

# Dance for Dance's Sake

Bharatanatyam exponent Navtej Johar has collaborated with a German choreographer for *LIVE* — a performance with no meaning or storyline

PALLAVI PUNDIR

+ THERE is a flurry of activity on the stage — with music, dance, some nonsensical dialogues and a slow-motion tennis game. The stage itself has been made like a big linoleum tennis court. This is a parallel dance world created by Indian choreographer and Bharatanatyam exponent Navtej Singh Johar in collaboration with German choreographer Ben J Riepe.

The activities will coalesce into *LIVE*, a contemporary performance piece meant to deflect conventional notions of a “performance”. Treading the lines of realism and surrealism at the same time, *LIVE* is part of the second edition of IG-NITE! Festival of Contemporary Dance, and will premier in the Capital on November 2. Later, *LIVE* will also travel to Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Berlin, Dusseldorf, Dhaka



PHOTOS: RENUKA PURI

and Colombo.

On a nippy Wednesday evening, as the six performers — three Indian and three German — rehearsed for the play, they tried to push the 75-minute-long performance towards one feeling — to ‘live’. “This is a theatre which

depends on life,” says one of them, as another slouches and breathes incessantly. The process of inhaling and exhaling, in fact, is the core of the piece.

“Breathing is the most direct contact that the artistes establish with the audience. It’s a problem



(Above) During the rehearsals; Navtej Johar (left) with Ben J Riepe

when people try to understand a piece and not feel it. When I came here, none of the movements of classical dance made sense to me. I couldn’t understand them, and after a while, I gave up and simply enjoyed their beauty. If you allow yourself to go to that level, it’s art,” says Riepe. Johar adds, “Here, it’s an experience that we’re trying to create, not a story or a narrative. It’s a completely abstract concept.”

The project, which came out of three years of dialogue between Johar and Riepe, began when the duo met in 2009. “When a piece is performed on the stage, it’s all plastic and there’s no sense of being in that

moment,” says Johar. Riepe chips in, “From the Western side, everything is shown and done already. There’s nothing left to explore. When we met, we started to talk about it. I came to India each year and got to know about Indian culture and art.” The performance was worked upon for six weeks in Germany and six weeks in India.

*LIVE* will be performed at Sri Ram Centre on November 2 at 8.30 pm. For tickets, log on to [www.bookmyshow.com](http://www.bookmyshow.com)

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