



BWW Review: APARNA RAMASWAMY at The Joyce Theater

October 8, 2015

By Jessica Abejar



This week **The Joyce Theater** is presenting two unique premieres. The first is Aparna Ramaswamy's *They Rose at Dawn*. Accompanied by a live musical ensemble, this gifted Bharatanatyam dancer graced the stage with such vibrancy, energy, and light, leading the audience to become part of a beautiful experience.

Bharatanatyam is an ancient Indian art that intertwines music, poetry, theater, and dance. This art form began in the ancient temples of Tamil Nadu, in southern India, and has survived for thousands of years, thanks to its relevance in exploring and understanding the mind, body, and spirit. Here in New York, Aparna Ramaswamy, co-director of Ragamala **Dance Company** (a position she shares with her mother), introduces audiences to this art in a most spectacular way.

The live musicians, visible on the side of the stage, set the tone and infuse **The Joyce Theater** with an enchanting melody. Aparna sets herself onstage for the solo evening performance. With four distinct pieces, a musical interlude, and poetry, it was an evening of non-stop entertainment, but also an evening of love, peace, and deeper meaning. Her first piece *Om Kara Karini* was a great introduction to the physical vocabulary of Bharatanatyam. Similar movements would be present throughout the entire evening, which featured greatly the articulation of fingers, hands, feet, and toes, foot stamps accentuated by the bells around her ankles, and excellent facial expressions. The other pieces would touch on themes of family, nature, and celebration of life, but all displayed one thing - Aparna's outstanding gift and devotion to this magnificent art form.

A standout piece was *Varnam*, based on a love poem with a dual meaning. It was the longest of the four pieces and was a marathon of movement and drama. Aparna's theatrical performance was sprinkled with moments of flirtation, displays of fervent love, and true devotion, expressing the poem's duality of spirituality and sensuality. The dance included a wide variety of dynamic movements from subtle neck isolations to grandiose sequences of pure rhythmic footwork. With particular strengths in spatial awareness and musicality, Aparna's flawless lines seemed to create a pattern of poses that hit each beat perfectly. The angle and extension of her arms and limbs and the depth and

placement of her bent legs created stunning pictures. Her fury of footwork was so synchronized to the music that the bells on her ankles seemed like they had always been part of the ensemble. As she repeated a few dance phrases, each was done with the same intensity and energy that each phrase seemed new.

Amid Aparna's technical abilities and her impressive stamina were a true delight for her own work. She had true dedication and commitment to her work, and paired with her energy and enthusiasm, she radiated throughout the evening. She also had an undeniable sense of living in the present moment and brought the audience members in with her. It was a truly wonderful evening that introduced audiences to the beauty and depth of Bharatanatyam.

Photo Credit: Amanulla