



Young artistes from Bolivia (left), India (centre) and Sri Lanka (right) brought a splash of colour from distant lands. Prof. Manuela Rousseau (centre photo, 8th from left) and Günther Käding (centre photo, right), the initiators of "Culture in the Company", invited audiences to experience the Kids' Culture Caravan.

Photo: Beiersdorf AG

A whole world of sights and sounds

The Kids' Culture Caravan sets up camp at Beiersdorf.

"**Truly impressive**, it really got to me," was how one enthusiastic visitor summed up his impressions of "Culture in the Company". Former street children, refugees or child workers recently presented the cultural variety of their native lands in the auditorium of the research centre and provided their audience with a different view of the "Third World". They presented a colourful picture far removed from hunger, poverty and war, placing the emphasis on the cultural creativity of their home countries. The Kids' Culture Caravan has been touring Germany for the past five years and made its first stop in Hamburg at Beiersdorf, where its visual and acoustic "treasures" were on display for three days. Children and young people aged between 9 and 19 from India, Sri Lanka and Bolivia received an enthusiastic welcome from audiences as they presented contemporary and traditional theatre, dance and a fast and furious masked show. There was even a premiere to be celebrated: the "Experimental Theatre Foundation", founded in 1992 in Mumbai, formerly Bombay, presented the play "Vishwa – The World" directed by Manjul Bhardwaj. Young actors told the story of their families who had moved from the country to the huge Indian metropolis with its population of 12.9 million and were now torn between the traditional and the modern world.

"**The future begins today**" was the motto of the "Teatro Trono" from El Alto in Bolivia. This group, made up of former street children, attaches great importance in its appearances to showing life's humorous moments in the plays it creates and to bringing about change through the liberating power of laughter. Audiences love the tangible *joie de vivre* in these performances, the impressive miming and masks and the foot-tapping music.

In Sri Lanka they say that "dance is the language of the gods". The "Bandu Wijesooriya School of Dance" was founded in 1987 to preserve and breathe new life into the culture of ritual. The tsunami disaster at the end of 2004 starkly changed the life of many children in the schools – most of them came from fisher families who lost their homes. Audiences in Hamburg were all the more surprised at the high standard achieved by the young dancers and enjoyed the splendidly colourful costumes and masks.

Each performance was followed by a lively dialogue between audience and performers. Prof. Manuela Rousseau and Günther Käding, the initiators of "Culture in the Company", had prepared a programme of events to accompany the shows. "It was important to us to establish contact between these young people and young Germans and for these meetings to contribute to international understanding and a reduction in prejudice. We therefore invited three Hamburg grammar schools to sponsor one country each," they explained. To encourage the "getting to know you" process, a joint breakfast was provided every morning in Factory III followed by a tour of NIVEA production facilities and lunch. In the evening the Hamburg pupils attended the performances of "their" group and spent the remainder of the evening with them. A visit by the young people of the Culture Caravan to the grammar school completed the exchange programme. "Beiersdorf organized everything superbly. The German pupils and teachers, the international guests and the audiences had a fantastic time in which they could meet and learn from each other without prejudice," says Bettina Kocher, chair of the Kids' Culture Caravan. "We would be happy if our Caravan could rest at Beiersdorf again next year".