

DANCE REVIEW

Joyous expressions join body and soul

L.A.'s Rangoli troupe and India-based Nadam find common ground in the latter's local debut.

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Spiritual yearning shared the stage with infectious celebrations of rhythm Saturday in a two-part program at the Barnsdall Park Gallery Theatre featuring the local Rangoli Dance Company and the Bangalore, India-based Nadam Dance Company in its first Southland visit.

What linked Rangoli's latest *bharata natyam* dance drama, "Kodhai's Dream," to the latter troupe's flashy "Kala Yatra" suite was a common interest in the manifold permutations of joy one may find in life.

In "Kodhai's Dream," the felicitous emotion took shape in the story of southern India's beloved 8th century saint Kodhai, who is revered for her devotion to the Hindu god Krishna.

This she articulated in two major sacred texts, excerpts of which were used by Rangoli artistic director Malathi Iyengar to structure the hourlong piece. But it was the company's ability to animate the romantically inspired metaphors in these poem-hymn cycles that breathed relevance into images of a young female cowherd's divine crush.

As Kodhai, a sprightly Kalpa Viswanadhan introduced the tale through gestural sequences accompanied by Iyengar's voice-over narration that were then expanded upon in lyrical solos featuring Hema Iyer and Mary Khetani as more mature, delicately sensual embodiments of the saint cum goddess.

The centerpiece, however, was an extended reenactment of the titular dream, in which the young Kodhai envisions her ultimate union with Krishna in an elaborate wedding ritual.

Performed by Lakshmi Iyengar as the bride-devotee and the commanding Shaheen Sheik as the god-groom, with support from Soumya Sundaresh, Iyer and Khetani, the section built to a level of visual and kinetic spectacle that incorporated an additional six-person corps.

Radiantly adorned in iridescent blue costumes, Iyengar and Sheik returned for a breathtaking finale showcasing their dexterity in accelerating cycles of intricate footwork, swift turns and sweeping arm gestures.

Nadam ushered in the second half of the program on a bold upbeat with "Ganesh Stuti," a splashy opener that interwove *bharata natyam* (performed by Kirti Ramgopal), *kathak* (Nandini Mehta, Murali Mohan Kalvakalva and Smitha Srinivasan) and Indian contemporary dance, which here meant athletic, angular abstractions that amplified the other forms (Sweekruth BP and Tushar Bhatt).

Under the direction of Mehta and Kalvakalva, a more contemporary presentational style infused even deft displays of classic *kathak* footwork.

Though group unity was sometimes marred by sloppiness — a result, perhaps, of the pell-mell pace that hurried

the troupe from one demanding piece to the next — the Nadam dancers roused themselves for the spellbinding sweeping patterns of "Basant," an ode to the spring festival that provided an appropriately elated finale.