

Ram Leela 2012: "The Journey of Lord Rama" by IACHF Foundation

HOUSTON: Houstonians are in for a double treat this year as preparations are in full swing for another Ram Leela to be performed on Saturday, November 3 at the University of Houston's Cullen Performance Hall from 6 to 9pm.

The victory of good over evil is a universal truth and one of the best depictions of this truth can be found in Sage Valmiki's Ramayana. This is not just the story of Lord Rama's rescue of Sita from the clutches of the demon king Ravana but is a telling saga of filial devotion, courage, loyalty and sacrifice. Bringing this story to life for Houstonians and devotees of Lord Rama is Kusum Sharma's Shri Natraj School of Dance and the Indian American Culture & Heritage Foundation (IACHF).

Kusum Sharma has several notable achievements to her credit and needs no introduction. As Director of the Shri Natraj School of Dance, she is an acclaimed dancer and teacher and has also presented many cultural and dance shows for the past 15 years. She has also been the creative muse of the Ram Leela production since 2005 which gradually evolved into a Broadway-style theatrical play when it was staged in 2010. An overwhelming response from the community encouraged Kusum Sharma to invest the show with several special effects such as the "Flying Hanuman" and pyro displays in the 2011 production.

Joining hands this year with Kusum Sharma to produce the Ram Leela is IACHF, a nonprofit organization co-founded by Sachin Sharma, Sukhi Kohli and Vipin Sharma. The aim of this organiza-



tion is to promote India's rich cultural heritage and keep it alive and interesting for the younger generation. The complete involvement and participation of these three in the previous two Ram Leela's has given these directors a wealth of

experience on stage as well as behind the scenes in understanding the complexities of the script and its perfect execution.

Taking their cues from Kusum Sharma is a cast of over a 100 volunteers. Most of the main characters remain unchanged from the last two years, with the role of Sita being portrayed by Kusum Sharma herself, Vipin Sharma as Shri Ram, Sachin Sharma as Lakshman and Arun Kumar as the arrogant Ravana. The directors, the cast, and behind the scenes staff of Arun



Kumar, Dhaval Mistry and Ketan Mistry of Mandap Creations are working tirelessly to create dazzling props. Rehearsals are feverishly underway at the Shri Radha Krishna temple every weekend.

So what's new in this year's enactment of the Ram Leela? The directors say that apart from the "Flying Hanuman" and the pyro display, there will be other awe inspiring dramatics that will thrill and entertain the audience. Masala Radio host Sunil Thakkar will emcee the program with his usual lively commentary and witty humor.

Putting together a show of this magnitude is no small task but supporting it whole heartedly as Grand Sponsors are several community stalwarts, such as Jugal Malani, Tilak Agarwal and Subhash Gupta, organizations like the Hindus of Greater Houston, Shri Radha Krishna Temple and an anonymous sponsor.

The tickets are priced at \$10, \$20, \$30 and \$50 and include a box dinner, courtesy of Madras Pavilion. A 10% discount is also being offered if the tickets are purchased

this month. Tickets are available at Parivar Grocers on Hillcroft; Bombay Grocers in Katy; Raj Grocers in Clearlake; Alings Hakka Chinese in Sugarland and Himalayan Grocers in northwest Houston

For more information, visit www.shrinatraj.com or www.iachf.org.

CG P. Harish's Message on the occasion of Ganesh Chaturthi

On the joyous occasion of Vinayaka Chaturthi, I offer my heartiest greetings and good wishes to the Indian Community of Texas and eight other states of USA served by the Consulate General of India, Houston.

Ganesh Chaturthi marks the celebration of birthday of Lord Ganesha, who is widely worshipped as the God of wisdom, prosperity and good fortune and traditionally invoked for the auspicious beginning of any new venture.

May the festival usher in joy, peace and prosperity to all.

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