

# Men in dance

This splendid performance proved the mastery of these performers of classical Odissi



Photos: Zlatko Varenina Photography

His face reacted to the voice, his torso followed the lyricism of instrumental music, and his footwork followed the percussion. Sam Goraya's Odissi dance performance, *Samsara* at Bharatalya Academy, Richmond on November 23 was one of those rare delights when a solo performer gives so generously and vividly of his talents. The agile dancer offered a performance in which he easily integrated music, movement and acting into a continuum of dancing.

Sam Goraya started learning Odissi at the age of five under the guidance of his mother Kirpal Kaur Goraya. His intrinsic talent flourished under the guidance of renowned Madhavi Mudgal at Gandharv Mahavidyalaya. Sam left India in 1987 to study in the US and Canada, but continued his Odissi training. He migrated to Australia in 1992 and became

a disciple of the famous Dr Chandrabhanu. He is recently extending his repertoire with the help of his friend and colleague, Monica Singh. Sam has gained four masters degrees and a Ph.D in the field of Mathematics and Oceanography. He is currently the National Operations Manager at Telechoic (Optus).

Sam's performance began without excessive preamble with the traditional *Mangala Chanrnam*, an invocatory homage to lord Vishnu. Sam specially dedicated this dance to Shakuntala Aneja, mother of his dear friend Sunila Forsyth, who passed away recently in Melbourne due to illness.

Originally choreographed by the renowned Odissi exponent Kelucharan Mahapatra, the *Shantakaram Bhujanghasayanam* marked the auspicious start to a recital that moved from strength to strength as the evening progressed. With unflagging stamina Sam articulated his movements

and revealed a strong feel for *abhinaya*. With a raised eyebrow, a mischievous smile, a flash of temper – several emotions were offered with seamless intensity as Sam moulded his body into expressive poses.

Sweating profusely due the exceptionally hot weather, a smiling Sam continued to offer a *Pallavi* giving life to the Orissan temple friezes through intricate movement. The *Pallavi* based on *Raga Sabana Tala, Ekatali* was choreographed by his guru Dr Chandrabhanu, who recently received the Nartaka Award 2012 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia for his lifetime achievement and contribution to Indian classical dance. Next came the *Ardhanarishwara* seeking a balance between the two energies of *Ida* and *Pingala*. The co-existence of masculine and feminine was expressed as Sam fluidly shifted between Shiva's *Tandava* energy and his wife Parvati's soft *Lasya* energy.

A short interval broke up

the segment, offering Sam the opportunity to change into yet another beautiful traditional Odissi dance costume, this time in majestic black. In his next performance, Sam evoked the characters of Radha and Krishna in *Geeta Govinda Ashtapadi*. Based on Jayadeva's 11<sup>th</sup> century epic script that immortalized the love of Radha and Krishna, the *Madhava Makuru* gave Sam a chance to vividly describe the roles of Krishna, Radha and the *gopis* through gestures and nuance: his forte. The balance of his overall performance was undisputable; however he could benefit from more focus on holding his balance, unshakably, in poses that involve standing on one leg, which incidentally, is easier said than done.

The last two segments came as a surprise as Sam, accompanied by Vikram Chin from Malaysia and S Sujeevan from Sri Lanka, performed to *Aye Giri Nandini*. The

trio had just returned from their performance in the Nartaka Dance Festival 2012 held in Malaysia in early November. *Joined in Dance*, organized by 'T Sutra Foundation and Natyanjali Trust (Chennai), offered people an exciting platform to experience the vigour and beauty of male dancers from different national backgrounds.

The select audience of art lovers who attended Sam's performance got a glimpse of the festival through the trio's immaculate execution of *Aye Giri Nandini*, *Moksha Nata* and *Sarva Mangala* which express the achievement of release or salvation through dance. As the dancers shifted from prayer to ecstasy, to sudden, trancelike acquiescence, it was a memorable end to the evening. A standing ovation met the three dancers as they took the curtain call; a befitting applause for the impressive richness and complexity of their performance.

**Preeti Jabbal**

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