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Monday

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Kala Arts Quarterly's Evening of Music

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Kala, an arts quarterly magazine that has been serving the South Asian community since 1996, had its debut fund raiser on Sunday June 6th at the Yorkwood Library Theatre. Touted as "the most unique, educational and social event of the year", it lived up to its promise with at least some of the featured artistes.



Weekly Poll

Are you satisfied with the election results?

Yes

No

Not Sure



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The very elegant and charming Mrs Gayatri Manchanda's warm welcome speech set the tone for the evening when she remarked that she was heartened to note that India's traditional art forms were not being ignored as a very dedicated set of people were keeping them alive in Toronto. Kala, she said, was highlighting the efforts of individuals and organizations of the diaspora to interpret their ethnic inheritances in dance, literature, film and music and encouraging intelligent innovations in these spheres.

An intense, energetic and vibrant Carnatic vocal rendition was the first offering, by a young, impeccably clad team of gentlemen - Ashwin & Rohin Iyer and Harish Ganapathy on the vocals, Anand Srinivasan on the violin, Sriram Suryanarayan on the mridangam and Karthik Venkatraman on the kanjira. They chose a traditional format for rendering the Raga Keeravani, with a very informative slide show running on the backdrop, which allowed audiences to understand what each artiste was performing. The slides (beamed via a stylish purple laptop) took us through the finer nuances of a raga-rendition and the complex mathematics that make up the beats and the time cycles of Carnatic music. The experience was truly a combination for both the left and the right brain, and my guess is no one would have complained had they stayed on to perform a few more ragas.

The next performance was by the very senior but unassuming Dr Swarnlata on the sitar, accompanied on the tabla by Deboo Chowdhury.



Dr Swarnlata took a few moments to explain the different parts of the sitar, and the ragas she was performing . Her Ahir Bhairav and Vilas Todi, topped by a light classical number in Bhairav, was truly a compact and contained performance which kept the audience in silence as her fingers flew over the frets.

Taking a break from heavy classical, a smart move on Kala's part, the next act was stand up comedy by Kiranmoy Dutta, who drew the crowds back into the theatre from the food stalls. "Kiran" as he is popularly known, is a graduate of the Second City Conservatory Program. He chose South Asian parents as his target for the night, engaging the audience with his one-liners like "South Asian parents know a lot of @**! and want to tell us all the time, which leaves us confused and mystified", and "South Asian parents are not afraid to show their knowledge with their hands - you know, the "smackdown"!" Politically incorrect all the way but completely and utterly delightful!

The celebrity surprise guest of the evening turned out to be the Juno Award 2004 winner, Kiran Ahluwalia, the hauntingly melodious singer of Ghazals. Invited on stage to say a few words about Kala, the petite Ahluwalia, resplendent in a green and lavender Indo-western ensemble, said , "When I picked up the first issue of Kala seven or eight years ago and read about so many young South Asian artistes pursuing both North and South Indian arts, it gave me a sense of community. Kala has been instrumental in creating this sense of community for the South Asian arts."

The interval saw a buzz of activity around the food stalls and a celebrity watch yielded senior dancer Lata Pada and her affable husband Hari, Keshub Chanderia, patron of arts, Sadanand Benegal, the sculptor and a couple of visiting percussionists from India - Neyveli Narayan and Mannargudi Easwaran, to name a few.

"Autorickshaw" set the pace for the second half, performing five quick numbers, a mix of traditional classical pieces arranged in contemporary style and some pure fusion. Subha Sankaran led with the vocals, supported by Ed Hanley on the tabla, Rich Brown on bass and



Debasis Sinha on the drums. Subha explained each of the compositions that were performed, creating a keen sense of participation in the audience. Her finale "Sunrise", composed by her for an ensemble, was truly a great end to this act.

The last performers generated a lot of excitement as their act held the

answers to a quiz contest set by Kala. Rajashree and Milind Karandikar (vocals and tabla) performed a medley of old Hindi film songs, mentioning the ragas that they were based on. In the next part of this act, Rajashree sang four songs for which the audience had to guess the ragas on which they were based. Rajashree kept the audience clapping and tapping their feet with her beautiful range, exquisite voice and easy presence. And as for the quiz, a huge number of responses poured in, truly a tribute to the unforgettable quality and power of Indian cinematic music!

Kala had not just a musical evening, but also demonstrated its commitment to the other arts by hosting an art exhibit and sale of Mrs Gayatri Manchanda's works in acrylic and water colors, the theme of most of her works being silhouettes of people in everyday life.

TSAR Publications (Nurjehan Aziz) had a book corner with many titles of South Asian and other writings in English - books were on sale too, and Aziz herself was available to answer any questions.



As Kala moves rapidly into its first decade of existence, its new avatar - sleeker type faces, better visuals and interesting layouts, seeks to attract new readership from the youth and young adults.

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