



State Dance Ensemble of Sri Lanka

THE STATE DANCE ENSEMBLE OF SRI LANKA
OF
THE MINISTRY OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS
PRESENTS

ASI DISI MIHIRA

A programme of traditional Dances of Sri Lanka
directed, choreographed and music composed
by

W.B. MAKULLOLUWA
Director Research & Creative Art.



PROGRAMME NOTES

1. **MAGUL BERA (CEREMONIAL DRUMS)**
This is drum music traditionally played at all auspicious occasions to usher in prosperity.
2. **GOYAM KAPEEME NATUMA (HARVEST)**
The village damsels along with their men folk wind their way to the fields to reap the golden paddy. Arriving in the fields the damsels reap the paddy with their curved sickles, singing and dancing to the rhythm of the drum. The men relax, enjoying the beauty of the lithesome movements of the maidens. The women go out to fetch food and drink while the men harvest paddy, spinning their sickles dexterously round their forefingers. The women carry the paddy to the threshing ground and after the seeds have been removed from the stalks the dried paddy is winnowed by the maids with their winnowing fans called "kulla". This is a stage version of a traditional rural folk dance in which everyone would join in.
3. **DEVOL (RITUALISTIC DANCE)**
Devol is a curing ritual prevalent in the southern coastal belt of Sri Lanka. The dance is an episode from this ritual, interpreting the myth of the landing of a god with his followers on Sri Lankan shores.
4. **BALI (CURING RITUAL)**
Bali is a curative folk ritual performed to invoke the blessings of functional deities and other supernatural beings. There are thirty-five varieties of this ritual which emphasises songs and chants. The item in this programme is excerpted from one of them.
5. **GAJAGA VANNAMA (THE ELEPHANT'S GAIT)**
A secular dance form known as Vannam is found in the Kandyan dancing repertoire. Vannama is a descriptive form of dance and Gajaga is one of eighteen such forms. Unlike similar dances in most traditions, the topics of vannams are not depicted in mime or caricature, nor are representative costumes worn by the dancer. The subject matter of each Vannama is expressed in a verse which is sung to an elusive rhythm and portrayed in subtle but characteristic dance movements. Gajaga depicts the majestic tread of the elephant.
6. **YUWALA BERA (DUET FOR DRUMS)**
Drum music in Sri Lanka is a highly sophisticated art. The language of the art of drum playing is based on mnemonic phrases peculiar to each genre of drum. In this item are depicted the intricate rhythms of two varieties of drums - the Geta Bera and Yak Bera. The item is presented in a dramatic manner.
OR
BHARATA NATYAM (TILANA)
Thilan is a pure dance performed to intricate rhythms with subtle movements and graceful poses.
7. **VES NATUMA (VES DANCE)**
Kandyan Dance is said to have its origin in the ancient fertility ritual known as Kohomba Kankariya, and this is an excerpt from that ritual. The term Ves refers to the complete array of the paraphernalia, particularly the spectacular head gear worn by the dancer.
8. **NAGAKANYA (DANCE OF THE COBRA-MAIDENS)**
In this item three danseuses in traditional masks play the role of Cobra-Maidens. The episode depicts how a Snake Charmer captures the Cobras and trains them to dance.
9. **RABAN**
Raban is a variety of hand drum much like the tamborine. The dancer spins two rabans on his forefingers and whirls eight of them on spikes while dancing to the rhythm of the drum.
10. **AN INTERPRETATION OF THE MUDALI KOLAMA**
Kolam is a variety of folk-play. The majority of the episodes in this variety of play are social satires. This episode is one such whose satire is directed to the human failings of Mudali, a high government official in feudal society.
It all begins with Lenchina setting upon another woman who makes love to her husband. The ensuing quarrel of the two brings the village Headman, a subordinate officer of the Mudali to the scene. He is infatuated with the beautiful Lenchina.

save his wife from the Headman's advances, Mudali is brought who in turn falls victim to Lenchina's beauty. Disposing of the rest Mudali makes amorous advances to Lenchina. The cunning Lenchina, encouraging him initially leaves him in the lurch. The comic character, Salu Paliya, an old man with a grinning mouth and flowing beard has been witness to the whole episode and his mockery and teasing of the Mudali represents the laughter and village irony of the folk audience.

11. **KAVADI (RELIGIOUS DANCE)**

The dance Kavadi is associated with religious performances in honour of the deity, Skandha. The dance derives its name from the arch like equipment with which it is performed.

I N T E R V A L

12. **THALAM (CYMBAL DANCE)**

Six danseuses dance to the rhythm of the drum while playing intricate rhythms with small brass-cymbals.

OR

Salu Natuma or the dance of the Shawl is an adaptation from the sequence called Saluvadeema of the ritual Kohomba Kankariya. In the traditional dance the propitiator fans the deity with a piece of white cloth in a fascinating dance sequence.

13. **PANTHERU (BRASS RINGS)**

The armoury of the Sinhalese Monarchs included a weapon by the name of Para Valalla, a ring-shaped missile which, when hurled at the enemy, his head and returns to the thrower, much like a boomerang. The pantheruwa, a brass ring with jingling little brass plates attached to it at regular intervals, is said to have its origin in the above mentioned weapon. The dance is performed with this ring in hand - hence its name.

14. **NAGA-GURULU RAKSHA NATUMA (THE DANCE OF THE MYTHICAL SERPENT.)**

KING (NAGA) AND THE BIRD KING (GURULA)

Three maidens go to the village pond for their bath. They are noticed by two Nagas, mythical serpent kings who are guardians of lakes and ponds. Overcome with lust, the serpents try to capture the maids and are almost successful, but just as the maids are about to fall into a hypnotic trance, the traditional enemy of the serpent, the Gurula (a mythical bird king), swoops down on the serpents. In the ensuing fight, the Nagas are killed and carried away by the bird while the maidens make their escape.

15. **SAVULA NATUMA (DANCE OF THE ROOSTER)**

This is an adaptation based on the traditional Savula Vannama. It depicts a rooster, and the duet includes the female of the species.

16. **LEE-KELI SAVARAN NATUMA (STICK DANCE)**

The popular folk dance known as Lee-Keli (stick dance) in the course of performance gets transformed into Savaram, the stick dance in which coloured tassels are fixed to the two ends of each stick.

17. **GINI SISILA (TAMING THE FIRE)**

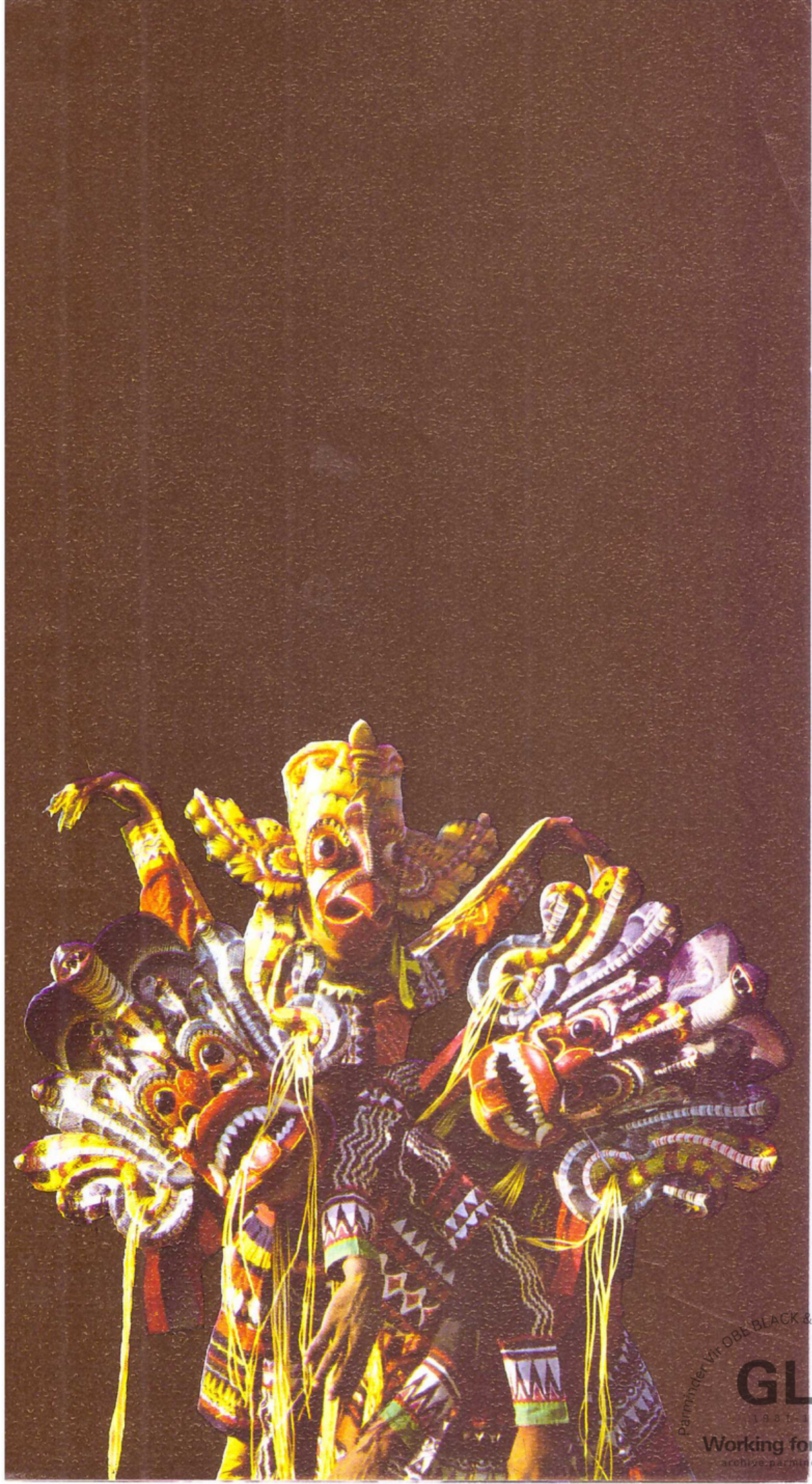
This dance is a form of exorcism in which the exorcist inserts flaming torches into his mouth and rubs them against his bare body while dancing to the rhythm of the drum.

18. **TE-WATTA (THE TEA ESTATE)**

The nimble fingers of the young ladies pluck the tender tea leaves while the male workers are engaged in weeding and pruning. At the end of the day they rejoice in a community dance.

19. **ALUTH-AVURDDU UTSAWAYA (NEW YEAR FESTIVAL)**

The New Year Celebrations take place in Mid-April in Sri Lanka. The rural folk are engaged in various activities and revelry associated with the season. Their exuberance climaxes in a drum orchestra using a varied range of drums commonly used in Sri Lanka.



DIRECTOR:

W.B. MAKULLOLUWA

Makulloluwa, one of the leading artists in the field of dancing and choreography widely recognized in Sri Lanka for the finesse and freshness of his theatrical productions is well known for his distinguished contribution to his country's traditional culture. Prior to his current position as Director of Research and Creative Arts, he served as Director of Aesthetic Education under the Ministry of Education. He was responsible for establishing a pedagogical training college for art, music and dancing in Kandy. A reputed musician and musicologist, he has produced several widely appreciated dance dramas, including a full-length opera. He has also published several books on Sinhala dancing and music. One of these, the Traditional Music of Sri Lanka, received the National Literature Award. The music of this production is also composed by Makulloluwa.

ARTISTES

1. Miss. W.G.M. Kusal Nayanie
Wijesooriya.
2. Miss. A.K.U. Perera
3. Miss. W. Ayuwathie
4. Miss. L.C.P. Jayasooriya
5. Miss. M.K.C. Indraseelie
6. Miss. D.W.T. Gunatunge
7. Miss. K.G.L. Perera
8. Mr. S.R.H.B. Senanayake
9. Mr. T.M.P.B. Tennakoon
10. Mr. Y.G. Premadasa
11. Mr. B.Y.J. Thilakasiri
12. Mr. Y.G. Gunasena
13. Mr. U.D. Rodrigo
14. Mr. K.W. Fernando
15. Mr. T.Y. Balasooriya
16. Mr. B.G. Siriya
17. Mr. W. Sudda
18. Mr. J. Seneviratna
19. Mr. M.H. Sumanadasa

Make-up: Indira Makulloluwa

Costumes: Somabandu & Malathi
Vidyapathi.

Manager: J. Weerakoon

DANCE & MUSIC OF SRI LANKA

Wishes can come to life, leap forward and reach ecstatic heights through the mystical rites of Sri Lanka's dances. The inextricably related art of dancing and drumming are the people's expression of folk beliefs, later assimilated into Buddhist rituals after the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka. Generations of dancer families have served as links over time, passing on the dance and musical tradition for over a thousand years.

The dances of Sri Lanka can be divided into four categories, primarily defined by the geographical areas where they originated. Kandyan dances are the most well-known of the traditional dances. They survived in the central hill country around Kandy, the seat of Government of the last King of Sri Lanka. Ruhunu dances come from the coastal belt of the Southern and Western provinces. The Sabaragamuwa dances are found in the midland districts between the hills and the lowcountry, and fourthly the dances of the North bearing the influence of the great classical dance traditions of the Indian sub-continent - Bharata Natyam and Kathakali in particular.

The entire repertoire of Kandyan dancing except for a few secular dances can be witnessed in the occult ritual of the Kohomba Kankariya, the most elaborate and spectacular of cults propitiating the deities, believed to date from the 4th century B.C.. The ceremony was, according to legend, performed to break a curse heaped upon the first king of Sri Lanka, Vijaya. The dances invoke the patronage of the demon-god, Kohomba and are performed generally in times of adversity. The Ves dance owes its origin to this ritual and is remarkable for its glittering costumery and acrobatic finishes.

Ruhun dances are culled from the exorcist rituals usually featuring the use of a variety of masks. In exorcist performances called Sanni held to cure different maladies masks are used. There are 18 such Sannis corresponding to various ailments, each represented by a typical mask. The most spectacular Cobra and Bird mask-dances occur in the Kolam Dance tradition.

It is strange how a nation which can justifiably look back with pride on their dance forms of artistic excellence, has overlooked the need for a national musical idiom. The only music which can be referred to as truly indigenous music of Sri Lanka is confined to the chants, songs and drum music associated with the rituals, secular dances and folk plays as Kolam and Kavi-Nadagam. Apart from these, Sri Lanka has a vast store-house of folk songs. The only melody producing musical instruments are two wind-instruments, the Horanewa a kind of oboe and the bamboo-flute.

Sinhala literary works and some of the chronicles like Mahawansa and Thupavansa refer to a classification of musical instruments, Pancha Turya Nada or five varieties of sound, namely Atata, Vitata, Vitatata Ghana and Susira. Scholars have given different interpretations to Pancha Thurya Nada. The following holds good when the array of traditional musical instruments are taken into consideration.

Atata:	Drums played only with hands - e.g. Geta Bera and Yak Bera.
Vitata:	Drums played with beaters - e.g. Tammettam.
Vitatata:	Drums played with hand and beater - e.g. Daula.
Ghan:	Metallophonic instruments - e.g. Cymbals and Thali.
Susira:	Wind instruments - e.g. Hoaranewa and flute.

In the absence of a national system of music the Sinhala people have borrowed North Indian Music from about the beginning of the twentieth century. The Tamil community has taken up South Indian Karnatic music.

The drumming is a highly sophisticated art in Sri Lanka, there having been over sixty varieties of drums in the past. Of this number only nine varieties of drums are in use now.



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