

I have preserved the great status and reputation of the Bolshoi. The Bolshoi has survived and is getting stronger instead of falling apart. I have always seen my aim as director to be to preserve the wonderful heritage and past of the Bolshoi, to preserve its unique productions that other companies don't have.

On the other hand, we have also staged premieres working with the Balanchine Trust, Kylián, the Cranko Trust (*Onegin*), and John Neumeier (*The Lady of the Camelias*). There has certainly been plenty of work. Only history will eventually show how this period should be judged.

New York

Karen Greenspan

At the 2015 Dancing the Gods Festival of Indian Dance presented by the World Music Institute at New York University's Skirball Center, Rajika Puri, the cocurator of the festival, attributed the renowned Tanjore Quartet with creating the bharatanatyam repertoire. I was intrigued by the attribution and the notion that musicians were considered responsible for a dance repertoire.

These four brothers, born in the early 1800s, were celebrated musicians and composers of Carnatic music that accompanies bharatanatyam. In the Indian classical dance convention, music and dance are completely merged in a way that I, a Western viewer, had not grasped. In fact, Rukmini Devi (1904-1986), the dancer/choreographer credited with systematizing the pedagogy of the bharatanatyam classical dance form claimed, "Music is Dance and Dance is Music." Wanting to better understand this relationship, I spoke with Rajika Puri by phone. She explained that the Tanjore brothers codified the basic bharatanatyam genres (we would say "movements" – as in a symphony) that make up a complete dance recital, the *margam* – the "ideal path" for how dance recitals are assembled – and probably devised the dance vocabulary of bharatanatyam.

The Tanjore musicians were dance gurus themselves. The only comparable parallel in Western dance, of this unique combination of skills, would be Louis Horst (1884-1964). This uniquely multifaceted intimate and colleague of Martha Graham was a composer, choreography teacher, and dance critic who shaped Graham's artistry along with generations of modern dancers and choreographers.

Puri continued, "There is no distinct word in Sanskrit for dance. It is subsumed in the word for theater – *natya*. Dance is an element of the total theater experience that has a defined set of elements as catalogued in the *Natya Shastra* – the comprehensive two thousand-year-old treatise on ideal Indian theater."

Puri added that just as dance is subsumed in theater, in some sense it is also subsumed in music. "In bharatanatyam, odissi, and kathak, each aspect of the choreography is tied to the music." Each element of the music requires a particular type of choreographic expression from the dancer. She put it most eloquently, "We receive the musical composition as the map of what is possible for us to explore in movement."

I was curious about the role of the *nattuvanar* as I am captivated by this member of the musical ensemble who plays the finger cymbals and calls out the *jati* (verbalized rhythmic sequences). Puri informed me that the *nattuvanar* also frequently composes the *jatis*, conducts the ensemble, and in former times often became a dance guru.

On the first night of the festival, we were fortunate to have an unusual abundance of two *nattuvanars*, who also doubled as vocalists. The exquisite harmonies they chanted truly lifted the performance to an otherworldly level.

The sonic complexity of the percussion alone was remarkable. Puri enumerated several methods used to enunciate rhythm in bharatanatyam. The young dancer first learns the codified rhythmic sequences pounded by the feet while reciting the accompanying verbal dance syllables. Layered on top of the percussive footwork, the *nattuvanar* calls out a dif-

ferent set of spoken percussion rhythms – the jati. And yet other rhythms are played on the *mridangam* drum, making use of all ten fingers to create the instrument’s vocabulary of sound. The melody or song also has rhythmic phrasing that the dancer’s upper body movement reflects.

The *bharatanatyam* recital was danced by another unusual duo – a mother and daughter – Rama Vaidyanathan and Dakshina Vaidyanathan. The evening-length work was called *Dwita – Duality of Life*. It explored the nature of duality in various relationships.

In the section entitled “Passion and Devotion” (referring to mortals’ relationship to the gods), Rama’s solo opened with spectacular rhythmic footwork. She moved through dance positions that were quite martial in aspect. Then she transformed into an unabashed devotee of Lord Shiva as the motion of Shiva’s idol riding on a processional palanquin first registered on her face and then progressed throughout her body in an eloquent translation of *abhinaya* – bringing out the inner life of the lyrics and what these could mean for the character portrayed. In this section, she introduced a signature move that would be repeated by both dancers through the course of the piece – a jaw-dropping, achingly slow, controlled descent into a sustained grand plié.

Both women are assured, precise, and generous movers. Rama, in particular, has tremendous mastery of nuanced facial expression while maintaining a refreshingly natural visage.

The next evening the festival offered a presentation of the classical *kathak* form performed by disciples of the accomplished *kathak* artist and guru, Kumudini Lakhia, followed by a group work in “contemporary *kathak*.” The *kathak* form, as explored by Kumudini Lakhia, leans toward pure dance, or *nritta*, and is noted for demonstrations of speedy, percussive footwork, executed while wearing the anklets of jingle bells called *ghungrus*, as well as lightening fast sequences of multiple turns. *Parampara – Ek Pravaah*, the

bravura solo performed by Prashant Shah, demonstrated another merged relationship of music and dance. This, however, was a dynamic conversation between the two.

The title of the piece, in which *parampara* means “tradition” and *pravaah* means “flow,” points to Prashant Shah’s use of traditional *kathak nritta* sequences and their flow into an improvised aesthetic. In an engaging display, he recited well-known, set, musical phrases of *tabla* and dance rhythmic syllables. The *tabla* player, Ramesh Bapodara, responded, drumming his embellished interpretations. Prashant Shah then danced his own virtuosic improvisations in response to the *tabla* – capturing the inherent excitement in the contrast between speed and stillness and the live interplay with his musician.

The evening closed with a very promising group work, *All That Is In Between*, choreographed by *kathak* dancer Parul Shah, and performed by her company and her. This fusion of contemporary dance and *kathak* began and ended with a body percussion phrase. The dancing incorporated elements of *kathak* – percussive footwork (minus the *ghungrus*) with animated arm gestures scribbling speedily through the air – as well as contemporary lyrical legato movement using interesting levels and groupings. The stylish costumes, consisting of sleeveless, gauzy, layered tunics in a variety of flesh tones over gray leggings, echoed the fusion of dance styles.

What was apparent was that the *kathak* training created versatile, expressive dancers, and the disparate dance aesthetics fused successfully into a captivating idiom.

Vienna

Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller

On July 6, 2015, the world celebrated the 150th anniversary of the birth of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. Since this Swiss national was in fact born in Vienna – something not well known – the “Second International Conference of Dalcroze Studies: The Movement Connection”