

DANCE REVIEW

A magical mix of tradition, styles

Moving tales from Navarasa troupe



By Karen Campbell

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CAMBRIDGE — Two bare-chested, black-haired, pony-tailed men stand front to back before the mirrored wall of the Dance Complex. So slowly and carefully do they move that they might be conjoined, the gestures of their heads and limbs emanating from one center. Then gradually they move apart, as if two facets of the same being.

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ENCOUNTER

Presented by Navarasa Dance Theater

At: the Dance Complex, through Oct. 2

Tickets: 617-776-7939

The stunning “Self” is only one “Encounter” presented in Navarasa Dance Theater’s concert of the same name, which premiered at the Dance Complex last weekend (continuing this weekend). But visually and conceptually, “Self” was the most breathtaking work of the evening, exquisitely performed by company codirector Anil Natyaveda and Rajesh Raveendran. They danced in parallel, then as mirrored opposites, moving away from one another then back together nose to nose. They created intricate, sculptural shapes in tumbles and lifts with one after the other upended, arms and legs in jagged profile.

Other encounters included “Divine,” its four dancers sweeping through space, evoking reverence and contemplation with arms raised heavenward or undulating like wings. An encounter with “Bob Marley” found the company’s three men humorously evoking the ambiguity of the singer’s “No Woman No Cry.”

Aparna Sindhoor, the company’s artistic director, portrayed how “Love” transformed Krishna’s lover Radha. In the most traditional work of the evening, Sindhoor seemed to be imparting a sophisticated story with her fluid hands and impeccably articulate fingers. Flirtatious glances and a coy smile complemented gestures that both beckoned and cautioned, reeling in and pushing away.

Collaboratively created by Sindhoor and Natyaveda, Navarasa’s choreography is grounded in traditional Indian dance, but reaches outward. They incorporate modern dance, Indian martial arts, aerial dance, Bollywood’s pop influences — all with an eye for originality and a skillful use of space, sending dancers into eye-catching floor patterns.

The second half of the program was the nearly hourlong “Encounter,” which told the story of the peasant rebel Dopdi. Be forewarned — it is not for the faint of heart. The story’s charming beginning, narrated and sung by the dancers themselves, is seeded with humor and irony. But gradually it turns dark and intense, and the ending includes a horrific torture and rape scene.

While the story is overly long and difficult to follow, its themes are obvious: drought, famine, racism, military might vs. tribal insurgency. Embedded are some compelling dances: an acrobatic solo up and down a roughly 10-foot-tall wooden column, a sensuous, serpentine duet, a fighting dance with the clash of wooden canes. The most engaging dances are the rhythmic group dances, slaps, and claps complementing the stomps of ultra-flexed feet and high kicks that smack against outstretched hands.

Karen Campbell can be reached at karencampbell4@rcn.com. ■