

Dance Imprints Vol II by Sunil Sunkara

Recently at the Maha Kathak Mahotsav 2018 organized by Kathak Kendra, Delhi in collaboration with Layaangikam Foundation at Ravindra Natya Mandir on Oct 7 2018, Pt Rajendra Gangani ji



had the audience spellbound for more than 2 hours! At the beginning of the performance it was requested that audiences do not record or go *Facebook live* with the performance. Midway through the performance, he noticed that there were a few people recording the performance. At that time, he said, carry me in your heart. When you focus on the performance, its echoes will reach your heart else it will be lost in the web of the mind. The thought received great applause from the audience, who wholeheartedly watched the performance with an even greater engagement. This is the very ethos of '*Dance Imprints*'. As days go by with us witnessing one performance after another, it is but few that remain etched in the corners of our heart, that leave an imprint on us...

This edition of Dance Imprints features moments from performances in Mumbai.

Time travelling into a golden era with Padmashri Sunayana Hazarilal

Natwari School of Kathak's Festival of Dance and Music, featured performances by Padmashri Sunayana Hazarilal and ace sitarist Niladri Kumar in memory of Guru Pt. Hazarilalji on his 26th Death Anniversary on 28th February 2018 at Ravindra Natya Mandir, Mumbai. They were accompanied by Pandit Kalinath Mishra and Amit Mishra on the tabla, Somnath Mishra on vocals, Alka Gujar on Sitar

Nritta or taal-paksh in Kathak is not directly associated with Bhava, but a master has the ability to create emotions within the audience through movements that have undergone a *japa* like sadhana. Such was the experience of watching Sunayana ji that the *sthayibhavas utsaha* and *vismaya* materialized leaving the audience both filled with energy and touched by wonder.

The natwari bols of the Jankiprasad Benaras Gharana have an aural intensity and intricacy that was recreated through the maestros footwork, especially highlighted in the farshbandi. As each composition approached the Sam, the combination of *aharya* and *angika* was such that the audience would forget that there were witnessing the performance in bustling Mumbai and be transported to the golden era of Kathak in the temples of Varanasi.



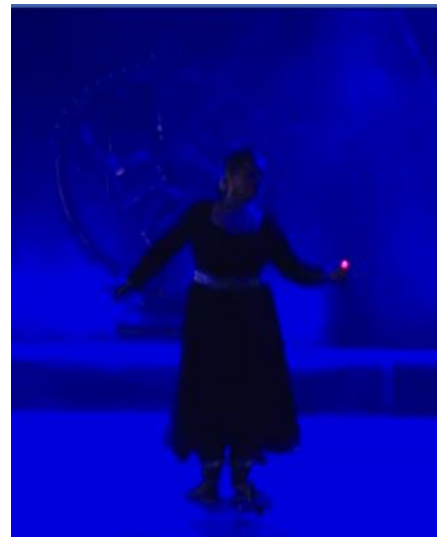
The Magic of Kathak- Pooja Pant

The Pooja Pant Dance Company and Shalini Thackeray (Kalki Foundation) presented Rivaayat on 30th Jan 2018 at Nehru Centre Auditorium, Worli, Mumbai. The show featured performances by young students of Pooja Pant on unique themes like aesops fables, chess, candy crush and other engaging narratives that had both the dancers and the audience engrossed. It truly highlighted the versatility of kathak in being able to adapt to new narratives while sticking to the traditional framework of the craft.



This was followed by a Kathak solo Tehreek by Pooja Pant herself, accompanied by Ojas Adhiya on Tabla. The solo ended with a unique composition where Pooja brought together the elements of magic and kathak together in a piece where the dance was accompanied with a continuous interplay with a mysterious light. The audience were left guessing till the end whether the light was from a laser device held in her hand, or brilliantly planned lighting on her.

In days of yore, when kathakaars travelled to the courts of zamindaars and nawabs, there was a phase when use of ‘magic tricks’ were a part and parcel of leaving an impression on the audience. While Pooja etched herself on the audiences hearts with her graceful and speedy kathak nritya, she also gave an extra cherry on the top with her finale performance.



Seeking Shikhandi- Guru Shila Mehta and Prakriti Dance Company, USA

Shikhandi from the Mahabharata has always attracted and inspired dancers. This could be attributed to the fact that the narrative around Shikhandi's tale featured a fight that overcomes obstacles, something that always connects with the common man. At the same time Shikhandi being the blending of the masculine and feminine energies this appeals to dancers who can feature both the masculine and feminine aspects in one character, very similar to the concept of Ardhanareeshwara.



"Nimitta"-choreography in Kathak style using the Charani ballad singing and text - Amba- Shikhandi story from Mahabharat was presented by Guru Shila Mehta on 23rd April 2018 at Veer Savarkar Auditorium Mumbai, celebrating 15 years of Sanskriti Mahotsav organised by Nupur Zankar Foundation. The script and direction by Mohiniattam legend Dr.Kanak Rele gave a unique and different perspective to this presentation that had a number of artists on live music- Vivek Mishra , Somnath Mishra , Sangeet Mishra , Alka Gujar, Nirmal Thakkar, Hemang Mehta, Anand Prakash Singh.

The charanis were travelling storytellers of Gujarat, similar to the Kathakaars of Awadh. Both of these story telling styles have their origins in the Kusilava parampara of travelling bards. Nimitta brought together the musical style, the dancer and the director all connected through a common ethos of Gujarat parampara.

The highlight of the presentation was the coming together of the male and female tattvas in Shikhandi's body that Shila ji brilliantly depicted through effective use of aharya (a kanchuki blended with a bandi) and Kathak tukdas that blended the

tandava (Amba) and lasya (Shikhandi) components. The quick changes that she depicted between tandava and lasya became faster and faster till they merged into one dance one person. A person that became Nimitta or the means to fulfil a higher destiny. In the end of the presentation as Shikhandi became one with the light, the boundaries between Shila, Amba and Shikhandi ceased to exist as for a moment they all came together as one, in one body, that of the kathakaar.



In a completely different take Evam 2018, presented by RasaBodhi Arts Foundation featured Amba Shikhandi by Prakriti Dance Company, USA on Feb 25th 2018 at Ravindra Natya Mandir, directed by Kasi Aysola and featuring Ramya S Kapadia, Madhvi Venkatesh, Madhvi Reddi, Archana Raja, with Kasi in pivotal roles of Bheeshma and Shikhandi. The story began with the three sisters Amba, Ambika and Ambalika who respond to the announcement of their swayamwara. Amba reveals to her sisters her love and secret trysts with Shalya raja. At the swayamwara, Bheeshma defeats all the kings and wins the three princesses. Here begins the story of Amba, who reveals her love for Shalya, Bheeshma lets her go to Shalya who rejects Amba. Amba is then left destitute and turns to Lord Shiva who gives her the boon of reincarnating as a man. A brilliant design in the choreography was representation of the transformation of Amba from a hopeful young woman, to a bitter and angry destitute to finally leaving her body for the next incarnation by Madhvi and Ramya, which received applause from Guru Jayshree Nair who was in the audience. The melodic voice of Ramya S Kapadia who had sung the piece elevated the production. Also well designed were the costume and costume changes that helped create a number of distinct characters on stage within the limitation of having just 4 dancers to create the production. In the climax, when Shikhandi is responsible for the arrow that defeats Bheeshma, Kasi as Shikhandi beautifully portrayed fleeting emotions of Amba in all her swaroopas as he finally moves towards Shanta. In the words of Guru Rama Vaidyanathan who graced the performance, such captivating work by dancers based in the USA definitely bodes well for the future of classical art.

Pitter patter of the Ghungroos- Raindrops Festival by Pta Uma Dogra



On 14th July 2018, as the 28th Raindrops festival began at 4.15 pm at the PL Deshpande Mini Theatre, a simultaneous shower drenched the latecomers as they headed towards the auditorium, a sign that boded well for the evening of dance in store.

The evening began with Odissi artist Vinod Kevin Bachan, disciple of Padmashri Guru Ranjana Gauhar who presented a lyrical portrayal of the varsha ritu through a Meerabai pada, danced in a combination of grace and strength. When Meera met Jeev Goswami, she said to him that the Purusha is but one - Krishna , we are all his naayikas. This philosophy echoes in the Bhakti poetry of India and Vinod presenting it on the same day as the Rath Yatra was a choice that reflected 'auchitya' or correctness as pointed out by festival curator Pta Uma Dograji.

Dr Sneha Chakradhar, bharatnatyam disciple of Padmashri Guru Geeta Chandran presented hasya rasa through a conversation between Parvati and her mother, upon the arrival of Shivas's other –worldly baarat. Specially penned in Hindi by her father, eminent poet Ashok Chakradhar, the conversation was based on a popular tamil composition ' *Etthai Kandanein*' (What do you see in him?). Regular grooms have 2 eyes, but your groom has 3, and the third eye destroyed the poor kaamdeva- 'Hey Mama Putri, Aisa Usme Kya Dekha Jo Dil De Baithi' . Humorously coined by Sneha as 'Ninda Stuti', the piece touched upon every Indian mothers aspiration to a perfect groom for her daughter, and the resulting discord between mother and daughter, when coming to terms with the 'love marriage'. A wonderful portrayal by Sneha, the use of hindi was a brilliant move as it helped local audiences connect with her , while sticking to the framework of the style making it a perfect example of '*freedom within the framework*'.





Ameera Patankar , Kathak disciple of Guru Shama Bhate began with a dhrupad in Raag Adana, 'Shiva Shiva' made popular by the Gundecha Brothers. Her powerful yet sweet footwork was appreciated by all in the audience. Sometimes, the greatest appreciation comes from the smile on the Gurus face when watching the disciple perform. The smile on Shama jis face as Ameera confidently and spontaneously presented Upaj in footwork, was a testament to the success of the performace

The finale performance by Sujatha Nair was a highlight of the evening. She presented a telugu padam where a Naayika, an ardent lover of Krishna, complains to her Sakhi about a rooster. Krishna tells the Naayika that he can only stay till dawn, and every time the moment of union arrives, the rooster crows disrupting the lovemaking. So angry is the Naayika that she almost curses the rooster. A piece that effectively weaved together Shringara and Hasya, Sujata's conversations with the rooster left a smile on the face of the viewer.

The pièce de résistance was a Malayalam lullaby composed for Maharaja Swati Tirunal, that held the audience in rapture. As Sujata depicted a mother putting the child to bed, it was laced with sweet moments and drew the rasika into the unfolding story. Just as the child went to sleep and the mother tried to get to her work, she finds his hands laced around her necklace. Sujata brilliantly depicted it using her left hand as that of the child and the right as that of the mother. Finally after much difficulty the child was asleep and the mother leaves the stage accompanied by resounding applause from the audience. Sujata rushed back in and berated the audience for making a noise and setting premise to disturb her child. Then assured that the child was still asleep, she finally went her way. A move not expected by the audience, it was a true demonstration of 'Saadharikaran' or bringing the audience onto the stage, as described by Acharya Abhinavagupta.

