



## VIRAJA & SHYAMJITH KIRAN

### TRAINING

Viraja and Shyamjith Kiran are a dancer duo trained in the Indian classical dance style of Bharatanatyam. Together, they completed their post-graduation at Kalakshetra Foundation, Chennai in 2009, excelling in their diploma and post-diploma courses. Viraja has been the Best Outgoing Student for the academic year 2003-07 and also received the highest in performance and theory certificates from Kalakshetra. Shyamjith additionally holds a diploma in Bharatanatyam from Guru V.P. Dhananjayan's institute Bhaskara, where he trained prior to joining Kalakshetra.

Being part of both Bharatanatyam and Kathakali performances of the Kalakshetra repertory company, they have taken up major roles in pioneering works of the legendary Smt. Rukmini Devi, Leela Samson, Sadanam Balakrishnan and Sheejith Krishna. They toured extensively while with the company and also taught part-time at their alma mater. Shyam has been a former dance instructor at the Singapore Indian Fine Arts Society and has played a significant role in choreographing their programs between 2010-13.

Viraja and Shyamjith are empaneled artists with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and graded artists with Doordarshan. They are undergoing training in Kathakali under Sadanam Balakrishnan. They both have also been trained in the martial art form of Kalaripayattu and have completed their Yoga teachers' training certification at Yoga Vidya Gurukul in Trimbak (Nashik). Their involvement in teaching dance to less privileged children as a part of a project of the Rotary Foundation and in arts outreach projects with LEAP Foundation brought them an opportunity to engage with the community.

Viraja and Shyamjith work as independent practitioners, performers, choreographers and teachers in the style of Bharatanatyam.

### PERFORMANCE

Viraja and Shyamjith Kiran have had the honour of sharing their art at diverse platforms across the globe. Their formative years of training and performing with the Kalakshetra repertory have played a major part in developing their sensitivity, aesthetic and understanding of details with depth. Shyam has played lead characters like Rama (Sita Swayamvaram) and Viraja that of Sita (Choodamani Pradanam) in Rukmini Devi's genius dance drama choreographies. They have both been part of Madhavi Mudgal's "Saptakam" and also many of Sheejith Krishna's choreographic works like Masquerade, Pravaha and so on. Viraja and Shyam have been part of "Charishnu" conceptualised by Leela Samson, Viraja has been part of "Spanda" and Shyam played the lead role of Krishna in Leela Samson's "Dasaru Kanda Krishna". Viraja has also taken up various characters like Psyche (Greek mythology adapted in Kathakali), Draupadi (Duryodhana Vadham), Sudeshna (Keechaka Vadham), Radha (Radha Madhavam) and more, in dance dramas along with her Kathakali guru Sadanam Balakrishnan. Every small and big performance has taught them equally and added immensely to their knowledge and experience.

Viraja and Shyam commenced their duet dancing journey in 2011 with their production "Pareekshana" and have since traveled widely with various independent duet and group works. Some of the venues they have performed at include Esplanade theatre (Singapore), Erasing Borders and Drive East (New York City), Indian High Commission (Bhutan), Eisemann Centre (Dallas), USF (Tampa), The Hipp (Gainesville), Cubberly Theatre (Palo Alto), Purdue University, UB (Buffalo), Center Mandapa (Paris), Nehru Center (London), Varnam Festival (Germany), Dharani (Kochi), Music Academy (Chennai) and many more. Their work has been featured and reviewed by leading publications like The New York Times, Financial Times (NYC), Oregon Arts Watch, India Post, The Hindu, The Indian Express, Times of India, Sakal Times and more.

### REVIEWS

**\* "Staccato, rectilinear and attuned to godhead, Bharatanatyam seems custom-made for such cosmic geometric concerns, as does Viraja's stateliness and loving amplitude of gesture. Indeed, whenever the Kirans' gestures overlapped, the air took on a special charge."**

- Apollinaire Scherr, Financial Times NYC, 16 August 2017 (Performance for the Erasing Borders indoor festival curated by the Indo American Arts Council)

**\* "Reflecting on their Kalakshetra training, Viraja noted that it's rewarding now as professional dancers to be asked if they are from Kalakshetra, based on their performance qualities alone. That reputation seeps through Viraja and Shyamjith's work as creators and performers, further validating the level of training that informs their movements."**

- Elizabeth Whelan, Oregon Arts Watch, JULY 25, 2019 (Preview of a performance for New Expressive Works, Portland, OR)

**\* "Viraja and Shyamjith Kiran, dancing the Bharatanatyam genre of their native Tamil Nadu, in south eastern India, made its rhythms and gestures vivid on both evenings. Facing across the harbor, they opened their arms with sculptural firmness toward the Statue of Liberty: a perfect Independence Day moment for us all."**

- By Alastair Macaulay, The New York Times, 16 Aug 2017 (Performance for the Erasing Borders outdoor festival, New York City curated by the Indo American Arts Council and co-presented by Battery Dance)

**\* "The crispness and clarity of choreography was extraordinary, especially in the swaras and jathis. Shyamjith's vigour was in stark contrast to the fluid movements of Viraja, who imbibed the essence of music into her nritya. So synchronized were the two dancers that it was a marvel to view the lucidity and precision in their movements."**

- Harish Bal, The Hindu, July 2012  
(Performance organised by the Dharani Society, Kochi)

**\* "And yet these modern touches, and the contemporary theme stay true the essence of dance and the mystery of art: how much can be communicated through music and motion and how sublime that message can be."**

- Cadence Mandybura, October 2009, The New Indian Express (Performance of Mudivil Oru Aarambam hosted by Alliance Française, Chennai)

**\* "The audience was enriched by their dynamic performance and was held spellbound. The evening gave samples of their skills in all aspects of Bharatanatyam. The divine music compositions were enhanced by the graceful and precise movements of the dancing couple."**

- Ashwin Patel, India Post, September 2017  
(Performance hosted by Abinaya, St. Louis)

## WORK

### REKHA

Rekha seeks to bridge the abstract and the narrative while finding new possibilities within the context of Bharatanatyam. With ancient Sanskrit verses, parallels are drawn between the philosophy behind the three sacred lines on Shiva's forehead and the underlying energy and dynamics of the lines created by the dancers' bodies. A - U - M the three primordial sounds merging together as Aum became the musical element we engaged with.

### EERAM

Eeram portrays stories of women from different backgrounds and revisits verses of the revolutionary Tamil poet - Bharathiyar, with fresh perspectives. It explores the power of education in discovering oneself, opening doors to new worlds and respecting the choices that women make in defining themselves. It melds classical and contemporary music, folk tunes and a string orchestra, with movement, spoken word and theatrical elements in an organic form that reflects the diversity in womanhood.

### SAMAAGATI

In April-May 2018 Viraja and Shyamjith had the honour of leading a group of eight dancers commissioned by the Ministry of Culture to represent the country in Bhutan. Samaagati, is an amalgamation of the four southern classical Indian dance styles namely- Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Kathakali and Mohiniattam. This effort was a part of ceremonies to commemorate fifty years of India and Bhutan's diplomatic ties.

### PAREEKSHANA

Pareekshana, our maiden duet production, involves five separate pieces set in the format of a margam - a traditional bharatanatyam repertoire. They were mostly composed by contemporary artists and chosen with an intent to experiment with the musical aspect and choreography. The melodies of the compositions opened possibilities to finding parallels and counterpoints in western classical music. A string orchestra added a rich and subtle layer to the musical experience, bringing in a refreshing tone.

### MUDIVIL ORU AARAMBAM

A tamil dance theater production that revolves around the challenges that artists face as they balance passion for their art with the practicalities of the world they live in.

With utopian expectations of their future artistic journeys, three friends with different circumstances, ideals and goals step into the world as dancers. They soon discover that the qualities of the world do not match the qualities of the art they practice. As they chase their ambitions, their experiences of reality shatter their dreams.

Will their ideals survive? Will their dreams overcome the obstacles they face? Will they hold on to their vision of the art? When society does not understand the purpose of art, where does that leave the artist?

### AHAM

The Human Self is inexplicably complex, beautifully layered and exquisitely conflicted. Mythical characters are often portrayed in the context of a story where the narrative takes more prominence over them as individuals. Aham explores the intensely human emotional and circumstantial complexities in the characters of Kunti as Karna's mother, Ravana as a devotee of Shiva and Shakuni's revenge and strategies.

### SVAM

A solo Bharatanatyam piece choreographed for a dancer who wanted to explore her personal and philosophical relationship with a sacred and spiritual art form. Each dancer's story is intrinsically personal and it is said that one can find what one seeks deep within, in their relationship with dance. Perfection, worship, love, surrender and peace - lived, experienced and expressed.

## CONTACT

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