

A tale of forbidden LOVE



By Athira M.

Radha's world is all about dance. Her passion for Indian performing arts has made her a daughter of Malayalam. The Malayali diaspora is not unfamiliar with the name Radha Carman, the Los-Angeles born artiste for whom the dance forms, culture and lifestyle of Kerala come easily. And she speaks chaste Malayalam which might put any pseudo-Malayali to shame.

Now, her 15-year-old association with Kerala is entering a new phase with a tale of forbidden love. *Maya - A Tale of Love and Sorcery*, a musical theatre production directed by Radha is nearing completion at Agastya Ashram at Kureekkad, near Tripunithura. "This will be the most complicated work from my school. *Maya* is a work that blends dance and theatre in a smooth and entertaining way," she says. Around 25 dancers from various dance schools are part of this production which will be staged in Kochi next month.

The production is on the lines of the famous 'Broadway Musical,' but has an Indian theme incorporating traditional classical and folk styles. "Almost all the dance forms of the country have been weaved into this production. Besides that, contemporary, folk, Western and Bolly-

Los Angeles-born artist Radha Carman's 15-year-old association with Kerala is entering a new phase with her musical theatre production 'Maya - A Tale of Love and Sorcery'

wood dance styles have been used. The objective is to present the art forms in such a way that even people who are not conossieurs of dance appreciate it," says Radha.

Radha grew up in Los Angeles listening to tales about the grand cultural heritage of India from her parents who had lived in India for a considerable period. "I grew up with Indian culture. My parents

named me Radha and my brother Ravi because they loved this land very much. When I was seven, my mother Beverly enrolled me in a bharatanatyam class and there was no looking back after that."

When she was 18, Radha took to learning kathakali. In 1992, Radha travelled to India to take intensive training in kathakali under the guidance of FACT Padmanabhan, a disciple of Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair. Then, under Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma, she learnt the fine nuances of mohiniyattam, a dance form which Radha holds close to heart. "What appealed to me most about mohiniyattam was that I had the freedom to create and choreograph," Radha said. And she even found time to learn kalaripayattu at Chavakkad. It was during her stay in Kerala that she picked up Malayalam words and the amount of success she achieved is incredible. "While I was staying at Tripunithura, all my friends were Malayalis and there arose a necessity to learn Malayalam," she said.

In 1996, Radha started her school in Los Angeles - Mandalam Performing Arts of India - which has toured US, Central and South America. It is an association of artists who specialise in South Indian art forms which gives annual performances, lectures, demonstrations and workshops worldwide. Akshay Pottathil is its executive director. Mandalam's productions explore a blend of Indian art forms presented through the medium of story-telling, says Radha. *The Ballads of Northern Malabar* (2001) combined dance with martial arts. *The Story of Nala and Damayati* was an operatic dance drama. *Divine Manifestations* (2003) was an exploration of the religious history of India through dance and music. In 2005, Tulasidas's epic poem, *Hanuman Chalisa*, was brought to life on stage with a troupe of 50 dancers and musicians.

'Maya - A Tale of Love and Sorcery'

Maya is set in ancient India. It is a story about two kingdoms - Nalinga ruled by King Kashi and Phulkar ruled by King Ghor. The 21st descendant of the Nalinga dynasty is prophesied to be a great emperor. Maya, the princess of the kingdom, is destined to be the mother of this emperor. Knowing this, a sorcerer in Phulkar convinces King Ghor to kidnap the princess for Prince

Shardul aided by the power of black magic. But Maya has already fallen in love with Raghu, the commander of her father's army. Ron Carman wrote *Maya*, an original dance drama in 2006 and the present production is its first stage presentation. Sreevalsan J. Menon has composed the music and has rendered songs for the production along with Bombay Jayasri.

