

An evening of Lasyam with Sunanda Nair
Mohiniattam Dance Performance (November 17, 2018)
A Review by Rubina Sudarman

Dedication, devotion and passion comes to life when an artist gives her fullest to a performance. That's how we sum up the evening of pure Lasyam by Kalasree Dr Sunanda Nair, a product of Nalanda Nritya Kala Mahavidyalaya. With such strong background and structured training, Dr Sunanda's exhibition of subtle nuances in the Mohiniattam art form was no surprise. The command she had over the subject and the characters reflects on the amount of work that has gone into character analysis and attention to details. Accompanied by Vocalist Kalamandalam Gireesan, Janardhana Rao on Mridagam and Raman Kalyan on flute under the banner of Sruti Philadelphia Dr Nair enthralled the audience with her graceful moments.

Rasanubhava, a characterization of four women at different periods and backgrounds were portrayed with their emotions and intelligence in depth. Dr Sunanda Nair commenced her performance with a Ganapathy Shlokam an invocation to Lord Ganesha followed by the first Character Savitri in Ragam Kedargowla where she depicted the story of Savitri and her negotiations with Lord Yama to return her husband to life. Dr Kanak rele's choreography with a blend of emotions and nritya aspect brought the beauty of Mohiniattam in every moment of her piece.



The second Character Shikandi was a challenging piece where the striking contrast of female and male characteristics were brought in as the Nayika transcended from Amba to Shikandi. Amba's anguish, insult and disappointment all at once was displayed with so much poise and intensity that the viewers nearly felt pity for the character and justified her actions to seek revenge. Dr Nair's clarity in her thoughts and adept handling of this could not have been better conveyed to the audience.

She moved on to her third piece Ghandari in ragam Kanada. A special reference to the princess Gandhari who was heartbroken when she realized her groom to be was the blind King of Hastinapura "Dritharashtra". A not so commonly depicted character in Mohiniattam of the iconic queen, who was devastated and showed her resistance to life and eventually witnessed the doom of her sons. Here again, Dr Nair's portrayal of the character made the audience feel for the queen's predicament.

The concluding piece was her all time favourite Kubja in Ragam Yadukulakamboji set to Mishra Chapu Thalam. The episode of the hunch backed maiden who yearned for Lord Krishna exhibited a river of devotion. Narrating the story, Sunanda Nair's nuanced abhinaya brought to life the lyrical quality of Late Sree Kavalam Narayana Panicker's composition.

Indeed, a well-thought out, intelligent and immersive performance!

Rubina Sudharman is a dancer and dance teacher in the New Jersey / New York area and is trained in Bharatanatyam, Mohiniattam, Kathakali and Kuchipudi.

A Review by T. Sarada

Dr Sunandha Nair's Mohini Attam program was a cultural journey into Kerala from an auditorium seat. From the moment DR Nair appeared on stage, an aesthetic Image of the visual art scene of Kerala was projected. With elegance, grace and beauty she covered the entire stage with her steps without missing a beat or losing track of the emotions and hand movements, (Bhavam and Angyam/Abhinayam).

A few scenes ably assisted by the music arrested my attention:

Savithri and Yama. Savithri's feelings when with clever logic and desperate pleading she tells Yama, that since she took seven steps with him, (Ezhu Suwadu), are they not friends?



L to R: Janardhana Rao, Kalamandalam Gireesan, Raman Kalyan

Gandhari's exuberant joy about all the wealth of the kingdom she is entering is dashed to bitter disappointment when she learns that her future husband is blind. That raw emotion was expressed brilliantly.

Sikhandi's dual emotion and demeanor, the woman in the man and the man in the woman in such rapid sequences could not have been depicted without the virtuosity of DR Nair.

The old lady begging Lord Krishna to accept at least a tiny portion of her sandal wood paste, she is making for Kamsa, (Itre Kalabham) came out as a combination of longing, pious offering and pleading; her rapture when the flute announced her Lord's presence was a an unforgettable moment, as presented by DR Nair Mohini Attam does not depend on elaborate and complicated foot work for a good reason. Advancing a story without distraction is the basis. The music was ideally suited to the same goal. The artists did a

fantastic presentation of enunciating the Malayalam wording with the Bhavas clearly coming through. The ending with Narayaneeyam was an additional bonus.

I thank Sruti for bringing an art form like this. We have to thank Dr Sunanda Nair for giving us all an authentic Mohini Attam recital with well-complemented music.

T. Sarada has been a strong supporter of Sruti. Sarada worked in the library/publication committee for a few years. She enjoys Music, Indian and western classical including operas.