

about town

A murder and a lie

AGE CORRESPONDENT

✓ The NCPA will host *The Big Fat City*, a black comedy by Ashvin Gidwani and Mahesh Dattani, this weekend.

The play comprises three stories, which involve a couple who have purchased a new apartment in the city, a famous television star dealing with a difficult marriage, and a small town aspiring actress who is in a relationship with a possessive man. The evening goes well — till one of the characters is murdered.

Mahesh Dattani, who has written and directed the play, says, "This is the first time we have attempted to try this genre. I have put in a lot of research and work, and hopefully it will engage the audiences." The play stars Achint Kaur, Nasir Khan, Pooja Ruparel, Ivan Rodrigues, Sonal Joshi, Aadar Malik, Gagan Singh Sethi and Shashi Bhushan.

Ashvin and Mahesh had earlier come together for *The Alchemist* and *Double Deal*.

At Tata Experimental Theatre, NCPA
On July 19 and July 20 at 7 pm
Entry fee: Starts from ₹200



Jeff, working on *Queer Voices*

Voices, unheard

A new film highlights the power of music, dance for LGBTQ community

ROHINI NAIR

✓ Fulbright fellow, documentary filmmaker and musician Jeff Roy's first project, *Rites of Passage*, dwelt on the journey of a male-to-female transsexual woman from Tamil Nadu. Now, Jeff's second film, *Queer Voices*, focuses on the music, dance and performance art expressions within Mumbai's LGBTQ and Hijra communities. He started work on the film in 2012, posting short videos on the Fulbright-mtvU website to engage viewers. A special screening of *Queer Voices* will be held at the Godrej India Culture Lab this evening.

For Jeff, working on the film was also a chance to share the stories of the many inspiring people he came across. Prince Manvendra Singh Gohil was one among them. "I look up to him both as a musician and gay man. He is one of those rare gems, who use their talent and influence to catalyse positive change for the communities within which they live," Jeff says.

There was also a not-for-profit dance group called the Dancing Queens, whose members include Hijras, transmen and gay men, that Jeff found inspiring. "Abheena Aher, the group's founder and leader, happens to be a Hijra guru (teacher) with several *chelas* (daughters). Abheena treats her *chelas* with an incredible amount of respect, care, and love. She uses her natural position of authority to show them the values of independence and education. Spending time with her and one of her older *chelas*, Urmi, I saw the love they shared," he says.

Jeff adds that Dancing Queens is a great example of how music and dance can be vehicles for empowerment. "For a few years now, the Dancing Queens have served a central role in the fundraising and overall pro-



motion of the Annual Mumbai Queer Azaadi March celebrations, which takes place during January and February. As one of the first organisations of its kind in India, the group harnesses the power of LGBTQ and Hijra talent to build support for their communities, spread awareness about their plight to the general public, and provide a platform for their dancers to channel their talent in a safe environment," he explains.

Music has played an important role in Prince Manvendra's life as well, says Jeff: "Music was a vital part of his coming out process. Manvendra ji uses his love for music to promote HIV/AIDS education and awareness throughout India, hosting an annual three-day *mela* at his palace, sponsored by his HIV/AIDS non-profit, Lakshya Trust." Incidentally, Jeff — who plays Western and Indian classical violin — has performed at the *mela*.

The response to *Queer Voices* has been "overwhelmingly positive" so far, Jeff says, adding, "I hope that my presentation at the Godrej India Culture Lab will raise more awareness about the project, the individuals featured in the project, and the unique issues represented in the LGBTQ and Hijra communities."

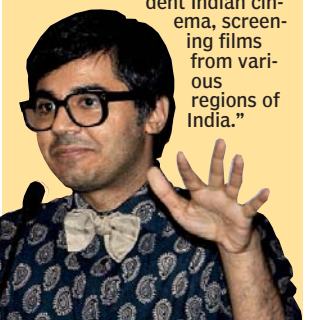
At Godrej India Culture Lab, July 19, 5 pm

Parmesh Shahani, head, Godrej India Culture Lab says:

"At the Godrej India Culture Lab, we always try and have talks and events that offer insights into what it means to be modern and Indian, and Jeff Roy's recent research around the themes of sexuality and performance is a unique angle to examine this.

We believe that contemporary culture needs to be chronicled, amplified and debated across interdisciplinary silos and our programming is a reflection of this mandate. Hopefully, the conversations we enable will lead to insights, connections and collaborations among our participants.

We have some very interesting events lined up: A special contest asking college students for ideas for that would make their locality or college a better place, and an all-day film festival in collaboration with the NFDC on August 17. We are celebrating independent Indian cinema, screening films from various regions of India."



must do

Weirdass Comedy presents Headliners, based entirely on what you see in the news straight from the tube, even though it's funny enough by itself. This show will feature Tanmay Bhat, Ashwin Mushran and Amogh Ranavive and Amogh Ranavive among others.



On July 20, 8.30 pm onwards at Canvas Laugh Factory, Palladium Mall