

## Review of events on 16MAY04.

Tamil Sangam Michigan (TSM) and Tamil Nadu Foundation (TNF) jointly sponsored a spectacular International Cultural Program on Sunday, 16MAY04 in Dondero High School, Royal Oak, MI. This show was given for the benefit of mentally handicapped and orphans in Tamil Nadu. Ms. Vani Prasad, Vice-President of Tamil Sangam announced that \$20,000 benefit was raised by the program.

Mr. Somalay Somasundaram of TNF functioned as the Master of Ceremonies for the Program. He introduced Dr. P. Chokkalingam, President of TNF and Dr. Athinarayanan, Regional Director of TNF. All welcomed the audience and initiated the Program.

Raagamala Music and Dance Theater is a group based in Minneapolis. It tastefully combined graceful Bharatha Naatyam movements and Japanese Taiko drum beats. A group of five women dancers, one male dancer, one male drummer performed five dance items. The opening item was a Shivasthuthi in the raagam Revathi and Adi thalam: "Bo Shambo". The solo dancer Aparna Ramaswamy brought out diverse facial expressions and dynamic and brisk dance steps. The river Ganga flowing out of Shiva's head as "Gangadhara" was exceptional. The background music with mridangam, swarajathi and sollukkattu embellished the dance movements very well. Then two more dancers joined in and all the three dancers performed in excellent unison to just the percussion beats slowly speeding up the pace. Well coordinated movements and complicated Bharathanaatyam steps performed by non-Indian dancers indicated the talent, discipline and dedication of the group members.

The second item was a Thillana (by Balamuralikrishna) in raagam Kundalavaraali and Adi thalam. The male dancer the four female dancers presented well coordinated intricate and fast stepwork and quick movements.

There was an intermission at this time when new Life Members of TNF were felicitated on stage. Dr. Athinarayanan spoke about the Objectives of TNF and appealed for donations for Alpha to Omega Foundation which helps a school for disabled children in Tamil Nadu. He also spoke about the upcoming TNF Convention in Chicago on 04JUL04.

Ms. Umaiyal Muthu, an eminent Tamil speaker felicitated Dr. P. Chokkalingam. She paid tribute to Dr. P. Chokkalingam. Then Dr. Chokkalingam presented a plaque to Mr. Hari Prasad, Mrs. Vani Prasad and Ms. Aarthi Prasad for their dedicated support for the day's program.

Ms. Becky Douglas has started a program "Rising Star Outreach" which helps people in a leprosy colony in Tamil Nadu. She gave an excellent speech describing how she started the program and how the program helps leprosy in Tamil Nadu. She presented an impressive and touching video show about the program.

The dance program resumed after an intermission. There were three more dance numbers in the second half. The second half started with solo Taiko drum beats. The eight beat patterns rendered were very expressive. This would have been a unique experience for this audience.

After a few minutes of drum beats in this pattern, the drummer switched to the triple beats when one male dancer and four female dancers all clad in a single piece colorful costume presented a dance number. This item started with all the dancers standing one behind the other in one line with hands in different position which depicted one God with many hands. The dancers presented well coordinated and rapid movements, all to suit the triple drum beats. The item ended with all the dancers in the same position, one behind the other with hands in different positions, just like the start.

The next item was based on quadruple beats with vocal scats in coordination with the drum beats. Male dancer and all the five female dancers presented unique steps to the slowly increasing speed of the Taiko drum beats and the vocal scats. Many different timing patterns and precise movements exhibited the efforts and commitment of the dancers. Overall, this Raagamala Dance program was a unique and special experience for the audience. We wished that there were more dance items from the Raagamala group and wished that there was more time for the entertainment show.

The program for the day concluded with the introduction of the artists including the comments from the artists indicating how each of them got interested in this art and Indian culture. Plaques were presented to the artists by TNF and TSM Presidents. Appreciation plaques were presented to Ms. Renuka Chalekode, Mr. Parasuram Chalekode, Ms. Nirmala Chokkalingam and Mr. Saravanan Chokkalingam. The program ended with a Thirukkural rendering from Mr. Somalay Somasundaram.  
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