

In the classical mould

SOME OF the Indian exponents of music and dance living abroad, particularly in the United States, are trying to keep Indian music and dance alive through performances and teaching by setting up institutes for music and dance. Ramya Ramnarayan, a Bharatanatyam dancer trained under Swamimalai K. Rajaratnam and Kalanidhi Narayanan (in 'abhinaya'), is one such exponent who runs Nrithyanjali Institute of Dance in New Jersey. Confirmed with the Kalaimamani in Chennai last year, Ramya is an adjunct professor in the dance department of Rutgers University. She performed in the city recently along with her disciple Meghana Pendurthi.

The dance programme at Hotel Viceroy commenced with a prayer in 'raga' "Todi" in praise of the village deity Gnanasabesar sung by Swamimalai Suresh. Meghana performed three items, while her guru Ramya performed two. Meghana, who has been learning dance for the last seven years under Ramya, danced a "Pushpanjali" ('ragamalika' and 'talamalika') invoking Lord Ganesha and also paying obeisance to Saraswati and Krishna. Endowed with big eyes and agile body, Meghana's 'nritta' and 'nritya' is good although there is scope for improvement. She is slightly hesitant and a steadiness in the standing still posture is required. In the Annamacharya 'padam' "Muddugari Yashoda" ('raga' "Kurinji" and 'tala' "Adi") Meghana's 'abhinaya' stood out. Her 'thillana' in "Todi" was at a slow speed. Meghana seems promising and perfection can be achieved with more practice and learning in the years to come.

Ramya's seasoned dancing stems from her strong grounding in Bharatanatyam. Her 'varnam', the piece de resistance in a Bharatanatyam recital, was evocative of the Vazhuvoor tradition. Swati Tirunal's classic composition Bhavayami Raghuramam was adapted to the 'varnam' format. This one-hour piece demonstrated Ramya's prowess as a dancer. There was perfect synchronisation of



footwork and 'abhinaya' in this piece, which highlighted the significant points of the "Ramayana" — from Rama's birth to coronation. Lithe and light on the feet, Ramya danced at a fast pace too. The classical depiction (where the dancer got into the skin of the character), her fluid movements and her expressive eyes displaying different 'rasas' were a delight.

The second item, an Annamaya composition "Indarikki Abhayam", bringing to light the 'Dashavataram'

(the ten incarnations of Vishnu), was a rendering in the same vein as the 'varnam' thereby proving her calibre as a dancer. Swamimalai Suresh (from Chennai) provided fairly good vocal support (as well as nattuvangam). The other musicians included Hari Babu on the mridangam, Subalakshmi on the violin and Dattatreya on the flute.

On the whole the audience was treated to pure classical dance.

• R.R.