

Indian Dances A Huge Draw At International Children's Festival

Indian Dance: From page 1

artists representing the time-honored traditions of India, China, Russia, Korea, Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, Poland, Africa, the Middle East, Spain, France, Ireland and the United States.

Ever since the first festival was held in 1971, the purpose has remained the same: "children from all over the world continue to share their cultural traditions through the international language of the arts, creating an atmosphere of friendship, trust and harmony".

For people of all ages, the Festival is a virtual treat, an oasis of interactive, educational fun. This year, it featured various pavilions showcasing traditional and some impromptu dances and music, and what must be one of the best-kept secrets for a first-time festival goer: a theater in the woods! Myriad activities included making murals, face painting, printing a festival poster, petting and playing musical instruments, and a tent for toddlers!

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Sheela Ramanath, Founder and Artistic Director of Kalavaridhi, is flanked by her gifted students at the 2010 International Children's Festival in the scenic Wolf Trap National Park.

On Sunday, the Festival took off on a rollicking start with the "Phooljharis" performing Bollywood dances choreographed by Shimaliya Agnihotri who is adept in the performing arts, particularly

big celebration thoroughly savored by an appreciative audience.

Daya Ravi explained that the Raas Lila embodies an important philosophy insofar as "It symbolizes the eternal quest



in stages. The seamless confluence of these aspects create a complete artist".

Now a dedicated instructor, Sheela believes "a lifetime is hardly sufficient to explore any art form to its fullest. The experience of art is truly humbling; the more you learn, the less you know. In art, the journey is itself the destination".

At the festival, the artists of Kalavaridhi performed at the theater in the woods: an awe-inspiring venue which matched their movements. The program began with the Thodayam, an invocation where dancers pay their obeisance to Lord Nataraja, the God of Dance, to the stage and to the audience. It was a rhythmic piece, complemented by graceful hand gestures and elegant footwork.

"S i n c e Bharatanatyam is a very ancient and traditional art form, most songs are composed in praise of Hindu deities", Sheela explained. "It is customary to begin any

recital with a prayer and an offering".

The invocation was followed by dances devoted to

petting and playing musical instruments, and a tent for toddlers!

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Day 1 of the festival saw students of the Balaji Music Academy displaying their vocal skills in Bollywood songs selected by Vatsala Mehra, a ghazal singer par excellence! The Academy, founded by Mehra, is a unique institution based in McLean, VA, offering classes in Indian classical vocal music, ghazals, bhajans, pop music as well as music of general interest.

At the festival, the girls - Kamya Khera, Ananya Suri, Anjali Taneja, Ragini Jha, Rhea Sharma, Saniya Suri, Shreya Bhatia, Shivani Prakash and Ruhi Maniyar - took turns in rendering popular songs from Hindi films.

The opening day also featured performances by students of the Nrityaki Dance Academy, Nrityanjali and the Natananjali School of Dance. What was strikingly apparent from the outset was the finesse with which the artistes executed their acts. A triumph of Indian dance!

2010 International Children's Festival in the scenic Wolf Trap National Park.

On Sunday, the Festival took off on a rollicking start with the "Phooljharis" performing Bollywood dances choreographed by Shimaliya Agnihotri who is adept in the performing arts, particularly dance and drama. Her young students danced with gusto to a number from the film 'Dil Bole Hadippa' and the ever-popular "Khaikhe paan Banaraswala". The opening dance, in the Bhangra style, was described as "a traditional jam from the Punjab region of northwest India. In modern times, Punjab dance fusing with western beat is a reflection of the globalization in the world where culture comes together in unexpected ways".

The ArtsFairfax Pavilion was packed, with an overflow crowd, for the Raas Lila performed by students of the Natraj School of Indian Dance located in Germantown, MD. The School's Founder and Director, Daya Ravi, choreographed various dances depicting the pastimes of Lord Krishna, Radha and the Gopikas. It was a sight to behold - the colorful costumes, vibrant dance movements, the artistic chemistry, the gaiety, mischievous pranks - one

big celebration thoroughly savored by an appreciative audience.

Daya Ravi explained that the Raas Lila embodies an important philosophy insofar as "It symbolizes the eternal quest of every human soul to ultimately merge with the Supreme: Jeevathma-Radha with the Paramathma-Krishna. This union represents an unprecedented endless bliss".

The artistes who performed this heart-warming, ever-popular Indian dance were Varshini (child Krishna), Sneha (adult Krishna), Smruti (Radha and Gopi), Rohini, Jhanavi, Agnes, Isha, Amy, Vidya, Jahnvi, Subhiksha and Sabrina.

Day 2 of the festival remained a testament to the talent of students belonging to premiere dance institutions: Kalavaridhi; Natyabhoomi School of Dance; Jhanak Dance Academy; Nritya Niketan; and those aforementioned. Indian dances, rich in variety, held sway!

Sheela Ramanath is the Founder and Artistic Director of Kalvaridhi, a Sanskrit word meaning Ocean of Art. The belief is that art is like the ocean - boundless, mysterious and



Shimaliya Agnihotri with her students at the 2010 International Children's Festival.

intriguing!

"At Kalavaridhi, we aim to instill the understanding and appreciation for life that art brings through the medium of Bharatanatyam", Sheela told the festival audience. "Being a very challenging

discipline, it takes years of training to achieve the caliber of a performer. Rigorous training begins at a very young age where the foundation is laid. Core aspects of rhythm, melody and emotive facial expressions are introduced

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recital with a prayer and an offering".

The invocation was followed by dances devoted to Lord Shiva and His son Lord Ganesha, and a Tamil composition in praise of Lord Kumaresha, the second son of Lord Shiva, which was a vibrant and energetic piece combining the pure aspects of rhythm and emotive expressions.

The concluding dance by Sheela focused on the cosmic dancer Lord Shiva. "The

devotee glorifies Him as the greatest sculptor of the universe", Sheela said. "His grandeur is beyond mortal imagination. His cosmic form personifies the cyclical nature of the universe: it has no beginning and no end".

It was a brilliant performance in an idyllic setting!