

Politics here, now

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Anjana Basu, advertising consultant and author, released her novel *Rhythms of Darkness* (Gyaana Books, ₹295) at Oxford Bookstore recently, with director-actor Rituparno Ghosh by her side. "Anjana is a friend. She has done subtitles for a number of my films. She is also a worthy writer," said Ghosh.

A spirited Kathak performance by Paromita (choreography by Amita Dutta) to the song *Srijono Chhonde* followed the launch. Theatre personalities Sumit Roy and Katy Lai came up next to read excerpts from the book. Katy read from a chapter written in the first person about Shyama, the novel's protagonist, while Sumit read from a chapter on Nihilish.

"It's about a girl who dances," said Basu later. "You could call her accident-prone. She accidentally falls in love, accidentally becomes a politician." *Rhythms of Darkness* is ostensibly a sequel to Basu's novel *Black Tongue*, but she said, "It's not really a sequel. It's being so called because some of the characters are the same. The political movement is now; the novel is set in present day Bengal."

It is this political movement that Shyama, the dark-skinned protagonist from the backwaters of Bengal, joins. She is also a dancer and is called Didi.

Some of the plot details reminded the audience rather strongly of our chief minister. Is the character inspired by her, then? Basu said the similarities were merely superficial. "I don't know anyone like her. She came



(Top) Rituparno Ghosh, Anjana Basu and Pinky Kenworthy at the book launch; Paromita in performance

out of my head," she said. So will there be a sequel to *Rhythms of Darkness*? "I don't know that yet," replied Basu. "I didn't plan this sequel either." Asked about the kind of

books she likes to read, Basu said, "Anything and everything. Since I also review books, I read a lot of them. However, I really like (Ernest Hemingway and (Rudyard) Kipling"



Shobana in performance

ALL HAIL THE DANCING QUEEN

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Padma Shri Shobana and her troupe Kalarpana presented a Bharatanatyam performance at Poolside, Hyatt Regency, Kolkata, on Sunday. Having won National Awards twice for her acting, Shobana is a well-known face even outside the world of dance, and quite a party turned up to watch her performance. Standard Chartered Priority Banking sponsored the event, which was presented by Anantara.

Nandita Pal Choudhuri of Anantara said, "Anantara is a young organisation trying to put together a complete cultural experience."

Soon afterward, the performance began with a peppy little number by the troupe. Next, Shobana narrated goddess Kali's story and its significance in the background, while a dancer interpreted it on stage. "This *varnam* is dedicated to the black goddess of Dakshineswar," said Shobana.

Though the longish piece was well choreographed and performed, like the rest of

the pieces, it was rather difficult to follow the story solely from the dance, without understanding the language of the song. This was one of the slightly 'heavier' pieces, in terms of theme and *varnam*.

A combination of Bharatanatyam and Sufi music followed, with a change in costumes to colourful ghaghra-chohis. Shobana explained the song in English before starting the dance to *Mera Sohna Sajjan Ghar Aaya*. This one was not only more understandable, but more likely to please the average audience. The mem-

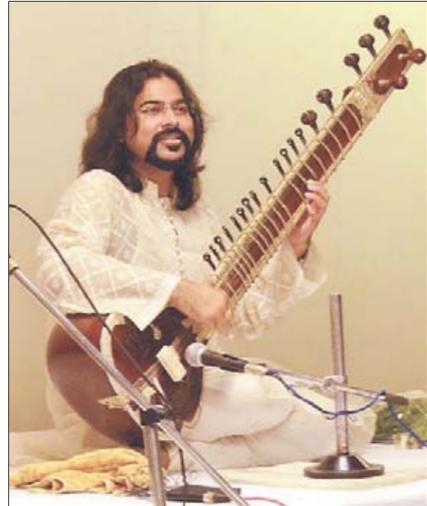
bers of Kalarpana got their share of the spotlight, never pushed to the background, but playing substantial roles in the performances.

After a short interval, Shobana announced that she would present some pieces from her new production, *Krishna*. The first was about Krishna meeting Radha for the first time since their childhood. They rediscover their love and also have a quarrel. Shobana enacted Krishna. The music for this number was particularly lovely. The next was more serious, though, dealing with

Krishna as the Supreme Being rising against evil. Shobana performed solo, in a beautiful red-and-gold costume. However, she saved her most interesting presentation for the last — Bharatanatyam to a composition by Johann Sebastian Bach.

It was a novel and well received marriage of Western classical music and the dance form, with the sounds of the ghungroo mixing with the waves of Bach's music. Indeed, the late October evening reverberated for a long time to the rhythms of the show.

PRATEEK CHOUDHURY



Purbayan Chatterjee performs at Akar Prakr

Art of reviving a lost tradition

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Ever since large auditoriums and microphones found a place in our culture, the space for open-air concerts, especially by well-known artists, has shrunk. In an attempt to give classical music lovers an experience of the former setting, Akar Prakr gallery organised an open-air *baithak* at its premises.

On the one hand sat listeners on mattresses laid out under the open sky, including the likes of artist Ganesh Haloi, TV actor Swagata Mazumdar, and painter Aditya Basak, among others, while on the other, sat sitarist Purbayan Chatterjee with Ashis Paul (tabla) on a slightly elevated platform, just a few feet from the audience.

"The experience of listening to an artiste in such an intimate setting is different from what one hears in an enclosed auditorium. This *baithak* is the first in a series that we plan to organise at the

gallery," said Reena Lath, director, Akar Prakr.

The next one will see the renowned Ken Zuckerman (sitar) alongside Pt. Swapan Chaudhuri and Apurva Mukherjee on the tabla on January 13, 2012.

Post the show, Chatterjee said he is currently working on two sitar lounge albums. "The first is a basic one, where we are doing a few numbers, including *Kya Yahi Pyaar Hai*, giving them a lounge feel. Bickram (Ghosh) has done the rhythms for one song in it. We have just started working on the second one. I am collaborating with Ustad Rashid Khan for it. It will be a thumri-lounge album," he said.

"These *baithaks* are an integral part of our traditional classic music scene, and their number has really shrunk only in recent times. It is here that an artiste gets the wah-wahs and most intimate feedback from his audience," added Chatterjee, on his experience of the *baithak*.

Youth and experience on show

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Deep scratches left behind by human nails are similar to those left behind by animal paws, at least in one sense — they reflect anger. "This anger, among other feelings, is part of the animal instinct present in each of us," says Srimanta Das about his mixed media on canvas, titled *The Secret Instinct*. This work is part of the 33rd annual exhibition of Contrivance, an established art group of the city.

The canvas, with a blue 'scratched' background, and the body of a cat with a human face wearing a cat, "holds a sense of power", says artist Bikas Mukherjee, one of the four founding members of Contrivance, alongside Mohi Pal, Ajay Das and Pradip Sur.

Of the 16 artists at the show, seven are exhibiting for the first time with the group, representing the younger generation which, the senior members feel, is important to keep any group alive.

Special mention should be made of Tanushree, whose works in wash depicting scenes from Indian mythology follow the Bengal School



of art. "Not many students (of art) wish to work this way now. Out of 100 admissions at Government Art College today, about three or four, at most, may take it up; two or



three go for sculpture, while about 90 rush to commercial or fine arts. Today, works like that of Tanushree's are not common," says Mukherjee.

Collage artist Swapan Dendra has an exhibition set to show. "I aimed to transform the original object, say a folded jeans or a muddy ground with children playing on it, into a human face or mountain. You will realise this after distant and close viewing," says Dendra.

On at Academy of Fine Arts until Nov 3, from 3 pm-8 pm

Get-together



Rituparna Sengupta, Parambrata Chattopadhyay, Rudranil Ghosh, Raj Chakraborty, Bidipta Chakraborty, PK Banerjee and Soumitra Chattopadhyay at the Bijoya get-together at Purple Movie Town

Art lovers



Ritabhari Chakraborty, Suman Mukhopadhyay and Jogen Choudhury at the inauguration of painter Saumi Nandy's art exhibition at Academy of Fine Arts



Youth theatre group Hypokrites are planning an intimate theatre festival in the city in April 2012

Intimate theatre here to stay?

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Can theatre break the fourth wall and compete with TV and cinema? Yes, says city-based youth theatre group Hypokrites. And they have begun with intimate theatre, a genre in which the cast and audience share the same space, like a circle with-

in a circle. The group plans to stage regular intimate theatre shows from November, along with proscenium theatre, followed by an intimate theatre festival in April next year. "We believe in making audiences feel as though the actors are behaving, not acting, similar to TV and cinema, which helps develop a connection between actors and viewers,"

says Anuvab Dasgupta, actor-director, Hypokrites.

"Our competition is with TV and films, toward which average audiences are shifting. Through intimate theatre, we feel we can bring them back. Intimate theatre is the future, and we plan to do a lot with it," says Anuvab.

In intimate theatre, viewers sit in the outer circle, while actors perform in the inner circle, the floor acting both as stage and sitting area. "Since the audience and cast share a platform, the experience is normalised," explains Anuvab. Veteran playwright Badal Sircar's Third Theatre had also contributed to audience-actor interaction, and launched the *angan manch* (courtyard stage) movement. And his plays *Bhooma* and *Michhil*

popularised the concept of street theatre. "We're inspired by Badal Sircar's masterful blending of street and intimate theatre," says Anuvab.

Lately, two shows by Hypokrites, *Bhalo* (Bengali) and *No Smoking* (English), staged at their rehearsal space at Behala, were appreciated by those present.

In terms of revenue generation, says Anuvab, intimate theatre is safer compared to proscenium theatre. "For proscenium theatre, even if you book a low-cost hall, the total expenditure, including lights, stage design, sound, music, stage rehearsals, costumes, rehearsal space, and publicity, is hard to recover. But in intimate theatre, the investment is low, and sometimes, there's even a profit," Anuvab says.