

The Silent Storyteller

By: Roshini Rangarajan

"Ladies and gentlemen! Let me present to you, Shruti Ram!" I plucked up the courage and stepped out on the black wooden platform stage, with a smile plastered on my face. The traditional Indian dance garments flowing with a multiplex of colors, as my feet made contact with the stage the heavy necklaces adorn with jewels swayed from left to right as my head jewelry remained fixed on my head. My face is decorated with bright red lipstick as my eyes are lined with black eyeliner with a red round *bindi*, an accessory worn by Indian women, on my forehead right above the middle of my eyes. I stood on the stage, as the image of an Indian god, waiting for the music to begin.

"Dum, Dum, Dum...". The sound of the *tabla*, a traditional Indian drum ring in, as the singer sings a song about the god being depicted. With the combination of the *tabla*, the *veena*, an Indian classical large guitar that is played horizontally, and the singer soothing the audience with a range of sounds. As the music starts, I start my dance. The dance of Indian gods, depicting their various stories, with *abhinaya*, facial expressions shown through Indian dance, and with *adavus* Indian dance steps. With the

combination of the music, dance steps, and facial expression; I simply glide across the stage showing the character's sadness, happiness, and joy. The anklets with bells jingle on my feet match the beats of the drums. My hands sway showing the character listening to music afar. Then, the god is startled by the sudden presence of the demon, I make my eyes wide bringing my hands to my eyes to accentuate it. Now, the sudden battle between the rivals. The god fights, as the demon, laughs as his attempt of superiority, and then the sudden loss of the demon occurs. My hand changes from bow and arrow to a club, showing struggle between the two. Finally, the god smiles as I return my hand swaying with the god returning back to the to music. The song displays the proud movements of the god, shows the battle won victoriously, shows the love found, and replays the moments of loss. It is a story said without words, but through an art form that can only be seen.

The song ends. The ending of the god's story. Softening my expression to happiness, the crook of my lips curve upward to a smile. My legs are weary from the jumps, and beating of my legs. At last, I end on my final pose, switching my hands to a *mudra*, or hand motion, and showing one final glimpse of the character. One final glimpse of who I was for three minutes. The music stops. One second. A loud applause echoes throughout the auditorium. That is my cue, I bring my hands together, and I bow to the audience in a *namaste*.

I am a silent storyteller, I am a dancer.