

SAMSKARA AN EVENING OF MYSTICISM

By Preeti Thandi

A roving spotlight in the dark is guided by fluid strains of the violin. The passage leads to an evening of mysticism and self-revelation. A journey through varied aspects of spirituality, 'Samskara', a Collaborations presentation directed by violist and artistic director, Valerie Kuinka pieced together many an experience amalgamating the east with the west on June 15 and 16th at the du Maurier Theatre Centre.

Replete with mystery, the show was a complete audio, visual and truly sensory experience which in essence combined dance, vocal and chamber music, performing and visual arts. A framework of suspended bells and a painting by Al Van Mils based on a one of his earlier works titled 'Threshold', formed a very intriguing part of the stage setting.

The opening soundscape created by Valerie gave a momentary feel of a crowded street in Delhi, India and soon transcribed to a very European ambience created by the dramatic appearance of violinist Parmela Attariwala walking down the upper reaches of the du Maurier Theatre Centre. Parmela played the "Giga" of Bach and simply heightened the reflective process.

This was followed by a tradition-

al South Indian dance sequence by dancer, choreographer Gitanjali Kolanad accompanied by vocalist Thanathevy Mithradeva and Ed Hanley on the Tabla.

The Piercing Embrace a beautiful, moving, evocative piece dexterously captured the strife of the 'eastern' in western environs. Performed with dance and choreography by Gitanjali and set to original music by Parmela. It was quite fascinating to see the agility of the two performers, Gitanjali with her spear and Parmela with her violin.

The evening flowed into a completely mesmerizing sequence titled 'Homage' which featured Gitanjali swaying within a framework of bells which was at many levels both entangling and releasing. The bells actually formed a very striking part of the setting.

The chanting of verses from the Sikh gurus by Parmela was symbolic of the spiritual presence which does not have a form.

The Jig based on music by Patrick Cardy evoked the strokes of Al Van Mil on the incomplete canvas which were in complete harmony with the group of musicians - Colleen Cook, Valerie Kuinka, Marianne Pack, Roberto Occhipinti, Dragolav Tanaskovic and Beverly Johnston.

What emerged on the canvas really pieced together the soul of

Samskara. The three predominant figures on the canvas reflected the west, the east and the contemplative figure in the centre signified the self-awakening. Draped in contemplation, the spiritual representation was splashed in saffron.

THE CREATION OF 'SAMSKARA' -THE ARTIST'S PERSPECTIVE

Valerie Kuinka: "Being a violist, the interaction with other artists and art forms was the most exciting form of creativity for me. I do not have a theme, a theme is static. What I try to create is a spine, a progression rather than a single point. I look at artists who would work well together and who would enhance the performance. I inspire them to come up with ideas which often fit into the puzzle. You cannot rush the creative process," she says.

Valerie takes inspiration from a lot of sources. A lot of research has gone into the making of Samskara and even into the choice of title. - "I wanted Samskara to be more spiritual... a moment in time, an extraordinary moment...searching for another option..."

Parmela Attariwala: Parmela started to play the violin when she was only 3 years old. She was deeply attracted to the instrument



Parmela Attariwala and Gitanjali Kolanad

Photo by Ashok Charles

even when she was very young. She describes herself as a person who responds to a challenge. Born and brought up in Calgary, she formed a group called the 'Calgary Fiddlers.'

Parmela is addicted to music and the violin is her mode to respond to culture. "It serves as an escape but is also an expression of emotion," says Parmela. "It is also my reaction to society and how I respond to culture."

For Parmela, the whole Samskara evening was symbolic of her life and so was recitation of the religious Sikh verses. Very Canadian in the way she grew up, Parmela frequently struggled with the understanding her Asian culture. "I just wanted the freedom and the simple desire of a person to be themselves," says Parmela. Samskara for her formed the loop to - how much do we take from the spiritual and material world...

Gitanjali Kolanad: Gitanjali started taking ballet lessons when she was just 6 years old however

she soon realized that she was not suited for the dance form. When she was 16, she travelled to India and began her study in Bharatnatyam at Kalakshetra. She draws deeply from her Gurus - Guru Nana Kasar and Kalanidhi Narayan. "They give you 'something'," says Gitanjali. "They give you the gift so freely - they give you the insights and then allow you to explore your own ideas."

Gitanjali has been exploring her own choreography since then and has never turned back. She performs in Europe, the US, India and various other countries regularly. Gitanjali has never quite done anything like Samskara before and describes it as quite an 'experience'. Speaking very highly of Parmela and Valerie, she says, "It was very nice to have a trust in someone else's vision and then bring it out...and realize the vision..."

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