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 Published weekly from Houston, TX

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Mughal-E-Azam Dance-Drama Enthralls Houstonians

By Praveena Lakshmanan
 Last updated: Feb 28, 2009



HOUSTON: On February 15, Houstonians present at the Cullen Performance Hall at University of Houston were enthralled by the wonderful musical dance drama performed by the students of Shri Natraj School of Dance. Kusum Sharma, the dance director at the school, who choreographed the show, with her husband Vipin Sharma, also performed at this dance show.

This was a fundraiser event benefiting the Students for the Advancement of International Social Work (SAISW). SAISW promotes the field of international social work at the UH Graduate College of Social

Work, by highlighting human rights and social justice issues, engaging students in active pursuit of global justice and increasing international social work awareness.

The musical dance drama "Mughal- E-Azam" was based on the most romantic bollywood drama of all times." Ever since, I was a child I loved the movie Mughal- E-Azam. Madhu Bala's (actress), daring expressions and dance in the movie was a great inspiration to me." says Kusum Sharma.

I had decided to do a dance drama on this, when the movie rereleased a couple of years back. We have already performed this dance play last year. On public demand we decided to do this again, adds Sharma. The guest of honor were Yasuhiko Saitoh, Executive General Director - Shinetsu and Akemi Saitoh, Chairperson, Japan Business Association of Houston Women Committee 2009.

Netha Nakano, one of the many audience at the show had the following to share: "I was given the wonderful opportunity as a mere stage hand to "Mughal-e-Azam". I had only been assisting one act which consisted of girls ranging from about 4 to 7 years of age. I literally had no idea what I was in for. Backstage I witnessed a beautiful array of costumes and performers. Please keep in mind I had never before heard of this epic love story, and also that this is also my first time seeing the whole show in it's semi-entirety (I was back stage). I do not speak Hindi, but I don't think that matters, because love is a universal language.

As soon as I saw Anarkali, played by Kusum Sharma, and Salim, played by her husband, Vipin Sharma, I was captivated. They made me forget where I was, they took me to some other era in a beautiful place.

As soon as I saw Ms. Sharma, not only grace the stage with her presence, but then lock eyes with her beloved, I knew that this could not be an ordinary production. Being so close to the performance, I did get to see the sincerity in Anarkali's eyes. They were that of someone who was truly I love.

Yes I am a definite romanticist, because it brought me to tears. It was the interaction of these two, that made me

research this epic tale, I was truly impressed and found that this school's performance successfully illustrated this tale of two lovers. The young stars had such stage presence. The performers young and old put their heart and soul into this valentine-themed event. The students' expressions, costumes and beautiful dance steps were just amazing.

I was surprised to know that some of her students were doctors, the person who played the role of King Akbar is a very successful accountant, the emcee is a professor from the Rice University and the cop (Daroga) is also a doctor. I know for a fact that the audience and I felt the love, the love for the dancing, the performance, the energy and the timeless love story. Stage hand or not, I will definitely be looking forward to another performance from the Shri Natraj School of Dance." Around 70 students from different age groups were part of this show. Students as young as 3 years of age performed gracefully with students as old as 65 years. "It was difficult to bring everyone together for our rehearsals, but support from each and everyone in the team made it much easier", says Sharma. The school plans to host their next program before the end of this school year. Kusum Sharma has been directing dance performances and shows over 15 years. She gives all credit for success of her school to Dr. Daisaku Ikeda and SGI for giving her confidence to pursue her dream and passion.

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