

Fresh talent to the fore

A bouquet of diverse genres, "Ashme" had the distinct aroma of Kuchipudi, Sattriya and Odissi

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An array of dance styles within a short span of an evening, say two-and-half-hours, has become the norm these days. In a way, it ensures a good gathering of viewers. It showcases diverse genres on the same platform which is interesting; this would broaden the horizons of diverse audience and aid in the appreciation of multi-lingual, multi regional art forms.

'Ashme' was one such posy that held the aroma of Kuchipudi, Sattriya and Odissi, each with its distinct aura and identity yet with a common thread running through them. Kuchipudi and Odissi dance styles are similar in body movements - graceful with a dash of vigour while Sattriya and Kuchipudi share story-telling - mostly mythological - through dance gestures. The performances by four artistes were virtuosi, succinct and absorbing.

Chennai-based Ashrita Keshav chose a Narayana Teerta's composition ('Jaya jaya Durge...'), a Tarangam in Sanskrit which was complete in itself to showcase Kuchipudi as a dance form. She was nimble-footed as she traced through the mnemonics, with a natural flair for abhinaya. The expressiveness of her eyes flowed into her nritya too which is a rare feature in young-and-upcoming artistes. Grace was inherent in every move as she enacted the Mahishasura mardhini story and final victory of good over evil through divine intervention.

The tarangam is usually wrapped up with the famed 'tambalam' (plate) dance which is a testimony of the dancer's balancing skills on the precarious edges of a wide



Measured footwork Ashrita Keshav; Meernanda Borthakur

brass plate. It is actually a skill to reproduce the mnemonics emanating from the percussion on the plate to the point of acute clarity without support of vocal or instrumental. But the trend nowadays is to go along with the beat of the percussion which generally drowns the sound of the plate under the feet of the dancer and the mnemonics cannot be deciphered. This artiste did her best though the sound of the plate wasn't all that audible.

Meenakshi Medhi (Delhi) and Meernanda Borthakur (Assam) both Sattriya dancers displayed a very vibrant dance to story-telling in their individualistic way. Meenakshi was grace personified as she went through the nritya covering all the three cycles of speed that is mandatory to classical dance. The anjali mudra (namaste as a greeting) to footwork gave her dance a quaint charm. The incorporation of Putana Vadh was undertaken with great artistic detailing of how the demonic woman hatches many a wicked plan to kill the infant Krsna before finally deciding to transform herself into a matronly soft woman offering to nurse the baby. Her eye expressions spoke eloquent as she portrayed the role of the wicked demon. Meernanda chose a very unique theme away from the Krsna episodes which are common to Sattriya because of its predominantly Vaishnava culture.

She chose to narrate the tale of the ancient Pragjotishpura (Assam) princess Usha's dream which is supposed to be a

predictable reality as the story unfolds. Usha dreams of a prince charming whom she doesn't recognise or know in real life and is unable to describe in waking state. Her friend Chitrlekha, an ace painter as the name goes, finally draws the picture with the help of Usha's descriptive qualities and the predicament comes to an end with the revelation that prince charming is none other than lord Krsna's grandson Aniruddha. Meernanda after the initial pure dance (nritya) executed with artistically measured footwork enacted this drama in solo format with aplomb. The erotic love the princess dreams of and her state of undressing before getting into bed was handled with extreme delicacy and mature interpretation without losing sight of clarity in conveying the picturesque details was commendable.

Exemplifying versatility

Shatabdi Mallick was the only dancer who did three pieces - the Pallavi, abhinaya and moksha within the short span allotted to her. She went through the pallavi with excellent footwork denominations to the mnemonics striking statuesque postures spontaneously like a statue coming to life and freezing alternately. The sway in her body lent a gracious air to her dance which was beautiful. The abhinaya piece on infant Krsna revealing the universe to his unsuspecting mother Yasoda was enacted with natural ease and realistic artistry. The show was hosted at IRCEN amphitheatre.

