

costumes were fussy and their feet showed under the too-short skirts, so we saw them walking, not gliding. The Polichinelles, who emerged from Mother Ginger's hooped skirt, were not tiny children, and their headdresses made them taller. These defects are easily fixed.

In the company's March season, the *Swan Lake* production by Angel Corella after Petipa and Ivanov had many strong points, both in the dancers and in the finely thought-out interpretations. Adrift at his own birthday party, Prince Siegfried (well danced and well acted by corps member Jack Thomas) alone hears the faint French horn of the swan music before he knows what it means. When he goes hunting, he will be ready to lay aside his bow and become a tender lover.

As the Swan Queen, Oksana Maslova's arms are most expressive. When Rothbart suddenly enters after she and the Prince have pledged their love, she has her back to us but we can feel she's stunned, her arms arrested. In thrall, she bourrées offstage, back still to us, arms now moving only as locomotion. As the Black Swan, she switches on those arms whenever doubt seems to surface in the Prince.

In this production, the Prince's friend, Benno (corps member Etienne Diaz), has a large role in addition to a sparkling trio (with Yuka Iseda and Kathryn Manger) at the birthday. He and others accompany the Prince on the hunt. They leave the Prince at his request, then several times Benno returns with them until eventually the Prince gestures with finality for him to go.

Benno's several returns come between many major passages of dance (Rothbart's first appearance, the Swan Queen's entrance, twenty-four swans, the four cygnets, the two big swans). Each time it is harder to call the Prince back to their world. At one point, Benno and the hunters are on one side of the stage, swans on the other, the Prince between them. The human and supernatural worlds see each other distinctly before the Prince is drawn away by love.

The role of von Rothbart (James Ihde, in his

final season) has always been the most varied in interpretation, as productions search for a gloss on the figure of an evil magician. One solution is almost lover-like, as it is here, which is fine, but such an interpretation needs to be pertinent to both the Swan Queen under his spell and the Black Swan who is his daughter.

The three Tchaikovsky ballets make a natural and audience-pleasing cluster and bring attention to how, amid other repertory items, narrative ballets are now programmed – one each – in fall and spring, with *The Nutcracker* the perennial third. Angel Corella was phenomenal when he danced in a large swath of Tchaikovsky. His decisions in their complex transmission to Pennsylvania Ballet will be well worth watching.

New York

Karen Greenspan

The odissi dance ensemble Nrityagram has just completed a five-week tour in the United States with their collaborative work *Samhāra*, a program they first brought in 2012. The group is winding up its final performances at the magnificent Temple of Dendur in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Warm lights bring into relief the massive, beige, stone, entrance gate to the temple etched with moving figures from another culture's antiquity. In front of the lit archway, the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble from India and two principal dancers from Sri Lanka's Chitrasena Dance Company interweave elements of classical odissi dance with the rhythms, movements, and energy of Kandyan dance from Sri Lanka. The ensemble of musicians is from both traditions as well and sits in a row on the floor along the left side of the stage. The result is a thrilling dialogue between two styles of music and dance that are seamlessly braided together with a lively, joyful spirit and skill.

The seed for this collaborative work began, according to Nrityagram's artistic director and choreographer Surupa Sen, when the great dancing couple of Sri Lanka, Guru Chitrasena and his wife Vajira, visited Nrityagram. Hav-

ing founded the Chitrasena Dance Company in 1943 and the first school of national dance in 1944, Chitrasena is noted for adapting the traditional Kandyan drumming and dances from the Central Hill region of the island for the stage. These dances originated, according to legend, as an exorcism ritual performed by shamans from India to cure an ancient king of a mysterious disease. They were passed onto a caste of male dancers that performed them in annual sacred festivals. Vajira not only infiltrated this traditionally male dance form, but also, according to her granddaughter Thaji Dias who is currently performing in *Samhāra*, “She created new movements to suit the female body.” The Chitrasena legacy was furthered by their daughter Upeka Chitrasena and today is maintained by the generation of grandchildren.

From their initial meeting, the dancers of the two companies formed an immediate connection and, in time, began a seven-year period of visiting each other’s countries observing, learning, and understanding each other’s styles. This led to a conscious exchange, in which the process was the goal. Sen explained how the interaction began with the musicians. Kandyan dance is performed to the accompaniment of many drums, which generates tremendous energy. So, they initially listened to each other’s drumming, and the rhythm composers created the percussion composition first. Sen clarified, “Throughout the production, the odissi and Kandyan dancers dance to both Sri Lankan and odissi percussion sounds. We do not, however, attempt to dance in each other’s style.” She went on to share, “I did not choreograph their [the Sri Lankan dancers’] actual movement. Their own choreographer Heshma Wignaraja [Chitrasena’s eldest granddaughter and artistic director of the company today] created their



Nrityagram’s *Samhāra* with Bijayini Satpathy and Pavithra Reddy.

movements, but with very specific guidance from me. The melody was overlaid on the dance by our music composer Pandit Raghunath Panigrahi after we had created all the movement to the rhythm.”

Back at the Temple of Dendur, a bamboo flute meanders through the sonic reaches seeking some unknown mystery. The lonely instrument finds its assured connection when the mardala (drum) joins in with its heartbeat of certainty together with the three Nrityagram soloists, who energize the visual space with their invocation *Aparnam*.

In this prayer to the goddess Parvati – Mother and Supreme Power of the Universe – Surupa Sen, Bijayini Satpathy, and Pavithra Reddy dance their request for her benevolent blessings. With sensuality in sound, body postures, and movement quality, the dancers enact the human propensity to feel wonder toward a higher power. Flowing, narrative hand gestures, facial expressions of adoration, and trembling hands and feet that set off the sound of jingling ankle bells express overwhelming awe and invite the supreme mother goddess (and the audience) to be present.

This moving invocation is followed by a ritual offering of the five elements – earth, water, fire, air, and ether. Thaji Dias and Sandani Sulochani of the Chitrasena Dance Company

join the stage for a celebration of varying energies and qualities. Adorned with glittering jewelry, the odissi dancers resemble goddesses in their jewel-tone, pleated, silk dance saris. They move through luxuriant, earthy, rounded shapes as every body part (ribcage, head, eyes, and so forth) glides from side to side.

By contrast, the Sri Lankan performers dance with a crisp, bright, bouncy vibrancy. Like foreign princesses in their colorful pantaloons, shimmering silk tops, and long braided ponytails, they smile contagiously while performing athletic turning jumps, wide walking lunges, and powerful stomping patterns. One can see the masculine *chouk* stance (square, wide, male posture) forms the basis for their positions and transitions. The palette of contrasting qualities of odissi fluidity and Kandyan spirited strength offers a rich feast for the eyes.

The program continues with a hymn in praise of Lord Shiva called *Shiva Ashtakam* danced by the three Nrityagram principals. This poetic depiction of Shiva's attributes translates into a highly dramatic, dual display of both masculine/vigorous (*tandav*) and feminine/graceful (*lasya*) qualities as it showcases Bijayini Satpathy's amazing technical control, expressive nuance, and force of presence. She sculpts images of Shiva's garland of serpents, wild matted locks, and blood-stained eyes with eloquent hand and arm gestures while moving through powerful postures with the fierce energy of the Creator/Destroyer of the Universe. And in the space of a breath, she transforms into the feminine half with whom Shiva shares one body. The other two principals join the visual poem in shifting three-bodied scenes of Shiva's legendary narrative that move about the stage like sliding puzzle pieces. Accompanied by the superb musicians playing and singing Pandit Raghunath Pannigrahi's soulful music composition and the mystery-inducing lighting by Lynne Fernandez, the total experience of *Shiva Ashtakam* is pure wizardry.

Surupa Sen's solo *Krishna's Lament* is an in-

terpretive abhinaya piece that uses detailed facial expression and gesture to convey profound emotional range. The dance is inspired by a poem from the *Gita Govinda*, a romantic ballad by the twelfth-century poet/saint Jayadeva that recounts the immortal love of the cowherdess Radha and Lord Krishna. Their love serves as a metaphor for the Vaishnava (worship of the Hindu god Vishnu) belief that all humankind is feminine energy (Radha) seeking union with the male godhead (Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu).

Krishna's Lament enacts a chapter in which the goddess Radha is broken-hearted at Lord Krishna's romantic dalliances. When he understands the crushing hurt he has caused his beloved, he berates himself and begs for her forgiveness. Sen portrays the gamut of emotional textures as her face and movements transform from the fun-loving, party boy Krishna to the anguished Radha and, finally, to a deeply remorseful Krishna. By the end, we have experienced every shade of remorse and even the additional prospect of hope.

Samhara pulls together in a rousing finale called *Alap*. Once again, the Kandyan and odissi dance traditions share the space in a conversation of movement and drumming. The two groups flirt, tease, play (a charmingly mimed game of dice), give and take as they thread their steps through, around, and with each other in a celebration of pure joy. *Samhara* is truly dancing at its very best.

Los Angeles

Eva Shan Chou

In late spring of 2018, the seven-year-old L.A. Dance Project presented the second of two programs as company-in-residence at the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Beverly Hills. The four pieces brought out the company's mastery of a range of styles, from 1940s Martha Graham to Ohad Naharin's gaga and also showcased its high profile with a commissioned work from Justin Peck and one by its founder and artistic director Benjamin Millepied.