

Rukmini
Vijayakumar

Lakshmi Sriraman and Aniruddhan Vasudevan

PHOTOGRAPHS: SHWETHA PANDIT



Mandakini Trivedi

Manhattan witnesses the splendor of Indian dance

ARTHUR J PAIS

Dancer, actress and yoga instructor Rukmini Vijayakumar got yet another opportunity to demonstrate her mastery at the Erasing Borders Festival of Indian Dance open-air performance in New York, August 17. It was held as part of the Battery Dance Company's annual Downtown Dance Festival and was presented by the Indo-American Arts Council.

'The slender, supple Vijayakumar has a stirringly beautiful face, with burning eyes that repeatedly catch the observer's breath; and she makes those eyes part of the fabric of the dance,' *The New York Times* wrote about Vijayakumar, the first Indian to grad-

uate with a dance degree from the Boston Conservatory. She is also a certified Pilates instructor, studied human anatomy and exercise physiology at the Boston University, and is pursuing a fitness instruction certification at the University of California Los Angeles.

At Erasing Borders, she presented two excerpts — one from her Bharata Natyam work *Shankarabharnam* that describes Lord Shiva, and the other from her contemporary site-specific work *Kanhaa*, which explores Radha's yearning for her lover, Lord Krishna.

The IAAC launched the Erasing Borders Festival of Indian Dance in 2008 to promote Indian dance in New York City.

'It is a premier event,' said Aroon Shivdasani, president and executive director, IAAC, 'that brings to New York Indian and India-inspired dance in an array of forms, old and new. Concerts feature performances traditional and experimental, classical and post-modern, folk and popular.'

Prachi Dalal is the curator for the event.

The IAAC makes an extra effort to feature artists in America and Canada. Invited this year was Lexington, Kentucky-based Lakshmi Sriraman, who collaborates with Aniruddhan Vasudevan from Chennai, to present two excerpts from their larger work *And She Said...* It is based on women's poetry on love and war.

Vasudevan is also an activist, mainly in

organizing support and advocacy services for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Sriraman runs the Shree School of Dance in Lexington.

Also featured was the Cary, North Carolina-based Natya Academy. Sanjib Bhattacharya received much praise for his *Pung Cholom* (the ritual dance with the Manipuri drum called Pung). Joining him were Natya Academy faculty Rinku Bhattacharya Das who specializes in Manipuri and Kathak dance, Kriti Rakesh Bhatia, Maitri Acharya, Bethanie Mickles, Prathima Chintala and Priyanka Pradhan.

The Financial Times singled out Mandakini Trivedi who opened the August 17 performance with a solo in the Mohiniattam style.

The festival drew not only curious Americans but Indians working in the Wall Street area.

An American on her lunch break felt guilty that she had exceeded her lunch break. "But I was helpless," she said, chuckling. "I thought I would stop by for a few minutes, but I just could not resist the performances. I was blown away. Can one think of a more glorious lunch break?"



Dancers from Natya Academy perform