

DANCE REVIEW

Moving through history with grace

By Lewis Segal
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Dancers from Cambodia, Malaysia and Indonesia attempted to reconcile the realities of the present with the spirituality and formal splendor of ancient classical idioms in a fascinating program at UCLA's Gloya Kaufman Dance Theater on Friday.

Titled "Can You Hear Me? Asian Dance Voices," the event showcased three artists brought to UCLA for the winter quarter under a new arts management fellowship program.

In solos evoking royal Khmer culture, Chey Chankethya moved in tiny increments from one sculptural stance to another with a sense of perfect serenity. The traditional "Brahma Dance" featured prayerful poses — hands pressed together, sometimes high overhead, with fingers curling backward — along with the slow unfolding of iconic positions.

Her "Neri Rattanak Dance" took a few baby steps toward modernity in depicting a goddess leaving the walls of an Angkor temple to briefly link her archetypal femininity with the image of contemporary Cambodian women. Chankethya's mastery of a fabled technique again proved exemplary, especially her limbs drifting weightlessly as if she were underwater.

Malaysian dancer-choreographer Umesh Shetty performed solos drawn from the dance languages of southern and eastern India.

In his "Alarippu," he traced a path from the percussive vigor of antique *bharata natyam* conventions to stretchy floor work from Western modern dance and even passages of engulfing rock 'n' roll freedom — before a triumphant return to heritage.

This was a spectacular showpiece, but it paled beside Shetty's performance of "Pallavi in Raag Kalyan," a traditional *odissi* dance-cadenza that called from him great interpretive flair and technical precision.

And moreover, it displayed his brilliant mastery of torso movement, a mesmerizing skill that "Alarippu" omitted in its emphasis on legwork and that a whole generation of American modern dancers seems to be lacking.

If Chankethya embodied delicate femininity and Shetty heroic masculinity, Indonesian dancer-choreographer Baghawan Ciptoning dared to present himself as androgynous at the beginning of his solo dance-drama "Moon Bridge."

This dance of transformations initially found him imprisoned in a diagonal shaft of light, painfully collapsing and rising again. Impulsive runs, hop-kicks and passages of singing led to his exit and reappearance wearing formal robes and carrying large, gilded shadow puppets — his partners in a particularly poignant sequence.

At the conclusion of "Moon Bridge," he wore a white mask — another reference to traditional Javanese performing arts — and exploited slow, elegant shifts of alignment informed by the refined court styles of his homeland.

Beyond the fine execution on display, the Friday program offered a meditation on an individual's relationship to history. Chankethya seemed happy to define herself in terms of the past, while Shetty derived both inspiration and a source of growth from it.

Ciptoning, however, ended up obliterated by it, still in pain but a pain expressed in a stylized, depersonalized manner that linked him to an endless legacy of suffering.

Material taken from <http://www.calendarlive.com/stage/segal/cl-et-asians23jan23,2,1368203.story>