

Manjula Viswanath hands over a cheque of \$12,000 to Dr Bala of SVT



Manjula



Kalinganarthana



Krishna



# Honey drenched tales

The Rasika Dance Academy's latest production is a sumptuous tale of events that chronicle Krishna's life



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It is every *nattummar*'s ultimate dream – to choreograph and chronicle the tales of Krishna; after all, it provides the perfect canvas for soul stirring *bhava* and *abhinaya*, as well as the all-important *nritya*.

Inspired by Vallabhacharya's *Madhurashtakam*, Manjula Viswanath's recent stage production *Adharum Madharam* (honey drenched tales) showcased the rich diversity of her Rasika Dance Academy. The sell-out fundraiser hosted in conjunction with Sri Venkateswara Temple Association, at the packed beyond capacity Bankstown Town Hall raised \$12,000 for the upcoming 10-day Brahmothsavam festival at Helensburgh.

Not only was the tale sumptuously told, each student had an integral role in the elaborate narrative fabric. While the junior students worked harmoniously to lend colour, texture and content, seniors demonstrated technical depth, which only comes with years of commitment to the art form.

Displaying stamina, endurance as well as understanding of the mythological and theological dimension, they were well versed

in Bharatanatyam techniques.

*Anga* and *adavu* *shuddhi* (perfect body postures and steps) besides complex emoting ability were evident as the ballet unfolded.

They excelled as Vasudeva, Devaki, Yashoda, Puttana, Chanura, Duryodhana, Arjuna and of course Draupadi, effortlessly metamorphosing from good to evil, as they denoted tastefully designed costumes. The negative characters particularly stood out for their portrayal of evil. From the apparently benign Puttana to the conspicuously arrogant and villainous Kamsa, cocksure Chanura and the power intoxicated Duryodhana, the portrayal albeit fleeting was powerfully eloquent.

Krishna, charmingly cherubic and later charismatic stole the limelight, as expected. *I am the beginning, the being and the end*  
*I am the conscience in the heart of all creatures*  
*I am the mind of the senses*

Thus Krishna depicts the Supreme Being in *Bhagavad Gita*.

*Adharum Madharam* is a sublime tribute to the evolutionary process, with its constant battles between good and evil.

After an invocatory *Anandanarthanam*, the dance drama opened with Mother Earth weighed down by overwhelming forces of evil. Yet there is hope that Krishna will eventually prevail and make life gloriously worth living (*Krishnam Vande Jagadguram*).

Thus the residents of Mathura and later Gokul, happily welcome their saviour.

Oothukkadu's *Swagatam Krishna Sharanagatam* Krishna was the constant refrain throughout the ballet, seeking lifelong refuge and sustenance.

While the opening scene was intense and energetic, the *Bala Kaandam* that followed was playfully, light hearted as the nurturing mother Yashoda lovingly doted (Purandaradasa's *Kadagola thaarena chinnavu* and *Raru Venu Gopa Bala*) on her truant son (*Navaneta chera*), savouring life's mundane pleasures.

As the alluring Krishna meanders through his eventful childhood, the narrative paused often to explore his mystic charm. Adorable yet convincingly all pervasive; a child at heart (*Therada vilagattai pillai*), but omniscient and omnipotent; nonetheless, no wonder then he is an enigma. Likewise, Manjula also chose to dwell on Krishna, the eternal lover who charms and disappoints innumerable *gopikas* - An irresistible chapter for a capable danseuse.

This balance of alternating tempo and juxtaposition of contrasts added flavour and dimension to the clever storytelling, whipping up a sensual feast.

Likewise, the *bhava* soaked music choreography by Bangalore based Balasubramania Sharma sustained the entire production, creating the basic structure for Manjula to artistically embellish. Interestingly, Manjula and Sharma traversed across seven Indian languages to capture this magic,

relying heavily on the works of legends Jayadeva, Purandara Dasa, Muthuswami Dikshitar Oothukkadu Venkata Subba Iyer, Subramanya Pillai and Subramanya Bharati.

No less dramatic was the use of props and lighting, creating an aura of suspense to an oft-repeated and much loved tale.

Kamsa's slaying was a classic example where Manjula mixes simple yet effective dance techniques with special effects to create a vivid effect. Kamsa swaggered onto the scene, flushed with pride and arrogance unaware of his impending death. Equally brilliant was the dramatisation of *Kalinga Nardhanam* (marrying the apt lyrics *Thaam thim tharana tha*), where Krishna subdues the poisonous Kaliya, who had terrorised the peaceful agrarian community. The five expert dancers worked in tandem to recreate the terrifying serpent.

The finale portraying the cosmic vision clearly was the crowning glory, picturising the unimaginable. As Krishna adorns the *Vishwarupam* (*Dharma samthapanarthaya sambhavam yug yuge*), emanating divine radiance, the stage explodes (literally and metaphorically) with sheer creative brilliance bringing together the entire cast for a celebration of life itself and awakening our inner consciousness.

Yet another creditable milestone for the Rasika family and a tremendous show of strength by the community, heralding the Brahmothsavam celebrations.