

KERALA

During lockdown, all the virtual world's a stage



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Online classical dance festivals and workshops are the in-thing now



Gayathri Vijayalekshmi performing Bharathanatyam as part of Kalanjali International Online Dance Festival.

For Bharathanatyam exponent Gayathri Vijayalekshmi, her performance on Friday was unlike any of her 50 previous stage shows. Swapping the well-decked stage for the confines of her drawing room, the former professor of T.K.M. College of Engineering, Kollam, who rekindled her passion for performing arts after retirement, performed in front of a camera mounted on a tripod, instead of a live audience.

Hers was one of the performances telecast on the first day of the

Kalanjali International Online Dance Festival organised by Thiruvananthapuram-based Kalanjali Foundation. An impressive array of accomplished dancers will perform various classical dance forms as part of the festival.

Like Kalanjali, several dance festivals and workshops have moved to the virtual world amid the prevailing COVID-19 crisis. While the shows have evoked an encouraging public response, they have generated a mixed reaction among performers. While some dub the move as one that could break the shackles of exclusivity, others lament that the absence of live audience makes it a less satisfying experience.



Sampreetha Kesavan performing Mohiniyattam as part of Kalanjali International Online Dance Festival.

Wider reach

Chennai-based Mohiniyattam exponent Sampreetha Kesavan, who delivered the inaugural performance, says such initiatives could ensure a wider reach for performances that are usually restricted to a niche audience. "Besides, online shows could also usher in equity by enabling greater opportunities for performers who are often sidelined for more-favoured others," she says. Incidentally, she has also been coordinating the Veyil online summer dance festival, which is organised by her Hamsini School of Dance and Chennai-based Malayalam publication *Mukhangal*.

Lacks aura

Prof. Vijayalekshmi, however, feels that online shows lacked the aura of conventional ones during which the performer can gauge audience response and use the energy to deliver superlative performances.

Kalanjali Foundation director Soumya Sukumaran says the online mode enabled many performers from USA, Singapore, Qatar, Bahrain and other cities, including Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata, to participate in the festival. Besides, archiving video clips makes future reference a possibility.

Video collection

Joining the online bandwagon to take art forms to larger audiences, Thiruvananthapuram-based Invis Multimedia has been providing free-of cost its vast collection of videos on performing arts online through various platforms.

M.R. Hari, managing director of the company, says the clips have generated a tremendous response from many who have developed new-found interest in art forms. With English subtitles, the videos can be accessed on the YouTube and Facebook pages of Natya Sutra Online and Invis Music.