

The young Nathans enthrall the Maryland audience while upholding the ancient and traditional dance form of South India

Lata Ganesh (World Bank staff and dance connoisseur from Washington DC)

Bharatha Muni, an ancient Indian writer whose life has been dated from the 5th century to the 2nd century BCE, wrote *Natya Sastra*, a theoretical treatise of performing arts – dance, music and theatre. Rooted in this millennium old work is the classical dance form, which originated in Tamil Nadu – the ***Bharathanatyam***. As the name suggests, Bharathanatyam stands for Bha (*Bhava* or Expression), Ra (*Raaga* or Music) and Tha (*Tala* or Rhythm). This dance form, which has been performed in the South Indian temples for centuries, is known for its grace, purity and tenderness.

On September 6, 2009, several thousands of miles away from India, the young disciples of Guru Smt. Shobha Subramanian, Dance Director, Jayamangala School of Dance - Eisha Nathan and Anusha Nathan - mesmerized the audience at the Slayton House Auditorium in Maryland, USA, with the same grace, purity, tenderness and dedication, at their *Rangapravesam* (solo dance debut). The program was graced by the presence of Swami Dheerananda of Chinmaya Mission.

Eisha and Anusha opened the performance with an invocatory prayer

to the gods, Ganesh, Saraswati and Rama - the prayer “Gajamukha” (composed by Smt. Rajalakshmi Krishnan, matriarch and founder of the Jayamangala School of Dance) a Ragamalika set to Adi talam; and continued with an *Alarippu* in Misrachapu talam.

This was followed by a *Jatiswaram* in Abhogi ragam and Adi talam. The Jatiswaram is a difficult item of pure dance in which the dancer weaves several patterns on a basic musical composition. Eisha and Anusha demonstrated their thorough knowledge of rhythm and beats through their coordination with the music and excellent footwork.

The next item was *Shabdham*, performed to a devotional song where the dancers seek the blessings of Shiva, Parvati, Ganesh and Kartikeya. This expressional dance accompanied by the song in praise of these four deities was a delightful item. The *Shabdham*, *Ananda Narthana Ganapathiye*, was composed by Smt. Geeta Navanithan in Ragamalika set to Adi talam.

The central piece of the Rangapravesam and ultimate test of the dancers’ skill and stamina – the *Varnam* – was wonderfully performed by Eisha and Anusha. Composed by Sri. P.V. Subramanian, a well-known carnatic music critic popularly known as Subbudu, set to Valaji ragam and Adi talam. Eisha and Anusha portrayed the tale of Devayani, the first wife of Lord Muruga and her woe and anger towards Valli, imaginatively and enthusiastically, showing no signs of fatigue after having danced for over an hour.

After an intermission of about 15

minutes, Anusha came back to the stage giving a solo performance of a meditative piece dedicated to Lord Shiva – *Mahadeva Shiva Shambo* composed by Thanjavur Sankara Iyer in ragam Revathi and Adi talam. She concluded this piece with an excerpt of the Pathanjali Stotram in tandavam style showcasing Shiva’s cosmic dance incorporating grace, heavy footwork, flexibility and control over expressions and movement. This was the highlight of Anusha’s performance for the day and she danced with flawless hastas, heavy footwork and appropriate facial expressions, the dancing aroused several rounds of applause at every demonstrated nuance.



This was followed by Eisha’s solo performance of the Sri Ranganatha Gurusevaikkaana composed by Bharati Ganesh in Arabhi ragam and Adi talam. Sixteen year old Eisha, commanded spontaneous appreciation and a standing ovation for an outstanding performance portraying the emotions of *Shringara* (attractiveness of the deity Vishnu) and *Bhakti* (spiritual devotion)



The sisters joined together to dance to the popular masterpiece Mahisasura Mardini Stotram composed by Aadi Guru, Sri Sankaracharya. This piece was exquisitely choreographed by Guru Smt. Shobha Subramanian to a modernized tune composed by Anusha and enhanced to a carnatic beat by lead vocalist Smt. Geetha Navanithan.

To conclude the classical part, Eisha and Anusha performed a *Thillana* dedicated to Lord Shiva in Hindolam ragam and Adi talam. One could feel the joys of rhythm and movement emanating from the dancers while they performed this wonderful piece with great dedication to this art form.

In the grand finale, the girls came back as the snake charmer (Eisha) and the angry snake (Anusha) in this very lively and spectacular piece. Magudi, from the album *Rhapsody* by Kadri Gopalnath, the piece was choreographed by Guru Vasantasena of Mumbai. It was an impeccable performance and sheer delight to watch the flexibility of the young dancers as they wiggled on the dance floor as the snake and her charmer, enrapturing the audience. The dancers proved that sheer dedication and hard work produces results.

The concluding dance Mangalam was a prayer to Lord Ayyappa. The dancers dedicated their Rangapravesam to their dear grandparents and thanked their teacher, the orchestra members, their parents and the audience, bringing tears of joy.



Eisha Nathan, a 12th grader in Centennial High School, Maryland, started training in Bharathanatyam at the age of 4 and has ever since been dancing under the tutelage of Guru Shobha Subramanian. She also took lessons from Guru Vasantasena of Nrithyalaya, Mumbai. In addition to being a Bharatanatyam dancer, Eisha is a proficient pianist and an active member of her High School debate team. She also recently obtained her Black Belt in Karate.



Anusha Nathan was introduced to ballet at an early age of three and thereafter moved to regular Bharathanatyam training from Guru Shobha Subramanian and briefly from Guru Vasanthasena. In addition, Anusha plays the piano, flute and various percussion instruments. She has also won awards for original music compositions.

The dances were performed to a fascinating live orchestra lead by Guru Shobha Subramanian, with Vocal support from Smt. Geetha Navanithan and Sri Srinath Balasubramanian on Mridangam and Smt. Sandhya Srinath on Violin. These artists are from the Jayamangala School of Music and Dance in Maryland, USA.