

DANCE

'Nrityopahara' in Thiruvananthapuram: Of aesthetics and precision

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 21, 2019 13:20 IST

UPDATED: MARCH 23, 2019 14:59 IST

Ananda Shankar Jayant and her disciples of Sankarananda Kalakshetra presented a scintillating Bharatanatyam recital in Thiruvananthapuram



An ensemble of youthful dancers performing in sync with precision and involvement was the highlight of 'Nrityopahara' presented by Ananda Shankar Jayant and her disciples of Sankarananda Kalakshetra. The near 60-minute Bharatanatyam group performance focussed on that aspect, and it was well received by the audience in Thiruvananthapuram.

The team began with 'Surya Namaskar', a short piece that was choreographed by using verses from the *Suryashtaka*, which pays homage to the Sun god. This opening indeed set the tone for the recital, with Ananda Shankar in the lead and the youngsters ably joining her in the recital.

Harmony on stage

When it comes to classical group performances, often, the dancers would be in different phases of their learning, thus making it hard to make them perform in harmony, resulting in inconsistent shows. It wasn't the case here as all the members seemed equally proficient and, more importantly, talented. Credit goes to Ananda for bringing them together and planning the choreography in a way that best suited them.

The main piece was 'Devi Upasakam' showing different facets of the goddess – the valiant Meenakshi, gracious Lalitha and enraged Durga. Starting with the Daru varnam 'Mathe malayadhwaja...', the team swiftly moved on to verses praising Lalitha, the one who resides in the centre of Sree Chakra. And it concluded with a portrayal of Durga to the verses of 'Aigiri nandini...'

Coming to the performance, Ananda did not take much of the stage time, but her signature was seen in the choreography. The dancers came up with asymmetric formations but the visual balance remained intact, an aspect that made the presentation laudable. And when she joined the team, to portray Lalitha and later Durga in her fearsome form, it was the piece-de resistance of the item.

The final piece was 'Shivoham', a duet in which two of the members, Harsha Kaja and Neha Sattanapalli, essayed Shiva and Parvati, giving form to the concept of 'Ardhanareeswara'.

They did well and the characteristic tandava and lasya features were evident in their dance. The integration of the dancers was what made this item unique, and the duo managed to create a memorable visual experience.

Another aspect that made the show stand apart was the coordination of music and lights. The benefit of using a recorded track was put to good use here, adding some studio-enhanced sound effects. Lighting was also well arranged, without overdoing the transitions.

The short sancharis within these items hinted that the dancers were equally skilled in abhinaya. However, the three pieces centred mostly on the dance aspect, giving fewer chances for the dancers to explore aspects of abhinaya. Perhaps an abhinaya piece with each dancer taking a turn or a solo by Ananda Shankar as the second last item would have enhanced the recital. Probably, it was time constraints that stopped the team from adding an extra piece.

The one-day programme also featured a Carnatic-Hindustani-Sopanam jugalbandi earlier in the evening. It was performed by Vinay Sharva, Dhananjay Hegde and Eloor Biju.

The event was staged as part of 'Bharateeyam' dance and music festival and it was organised under the aegis of Centre for Indian Classical Dances with backing from a host of central and state government agencies.



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Printable version | Jan 23, 2021 8:41:18 AM |

<https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/dance/bharatanatyam-recital-by-ananda-shankar-jayant-and-her-disciples/article26597655.ece>

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