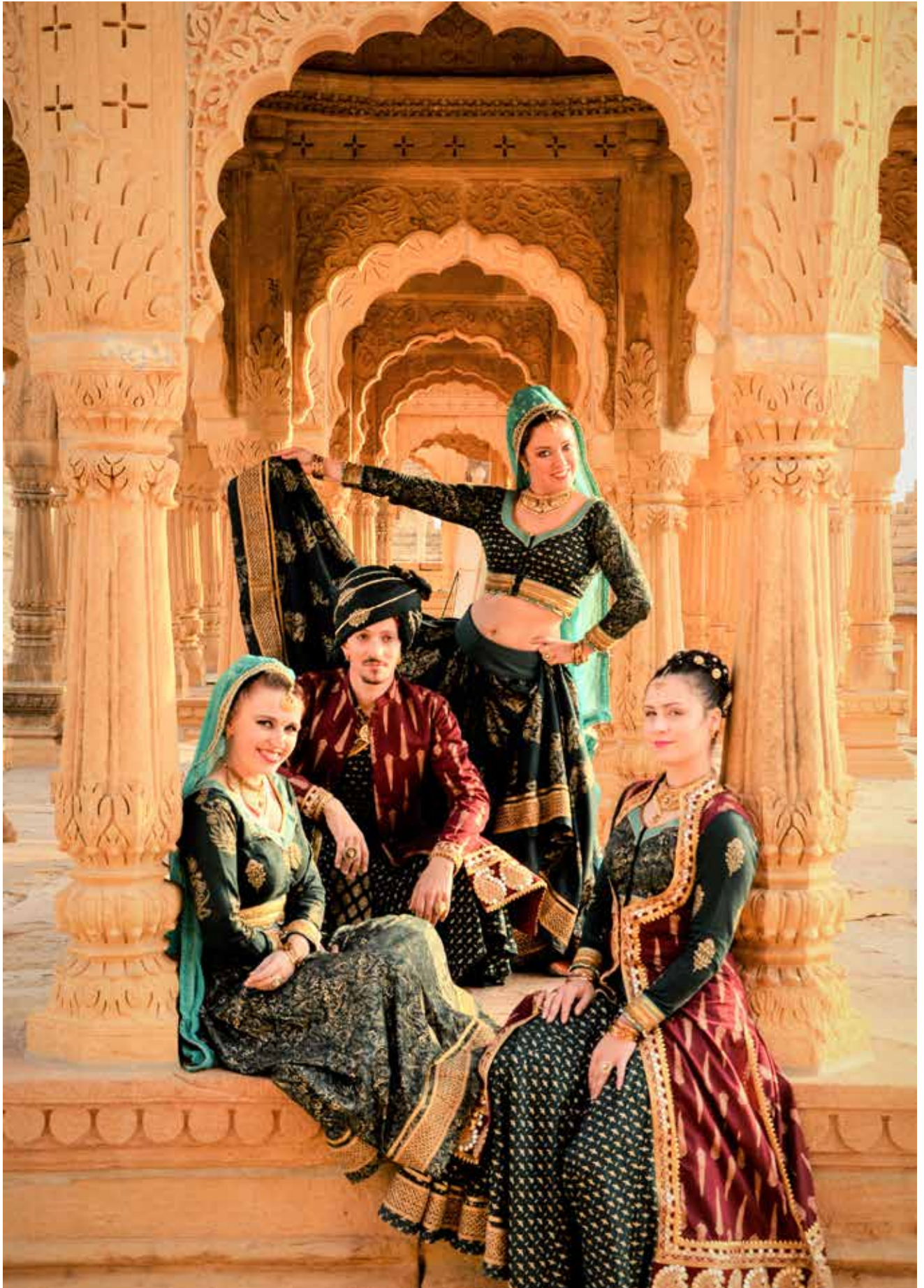


#dance

#review





EVERY STEP IS A CELEBRATION

OR SO IT SEEMS WHEN YOU WATCH *BOLLYLICIOUS* PERFORM THEIR UNIQUE MÉLANGE OF DANCE STYLES, DISCOVERS **RŌMAL LĀISRAM**

WE live in a country that selectively chooses to forget its past. And when it comes to the histories of dance, the cherry picking only gets worse. As someone who has reviewed dance for over a decade, there isn't a contemporary movement that has escaped my interest, nor has there been a redefining of a classical form that has missed my attention. I take great pride in being au courant about the world of dance. This is why *Bollylicious* left me so surprised. Now, I have heard about the company and I know they are popular for a unique blend of Bollywood, Rajasthani and Classical styles – what

I didn't know was that they are really good at what they do.

Contemporary and fusion dance often occupy a large grey area for an Indian dance aficionado. We're brought up with such strict adherence to the rules of how dances are differentiated; we often cannot even imagine certain dances meeting to create perfect mélanges. For example, who would have thought that Voguing would meet Bharatanatyam someday or Bachata meet Kathak? The common Indian dance lover still shies away from the way different dance forms mellifluously blend into each other — I'm not too sure if this stems from fear of being called a non-purist

or from pure laziness. Bottom line, it hardly happens and when it does, it is so poorly executed that you are convinced of your reservations. It always leaves me perplexed, however, because dance forms in India weren't always this rigid by definition. Most classical forms evolved from less rigid folk forms and most dance vocabularies were only standardised less than a 100 years ago. So, where did this begin and is there a possibility that it will ever end?

Watching *Bollylicious* perform at a private event in Chennai organised by the International Women's Association convinced me that there is hope. The company was in India to perform for



the Belgian King's birthday and his visit to the city, but I managed to catch their quaint performance — the only man in an all-woman audience.

The show began with a beautifully choreographed tribute to Bollywood classics that celebrated the tales of the Mughals — from *Mughal-E-Azam* to *Umrao Jaan*. This piece combined traditional Kathak choreography with influences from the *mujra* and Bollywood choreographies of the time. Celebratory and steeped in a form that we are only all too familiar with, this piece was the

perfect opening. The company then presented an Odishi sthayeree by Sooraj Subramaniam — someone we Bharatanatyam lovers consider no less than a *gandharvan*. Watching him perform Odishi was refreshing to say the least. The seriousness of the sthayeree then gave way to several performances in the company's most-celebrated form — Rajasthani folk dance. From *ghoomar* to *kalbeliya* and many other folk forms in between, the company created a rich tapestry by adding fun Bollywood-inspired choreographies that would make even the gloomiest rasika smile.



The next surprise came when the company performed pieces that fused Latin American dances and more contemporary styles like Vogueing to Kathak and Rajasthani folk styles — to say my mind was blown would be terribly under-hyping my excitement. I'd never, in my wildest dreams, imagined these dances coming together so seamlessly. Like that was not enough, the company then performed to an Ambi Subramaniam highly-Carnatic *thillana*. Here was a piece that I would have imagined being choreographed in either Bharatanatyam or Kuchipudi, but it was instead being flawlessly danced using styles so different from the musical form — this was sheer pleasure to watch.

The performances featured many other beautiful choreographies and I can continue describing them in detail, but it would fail the purpose of this review. As I watched a fun reimagining of *Dola Re* from *Devdas*, as the culminating piece, I was convinced that a dance company like *Bollylicious* could well be the much-needed breath of fresh air that the contemporary and fusion dance movement in India needed.

The company has the benefit of looking at Indian dance from the outside, and has the courage to experiment and reinvent even in the face of criticism from the supposed gatekeepers of Indian dance — this is what makes them so unique and so wonderfully entertaining. Do not miss an opportunity to watch them if they ever visit your city; it's something they've promised they will be doing more often now (visiting India, that is!) **P**

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