

Devi: The Golden Voyage

Posted on

A Sri Lankan Story. A World Premiere

Devi: The Golden Voyage presented by the Colombo Ballet School, will be staged at the Bishop's College Auditorium from 12 – 15 November, 2026.

Words: Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane.



The story of Viharamahadevi is a Sri Lankan born entirely new classical ballet for the world.

The world premiere of a two-thousand-year-old story etched in the annals of Sri Lankan history will be brought to life as a full-length classical ballet in three acts, with original music, performed by the students of the Colombo Ballet School. Accompanying this world-first production is an original musical score by Sachchiththa Fernando, who has masterfully composed for a Western classical ballet, incorporating the sounds of traditional instruments such as the Yak Geta Beraya, Thammettama, and Hakgediya as an ode to the story's origins. This is the story of Viharamahadevi, a princess who became a queen, not by succession, but as fate would have it.

The world premiere of Viharamahadevi, with an original musical score composed by a Sri Lankan, has been a mission driven by passion and an unprecedented challenge undertaken by the former students of Sri Lanka's leading ballet teacher, the late Oosha Saravanamuttu. They went on to establish the Colombo Ballet School in 2016, and as the school completes ten years, they have taken the bold step of presenting a Sri Lankan historical story that no one has previously brought to the stage, creating an entirely new classical ballet for the world. The task has been nothing short of unique and innovative.



Romina Gyi, Co-founder, The Ballet School of Colombo.



Tara Cooke, Choreographer and Co-founder, The Ballet School of Colombo.



Sachchiththa Fernando, Music composer.

Although the story of Viharamahadevi was not the school's first choice, as co-founders Tara Cooke and Romina Gyi weighed their options, including popular classical ballets and animations, Viharamahadevi's extraordinary strength and

survival as a young girl emerged as a powerful story of courage and independence. After all, who would imagine reading about an empowered woman in Sri Lanka two thousand years ago, and no less a young princess?

However, this choice came with many challenges. With Viharamahadevi, everything had to begin from scratch. With no existing production to follow, every movement had to be created to tell the story of a young Sri Lankan princess who undertook an unprecedented mission, sacrificing herself to save her father's kingdom from a tsunami believed to have been sent as a consequence of King Kelani Tissa's sacrilege.





Every step of the ballerinas have been uniquely created for Viharamahadevi.

Celebrated for her bravery, Viharamahadevi is believed to have been as young as 12 when she volunteered for this sacrifice. She later emerged in the southern kingdom of Ruhuna, married Prince Kavantissa, who became king, and became the mother of King Dutugemunu, one of Sri Lanka's most revered historical figures.

Viharamahadevi's extraordinary strength and survival as a young girl emerged as a powerful story of courage and independence.

At a time when Sri Lankan history often celebrates male heroism, Viharamahadevi's story offers a remarkable alternative: a young woman whose courage and self-sacrifice saved countless lives. Through this ballet, her story is brought to the fore, reminding audiences that heroism extends beyond the battlefield and can emerge through a single act of extraordinary courage.

As Tara explains, building on an existing production is far easier than creating something entirely new. This meant that they had to adapt it to the framework of a classical ballet, incorporating situations, emotions, challenges, tragedy, and love. It was about understanding both the legend and the documented facts, and remaining as true to them as possible.

Yet she believes their students deserve to be part of a unique creation such as Viharamahadevi. The result is an entirely original Sri Lankan classical ballet, a bold departure from established works such as Swan Lake and The Nutcracker. To bring a chapter of the island's history to life through an original, full-length ballet is an ambitious undertaking – and a remarkable achievement.

Approximately 60 students are participating in Viharamahadevi, with some of the main characters being portrayed by different dancers on different nights. For over a year, the students have been in technique training, including strength and stamina. The school began its concert choreography in February, under Tara's direction.

Interestingly, Tara reveals that once the story was finalized and the roles allocated, the entire cast was asked to research the historical facts surrounding their respective characters and consider how they interpreted the individuals they were

portraying. She insists that it is up to the students to bring the emotional aspect of their roles to life.

In composing the musical score, Sachiththa worked closely with Tara, the choreographer, allowing them to develop the music and movements simultaneously. He would compose a score for a particular scene, which would then be rehearsed alongside the choreography, allowing him to make changes along the way. The process was undertaken on a cue-by-cue basis, with each section finalized before moving on to the next.

Tara explains that Sachiththa's background in classical music, coupled with ballet's reliance on classical compositions, gave them a clear idea of the sound they wanted to achieve, whether it was a waltz or a different time signature. Despite being a Sri Lankan story, the production had to adhere to the framework of a classical ballet. It was therefore a cohesive exercise in fusing music and movement.

The music is slow and emotional, in keeping with the story, while the creative process also involved brainstorming, with new ideas emerging during rehearsals. Given that this was the first time such a massive undertaking had been attempted, the production remained a work in progress, requiring constant adjustments and a continuous exchange of ideas between the composer and the choreographer.



Every aspect has been well thought out, including the costumes that carries the distinct style of ancient Sri Lanka.

In terms of choreography, depicting the voyage across the ocean has been the most challenging. Interestingly, the journey across the sea and Viharamahadevi's eventual landing in Ruhuna are not documented. Tara had to imagine the journey, which occupies a considerable part of the story, and consider what a young girl, alone at sea, might have endured. This led to the creation of a character called Fate, who accompanies the young princess throughout her voyage. As fate would have it, Viharamahadevi eventually lands in a place that would determine her destiny from then onwards.

Tara explains that during her research and story development, she began to reflect on how fate shaped Viharamahadevi's historic journey beyond her sacrifice and voyage, as if destiny itself followed her. This prompted Tara to bring Fate to life as a character. Fate plays a significant role in the performance, appearing first in the court of King Kelani Tissa as his chief advisor, accompanying Viharamahadevi throughout her voyage, and later reappearing in Ruhuna as the wise man who blesses the union between the princess of Kelaniya and the prince of Ruhuna.

Tara explains that one of her greatest challenges was creating steps that would showcase the dancers to their best advantage, given their varying skill levels and the different roles they portray. She is working with both senior and junior casts. Among the most dramatic scenes is Viharamahadevi's departure, as she bids farewell to her parents, the king and queen. This highly climactic moment demands considerable ingenuity in both choreography and performance.

Listening to Tara describe the process and Sachiththa recount how the story and music came together, one can only imagine the magnitude of detail involved in bringing a historical story to life through classical ballet. The colors, costumes, sets, adventures, and emotions all come together in an entirely new production. The challenge has been to remain faithful to the principles of classical ballet while depicting an oriental story.

Having devoted so much time and effort to creating this original Sri Lankan ballet for the world, the Colombo Ballet School hopes that Viharamahadevi will one day enjoy the same popularity as the world-renowned classical ballets. For them, this could be the beginning of many more firsts.

November 12 - 15, 2026

Venue: Bishops College Auditorium,

Colombo 3; Time: 7.30pm onwards;

Tickets: Rs.2,000, Rs.2,500, Rs.3,500, Rs.4,000, Rs.4,500, Rs.5,500 (With a 10 percent discount for 10 tickets or more)

boxoffice.lk/events/devi-the-golden-voyage