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Memory lingers in the mind



Rani Nair (above) in Future Memory and Preethi Athreya in Light Doesn't Have Arms To Carry Us. PHOTOS: KEVIN LEE

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Rani Nair is riveting in Future Memory, while Preethi Athreya is stunning only in some parts of Light

Red sneakers, sleeveless top, unshaven underarms - Rani Nair's irreverence was endearing and atypical in the context of classical Indian dance. Future Memory was centred on the solo piece Dixit Dominus that was choreographed by Kurt Jooss for dancer Lilavati Hager, who chose to gift it to Swedish-born Nair.

One segment had a video clip of Hager's performance playing on the television screen with Nair comfortably perched on the television set, looking down at the late dancer and providing the audience with her analysis of the dance.

With the central theme of "what you take, shall be lost to you - what you give, will remain yours forever", the piece was powerfully poignant. Although it dragged in a couple of parts, Nair was refreshingly unassuming, lending focus to the dance and issues of history, memory, inheritance and legacy.

She began by uttering the rhythmic syllables "jhem jhem", "thalangu" and "thaka thaka thei", stretching and interspersing them with other vocal sounds. Her back facing the audience, she moved around the edges of the performance space with a mobile phone in hand. We glimpsed a dancer performing bharatanatyam movements on her little screen. This opening ritual seemed to evoke the presence of an imaginary dancer at centre stage.

The performance was riveting in its inventiveness and unpredictability. As Nair read out a letter she had written to the late Hager, some audience members pulled out red sheets of paper from which they began to read more such letters in delightful discord. Nair then brought out articles from Hager's past including her dance jewellery, costumes and brass ankle bells.

REVIEW / DANCE

FUTURE MEMORY

72-13 Mohamed Sultan Road/Wednesday

LIGHT DOESN'T HAVE ARMS TO CARRY US

Studio Theatre, School Of The Arts/Thursday

We saw, we touched, we heard and thus entered the world of Hager. I found myself asking: "Where does Lila end and Rani begin?" It became an imperceptible line.

Preethi Athreya's solo work, *Light Doesn't Have Arms To Carry Us*, was based on a piano composition by Gerard Pesson, creating a visual rather than aural interpretation of music. With a stark grey video projection and scratchy soundtrack in the background, Athreya moved within a small square of light, her arms tucked inside her sleeves.

An imaginary piano played on a table to create sound and rhythm was then projected. Athreya appeared on stage standing against a wooden table, the music gradually reflected through her body's connection with the table. There were a couple of visually stunning points in the show, for instance, when the table top became a screen on which images and shadows were seen. The isolation and projection of different parts of the dancer's body also offered interesting perspectives, as did the demonstration that one set of actions can carry multiple meanings.

On the whole, however, Athreya's work was disjointed and tedious. It stimulated little engagement or reflection. *Future Memory*, on the other hand, is still on my mind.