

Akademi NAVODIT 2014 review published in Pulse



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The latest showcase of young talent, **Navodit**, presented by Akademi, features two UK born and trained dancers: **Parbati Chaudhury** (kathak) and **Natalie Rout** (odissi) – though strictly speaking Natalie is pursuing her training in India under Ratnikant and Sujata Mohapatra. As the evening progresses the British influence in the kathak choreography of Urja Thakore, versus the odissi items' heavy reliance on the creations of Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra become more evident to a classical dance trained eye.

The two artists make a splendid opening with a *dhrupad* rendition in praise of the majesty of Lord Shiva. Parbati, attired in a *ghara choli*, radiates a stately presence, her long limbs stretched to maximum effect, against the petite but powerfully etched sculptured postures of Natalie as Shiva Nataraj. The narrative of Sati's immolation and Shiva's anguish is played with great dramatic effect by both dancers, and makes a refreshing start to the more common vandanas. The programme notes credit the dancers themselves for the choreography, which is good touch to the evening.

The next two items are pure dance pieces set to melodic and rhythmic variations in each of the two styles. Parbati performs to a sitar bandish of Asit Desai. The movements from the kathak repertoire include beautiful arm patterns, footwork, leaps and pirouettes (*chakkars*), moving across the stage in a diagonal line. Underneath the smile, there's a hint of nervousness, a misstep and balance awry, but only momentarily. Parbati's command of technique is clearly visible with clarity of line, grace, and sharpness when needed.

Natalie performs the gem of the odissi repertoire, the *pallavi*, which weaves variations on the theme of the raga, *Hamsadwani*, in this case. Her *bhangis* (positions with bent knees) are deep, the movements smooth and fluid, the contractions of torso in perfect timing. As the speeds builds up, and the movements become more subtle and complex, Natalie keeps her serene expression and supreme ease. It is not for this dancer to express the highs and lows, the grunts and sweat of everyday life.

Parbati returns to dance an *abhinaya* piece based on a *ghazal* which urges the protagonist to face up to disappointment and come to terms with rejection. The young dancer expresses depth of emotion both in *angika abhinaya* (arms raised in supplication, deep back bends) and facial expressions. This is a new kind of *abhinaya*, not so heavily stylised.

Natalie performs a more formal *abhinaya* which evokes Durga for her beauty, her strength and ferocity in dispatching the demon Mahisasura. The range of emotions are more supernatural than human and we observe the flashing eyes and the angry pout of *rudra rasa*. Natalie's own beauty, recalling that of Durga, sets her up more as a goddess than a human. What we miss on the whole from this dancer is the range of human emotions, partly because of the selection of the items she performs.

The short but visually satisfying coming together of the two dancers in the last item set to lines from the *Rig Veda* brings a harmonious conclusion to the evening. The lights fade on a beautiful pose struck by the duo and the audience breaks into warm applause.

Akademi's platform serves as a useful first step for dancers who have achieved a certain standard to be able to carry an evening. However the road from this stage to a 'sustainable career in dance' as stated in Akademi's programme statement, is a long and arduous one. Pulse wishes Parbati and Natalie success in the journeys they take.