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**1rshankar**

Ravi Shankar

**Her Story - A bharatanatyam duet (Ms. Srinidhi Raghavan and Ms. Sahasra Sambamoorthi)**

**Concept and Choreography:**

Ms. Raghavan and Ms. Sambamoorthi

**Artistic Direction and Nattuvangam:** Smt. Usha Raghavan

**Music Score:** Ms. Sudarshana Arunkumar

**Vocals:** N. Sasidharan

**Mridangam:** V. Vedakrishnan

**Violin:** R. Kalaiarasan

**Flute:** C. K. Patanjali

**Sitar:** Sivaramakrishna Rao

**Lyrics:** 5th, 8th, 9th and 12th century poems from tamizh literature

**The Show:**

Act I: Welcome

The performance began with a musical obeisance to ganESa - Papanasam Sivan's 'gajavadanA karuNA sadanA' in SrIranjani was rendered very well.

pushpAnjali

This was followed by a pushpAnjali in hamsadhvani performed by both dancers.

SIOkam

The 51st SIOka from Adi Sankara's saundaryalahari - SivE SringArArdrA - set to rAgamAlIkA was interestingly presented with the dancers alternately assuming the roles of Siva and Sakti to bring out the ashTa rasa.

**Act II: The Legendary Characters - Women in Love**

Scene 1: kaikEyi

Presented by Ms. Srinidhi Raghavan - showed kaikEyi's decision to take on the world knowing fully well that she risked being scorned and shunned by everyone - as an example of a mother's love

### Scene 2: ANDAL

Presented by Ms. Sahasra Sambamoorthi - showed ANDAL's steadfast devotion to Lord Ragnathan, despite being teased for expecting to marry a 'god' - an example of steadfast, romantic love that is finally requited.

### Scene 3: dEvaki

Presented by Ms. Raghavan - of dEvaki's sorrow at being a 'mother who wasn't', trying to enjoy krishNa's childhood vicariously through the stories she hears.

### Scene 4: kaNNagi

Presented by Ms. Sambamoorthi - an example of chaste, wifely love that turns into a destructive force that cleanses the town of madurai for its rulers folly.

### Act III: A more contemporary look at women in love

#### Scene 1: padam - nETrandi nErattile - huseini - Subbarama Ayyar

Presented by Ms. Raghavan - as an example of a woman, who despite her beau's perfidy, loves him.

#### Scene 2: jAvali - smarasundarAnguni sari evvarE - parAs - Dharmapuri Subbaraya Sastri

Presented by Ms. Sambamoorthi - as an example of a woman who defends her husband from her friends.

### Act IV: Conclusion

tillAna - rEvati - Madurai N. Krishnan

mangaLam - saurASTram

### **The presentation:**

#### What went well:

- 1) The presentation was SLICK - there was no dull or sagging moment. The soundtrack was recorded, including the introductory explanations to all the pieces. The explanations were lucid, lively, and very appropriate for the audience. I liked it that they did not have a break, and the whole show moved along like a well oiled machine.
- 2) The music was great - very well recorded. The choice of the rAgas for the main center-piece Act II was just right.
- 3) The idea was novel, and it was very cleverly presented as a center-piece like a varNam - it started with both dancers together on stage with a trikAla jati sequence, followed by the 4 stories. Each story had a small jati built-in. The dancers were very involved in their portrayals. I was moved by the stories of ANDAL, dEvaki, and kaNNagi as portrayed in particular.
- 4) The jatis were nicely choreographed - in particular, I liked the duet choreography - especially in the pushpAnjali, where the dancers began at different points in the tALa cycle.
- 5) Ms. Raghavan's abhinaya to the padam nETrandi nErattile was disconcertingly well done (disconcerting because of her age, and to see such a nuanced portrayal by girls who have grown up outside of India is rather unusual IMO). She brought out the sarcasm of the

situation very well. I am sure that with age and more experience, she will be able to present this padam in a more subdued but lethal way - with 'smiles that can kill'.;)

Things that could do with improvement:

- 1) The aRaimaNDi was rather conspicuously absent! The jati's would've been better with a deep aRaimaNDi.
- 2) Lax fingers in the mudras, and incomplete mudras - Ms. Sambamoorthi was guilty of this quite a few times 😊
- 3) May need a resource person/director to observe, critique and correct so that the punch it packs can be increased
- 4) The interpretation of 'tAd itara janE kutsana parA' in the SIOkam in Act I was wrong - it was portrayed as disgust at Siva's animal-skin garments, while in actuality it is 'disgust/vibhatsa (kutsana parA) at other (itara) men (janE) who look lasciviously at her'

Overall, it was a very enjoyable evening. Two-and-a-half hours passed very quickly, and all too soon, it was time to go home. The ambience of the auditorium was small and intimate, and made the perfect setting for the performance. I would strongly recommend this show to others if they come to your city/town, and if you have a child who is a student of dance, please take them along - the descriptions and the pair's approach to abhinaya will be very educational for others.

Ms. Sambamoorti I understand is the president of the not-for-profit organization called navAtman ([www.navatman.org](http://www.navatman.org)), and co-owner of the magazine parampara (<http://www.paramparamagazine.com/>), and this is the first production of these budding professional dancers. I wish them all the very best.

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