

# Nineteen counts

**DANCE** The second Keshav Smriti Festival, held in New Delhi recently, had a lot of dance, music and theatre to offer.

LEELA VENKATARAMAN

## Abhinaya skills

Wordless music starting with the ascending and descending scales of Mayamalavagowla saw Mohiniattam

dancer Manjula's Kala Asmi showing a neatly visualised Man/Nature conflict, the dancer very sure of what she wanted to convey in 19 minutes. Athana strains conveying arrogant man were fitting and the sparingly used percussion had impact. This disciple of Bharati Shivaji has appreciable abhinaya skills.

The other Mohiniattam projection of excerpts from Vijayalakshmi's choreography of Swan Lake set to Tchaikovsky's score, with simple but effectively costumed Santosh Nair doing Chhau movements enacting the hero's role, is not new. But the 19-minute slot so convincingly abridged while communicating the swan princess and prince interaction, was praiseworthy.

Based on lyrics of Rabindranath Tagore, Rishi Aurobindo and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, "Matrika", an impassioned address to the Motherland by Bimbavati, daughter of the late Manipuri Guru Bipin Singh, was another clearly devised work. Wrecked by her subjects full of power lust, the Mother is ever willing to forgive and guide wrongdoers.

Evoor Rajendran's crisp Kathakali Ravana was one of the highlights of the festival. Without the traditional vesham, the plain dhoti and simple get-up enabled the audience to see the facial expressions clearly and with chenda, maddalam and talam providing support, Ravana's abduction of Sita, (without harming her or violating her chastity), concluding with his subsequent moksha at the hands of Ram created a vivid portrayal of an anti-hero who though wrong, was also great. Releasing Arijeet's selection of poetry "Kiski hai ye Kavita", with excerpts read aloud, was a revelation of a hidden talent.

The concluding note was a Kathak recital by this year's Keshav Smriti awardee, Prerna Shrimali. Suffice it to say that this most natural performer's art has honesty, her dance eschewing all exhibitionistic show-off.

As for her layakari, its exactitude combines a flow with no hint of effort visible in the dancer. After a sensitive abhinaya interlude, going back to already proven nritta brilliance, breaks the mood.