

1963

Eighty-fifth Season

1964

UNIVERSITY MUSICAL SOCIETY

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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Chamber Dance Festival

SVETLOVA DANCE ENSEMBLE

—
SHANTA RAO AND COMPANY

—
HUNGARIAN BALLETS

“BIHARI”

OCTOBER 25, 26, 27, 1963

RACKHAM AUDITORIUM

ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

Second Program
Complete Series 3400

The Steinway is the official piano of the University Musical Society

A R S L O N G A V I T A B R E V I S

SHANTA RAO

and her

COMPANY OF DANCERS AND MUSICIANS OF SOUTH INDIA

Assisting Dancers

CHANDRAMATI

PADMA

The Musicians

SANTHA RATNAM, *Vocalist*
NETHAPPA KRISHNAPPA, *Mridangist*

VASANTI RAO, *Nattuvanar*
S. P. NATARAJAN, *Flutist*

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1963, 8:30 P.M.

P R O G R A M

Bharata Natyam (*Nattuva Mela*) SHANTA RAO

The best-known of India's great forms of classical dance, Bharata Natyam also provides the artistic canons for all other forms of this great religious art, created in Heaven by Gods, who were, themselves, artists and who gave the arts to human beings—for their delight. These principles of esthetics, of training, and of performance relate to music, dance, and drama. They were formulated and reformed through many centuries and are attributed to the sage, Bharata (whose name means "actor-dancer"). In Sanskrit, the language of the scholars who set down these shastras, or artistic laws, there is no separate word for "drama" or "dance." Though there are distinctions within the form, one word includes both—*natyam*. And Shiva, in his aspect as the God who danced the world into being, is Nataraja, which means The Dancer-Actor.

Thana Varnam (*Sankarabharanam Ragam, Kantajati, Ata Talam*) SHANTA RAO

The Varnam is the most elaborate and elevated expression of Bharata Natyam, calling for the greatest versatility in the dancer. Here, pure dance is interspersed with dramatic dance. Lines of poetry, which the singer sings and the dancer enacts, are alternated with phrases of music, which accompany pure dance. It is the composite of this great classical form of Indian dance. (*Shanta Rao is the first dancer in fifty years to essay a Thana Varnam.*)

The rapture of worship gives these devotional songs the intensity of love songs. For human love is the Hindu symbol of oneness with the God. This one is the complaint of a languishing and neglected lover: "Why this indifference toward me, Oh Lord? . . . Oh, Moon-faced one, Lord of the Three Worlds . . . Whose eyes resemble the lotus-flower . . . I speak to thee, but silence is my answer . . . I approach thee with sweet words but I meet a heart as cold as stone . . . When the God of Love pierces my heart, . . . I faint with love for thee . . . But thou cometh not . . . Thou art cold and stubborn . . . Why this indifference, Oh Lord?"

Folk Dance of Andhra CHANDRAMATI AND PADMA

Andhra Pradesh, a state rich in dance, has its prized forms of communal folk-dance. The music pattern and style are unique, carefully guarded by tradition from outside influence and borrowed techniques.

A village dance of jubilation over the harvest but, more than that, it is almost a ritual—representing work as a form of worship, in which the girls and women of the village gather the harvest reverently, joyfully.

Bhama Sutram SHANTA RAO

Though very ancient, outdating many other classical Indian forms, Bhama Sutram has been unknown in India outside of the centers where it was practiced and preserved as ritual by a special Tantric cult of priests. While elsewhere in India cults sprang up in worship of Krishna (Vishnu) or Shiva, the cult of Bhama grew up in South India in devotion to Satyabhama, the wife of Krishna—and the only Goddess in the Hindu Pantheon who went into battle at his side against the demons of evil.

As she has done before, Shanta Rao sought out these secret mysteries, saved them from oblivion and brought them to artistic life. Though she has been urged to unveil this new discovery in India, Bhama Sutram is being seen for the first time on this tour.

The dances in this tradition are feminine, beguiling, even flirtatious, at times. Like Zeus, in our own Western mythology, Krishna had many loves among the heavenly nymphs and the Gopis. The feminine character of Bhama Sutram is appropriate to a cult, whose patron is not a God, but a Goddess; but also one, who was a neglected wife—devoted, hurt, proud, languishing and sometimes trying to woo back her wandering spouse.

Tillana (*Sankarabharanam Ragam, Kanta Chapu Talam*) SHANTA RAO

Pure dance, but with its own special characteristic poses and speed. A Tillana is a joyous dance, with all the charm and caprices of femininity, a dance celebrating the pleasure of dance.

Satyabhama's Letter to Lord Krishna SHANTA RAO

A poetic narrative in Bhama Sutram style with Jatis (rhythm patterns). Following the letter, Satyabhama takes over the poetic climax. (*The first part is in Arabhi Ragam; Satyabhama's exultation is in Mohana Ragam and Adi Talam.*)

The letter is in three sections. In the first, she honors Krishna as the God, describing his magnificence, his beauty, and she makes her appeal almost as a prayer: "I, Satyabhama, bow reverentially and surrender with complete devotion."

In the second section, she speaks to him as husband, reminds him of their marriage—of his "charms and pranks." "When my father gave me in marriage to you . . . I was given the status of wife."

Then she complains of his cruel desertion, her unrequited love. (The God of Love has no pity on her, with his "sharp-edged flower arrows" her "heart is pierced," the unending song of birds is jarring; the "cool moon is hot;" the wind from the mountains has the coldness of death.) "Pray come quickly, see my plight, and save me from the ordeal of suffering."

Closing, she blames the God of Love, if she has written rashly. And there is a touching finish: "Do not be irritated. Come soon to take me." Then, it is signed, "Your devoted Satyabhama."

At this, the tempo and music change. In an ecstasy of high hope Satyabhama calls to her maidens, "I have a good omen . . . My Lord has not come. But there is thunder in the North. The Lotus-eyed is my Beloved and My Lord is coming, it seems."

INTERMISSION

Folk Dance of Malabar—In Ottam Tullal Style CHANDRAMATI AND PADMA

This is pure dance, a pattern in rhythm, without specific meaning—deeply characteristic of the dance of the Malabar Coast. Its weaving movement suggests the close relationship with Malaya through many centuries of Indian conquest and travel. But its vibrant, insistent pulse belongs to South India.

Mohini Attam SHANTA RAO

This form belongs to Kerala and was saved from oblivion by Shanta Rao. Named for Mohini, the most gloriously beautiful of the heavenly nymphs who danced in Paradise, this is called "The Dance of the Divine Enchantress," and is considered the ultimate in lyricism and beauty. When it is not purely lyrical, it is the *essence* of its subject, and the *quintessence* of Indian dance.

Chollukattu, Ramayana (*Sowrashtra Ragam, Adi Talam*) . . . SHANTA RAO

By reference, this poem-in-dance gives the essence of the great Indian epic, the *Ramayana*. It is a paean of praise to the hero Rama, celebrating his valour, his majesty, his compassion, his love of beauty, his great deeds in war against the demons of evil—and his *triumph*.

Kunti-Karna (*Devagandhari Ragam, Adi Talam*) SHANTA RAO

The background for this dance is a deeply dramatic, even tragic, situation from India's other great epic, the *Mahabharata*, which chronicles the long struggles of two warring clans, the Pandavas and the Karauvas.

In essence, it conveys the agony of Kunti, queen-mother of the Pandavas, and her unclaimed hero-son, as they meet on the eve of a great battle, in which he, as the general of the opposing army, must fight his natural brothers.

Child of the Sun-God, though he does not know it, Karna was born to the "beautiful and good" Princess Kunti out of wedlock and, in her shame, she had put him away. Now, he disowns her, as she had disowned him, resists her pleas to take his proper place as a prince of the Pandavas, and, like a true hero, refuses to desert his allies. But he promises to spare all of his brothers, except one—the greatest hero and his true adversary. Then he asks her blessing and, torn with sorrow, she gives it, likening him to his father, the Sun.

The musical system of India is not only the oldest in the world but the most elaborate, which is one reason for its great excitement. An Indian dance adds another dimension in the percussive foot-beats (which develop counter-rhythms), and sometimes in song, for the Indian dancer is also a musician. The RAGAM (or Raga) is neither a mode nor a scale in the Western sense, but a fixed melodic design, within which each composition is developed. The THALAM (or Tala), another unique element of Indian music, is not a measure or bar but a rhythm-pattern and a time-cycle, which may run for an extended section of the music. Like the raga, each tala has its own characteristics, distinguishing it from others, because the beats may be divided in special combinations. Indian rhythm is not syncopated but elaborately mathematical, yet, to the Indian musician or dancer, "flexible and free." JATHI (or Jati) are time-units or phrases-in-rhythm made up of long and short beats—hence, Jatiswaram, a design in rhythm. Here the dancer adds infinite variety, interweaving and countering the rhythms of the musicians.

First complete tour of the United States and Canada presented by the Asia Society Performing Arts Program.

Hungarian Ballets "Bihari," starring Kovach and Rabovsky, will appear in the third and final performance of the Chamber Dance Festival tomorrow AFTERNOON at 2:30.