

FLAMENCO FRENZY



(A review of “THE KILLING OF DUSSHASANA” at Tata Theatre on 15th Nov,13)



As the house lights dim a hushed silence descends on the room. She walks stealthily onto the half lit stage. The lights go out completely and a harsh backlight comes on. She is in silhouette. You sense her powerful presence even before you see her. She snaps her fingers. She taps her feet. She raises her arms into a graceful arch as she begins an intense and intricate rhythm that engulfs the stage with her fingers and feet in perfect harmony. An expression of immense concentration, pain and passion is revealed as her face is slowly lit in an orange glow. You are captivated. For the rest of the evening you are lost in her sheer raw beauty, grace and strength as she sways, pirouettes, and stamps to a silence

that pierces your ears. The only sound is that of her feet pounding against the floor - sometimes gentle as a bird pecking at the bark of an old tree, and sometimes deafening as a drumbeat that screams out into an African jungle sending warnings of impending danger.

She dances herself into a quiet frenzy and as you hold your breath she finishes off with a breathtaking high speed rhythm pattern with her feet and with one yell she knocks you off yours. She is spent. She lies down to rest on her chair. Only to rise a few seconds later - but this time to the sound of exquisite music and holding a “mantilla” - a red and black shawl made of finely woven wool and lace - that symbolizes the beauty and power of the woman. She performs a dance of gay abandon - revelling in her



feminine charm and breathing in the air of freedom and joy.

All of a sudden you hear a blood curdling scream. The voice is coming from behind you. She cowers and hides behind her chair. It is he. It is the demon Dushassana. He towers above the audience with his ghoulishly magnificent persona. Dressed in his vibrantly coloured regalia, he descends onto the arena with his astoundingly beautiful yet frightening presence. So overpowering and intimidating is he that you cannot help but back away from him as he pounds his way down onto the stage. As he comes face to face with her she steadies herself - and looks at him straight in the eye. With a wooden stick in her right hand, she proceeds to challenge him. She pounds and taps as he swirls his red baton and opens his eyes in a terrifying expression - a combination of anger and lust mixed with a demonic delight as he slowly begins to violate her. After a long and brutal battle he finally breaks her. The mantilla is mutilated and she is thrown mercilessly on the floor along with it. He lets out another terrifying guttural scream and walks off in triumph.



She lies there for what seems like an eternity, but you don't mind. Because you know that she is broken - but only in body - not in spirit. You want to give her time. Time to heal. Time to nurture her wounds and gather the strength to rise up and fight again. But she doesn't move.

Enter her saviour. From the other far corner of the hall you see an enormous man - his goodness emanating right across the room. You know he has come to her rescue. The gentle giant wins you over with his graceful dance of power and valour. He is shocked

when he sees the bloodstained mantilla lying crumpled in his path. Then he sees her. There is a moment of intense tenderness as he slowly coaxes her to get up, wipes away her tears and gently smooths her hair. A heart wrenching and uplifting courtship ensues and the promise of love blends with his absolute desire for revenge.



The next scene brings the two giants face to face in a dance of war and revenge. It ends in the total annihilation and devastation of the evil King at the hands of the gentle giant. He disembowels him and drinks his blood with relish as he shows off his hands to the audience with a look of total and complete triumph. For a moment you almost catch a glimpse of the demon in him as you experience the gut wrenching violence of the moment. This feeling is reinforced when he asks her to taste the blood of the demon as he had just done. Her expression of shock and disgust mixed with gratitude make for an interesting dialogue between her and the two percussionists on stage. The raw drums match her hands and feet once again as she slowly begins to realise that she is now free. The

demon is dead. A dance of joy and union between her and her saviour brings us to the end of this tale of brutality and humanity - both expressed through - Flamenco and Kathakali. Although being two completely different dance forms, they have something in common - raw power and passion mixed with divine grace.

Such is the beauty of dance. And such is the beauty of life.

Suneeta Rao

17/11/13

