

HIGH DRAMA / RAVINDRA MANCH

Clowning Is Serious Business



Naresh Gulati

MEMBERS OF the Caravan Theatre group of France will complete their workshop in Jaipur today. Seventeen of them have been here for yet another workshop in the space of one year — a workshop that aims at grooming the clown within each individual, at bringing him out of the façade and be good to the world around.

While an equal number of young theatre workers joined their French counterparts from here in the workshop at the Ravindra Manch, it seems the Pink City has become second home to the clowning genre.

As the end of the workshop hosted by Jan Kala Sahitya Manch (JKSM) is in sight, Jean Pierre Besnard the director is a satisfied man. Not because the work-

shop is ending and he will fly home. (In fact, his entire troupe will move out for a Rajasthan darshan before going back.) No, Besnard is happy recalling his discovery at Jaipur two years ago of the tremendous appeal that the genre could create when applied to the Theatre of the Oppressed.

Also called Forum Theatre, this has been Besnard's core performance activity for years. Clowning has done some value addition to what once used to be an exercise in information dissemination, participative interaction, discussion and debate for resolution of a proposition taken in hand. And he discovered it here while doing a standard drill of a workshop, says Besnard.

"Clowning has added a much-needed lighter ap-



proach to serious issues," informs the young, bubbly and communicative Laurence Marafante. Half French, half Spanish she is performing two roles for the troupe. Not only is acting as

its interpreter, but also she is more or less Chef De Mission as she takes care of all the mundane details. Then there is Besnard's co-worker Beatrice, who was here last year too, handling the beginners while he grooms the seniors.

The workshop has proved to be a refresher for the 11 actors who visited and performed in France about two months ago. Sponsored by JKSM, the actors seem to be a cohesive group, now coordinated by this young Pankaj Sharma. A visit to the workshop reveals them the midst of an exercise on inter-cultural appreciation. An energetic Pankaj leads her side to join the counterparts from France in understanding and analysing the session.

No doubt she doesn't see clowning as just a comic relief for an audience. She seems to be in agreement with Besnard when she says the clown has the power to create empathy. Jaipurites have learnt that language does matter, but what the

clown does is create an instant rapport with the universal body language, for he addresses the clown within each individual.

And that is where a new beginning always is. ■