



Abhinaya News



Abhinaya Dance Company of San Jose

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Upcoming performances

Fall 2009 Collaborative Concert *Nritya Sangati*: *Dance Progressions* - November 14 and 15

Abhinaya Dance Company's Fall 2009 concert, funded by a Fast Track grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, will feature the work of a special guest composer Kartik Seshadri. The concerts will be held on **November 14th at San Jose's Mexican Heritage Theater in San Jose, and November 15th at Cowell Theater in San Francisco.** The orchestra will comprise of Malavika Kumar for nattuvangam, Asha Ramesh for vocals and additional music, N. Narayan on the mridangam and kanjira, Shanthi Narayan on the violin, Ragavan Manian on the flute, Ravi Gutala on the tabla, A. Mahadevan on the morsing, and Prasad Jogalekar on the sitar.

Guest artist Kartik Seshadri

Seshadri's initial training in music began with Shri Shankar Rao of All India Radio, who nurtured his precocious abilities. He had already embarked on an illustrious performing career when he met the renowned Ravi Shankar in 1965. Since 1974, when Seshadri became Shankar's disciple, the maestro has had a profound musical influence on his career. For over 35 years he has studied with Shankar and absorbed his distinctive, pure and traditional style of sitar music. He has performed with Shankar in major concert halls throughout the world, from India, Europe and the Middle East, to Japan, Mexico and the United States, including New York's Carnegie Hall. Seshadri is also a distinguished teacher of Indian music. He heads one of the largest Indian Classical music programs in the country and teaches at the University of California-San Diego.

Nritya Sangati will present vignettes of Indian immigrant women whose relationships progress in different ways as they adapt to a new life in a different country from their land of origin. Presented in the Bharatanatyam style, the performance will feature choreography by Mythili Kumar, Rasika Kumar and Malavika Kumar. Narratives of women from Indian mythology whose experiences compare and contrast with the modern women will also be depicted.

Annual Vijayadasami Concert

Abhinaya's annual Vijayadasami concert as part of the Navaratri festival honoring *Sarasvati*, the goddess of Wisdom, will be held at the Moreland Community Center on **Saturday, October 3 at 2pm.**

Artistic Director, Mythili Kumar performed on several occasions starting in February 2009 with a performance for Shivaratri at the temple in Livermore. She was invited to present her recital at the **Sri Venkateswara Temple of North Carolina, Cary, NC on May 28, 2009.** Former student Swapanthi's parents Ram and Durga Nagulpally invited Mythili to perform in front of the newly installed image of Lord Venkateswara and remarked that *'It was special treat for all of us'*. Mythili was honored to dance at the temple on this holy occasion and delighted that Kumar also was there to sing one of his favorite songs, *Om Namō Narayana*, performed by her. Jayanthi Balachandran (audience member) said Mythili Kumar's performance was "food for the soul" and a treat for the eyes!



Recent Abhinaya performances

Abhinaya Dance Company in the East Coast - April 24 & 26

In late April, Mythili Kumar, accompanied by Abhinaya's principal dancer Rasika Kumar and company dancer Yatrika Ajaya, traveled to the east coast to perform at several venues.

Domestic Harmony Foundation- April 25, 2009

A fundraiser for this foundation featured performances by Mythili Kumar and dancers Madhav Vissa and Yatrika Ajaya. Mythili Kumar presented 'Sudha's story', a dramatization of a poem by Chitra Divakaruni about a woman who undergoes abuse by her husband and seeks vengeance. The audience consisted of volunteers from all walks of life who are working to alleviate the suffering of victims of domestic violence in the New York area. Many were moved by Mythili's portrayal of the woman's anguish. They also enjoyed the lively dances performed by company dancers Rasika Kumar and Yatrika Ajaya who were joined by Madhav Vissa studying at Columbia University in New York.

Rasika Kumar presented two solo performances of *Dharma Yudh- Stories of the Great war of Mahabharata* at the National Heritage Museum, Lexington, MA on April 24 and at the Hindu Temple & Cultural Society of USA, Bridgewater, NJ on April 26th. Both of these performances were well received. See excerpts from reviews below:



Photo credit: Mukul Sheopory

Excerpts from a review by T.V.Krishna (New Jersey)

Rasika's performance ended with thunderous applause from the audience, and rightfully so. Despite being a very imposing 5' 11', performing solo, and unavoidably conspicuous on a rather smallish stage, she demanded she not be ignored. If that is a contradiction of sorts, it is only because her physical stature was only secondary to her display of talent. For such a tall dancer (perhaps the tallest I have seen perform), she was remarkably 'unawkward' and so very stable – and almost always when planting herself in position and facing the audience, I noticed her foot was parallel to the edge of the stage, a step that few dancers truly adopt. The opening prayer was routine in terms of choreography and execution, but it was evident that Rasika had a penchant for almost perfect mudras and adavus. What such a piece did was to allow the audience to be awed by her physical presence, her mudras, and immaculate footwork while not being distracted by drama. The drama was to come later.

Panchali Sabadam is an oft-performed episode, and it has its natural and intrinsic pathos that dancers can exploit. And Rasika did a remarkable job of it. What caught my eye though, was the

reaction of an unsuspecting Draupadi when she hears the knock on her door- the twitch of her neck and the glance of her eye depicted that not only was the knock unexpected, but also suddenly filled with ominous foreboding. And then the drama. As she clippety clopped on to the stage bearing Partha and his Sarathi, the audience could not but spontaneously applaud the final reining in of the chariot to a halt. Deeper into this episode, Rasika really took full advantage of her height as she devoured the entire real estate that the stage could provide, creating the ethos of battle, prancing from one end to the other, and depicting the mayhem of war. Moving from the energetic to the more subtle, Rasika portrayed the blindness of Gandhari, almost draining her eyes of their natural brightness. To believe that she was also the one who choreographed this piece is to be even more awed by her talent. In summary, a truly enthralling program in content, harmony and execution. We do hope we see more of Rasika in the coming years.

Rasika Kumar Delivers A Fine Performance (in emagazine Lokvani – May 14, 2009) - by Ranjani Saigal

Rasika Kumar is the daughter and student of Mythili Kumar, who is the founder of the Abhinaya Dance Company. She has also trained under Prof C.V.Chandrasekar and Smt. Kalanidhi Narayanan. An alumni of MIT, she served as President of MIT Natya when she was a student. Currently she works at Google. Rasika's towering personality, beauty and her fine training cast a spell on the audience from the get go. She opened with Muthuswamy Dikshitar's Panchaashat Peetha in Karnataka Devgandhari. Rasika paid obeisance to Goddess Rajarajeswari. She then moved into the thematic presentation of the evening opening with the classic Panchali Shabadam - or Panchali's Oath, written by Mahakavi Subramania Bharathi. Rasika did a fine job depicting the game of dice, Draupadi Vastraharan, Krishna's miraculous rescue of Draupadi and the final pledge taken by Bheema, Arjuna and Draupadi. The next scene was Geetopadesam. Of note in this scene was the Viswaroopa Darishanam. The use of hand gestures and jathis were brilliant and succeeded in the creating the illusion of the all-encompassing Lord. The meeting of Karna with Kunti is perhaps one of the touching moments in the Mahabharata as the son bonds with his biological mother. Veda Vyasa's brilliance shines through in this scene and Rasika did great justice to the character of both Kunti and Karna. The last scene in the thematic presentation was the lament of Gandhari. The scene where the blind Gandhari feels her dead sons limbs was touching. Rasika ended with Lalgudi Jayaraman's Tillana and presented Bhaja Govindam as a Mangalam. It is always a pleasure to watch second-generation Indian American dancers show such dedication to the arts. She is an inspiration for young dancers in New England. Her technique was impeccable. Overall it was a wonderful program and we must thank Dr. Vanita Shastri and the Meru Foundation for bringing this dancer to the Boston Area.

Himalayan Festival - Sri Sri Radha Krishna Temple, Spanish Fork, UT- June 6, 2009

Rasika Kumar also presented a solo performance, which included the Gitopadesha. Caru Das of the Krishna temple said this of the performance: 'What a marvelous artiste you are. Every one was mesmerized by your performance. It had the quality of bringing your subjects to life before the eyes. We were all touched by magic, thanks to you. If you have any

interest in bringing a few students for our much larger event in September, we would be honored.’

Rasika and the Abhinaya dancers are therefore headed to Utah for a performance for the annual Festival of India attended by over 4000 on **September 12, 2009**.

Abhinaya Dance Company Marks 100th Arangetram

Abhinaya’s 2009 spring recital series presented the 100th student’s arangetram (Gayatri Venkatesan) as well as a student recital presenting *Visions of the Goddess*. The student recital showcased students and company members performing stories of the goddess. This was a sold out series and was well received by audience that included developmentally disabled and senior citizens of the community.



Excerpts from article by Lisa Tsering of India-West

A dizzying array of local talent was on display last weekend as the Abhinaya Dance Company presented back-to-back shows highlighting the ancient art of Bharatnatyam. Gayatri Venkatesan marked the school’s 100th arangetram May 23 with a confident performance of seven demanding dances; the following day, nearly 80 young female dancers, all dressed in glowing silk costumes, each took a turn in the spotlight as part of the school’s spring recital May 24.

Venkatesan displayed poise and talent in her solo debut, Mythili Kumar, Abhinaya’s founder and artistic director, told **India-West**. “To sustain that level of energy through seven pieces is admirable,” she said. The young artist, just 15, has studied since the age of 5, said Kumar, who choreographed the arangetram along with her daughter, 23 year-old Bharatnatyam dancer and teacher Malavika Kumar.

The spring student recital, titled “Visions of the Goddess,” included no fewer than 12 pieces- each devoted to a different aspect of the female side of the Hindu pantheon. A goddess theme, said Kumar, offers “a vast scope of things to do... goddesses themselves represent wisdom, wealth, power, and many other manifestations.”

Despite the rigor that that goes into rehearsing and performing Bharatnatyam is a rewarding discipline, said Devaki Belwalker, 12, who has been studying the art for six years. “I’m excited,” she told **India-West** before going on stage for her performance- her sixth in as many years. “It’s fun. It’s not really hard work,” said Belwalker, who practices an hour each day. “You get to tell stories through [Bharatnatyam], and express stuff.”

The dance students at Abhinaya, overwhelmingly female, are taught posture, expression, and technique, explained teacher Sharada Bose. It’s not always easy to get them to concentrate. Bose, who has been teaching since her arangetram in 1997, has inspired her daughter, Sonia, to follow in her footsteps; Sonia Bose had her arangetram in 2001. “Dance has taught her discipline, and it’s also taught her mythology,” said Bose. “She’s learned all of the Indian mythology through dance.”



Teacher Sharada Bose with her students

Mythili Kumar, 55, is an expert in Bharatnatyam, Kuchipudi and Odissi dance who founded the Abhinaya Dance Company in 1980. Since then, the company has utilized Bharatnatyam to present novel spiritual and artistic concepts in shows such as “Rivers: A Mystical Journey” and “Prithvi, the Earth,” and has appeared in nearly every leading dance festival in the region. Kumar notes the growth in popularity of the Southern Indian dance style of Bharatnatyam for Indian American students whose families hail from across India, as well as for non-Indian students. “People here who are coming from India range from those who were modern back in India to those who were very traditional. Those given a Western upbringing, or who are into Bollywood, may not join in [our enthusiasm],” she said “But the dedication and discipline of Bharatnatyam is more fulfilling than Bollywood dance, which does not go beyond the physical,” Kumar told **India-West**. “This art form offers physical, intellectual and spiritual rewards. The traditional, and the classical, are never going away.”

Kalalaya 20th Anniversary Celebrations -May 3, 2009

Abhinaya Dance Company was pleased to be a part of Kalalaya’s 20th Anniversary Celebrations. The concert showcased performances by Artistic Director Mythili Kumar and principal dancer Rasika Kumar, and dancers Kaushika Vayyala, Pia Mishra, Pamela B., and Lakshmi Venkatesan. Live music was ably provided by Roopa Mahadevan, N. Narayan, Shanthi Narayan, Mythili Kumar, and Sharada Sripadam, and special guest vocal artist B. Kumar.

Audience comment: “B. Kumar’s intense vocal rendition of the *Bhairavi raaga* for Mythili Kumar’s dance piece created an intense mood perfecting fitting this abhinaya piece.”

White Blossom Care Center on Aug 21, 2008.

Dancers Megha Ranganathan, Gayatri Venkatesan and Chinmayi Aryasomayajula performed traditional pieces that entertained the senior citizens at the center.

TriDevi Mahotsava at the South Bay Hindu Temple - June 28, 2009

A collaborative fundraiser with Bay Area Dance teachers featured stories of the Mother Goddess with a special solo performance, Incarnations of Bhudevi, by Artistic Director Mythili Kumar with nattuvangam performed by Malavika Kumar.

Yuva Bharati - Kalpana - August 9, 2009

Anjana Dasu who had choreographed a special piece for UC Berkeley's culture show presented the piece with Abhinaya dancers at Yuva Bharathi's show featuring student choreography. She was joined by Kaushika Vayyala, Megha Ranganathan, Pia Mishra, Sushma Umesh, Yatrika Ajaya, Pooja Sohoni, and Lakshmi Venkatesan.

Graduating Seniors

Congratulations to Abhinaya graduates who are going on to college:

Serena Chacko - Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo.

Pooja Sohoni - Washington University in St. Louis.

Yatrika Ajaya - De Anza College in Cupertino.

Guest Artists visit during annual Summer Camp

Summer Recital – July 26, 2009, Monte Sereno Amphitheatre
Summer camp participants presented padams learned from Bragha Bessell along with student choreography.



Guru Shri Muralidharan, a prolific composer of Bharatanatyam numbers was a visiting artist in June, and taught the dance accompaniment skills of nattuvangam and jathis. He also taught two dance numbers which were then presented by the students in a performance to Abhinaya students' family and friends.

Smt. Bragha Bessell, a senior disciple of Smt. Kalanidhi Narayanan who teaches at Kalakshetra, Chennai and who is a sought after teacher for expressional pieces by several noted dancers held summer classes in July. Students enjoyed her detailed and encouraging teaching technique.



Smt. Bragha Bessell – Photo credit: Sreekala Sripathy

2009 Arangetrams

Gayatri Venkatesan



Serena Chacko



Sindura Ravichandran



2009 Calendar of Events – Student and Company participation

Date	Event	Location	Performers
1/11/2009	Pongal Festival	Shiva Murugan Temple, Concord	Bhavana Bandikallu, Sweeya Raj, Renuka Belwalker, Abhinaya Srikanth, Vasalya Panchumarthi, Ananya Sriram, Madhunila Chandra, Goonja Shah, Sahana Viswanath, Savithri Koka, Aditi Gupta, Suchita Nety, Gayatri Venkatesan, Maya Sripadam, Shruthi Thattikunta, Lipika Sadaram, Sitara Sriram, Kavita Ramnath, Astha Tripathi, Maya Nandakumar, Samika Kikkeri, Pooja Nerker, & Serena Chacko
1/18/2009	Arudra Natyanjali	Livermore HCC, Livermore	Sharanya Sriram, Rekha Nagaragan, Sushmita Bhat, Vrushali Samant, Sameera Samant, Swati Belwalker, Lalitha Kristapati, Megha Koduri & Ishani Joshi
2/6/2009	Young Audiences	Santa Rita School, Los Altos	Mythili Kumar & Yatrika Ajaya
2/7/2009	Yuva Bharati-Anjana Dasu's solo	Cubberly Theater, Palo Alto	Anjana Dasu
2/11/2009	Ethnic Storytelling Festival	Diablo Valley College, Pleasant Hill	Mythili Kumar, Yatrika Ajaya, & Megha Ranganathan
2/14/2009	Sujata Mohapatra's Solo-An Odissi Performance	Woodside HS Performing Theater, Woodside	Sujata Mohapatra and live musicians
2/21/2009	Mahashivarathri Natyothsav	Sanatan Dharma Kendra, Sunnyvale	Anjana Dasu
2/27/2009	International Thinking Day	Buddist Church Betsuin, San Jose	Lakshmi V, Nidhi Gandhi, Pia Mishra, Kaushika V, Sushmita Bhat, Rekha N, Sharanya S, & Gayatri.V
3/20/2009	Young Audiences	Notre Dame de Namur Univ, Belmont	Mythili Kumar & Yatrika Ajaya
3/24/2009	Arts Express	Children's Discovery Museum, San Jose	Mythili Kumar, Yatrika Ajaya & Anjali Thakkar
4/4/2009	Duet Performance	Forum @Rancho San Antonio, Cupertino	Radhika Kannan & Yatrika Ajaya
4/24/2009	Dharma Yuddh	National Heritage Museum, Lex, MA	Rasika Kumar, Yatrika Ajaya, & Anjali Thakkar
4/25/2009	Domestic Harmony Foundation	The Greens at Half Hollow, Melville, NY	Mythili Kumar, Rasika Kumar, Yatrika Ajaya, & Madhav Vissa
4/26/2009	Dharma Yuddh	Hindu Temple & Cultural Society of USA, Bridgewater, NJ	Rasika Kumar
5/3/2009	Kalalaya's 20th Anniv.	CET, San Jose	Rasika Kumar, Mythili Kumar, & Co.
5/23/2009	Arangetram	CET, San Jose	Gayatri Venkatesan
5/24/2009	Spring Recital	CET, San Jose	All Students
5/28/2009	Prana Prathista Ceremony	Sri Venkateswara Temple, Cary, NC	Mythili Kumar
6/6/2009	Himalayan Festival	Radha Krishna Temple, Utah	Rasika Kumar
6/13/2009	Serena Chacko	McAfee Center, Saratoga	Sereno Chacko
6/25/2009	Summer Recital	Garden Theater, Monte Sereno	Summer Workshop Students
6/28/2009	South Bay Hindu Center	India Community Center, Milpitas	Mythili Kumar
7/11/2009	Community Performance	White Blossom Center, San Jose	Gayatri Venkatesan, Gayatri Divekar, Amritha Mohan, Sindura Ravichandran
7/26/2009	Summer Recital	Garden Theater, Monte Sereno	Summer Workshop Students
8/9/2009	Kalpana- Concert based on Student Choreography	Mission City Center, Santa Clara	Anjana Dasu, Lakshmi Venkatesan, Pooja Sohoni, Pia Mishra, Sushma Umesh, Yatrika Ajaya, Megha Ranganathan, Kaushika Vayyala
8/15/2009	Sindura Ravichandran	CET, San Jose	Sindura Ravichandran
9/12/2009	Ramayana Festival	Sri Sri Radha Krishna Temple, UT	Rasika Kumar, Mythili Kumar, Anjana Dasu, Pia Mishra, Madhav Vissa, Priya Patel & Divya Patel
9/1/2009	Navaratri Celebrations	Hindu Temples, Sunnyvale	TBD
10/3/2009	Vijaya Dasami-Student Recital	Moreland Community Center, San Jose	All Students
11/14/2009	Fall Production- Nritya Sangati	Mexican Heritage Theater, San Jose	Company
11/15/2009	Fall Production- Nritya Sangati	Cowell Theater, San Francisco	Company
12/6/2009	Yuva Bharati	Albert & Janet Schultz Theater, Palo Alto	Featuring Rasika Kumar and other Bay Area dancers