

A Report

Dance mania continues in January

Bharatanatyam by Rasika Kumar

Jan 6, 2005 Raga Sudha Hall, Chennai

Text & photos: Lalitha Venkat

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We read about how classical dancers now residing outside India are doing well in their field. They run successful dance institutions, imparting their knowledge to the new generation, and help keep this ancient art alive. We often wonder if their children, born and brought up there, have chosen to follow in their parents' footsteps, and if so, how proficient they are. A good opportunity to find out is to attend the performances of some of these artistes who perform here during the dance and music season.



Rasika Kumar, daughter of Mythili Kumar, presented a traditional solo Bharatanatyam recital on the rather small stage of Raga Sudha Hall. Given the space restrictions, the stately 5'11" tall dancer did an admirable job of space management! After the pushpanjali dedicated to Lord Venkateswara, Rasika presented the popular varnam 'Mohamana....' The padam 'Jagadodarana' and javali 'Appadoodukulo' were taught to her by guru Kalanidhi Narayan. The thillana completed her spirited recital. Rasika's sister Malavika provided neat support on the nattuvangam, accompanied by Chitrambari on vocal, Karthik on mridangam and Srinivasan on violin.



Dancer Lakshmi Viswanathan neatly summed up Rasika's prowess when she said, "It is amazing to see children born and brought up in the US do so much justice to a Bharatanatyam performance. Bharatanatyam has made them realize what it is to be an artiste, especially a classical artiste. It is the greatness of the art." Mythili's guru Indira Rajan complimented Malavika for her concentration on the dancer and keeping rhythm accordingly, and wondered if she would have the good fortune to perform in the US with Malavika doing nattuvangam for her!

After completing her undergrad studies in the US, Rasika has just spent three months in Chennai practicing dance, dance and more dance under the guidance of Bharatanatyam guru C V Chandrasekhar and abhinaya from guru Kalanidhi Narayan.

When did her interest in dance start?

Being the daughter of Mythili Kumar, artistic director of Abhinaya Dance Company of San Jose, she took naturally to dance even as a toddler. Starting her formal training under her mother from the age of 4, Rasika had her arangetram in 1996 at the age of 12.

Did academics interfere with her dance training?

She performed throughout school years with the Abhinaya Dance Company. Once she started college in Massachusetts at the other end of the country, it was difficult to keep up the practice. So, she put her classical training aside for a while, but dabbled in learning other dance forms.

When gurus C V Chandrasekhar and Kalanidhi Narayan were recently on tour in the US, Rasika was grateful and happy to be accepted by them for further training in India. That brought her to India during the 2004 Fall season for intensive training and performing in the famous Chennai season.

How did she spend the season?

Attending the performances of not only the senior dancers, and the best of the best, but also those of her peers to see what people her age were doing. It was very inspiring and helpful as well.

Any comment on the audience – the poor turnout?

Rasika thinks the quality of dance dictates the sort of audience to expect. For her performance, only close friends and family turned up...in spite of sending out emails and handing out information leaflets... "There's too much happening at the same time, so it must be difficult for people. Also, a lot of publicity and PR work is needed to attract audiences for one's performances."

What next?

"My dream is to keep up my work at a professional level, and not let it slide or stagnate. I want to do better and better," says Rasika earnestly.

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BHARAT KALACHAR

Wholesome fare

There must have been a surge of pride in dancer Mythili Kumar, watching her older daughter Rasika perform, while her younger daughter Mallavika conducted the programme. And the mother is justified in her pride, for both daughters proved to be inherently talented and hardworking as well. The unhurriedness that characterised the recital was reminiscent of days gone by, when there was time 'to stand and stare.' Paying homage to the gods, Rasika handled the Ishta Devata Stuthi with fervour. She has an expressive face, and was very clear in her delineations that dealt with each deity in isolation. Her footwork was good and so was her timekeeping, that was more visible in the concluding thillana. She became a young girl who feels she is being persecuted for no fault of hers in the Khamas Deshadi javali, 'Appaduru Kulonathine.' Rasika's portrayal of the hurt and bewilderment at other's unkind remarks was sensitive.

The senior artiste from North America, Mythili took up the Yadukulakhambodi ragam, Aditam, varnam, 'Sami ninne' where the nayika is in love with Lord Padmanabha. With a maturity born of continuous engagement with the art, Mythili was unpretentious in her admiration for the nayaka, and in her distress with his apparent indifference. Padmanabha's various forms as seen in different temples were also well thought out and illustrated. The agile dancer's tireless execution of the uniformly long theermanams also requires special mention.

But the most impressive in the varnam was Mallavika's precise, well-intoned nattuvangam. In fact she was easily the star of the show, supported effectively by Viswanathan on the mridangam. She displayed sensitivity in toning down during the abhinaya pieces, picking up once again towards the end in the Krishna Karnamritham delineation and in the Misra Sivaranjani thillana, a composition of Lalgudi Jayaraman set to Aditam.

Radha Badri's music was delightful as were the accompanying musicians, Bhagyalakshmi on the flute and Muruganandam on the violin. This was wholesome fare traditionally served.

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