

Priyadarshini Govind

Bharathanatyam Recital (October 7, 2006)

A Review by Anita Ranjani and Meena Pennathur

The exhilarating Bharathanatyam performance of Priyadarshini Govind opened at the Annenberg Center, on October 7, 2006 with a Devi stuthi, Jaya Jaya, that immediately set the tone and tempo for the rest of the performance. The feminine power in all its glory was woven on stage where you witnessed the divine compassion of Devi. Her portrayal of Devi's Soundaryam spoke volumes about her abhinaya skills. The Ragamalika varnam that followed next was a show of perfection in all aspects of Bharathanatyam, the geometric aramandi, the subtle but distinctive attami, the ease and flow of adavus, the clarity of expressions, the adherence to tradition, the defined arudis and body extensions. The varnam was indeed poetry in visual form.

If we thought that we had seen the best of Priyadarshini in the varnam, we were at once proven wrong in her rendering of Siruvan in Bhavapriya. A verse from Puranananooru, she has been working on for the past six months, set a sharp contrast in mood to the vibrant varnam. This was about a mother searching for her young son in the battle field, in an attempt to verify the rumors she had heard that he was killed by an arrow to his back as he was running away from the battle field as a coward, contrary to the way he was raised - to be a brave soldier. As Shakthivel, the mridangam artist of the evening, raised the battlefield drumbeats, the mother enters the scene filled with shame searching for her son. When she finally finds him dead from an arrow to his chest disproving all the rumors she had heard, the mother is so overcome with emotions, a somber, dense pathos takes over. I would be surprised if there was one person who did not shed a tear for the mother, the dead son, and her sad, but fulfilled ambition in a brave lad. We might say the Siruvan she portrayed who was indeed too young for war does not matter, but what actually matters is the intensity with which Priya unleashed the emotions on stage. The sadness and depth with which she hits you with her total surrender to the character - of the mother - she was playing, was unmistakably striking. You become a pawn in her hands dancing to the emotions that she invokes in you.

A javali Samayamide followed. She pretends to be the faithful wife and bids farewell to her trusting husband with tear filled eyes. She then transforms to a coy, flirty woman the minute she shuts the door. Cheating on her unsuspecting mate, she challenges her secret lover to be bold in demonstrating his love for her. The Javali was done extremely well were you were able to see the sudden contrast between the shy faithful wife and a flirty lighthearted nayika.

The rhythmic Kavadichindu brought a sway and swing among the audience responding to her movements and the music.

Kadanakudoogalm thillana of Balamuralikrishna was performed as only Priyadarshini could perform. It almost seemed like it was composed with her in mind though she came to fame many years later. The sarpanadai was the first time I have seen it employed in a thillana very effectively.

She concluded the performance with a mangalam on Muruga of Sri Lanka. Vocal by Preethi Mahes was exceptional for a performance that was complete and satisfying leaving a longing to see and hear more.

Following are couple of quotes from the audience who were foreign to this art form:

'I am going to India soon. This program was wonderful' Thomas Scasins - he added the he would like see more.

'Brilliant, I could have sat here for hours today. I would come back again' - Francis McKloskey.

Priyadarshini's form and beauty seems just made for Bharathanatyam and her well developed techniques, grace, alacrity and precision made the program one of a kind leaving you thirsting for more.