

A Young Dancer's First Solo

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-Manohar Khushalani

An *Arangetram* in dance is like an airplane pilots first solo flight – an announcement to the world that you have arrived and can now go it alone. Shruti Gurudanti is still in school, in class twelve, she had her *Bharatanatyam Arangetram* this Sunday after having practised dance since the age of eight. The debut performance was also the dancer's personal saga of courage – despite a knee operation last November, she chose to go ahead with the show. Shruti's performance was technically flawless. Credit would also go to her Guru, Vasanthi Sridhar, who was able to inspire her to work so hard for her performance.

Gurudanti's rendition started with *Pushpanjali* in Raga *Tala Malika*. An offering of flowers to the audience, with brisk and agile light footed movements which built up to a crescendo of the pulsating beat of percussion. This was followed by *Khanda Allaripu* set to *Khanda Jati*. This is a short and crisp item symbolising the flowering or opening up of the body as a warm up for the more difficult pieces that follow. Shruti used fluid movements of the shoulder with neck and eye rolls to embellish this dance sequence. In *Jatiswaram*, which is a combination of *jati* (rhythmic syllables) and *swara*, the dancer used side stepping with symmetrical and circular movements of the arms. She gave an inspired performance of pure *Nritya*, drawing repeated applause of the audience.



Above: *Shruti Gurudanti*

Not many of the celebrated Gurus these days create worthy disciples, for fear of creating competition for themselves. An insecurity that Guru Sridhar does not suffer from. Under the aegis of Prashanti Natya Nilayam, she has conjured up a number of collective Arangetramn's and Dance Drama's to introduce her young disciples to the real world.



Above: (L) *Guru Vasnathi Shridhar*
(R) *Shruti Gurudanti*

Varnam was the *piece de resistance* of the show. Through *abhinay* the danseuse described the naughty Krishna and how he enchants the Gopis with his pranks. The vanishing trick is used by him while playing hide and seek with the Gopis, and the audience is bemused by the intriguing confusion he creates in their mind by insisting that he was always there. The transformation of this prankster to a full fledged artist by melodiously playing the flute along with the accompanying instruments to placate the agitated gopis is a popular sequence in Bharatanatyam. The nayika is so much in love with Krishna that she has lost consciousness of her own existence.



Shruti displayed a range of expressions as she recreated the Draupadi *cheer haran* sequence playing the wily Duryodhan and the anguished Draupadi alternatively. The sequence included the sight of the little Krishna dancing on the poisonous snake Kaaliya *Varnam* was set in Ragam “Mohanam”, Talam “Adi”.

Padam “Padari” set to Ragam “Kamboji” Talam “Roopakam”, is a endearing interplay between the nayika who has recently fallen in love and her sakhi who is her confidante. The sakhi pretends not to care or bother about what she was being told. She only appears to admire her own self and strut about without a care in the world. The nayika ultimately pleads to her sakhi to go fetch her lord for her. Shruti concluded her recital with the *Tillana*. in Ragam “Kadanakuduralam” and Talam “Adi”. The young danseuse displayed a great promise, provided she applied herself and internalised the moods of abhinay. Something that will follow with age and practice.