

DANCE

Interesting interpretation of an oft-told tale

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Shankarananda Kalakshetra's premiered its latest work 'Tales of the Bull and the Tiger' recently in Hyderabad

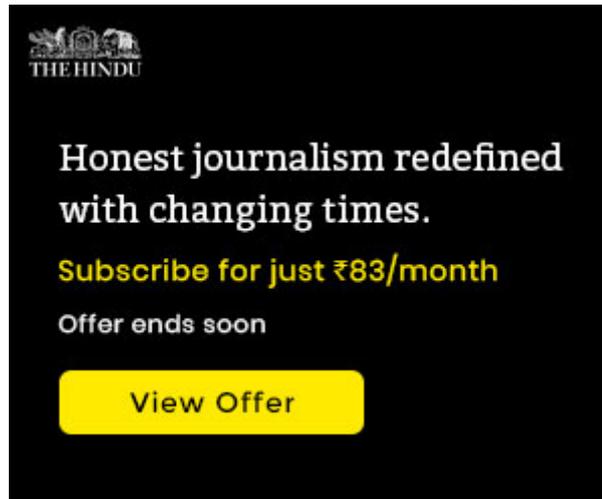


A tightly packed Ravindra Bharathi was witness to the overpowering energy of Shankarananda Kalakshetra's premiere of its latest work 'Tales of the Bull and the Tiger' recently. The who's who of Hyderabad's culture aficionados was in attendance. Every dancer worth her salt in the audience would surely have at some point, been swept by the cinemascope nature of the ballet that saw creative individuals converge to sew together a tale that though timeless, leaves one the richer for it, with each retelling. Mention of bull and tiger in the Indian puranic context, expectedly alludes to Siva and Parvati, yet the skewed reference to the godheads, created a nice anticipatory relish, as one is wont to feel at the beginning of a story being told. And that was pretty much the hook of the evening: the perennial tale of the cosmic couple Siva and Parvati told through their vahanas, the nandi and the simham, to Kartikeya and Ganesha, divinities unto themselves. Indeed, the

evening recreated the nostalgia of a grandmother's vivid night-time storytelling that was oft-punctuated by flashes of thunder and lightning.

Watching 'Tales of the Bull and the Tiger', was a lesson in precision and aesthetics. Ananda Shankar Jayant's productions have never scrimped on presentation. The importance of sensitised lighting in a production of this nature can never be overstated, and this was amply visible in the color schema used by lighting designers Gyandev Singh and Basavaraju. The digital graphics created by artist Gunjan Ashtapura, were subtle and elegant much like a beautiful tapestry hanging unobtrusively on a wall. The costumes designed by Ganesh Nallari, well thought out and carefully put together, were a treat to the eyes without compromising on character suitability.

A dance rests on the pedestal of its music. Good music is half the battle won. Venu Madhav's music seamlessly knitted the sahityam culled and compiled from various sources such as stotra literature, kritis, Thiruppugazh and the Tevaram using a range of ragas; his scores were ably matched by Renuka Prasad's masterful jatis and rhythmic segments. While some of the compositions were familiar such as the Thiruppugazh used in the alarippu, Adi Shankaracharya's 'Mahim muladhare' from his Soundaryalahiri, Dayanand Saraswati's 'Bho Shambo', the lingashtakam and the ever-popular Siva tandava stotram, there were some others that one may have been unfamiliar with. For instance, Ganesha enters to a Ganesha talam 'Vikatotkat sundara danti mukham'; the akasha lingam is described through a Tevaram 'Vilavar kanipada' and Siva as Nataraja is depicted with lines drawn from the Nataraja Dasakam, Patanjali's stotram, Papanasan Sivan's varnam in Nattakurinji etc. Yet, at no point did the musical score seem unsettled by the range of text used.



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While the technique was predominantly Bharatanatyam, there were a few Kuchipudi adugus used every now and then to pepper the choreography.

Group presentations of this nature obviate skill in demonstrating intricate footwork, rhythmic variations and complicated patterns where the focus is mainly on pushing the narrative forward. Accordingly, the choreography is designed in a way to cover the stage and keep the momentum going with minimum reliance on traditional techniques of storytelling like tatta mittu and maximum use of spatial movements.

Chiefly choreographed by Ananda Shankar Jayant, she was assisted by some of her senior students. Stupendously talented Mithun Shyam played the part of the enigmatic family-man Siva to the hilt: now full of ardour for his lovely bride Parvati, now fierce with abandon as the lord of cosmic dance. Ananda Shankar Jayant played the part of the motherly and loving Parvati, a perfect foil to Siva's boundless energy. The other key roles were remarkably essayed by Harshita Kaja as Simham, Neha Sattenpalli as Nandi, Srividya Sripati as Ganesha, and Archita as Kartikeya. Senior dancers included Surendranath as Brahma, Uday Shankar as Vishnu, Sneha Magapu, Aditi Rao and others. Presented in acts, the first act saw the introduction of the two vahanas and Ganesha and Kartikeya, thus establishing Shiva's household and holding him up as a family man. The second act went back in time as though in flashback mode and recreated the wedding of the celestial couple. The third act delineated the two deities' individual traits and ended with them delighting in the loving embrace of their two sons, thus completing the family portrait. The fourth act dwelt on Parvati as Sri Lalita Ambika, as the one who controls the Kundalini Shakti, the universal mother. The fifth act belonged entirely to the form and fury of Shiva as Nataraja, the lord of dance who when he dances, makes every earthly creature dance along with him. Mithun Shyam's effortless jumps and leaps in this segment drew the expected applause from the audience. Enfin, night falls and the two children, Ganesha and Kartikeya along with their respective vahanas nestle comfortably in their mother's lap as she sings them a lullaby even as Siva, Simham and Nandi look on tenderly.



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