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We, with our origins from South Asia, always try our best to instil in our children, the grand culture & tradition of Hindu religion and philosophy. What better way that could have been depicted than KSHETRAM, a Bharatnatyam program in the form of a Ballet, conceived and presented in a stunning way by Smt Manjula Vishwanath, the Artistic Director of Rasika Dance Academy, along with her students, on the night of 14th May at the Auditorium in PLC at St Ives. Stunning it was when you imagine a non-stop hour-and-a-half ballet, riveting in its speed and eye-pleasing in its participants' performance and its colourful costumes, and that's the veritable feast the

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viewers enjoyed on that evening. The novel way in which the audience was led through was heart-warming – an Indian dance teacher who has a surprise visit from her 2 grand-daughters (born & bred in Australia) and takes them through a journey of prominent South Indian places of worship and the religious story behind each. To start with, the program was staged to collect funds and donate to AIM-Seva, an initiative by Shri Dayananda Swamigal to bring education to the underprivileged in India. The evening had an interesting start when kids from a local Australian School, (mind you a majority of the kids were of non-Indian origin) recited vedic prayers. Then further to the normal speech by guests and an audio-visual presentation, the ballet proper began.

The first item was a classic selection, ‘Ulagam Pugazhum’, which brought to the forefront the fame of Natyam, both in its meaning and in the way the girls performed the piece. The co-ordination and the aramandi of the students in this piece indicate the level to which the students have been trained and there are no two thoughts about the standards to which Manjula drives her students. Next was a crisp performance to the music of ‘Vedham’. After that, what followed was a pure connoisseur’s dream, ‘Ananda Natanam’ by Manjula herself & Sandhya. The way the two dancers went through the piece, it was like music in motion, so graceful and full of bhavam & layam. Following that was ‘Tunga Kari Mugha’ which was a different type altogether. There was one student with a Ganapathi-mask, dancing skillfully without a single misstep, while surrounding her and dancing with a high level of grace & expression were four others. Captivating it was.

The next piece was ‘Arupadai’, glorifying the greatness of Lord Muruga. It captured the heart of the audience in many ways, chief being the

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appearance of the six murugans (of different ages) and to think the tiniest one is only one-and-half years old and boldly went through the paces on stage without any reluctance. It had in it a sweet moment between Murugan & Devyani (where a bedecked swing comes down as if celestial in nature) as well as a very nice kurathi dance. This was followed by a piece on 'Iyappan' where the dance with mohini & padmasuran was well received. Following this was a pleasing piece 'Harivarasinam' by young ones and then a very fast item, 'Parkadal', which simply took the breath away, followed by 'Thillana'.

At the outset, it is Hats-Off to the genius of Smt Manjula Vishwanath, the Artistic Director of Rasika Dance Academy, in conceiving such a masterpiece and presenting it with her students, to the audience to such high standards that it did receive a standing ovation at the end.

Also to be facilitated are the quality of the music,

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provided by the musicians Vocal- Dr Ramanathan, Shubha Harinath & Anand Dixit, Violin- Balaji Jagananathan, Mrudangam- Bala Sankar, Ghatam/ Octopad/Ghanjira- Siva Sethupathi, Violin- Sanjay Ramaswami, Flute- Giridhar Thirumalai and Veena- Tulasi, Sound Recordist- Rajashekar. The amount of effort that they should have put in can be clearly visualised in how well the music has aligned with the dance itself. Also credits are due to Mr Murali & his wife, Mrs Sudha Murali, for their organisational ability in making this event a grand success.



To quote from a connoisseur's feedback "The whole thing was perfectly choreographed, and from the audience perspective, moved with breathtaking precision. What galvanised the audience was the vigour and "abhinaya" of the participants. Together with the splash of colour and innovative ideas (bringing 6 infants on to the stage, the "oonjal" for Murugan's wedding, etc.),

there were some scenes that will be embedded in our minds for a long time, like the Narasimha-avataaram, and Murugan's encounter with the asuraas. May I mention that some of the senior students excelled, and are clearly "born to dance". The long journey to realising their full potential will be a pleasure and a tremendous responsibility for you, as their mentor".

Last year we had 'Adharam Madhura', a sell-out program, and then this masterpiece. What & when next from Smt Manjula Vishwanath, would surely be the expectation of the audience who had seen this.





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