

Ballet meets Kuchipudi



We're a team Haleem Shaik, Maia and Vijayalakshmi

Three youngsters come together to present a fusion of French ballet and Kuchipudi

On Monday evening, three youngsters — two Indians and one French — will present a fusion of ballet and Kuchipudi, *Melange of Dances*. And they are not out to belittle their respective dance forms and fall short of pleasing aficionados of both art forms.

Koka Vijayalakshmi and Saleem Shaik understand the nuances of Kuchipudi and Maia Bouthors the intricacies of ballet. In the performance that will last over an hour, they will present their individual solos staying true to their dance forms in the first half. “The second half is where we synchronise,” says Vijayalakshmi, a Kuchipudi dancer and a research scholar.

Dressed in a long crushed skirt and a short top, Maia Bouthors could be any another Indian youngster. Now interning at the Alliance Francaise Hyderabad, she came to India for a one-year assignment.

“As part of my course in political studies, I am required to do an internship abroad for a year. I chose to come to India and even before I came here, I learnt Hindi with the help of a teacher of Indian origin,” says Maia.

Maia and Vijayalakshmi happened to meet each other at an event in Hyderabad and a mutual discussion on dance followed. “I am trained in ballet and I was eager to try out fusion, ever since I arrived here in November. Meeting Vijayalakshmi gave me that opportunity and we started working on the idea,” says Maia.

Vijayalakshmi on her part had worked on a fusion programme with Spanish flamenco dancers in April. “The workshop was personally a satisfying experience and I learnt a lot,” she says.

Saleem Shaik, having learnt Kuchipudi in the same dance school as Vijayalakshmi, joined the fusion team. “We have been rehearsing for three months during the evenings. I work as a recruiter and have night shifts, so evenings are the only time I could spare,” he says and adds, “Perhaps one in a lakh would take to dance in my community. Despite detractors, I learnt Kuchipudi.”

“I was confident that we could coordinate Kuchipudi with ballet. Kuchipudi has more hand movements, footwork and emphasis on expression than ballet. For the fusion, we have stayed clear of mythological themes that are common in Kuchipudi since we will be performing to a mixed audience,” says Vijayalakshmi.

Maia pitches in, “They would show me a few jathis and we would discuss how we can choreograph according to the music. The music is Indian classical instrumental with vocal interludes.”

The trio is counting down to the D-day and hoping to do more fusion performances.

“I don't know if that will be possible though. My tenure in India will come to an end in September,” says Maia.

SANGEETHA DEVI DUNDOO