CULTURE FEST AT ISHA

Filled with devotional fervour

YAKSHA

The annual festival of music and dance brought veterans together on the same platform.

B. RAMADEVI

Renowned Odissi exponent Madhavi Mudgal presented an excellent sample of traditional odissi at the open-air Linga Bhairavi Courtyard, adjacent to the DhyanaMalinga Temple, Coimbatore. She was performing for 'Yaksha,' the annual festival of music and dance hosted by Isha Foundation, Coimbatore. By including compositions from Kalidasa (sixth Century), Jayadeva (12th Century) and Sharamadeva (13th Century), the famous disciple of the legendary guru Kejucharan Mohapatra, proved that the appeal of these great poets remains intact across centuries. Her introduction to each piece was as beautiful as her performance.

The Mangalacharan invoking Lord Siva was from Sharamadeva's 'Sangita Ratnakar' that described how Siva controls the rhythm of the universe with his 'damaru' and portrayed the union of Siva-Parvati. 'Yallavali,' a typical Odissi item was presented next. Madhavi excelled with her lovely eye movements, deft footwork and subtle feminine grace. The statuesque postures that were interwoven in the choreography were a delight to watch.

She presented two ashtapadis together, one describing the angry Radha, who is upset about Krishna's dalliance with other women and the other showing Krishna at his submissive best. Radha is so angry that she asks Krishna to just leave the place, 'Yash Madhava, Yash Krishna.' But the eternal charm of Krishna is able to placate her with the ultimate submission (Pryee Chaarunarache), requesting her to keep her feet on his crown. The delicate beauty of the song was brought out with graphic details by the dancer.

'Vasan' from 'Ritusamhara' by Kalidasa appeared next. Blossoming flowers, flitting butterflies and flowing rivers emerged alive through her gestures and facial expressions. Madhavi concluded with 'Moksha,' a symbolic representation of the self becoming one with the Cosmic soul. She was supported by an excellent orchestra led by soulful singing.

The next day's venue was shifted to the Adi-Yogi Alayam due to the threat of rain. The audience thoroughly enjoyed the performance of Hindustani vocalist Pt. Ullas Kashalkar, a representative of the Gwalior, Jaipur and Agra gharanas. He began his recital with a lovely elaboration of Raga Kedar (in Carnatic paddhati), it is known as Hamir Kalyan) and presented 'Jogi Rawala' set to vilambit tilwada tal and 'Tum Sugaara Chaturthi Bhaiyaa' in ek tal.

This was followed by a wonderfull tarana in teen tal. The charming raga Malkauns (Hindolam in Carnatic paddhati) poured forth and he presented a vilambit composition 'Sunder Badan Ke' set to Jhap tal.

Pt. Kashalkar concluded with 'Aayo Phagun Maa,' a composition in raga Bhairavi. The spontaneous applause from the audience was a fitting reward to the great artist. He was accompanied on the harmonium by Tanmay Deochake and on the tabla by Suresh Talwalkar.

Ustad Nishat Khan, the ace sitarist, mesmerised the audience with his sparkling recital. A scion of an unbroken family line of musicians for nearly four centuries, Nishat Khan elaborated rag Marwa, an evening raga that sets a devotional mood. He began slowly, and gained momentum reaching great speed and heights. Even those who were listening to Hindustani music for the first time were charmed by his virtuosity. Tanmoy Bose on the tabla gave him energetic support and earned bursts of applause.

Acclaimed as one of the foremost exponents of Agra gharana, Vidushi Subhra Guha charmed the audience with her hearty music and hearty attitude. She began with raga Chayanat with the bandish 'Johan Mora Didi' and followed it up with the faster 'Malini Goondh Lao Ri.' After 'Adi Siva Sankara,' a dhrupad composition in praise of Siva, she presented a few variations of Malhar - the Monsoon raga. 'Barha Ritu Rauri Hamari' described how the rainy season had become her enemy in the absence of her beloved. She sang a unique composition, in the 'Adhar Bandh' (closed lips) format where the lips do not touch each other. ('Ae Sakhi Sajiyan Ki Suratiya Jiya Hare') One was reminded of a similar raga in Carnatic style, 'Niroshita' and the composition by Muthaiyah Bhagavatara, 'Raja Rajarajachithi.

'Bang Daroorangi Nand Ke Laahon Pe,' describing how Krishana and the gopikas played 'Holi,' gave a lively conclusion to the concert. Her disciple Sanjukta Biswas gave her excellent support with her stunning voice. Accompanists Tanmay Deochake on the harmonium and Yogesh Sami on the tabla showed their expertise and made it an enjoyable experience.

T.M. Krishna's inward journey into music on the final day pulled the audience along. With closed eyes and oblivious to the surroundings, he began at a slow pace with 'Kaali Kaushiki Nindradam Deviye' in Yadukula Kambodi by Marimuthu Pillai. Krishna gave life to the song that was a verbal portrait of Nataraja in motion.

'Rama vishnu' in Jonpuri by Gopalakrishna Bharati was sung as it should be sung, bringing out the pain and longing in the heart of the devotee for a darshan of the Lord. 'Sarvam Brahman Mayam' by Sadashiva Brahmendral and the concluding vrittham, 'Pallangi... were full of spiritual wisdom. R.K. Sriman Kumar proved a genius with his bow and presented some unforgettable music.
Sivaratri reverberations

FEST Music concerts and discourse were a part of the celebrations observed at the Isha Yoga Centre, Coimbatore.

PANKAJA SRINIVASAN

Thousands of people converged at the ISHA Yoga Centre to observe Mahasivaratri that featured performances of Aruna Sairam, Anita Ratnam and Raghu Dixit.

The night-long event brought to an end the series of concerts by veterans held for a week.

Though temperatures refused to dip even towards midnight, no one seemed bothered by the heat, as waves of music washed over them.

Sounds of Isha filled the air with primate drum beats and mesmerising chanting. Rasikas enjoyed a wholesome treat as Aruna Sairam, a glimmer of blue, came on stage and started singing 'Vaazhga Siva... Sabhapatikku Veru Deivam.'

She followed it up with a beautiful paean to Saraswati, 'Mamavatu Sri Saraswati.' Padma Shankar accompanied her on the violin, L. Kishore Kumar on the sitar and Vishnu on the flute.

Enjoyable line-up

The tani avarthanam by S. Karthick on the ghatam, D. Chandrajit on the tabla and J. Vaidyanathan on the mridangam further charged up the atmosphere.

Tamil folk songs such as 'Maadu Meikum Kann' and 'Vishamakaara Kannan,' the Hindi song 'Guruji Mein Tho Ek Niranjjan' by the saint-poet Gorakh Nath and the thrilling 'Jaago Re Tumi Jaago' in Bengali were enjoyable. Aruna's thillana 'Kalinganarthanam' by Oothukkadu Venkatasubhashiyer completed the magic.

This was followed by Jaggi Vasudev's discourse where he explained how the location of the Velliangiri Hills, the time of the year and the positions of the planets made Mahasivaratri here so special. He interspersed philosophy with stories from the Siva Purana, and Anita Ratnam danced in accompaniment.

There was a special meditation session at the stroke of midnight followed by the maha aarati. There was a spectacular fire dance too.

Thapattam performers danced on to the stage and prepared the mood for The Raghu Dixit Project. When he and his fellow musicians walked in wearing colourful lungis and beads, the energy levels soared.

'Hey Bhagwan' had everyone dancing throughout the programme that lasted for almost two hours. Raghu picked up happy songs, songs about second chances in life and of course, love.

They performed 'Masti Ki Basti,' 'Mysore Se Aayi,' 'Jag Changa' (a new song, said Raghu) and a qawwali that also had the audience singing along with the artist.

Dixit also sang 'Gudugudiya Sedi Nodo' and 'Kodagana Koli Nungitta,' poems of Sishunala Sharifia, a Kannada poet saint and philosopher.

Muhesh Vinayakam with V.V. Ravi on the violin gave a foot-tapping performance, along with the Sounds of Isha. They performed Muthuswamy Dikshtar's 'Panchabhuta Kiranavallim.'

Vinayakram's robust 'Om Namo Sivaya' resonated in the early hours of the morning. The sun came up to the strains of the violin played by Bala Bhaskar, who also performed a few pieces from his latest album 'Let it Be.'