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Make time for this puppet story

LIM ANG NEI

IT is a shame that only a small group of children and adults turned up last Sunday afternoon to experience a wonderfully presented story of a man (and his dog) who planted trees and in so doing transformed a desolate place into one of beauty to be enjoyed by all.



Puppeteers Richard Medrington and Rick Conte of the Edinburgh State

Puppet Theatre Company, with the help of Dog, an endearing, loud-mouthed button-eyed dog with a bit of a hearing problem showed what an award-winning team could do to breathe life into a simple story of tree planting.

Jean Giono's *The Man Who Planted Trees* was first published in 1953. It's a story narrated by a youth who had gone on a hiking holiday in 1910. Passing through areas populated only by wild lavender, he ran out of drinking water.

A shepherd named Elzeard Bouffier helped him. Later he learnt that the shepherd was planting trees in the barren land — 100 seeds in the morning and another 100 in the evening, every day.

A friendship developed that was to span 40 years. By the time Bouffier died, there was a great thriving forest, full of life and beauty.

Although Bouffier is a fictional character, the essence of the story is very much alive.

Nobel Peace Prize Winner 2004, Wangari Maathai and her Green Belt Movement planted more than 40 million trees in Kenya and in her words: "Human beings cannot thrive in a place where the natural environment has been degraded."

And in Sangamner, Maharashtra, India, 45 million trees have been planted since 2006 by the Dandakaranya Movement. Led by octogenarian Bhusaheb Thorat, the movement made a pledge in July 2008 to plant a further 25 million seeds and 450,000 saplings.

Watching the show, it is easy to appreciate the creative talent of the Edinburgh Puppet State Theatre Company and see why *The Man Who Planted Trees* won the Eco Prize for Creativity 2007 and the Total Theatre Award for Story Theatre 2008.

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Medrington, slipped seamlessly in and out of his roles as the storyteller and the hiker-narrator. Dog was delightful as himself.

Dog was voiced and performed by Conte who also managed the shepherd, a politician, the sheep, birds and fanned us with gusts of fragrance.

Dog was the one who livened things up. In fact, the dialogue between Medrington and Dog was hilarious and had the audience — young and old — in stitches. The Dog bedtime routine was a gem.

The simplicity of the set and the graceful movements of the two performers made watching the show a joy.

Watching the two puppeteers work their magic on stage set me wondering as to how such theatre would breathe life into the Malaysian national school curriculum. It is interactive, funny and lively.

An hour at a show like this would leave an immense positive impression in the hearts and minds of the children.

The entertainment factor aside, this beautifully crafted performance draws upon our innermost desire to be courageous and to do what is right. Education is more than swotting over books. It will make more sense when it touches the heart.

• Last two shows (11am & 2pm) for The Man Who Planted Trees at Actors Studio, Bangsar Shopping Complex, KL. Tickets from RM42. Call 03-20941400.

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Regular Section

FEATURES



Get a life: Mirror, mirror on the wall

I BELIEVE life is a mirror showing us images of our self.

I believe life teaches us who we are - a pretty strict teacher too, because life calls it the way life sees it... no ceremony, no sweetener, plus the camera adds five kg!

MUSIC/DANCE



No plain Jane

Grammy-nominated jazz singer Jane Monheit talks to SUBHADRA DEVAN about her new album and being a new mum

STYLE/FASHION



Dressing up men

Right now, Bala Chandran Subramaniam has designs on making men look dashing. He tells INTAN MAIZURA AHMAD KAMAL he's simply acting on the wishes of his women customers

SAVOURS



Time to celebrate

Whether you're planning for Chinese New Year or giving your staff a treat, chef Louie Hoi has special menus to make it more meaningful, writes TAN BEE HONG

CINEMA/THEATRE



Candice Bergen's casting problem

IN the Sex And The City series a few years ago, Candice Bergen made a cameo appearance as the editor of Vogue. Glamorous and arch, she was the epitome of frosty WASP perfection.

PERSONALITY



Yellow is the new green

Carpooling has never quite taken off because of poor execution. But at DiGi, Catherine Kok is determined to make it work, writes RACHAEL PHILIP