



# The world's her STAGE

**MEET** LIZA GEORGE talks to French theatre artiste Françoise Calvel, who has made the city her home and teaches theatre to adults and children alike

“I love performing for children and having children perform,” says French theatre person Françoise Calvel. She goes on to add: “If in March, I had a 100 children from the city’s Rainbow Montessori performing a play about a boy who had a moon on his forehead and a star on his chin, this year, Abhija Sivakala, a theatre person with Abhinaya Theatre and I will perform ‘Sleeping Beauty’ for children in November.”

‘Sleeping Beauty,’ says Françoise, will see Abhija and Françoise bring to life 14 characters through change of voices, puppets, and masks. The play is an adaptation of the characters of this much-loved children’s fairy tale. Françoise will be bringing in professionals to help out with the play. If a fight scene has Françoise and Abhija training with a Kalaripayattu artiste, the dance part has the duo training with a Kathak teacher.

Theatre happened to Françoise at the age of 11. The then cultural minister of France, she says, was keen that professionally trained artistes teach students their respective art forms in schools. “By 18, I was a professional who was working with a leading theatre group. A shy child, theatre gave me confidence. That is why I advocate teaching theatre to children,” says Françoise who teaches theatre to children at L’ecole Chempaka and Rainbow Montessori School. She also conducts theatre classes for a group of adults every Sunday at Rainbow.

Her adult class comprises mostly of men and women working at Toonz Animation India Pvt. Ltd. Says Cheery Cherian Thomas, a 3D animator at Toonz: “Acting is a base for good animation. Only if you know how to bring on the right emotions, expressions and so on can you animate a character on screen. Françoise teaches us the techniques in acting, the history of theatre, contemporary theatre... in her class.”

Adds Riyaz Khan, senior animator at Toonz: “Recently, she taught us the difference between how an elderly person and a youngster, would walk, talk and behave. These techniques prove useful in our work as the

**RACONTEUR** Françoise Calvel

## How I met my husband

Françoise has another reason why Kerala is dear to her. After completing a Kathakali workshop at Fort Kochi, she decided to spend a couple of days at Varkala. That is where she met Eric, a fellow French, holidaying. “It is funny how it took Varkala, to hook up two French people; it’s kind of romantic as well,” she sighs dreamily.



Western acting style is different from ours.”

Laughs Françoise: “Last Sunday, I asked them if they had seen a Kathakali performance. Out of the group of eight, one of them raised their hand. I asked her where she had seen it and she replied, ‘On TV.’”

She adds: “But then I guess it is natural. When you live in the place you are born in, you tend to take the place, its surroundings and its culture for granted. A visitor to the place, on the other hand, would find it interesting and fascinating.”

And that is perhaps one of the reasons, Françoise and her husband, Eric, decided to stay in Kerala. “We could have chosen any place in India and in Kerala, but we found Thiruvananthapuram, comfortable.” The duo has been living in the city for the last five years. “We wanted to move out of France and were debating where to go when Kerala came to mind.” With their 11-month-old daughter, Léa, they moved to the city. Avid travellers, Eric and Françoise started Layam Cultural Events and Training Pvt. Ltd. “Layam organises tours for groups not exceeding eight from France to places in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.” Layam tries to give the visitors an authentic feel of the place by organising stays in traditional home stays, offering traditional food... “We also organise professional workshops for French artistes in Indian art forms like Kathakali, Mohiniyattom and Carnatic music.”

It has only been in the last two years that Françoise has started returning to theatre. She started off by conducting a theatre workshop at Alliance Française de Trivandrum last October. “I love theatre. I love making people laugh, which I find is a huge task in the city as the audience here is not a very expressive one. I hope ‘Sleeping Beauty’ which is for adults too, will bring a smile on people’s faces.”

Contact Françoise for the adult theatre classes at 9567421039.