

DIENSTAG, 16 December 2008

Eastern Dance Magic

Anuradha Chaturvedi enthralled audiences in the Old Chapel, Hassbergen

Hassbergen. On Saturday night in the old chapel at Hassbergen you could experience whirling dance forms with mysterious spiritual origins. The cultural centre had invited the Indian dancer Anuradha Chaturvedi, residing in the UK, to create an evening of Kathak dances. These are narrative dances that dramatically re-enact scenes from stories. Central to the stories is the praising of gods, the devotion to the gods, the joys and sorrows of earthly love, and nature characterised through plants and animals.

The dance forms originate from a unique mixture of Hinduism, influences of Islamic mysticism, and poetry by *Amir Chosrau Dehlawi* (13/14th Century) and *Surdas* (15/16th Century).

The dance is backed by an ensemble of a harp-like instrument, a recorder, a voice, and lively percussion instruments. Thoughtful, expressive movements are followed by whirling dance sequences, and the intensive drumming rhythms repeated again and again achieve a narcotic effect.

The Kathak dance is unique in that it integrates four different types of movements. The sweeping large dance movements are performed with the entire body. The feet, with dozens of bells wrapped around the ankles, function as percussion instruments. The arms and hands are used for symbolic expression, most of which is not understood by non-Indians. But there were a few expressions that were recognisable, for example when the dancer picked a flower and put it in her hair or when the rose pricked her finger. Another dance movement is the differentiated varied representation of moods through eye and facial expressions. The dance is highly complex and involves the integration of these different types of movements, each of which follow their own rhythms yet together form an atmospheric coherent whole.

The dancer's arrangements were perfect. Remembering all the different movement sequences is an amazing memory feat in itself. The dances require a high amount of physical stamina and endurance, as well as the sensitivity to express very subtle detail, and an infinitely warm stage presence/charisma. The dancer had all of these. The spiritual background to these dances is difficult to interpret and is not familiar to many cultures. It links ascetic, other-worldly elements with sensual, even erotic celebration of the world of senses.

The audience made up of over 70 people, filled the old chapel. The audience let itself be willingly caught up with the oriental magic of the evening, and celebrated the dancer with heartfelt applause and long ovation at the end. The event was like something out of 1001 Nights.

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