



Dance: a dirty word ?

Posted On Nov 01, 2013

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1 comment

“Dance is the hidden language of the soul,” said legendary American choreographer and dancer Martha Graham. She was far from alone in considering dance integral to existence: down the ages, dance has been considered the most visceral form of human expression. But for years under the Khmer Rouge, dance, like so many other art forms, was denied in Cambodia. The country’s classical dancers, part of a rich tradition stretching back to the times of Angkor, were among the thousands of artisans and artists exiled – or worse – by Pol Pot’s ideological insanity. ‘Dance’ was a dirty word.

It takes time to recall a forgotten language, but the choreographers and dancers of Amrita Performing Arts are attempting to do that and more, creating a ‘Cambodian contemporary dance vocabulary’ through experimentation and international collaboration. On November 2, Amrita’s ‘Contemporary Dance Platform’ will bring audiences three works that propose a new lexicon of dance, one with a determinedly Cambodian accent.

Few people would think you could give much of a Cambodian twang to Johann Sebastian Bach, and even fewer would feel the urge to don their dancing shoes when they hear the German composer’s Cello Suites, which range from serious to downright lachrymose. But Chumvan Sodhichavy (also known as Belle) didn’t let that stop her setting a contemporary dance piece to the baroque classic. Belle, who personifies the new international face of Khmer dance with her background in the Kingdom’s classical forms and experience dancing in productions from New York to Madrid, chose

to interweave Western classical music with modern movement and autochthonous forms of expression.

It works. As the spotlights go up on Belle's *Bach Cello Suites*, three dancers begin to coil across the stage, combining the controlled attitudes of classical Khmer dance with the more fluid movements of the contemporary. The piece, which was originally devised with the help of the Institut Francais du Cambodge, is well travelled, having been performed in Phnom Penh, Taiwan, Thailand and Malaysia since its 2010 birth. In each location the dance changed slightly, influenced by what Belle and the dancers learned along the way.

Ferocious Passion and *Dream*, the two other dances showing during the evening, are equally international, combining Eastern and Western elements. *Ferocious Passion* was choreographed by Toronto-based Peter Chin, and *Dream* was created by Amrita choreographer Nam Narim in collaboration with a Taiwanese dance troupe in July of this year. If dance truly is the hidden language of the soul, then contemporary Cambodia is having a global conversation.

WHO: Amrita Performing Arts

WHAT: A Contemporary Dance Platform, an evening of Cambodian dance

WHEN: 7pm November 2

WHERE: Department of Performing Arts

WHY: Music may be the food of love, but dance nourishes the soul

One Comment



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