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How humour meets magic

MALATHI RANGARAJAN

Delving into the special charm of Crazy team's 'Chocolate Krishna.'

Photos: S.R. Raghunathan & Jothi Ramalingam



Sleight of hand: (From left) Balaji, 'Crazy' Mohan and Sivaji Chaturvedi.

Effervescence is their middle name and they have been keeping Tamil theatre goers in stitches for over three decades now. Catch Mohan and Balaji, along with Sivaji Chaturvedi, for the latest on Crazy Creations' 'Chocolate Krishna,' which is creating ripples in the sabhas of the city.

Crazy Creations has always been synonymous with success but what in particular has made 'Chocolate Krishna' tick? "Humour turns magical once the audience receives it well. But when comedy and actual magic are blended together in a play, it's not just unique, it's fun to watch. Therein lies 'CK's USP," laughs Mohan.

Actor R.S. Manohar, hailed for his incredible sets, created magic on stage even years ago. "But there's a big difference. Technicians behind the scene were in

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- [Busines](#)
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charge of the magnificent tricks shown on stage. Here, Mohan as Krishna has to perform the tricks, and get each of them right, every time. And he has to handle his dialogue too," says Sivaji Chaturvedi, the magician who has trained Mohan.

"In fact, I suggested Sivaji could act as Balaraman, be with me on stage and perform magic on my behalf. But he shot it down. Don't you think he'll be an apt Balarama?" Mohan quips, referring to Chaturvedi's rotundity, as the magician looks at him indulgently.

Chaturvedi comes across as a taciturn person, but mention magic and he is excitement personified. It was at a mall in Dubai that he first stood rooted to a magic show. The fascination led him to enrol himself with the wizard on stage the very next day and literally learn the tricks of the trade. Later, back in Chennai post-retirement, Chaturvedi decided to pursue magic more intensely. "I've been doing shows for over a year now," he says.

Wowing children

Says Balaji: "When we planned to stage a new play this holiday season, we decided we would target kids totally. Experience has taught us that once children like a presentation, elders automatically follow. Including Rajinikanth, many have proved it true. The title is an added attraction."

"Also Lord Krishna lends himself to any genre, be it romance, action or humour. So credit goes to him first," Mohan adds. Help was at hand with friend Sivaji Chaturvedi, an avid theatre enthusiast, around and soon Mohan began training under him. "He needed just about a fortnight. Mohan is a quick learner. Even as a painter he honed his artistic skills in no time," Balaji observes. Not many know that Mohan's paintings spell aesthetics.

At the inaugural show when Mohan descended on stage as Krishna on a decorated seat lowered by a pulley, he was quite apprehensive. "Thankfully I don't suffer from vertigo," he smiles. And things don't ease out for him after the scene. "I have a folded flute and my glasses that I wear later on in the scene in one hand, a flower, which would spread out as a garland pasted on my other palm, a huge head gear and heavy costume to match."

The 'Crazy' team is tickled no end by the gadgetry Mohan is stuck with for a whole two hours. "He's a very busy man and would just take up a small 15-minute part in our plays. This time we haven't let him get away easily. The play has poignant messages and only Mohan as Krishna can drive them home. But what we didn't anticipate is the children crowding the green room after the play and quizzing him on the magic," Balaji laughs.



Chaturvedi is so excited with the way Mohan has perfected the tricks that he keeps introducing a couple more every now and then. "It enhances the levity and watching the children go gaga over them, from backstage, makes me want to do more," he says. "Yet we can't go overboard and make it a glorified magic show either. That's why though we first thought we'll put Krishna in a box, make him disappear, and then have him walk up to the stage from the entrance to the hall, we haven't done it. But with the way the play has picked up we soon might," pauses Chaturvedi.

The Krishna inspiration

Ever since Mohan watched Padma Subrahmanyam's 'Krishnaya Thubhyam Namaha,' some years ago, he had wanted to write a play with God as the fulcrum. Later 'Kaliyuga Kannan' with Thengai Srinivasan urged him to pursue the idea further. Kanthan, its director, has pruned the play effectively, and every 'Crazy' performer makes an impression in 'CK.' "Most of them, including Kanthan, have been with me for 30 years now. Friendship is the base on which the Crazy edifice has been built. That's why it's strong," says Mohan striking a sentimental chord.

"Never underestimate the audience. They are more intelligent than we are, is our bottomline. It's gratifying to see the overwhelming response every 'CK' show meets with," they chorus.

"Mohan's healthy humour is always a hit. What I'm doing for them is only value-addition," is Chaturvedi's modest stand. But those who've watched the play know that 'Crazy's Krishna will not be the same without the magic wand!

* * *

Tricks up their sleeve

The moment you ask Sivaji Chaturvedi whether he is game for a small demo

of his magic expertise and he is all energy.

He walks up to his car and brings in the materials necessary. "This is how Krishna changes a dupatta into an angavastram for the musician on his way to the concert. Do it Balaji." Balaji takes it in his hand as Chaturvedi proudly looks on. A swirl, Presto! The pink dupatta turns into a green and red bordered vastram!

The next is a piece of plain black cloth which with a swish has Krishna's figure on one side and Rama's on the other!

"You see this small white packet in my hand? It is from this packet in Mohan's hand that a beam of light emanates," explains Chaturvedi.

And what is it about a policeman's lathi changing shape? "Please! We plan to introduce it only in our future shows. So for the moment it's suspense," smiles Balaji.

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