

Meet theatre veteran Paul Mathew, who played a pilot in Suriya's latest flick *Soorarai Pottru*



Theatre to screen
Paul Mathew; (below) with Suriya and Aparna Balamurali in *Soorarai Pottru*

Ready for TAKE OFF

such as *Purindhunarvu* and *Cure Through Love*.

It was based on his work in *Cure Through Love*, directed by Sudha Kongara, that he bagged *Soorarai Pottru*. "Sudha was extremely demanding without being harsh. She did not encourage overt 'performatory acting'. What she wanted was natural, responsive character expe-

rience. Suriya's simplicity and warmth made me comfortable. I take up movie offers when filmmakers approach me, but my passion has always been theatre," he says.

The world's a stage

Paul's tryst with the stage happened when he was in school in Bangalore. He says, "In my eighth standard, theatre was part of our curriculum. I remember writing and directing a play that turned out to be a total disaster." The next year, in 1968, he acted in a play titled *Hewers of Coal* that was well received. "That's when I fell in love with theatre."

Paul took up Literature in college for the opportunity to do more theatre. He subsequently cleared the exams for commission into the Army and joined the Artillery Regiment as a Second Lieutenant in 1972. Posted in Sikkim, he started a theatre group named BLACKADS (Black Cat Amateur Dramatic Society), thanks to the encouragement he got from Major General MCS Menon, and staged plays like *Night of January 16*, *Desire Under the Elms* and *Loots*.

Paul left the Army in 1977 but his tryst with the stage continued, working with Living Theatre to do productions like *Deathwatch*, *Lady Aoi* and *Enemy of the People*. During that time, he was also involved in regular theatre workshops and productions; his most talked-about performance was playing the role of Vaikkom Muhammad Basheer in *Under the Mangosteen Tree*, directed by Rajiv Krishnan for Perch.

The corporate link

Over time, Paul realised how theatre groups brought together people from varied backgrounds to manifest the behavioural dynamics of high performance. During a HR conference, he spoke about using theatre as a corporate training tool; after his 20-minute presentation, he was surrounded by several professionals interested in the subject. This spurred him to establish his own company, Corporate Theatre, which has, since 2002, trained more than 44,000 people.

Paul has been busy even during the recent lockdown, using virtual means to work on a play. "A few friends and I have worked on a play revolving around an article we read about a lady who filed for divorce because 'her husband was too kind to her.' We plan to record it and post it online, and also perform it live in December or January," says Paul, who is currently basking in the positive feedback to *Soorarai Pottru*.

✶ REJI VARGHESE

A white-bearded pilot is staring out of the windshield as the small turbo-prop hurtles towards the end of the runway. One of the aircraft's engines is on fire as the pilot struggles to bring it to a stop.

This scene is from the recently-released Suriya-starrer *Soorarai Pottru*, based on the story of Captain Gopinath and Air Deccan. The pilot is none other than theatre veteran Paul Mathew, who has done similar cameos in *Kannathil Muthamittal*, *Rojakoottam* and *12B*. He has also acted in several advertisements, telefilm *Uyiroviyum* and documentaries

