

Dance Transforms: Vivartana

(April 21, 2018)

A Review by Arathi Narayan

Sruti brought the magic of the renowned danseuse, Rama Vaidyanathan to the Philadelphia area as part of the 2018 spring events. Rama Vaidyanathan is at the forefront of Bharatanatyam dancers around the world due to her creativity, unique style and innovative choreography, which includes presenting traditional repertoires as well as experimenting with more contemporary themes.

The theme of this group production was “Vivartana – Dance Transforms”, which explores how dance transforms the dancer as well as the audience and generates a deeply satisfying and enriching experience for all. The production was presented in five parts. The dancers were Rama Vaidyanathan and her four students, including her daughter, Dakshina Vaidyanathan.

PRATIKRIYA “DANCE RESPONDS”

The first part of the production started with Rama’s younger daughter, Sannidhi Vaidyanathan at the center of the stage playing the mridangam. The dancers entered the stage one after the other, performing different adavus in perfect synchronization to the beats of the mridangam. With no other musical instruments or vocal sounds, the sounds of the mridangam and the footwork of the dancers blended harmoniously to transform the audience and the space into a rhythmic oasis. Gradually, the tempo increased and all the dancers danced in sheer abandon to showcase the joy of movement.



SAMYOGA “DANCE MERGES”

This piece was a solo by Rama where she seeks the breath when she dances. *Anandha Thandava* – Shiva dances the cosmic dance and makes the whole world dance. Rama beautifully depicted the dance of the deer, water, creeper, bee, peacock, snake, elephant, bird, fish and even a worm. As the dancer dances with pure joy and abandon, she imagines dancing with Shiva and finally merging with him and becoming one. The lyrics for this composition was from the Tamil version from Tirumular’s Tirumandiram.

NIMAGNA “DANCE IMMERSSES”

This piece was very creative and unique as it showcased dances to poems in different languages, to create an immersive experience for the audience. The Persian poem by Rumi was presented by one of the dancers

which she performed very gracefully. She glided effortlessly on stage and her turns were flawless. She performed the Turkish Sufi Whirling dance, where the dancer abandons one's egos or personal desires, by listening to the music, focusing on God, and spinning one's body in repetitive circles.

Dakshina entered the stage next and performed to the classic Meera Bai bhajan – *Pag Ghungroo Bandh Meera Nachi Re*. Rama danced to a composition from a Kashmiri poem by Lalded. Both these dances had elements of folk in it and were a joy to watch.

Two dancers then performed to a composition by Muthuswamy Dikshitar – *Thyagaraja Palayasuman*, in Raga Gowla. Here the dancers, with very graceful movements, beautifully depicted the procession of Shiva in a palanquin. This dance is enacted in the Tiruvarur temple of Tamil Nadu. Nimagna concluded when all the dancers joined the procession and danced in great delight.

PRATIBODHANA “DANCE AWAKENS”

This part of the production depicted the Raas Leela, the joyful dance of Krishna and the Gopikas. Rama portrayed the Gujarati poet, Narsihn Mehta, who imagines how this enchanting dance unfolds on the banks of the river Yamuna. The audience was treated to glimpses of scenes from Vrindhavan. It was very unique to see the dancers dancing to Bharatanatyam sollukattus, while depicting the Dandiya and the Garba dances between Krishna and the Gopikas. The dance concludes with depictions of the Gopikas flocking around Krishna.



RASA BHAVA “DANCE EVOKES”

“Yatho hasta, thatho drishti...”, the motto by which all Bharatanatyam dancers have to adhere to, as written in Nandikeswara’s Abhinaya Darpana, was the basis for the finale of this grand production. The Asamyatha Hastas or single hand gestures, were depicted by four of the dancers while Dakshina used the mudra to evoke the rasa, which was a treat to watch. Beautiful formations and fast jathis were the highlight of this piece.

In spite of some technical difficulties, this production was spectacular and was a visual treat for all. Although the overall theme was more abstract than traditional repertoires, the grandeur of nritta elevated the whole performance. It was very impressive to see how well the space was utilized and the dynamic movements on the stage was a visual treat for the audience. The dancers showcased both grace and strength and the high energy was sustained from start to finish. The 'angashudda' from every dancer enhanced the performance. Rama has trained her students extremely well and everyone gave a performance par excellence.

Bharatanatyam Dancer and Dance teacher Arathi Narayan has been a long-time supporter of Sruti and runs the Natyaarathi School of Dance in Exton.