

Review

Guru Vandanam

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Kuchipudi Parampara Foundation presented 'Guru Vandanam' to Guru Balakondala Rao, Central Sangeet Natak Akademi Awardee 2017 on 24th September 2017, at Shukra Auditorium, Bangalore. The founder of KPF, Kuchipudi dancer Deepa Sashindran's program marked Guru Balakondala Rao's return to India after a successful USA tour. It was during her USA tour that SNA announced her as the recipient of the prestigious award.

The program commenced with lighting ceremony in the presence of Prof Mysore V Subramanya, Kiran Subramanyam and Sandhya Kiran. A documentary 'Balakka - Dancing with Tradition' was screened and proved to be the highlight of the event. The documentary was played after the performances and was well received by the audience. The film opens with Balakka teaching Kuchipudi to her students and moves to show clips and pictures of young Bala and her performances. Directed by award winning documentary filmmaker Dulam Satyanarayana, the work includes Balakka's views expressed to her disciple Roxanne Gupta about dance, shots from Kuchipudi village, and narrative about the traditions of Kuchipudi.

She was felicitated by Kuchipudi Parampara Foundation and prominent art and classical dance personalities of Bangalore. The presence of family members of Balakka, her grandchildren, made the felicitation an occasion memorable to the Guru besides bringing the dancers closer and in providing younger dancers an opportunity to perform in the presence of stalwarts. Kuchipudi performances in the event came from Payal Ramchandani (solo), Sita Prasad and Mrutyumjaya Sarma (duo), and KPF Ensemble (group). The performances commenced with invocatory prayer "Vani paraku" as is the established practice for Kuchipudi recitals.



Balakka being honored

Payal Ramchandani, who recently conducted a Spic Macay workshop in Kerala, made an impressive performance of three dance pieces. The first item was "Rusali Radha", in raag Mishra Yaman, in Marathi, and it's her own choreography. The performance had a music prelude composed by Rajat Prasanna. Written by Rangeshwar it describes a spat between Radha and Krishna and how nature in its entirety is withering away in disappointment due to their fight. The peacocks that were once dancing are not dancing anymore, the flowers that were blooming with bees hovering over them are now dying out, the trees that had creepers clinging on to them are now falling in despair. How long will they not speak to each other? Who will speak first? "Rusali Radha" brought to the audience, the study of the content of this beautiful narrative of Radha and Krishna. It's quite rare to come across a choreography set to a Marathi poem in Kuchipudi and Payal's introduction before the piece helped both to appreciate beauty of the lyrical content and of the presentation. Payal's nritya was energetic, her expression was apt and her portrayal of lovers' intense feeling about each other, connecting. It's worth looking forward to her future choreographic works.

The next item Kaliya Nartanam (also called Kalinga), by Oothukadu Venkata Kavi, choreography by Guru Raja - Radha Reddy, in raag Gambheera, was performed with symbolic rhythmic steps, wavy movements akin to the gushing waves of the Yamuna, and beauty in depiction of the lord - his eyes, beautiful like lotus petals and the venomous serpent on whom he dances to crush its arrogance. The rendering follows a pattern that runs throughout the characteristic of the situation, words resembling the hissing sound, jathis and lyrics intermingled to create the drama of the nartanam.

Payal concluded her performance with Aarathi (Surutti, tisra chapu), choreography by Guru Jaikishore Mosalikanti. This Purandaradasa kriti depicts the Dasavatara or ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu with the poet suggesting to lotus-faced women to come and take "aarati" of Venkataramana (Lord Vishnu) along with Lakshmi. This item reminds us of the famous Dasavatara Sabdam and has various postures to depict each avatar.



Payal Ramchandani



Sita Prasad and Pasumarthi Mrutyumjaya Sarma

Sita Prasad and Pasumarthi Mrutyumjaya Sarma performed a composition of Mysore Vasudevachar (Hindolam, adi) in praise of Goddess Saraswathi, the goddess of knowledge and learning in Indian mythology, choreography by Sita Prasad showing the goddess in all her glory through many stylistic angika stances. However it is the item that they both performed later that captured the audience's hearts.

From the Adhyatma Ramayana keertana written by Munipalle Subramanya Kavi, the duo performed "Inti chengalva banti cheluvala..." (Saveri, misra chapu). This episode is from the Aranya (forest) Kanda, and describes the abduction of Sita by Ravana. Sita Prasad and Mutyam (Mrutyumjaya Sarma) have been performing as duo for quite some time and their synchronizing worked with finesse. The drama element so characteristic of Kuchipudi dance form received applause from the audience. They enacted multiple roles through the narrative and the choreography vividly communicated the characters quite distinctly and efficiently. This is a wonderful coming together where Sita plays Ravana! Being from the traditional family, Mutyam played the role of Sita with ease. The team graduated to a higher level by their creative work. No wonder they both received a long applause.

KPF Ensemble initiated their performance with Saint Annamacharya kriti "Vandeham" on Lord Venkateshwara in ragam Hamsadhvani, khanda chapu talam. Music has been set by Shweta Prasad and choreographed by Deepa Narayanan, performed by students Vinu Ambadi, Kalamandalam Roshin Chandran, Kalamandalam Bilahari and Prathibha. The next item was 'Chandrasekaram,' a composition of Bellary Brothers in praise of Lord Shiva, first with a shlokam in Kapi ragam followed by musical lyrics in Chandrakauns ragam set to adi talam choreographed by Deepa Narayanan. It was performed by the girls' ensemble of Dr. Spandana Bhardwaj, Kalamandalam Bilahari, Sreelatha Girish and Prathibha. 'Ramayana Sabdam' which is in ragam Mohanam, choreographed by Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam set to adi talam was performed by the male ensemble of Girish Kumar, Vinu Ambadi, Kalamandalam Roshin Chandran, Byju, Haneesh and Deepak. The students were good in their footwork, Vinu displaying talent for the future, girls in their expressiveness and the male students displayed high energy with élan.



KPF ensemble

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