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This Valentine's Day: A special



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Editor's Note:

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Breathing out of sync



Viswa Prana: The Cosmic Breath explored breath as the basis of life. PHOTO: VISWA PRANA

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Nirmala Seshadri

Viswa Prana: The Cosmic Breath, a special commission of the Esplanade's Kalaa Utsavam, was rooted in the bharatanatyam dance form. Choreographed and performed by Rama Vaidyanathan (India) and Ajith Bhaskaran Dass (Malaysia), the 90-minute work also featured more than 20 local dancers. Artistic direction and script were by Gowri Ramnarayan.

The production set out to explore breath as the basis of life, facilitating interaction with the environment, internally and externally. It opened with much promise. Dancers executed abstract movements with powerful musical support in the first segment, Prana. The dancers' bodies undulated gracefully. The rhythm and repetition were suggestive of breath cycles. They then entered in pairs, traversing the stage in repeated movement patterns. This was followed by circular movements of the body that conveyed the idea of breath.

Sudha Raghuraman stole the show with her effortless singing, while T. Ramanan on mridangam (percussion) came across with clarity. The orchestra was superb although there was an overemphasis on vocals. The hard work was evident with vibrant rhythmic duets by Vaidyanathan and Dass.

Durga Manimaran, Sreedevy Sivarajasingam and other Singapore dancers were impressive. Their formations were imaginatively choreographed and enhanced by James Tan's sensitive lighting.

REVIEW / DANCE

VISWA PRANA

Kalaa Utsavam (Indian Festival of Arts)

Esplanade Theatre/Last Saturday

The introduction of the spoken word diluted the abstract quality of the dance. Phrases such as "You give I take, I give you take" were trite. Instead, there might have been merit if the body had been allowed to speak, especially with senior dancer Shantha Ratii as the narrator. She would have breathed life and meaning into her hand gestures and facial expressions.

The opening saw the group clad in conventional costumes, while the second part opened with Vaidyanathan and Dass dressed in cream-coloured costumes with green sashes to possibly depict trees. In another segment, yellow "wings" made of cloth were worn to depict bees, while dancers representing flowers each wore a large red artificial flower.

In a form such as bharatanatyam that is imbued with various representational tools, these attachments appeared superfluous. Viswa Prana would have benefited from maintaining a clear focus on the breath/nature relationship rather than on individual technical prowess.

With Dass and Vaidyanathan as the archetypal hero and heroine, the local dancers were relegated to the sidelines. The Singapore talent could have been better harnessed to enhance the production.

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