

Steps of the Sacred

The spiritual content in Bala Devi's 'Vishwam' was a high point.

VIDYA SARANYAN

Vishwam, the thematic production of Bala Devi Chandrasekhar, was full of spiritual content that emphasised the all-pervading nature of Lord Narayana. Bala Devi is a senior student of Padma Subrahmanyam, who is based in the U.S. and is well known for her ardent interest in religion and Bharatanatyam.

'Vishwam' drew inspiration from the special guidance of Swami Shantananda Puri of Tiruvannamalai. The script, by Dr. Pappu Venugopala Rao collated verses from several texts including Sri-mad Bhagavatham as a lucid pattern. Conceptualisation and dance composition by Bala Devi brought out many details in the texts extolling the Lord.

'Vishwam' was presented in four acts wherein Bala Devi incorporated the familiar points such as mallari, varnam and other features of Margam. Rajkumar Bharathi's musical creativity was like bedrock for the dance drama. His ingenuity was felt in the cadences of the ragas that moved with the incidents in

storyline. Ragas such as Mohanakalyani and Ameerakalyani in adi were merrily used for the dance interpretation.

Act One contained a lively mallari interspersed with slokas of Sage Suka. The avatars of The Lord in one, two, three, 10 and 22 forms were depicted with joyful abandon by Baladevi.

Act Two began with a kavutuvam that resounded with musicality, in Arabhi ragam, then traversed other ragas and culminated to Shankarabaranam. The slokas 'Kararavindena Mukharavindam' combined with music and rhythm memorably. The episode ended with the smiling depiction of baby Krishna afloat on a peepal leaf at the beginning as well as the end of Creation. Better spacing of sequences of the 10 avatars would have heightened the abhinaya. In the following act, Bala Devi enacted Devaki's maternal love and linked it to Krishna granting her a unique darshan, through the Kalyani



varnam with great charm. The next sequence was that of Lord Vishnu assuming infinite proportions before Mahabali. This had been imaginatively composed

in a ragam tanam pallavi format. Arjuna's dilemma and the Lord's empowering revelation were captured by Bala to the background of ragamalika.

At one phase, the dancer had inadvertently confined her actions to her right side in the performing space, probably because of lighting, which proved to be a distraction. The narration had better reach once she re-positioned the dancing to centre stage. A medley of movements formed the mainstay of tarana/thillana based on Behag and Bhagyasree. The recorded music offered the talents of vocalists Srikanth and Kirtana, Vijayaraghavan on nattuvan-gam and mridangam, violin by Embar Kannan, flute by Vishnu and the veena of Bhavani Prasad, among other musicians.



Bala Devi Chandrasekhar.