Farid-ud-Din Attar’s Play: Conference of the Birds



Poet: Farid-ud-Din Attar
Director: Wendy Jehlen
Group: Anikaya, USA
Language: English (???)
Duration: 1 hr 20 mins

The Play
Conference of the Birds is an evening-length movement theatre work, conceived and directed by Wendy Jehlen and inspired by the epic poem of Farid ud Din Attar. It is a tale of a group of birds that set off in search of the mythical bird, the Simurgh. Many of the birds abandon the quest. When the remaining birds arrive in the land of the Simurgh, they find themselves reflected… they are the Simurgh. We use Attar’s text as a frame for narratives gathered from refugees and other migratory people, symbolizing the journey that we, the diversity that is humanity, take together. It is a story of found community, of the necessity of difference. Conference of the Birds has been supported by the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, The Boston Foundation, Jacob’s Pillow, Arts Emerson, Theatre Communications Group, New Music/USA and National Endowment for the Arts.

Director’s Note
Conference of the Birds poses the question: How can we be

different together? The performance proposes an answer. Anikaya explores this question by translating contemporary migrant stories into dance. In the creation of the work, the company directly engaged with refugee and other migrant communities throughout the creative process. Through a community-based, artist-led process, we have created a framework within which a dynamic evolving presentation can happen – relevant to the moment. Conference of the Birds addresses many narratives at once. It addresses issues pertinent to religious and cultural minorities, gender and sexuality, refugees, and works to counteract xenophobia in its many manifestations – both in content and in the composition of the company. Re-contextualising this classical Sufi text illuminates current moment in history, bringing to full circle the idea that human history is a history of movement, mingling and entanglements.

The Director

Wendy Jehlen's career has been marked by international explorations, study and creative collaboration. Wendy engages in collaborations across languages, culture, media and genres. Her work questions the boundaries that we imagine between ourselves, and seeks to break down these imagined walls through an embodied practice of radical empathy. Her unique approach to choreography incorporates elements of Bharat Natyam, Odissi, Capoeira, Kalaripayattu, West African dance, Butoh, and a wide-range of contemporary movement forms. Her emotionally powerful choreography has been created and performed in the US, Canada, Italy, India, Japan, Brazil, Benin, Burkina Faso, Botswana, Mali and Turkey. Her works include Delicateness in Times of Brutality (2017), a duet with Deaf Butoh artist Dakei; Entangling (2015), a duet inspired by Quantum Entanglement; The Deep (2015), a work for 25 dancers created in Brazil; Lilith (2013), a solo on the first woman; The Knocking Within (2012), an evening-length duet on a disintegrating relationship; Forest (2010), a journey through the archetypal forest; and He Who Burns (2006).

The Poet

Abū Ḥamīd bin Abū Bakr Ibrāhīm, better known by his pen-name Farīd ud-Dīn Aṭṭār, was a Persian poet, theoretician of Sufism, and hagiographer from Nishapur who had an immense and lasting influence on Persian poetry and Sufism. Manṭiq-uṭ-Ṭayr (The Conference of the Birds) and Ilāhī-Nāma (The Book of Divine) are among his most famous works.

The Group

Anikaya's mission is to break down the perceived boundaries between people, cultures and art forms. Our work has so far extended to the US, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, France, India, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mali and Turkey. Anikaya weaves together music, dance and storytelling to create works that pull from the full range of the body's communicative capabilities. We incorporate traditional forms, internalizing them and then allowing them to reemerge as part of a new contemporary movement vocabulary. The result is work that is resonant of deep-rooted traditions, without being bound to any particular genre, place or practice. The ensemble includes performers from Benin, Brazil, Egypt, Indonesia, India/South Africa, Japan, Turkey and the US.

Cast & Credits

Dancers	Ibrahim Abdo (Egypt), Yasin Anar (Turkey), Sarveshan Gangen (South Africa/India), Kae Ishimoto (Japan), Danang Pamungkas (Indonesia), Luciane Ramos da Silva (Brazil)
Music created by	Fraction (Eric Raynaud) (France), Shaw Pong Liu (USA), Shaho Andalibi (Iran/Canada), Deraldo Ferreira (Brazil/USA)
Light Design	Stephen Petrilli (USA)
Light execution	Gregory Casparian (USA)
Projection Design	David Bengali (USA)

Calligraphy artist
& content consultant Pouya Jahanshahi (Iran/USA)

Director/Choreographer Wendy Jehlen (USA)

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Nishantha De Silva & Rajitha Hettiarachchi's Play: Grease Yaka Returns

GREASE YAKA RETURNS

Playwrights & Directors: Nishantha de Silva & Rajitha Hettiarachchi
Group: Ananda Drama, Sri Lanka
Language: English
Duration: 1 hr 05 mins

The Play
Prologue – Fear Walks
Study Partners – Sahani and Arun 'study' despite Kalana, when they see their creepy neighbour.
Lu, Lu – Sahani posts a story that goes viral.
Bus Stand – Kanthi and her daughter Charini learn about the grease yaka.
Shoe Shopping – Arukshi is shoe-shopping with Kishan, helped

by a greasy salesman.
Lunchtime – Supun, Hansani, Ms. Shriya and Mr. Manjula are public servants. What happened to their dessert?
Channel Surfing – TV shows enthrall the nation. What is this grease disease?
Warriors – Sahani conducts a make-up tutorial, but can 'darkies' discuss beauty?
Spilt Coffee – Charini appeals to Arukshi for help against discrimination.
Fairness Treatment – Sahani needs help to become fairer.
Mirror – The politicians are with us.
The Cure – Kanthi seeks medical help for Charini.
Consequences – Riots!
Another Beginning – We look to our leaders.
Epilogue: A Mother's Love – Is there a cure?

Directors' Note

The Grease Yaka (grease demon) myth describes scantily clad, grease covered men suspected of crimes ranging from voyeurism to rape to abduction and murder in Sri Lanka. Although no grease yakas were ever caught, grease yaka 'sightings' hogged the headlines from time to time, causing widespread alarm and panic, especially during the conflict period. Ananda Drama's Grease Yaka (2014) examined the emergence and proliferation of fears in the society by using this urban legend as a metaphor and a tool.

Grease Yaka Returns, first staged in 2018, explores the corrosive and sometimes devastating consequences of those fears. It looks at how easily distrust can be sown between various groups in the society through the aggregation of relatively small event and incidents. It looks at how quickly this distrust can morph into social divisions, sometimes even erupting in violence. It holds a mirror, and a warning, to the society.

The Directors & Playwrights

Nishantha de Silva is the founder of Ananda Drama, a non-

profit theatre company based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Before Grease Yaka Returns (2018), Nishantha co-wrote and directed the trilingual political satire Picket Republic (2017) and a comic adaptation of Dracula (2015). He produced Grease Yaka (2014) and Grease Yaka Returns (2018) for Ananda Drama. Together with Rajitha, he won the awards for Best Direction and Best Original Script at Sri Lanka's State Drama Festival 2019 for Grease Yaka Returns, which won a total of 10 awards including Best Play. His other directing credits include The Tempest at The Workshop Players' Shakespeare in the Park Festival 2017 and Stuart Paterson's adaptation of Michael Morpurgo's Kensuke's Kingdom (2013). He holds an M. Phil from Cambridge University and a Fellowship in Directing from Trinity College London.

Rajitha Hettiarachchi joined Ananda Drama as a writer and director following its establishment in 2013. Rajitha co-wrote Grease Yaka (2014) with its director Ruwanthie de Chickera whilst also acting in it. He acted in Stages Theatre' Group's Walking Path, which won Best Play and Best Ensemble Cast at the THESPO theatre festival in Mumbai in 2014. Rajitha founded the performance company Idea Couch and was an Art Think South Asia Fellow in 2018. He holds a B.A. in English from Sri Jayawardenepura University and is an Attorney at Law.

The Group
Ananda Drama grew from the work carried out by its founder Nishantha de Silva and other alumni at Ananda College, Colombo, since 2006. With many students involved in the school's English theatre activities wanting to continue their work in theatre after graduating, Ananda Drama was formed as a non-profit entity in 2014 to showcase their work to the general public.

Cast & Credits
Students Leeth Singhage (Kalana), Eshani Seneviratne (Sahani)
Lakshitha Edirisinghe (Arun),

Mother and Daughter Dmitri Gunatilake (Kanthi), Dinoo Wickramage (Charini)
Couple Ashini Fernando (Arukshi), Chalana Wijesuriya (Kishan)
Government Servants Jayavi Jayawardhana (Hansani), Sabreena Niles (Shriya), Lithmal Jayawardhana (Supun), Gavin Ranasinghe (Manjula)
Opportunists Charith Dissanayake, Nandun Dissanayake
Pemanthi Fernando, Eraj Gunawardena
Ayudhya Gajanayake, Rithmaka Karunadhara
Vidura Manoratne, Malith Kulathilake
Amandi Kulathilake, Hiruni Herath

Designer Jayampathi Guruge
Stage Manager Ishtartha Wellaboda

Playwrights & Directors Nishantha de Silva and Rajitha Hettiarachchi

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Kavita Srinivasan’s Play: Kumari and the Beast

Playwright & Director: Kavita Srinivasan
Group: Sushila Arts Academy, Nepal

Language: English
Duration: 1hr 10mins

The Play

Satya Yuga (era of truth) was an era when gods, demons and humans cohabited the earth. Set in this time is the story of goddess Kumari who came to rule the kingdom of Kathmandu. The legend describes a young goddess Kumari, born to the gods Svet-Kali and Svet-Bhairav in the neighbourhood of Nardevi in ancient Kathmandu. To their alarm, she falls in love with an asura (demon), Chanda. Their tumultuous love story ends tragically, as Kumari ultimately sacrifices her love to in order to fulfil her duty. Her parents in return, make her the ruler of Kathmandu.

Kumari and the Beast is an interpretation of the story told by Maheswor Juju Rajopadhyay in his book of short stories Nepali Adhyaatma Jagat ko Itihas (History of Nepal's Spiritual World). The story is presented through a fusion of Nepal's classical Charya dance and contemporary dance-movement, with live music and vintage photography.

Director's Note

Three things attracted me to this story: First, the story provides a fascinating role model of how a female child can hold one of the highest positions of social and political power, and can remain unmarried of her own will. In a world where power has been known for eons to be held by the senior-most male, the relevance of such a figure is immense.

Second, the story's central theme of 'forbidden love' remains as relevant today as it was ages ago. Society's condemnation of certain kinds of love based on caste, creed, gender, race etc. continues to trample on the fundamental right to choose.

Last, the sacrifice of the beast is symbolic of the price that society extracts from each of us.

The Director & Playwright

Kavita Srinivasan has focused on stories of culturally iconic figures like Gautama Buddha and Goddess Kumari, reinterpreting

and telling their stories in a way that fuses the classic and the contemporary, focusing on the human element, through movement, dance, music, theatre and visual art. She also created Nepal's first online sitcom P.S. Zindagi (Post Seismic Zindagi) which won local and international recognition. Kavita has done two Masters – in Architecture, and in City Planning – from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT, USA).

The Group

Sushila Arts Academy (SAA) is a theatre dance music and arts institution in Kathmandu, Nepal founded in 2012 with the aim to promote the Arts in Nepal. Since its establishment, it has been providing hundreds of scholarship seats to talented but financially limited or underprivileged Nepali students. The Academy has delivered numerous musical and theatre-dance productions, art exhibitions, shows and various art programs, all aimed at promotion of the arts in Nepal, as well as giving a platform to young, talented Nepali artists to flourish further.

Cast & Credits

Kumari Kripa Bajracharya

Chanda Kiran Shrestha

Svet-Bhairav Sudan Munikar

Svet-Kali

Vijaya Karki

Representation of Kumari's feelings Arpana Lama, Glory Thapa, Sunita Darnal

Representation of Chanda's feelings Srijan Bhattarai, Jerox Chaudhari, Nikesh Raj Chaudhary

Charya Dance Choreographer Sudan Munikar, Kripa Bajracharya

Musicians

Chandra Man Shrestha (Drums, Percussion and effects),

Prabesh Maharjan (Percussion and effects),
Saroj Shahi (Guitar and effects),
Rupesh Shakya (Flute, horn and effects)
Original Music and Sound Effects Dimitris Giannopoulos
Recorded Music Various Sources
Narration
Kavita Srinivasan
Costume Designer Sammriddhi Mittal, Samita Kapali
Beast Make-up Sunita Darnal, materials from Aesthete Studio
Lights
Dinesh Tuladhar
Sound
Tuphan Thapa
Smoke/Projection Kanchan Pandey
Black and White Photographs Kiran Chitrakar (Poster), Dominic Sansoni, GTZ,
A. Proksh, AFP, Ian Trower and others
Publicity Stills
Avishesh Raj Maskey, Shilu Jain
Behind the Scenes Photographs Suman Nagarkoti
Production Stills Bijay Tamrakar
Truss / Thermacol / Set Binod Pokharel (Stage Mind)
Producer
Sushila Arts Academy
Assistant Director/ Stage Manager Vijaya Karki

Special Thanks – Jagannath Dhaugoda (Djimbe), Brikchya Band (Khen, Dhimey, Taa, Ghungro), Shree Guru Nitya Baja Khala (Dhime, Taa, Bapucha, Bhusya), Vajra Kala Kunja (Charya music and costume support), Swarnim Maharjan (Flute Melody concept

tips), Pawan R. Joshi (Projections)

Story
Maheshwor Juju Rajopadhyay
Playwright & Director Kavita Srinivasan

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Daniil Kharm's Play: Mondays are best for flying out of windows



Playwright: Daniil Kharms
Director: Rajiv Krishnan
Group: Perch, Chennai
Language: English
Duration: 1 hr 30 mins

The Play

A girl finds a job as a cashier in your store, turns the handle on the cash-till and dies. What do you do? Stick a mushroom in her hand and pretend she's alive. People throw themselves off windows, they leap out of cupboards, they spend maddeningly long hours in queues, they attack each other with snot and cucumbers, they fall, they sleep, they fight, they die. This is the world of Daniil Kharms. Chaotic, absurd, sometimes frightening, often incomplete. And you find that the only rational response is to laugh. The worse it gets, the more you laugh. Kharms is the master of dark laughter. It's so ridiculous, so absurd, it can't be true, right? Right?

Director's Note

Our approach to Kharms was from a state of complete unknowing. A piece of text, a thought, an idea or an image triggered off our explorations. The entire process was a challenging one to say the least. This play represents our individual and collective response to Kharms, conceived in a true spirit of collaboration.

Puppets play an important role in this piece. The choice of working with puppets was a chance occurrence. Not being trained puppeteers we started from scratch, using storytelling as a guide. Like every piece of ours, we see this work too as a work in progress, evolving as we present it to audiences. And as much as we want to engage and provoke you, the audience, we hope that you will engage with the piece and provoke us in turn. In true Kharmsian spirit, we invert the typical theatre greeting and direct it to the audience – Break a leg!

The Director

Rajiv Krishnan is a theatre director and actor based in Chennai. His first play as a director was an adaptation of the comic satire Accidental Death of an Anarchist (Dario Fo) in 2000. In 2004, he organized a fortnight long festival called 'Angloscapes' focused on the Anglo-Indian community for which

he co-adapted and directed a play inspired by Tennessee Williams Glass Menagerie in English. It was with this festival that the theatre collective Perch informally came into being.

The Playwright

Daniil Kharms (1905-1942), was an early Soviet era absurdist poet, writer and dramatist. He was often incarcerated by the Stalinist regime of his time for his unconventional and rebellious ways. His adult literature was not published during his lifetime and he was confined to writing for children. He is said to have starved to an anonymous death in the psychiatric ward of a Soviet hospital after being arrested during the siege of Leningrad in 1942. His stories defy easy characterization – they may start humorously but quickly turn dark, many featuring random acts of violence.

The Group

Perch is a theatre collective based in Chennai. It was formed by a motley bunch of actors, designers, filmmakers, journalists and others in 2008. Perch has been constantly exploring new ways of storytelling on a variety of themes from pure fantasy to contemporary Indian reality, from humour to political satire. Starting with adaptations of well- known plays and short stories, they have also explored devised work which is multilingual, collaborative and ensemble driven with a strong focus on visual design and music.

Cast & Credits

Created & Performed by Iswar Lalitha, Rency Philip, Sachin Gurjale, Vijay Ravikumar, Vinod Ravindran

Music
Abhaydev Praful
Photography Richa Bhavanam
Costumes Kaveri Lalchand
Puppets and Prop making Iswar Lalitha, Rency

Philip, Sachin Gurjale, Vijay Ravikumar, Vinod Ravindran
Set and Light Design Kalpana Balaji, John V. Mathew
Production Management Anushka Meenakshi, Bharavi

Commissioned by The Serendipity Arts Festival

Playwright Daniil Kharms
Director Rajiv Krishnan

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