

Arangetram Writeup

By: Lia Kauffman

“Arangetram.” “Natya Nivedanam.” “Bharatanatyam.” I had no idea what these words meant or that they even existed until my Indian friend Aishwarya Subramanian invited me to her “arangetram.” All I knew about the occasion was that she was doing an Indian classical dance and that it was something like a coming-of-age ritual. Still, I was pleased and honored when Aishwarya—friends call her Arya—asked me to attend this event. However, when I arrived at Wilde Lake High School’s Jim Rouse Theatre on June 12, 2010, I discovered this “arangetram” was a much bigger deal than I had originally thought. Throughout the performance, I was awed by the amount of time and effort my friend had put into her presentation. I did not know she was so talented! I am so thankful that she invited me to her arangetram; I was able to see a different side of Arya that I had heard about but had never experienced for myself.

First, Arya sang a prayer. Her voice was rich and soulful, and she sounded great! Next, after some introductions, she began to dance. Arya was accompanied by five musicians. All of the musicians were related to Arya in one way or another, be it mother, brother, or cousin. Jayamangala Krishnamani and Shobha Subramanian were vocalists; in addition to vocal recitation, Ashwin Subramanian played the cymbals; Rajna Swaminathan played the mrudangam; Anjna Swaminathan played the violin. As a westerner unfamiliar with Indian classical dance, I was startled at first by the music. It was unique and fast-paced with vocals from male and female. Before long, I adjusted to the beat of the music, because it fit with the dance itself.

The performance was hosted by two emcees, Vijay Palaparty and Sumi Tadmamalla. The emcees were very helpful to foreigners. They told stories of Indian gods and goddesses. Arya then acted out these stories in a dance as the panel of musicians accompanied her. Without the emcees, I would not have understood the dances as thoroughly. With the emcees, I could see the stories unfold through Arya’s dance.

I was amazed by Arya’s dancing ability. Indian classical dance is a completely different world from ballet or hip hop. Two things stood out to me as I watched my beautiful friend perform: (1) Her face was extremely expressive, and (2) her feet rarely stopped moving. Arya engaged the audience with her animated facial features. As her eyes moved from side to side, her eyebrows moved up and down. Arya had a small smile on her face, making her pleasant to watch as she moved around on the stage. Her feet were always moving, and she kept her feet tapping as she positioned her hands. Arya used small steps, large steps, and sometimes she balanced on one foot. I learned that Indian classical dance is a real workout! I respect my friend Arya for her discipline in rehearsing for hours and hours. She is a lovely young woman and I am so proud to be her friend.