

The dance performance of Rasika Kumar at the Bridgewater Temple on Sunday April 28<sup>th</sup> 2009.

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 clippetty 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. Narayanan's Mridangam was no less worthy of applause, because that was what lent the audio imagery to Rasika's movements. 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.

Kudos to the strong voice of Asha Ramesh. To be able to sustain it over such a variety of emotions (I do realize it is a recording and could have been recorded over intervals) was remarkable. Also for the most part she stayed on the upper Sthais to eke out all the poignancy of the episodes – which lent a nice platform for Rasika to build up on. And Narayanan's Mridangam was equally soulful as needed. In many instances he coaxed the Ghumkis from the Mridangam, leaving a pleasant sensation, while at other times he punctuated the energetic movements with great aplomb. (a la chariot riding)

If there was a discordant element in this performance, I would reluctantly point out the the Sollu Kattus/ Jathi while Rasika was revealing her Viswa Rupam. The syllables were overly repetitive and monotonous. I believe given the creativity of the entire team, that particular crescendo could do with a more imaginative Jathi to showcase the Viswa Rupam.

But in summary, a truly enthralling program in content, harmony and execution. We do hope we see more of Rasika in the coming years.

**\*\* end**