



# Abhinaya News

## NATYA MAHOTSAVA 2000 ABHINAYA CELEBRATES ANNIVERSARIES

Mythili Kumar and the Abhinaya Dance Company (ADC) of San Jose wish you a happy millennium. The year 2000 is a very special year for our company. It is the tenth anniversary of the establishment of ADC as a non-profit organization, the twentieth anniversary of Mythili's teaching career and the twenty-fifth anniversary for Mythili as a performing artist. We plan to celebrate the accomplishment of these milestones by giving thanks to all those who have collaborated with, and supported the company in the past years. The anniversary will be marked by performances throughout the year 2000. Special events including programs by the artistic director and her disciples, alumni of ADC, visiting artists, past collaborators, lectures and demonstrations and finally a reception to honor donors, volunteers, staff and other supporters of the academy, are planned for late June 2000. So mark your calendars!

Abhinaya Dance Company, as most of you know, is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and perpetuating the traditional dance forms of South India. ADC as one of the oldest and most active ethnic arts institutions in the South Bay is a key contributor to the cultural diversity of the area. The company plays an important role in the lives of local children, mostly of Indian American origin. As students, the children gain expertise

Classical Dance styles came together for a rare performance called *Vande Mataram. The Power of Saturn* was staged for the first time in 1999 with Shadow Light Theater's Larry Reed. This program won critical acclaim and there will be encore performances in the year 2000. Collaborative productions are a unique and distinguishing feature of the Abhinaya Dance Company.

Mythili is widely recognized for her ability and the company has received coveted grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, the City of San Jose and recently, a three-year grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. ADC has also received grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and from other corporate sponsors.

As we begin a new millennium, a new era in classical art education and performances, we look forward to your participation in our anniversary celebrations and for your continued financial support. For our part, we pledge to fulfill our mission with utmost dedication and commitment.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of ADC, Mythili Kumar, the artistic director, and the Anniversary Program Committee, we extend our sincere thanks to you for supporting our mission.

## NATYA MAHATSOVA HIGHLIGHTS

- Visiting artists from India. Mythili Kumar's gurus :
  - Padmabhushan Smt. Kalanidhi Narayanan

## Mission of Abhinaya Dance Company of San Jose

The Abhinaya Dance Company of San Jose is dedicated to promoting, propagating, and perpetuating the traditional dance forms of South India through instructional classes and creative, professional performances to entertain and enrich the audience.

importantly, their experience with ADC stimulates their body, mind and spirit, gives them an unique identity and helps them develop their self-esteem and character.

Mythili Kumar is an accomplished dancer, teacher and choreographer. She is well known for her cross cultural, collaborative programs with people from various artistic backgrounds. As early as 1991, Mythili performed with Chitresh Das, a leading exponent of Kathak, in the performance titled *The Guru*. In 1993, she worked with the Japanese Taiko drummers to bring *In the Spirit* to Bay Area audiences. Then in 1998 Mythili collaborated with Gamelan Sekar Jaya on *The Ramayana*, which played to sell-out crowds in San Francisco and San Jose. In the winter of 1998, four mothers and daughters trained in various Indian

(early June workshops)

- Kalaimamani Smt. Indra Rajan (Dance-drama choreography and rehearsals in June.
- Company performances, student and alumni recitals.
- Recognition of artists, collaborators and donors.
- As part of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, ADC is sponsoring the Irvine based Aparna Dance Company (Artistic Director Ramya Harishankar) in performance on March 19, 2000, at the Louis B. Meyer Theater, University of Santa Clara at 4pm. Aparna Dance Company will be presenting *Nritya Saram*, the essence of dance, with musicians from India, namely, Reji George, D. Kannan and Krishna Kutty. Ramya Harishankar, a disciple of

Guru Rajarathnam and Smt. Kalanidhi Narayanan displays exceptional abhinaya in performance and has won several grants from the California Arts Council and the National Endowment for Arts.

### News from the Abhinaya Office

Abhinaya Dance Company shares office space in San Jose with other multi-cultural groups as part of the City of San Jose's Arts Incubation Program.

Arlene Terneus, our office manager, is currently working minimal hours. We are looking to find a motivated, well-organized individual with computer skills to manage the organization and eventually become the administrative director for the organization. We look forward to getting your suggestions from among the vast number of successful Indian-Americans living in the Bay Area.

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### ABHINAYA BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2000

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### MYTHILI AWARDED TITLE

On December 10, 1999, Mythili Kumar was honored with the title, *Viswa Kala Bharathi*, awarded by Bharat Kalachar of Chennai. In a ceremony attended by many artists, Mythili received the award from legendary Carnatic vocalist, Shri. Semmangudi R. Srinivasan (Chairman, Advisory Council of Bharat Kalachar) and Mrs. Y. G. Parthasarathy (Secretary of Bharat Kalachar). On December 12, 1999 Mythili Kumar performed at the Bharat Kalachar.



### GRANTS AWARDED

Arts Council, Silicon Valley announced its grantees in the Arts Build Communities category in January 2000 and Abhinaya Dance Company is proud to be one of the 16 recipients from over 60 applications. The grant was awarded to create a new performance piece from the real life experiences of women in abused situations in order to create awareness among the Indian-American community about the existence of these problems among immigrant women and strive to assist them. Usha Welaratna, an anthropologist who writes for the San Jose Mercury News will be the co-collaborator for this project.

### ABHINAYA IN THE NEWS

**INDIA-WEST October 22, 1999: (Arts & Entertainment section) By, Monica Uppal**

San Jose, Calif. – Wearing shimmering clothes, ornate jewelry and unwearied faces, a group of dancers from the Abhinaya Dance Company portrayed a myriad emotions through the language of gestures and dramatic mime of Bharatnatyam in their performance entitled "Love Exquisite", part of this city's 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Performing Arts Series at Montgomery Theater here Oct. 16.

Dance is a potent medium of expression. It becomes a vent for intense sorrow or anger (exemplified by Tandav nritya) and an eloquent vehicle for love. Dance finds an important place in celebrations, rituals and religious ceremonies. It can speak volumes, but with rigorous training and adherence to the classical forms, danseuses can make their movements convey any message in a beautiful idiom. Synchronization among the group members and perfect timing make the recital salubrious.

The Abhinaya dancers tapped the immense communicative power of the medium and with their talent harnessed it to present a harmonious presentation. The ubiquitous love theme was presented with a different slant. In Indian devotional poetry, the supreme god is not just visualized as a divine power but also as a friend, confidante and especially a lover. The deity is conceptualized as an intimate lover, tortured by longing,

who yearns for the bliss of union, akin to moksha or salvation.

The Abhinaya Dance Company's performance primarily focused on the love poetry of devotees of Lord Vishnu, called Alvars, who lived between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. Their compositions have been compiled as *Nalaayira Divya Prabhandam*.

The heroin is depicted in the eight-fold states of *Vasakasajja* (joyfully adorning herself for her lover); *Vipralabda* (deceived by her lover breaking his promise); *Virahothkantita* (suffering deeply at separation from him); *Kalahantarita* (feeling remorse for quarreling with her beloved); *Khandita* (deeply offended and angry with her beloved); *Proshitabhartruka* (pining for her beloved who has left on a journey); *Abhisarika* (ardently going out to meet her beloved); and *Swadinabhartruka* (whose beloved is devoted to her).

Abhinaya's artistic director Mythili Kumar, along with Radhika Kannan, Satyasri Yendluri, Ami Buch, Rasika Kumar, Malavika Kumar, Preeti Vissa, Madhuri Sharma and Venita Katir, added another feather to the cap of their dance school with their magnificent performance. They were ably accompanied by Asha Ramesh (music and vocal), Vidya Ramakrishnana (nattuvangam), V. Narayanan (mridangam) and Shanthi Narayanan (violin).

Yearning for the divine is also perceived in love poetry from the Bible in the celebrated *Song of Songs*, a short excerpt of which formed part of the show. "*Song of Solomon* gave the idea for the program's theme," Kumar who choreographed the performance, said. Talking to India-West after the show, a beaming Kumar said that she had wanted to work on a collaborative work with Ann Malmuth-Onn, using both Israeli modern dance and Indian dance. "The theater was booked a year ago with an intention to present the collaboration but Onn didn't have much time and we could just perform a short piece from that. However, it led me to find parallels in Indian poetry and come up with today's program."

Divine frenzy for Lord Vishnu and the playful dances of Lord Krishna with romantic leitmotifs were presented with elan and elegance in the items, *Messengers of Love* and *Raas Kreedaa*, respectively. The props, especially a translucent curtain, were used as efficacious aids in *Nachiar Thirumoli* and *Andal Kavuthuvam*. Contemporary poetry by the 20<sup>th</sup> century composer Subramanya Bharati, who visualizes himself as a soul yearning for the divine goddess, was eloquently depicted in *Paayum Oli*, which used vivid imagery.

### **Mythili Kumar featured in KutcheriBuzz (a publication of Mylapore Times, Chennai)**

**Showcasing Bharatnatyam in the USA:** Propogating Indian art and culture in distant lands has been the endeavour of many a leading artiste and the efforts of Mythili Kumar, a US based Bharatnatyam dancer, cannot be overlooked. Mythili who runs Abhinaya Dance Company, does much more than just teach Bharatnatyam.

Her company has toured the US extensively and has performed dance-dramas on varied themes like Shiva – the Cosmic Dancer, Women Triumphant and even a performance on the life of the Mahatma.

Thanks to Mythili's untiring efforts, since 1978, to promote South Indian dance forms, her organization is now a leading light in the cultural melting pot of San Jose, California.

"We are known for our adherence to Indian traditions as well as innovative collaborations with our diverse cultures", says Mythili about the functioning of Abhinaya.

Innovations are certainly her forte; a collaborative performance with Kathak Maestro Chitresh Das was rewarded with the prestigious Rockfellar Foundation grant. Her experiments with Balinese music, Japanese drums and Western classical too has brought her critical acclaim.

Such outstanding contributions in the field of arts even got her a nomination for the Bay Area Woman of Achievement award in 1998 – a rare honour for an Indian artiste in the US. She has trained more than 45 dancers who have given numerous solo and group performances in both the US and India.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Abhinaya's fame reached astronomical heights. Kalpana Chawla, who hit the headlines for being the only woman aboard the Columbia space shuttle, was a student with Mythili and she took her Abhinaya T-shirt with her to space!

Mythili is now in India for the December season, giving Bharatnatyam and Odissi performances, again on unique themes like *Love Poems from Nammazhvar Krithis*.

Having captured the imagination of the western audiences, it's now the Chennaiites pleasure to be enthralled by her dance. Mythili can be contacted at [mythili\\_kumar@yahoo.com](mailto:mythili_kumar@yahoo.com).

**Spartan Daily, San Jose State University, November 19, 1999:** By, Ryan McCrossin

**Music bridges cultural gap:** Aimee Lam and 11 other dancers from San Jose State University's Dance & Theater department, performed a bharatnatyam piece, the Pushpanjali, on Thursday November 18, 1999 as part of the Personal Perspectives in Diversity performance sponsored by the College of Humanities and Arts. The program showcased a cross section of music and dance from South Asia and Africa, emphasizing personal growth through culture. Abhinaya's Artistic Director, Mythili Kumar gave a six-week workshop to the students at the university and taught them some basics in bharatnatyam and the piece, Pushpanjali, which they were able to learn in a short period and perform creditably.



## 2000 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION	VENUE	CITY
January 15	Arudra Natyanjali Festival	Shiva Vishnu Temple	Livermore
January 16	Pongal Performance	Shiva Murugan Temple	Concord
February 1-5	People Like Me, World Arts West and Mexican Heritage Corp.	Mexican Heritage Plaza	San Jose
February 9-12	People Like Me, World Arts West and	Ohlone College	Fremont
February 12	SAMSARA - Shiva Murugan Temple fundraiser performance	Cubberly Auditorium	Palo Alto
Postponed to September	Power of Saturn performance	Cowell Theater	San Francisco
March 1	Demonstration-Performance	Discovery Museum	San Jose
March 19	Aparna Dance Company, Irvine with visiting artists from India presents Nritya Saram	Louis B. Meyer Theater, Santa Clara University	Santa Clara
June 25	Kid Arts Sunday	San Jose Museum of Art	San Jose
July 1-2	Natya Mahotsava, 20 <sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration	Mexican Heritage Plaza	San Jose
July 15	Arangetram – Ragini Srinivasan	Cubberly Theater	Palo Alto
July 30	Arangetram – Pradeepa Sivaswaroopan	Dean Leshner Theater	Walnut Creek