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Report

'Queen of Jhansi' at Chicago

- Niteen Joshi

e-mail: nj21@comcast.net

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On June 3, 2005 more than 400 people had the privilege of watching the story of the 18th century great Indian freedom fighter, the Queen of Jhansi, at Prairie Center for the Arts, Schaumburg. Gauri Jog, who is running her Kathak Dance School in Chicago area for the past four years, displayed great professionalism by starting the program right on time. Things got better from there and the program threw up some unexpected talent to the delight of all present. There were more than 40 dancers in the age group of four to fifty and they performed Kathak, Bharatanatyam, Ballet, and folk dances of Maharashtra.



The program began with Ganesh Vandana, a traditional prayer to Lord Ganesh who is a prime Hindu deity and God of Knowledge. Five girls including Gauri Jog formed various poses of Lord Ganesh. In the first part of the program, budding artists who are in various stages of learning Kathak, presented items to show their achievements, including a tarana and a thumri.

The main part of the program described the childhood of the Rani of Jhansi. The narrator and projected images on the main screen helped people to understand the story of Jhansi and get involved in the dance sequences. These images also acted as a great backdrop and introduced each choreographic segment, with a brief historical and geographical reference.

The gifted Isha Jog who performed as the small Jhansi and Anuya Wagh who performed as the British, invoked applause from the audience. The star of the night was Gauri Jog, who performed as the queen of Jhansi. Unlike other teachers who seldom perform on stage, Gauri is very much a performing guru,

displaying her talent for all to see. The program was characterized by good choreography, fast rhythmic footwork, great music selection, apt facial expressions and refined hand gestures or mudras, which described the story and important events in the life of the queen.

The confrontation between the British and the queen in the final battle was depicted as a Jugalbandi in Bharatanatyam and Kathak styles between Anuya and Gauri. Gauri wore exotic costumes and looked every inch like a queen. The others dancers who were also beautifully clad, made a colorful spectacle on stage.

Another attraction of the program was the traditional folk dances of Maharashtra, performed by a group of girls. The program ended with Vande Mataram. Gauri Jog has been performing Kathak for the past 30 years. She obtained her training in India from guru Madan Pande of Nagpur and Madurita Sarang of Mumbai.

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