

The Colombo Cultural Show: A Soiree into Sri Lanka's Heart

Posted on

As the rays of dusk slowly seeped into the waning day, the glow of flaming torches illuminated the ground under the shelter of the banyan tree. The warmth from the flambeaux evoked charm and nostalgia. Then a spectacular cultural cavalcade of Sri Lanka's finest dances unfolded to the sound of drums and cymbals. The Colombo Cultural Show was brought back to life and made its fresh debut to an enthusiastic audience's applause.

Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane.



Gini Sisila (Fire Dance).

It was an evening of color. A place where culture fused into nature's magnificence. Of many sounds and voices. Of movements. Of folk dance and music. Of costumes, exaggerated and flamboyant, shining torsos, ostentatious skirts, necklaces and bangles, and burnished headgear. Men were twisting and turning firesticks, running them against their bodies, consuming them, and performing rhythmically to the sound of drums. Bejeweled women and men in glitzy crowns performed the famed purification ritual of the "Ves" dance of the Kandyan tradition. The rib-tickling performances of the masked dancers with their constant hip movements gave rise to the ceaseless chatter from jingling anklets. Men danced gloriously. There was passion in every action, women and men dancing in ritualistic piety, the mirthful "kolam" dancers teasing the audiences with their humor. The foreground to this evening of theatrics was adorned with décor made from tender coconut palms with lamps adding to the solemn yet strident evening of celebrating Sri Lanka's culture through the Colombo Cultural Show.

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The debutant show in an arena by the banyan tree was more than a show-stopper. It was an all-consummate expression and demonstration of native lives to fruitfulness. To the novice who desires to savor the richness of this tropical island famously known as Sri Lanka, dance is an expression of who we are. Dance, as a physical manifestation of Sri Lanka's culture, is what its people offer the world in a more dramatized, stylized, and schematized form. Our dances provide a window to the bond between dance and culture, of the essential mutuality between the two, rhythmic masteries, and shifts of the body aligning with culture as a ritualistic performance, preserved for posterity and merged to their life activities on varying levels.

The Colombo Cultural Show is a delightful hour of entertainment every Wednesday at six-fifteen in the evening in Colombo, where ten recitals from the three dance genres of low, up-country, and Sabaragamuwa are performed by a troupe of 15 dancers who provide the audiences with an authentic and opulent aesthetic fair.

The Colombo Cultural Show transcends the mundane, elevated to a spiritual realm by a group of artists passionate about their work, with a deep understanding of the significance of every act beyond its conceptual level to influence the practical domain of human existence. From delivering folk songs to a final pulsating drum orchestra, the show was a tapestry of vivacious recitals. The harvesting dance through the Goyam Natuma to the comical shawl dance (Salu Paliya), the dancer engaging with the audience in humorous action while waving the shawl around the shoulder through the air dancing to the beat of drums was an animated recital. The drama-packed "Yakun Natima" or devil dance ritual, a kind of liberation from malefic forces, is a well-known and often conducted ceremonial performance from the lengthy Shanthi Karma ritual practiced in villages to bring healing to the individual and to the community.

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The dedicated team behind the Colombo Cultural Show is led by Kishan De Silva, Managing Director/ CEO, Transcend Drive, Sudeshika De Silva, Director, and Ranjan Josiah, Head of Operations and Administration, Transcend Drive. They decided to break the post-pandemic lull and embark on a new journey to showcase Sri Lanka's immense wealth of dance forms, a window into the cultural heritage of its people through a dedicated cultural show in Colombo.

The Colombo Cultural Show is a magnificent pronouncement of Sri Lanka's readiness to welcome visitors to whom the island has myriad surprises waiting to be explored and discovered. The trio is banking on the fact that people travel to experience many things, with history, culture, and cuisine on top of their lists. The new gig, they hope, will become an animated and jocund way to titillate the senses of the travel buff and spur the curiosity to not just learn more about the country but they will take back fond memories. That would encourage more people to visit Sri Lanka as an exceptionally vibrant destination worth exploring. The Colombo Cultural Show is a beautiful distraction and a delightful evening of entertainment that every visitor should watch. They could get a grandiose foretaste of Sri Lanka's culture and then embark into the island's heart to experience more visual glamour entrenched in paddy fields, cascading waterfalls, tea gardens, perpetual mountains, and the dwellings of the natives.

Soon the weekly cultural show will extend to twice a week with the organic growth of this initiative. Kishan and his team plan to have more shows a week eventually. As they focus on continuing the show, the team at Transcend Drive is positive and hopeful as they have invested time and resources to ensure that the best performers play their part dedicatedly and let the show do the talking. Accompanying their upbeat sentiment is the support they hope to receive from the travel and tourism industry in the private and public sectors. They seek more players on board to help promote this revived initiative sponsored solely by the company to make it a sustainable program that they hope would become a visitor's itinerary staple in time to come.

Watching the artists perform the different recitals, one realizes that there are no superstars in the show but passionate dancers committed to giving a once-in-a-lifetime experience coupled with the hospitality the country is known for. The initiative is also a bold step in sustaining Sri Lanka's diverse dance forms. While it's an opportunity to provide local artists an avenue to showcase the art they are conversant in, as Sri Lankans, we're also committed to their longevity, said Kishan.

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From women and men aged 17 to 40, selected solely for their passion for art and commitment to preserving it for posterity, the process was painstaking, the show meticulously practiced and organized. The debutant show was more than an ode to Sri Lankan culture and antiquity. Under the shade of the banyan tree, the performers spoke to their audiences skillfully swaying, singing, and drumming and displayed their prowess as the torchbearers of our culture's endurance.

It was an enthralling evening that cast a spell on everyone present. The sound of drums stirred the celebration of symbiotically stylistic movements and lyrical and rhythmic whirling of bodies that narrated bits and pieces of people's lifestyles and shed light on the indigenous psyche. Drums and dances harmoniously demonstrated the celebration of life's moments. The literal song and dance that natives put on at the beginning of an activity, how they use dance rituals to bless and subdue maleficence and heal and rejuvenate. They depict people at work and make belief affirmations. That evening of dance unfolded a dynamic spectacle – colorful, interactive, funny, and sacred.

Colombo Cultural Show

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Wednesdays from 6.15pm onwards

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Kandyan Ves – Kandyan dance from the hill capital.



Naga gurulu.



Pandam Paliya (Mask dance).



Rabana (Raban dance).



Goyam Natuma (Harvest dance)



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Salu Paliya (comical shawl dance).



Thelme dance (Low country traditional dance).



Pooja natuma (Traditional welcome dance).