

A CHINESE LEGEND THROUGH THE LENS OF INDIAN TRADITIONAL DANCE



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Butterfly Lovers



3 - 5 JUN 2022

SINGAPORE CHINESE CULTURAL CENTRE

AUDITORIUM, LEVEL 9

新加坡华族文化中心

表演厅, 九楼

PART OF



PRESENTED BY



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Festival Message

from SCCC CEO



As the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre celebrates its 5th anniversary, our Cultural Extravaganza is also into its fifth edition.

Five years may be a short time, but long enough for us to explore new grounds, refine our programmes and grow our audiences.

Over the past five years, we have commissioned many programmes celebrating “crossovers”, by examining and expanding new possibilities through cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary and cross-generational collaborations. This journey has also broadened our minds and hearts.

The spirit of “crossover” stands at the very core of Cultural Extravaganza, just like our Chinese Singaporean culture, which has derived its distinctiveness from different influences and “crossovers” of diverse cultures over time.

Through “crossovers”, we seek to showcase the different sides of our multi-faceted and ever-evolving Chinese Singaporean culture. For instance, the preservation of traditional artforms can happen concurrently with innovation and renewal as local groups reinterpret them in new ways for audiences of today.

As Cultural Extravaganza enters its fifth year, we hope you will enjoy our showcase and discover something new about our Chinese Singaporean culture!

Low Sze Wee

Chief Executive Officer

Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre



from the Artistic Director

I was attracted to this popular Chinese folk tale which originated in the People's Republic of China and became a popular form of all-female theatre called Yueju opera. In the 1950s a few Chinese operas were made into films and exported throughout Asia. The movie I saw was so inspiring; I can't explain the impact it created in my mind. And that was the inspiration for me to create this love story Liang Shanbo Zhu Yingtai as a traditional Indian dance drama, performed right here at Victoria Theatre in 1958.

I was captivated by the values that the story conveyed - the filial piety demonstrated by Yingtai as well as her determination to acquire knowledge even when it necessitated unconventional means. I also found the emotions (Rasas) of the characters and the lure of sadness very appealing.

I did not have much resource at that time. So, I relied upon advice and feedback from my friends in the Chinese arts community. They were of great help, and I will always be grateful for all the support I had. I was very young, and my dance choreography was also young and simple. My exposure to traditional Chinese long sleeve dance and Fan dance was an advantage as I was able to weave the techniques into my choreography.

We are very excited to recreate this story after more than six decades, this time by Meenakshy Bhaskar, one of the next generation of choreographers, and performed by second and third generation dancers from Bhaskar's Arts.

This is a dream come true production for us. I believe that there is an enormous Divine mediation in this Love story's production. Melodious music composition from Rajkumar Bharathi along with Neil Chua's Ruan will bring life to the dance drama.

Our collaboration with the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre is a blessing that I am particularly grateful for, and hope that it will be the start to many more in the future.

The late Santha Bhaskar

Artistic Director, Bhaskar's Arts Academy

Cultural Medallion recipient, 1990

Bintang Bakti Masyarakat (Public Service Star) awardee, 2016

Pingat Jasa Gemilang (Meritorious Service Medal) awardee, 2021



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from the Choreographer

As a child, I took fascination to different dance styles as I was raised amid the cultural collaborations my parents partook in. I was born almost a decade after this show was staged and only had photographs and stories my father shared about *Butterfly Lovers*. The star-crossed lovers, the internal conflict Yingtai faced, of being filial to her parents and her desire to pave her own path in life, and the magic of their eternal love fed my imagination. I empathise with the trials of this intelligent, passionate young woman.

Since my mother's original choreography about 60 years ago, Carnatic music and choreography in Bharatanatyam have evolved so much. We both decided that this version should reflect that. Choreographing *Butterfly Lovers* for my mother is a gift I am thankful for.

The original performance and this iteration share some similarities. Like the Yue Opera of the early 20th Century, both feature an all-female cast. I chose to keep the original style of costuming and make-up, took creative license in the retelling but tried to stay mindful and respectful of Chinese culture, and the storyline. Dr Chua Soo Pong was nine years old when he attended my mother's original performance. For his valuable memories of her earlier production, guidance on research and styling of costumes for this show, I am grateful.

It has been a great honour working with composer Rajkumar Bharati's beautiful music, Ruan expert Neil Chua, and storyteller Kamini Ramachandran, who all add colour and imagination to this production.

Raising a child, it takes a village. I am grateful to the larger community who have reached out to help us nurture our newly reborn baby, *Butterfly Lovers*, into a reality: the exciting partnership with Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre; Mdm Lim Moi Kim's Chinese dance workshops with our dancers; Mdm Joanna Wong, Mdm Goh Lay Kuan and Albert Ang, who shared their experiences with performing this love story, to name a few.

May our baby unfurl her wings and fly high with your blessings tonight.

Meenakshy Bhaskar

Artistic Director, Bhaskar's Arts Academy, Singapore

Advisor, Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society, Singapore

Director, Bhaskar's Arts Academy, California

Young Artist Award recipient, 1996

from the Music Composer

I should admit that when Santha Amma and Meena ji spoke to me about scoring music for this project, it was the first time I was hearing the story! I found it very interesting, particularly the climax.



Since it was a Chinese story, I was eagerly looking forward to working with Chinese musicians. Santha Amma had given me such an opportunity in BAA's previous production for which I had scored the music. Unfortunately, the pandemic situation did not allow this to happen. In any case, we arranged to set the music in such a way that our sweet Neil would still be a part of this.

The other interesting aspect was that it had to be presented primarily based on Bharatanatyam. So, I chose to use many pentatonic scales that are so popular in Chinese music. It had a great impact on me as we were recording the music. That was when I realised that after all, human emotions are the same wherever one lives, and that world music is actually one.

I am extremely happy to be a part of this production.

Thank you!

Dr Rajkumar Bharathi

Music Composer

Puraskar awardee from Sangeeth Natak Akademi, 2016

Butterfly Lovers.

A Milestone of Cross-Cultural Dance Productions in Singapore



Since the 1950s pioneers of Indian dance, Chinese dance and opera and Baba play have created works that are based on the folktales or epics of different cultures of various historical periods. In 1956, “Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai” (Butterfly Lovers), performed in Shanghainese opera genre, was the first movie from the People’s Republic of China that came to Singapore. It was screened full house for 77 consecutive days.

Inspired by the movie, Mr Bhaskar adapted the folktale and presented *Butterfly Lovers* at Victoria Theatre in 1958. It was one week of sold-out performances which attracted many non-Indian audiences.

I was a pupil at Tuan Mong School then. Told by our music teacher about this unforgettable show, my grandmother brought me to attend. This nine-year-old boy was totally engrossed by the intricate hand gestures, expressive eye movements, exuberant dances and dramatic articulations of the cast. Especially memorable was Mrs Bhaskar’s portrayal of Ying Tai. She was a vivacious girl keen to go to school in one scene and then a heartbroken damsel when her father decided that she has to marry a stranger.

I was so inspired by the idea of adapting a story from another culture and presenting it in one’s traditional art form that I adapted “Ramayana” and “Mahabharata” as drama in English and Chinese as well as Chinese opera years later.

Butterfly Lovers.

A Milestone of Cross-Cultural Dance Productions in Singapore

(Cont'd)

Butterfly Lovers' success also coincided with the height of the anti-colonial movement. Young Chinese students were keen to learn the Malay language and the dances of other ethnic groups, believing that by doing so, they would be contributing to national culture building. The slogan was 'Creating Malayan New Culture' with three components i.e. Chinese culture, Malay culture and Indian culture.

Mr Tan Yeow Seah, a Tai Chi master, recalled that they learnt an Indian folk dance without professionally recorded music soon after the premiere of *Butterfly Lovers*. His team approached Mr Bhaskar for assistance. Tan said: "Mr Bhaskar rendered his help without a moment of hesitation, guiding an orchestra and recorded for us without a fee! So we are so grateful to the *Butterfly Lovers* master".

Butterfly Lovers is indeed a milestone in cross-cultural dance productions and a gem of Singapore's multicultural performing arts heritage.

Dr Chua Soo Pong

Founding Director of Chinese Opera Institute

Former student of the late KP Bhaskar

Audience member at Butterfly Lovers, 1958

Tonight



ACT 1

Yingtai, the youngest and only daughter in the Zhu family, has an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. But attending school was a privilege only boys enjoyed. To convince her parents, she disguises herself as an astrologer. Persuaded, they relent and agree to let her go to the academy but disguised as a man.



At the same time, Liang Shanbo, an ambitious young man, is on his way to the same academy to fulfil his dream of becoming a scholar. The two meet along the way and become fast friends as they journey together.

Tonight

ACT 2

At the school, Shanbo, Yingtai and the other scholars thrive under the guidance of their teacher Confucius. Over time, Yingtai begins to have feelings for Shanbo. And while several close calls occur, Yingtai's true identity remains a well-kept secret.



Soon it is time to head home. The two friends once again journey together. Along the way Yingtai drops hints to find out if her feelings for Shanbo are reciprocated. Having no luck with that, she invites Shanbo to visit and meet her “sister”. The two part ways.



Tonight

Back home, Yingtai reminisces about her time with Shanbo. But her father has other plans and gets her engaged to a boy from the affluent Ma family.

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When Shanbo visits, he is mesmerised by Scholar Yingtai's beautiful "sister". Yingtai reveals herself and the two share their feelings for each other. But the happiness is short-lived as Yingtai informs that she is already promised to another. The two continue exchanging letters and promise to love each other through eternity. But a heartbroken Shanbo falls ill and eventually dies.



Tonight

ACT

3

On her wedding day, Yingtai pays respect at Shanbo's grave on her way to the Ma residence. As she stands there, the grave opens up and Yingtai jumps in without a second thought. A pair of butterflies emerge from the grave. The star-crossed lovers are rejoined in the afterlife in their eternal love.



FINALE

The Cast

Liang Shanbo

Zhu Yingtai

Yingtai as Scholar

Yingtai as Astrologer

Mr Zhu

Mrs Zhu

Yinxin the Maid

Yinxin as Scholar

Sijiu the Manservant

Confucius

Baby Butterflies

Scholars

Ruan artiste

Malini Bhaskar

Sarenniya Ramathas

Davinya Ramathas

C Dayanita Rani

Nishalini Lakchimanathas

Unitha Vasu

Gayathri Kanthan Prakash

Prishalini Rajendran

Shubaashini Vijayamohan

Shivashni Kummur

Aadya Krishna

K Nidhi Lakshmi

Anusree Sreekumar

C Dayanita Rani

Gayathri Kanthan Prakash

Kaavya Ganeshan

L Divyaasri

Nishalini Lakchimanathas

Prishalini Rajendran

Shubaashini Vijayamohan

Unitha Vasu

Vishnupriya Nadarajan

Neil Chua

The Artistes



Neil Chua

Neil is the first musician from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music to receive a Master's Degree in Music - Ruan (阮). His fluidity in melding different cultures led to an invitation to participate in the highly acclaimed international music exchange programme, OneBeat 2014, organised by the US Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs to educate and promote ruan (阮) to students and musicians globally. He also earned a place in cello maestro Mr Yoyo Ma's Silkroad's Global Musicians Workshop where international musicians learnt from one another's traditions and incorporated them into their own artistic voices. His dedication led him to be the first artist-in-residency for the inaugural National Arts Council Stamford Arts Centre Traditional Arts Residency Programme. Neil also founded RuanAtWorkz Musical Arts (R.A.W.), a charity that promotes traditional culture, music, art and other forms of traditional values.

The Artistes



Aadya Krishna

Aadya started learning Bharatanatyam with Guru Malini Bhaskar when she was six years old and has already performed on a few stages and been hugely appreciated. She also topped her Elementary 1 dance assessment. This is her first opportunity to be part of a dance production and she is on cloud 9 to be chosen from the many kids in Nrityalaya. Aadya is hardworking, committed, expressive and, above all, a confident dancer. She hopes her performance in *Butterfly Lovers* will lead to many more opportunities to learn from choreographers and senior dancers.

Anusree Sreekumar started learning dance from age seven. She started her journey with Kuchipudi and went on to learn Bharatanatyam under the tutelage of Guru Neewin Hershall at Nrityalaya. An eager and passionate learner she also went on to explore other Indian classical dance forms like Mohiniyattam and wishes to delve deeper into it. She has performed on various platforms and at a number of Navarathri festivals. In 2021, she successfully auditioned into BAA's Junior Company dance team. *Butterfly Lovers* is her first BAA production, and she hopes it will be the start to many more future programmes.



Anusree Sreekumar

The Artistes

A strong and agile dancer, Dayanita started at age five with Guru Ambujah Thiru. She was talent-spotted early in her journey, and was selected to play lead roles in Nrityalaya productions such as *Muruga in Shashti* and *Vanar in Crocodile Tears*. Following that, she successfully auditioned for the Junior Company and performed in BAA's *Manohra* and played Manmatha in *Kutrala Kuravanji*. Dayanita was also able to showcase her abilities in the Choreography Lab, a workshop that honed dancers' movements and expressions through self-choreographed pieces. A rising talent with a determined attitude, Dayanita is a soon-to-be familiar face in productions.



C Dayanita Rani



Davinya Ramathas

An eager and spirited dancer, Davinya started learning Bharatanatyam at the age of 10 and completed her Diploma in Bharatanatyam under the tutelage of Guru Ambujah Thiru earlier this year. She auditioned successfully to become a part of BAA's Junior Company in 2016 and recently earned her role as a Company Dancer. Davinya shone as a performer in BAA productions including *Manohra* and *Kutrala Kuravanji* and, most recently, in its Choreography Lab series, which sparked her interest to explore creativity within movements and abhinaya. A fast learner who demonstrates a keen desire for precision, Davinya is a promising up-and-coming dancer to watch.

The Artistes



Gayathri Kanthan Prakash

Gayathri began her formal training at the age of four under the tutelage of Mr and Mrs Bhaskar. She performed her Arangetram in 1997, and successfully staged her solo production *Natyanjanli* in 2000. An elegant and graceful dancer, Gayathri went on to present *Athmeeya Bhava* together with her sister, Shivashni, under the support of the Centre for the Arts (CFA) in NUS. Gayathri has been a part of many BAA productions both locally and abroad. Currently she is a Bharatanatyam instructor at Nrityalaya, a role she hopes will help her make a difference to the next generation of dance students.

Nidhi started learning Bharatanatyam at the age of six under Guru Malini Bhaskar. She belongs to the third generation of dancers, as her grandmother, mother as well as her aunt, have learnt dance under Mrs Santha Bhaskar. Nidhi is a motivated and enthusiastic student and looks forward to performing in *Butterfly Lovers*, her first dance production. It is especially special for her to be in the same show as her Guru, her mother and her aunt. Nidhi hopes that this will be a stepping stone for her to learn and grow as a dancer.



K Nidhi Lakshmi

The Artistes

Kaavya began learning Bharatanatyam at age seven and completed her Arangetram in 2018 under Guru Swarna Varsha Gurumoorthy. Currently learning from Guru Santha Bhaskar, Kaavya is a keen performer who has performed in various community centres and temples. With the support of her Gurus, she has blossomed into a hardworking dancer with great potential. To further explore her passion for dance, she started learning Odissi. Kaavya is a recent addition to the Junior Company and *Butterfly Lovers* is her first BAA production. Earlier this year, she was one of 14 dancers chosen to participate in the Vasantham show "Aayiram Malargale".



Kaavya Ganeshan



L Divyaasri

Divya started learning Bharatanatyam at the age of six from Guru Padmini Subramaniam and completed her Diploma this year under the tutelage of Guru Ambujah Thiru. In recent years, Divya has displayed diligence and determination, and has bloomed into a confident dancer. A member of BAA's Junior Company since 2019, she has performed in *Kutrala Kuravanji* and in the annual *Kantha Shashti* recitations. In 2018, she performed in *Community Chest Singapore's* Fundraiser event. In parallel, Divya also learns the flute. Her exposure to the performing arts has inspired her to further hone her skills and explore various facets of the art.

The Artistes



Malini Bhaskar

Malini is the granddaughter of dance doyens the Bhaskars and is trained in several dance genres such as bharatanatyam, ballet, hiphop and contemporary. Having completed her Arangetram in 2010, she joined BAA's teaching wing Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society as a bharatanatyam instructor. Malini is a natural on stage and has been impressing audiences as a full-time Company Dancer in works such as *Yaatra*, *Chakra*, *Purnima*, *Na Mah* and more recently through lead roles in *Vinayaka* and *Brihannala*. With her ability to pick up challenging choreographies just by watching them, Malini's choice to be a professional dancer could not be more apt.

Nishalini started dancing at age nine and completed her Diploma in Bharatanatyam under Guru Neewin Hershall in 2010. Since then this bold and spirited dancer has continued to bloom and has been a part of numerous BAA productions including *Manohra*, *Chakra*, *XPressions*, *Vinayaka*, *Brihannala* and *Kutrala Kuravanji*. With her ability to take any role and make it her own, Nishalini was particularly impressive in her role as the Evil Minister in Bhaskar's Arts' third iteration of *Manohra*. As one of BAA's fine talents, Nishalini continues to bring her personality and creativity into all her performances.



Nishalini Lakchimanathas

The Artistes

Prishalini has been learning Bharatanatyam for the past 10 years under the tutelage of Guru Neewin Hershall and completed her Diploma in 2018. A hardworking dancer who aims for perfection in her craft, Prishalini is a Junior Company member and has performed in productions such as *Manohra* and *Kutrala Kuravanji*. To further explore her passion for dance, she started Kathakali training under the guidance of Guru Kalamandalam Biju and made her debut in *Jatayu Moksham* in 2019. She started 2021 by performing in *People Get Connected 2.0* and hopes to continue performing in as many productions as she can.



Prishalini Rajendran



Sarenniya Ramathas

An agile and flexible dancer, Sarenniya has been learning Bharatanatyam since she was 10 and is one of BAA's shooting stars. This notably vibrant dancer successfully completed her Diploma in Bharatanatyam in 2010 under the tutelage of Guru Neewin Hershall and joined the Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society teaching faculty soon after. In all her BAA performances as a Company Dancer such as *Manohra*, *Thirukutrala Kuravanji*, *XPressions*, *I*, *Cyclops*, *Na Mah*, *Brihannala* and *Kutrala Kuravanji*, and especially in her lead role in *Vinayaka*, her impeccable executions and perfect anga saushtaava are evident, making Sarenniya a joy to watch on stage.

The Artistes



Shivashni Kummar

Shivashni began her dance training with Guru Santha Bhaskar at age four and immediately impressed with her maturity and abhinaya skills. She was soon chosen to play the lead role of Muruga in the *Aum Muruga* series. In 2009, she also played the titular role in *Manohra*. Upon completing her Arangetram in 2001 she staged her solo production *Prachodana* in 2012. An active student and alumni dancer in NUS Centre for the Arts, Shivashni presented a duet performance *Athmeeya Bhava* in 2007. While she has not been performing regularly in the past 10 years, she is glad to be back on stage for this iconic production.

An unassuming dancer who exudes a sense of calm, Shubaashini completed her Diploma in Bharatanatyam (Margam) in 2010 under Guru Neewin Hershall. Since then, she has participated in several of BAA's productions, the most recent being *People Get Connected 2.0*. Shubaashini has also represented BAA in ASEAN cultural exchange performances in Thailand and Myanmar. As an active contributor to the community in her own capacity, in 2018, Shubaashini choreographed and taught basics of Bharatanatyam to fellow participating youth leaders from ASEAN and Japan as part of a two month long programme 45th Ship for Southeast Asian and Japanese Youth Programme (SSEAYP).



Shubaashini Vijayamohan

The Artistes

Unitha has been learning Bharatanatyam for about 25 years. In 2009, she presented her Arangetram under the tutelage of Guru Ambujah Thiru. She is presently a student of Guru Santha Bhaskar, an experience she enjoys and finds stimulating at the same time. Unitha is an expressive and earnest dancer who over the years has been a part of several BAA productions including *Ramayana*, *Advaita* and *Chakra*. To further explore her love for Indian classical dance, Unitha attends online Mohiniyaattam classes with Kalamandalam Pushpalatha. Unitha aspires to develop and broaden her dance experiences.



Unitha Vasu



Vishnupriya Nadarajan

Vishnupriya began her dance journey at the age of five and completed her Diploma in Bharatanatyam in 2018 under the tutelage of Guru Neewin Hershall. An unassuming and committed dancer who has blossomed in recent years, Vishnupriya believes dance has helped her immensely to grow as an individual. Having successfully auditioned into the Junior Company, she gave her debut performance earlier this year in BAA's *People Get Connected 2.0*. Still relishing her moments on and off stage, Vishnupriya looks forward to being part of many more memorable productions in the future.

Credits

Artistic Direction

Santha Bhaskar

Choreography

Meenakshy Bhaskar

Music Composition

Dr Rajkumar Bharathi

Narration

Kamini Ramachandran

Announcement

Indu Vijay

Lighting Design

Alberta Wileo

Multimedia Design

Yusri Shaggy Sapari

Multimedia Operation

KayKay Nizam

Surtitles Cues

Bala Saravanan Loganathan

Historical/Costume Consultation

**Mdm Joanna Wong
Mdm Goh Lay Kuan
Dr Chua Soo Pong**

Classical Chinese Dance Coaching

**Mdm Lim Moi Kim
Singapore Chinese Dance Theatre**

Linguistic Assistance

Dr Wong Chee Meng

Costumes Support

CHK fabrics

Publicity Visuals

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Publicity Photography

Lijesh Karunakaran

Wardrobe

**Gayathri Jayaram
Kishanna Sasidaran
Shangari Sadheesh**

Production Assistant

Ambujah Thiru

Production Management

Thava Rani Mohan

