

Digging deep

REVIEW: TAPATI CHOWDURIE

Shila Mehta, while offering a glimpse into the Kathak tradition also made a connection with the audience.



The most perfect example of how much more of Kathak Shila Mehta (of the Lucknow gharana) can give the audience to savour was to be seen in the piece she presented on a composition of the late Guru Prahlad Das, her first mentor. Even more gripping were the brief ginti pieces in fast rhythm, on “Sita Harana”, the abduction of Sita in Ramayana, and “Navarasa”, or the nine emotions.

From the moment Shila entered the performance area at Padatik Buildwel Theatre, rendering teen taal in flawless rhythm, she created an aesthetic atmosphere, offering a charming glimpse into the cultural tradition of Kathak she has honed from a galaxy of Kathak gurus — Pandit Birju Maharaj, Pandit Vijay Shankar and Pandit Chitresh Das, among others.

Rather than opening with a vandana, Shila chose to start with a thata, to create the mood of the audience as well as herself before plunging into the challenges of dance. Amad, which was to brief the audience about what is to follow, came soon after thata. Tisrajati showed the open-ended quality of the form and the dancer's ability to render it in a relaxed mood. Connection with the audience was established by the dancer and the percussionist challenging each other. These were moments which bound all three.

Shila offered a kaleidoscopic vision of the monsoon as seen through the eyes of a human being in different stages of her life, from the age of innocence till her old age. The ecstasy of monsoon permeated both the audience and the dancer.

Veteran singer Debasish Sarkar mesmerised the audience with his singing, which greatly helped in embellishing the dance on monsoon. Biswajeet Pal on percussion lived up to the occasion.
