

Home > Lifestyle > Art-Culture > Art and Beyond

Art-Culture Lifestyle

Art and Beyond

March 18, 2021



Over three sold-out nights Carlton's Dancehouse theatre hosted Sangam Commissions where local Victorian and international artists performed both classical South Asian and contemporary dance solos. The event was part of a series of performance works for Sangam: Performing Arts Festival of South Asia and Diaspora. With over 100 artists performing across four locations in Melbourne over four weekends (February 27-March 13, 2021), this is the first festival of its kind to showcase South Asian performing arts in Australia so broadly. The festival is lead by Dr. Priya Srinivasan, Hari Sivanesan and Uthra Vijay – a highly talented and experienced multidisciplinary team passionate about increasing the representation of South Asian arts.



Lekshmi Sarath, photo credit Arun Munoz

Sangam at Dancehouse, Thursday 11th – Saturday 13th March
The performances at Dancehouse theatre concluded the festival's events on a high. Five soloists and a duet across two programs had created new work under the mentorship of renowned dancers Priyadarsini Govind, Mavin Khoo and Dr. Chandrabhanu. The six commissions aimed to explore notions of the contemporary, the complexity of South Asian dance and what the postcolonial context of South Asian dance practice means in Australia. Program two included the compelling work of Sooraj Subramaniam, Shriram Theivendran and Raina Peterson, and hurdled contemporary and classical dance into new directions. Both Shriram Theivendran and Raina Peterson are Melbourne based artists while Sooraj Subramaniam is currently based in Sweden after growing up in Malaysia and living in Australia for several years.

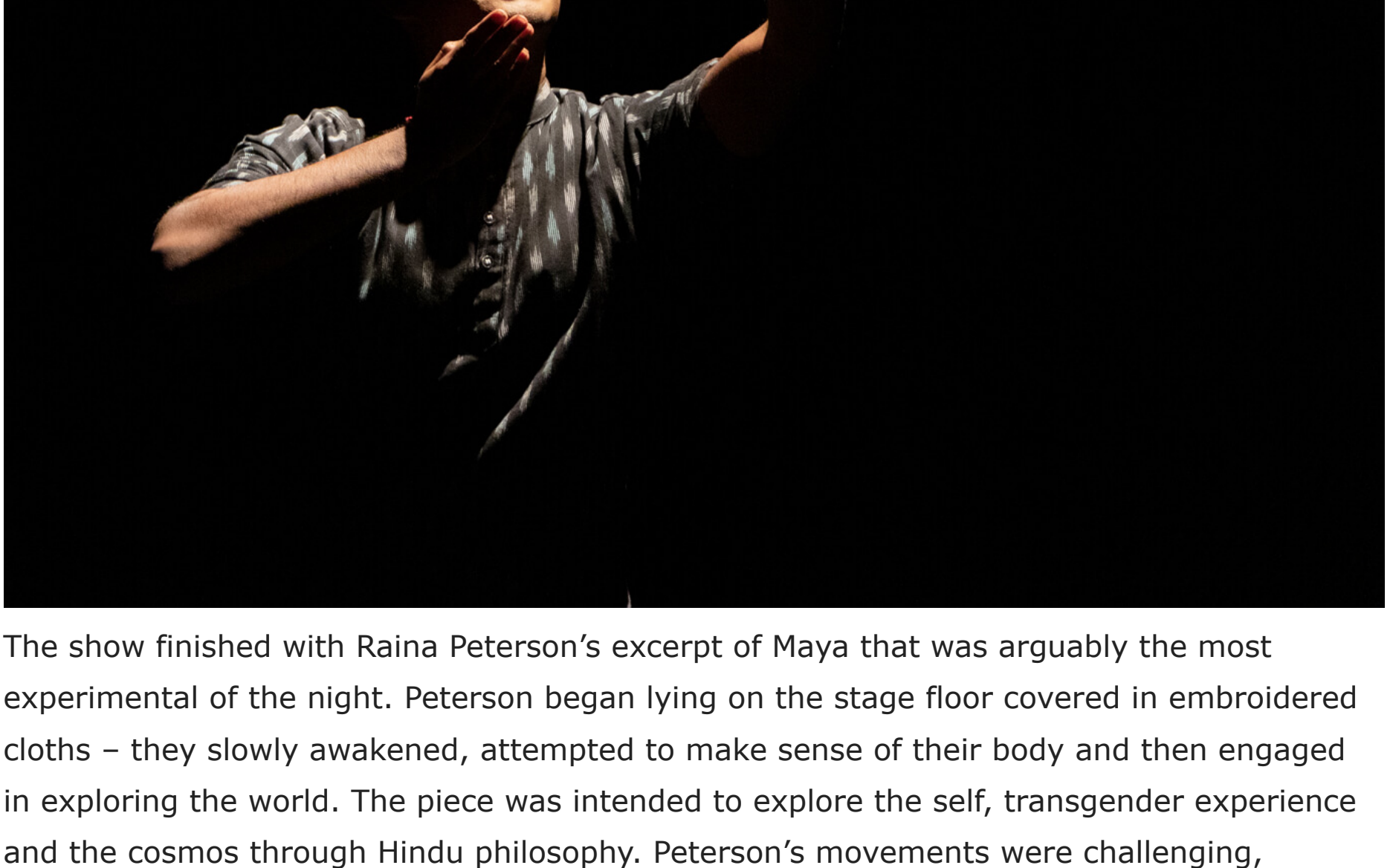


New Homes Choir directed by Uthra Vijay, photo credit Arun Munoz

The night began with Sooraj Subramaniam's contemporary solo Nimbus; a video installation of experimental dance work that explored internal human conflicts. The piece drew on the metaphor of a nimbus, a dark and amorphous cloud. Together with his movements and eerie music that grew heavier and incorporated heartbeats, a sense of foreboding was created. The contrasts of shadow and light and the fluid cinematography enhanced his sweeping movements that gradually built pace. He began with slow poised writhing movements and as the music escalated, his movements expanded and he commanded the space with a more rapid presence.



Shriram Theivendran took to the stage next in Sacred Sensuality, accompanied by a four piece classical Indian band including vocals, string and drums. While this piece was dynamic and contemporary it was also the most traditional of the night, steeped in the form Bharata Nrityam – a combination of the classical South Indian form Bharatanatyam and the techniques of Natya Sastra. The tone and pace of the music and dance shifted back and forth as if in a dialogue and conflict with each other, creating an evocative sense of longing and taking the audience on a captivating journey. Theivendran took charge of the whole space, circling many times in fierce energetic bounds and leaps and transitioning to slower movements more imploring and delicate. The work is said to have explored religious sentiment, love and lust and was framed by an opening monologue that implored, "I crave something more. Nothing short of union will quench this great fire, burning for my Lord".



The show finished with Raina Peterson's excerpt of Maya that was arguably the most experimental of the night. Peterson began lying on the stage floor covered in embroidered cloths – they slowly awakened, attempted to make sense of their body and then engaged in exploring the world. The piece was intended to explore the self, transgender experience and the cosmos through Hindu philosophy. Peterson's movements were challenging, experimental, visceral and captivating – contemporary but drawing on classical forms at times. While the piece felt strikingly modern through the experimental electronic music and contemporary style, conceptually the performance alluded to Hindu mythology around the churning of the ocean of milk and the elixir of life.



The three performances at Dancehouse Commissions Program Two were a taste of how the whole festival uniquely pushes boundaries and also speaks to traditions in South Asian performing arts practice. While this event was the last of the festival, it sat alongside a range of diverse festival events that showcased the various creative practices of talented South Asian artists and diaspora.

Sangam at Bunjil, Saturday March 6th

Sangam at Bunjil Place, Narre Warren, featured the premier of groundbreaking music and performance work across three acts. The New Homes String Quartet combined the western structure of string ensembles with the Carnatic music style in a quartet of three classical South Asian string instruments (Sarod, Taus, and Veena) and a double bass. This was preceded by the New Home Choir whose Carnatic choral performance was written by renowned singer, teacher, and composer Uthra Vijay. The show concluded with a multi-artform performance called The Flowering Tree, directed by Hari Sivanesan and Priya Srinivasan. The piece was a collaboration between nine emerging artists and took inspiration from an Indian folktale to address issues of climate change.



Sangam at Dandenong – Earth Matters Walking Experience, Saturday February 27th, the Dandenong's Drum Theatre, Harmony Square and Walker Street Gallery were host to a vast array of performance and audience participation works. In a walking tour, audience members could move between locations to experience dance performances from classical South Asian forms, to Bollywood and experimental, as well as musical events and spoken word.

Sangam at Abbotsford Convent, Saturday 20th February

Abbotsford convent hosted a range of events including panel discussions, Sangam at Convent – Afternoon and Dada Desi. The free afternoon event was entertainment for the whole family consisting of South Asian food and drink stalls and a range of workshops and activities including a Bollywood dance workshop led by Jhoom Bollywood Dance Company. The evening event at the convent, Dada Desi, was a diverse line-up of 18 South Asian artists, emceed by award winning comedian and writer Vidya Rajan. The artists had received mentorship during the COVID-19 lockdown and performed an array of experimental music, dance and screen performances as well as comedy and spoken word.



Shireya Rath, photo credit Arun Munoz

Each performance by these highly trained professionals demonstrated the strong skill set of local South Asian performing artists and the growing public support and interest in these forms. From a small three day event in 2019 to how the festival has developed in 2021, we can only say Sangam will continue to grow. This year they were proud to be guided by Blakdance and supported by Creative Victoria, Australia Council for the Arts, City of Melbourne, City of Greater Dandenong and Yarra City Council as well as Ausdance Victoria, Peril Magazine and Space and Time Today.

These works were a space to celebrate culture and the arts for an intercultural and intergenerational sharing of knowledge, ideas and creativity. Speaking on the festival, co-director Dr. Priya Srinivasan states.

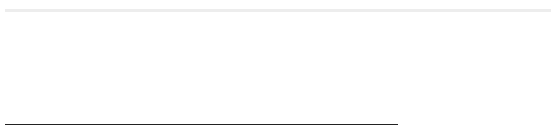
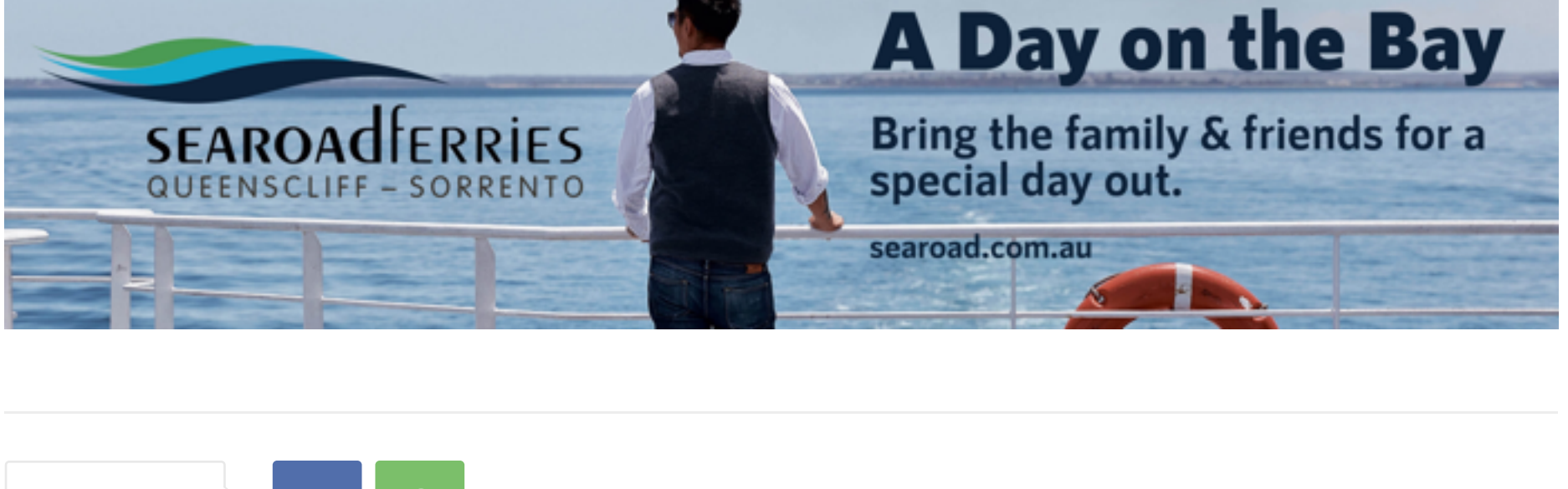
"We are so grateful to see the interest and excitement for South Asian Australian artists and artistic practices grow. Through Covid and our severe lockdown we had to innovate connecting the local with global which enabled surprising and beautiful relationships, learnings, and performances that you will see at our festival. It shows how resilient artists of color and how needed new voices are to truly reflect Australia as it is today".

Congratulations on a breathtaking show, we look forward to seeing more from these artists in the future and seeing more South Asian performing arts. While South Asian dance and music forms are not highly integrated into mainstream western society, there is hope that this festival is one important step towards increasing visibility and carving out a space in the local arts scene.

www.sangam.com.au
www.facebook.com/artsouthasia

By Monique Nair

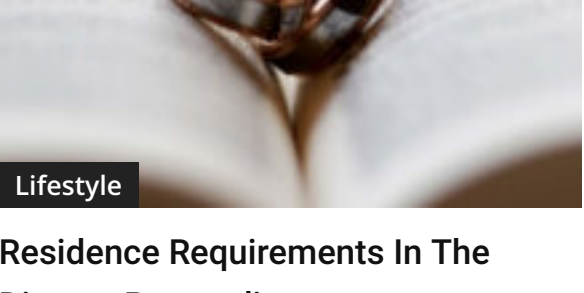
BA with First Class Honours in Undergraduate writing Monique's interest is in diaspora experience and uplifting underrepresented perspectives



RELATED ARTICLES



Patience + Love + Confidence + Strength + Compassion + (Little pain) = Women!



Residence Requirements In The Divorce Proceedings



Eating for Two During Pregnancy

LEAVE A REPLY

Comment:

Name: *

Email: *

Website:

☐ Save my name, email, and website in this browser for the next time I comment.

THIS MONTH ISSUE



Subscribe to Newsletter

Stay informed with our features, exclusive interviews, and outstanding coverage of issues you care most about

SIGN UP FOR OUR FREE NEWSLETTER

Email Address



An India-Australia Cricket Story You Haven't Read!



BREAKING NEWS Australia | Google Ranga Plays Austr

Even More News

Over 1,000 players register for IPL 2019 auction

If You Got Married in India, a Divorce in Australia Has Few Challenges

Family Law – parallel proceedings in Australia and India

Sushi lovers warned of parasite danger in raw fish

