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Crackling good tales

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Children gleefully feast on Derek's stories

The British Library was all abuzz on a Sunday morning with a large crowd of excited children. And very spontaneously they all gathered around and sat at Derek Hook's feet, who proceeded to tell them three 'dark' tales. Using two drums as audio props Derek had the kids rivetted to his every word.

"I love stories and reading," said eight year old Amritha from the Royal Concorde School, "and the best stories I love are the mysterious ones!" Maya Bharathan, Amritas mum said her daughter was naturally interested in reading and she has been a member with the British library from the time it was on the top of Koshy's Bakery.

Using music and percussion, Derek used his even timbred voice to weave his stories, that were packed with sound, colourful characters, twists in the plot and cheeky dark humour. Effectively using the drums which included a curious looking oblong box shaped drum called the Tonga from Africa. The second was a beautiful set of brass cup shaped bells, fixed to a stand, from which the most delicate sounds emerged when struck with a soft mallet. He also clashed the cymbals once in a while, especially when telling the most scary part of his tales, which sent obvious shivers up and down his audience spines.

"Every time I tell a story it sounds different to me," said Derek and proceeded to start with 'The Unlucky Man'. Walking and walking in a pair of red boots, the man goes in search of the Great Spirit, who a monk said will change his luck. On his way he meets an old wolf whose 'teeth wobble in his mouth, his bones stick out of his flesh and his eyes roll around in his head. He then comes upon a tree with its branches in the ground and finally he meets the prettiest girl in the world. But unfortunately he is responsible for changing the luck of the threesome and then gets eaten by the wolf, remaining the unluckiest man in the world.

The second story was again a dark tale about a young man in Egypt who was a gifted player of the flute. He falls in love with the beautiful princess whom he is too poor to marry. Using facial contortions Derek tells the sad tale of how the young man sells his soul to a witch to turn into a knight. But the princess rejects him because she has fallen in love with the young man who could play he flute. "Whats the moral of the story?" asked one of the kids in the group, which was promptly answered by another child. " We must be happy with whatever we have!" said a little girl sagely.

The third story was called 'Friendship' which was a marvelous tale about how a man battled all odds to return to save his best friend who had stood in for him. A tale of valour and the true bond of friendship which had to run the gamut of slathering crocodiles, muscular guards and a wicked three headed beast!

After the reading the children rushed forward to buy his books, the funds of which said Usha Mukunda of 'Patara', go towards the foundation which the Rishi Valley School uses to help rural schools.

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