalpur House of the National School of Drama (NSD) here on Friday.

While their performance was almost surreal – imagine a bunch of people, their face painted like clowns with top hats and pink and orange wigs swaying to music high up in the air – the name of the group, Strange Fruit, was not quite run-of-the-mill either.

“The image we had was ears of wheat in a field swaying in the wind. When the performers sway, they look like strange fruits on trees,” says Grant Mouldey, who balances being the production manager, director and sometimes even a performer.

The image may sound too poetic, but the performance promises to be no less. A Melbourne-based performance group, Strange Fruit likes to transform the landscape of public spaces, whether plazas or lawns, with tall performers and all for free. Giving audiences the chance to watch this circus in the sky, performers blend acrobatics, dance, and theatre together into a performance often leaving people gasping at their seemingly impossible movement.

“Strange Fruit is the only group in the world that does this. We have performed across the world in every continent, except Antarctica. But I’m sure we’ll get here some day,” says Robina Burton, the tour manager.

Perched on top of black poles strapped on with leg braces for support, their rhythmic swaying is thrillingly nerve-wracking, immensely graceful and strangely hypnotic. Using just the power of performance, they manage to communicate across countries and cultures abstract concepts such as freedom, loneliness and death.

In Delhi for NSD’s ninth “Bharat Rang Mahotsav”, they will be performing “The Field”. A story about courtship, breaking hearts and plenty of bending over backward, it takes the audience on an exhilarating journey of beauty and laughter.

““We just performed at the Gateway of India in Mumbai. There were 3,000 people. There we did a different piece, ‘The Spheres’. It was about the individual and the universe. I feel ‘The Field’ is a more European piece, but ‘The Sphere’ has an Indian soul. People came up to me wanting to discuss certain points. It was wonderful,” says Grant.

But Strange Fruit has a deeper connection with India than just the story of the “miracle of birth and humanity’s existential relationship” with the planet as “The Spheres” has been described by the group. With yoga an integral part of their warm up routine, this is one benefit that even the much televised yoga guru Ramdev is probably yet to discover – the ability to fly without wings.

“You need strong stomach muscles for the performance. It gets easier with time,” asserts Grant with a smile.

Those wanting to catch their breathtaking performance can go to MSD at 4 p.m. today (Saturday).