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 **Pulse** is with [Lise Smith](#) and 4 others at [Rich Mix London](#). April 10, 2017 · 

#Margam by [Sooraj Subramaniam](#) - Dance

Work is taking place on our website but as we didn't want to keep you waiting here is [Lise Smith](#)'s review of [Sooraj Subramaniam](#)'s recent solo performance at [Rich Mix London](#) – 'truly thrilling'.

'Margam'
Sooraj Subramaniam
Friday 24 March
Rich Mix, London
Reviewed by Lise Smith

Malaysian-born dancer Sooraj Subramaniam is currently best known in the UK for his work as a performer with the contemporary-classical [Balbir Singh Dance](#) Company and [Shobana Jeyasingh Dance](#). This evening, supported by [Akademi](#)'s 'Daredevas' programme, shows Subramaniam's technique and versatility as a purely classical dancer, performing a programme (or margam) of bharatanatyam in a traditional context. The performance, accompanied by superb live music, is a delight from the first pushpanjali to the final tillana.

Subramaniam has drawn praise for his elegance as a dancer, shown to great effect as the titular Bayadère in Jeyasingh's 'Bayadère – The Ninth Life' two years ago and currently in 'Material Men redux'. What's striking about his performance in this programme is how that long-limbed elegance combines with strong, poised lines, rhythmic precision and fierceness of attack in the fast nritta sections to create a truly thrilling solo performance. A jatiswaram in misracapu at the start of the programme illustrates this poise and precision to electrifying effect, and this finely-tempered energy does not let up from here to the end of the performance.

An extended varnam set to a verse in Telegu by the 19th century composer Subbarama Dikshithar and choreographed by Guru Adyar K Lakshmanan allows time and space for sensitive abhinaya sequences showing the protagonist's love in separation from Lord Siva in between bursts of pure dance. Subramaniam's plays a coquettish, almost vampy lover who seems to be rather enjoying the exquisite anguish of separation, recalling dice games and other pastimes for two with animated facial work and graceful gestures.

A more conventionally devotional kirtanam follows the interval; then the mood changes again with a witty padam in adi talam. Set to a colloquial verse by composer Subbarama Iyer, this short but sparkling sequence lets Subramaniam show off his chops for comic acting as a gossiping neighbor trash-talking a former friend, whose own sudden rise in social status is the cause of moralizing suspicion. If the classic teen comedy 'Mean Girls' ever needed a bharatantyam reinterpretation then here, clearly, is the man to do it.

The evening closes, as is traditional, with an energetic pure dance tillana, giving the audience one last chance to enjoy the brisk footwork and effervescent gestures of classical bharatanatyam. As Subramaniam gives a final invocation to Tamil god Muruga and takes a bow, the audience

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risers in some of the most rapt appreciation I've seen in recent years.

The interaction between dancer and musicians always elevates a dance performance but the costs are frequently too high for solo performers to bear alone, so it's a great treat for performer and audience alike to see this programme presented with live music from four experienced and exquisite performers: [Prathap Ramachandra](#) on mridangam, [Madhusoodanan Satchithanandan](#) on bamboo flute, [Nina Rajarani](#) on nattuvangam, and vocalist [Yadav Yadavan](#). Yadavan's sweet, resonant tones in particular enriched the performance throughout.

As well as being an enjoyable performance in its own right, it was great to see that a classical bharatanatyam programme could sell out the upstairs venue at Rich Mix – and that the chock-full stalls were moved to a unanimous standing ovation (the first time I've seen such a thing in a long while) by the performance. Hopefully this reception will encourage more venues to take a risk on more traditional dance programming; this Margam has shown that the rewards are surely worth it.

Photo credit: [Simon Richardson](#)



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