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Unconventional show

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Divya Devaguptapu. Photo: K. Pichumani

In 'Naada Sudhaa Rasa,' Divya Devaguptapu's vibrant choreography and maturity saw her sail past the most unconventional presentations

To mark the inaugural of the Suryakala Foundation for Performing Arts in Chennai, a non-profit trust for the promotion of classical music and dance in memory of Surya Voruganti and Pasupati Rao Voruganti, Divya Devaguptapu, senior disciple of Gurus Shantha and V.P. Dhananjayan, presented a Bharatanatyam performance in association with Artery. The programme, 'Naada Sudhaa Rasa,' a celebration of the 'sound' of dance, was in effect a celebration of Carnatic music.

True to intent, the flavour of the programme was kutcheri-like as regards the style of rendition and accompaniment. With a talented singer such as Sreedev Rajagopalan (Swati Tirunal College of Music, Trivandrum), whose melody, delicacy and depth brought intensity to the presentation and a senior mridanga player such as K.P.Ramesh Babu, who played the role of a bright and sharp accompanist to the musician not the dancer, Divya became a happy co-artist providing a mature, visual dimension to this poetic combination.

The repertoire was also kutcheri-like - the invocation was the traditional one sung before the navavarana kritis, 'Sri Maha Ganapathi ravathu mam' (Gowla, misra chapu, Dikshitar), then a kriti ('Naada Sudhaa Rasa,' Arabi, Tyagaraja), the ragamalika R-T-P, padam ('Ye mataladina,' Yadukula Kamboji, Kshetrayya), thani avarthanam (ragamalika, Adi, K.P.Ramesh Babu) and tukkada ('Maya mohamu' misra jog, Annamacharya).

The Ragam-Tanam-Pallavi (ragamalika, khanda Triputa) in praise of Lalithambika, written and composed by the violin vidwan R. K. Shriram Kumar, was easily the pick of the evening. Melody ruled the hauntingly beautiful piece; it was put together very intelligently- minimal lyrics to indicate the theme and the progression of the devotee's journey through the Sri Chakra, the sahitya phrases repeated in varying speeds and

with varying emphasis, a subtly delayed start (3 matras after samam) and the addition of lilting swara passages in between. It was poetry, no less.

The Todi ragam-tanam segments were drenched in soft melody, meditative movements and mood lighting. They created other-worldly images that set the tone for what was to follow. That these segments were improvisational perhaps added to its authenticity. Composer Shriram Kumar had taken inspiration from Muthuswami Dikshitar's Kamalaamba Navavarana kritis and used the ragas in the same order in the pallavi. The explanations for each avarana or stage in the worship came through an audio-visual screen that played alongside the performance and the dancer's suggestive gestures. While each avarana had complex physical and spiritual implications, all of which cannot be understood at once, the radiant aura and benevolence of the goddess was a recurring image that came through clearly.

The thani avarthanam was a brave attempt by Divya to give the percussionists centrestage. Partly choreographed and partly not, the segment had refreshing bursts of melody sandwiched in between nadai changes and the rhythmic fireworks.

Divya's vibrant choreography and maturity saw her sail past the most unconventional presentations. While there may not have been any 'aah' moments of innovative visualisation, there were enough fulfilling moments of wonderful music and intense involvement to set the performance apart, as a must-see.

The other talented artists of the evening were: Venkatakrishnan Mahalingam (nattuvangam), Rijesh Gopalakrishnan (violin), Sunil Kumar (kanjira) and Saraswati (tambura). There were inspired performances all around.

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