

Natsamrat Summer Festival

Comedy Junction

Dir: Shyam Kumar. Writer: Anton Chekhov, adapted by Shyam Kumar.

Review: A good Hindi comedy will always have an audience here in Delhi. For this reason, if none other, *Comedy Junction* could be one of the most watched plays in the city. This fortnight's performance is by the Natsamrat theatre group and is directed by Shyam Kumar, but the play has had several other avatars across the city, including a version called *Log Baag* by Asmita, Arvind Gaur's troupe.

The play comes in several instalments. One of them is called "Surgeon", where a dentist tries to help his patient by extracting a tooth that's causing trouble. Only, he's not a qualified dentist. After a physical tussle that involves much screaming and running across the stage by both characters, a tooth is finally extracted. It turns out to be the wrong tooth, and

now the patient is in double the amount of pain. The segment ends with both actors collapsing on the floor from utter exhaustion.

Another segment, called "Bank Manager", is about a woman who is looking for a bank loan. She goes to an elderly bank manager and complains to him about all her troubles – an ailing husband, the rising price of groceries and all the woes of a housewife's daily life. When the bank manager still refuses her a loan, she becomes a crazed version of her already hyper self. Jumping up and down on the tables and chairs of the bank, she screams and whines until the bank manager is willing to give her anything she wants. At the end of it, she announces that she'll be back the next day to complete the paperwork. The bank manager faints at the thought of having to deal with this woman all over again.

The play relies heavily on physical humour. Kumar directs his actors to pack in lots of bodily back and forth. Therefore, Lalit Joshi and Sonu, who play the Dentist and the Patient in the first scene, are just grown men wailing like banshees and bouncing like rubber boards across the stage. Joshi and MunMun, who play the Bank Manager and the Housewife in the second scene, go through mostly the same progression. MunMun's screams get louder and louder as she gets more desperate, and by the time she is on top of Joshi's table in her sari, she is a wailing caricature and loses the momentum of the moment. Such as it is, though, *Comedy Junction* does fulfil its brief – to provide us with fast,

physical humour. If that's your bag, stop by. Piyali Bhattacharya
Alliance Française Auditorium, Sun
Jun 28, 5pm & 7.15pm. Tickets

Rs 100-300 available at 102
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