

Neelambari - Close to Our Arts

Program Schedule for 17 Feb. 2018



Close to our Arts is a flagship endeavor of Neelambari to present the rich cultural tradition of Kerala to its discerning visitors. In this series, we attempt to provide some context and guidance for a better appreciation of the traditional art forms of Kerala. The *Koothambalam* (traditional theater / performance arena) of Neelambari provides a truly magnificent space to engage in these classical art forms. The beautiful nature around us including the riverside is used as an extended setting to add a feeling of timelessness as you engage in art forms that have evolved over centuries.

Close to our Arts involves a full day of entertainment that includes performances, audio-visual briefings, live demonstrations and artiste interactions in a very casual and lively setting so that our guests are engaged without being challenged. An epicurean fare involving Kerala's traditional fare, a boat or canoe ride in the beautiful Karuvannur Puzha (river) and village walk add to the charm of this signature event. For our Feb 2018 edition, the schedule would be

11.00 am Introduction to the Art forms of the Day - Pava Kathakali and Mohiniattam. This would be in English and aided by multi-media content. There can be a short Q&A session though detailed discussions can happen in the afternoon artiste interaction.

11.30 am Pava Kathakali (by Natana Kairali, Irinjalakuda)

12.30 A traditional Kerala lunch in Neelambari's Nalukettu (traditional courtyard)

2.30 pm Free flowing artiste interaction and demonstration in our riverside campus

3.30 pm Leisure time: you can go boating, kayaking, cycling, village walk etc. Tea and snacks would be served. Ayurveda massage can also be arranged during this time with advance reservation

5.30 pm Mohiniattam by Sandra Pisharody (disciple of Smt Nirmala Panicker, Natana Kairali)

6.30 pm A sumptuous Indian dinner, which would provide opportunity for artiste interactions and discussion on the performance

8.00 pm Close of the day! Hopefully our art is now close to your heart as well

Pava Kathakali

Kathakali evolved as a highly integrated art form in Kerala in the seventeenth century. A highly stylized and sophisticated art form, Kathakali follows an elaborate make-up system, acting techniques and gesture language. Only a learned aficionado is able to appreciate the art form in depth though Kathakali attracts the masses too, with its music, percussion and colorful costumes. *Pava kali* (puppetry) has always been popular in Kerala and have always been liked by people of all ages and backgrounds. Around two hundred years back, the classical art form of Kathakali was blended with the fold art Puppetry giving rise to *Pava Kathakali* (Kathakali puppetry). Much of the structure of Kathakali is followed except that puppets come on stage instead of human actors. Percussion and musical elements of Kathakali are adapted with little changes. Even the make up donned by the puppets follow the elaborate character based costume tenets of Kathakali.



Usually, two popular plays from Kathakali, *Kalyanasaugandhikam* (The Enchanting Flower) and *Durodhanavadham* (Slaying of Duryodhana) are enacted in Pava Kathakali. For Neelambari Close to Our Arts, both these plays would be enacted. Both are adapted from Mahabharata, the great Indian epic. Performance will be by artistes from **Natana Kairali**, one of the premier centers in Kerala for our classical theater forms.

Mohiniattam

All classical dance forms of Kerala have a strong regional association. Be it Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Odissi, Manipuri, Kathak or any of the several beautiful and captivating dance forms of India, they are strongly tied to a state or region of India. Mohiniattam is the classical dance forms with inalienable roots in Kerala, though it is popular with dancers from different parts of India. Like other classical dance forms, Mohiniattam too derives its precepts from Natyashastra, the seminal Indian work on performing arts written ca. 200 BCE. Mohiniattam however stands out easily with its unique costume that is quintessentially Keralite. The soul of the dance form however lies in its emphasis on *Laasya*. A concept that eludes easy translation, *Laasya* can mean graceful movements to a slow tempo. There is strong emphasis on circular gait, facial expressions and *mudras* (hand / finger gestures).



In its early days, Mohiniattam was confined to royal courts and feudal homes. The art form has evolved with contemporary sensibilities and today Kerala has a rich line up of talented artistes, each of who bring their individuality and outlook to the art form while steadfastly adhering to its classical structure. Sandra Pisharody is one such supremely talented artiste. She is a disciple of Smt Nirmala Panicker, an accomplished Guru and a herself a direct disciple of Guru Kalyanikutty Amma, widely considered to be the principal force behind the revival of this dance form in twentieth century.