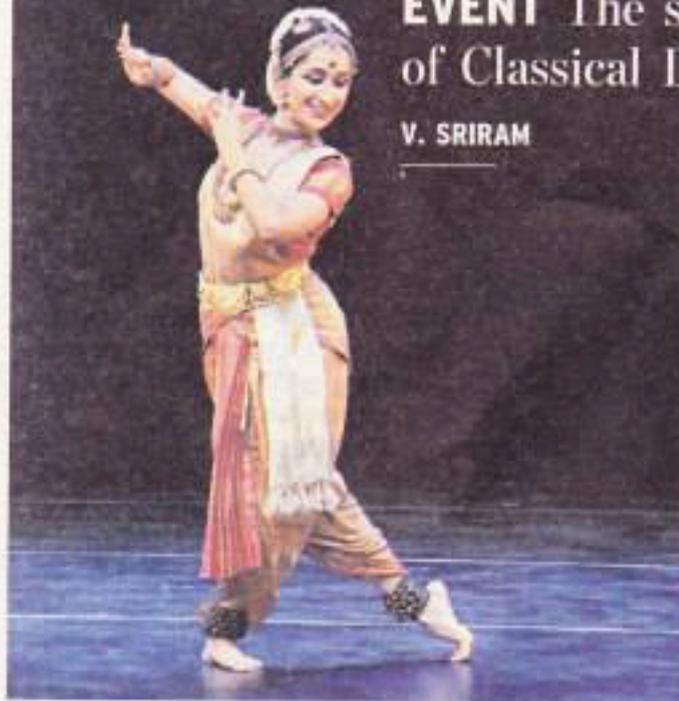


# Classical evenings in Singapore

**EVENT** The second edition of Samarpana, Asian Festival of Classical Dance, explored every aspect of the art form.

V. SRIRAM



**ARTISTIC RENDEZVOUS:** Amrita Lahiri's Kuchipudi; Gundecha brothers and the Kadamb group. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANG

**S**amarpana, the Asian Festival of Classical Dance, produced by Gayatri Sriram and handled by the Jade Group of Companies, was held between recently in Singapore. On display were some fine performances, a presentation and a lively discussion on the state of the classical arts.

The festival, held at the acoustically perfect Drama Centre Theatre, National Library Building, witnessed a good turnout of Singapore's art-loving population. The first evening featured a collaborative event - the Gundecha Brothers singing in the dhrupad format with disciples of Kumuduni Lakshia's dance school - Kadamb, performing to it. The principal ragas presented were Malkauns and Hamir. The end piece on Lord Siva as Mahakaleswar, the presiding deity at the Gundecha Brother's hometown of Ujjain, saw repeated rounds of applause. The evening concluded with the presentation of Sa-

marpana Citation 2013 to Madam Som Saïd, well known choreographer, instructor and director who has been tirelessly working on popularising Malay dance in Singapore for over forty years.

## Agile stage presence

The second evening began with Sankhya, a dance performance by Diya Gopalan, which had numbers as its theme, choreographed by gurus Minal Prabhu and Gayatri Sriram. The young performer, whose agile presence on stage promises a bright future in dance, held the audience enthralled. This was followed by my presentation on the Devadasis of George Town. This traced the lives of the courtesans of Madras in the endgame of their pro-

fession, even as the Government enacted legislations to outlaw them. The last performance of the evening was more Spanish than Asian, but it perhaps reflects the cosmopolitan nature of Singapore. This was a Flamenco performance titled *The Cruel Gardens*, an allegorical representation of the psyche of a bullfight. Directed by internationally renowned choreographer Antonio Vargas, it had Miguel Angel Espino of Spain as the matador with the Singapore-based Soren Magnus Niewelt as the bull, along with other performers.

The third and final evening witnessed three events. The first, titled *Feathered Fables*, had three performances each of half hour duration, all

themed on birds. The first, by the L'Academie de Danse was a ballet, based on Richard Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, which compares a bird's learning to fly with a search for perfection. The second, a contemporary dance choreographed by Zainin Mohammad Tahir and performed by the NUS Dance Ensemble, looked at life through the journey of birds. It was performed to a multitude of musical styles, including the Carnatic. The third in the *Feathered Fables* trilogy was a rendition of *The Golden Mallard*, an episode from the *Buddha Jataka*, by the Shruti Laya School of Dance, run by Gayatri Sriram.

The second programme of the evening was a panel discussion. Based on the

oft-repeated fear of the lution of the classical a it featured Dr Sunil Kari, the eminent da historian, Zaini Ta Artistic Director of NUS Dance Ensemble, Nathan, Director of Programming, the Esplan Theatre, Singapore, ve an dancer and guru Mi Prabhu and yours truly

The discussion moderated by Dr Prasjit Duara, Raffles Professor of Humanities, Director of Research, Humanities and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore

## Intriguing

The last and final performance was intriguing to begin with. How could Tagore's immortal *Chitrangadha* be performed in the Kuchipudi style

**THE SABHA CULTURE HAD MANIFESTED ITSELF IN SINGAPORE TOO... AFICIONADOS ANIMATEDLY CONVERSING IN THE LOBBY AND A COFFEE BAR THAT HAD ALL THE TRAPPINGS OF A FUTURE CANTEEN.**