

In sync with their art

Bharatanatyam is full of dancing couples. This is not a new trend at all. From the veteran lot of dancers like C.V. Chandrashekar and his wife Jaya, V.P. Dhananjayan and his wife Shanta, Narasimhachari and Vasantalakshmi to the later batches of dancing couples, this has been a long standing development. Among all the couples, very few of them can break out into solo performers of good merit. One is always balancing the other in a performance or in the choreography. While this kind of dependence seems charming, it can soon lead to creative stagnation. Several couples have ended up that way. But among the new age couples, if there is anyone that comes with a great freshness in energy and performance it is Renjith Babu and Vijna Vasudevan.

They opened their performance with a sollu-heavy Pushpanjali 'Thajonn Thadhimi Thaka' set to ragam Nagaswarawali and adi talam, a composition of K Balakrishnan who was also accompanying them on nattuvangam. The main piece was "Rave Himagiri Kumari" the famous Shyama Sastri swarajati in ragam Todi. This was precluded by a sloka from Adi Shankara's Soundaryalahiri "Shive Shringarardhra" that describes the compassion in the eyes of the mother goddess. Ramprasad's melodious vocals rendered the sloka in a Grihabhedam and returned to Todi, a quick one that could have almost gone unnoticed. At this point I must mention it was an idea the dancers and I were thinking of for over a year. The ideas of the choreography was completely their own. The Swarajati is a complicated one. The composer doesn't delve much into stories except for the fact that he is a subject who is requesting the goddess for her motherly compassion. Added to all this was the justice one had to do with a heavyweight ragam like Todi. With great efforts Renjith and Vijna utilized their choreographic skills to literally tame this composition to suit dance vocabulary. A feat in its own! Using subtle but efficient sancharis, be it a majestic Gaja Gamanam, the stride of an elephant, or simple stories, the choreography fit in the flow of thought that the composition demanded. The jatis were executed with precision. Ramprasad who began the vocals melodiously seemed to tire out with a fatigued voice towards the end of this piece. Overall it was great attempt and with some more reworking it can be polished further.



This was followed by a javali "Appadurukulonathine," a composition of Thirupanandal Pattabhiramayya set to ragam Khamas and adi talam. Performed as a solo by Renjith, who played the role of a nayika, it was refreshing to watch his choreography around it. Renjith doesn't make for the best of nayikas as his mukhaja abhinayam needs much more expressive reworking. However, he managed to pull this number off with much charm and ease. The next was a solo by Vijna. Kshetrappa's padam "Ninnu joochi" set to ragam Punnagavarali and trisra tripata talam had Vijna play a different nayika. Here she remembers her lover who went away and returned to a home that has changed over the years. A child who grew up while he was away and how life moved on contained the pathos of the nayika's bhaavam. With a few changes in the choreography, it could be bettered. Some of the abhinayam didn't match the poetic lyrics of Kshetrappa. But in these two solos we knew how both of these dancers made for individual strong soloists as well.

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The last piece of their presentation was a joyful rendering of a traditional Hori composed by Pt Ratanjankar. "Holi khelan ko chale Kanhaiya" is a common number among Kathak dancers. With a different kind of choreography, this Hori got a new lease of life. Vijna playing the nayika and Renjith playing Krishna, frolicking in Holi colours as the rest of Braj celebrates was portrayed with great bonhomie. If you had to see the Yoga practitioner side of Renjith, the choreography of this piece had him reveal it in small measures. With immense control over his body, as Renjith performed a full circle on the floor in one scene where the Pichkari of colours is thrown over him, he was received with applause. The piece ended with both of them playing Holi and drenching the land of Braj in divine colours. Their performance received a standing ovation from an unusually packed audience for a mid-morning show.

Both Renjith and Vijna are dancers of high merit, and when they perform as a duet, they are a delight to watch. This year's Academy performance was one of the best they gave.