

# In Indian dance, fanciful folk tales and tantalizing aerial feats

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You don't have to be well-versed in the intricacies of Indian dance to appreciate Aparna Sindhoo's dance theater piece "A

## Dance Review

Story and a Song." However, she cautioned slyly, you do need to be willing to share the story she has to tell — otherwise you will be cursed with seven years of bad sex. "Or no sex at all!" her cohorts add with playful mock horror.

"A Story and a Song" presents the beguiling if elliptical tale of a woman who has the ability to turn herself into a beautiful flowering tree. The only requirement is two pails of water — one to turn her into a tree, the other to turn her back into a woman. Being dependent on that ever important second pail of water to restore her to back to a human being keeps the woman quite reluctant to perform this magical transformation lightly, and

## A Story and a Song

Aparna Sindhoo Dance Theater

At: Boston University Dance Theater,  
Friday night (repeats Friday and Saturday)

indeed, it gets her into some trouble, which gives the story its slight dramatic arc.

Sindhoo plays a dual role as dancer/character and storyteller. Two dynamic and athletic male dancers, Anil Natyaveda and Pratheesh Sivanandan, portray a variety of characters, from childhood playmates to the woman's husband to elements of nature.

If there's a lesson to be learned here, it's never quite clear. And sometimes the story, based on a concept and script by S.M. Raju, is diverted by elements from two other fanciful folk tales, making the whole endeavor a little unfocused. Even at a relatively short 75 minutes, "A Story

and a Song" feels too long, too repetitive in many spots, yet far too obtuse in others. The production would benefit greatly from a leaner script and tightening by an experienced directorial eye.

However, the dancing is quite fascinating, and I found myself wishing Sindhoo had streamlined the drama and focused more on letting her choreography come to the fore, especially the more stylized traditional movement. Sindhoo, who has trained in India's Bharatanatyam, grounds her work in the form's basic vocabulary and style — the low-gravity, bent-legged walks on turned out, flexed feet; the erect, but gently held torso, the head loosely bobbling ever so slightly; hands that seem to tell elaborate stories all by themselves, with fingers that alternately curl, splay, and spiral. But she also embraces Indian martial arts, yoga moves, theatrical gesture, and a modern dancer's eye for space to create

dances that seem both old and new.

Sindhoo also effectively incorporates aerial work. Two scarves of green and red form a hanging sling on which Sindhoo often perches or dangles, swinging back and forth or spinning like a top. At one point, she hangs upside down, arms flung to the side as the two men stand behind her, their arms raised upward, evoking a multi-limbed creature. During another section, the two men grab scarves of their own to spin and soar in giant circles.

Music ties the production together, from the songs Sindhoo sings onstage to contemporary guitar music by film score veteran Prasanna.

The production values are excellent, from elegantly shifting lights to the minimal sets, which include a huge square of blue cloth unfurled to represent water, its silky fluttering evoking the waves and ripples of the sea.



Aparna Sindhoo Dance Theater draws on traditional choreography