

Floored, Spanish director to 'unveil' Durga Puja to world

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Kolkata: Leandro Blanco, the acclaimed filmmaker with National Geographic who was in Kolkata to experience and document the Durga Puja, says it surpasses all festivals and carnivals he has witnessed around the world.

Blanco told TOI the festival evoked the joy of celebrating life. "I have travelled all over the world and been to many celebrations, fiestas and rituals. But I have never experienced something like the Durga Puja. You can feel the pulse of a whole city united as one," said the much-awarded director, who was named video filmmaker of the year by the BBC wildlife magazine. He is also an honorary member of the Royal Photographic Society (UK) and the Ocean Artist Society (US).

Blanco plans to make multiple documentaries on Kolkata's Durga Puja, right from trailers to 4-minute wraps to 40-minute docu films in Spanish and English. "Kolkata's pandals must be showcased to the world. They aren't just art, they are also a medium of expressing important messages. Coupled with the dancing, singing and pounding of the drums, the mega event casts a spell that takes one into a trance. I found myself among hundreds and sometimes thousands of people, dancing in the streets to the rhythm of life," he said.

While Durga Puja is celebrated by Bengalis settled all over the world, Blanco says the festivity in Kolkata is perhaps one of the best-kept secrets that needs to be unveiled to the rest of the world. "Cosmologist Carl Sagan once said: 'Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known.' Now I know what he meant! That somewhere in Kolkata and the incredible something is the Durga Puja."

Blanco's documentary is expected to be telecast by channels like NatGeo and BBC. City-based travel firm owner Jaydeep Mukherjee, who has been trying to popularise Kolkata's Durga Puja in Europe and the US, will screen the film at road shows on Durga Puja in Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, Argentina, Mexico and Coloumbia. Mukherjee hosted Blanco and others from Spain in Kolkata during this year's festival.

Jesus Vazquez Mendez, a bull-fighter who accompanied Blanco on the trip and is keen to popularize the festival in Latin America, felt Kolkata's Durga Puja was much bigger and certainly more profound than the Rio Carnival as it showcased art and culture for a week. "And all this sans alcohol! In the West, there is no celebration without it," he said.