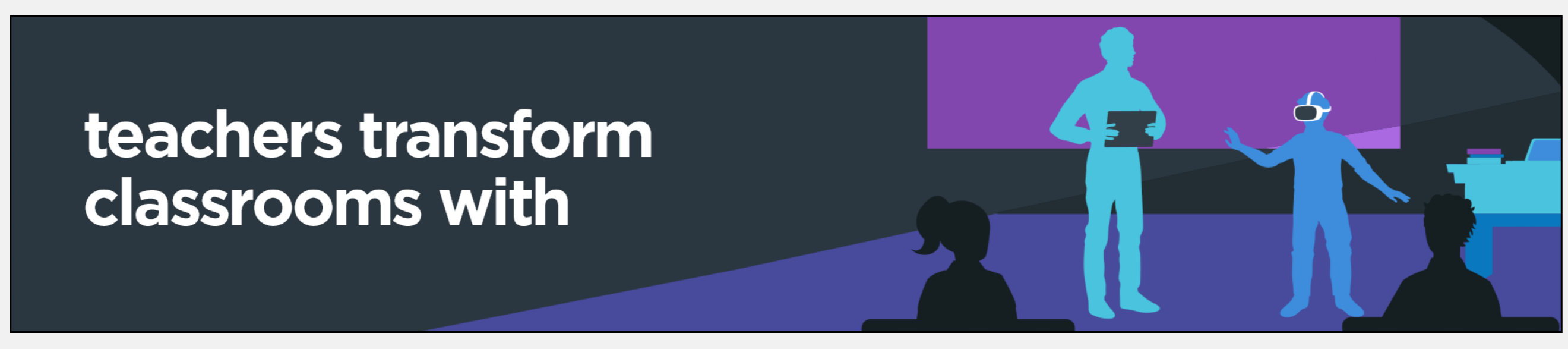


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## Enter, stage left. Theatre goes back to being live at Ranga Shankara

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Theatre is slowly going back to the 'normal' way of staging plays in person, after a daunting phase of no physical performances during the nearly two years of the pandemic. The return of The **Ranga Shankara** Theatre Festival, 2021, shows that the theatre community and audiences are open to the changing tide. The festival, which has been planned keeping in mind all safety protocols, will showcase five plays that will be performed on stage till October 31. The theme of this year's theatre festival is 'Staying Alive', which aptly sums up what the theatre community has been trying to do since the pandemic — continue to perform despite all odds. **Arundhati Nag**, managing trustee and artistic advisor, Ranga Shankara, says, "We chose the theme because we have all been managing to do just that — stay alive, from no work, no audiences, less money, disproportionate greed, and through all these, some acts of immense courage, humanity and sharing. We are celebrating 'Staying Alive' through what we know to do best — sharing with our audiences stories that are happy and sad, pensive and pondering, and drawing them into our world by illuminating a truth or making them forget a worry, for that is what gives us the utmost joy. It is the reason for our being."

Apart from the five plays, short ancillary programmes will be performed in different parts of the Ranga Shankara building. Safety protocols are also thoroughly being followed, Arundhati says. "The audience members must have at least one dose of vaccination. People are also expected to wear masks, and we take details like address, email IDs, and phone numbers from them. After every staging, we sanitise the premises," she says.

Three **Kannada** plays and one play in Hindi will be staged. Every festival has plays from other parts of India, but this time, taking into account government strictures in travel, Arundhati thought it better to have plays be staged from within **Karnataka**. "We strictly follow all government guidelines and we didn't know if auditoriums will be open or not, so we had to hedge our bets. We thought it better to have local teams perform. Also, nobody has really made new plays for two years. We decided to help theatre teams with a little funding and give them a push to create new plays. We chose four theatre groups and asked them to write plays as a response to the theme."

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The festival is in a hybrid format, with a digital festival curated by **Amitesh Grover** as a way to ensure that all bases are covered. Arundhati feels that the digital experience plays a dividend when a play, after being staged multiple times, closes. "Like **Bikhre Bimb** — it would be nice for it to be seen online, as many people haven't watched it. This is an advantage the digital medium affords for plays like this. Otherwise I am not an evangelist for recording plays," says Arundhati. Abhishek Iyengar, founder-artistic director, **WeMoveTheatre**, who is staging his play **Lock Down** live, says that he had to manage many things, and not just the creative aspect of staging the show. "I had to work with two different sets of actors to manage emergencies, in case any actor falls ill," he says. Chanakya Vyasa, whose play **Jhund** will also be staged as part of the festival, says that he would usually take a month to delve deep into researching and writing his plays, but this time, the creative process was very different.

"We got about a month and a half to create a play, so work started from the get go. I was fortunate to have a team that was willing to go through the journey with me. We also have a lot of trust among us, which made things easier. We have been particular about safety protocols, like wearing masks, hand washing and maintaining physical distancing. What gave us more confidence is that all of us have received at least one dose of the vaccine," he says.

- Sravasti Datta

End of the article

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