

Nritta, natya, music... philosophy

Inspiring music and lilting jatis conveyed the message.

RUPA SRIKANTH



PROFOUND: Bala Devi Chandrasekar.
PHOTO: R. RAVINDRAN

Uddhava Gita is a body of teaching from the Isaagavata Puraana, in which Krishna counsels Uddhava to give up his attachment to the illusory, material world and discover the true nature of the self, imparting philosophy through the teachings of the Avadhuta, Hamsa and others.

Bharatanrityam dancer Bala Devi Chandrasekar presented 'Uddhava Gita,' that was a well-researched effort, with the original verses compiled by Swami Shantanandapuri, recast by scholar Dr. Pappu Venugopala Rao and set to inspiring music by well-known musician Rajkumar Bharati. The mature artist that Bala Devi is, she was sensible about her communication strategy. She displayed detailed notes on audio-visual screens on either side of the stage, had an informed Sanskrit scholar, Lalitha Subramaniam, to introduce each segment, planned a detailed musical score and visualised the content with reasonable clarity.

The work smacked of dancer-scholar Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam's unique style that employs elaborate musical arrangements and good acting to lighten the abstract content. Little details in the

presentation such as the kattiyakaaran introduction (it was too short here), and the use of ragas such as Charukesi used for Uddhava's shock in 'Gadghadghadhitaha,' a Ranjani refrain 'Uddhava Gita,' a Kuntalavarali swara passage for the carefree saint Avadhuta's entry and others served to keep Dr. Padma in mind.

The slokas were fashioned into a margam-style presentation. Jatis were composed by ace mridangist G. Vijayaraghavan for the Varnam-style composition in which lessons from the Avadhuta's five spiritual masters are described - spider, pigeon, courtesan, girl with a single bangle and wasp.

Savour the spider sequence in Chatusra Ekam, 'Tham tham tham...nu//tham tham tham.. vinu//tham tham tham. Ravinu//tham tham tham suravinu//...,' swaras in Vachaspati, then back to sollus, 'Sukabhava suravinu//tham tham sukabhavasuravinu tham//sukabhavasuravinu tham tham.. mahi//tham tham tham padamahi//tham tham.. para padamahi//...', ending with swaras...

The catchy rhythm, the speed of delivery, the play of words describing Krishna, the swaras depicting the spider spinning its web from within and retrieving it unto itself (the spider's characteristic is equated with the Brahman's act of cosmic manifestation and dissolution) was simply inspiring. Hansavataara, where Brahman as a swan expounds on the Eternal Consciousness and the concept of a Jivanmukta, a liberated being, and Bhakti Yoga, in which Uddhava is made to experience the devoted immersion of Nanda, Yasoda and the gopis were the other segments. The production closed with Uddhava's parting from Krishna, which turned out to be a powerful moment that made one reflect on the inevitability of life and the need for going beyond the 'body am I' identification. You may not understand every word in this philosophical venture, but it is a must-see for those who follow music, dance or Hindu spiritualism.

Music was rendered by G. Srikanth, Keerthana, Embar Kannan (violin), Bhavani Prasad (veena), Vishnu (flute) and jatis recited by Balakrishnan and Ganapthy (tabla).



● Bala Devi's next performance will be at: KARTIK FINE ARTS; JANUARY 1, 7.30 P.M.