

There were 700 children at the Tata Theatre that morning. The dancer finished performing and asked the kids, “What was this piece about?” Some said it was about sorrow, others, pain. One girl said it was first about devotion, then loss, and finally sadness. How does a child pick up on such nuanced emotions that many adults cannot? As we get older, rather than try to understand and empathise with a performer, we judge. Sometimes this judgement is made within seconds—it was too ‘loud’ or too ‘classical’ or too ‘Bollywood’ or too ‘traditional’.

Understanding dance is simple. If the dance moves your heart, it is good. But that requires a willingness on the part of the audience to be a rasika rather than a spectator. In the coming year, therefore, the appeal is this: give dance a chance. That is why we begin the new year with a workshop on the seven classical dance styles of India—specially tailored to suit those who do not know the difference between Kathak and Kathakali, or those who think Kuchipudi is the ‘dance on the brass tray’! These workshops are brief and interactive, for children and adults. The most fun way to understand dance is to try it yourself!

We have the finest dance performances around the country happening at NCPA every month. Here are just a few from 2011 that I hope you did not miss:

March 2011: Carnatic vocalist Bombay Jayashri and Bharatanatyam dancer Priyadarshini Govind performed together and offered us an evening to remember. The ashtapadi that was performed, as well as the light-hearted ‘Main nahin maakhan khaiyo’ reaffirmed the vital relationship between great music and great dance.

April 2011: Sujatha Mohapatra performed in a solo format on the last day of the Mudra Dance Week. Within seconds she was Sita, Rama, Maricha, and Ravana. Her finesse and body control were truly admirable.

July 2011: Ramli Ibrahim and Sutra Dance Theatre's 'Vision of Forever' left the audience in awe. That such professional Odissi dancing came from Kuala Lumpur makes it even more amazing!

August 2011: Kalakshetra, headed by Leela Samson, presented the best of its trademark Bharata Natyam in two evening performances. Samson led a school children's performance, with overwhelming response from the 900 children present.

October 2011: Nakshatra Festival had a feast of great dance over three days:

Margi Madhu performed Kudiyattam, a dance-drama form rarely seen in Mumbai. Sitting on a stool, he drew us into the world of Ravana with his exquisite abhinaya. Aditi Mangaldas presented 'Timeless', a powerful group choreography. The lighting design was something never seen before—a grid of lights on three sides of the stage created formations that played a key role in the performance. In Priti Patel's 'Throw of Dice' we saw martial arts combined with delicate raas technique, drawing a connection between the violence in Manipur and the violence of the great epic Mahabharata.

The night previous to the Manipuri performance, we attended a Flamenco performance—all 1,000 seats of the Tata Theatre were occupied. There is an exclusivity associated to foreign programmes—not to be missed in fear that it may not come again! The Manipuri artists, though from our own country, travelled from Imphal, where most of us have never gone and will never go, a culture most of us do not know, a journey much more difficult than the next flight to Spain. What treasures exist in every corner of India, if only we explore! There are many more enthralling performances in store for you in the year ahead. I cannot explain to you in words the joy of being moved by dance. This new year, take a chance, and try it for yourself.

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