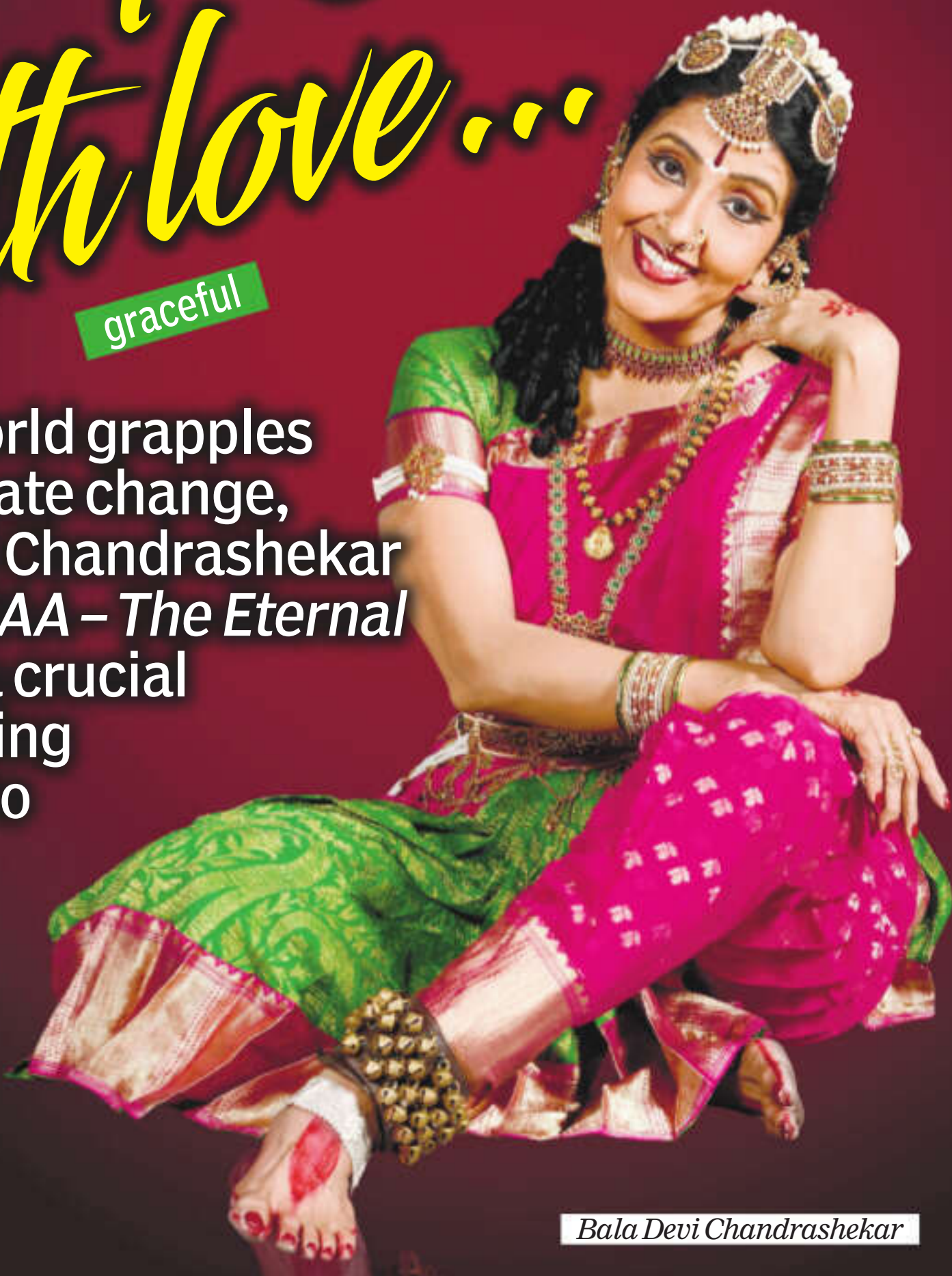


culture

To Mother, with love...

graceful

As the world grapples with climate change, Bala Devi Chandrashekar brings, *MAA – The Eternal Truth* at a crucial time, paying homage to Mother Nature



Bala Devi Chandrashekar

KALAIMAMANI BALA DEVI Chandrashekar, a celebrated *Bharatanatyam* dancer from a distinguished lineage of scholars, is renowned for blending ancient wisdom with modern artistry. With a scholarly approach, she explores sacred texts and collaborates with experts across disciplines to craft performances that resonate deeply with today's world. Her captivating artistry has graced over 35 countries, enchanting audiences with more than 300 mesmerising performances that seamlessly fuse tradition and innovation. She has presented *Bharatanatyam* in prestigious venues such as the Paris 2024 Olympics, the Bali World Cultural Festival, UNESCO headquarters in Paris, Broadway, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

As the world grapples with climate change, Bala Devi brings *MAA – The Eternal Truth* at a crucial time, paying homage to Mother Nature and raising awareness about environmental issues. Ahead of her performance in the city, we speak to Bala Devi to know more.

What is *MAA – The Eternal Truth* all about? And what is 'the eternal truth' that the performance brings to the fore?

MAA – The Eternal Truth is a solo thematic operatic *Bharatanatyam* production, and this performance explores and celebrates the loving nature of both Mother and Mother Earth, highlighting the profound connection between them. The production draws inspiration from ancient texts and philosophical contexts, emphasising the protection and nurturing role that mothers and Mother Earth play in sustaining life. It delves into the significance of *karma bhoomi* (land of action) and explores the interconnectedness of all existence.

It utilises the classical *Bharatanatyam* dance form and features world-class recorded music. It also incorporates symbolism, such as the 18-faced *rudraksha*, to represent the intricate web of a mother's love.

How was this piece conceptualised?

The inspiration for this production originated from my desire to celebrate the interconnectedness of all existence, with a particular focus on the nurturing aspects of motherhood and Mother Earth. I delved into various sacred texts, including Adi Shankara's works, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, *Srimad Bhagavatam*, and *Mandukya Upanishad*, to form the philosophical backbone of the performance. The decision to structure the performance around the concept of *Maa* allowed for a seamless integration of various aspects of Indian philosophy and mythology.

Please elaborate on the choreography and the music.

The choreography is a carefully crafted journey through four acts, each exploring different facets of motherhood and Mother Earth. In Act 1, we open with Adi Shankara's *Mathru Panchakam* set to *Ragam Dhenuka*, incorporating intricate movements to represent the primordial sound of *Om*. A traditional *Mallari* in *Ragam Gambiranattai* and *Misra Eka*

Thalam weaves together salutations to Lord Ganesha and Uma Shiva. Act 2 features a cosmic dance set to *Ragam Panthuvrali*, exploring the Ardhanaree-shwara concept through contrasting masculine and feminine movements. We incorporate the powerful *Maheswara Sutrani*, using complex rhythmic patterns to depict the sounds of Lord Shiva's *Damaru*. Act 3 focuses on Lord Varaha rescuing Bhooma Devi, set in *Adi Thalam Tisra Nadai*. This section showcases intricate footwork and expressive *abhinaya* to portray the rescue of Mother Earth. The final act celebrates Andali's devotion through the nine forms of *Bhakti*, incorporating a variety of *ragas* and *talas* to express different emotional states. It culminates in a *Thillana* set to *Ragam Kosala* and *Kanda Eka Thalam*.

The music, composed by talented artistes, features a rich ensemble including *mridangam*, violin, veena, flute, tabla, *nadaswaram*, and *sitar*. The diverse range of *ragas*, including *Dhenuka*, *Gambira Nattai*, *Sri Ranjani*, *Revathi*, *Panthuvrali*, and *Suruti*, enhances the emotional depth of the performance.

How does it feel to be performing *Bharatanatyam* on an international stage?

With over 300 performances across 35 countries, I've had the privilege of sharing this classical Indian dance form with diverse audiences worldwide. My distinct scholarly approach, which combines intense research of ancient texts with contemporary interpretations and investment in world-class music, has captivated audiences from various cultural backgrounds.

Open to all.

December 30, 5.30 pm:

Kartik Fine Arts, Mylapore

January 2, 7.30 pm:

Brahma Gana Sabha,

TAG Dakshinamurthy

Auditorium, Mylapore

January 4, 6 pm: *Bharatiya*

Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore.

—Rupam Jain

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An Ode to Tanjore Quartet

elegant

Margam Mastery

An Ode to the Tanjore Quartet and the significance of digital release

THIS UNIQUE PRODUCTION aims at preserving the majesty of the dance compositions, which combine an intense knowledge of Carnatic music and *Bharatanatyam* of the Tanjore quartet illustrious brothers that form the *Bharatanatyam* repertoire, the crescendo to our artistic heritage.

An *Ode to the Tanjore Quartet* is a digital presentation of a traditional *Bharatanatyam Margam*, continuing the *Nritya Upachara* series. This production aims to create a new Renaissance in understanding traditional classical *Bharatanatyam*, as evolved by the famous Tanjore Quartet brothers. The project, guided by Guru Nandini Ramani, showcases specific compositions of the illustrious brothers Adi Ponniah, Chinniah, Vadivelu, and Sivanandam, who were court musicians trained under Carnatic musician Sri Muthuswamy Dikshitar.

The *Margam* follows the traditional format codified by the Tanjore Quartet, considered the lifeline of a *Bharatanatyam* performance. It includes a series of items such as *Alarippu*, *Jatisvaram*, *Shabdham*, *Varnam*, *Padam*, *Javali*, and *Tillana*, each designed to showcase different aspects of pure and interpretative dance. The presentation adheres to this order to preserve and propagate the values of the *Margam*-based *Bharatanatyam* recital, which is meant to be solo dancing according to ancient treatises and oral tradition.

This production features compositions in both Tamil and Telugu, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the Tanjore court. The centerpiece of the recital is the *Varnam*, a challenging item that combines pure and interpretative dance, set to a composition by Sivanandam of the Tanjore Quartet. Other notable pieces include a *Shabdham* addressing Lord Krishna, a *Keertanam* devoted to Lord Brihadeshwara, and a *Tillana* composed by Adi Chinnaya.

Entry free. January 5, 9 am.
At TAG Dakshinamurthy Hall, Mylapore.

—RJ