

24th February 2015

Meet our Choreographer



[http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-2EloY9yhVbY/VOyhMjUxtRI/AAAAAAAAA4Q/m57egh4Z_LA/s1600/Ranjana_header.png]

It's not often that Florida Grand Opera recruits the talents of a choreographer, but for FGO's upcoming production of Bizet's exotic *The Pearl Fishers*, FGO jumped at the opportunity to hire local Indian Classical dance choreographer, Ranjana Warier. Continue reading to learn more.

To see Florida Grand Opera's lush and exotic production of Bizet's ***The Pearl Fishers***, which features Ranjana's choreography and students from her dance studio, please call our Box Office Monday-Friday from 10am-4pm, or order securely online 24-hours a day at FGO.org.

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The 1800s witnessed an infatuation in Europe with all things exotic, with a particular fascination paid to Asian cultures. The customs of this unfamiliar continent deeply inspired ***The Pearl Fishers***. The foreign locale and its colorful individuals with their emotional turmoil provided Bizet with a perfect opportunity to create this tuneful, compelling story.

The traditional production, like the one FGO is using from Sarasota Opera, is based in ancient Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), an island off of India's mainland. The opera begins with a brief orchestral prelude, followed by an opening chorus piece that is punctuated by ethnic dance. However, Indian dance styles require proper training and years of practice to master. Due to the lack of experts in the field and time and budget requirements, the dancing required for this chorus number is sometimes omitted. Thankfully there is an expert Indian Dance instructor within the South Florida Community.

Ranjana Warier is the artistic director of the Rhythms School of Dance in South Florida, which offers certified degree courses in Indian Classical dances. Warier was introduced to Indian Classical dances at the age of six. She received her training in Bharathanatyam and Mohiniyaattam from Kalamandalam Devaki and Kalamandalam Indira and has had the opportunity to perform under the guidance of gurus at several festivals over the years.

In addition to running her dance studio, Warier is a Knight Foundation Arts Challenge winner for 2012 and 2014, a multiple grant recipient from local government organizations and a routine presenter at various educational institutions promoting Indian art forms and culture. Truly a marvel in many fields,

Warier has degrees in both engineering and computer science. She was a nationally seeded chess player and has won several prestigious tournaments. She is currently working in the field of cyber security. However, she looks at this opportunity with the opera as a particular point of pride.

Welcome to Florida Grand Opera, Ranjana. Can you please tell us a little bit about yourself and how you got into the world of Indian dance?

I grew up with Indian classical dance and music. I had the privilege to be trained under the best teachers. Indian dances are very diverse, colorful and a symbolic representation of everything India is. My focus has been on preserving the tradition while continuing to find innovative presentation styles to better connect with audience.

Teaching children this art form has been the most satisfying part of my dance career. Our dance school spread the joy of Indian Classical dance through educational workshops and performances all through the year.



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Courtesy of Facebook

Is this the first opera you've been apart of?

Yes. This is my first ever opera experience.

Obviously, opera is mostly about the music. The initial challenge [I faced] was to understand the production/spacing requirements and to ensure the choreography pays proper respect to the culture and context.

It was a departure from usual style of "presentational" choreography to focus on giving a visual backdrop to the music delivery.



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FGO's final room run.

Photo: Brittany Mazzurco for Florida Grand Opera

What do you think about this opera and its music so far?

I can already see why productions like these take such a great deal of planning and preparation! As for the presentation (visual) aspect of opera, I am able to connect really well because of my background.

It has been an amazing experience to see how well the elements of theatre such as acting, costumes, props, scenery, and dance come together to support the music and tell a colorful story.

It is impressive to watch the ease with which music is "performed."

We would assume, given the fact that Georges Bizet is a French composer, that the music to which you are choreographing is significantly different than more traditional Indian music.

Is this difference reflected in your choreography and artistic decisions?

Absolutely. This choreography is different from anything else I have done in the past.

I kept the choreography very traditional to stay true to the story and the culture that is represented here. But, the traditional Indian folk and classical moves were broken down as needed and blended with some contemporary transitions to support the music and delivery effectively.

In Indian classical dance, especially in "Bharatanatyam," the style that we specialize in, percussion instrument is an essential part of orchestra. One adaptation that you will notice very quickly is the replacement of intricate combinations of flat stomp of the feet with more vertical and fluid movements.



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Photo: Rod Millington for Sarasota Opera

What has been the most rewarding part of this experience so far?

FGO is one of the most professional artistic organizations I have ever worked with. The experience we had with administrative, artistic and costume/make-up groups has been amazing.

An opportunity to do choreography for such a unique amazing production and giving a glimpse of Indian dances to new audience is priceless.

Despite being completely different genres, there are still some similarities in Opera and Indian classical music. I certainly hope that, those interested in Indian Classical music and dance will also come see this opera.



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Photo courtesy of Facebook

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Posted 24th February 2015 by Brendan Glynn

Labels: choreographer, choreography, classical, florida grand opera, georges bizet, indian dance, les pecheurs de perles, ranjana, the pearl fishers

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Ruhi March 25, 2016 at 1:32 AM

This is really interesting and inspiring as well. Ranjana ji definitely took the Indian classical dance and her magnificent choreography to the next level.

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