



ARTS STAGE

When the planets align

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The monkeys play, leaping over each other on stage, and the audience laughs. One monkey is lifted up by the others in his quest to capture the sun and the audience giggles as he topples off his friend's shoulders. Alas, the sun is not to be caught, and an almighty thunderbolt strikes the Monkey-God Anjanaya down.

The monkeys were the junior dancers of Rasika Dance Academy, and an integral element of *The Sacred Grahas*. The show was an exploration in dance of the planets and their relationship with each other in Hindu mythology.

Presented in early May at UNSW's Science Theatre, it was a show that raised funds for OZINDCARE, a local charity that provides for the needy in India.

The performance's success is attributable to the high calibre of Rasika Dance Academy's dancers, as well as the creative choreography of their guru Manjula Vishwanath. Over the course of a few hours, the audience were taken through the stories that surround the planets (*grahas*) in Hinduism, many of these tales being the origins of frequently practised Hindu rituals.

In *Chandran*, Lord Ganesh was portrayed comically trying to ride his protesting mouse *vahana* (vehicle). The moon, *Chandran*, was watching and unable to contain his mirth, laughed out loud. Indeed, the audience was laughing with him, so delightful was the portrayal. Ganesh was insulted and declared that no-one shall look upon the moon on Ganesh-Chaturthi day.

There were well-known stories such as the one when Vishnu as Vamana asked Mahabali whether he

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could take three steps; he then proceeded to place a foot on Earth, then heaven and finally on Mahabali's head.

The much loved tale of Princess Damayanti and her beloved King Nala was depicted in *Sani*.

Then, there were lesser known tales such as when Muthuswami Dikshithar taught Thambiappan to relieve himself of his stomach pain through prayer, portrayed in *Guru*.


Each planet was described through intricate, innovative choreography by Mrs. Vishwanath and the mature, captivating performance by her students of all ages. The youngest in the group stole the audience's hearts, while their seniors displayed an expressiveness and technical finesse that was uniformly excellent across the group. Special mention must be made of Anjana Chandran who managed to draw and hold the audience's attention with her graceful, charming performance. To stand out in a group of such a high standard is no easy task, and it really seems as if Anjana was born to dance.


Interestingly, each segment of the program was introduced by a small skit, in which a marriage is being arranged and the Hindu priest is explaining the planetary arrangement to the young couple. Like the dance performance itself, these skits were a unique and well thought-out addition.

Rasika Dance Academy's *The Sacred Grahas* was a well-choreographed, beautifully performed dance recital by a group of Bharathanatyam dancers that are one of the best in Sydney. The fact that it raised funds for a cause as good as those represented by OZINDCARE added to its appeal, and made it truly meaningful in every way.

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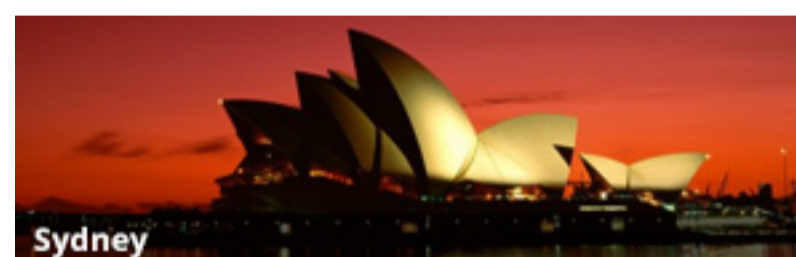
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