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It was no different from other music festivals that Bombay is treated to during the peak music season, except that it was organised by Protima Bedi, and her Odissi Dance Centre students. And since Protima is a commercial password when it comes to all things cultural, the festival drew to its charmed circle, big names. As a result, contrary to a few thousand rupees that a more modest organisation would collect on such an occasion, Protima's rough estimate stood at Rs 2 lakh. "We had aimed at about Rs 5 lakh. Let's see—maybe some more contributions will come in," says a disappointed Protima.

The proceeds are to go towards the Odissi Dance Centre, initiated two years ago to "celebrate, preserve and perpetuate" Odissi, which as a dance form, is relatively unknown. "This festival is not arranged as a kind of tamasha," claims Dr Sunil Kothari, dance critic and professor at the Rabin-dra Bharati University, who had come down from Calcutta specially for the festival. "We are genuinely involved in promoting Odissi," he adds. Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, acknowledged as the finest exponent of Odissi, was very much a part of the proceedings. "The centre itself was started because of Guruji," admits Protima, who is a disciple of Mahapatra. The work being done at the centre fits in with Protima's plans to "publicise Odissi". "I want everyone in India to have heard of the dance form, and to have seen it at least once," she says. The funds collected at the festival will be used for achieving this objective.

Unfortunately, the three-day music and dance *mela* held on the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th of the month, started off on a jarring note. The Patkar Hall's mini foyer overflowed with irate ticketholders—all crowding around the counter to get their seat numbers. Feeble cries of "we want our money back" were raised by some of the more ardent music lovers. Says Protima: "It was very ironic. The whole idea of not awarding seat numbers was to make

## MUSIC FESTIVAL A Musical Fair



Protima Bedi in action: delectable dancer

people realised the benefits of punctuality." It was decided that those who came first would get the better seats in their block. "I wanted to train the audience to be on time," explains Protima. Unfortunately, the earliest arrivers took to the first few rows, which had been reserved for VIPs—like V.P. Sathe, Minister of Information & Broadcasting, Frank Simoes, who incidentally took a load off the organisers' shoulders by collecting all the advertisements for the brochure and surprisingly enough, Kabir Bedi. Bedi, who sat in the third row, was easily one head taller than the rest of the audience forcing the luckless spectators behind him to crane their necks. At the end everyone had been seated to his satisfaction and the session was 45 minutes behind schedule.

Nevertheless, Shivkumar Sharma accompanied by Zakir Hussain on the tabla was the first artiste to perform. Sharma rippled through *Raag Hans-dhwani*—popularised by the Hindi film song—*Jaa Tose Nah Bolu Kanhaiya*. To the audience's delight, both Sharma and Hussain went through a quick *sawal-jawab* routine at the end of the piece. In fact, presumably spurred on by the enthusiastic response, the two were led back to the stage by Guru Kelucharan and Pandit Jasraj, who is a trustee of the centre.

In the latter half of the programme Protima danced herself, since Yamini Krishnamurthy, who was supposed to



From left to right: Kabir Bedi, Sanjukta Panigrahi, Protima and Dr Sunil Kothari



The 'all greats' gallery of artistes: performing gratis for Protima

perform, fell ill at the last moment. Protima was at her best, and drew rave reviews. Said Kothari: "With her flair for showmanship, excellent lighting and a sense of programming, Protima literally cast a spell on the audience and brought forth the beauty of *nritya* in a delectable manner."

The second evening was set off smoothly by Rais Khan. Somehow, the sitar is a particularly popular instrument in Bombay, and to top that, Rais Khan played a popular raag—*Yaman Kalyan*. Like Shivkumar, he drew repeated rounds of applause for the frenzied speed playing that he and Hussain indulged in.

Rais Khan's melodious sitar was

followed by the more sober Pandit Jasraj, who with his usual finesse, sang *Raag Nayaki Kanada* and *Basant*. He too was accompanied by Zakir Hussain on the tabla, and it is to Hussain's credit that he can accompany both instrumentalists and vocalists in the same evening, with remarkable ease.

The festival was rounded up by yet another crowd-puller—Hariprasad Chaurasia—this time accompanied by Alla Rakha, tabla maestro, and Zakir

Hussain's father-and-guru and Odissi exponent Sanjukta Panigrahi. Chaurasia played Durga, then *Raag Hemavati*, and ended with an exquisite *Pahadi dhun*, which sounds especially evocative on the flute. As for Sanjukta Panigrahi, Sunil Kothari says, "If you missed her, you really missed something."

The next day, a seminar on Odissi was held at the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) presided over by Dr Mulk Raj Anand and Dr Kapila Vatsyayana among others from the organisation. It was attended by a select audience of dance lovers, and was intended to explain Odissi to the uninitiated.

By any standards, the three-day festival was a success. The artistes, who incidentally, played gratis, for the centre, and even gave donations towards it, were much appreciated. The auditoriums were packed full on all three days. To an extent, the conference brought the much needed publicity to Odissi and the centre's efforts. Quipped a satisfied Protima: "As my friends say, it feels as if a daughter of mine has at last been married."

—Robini Nilekani



Protima with Guru Kelucharan: taking the cue