

The French Windows Are Wide Open

France brings a grand three-month festival to India. Recommended viewing: Albert Kahn's collection of images documenting early 20th century India

UMA VISHNU

TO be French, you must wear a beret and carry a baguette at all times.

France is in the midst of a raging debate — initiated by Eric Besson, France's minister of national identity — on what it takes to be French, a poser that has seen sharp reactions from intellectuals and the general public. And most of the responses, posted on a website, aren't really about berets and baguettes.

It's an unnecessary debate, say critics, but France's Ambassador to India Jerome Bonnafont says it's a debate that comes up with every new wave of immigration to France. "It's a pact that people who come to France make with the republic — that you will become French not because you are living in France for long, but because you will inherit centuries of culture in France," he says.

Culture. That's a part of their identity that the French guard zealously, even in the face of challenges that come with globalisation. While the debate goes

on, some part of that French identity will travel to India as part of Bonjour India, a grand, three-month festival of France in India. The festival, which begins on November 28, will feature more than 100 events and 250 French artists, musicians, researchers and entrepreneurs across 18 Indian cities.

Organised by Culturesfrance and the Embassy of France in India, the festival will introduce Indians to the finest of French music, arts, cinema, theatre and literature. Besides, there will be debates, conferences and exhibitions on science, sustainable architecture and education.

It's an opportunity to showcase a France that's classic yet contemporary. "Graffiti, street art, installations, opera, dance and music play an integral part in defining the cities of France. The varied forms of art presented at Bonjour India will give a taste of today's French culture," says Aruna Adiceam who is heading the Bonjour India project. On Wednesday, at an event held at the French Cultural Centre in Delhi to an-



Rabindranath Tagore in Albert Kahn's garden in Paris, June 1921; the giant giraffes that will be part of a street parade

ounce the festival, Bonnafont said the "aim of the festival is to bring together the two countries and facilitate dialogue and co-operation in varied fields".

"It's fashionable to be an Indian in France. Today India is in our minds just as Japan was in

the past. And culture is the best way of diplomacy, by sending our artists and philosophers over," says Olivier Poivre d'Arvor, director of Culturesfrance.

The artists and scholars who will be in India for the festival hope to achieve just that. Like

the Albert Kahn exhibition, titled "The Albert Kahn Collection: Journeys to India". Albert Kahn, millionaire banker and philanthropist, sent two operators to document India in autochromes (early colour photographs) and black-and-white

films. The result is a stunning mosaic of 1,200 autochromes and two hours of B&W silent film that capture the India of the first two decades of 20th century — the water-carriers of Bombay, the mahouts of Udaipur and the Golden Temple in Am-

ritsar. The festival also brings Jean-Michel Othoniel's glass installation, *The Precious Stonewall*, for which he has worked with glassmakers from Firozabad, Uttar Pradesh. Another highlight is The Giraffes-Compagnie OFF, a street parade mixing opera, circus and burlesque, featuring giant giraffes and circus boys.

"Our goal is to present a new, contemporary image of France. It's a strong cliché that France, as a country, has stopped evolving," says Cecile Peyronnet, head of Artistic Services Department, Ministry of Culture, France.

So while France continues to pride itself in being the country of Montmartre, Eiffel, wine, cheese and *Mona Lisa*, it is today also the country of world music, thriving McDonald's restaurants and hip-hop artists Mourad Merzouki, whose show *Wasteland* is a highlight of Bonjour India.

It's this spirit that the festival hopes to bring to India.

Programme schedule on www.bonjour-india.com

Bee Season



DIDACTIC, inconspicuous and presbytery were only some of the words that the contestants tripped over at the preliminary round of the Spelling Bee at the Capital. Organised by the American Center along with Mirriam-Webster, the Bee saw students from all over the NCR twisting their tongues at St Columba's School on Tuesday morning. Twenty-nine students from Delhi will proceed to the next round. Nikita

Sahay of Carmel Convent scored the highest, getting 18 of 20 words right. "Last-minute preparation will not work for the Bee," says Sahay. "I used to read a lot. And there was a lot of help from my friends and teachers." The final at the American Center on January 2010 will see the Delhi winners battling the finalists from Kolkata, Chandigarh-Mohali and Gurgaon.

(EFS)



Perfect Fit

VESNA Pericevic Jacob, personal trainer and former gymnast, is well known for introducing the revolutionary Power Plate exercise machine in Delhi. Now Jacob, 34, has opened her first wellness clinic, Vesna's Wellness Clinic, at Panchsheel Park — it is spread over 3,000 sq ft and equipped with the latest technology to combat cellulite and stubborn fat. At the launch party, Bosnia-born Jacob walked around the studio, entertaining friends (and potential clients) such as lawyer Rajiv Luthra and former cricketer Ajay Jadeja. Socialites Sanjay and Sheena Sharma, Deepika Jindal of Art D'inox and Pankaj Munjal of Hero Motors popped in for a



Jacob (right) with Jindal

dekkho. "I used to run a small studio in Asian Roots but now this is my hub," said Jacob. "We have decided to bring the Hypoxi therapy as it is the most natural way of losing weight and we're confident the results will show." Contact: lnvfitness@gmail.com

(EFS)

Sound of Musicals

Everybody loves a song. Is that why the Delhi stage is hosting so many musicals this season?

DIPANITA NATH

WHILE travelling the arc from social satire to slapstick comedy, Delhi's theatrewallahs seem to have had an epiphany: that success comes packed with songs, that actors' breaking into a lilting number is better than their spouting a racy dialogue.

Consequently, we're being treated to a number of musicals this season — *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Hello Dolly* and the biographies of the poets Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Sahir Ludhianvi called *Mujhse Pehli Si Mohabbat Mere Mehboob Na Maangand Sahir: His Life and Loves* respectively, besides the National School of Drama's *Zara Bada Ek Basheer* on the Malayalam writer Vaikom Mohammed Basheer. "Musicals attract more people

than ordinary plays," says George Pulinkala, director of *Fiddler on the Roof*. His adaptation of the Broadway hit was staged before a packed house on October 31 and November 1.

The cast too finds creative satisfaction in the happy mélange of song, dance and acting. As Ravi Raj Sagar, director of another Broadway adaptation, *Hello Dolly*, says, "Musicals are fun to make and fun to watch." KK Kohli, producer of *Mujhse Pehli Si...*, which was staged earlier this month, traces the audience's "instant connect with musicals" to India's music-rich folk theatre like *nautanki* and *jatra*. Abhilash Pillai, a faculty member at the NSD, who directed *Zara Bada...*, says, "A normal play cannot bring alive the world that occupied the writer Basheer — the stars, the

particles of the moon, the tiny birds. We used around 14 songs and the dialogue was like punctuation to give the audience time to sink in what the lyrics had painted."

Buoyed by the success of musicals in the Capital, Kohli is set to revive his 10-year-old musical *Bichhrey Paani*, a story of the undivided Punjab, for which he has culled independence-era songs like the one composed by students of the Lahore Government College after Bhagat Singh was sent to the gallows. For his plays, instrumentalists sit in the wings while the chorus is positioned backstage. Recorded music frequently bolsters live singing, but as Pramila Le Hunte, who directs *Sahir* — which has 17 live songs and 30 recorded tracks — says, "I'd like just one live instrument, a tabla or a string instrument, so that nothing



Scenes from Hello Dolly

distracts from Sahir's lyrics."

"It isn't song and dance all the way," says Sagar. For, there are choreographers to hire, musicians to choose and you need actors who can sing. Pulinkala auditions first for singers and then decides on the lead actors from among them, while Le Hunte "worked around the fact that the actor playing Sahir couldn't

sing". "I used devices like having Sahir's mother and his nurse — actor Aarti Wahni in double role — sing many songs. Another actor, Anil George, who plays Yash Chopra, sings *Kabhi na jaon chhod kar*. Thus, with only three singing actors, I put across the essence of Sahir's life and music," she says.

Musicals are also an expensive proposition — often costing double that of an ordinary play. Kohli paid around Rs 45,000 for instrumentalists alone when *Mujhse Pehli Si...* was staged. Fiddler was made on a budget of Rs 8 lakh, while *Hello Dolly* cost Rs 5 lakh. But then comes the first inkling of good tidings: "The first thing of good tidings ask is, 'Is it a comedy?' Fortunately, most musicals are," says Sagar. Such is the demand for *Hello Dolly* that Sagar has stopped bulk corporate bookings this year in order "to leave seats for other theatre lovers". Call it the sweet song of success.

Sahir will be staged at Kamani on December 13. Hello Dolly will be staged at the Shri Ram Centre on November 21, December 5, 6, 12, 13

Sunny Fiesta

Here are the best places — garden patios and terraces with a view — to eat out on a winter's afternoon

MEHER FATMA

TEEMING GREENS

Considering how brief our winter is, Saket's Garden of Five Senses is ideal for a sunny Sunday brunch with swaying branches offering some shade and cool breeze. The choices are plenty but, beware, dining in the garden does not come as cheap as taking a stroll in this green patch. There is Marut Sikka's Magique serving fusion with a desi tadka on the patio. Then there is the newly opened Fio offering Italian and Indian in a charming, rustic atmosphere.



MALL TROLL

The concept of a family outing in the mall on Sunday, combined with brunch, seems to have really taken off, with plenty of eating options at places such as Select Citywalk, Saket



"We are getting more bookings and walk-ins for our terrace than for the indoor space after the weather has

changed," says Zorawar Kalra about his "fine al fresco dining" at Punjab Grill in Select. "We are now trying to

(From far left) Magique

get a liquor license for the outdoors and have posted two tandoor pits to complement the ambience," he says. On the same floor is Joy Luck Moon offering a similar ambience for its Chinese grills and plates of stir-fries. Further ahead at DLF Place, Vasant Kunj, Italia and Veda make for a sunny stop. Even the Smoke House Deli, located on the ground floor, has added a small portico to its space.

MARKET DINING

The packed landscape of Khan Market has slowly evolved into a foodie's haunt. But the selling point for winter are the various terraces attached to some of its well known diners. Enjoy a gooey chocolate cake at Cafe Turtle while following the shoppers in the streets below or settle for a hookah in the sun at Urban Cafe.

SOME LOVE STORIES HAVE BLOOD ON THEM

KARAN JOHAR PRESENTS

KURBAAN

IN CINEMAS TOMORROW

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------|--------|-----------------------|--|-----------------------|--|--|
| GOKUL | SHIELA | DELTA | LIBERTY | REGAL | Batra | AMBA |
| SANGAM | S&S | GRITTY | SAPNA | ABHISHEK | SANRIT | SEBLE |
| AANKASH | LOKESH | SURAJ | SUPREME | FVR | Prak, Pooja, Nishi, Sahil, Suresh, Gaurav, Manoj, Varun, Prakash, Kishu, Kunal | Saket, Vasant Kunj, Saket, Vasant Kunj |
| BIG Cinemas | Odessa | Omni | Moti Nagar, Prakash, Liza, Nishi, Manoj, Prakash, Kishu, Kunal | SATYAM | Kamla, Nishi, Manoj, Prakash, Kishu, Kunal | Prakash, Kishu, Kunal |
| MOVIE FRANCHISE | YAMA | RAJ | G3S | M2K | Prakash, Liza, Nishi, Manoj, Prakash, Kishu, Kunal | Prakash, Kishu, Kunal |
| NEW PAVAN | GALAXY | SILVER CITY | WORLD | MOVIE | SAN WORLD | MOVIE |
| NEW PAVAN | GURDAS | PVR | W&A | City Centre | BIG Cinemas | Prakash, Kishu, Kunal |
| FARMAAT | PVR | Prakash, Kishu, Kunal | Prakash, Kishu, Kunal | Prakash, Kishu, Kunal | Prakash, Kishu, Kunal | Prakash, Kishu, Kunal |

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