

South Indian song, dance

By Nancy G. Heller
FOR THE INQUIRER

Sruti, the India Music & Dance Society of Philadelphia, performed *Saayujya (The Merging)*, Saturday at the Annenberg Center, featuring two of India's most accomplished artists, dancer Priyadarsini Govind, a proponent of Bharatanatyam, and Carnatic vocalist T.M. Krishna.

The evening combined traditional presentations of these solo forms from South India — accompanied by impressive percussionists and the extraordinary violinist R.K. Shriramkumar — with two experimental pieces.

The first and last items on the bill showcased the mastery of these seasoned performers and the ease with which they communicated musically with each other. It was a pleasure to watch Govind, clad in scarlet, purple, and emerald green, as she conveyed an enormous range of emotions — and, sometimes, different characters — through the subtle flicker of her eyes or a tiny shoulder shrug. And Krishna was thrilling, with his rich voice, winning manner,

and the graceful way he moved his hands.

Less successful was the world premiere of *Voices*. Created to honor Philadelphia's history as the cradle of liberty, this work included spoken comments about freedom, made by Indian and foreign cultural and political leaders — from Rabindranath Tagore to Nelson Mandela and Rosa Parks — including a snippet of a song by Joan Baez. This piece seemed overly ambitious, and theatrically disconnected.

On the other hand, *Pratyaksha* used 21st-century technology (courtesy of Vignesh Ishwar and Satish Kumar) to present colorful visualizations of the sounds the musicians produced. Here, the audience and the performers saw, projected onto the back curtain, ever-changing bursts of yellow and blue (for the drums); red, snake-like forms (the tamboura, or drone); curling striped ribbons of brown, beige, and cream (violin); and a lovely green, veil-like form (vocals). These shapes were more than a mere gimmick, in that the artists based their improvisations on how the sounds looked.

