

Stars, stars and stars on the horizon

The Sangeet Natak Akademi's festival of young dancers got off to a flying start this week, says ANJANA RAJAN.

THE WEEK began on a high note as the Sangeet Natak Akademi's festival of young dancers, Nriya Pratibha, got off to a start this Monday at the SNA's Meghdoot theatre. First off the block was Moumita Ghosh, a disciple of Madhavi Mudgal. This was definitely a good choice to start the festival with, as Moumita's Odissi recital reflected sound training, good taste and a concern for the different aspects of a performance of classical dance on the proscenium stage. Backed by an excellent orchestra, led by her guru Madhavi with a veteran panel including vocalists Poornachandra Majhi and Manikuntala Bhowmik, pakhawaj exponent Gandhi Mallik and others, Moumita's dance exuded serenity.

Beginning with a mangalacharan, the Jagannatha Ashtakam of Sankaracharya, Moumita presented the picture of a dedicated disciple. One could see the reflection of her guru not only in her neat and controlled nritta and her understated abhinaya (in evidence during the invocation and the ashtapadi "Dheera Sameere"), but also in her expression during these pure dance passages. A welcome feature of her dance is the well-anchored pelvis, which resists moving from side to side during fast footwork in the chowk position.

Since her pure dance technique is well honed, barring the occasional spinal curvature that is the bane of dancers using chowk or ardhmandala postures, one can only expect Moumita to move upwards.

Swapnasundari's disciple Nandini Nandan next presented a Kuchipudi recital. A personable and lithe dancer, Nandini began with a jatiswa-

ram in the raga Vasanta, laced with rhythmic patterns in the song and jatis. A traditional item was the manduka shabdham, which calls for stamina and a sense of drama. Nandini impressed with her efforts at keeping up the Kuchipudi tradition of singing during the performance, though breath control is a factor to be worked on.

She also performed a javali in which she showed her flare for abhinaya, depicting the nayika complaining about the faithless lover, asking him where all his grand promises disappeared. While it is creditable to improvise on stage during abhinaya numbers, a better way should be worked out of signalling the cues to the musicians, if this indeed was the cause of the communication between the artistes on stage.

Awesome music

Nandini was fortunate to have her guru singing for her recital. Swapnasundari with her awesome reputation for musical knowledge gave an expectedly awesome vocal performance, while Thanjavur Keshavan provided nattuvangam, Lalgudi Sriganesh played some scintillating fillers on the mridangam and VSK Annadurai accompanied on the violin. Some missed cues in the jatis however, were unsettling in a festival of this sort where one expects a high level of preparation.

The last artiste of the first evening was Kathak dancer Monisa Nayak, disciple of Rajendra Gangani. Though suffering from the usual disadvantage artistes scheduled at the fag end of an evening face in the Capital, Monisa impressed with her taiyari, precision of footwork, grip over



Nandini Nandan, Monisa Nayak and Moumita Ghosh performing at the festival of young dancers, Nriya Pratibha in New Delhi. Photos: Shanker Chakravarty.

rhythm and the technique of Kathak. Beginning with the Shiva Panchakshara stotra, "Nagendra haaraaya trilochanaaya..." she went on to technical aspects like upaj, thaata, impressive uthaans and other samples of virtuoso footwork. She also took up some kavits on romance, whether of Radha and Krishna or the cloud and lightning.

Another Kathak recital that

made its mark was the performance of Manisha Mishra of Lucknow. A disciple of her father, tabla exponent Ravinath Mishra and Arjuni Mishra of Kathak Kendra, Lucknow, Manisha forced the audience to sit up with her masterful display of rhythmic patterns, her footwork that ranged from the thundering to the feather-light, and her sheer exuberance positively reminiscent of the veter-

an Sitara Devi. Ravinath Mishra on the tabla supported her measure for measure.

In her display of abhinaya, though she referred to the "aloukik prem" of Radha and Krishna, the expressions, with lips continuously parted and her habit of making use of the fallen leaves scattered on the open-air stage as 'props' to show Radha's temperamental state, brought the portrayal

down from the otherworldly to the material. Add to this, her comment that the dadra she presented at the end was specially for SNA Secretary Jayant Kastuar, as she considers him as "Kaliyuga ke Krishna", and spell was of a different kind altogether.

The following recital, Bharatanatyam by Maya Ratnam, a disciple of Jayalakshmi Eshwar, was an interesting foil, con-

trolled and radiating a quieter joy. Maya began with todaya-mangalam dedicated to Lord Vishnu and went on to "Ananda Natamaduvur Tilla!" in the *poorna* Poorvikalyani, describing the cosmic da

Her very neat upper body movements and arms, charming smile eyes that convey a lot without exaggerating, besides a good grip over rhythm, are assets of Maya's dance. In

comparison, though her footwork cannot be called lacking, it would add immensely to the overall effect if she worked on knee turnout and clarity of strikes. Guru Jayalakshmi on the nattuvangam added strength to the recital. Vidya Srinivasan (vocal), Lalgudi Sriganesh (mridangam), KLN Sasstry (violin) and Shyamala Bhaskaran (veena) added lustre to the show.