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Review Of "Performing Konarak, Performing Hirapur: Documenting The Odissi Of Guru Surendranath Jena" And "Interpreting And (Re)Constructing Indonesian Dance And Music Heritage" By A. Lopez Y Royo

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ba: *Dance and Social Change in Contemporary Cuba* (1995), Daniel examined a signature secular dance in one culture of the diaspora; in *Dancing Wisdom* she makes a giant graceful leap into many sacred dances and their contexts across the diaspora. In the process, she advances dance anthropology through ambitious meticulous scholarship, acute comparative analyses, riveting ethnographic description, and a sensual sense of the dancing body that makes one feel the movement in the muscles and the spirit.

Halifu Osumare

University of California, Davis
Priestess of Oya-Yansan

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PERFORMING KONARAK, PERFORMING HIRAPUR: DOCUMENTING THE ODISSI OF GURU SURENDRANATH JENA

by Alessandra Lopez y Royo. 2007. SOAS, University of London, AHRC Research Centre for Cross-Cultural Music and Dance Performance. £10.00.

INTERPRETING AND (RE)CONSTRUCTING INDONESIAN DANCE AND MUSIC HERITAGE

by Alessandra Lopez y Royo. 2007. SOAS, University of London, AHRC Research Centre for Cross-Cultural Music and Dance Performance. £10.00.

Two recently produced films by Alessandra Lopez y Royo focus on dance innovation in two different cultural contexts, each demonstrating how new aesthetics are forged within and between traditional practices. Both films are well crafted, thoughtfully edited, and will be very useful for pedagogical purposes. They illustrate dance innovations not in terms of rupture or as dismantling classical canons but rather as continuous reinventions existing in relation to tradition.

In *Performing Konarak, Performing Hira-*

pur, for example, Royo merges archaeology, dance, and art history to narrate the story of the distinctive Odissi style created by the late Surendranath Jena. This richly documented film does several things. First, it gives us a glimpse of the multiple strands of dance practices from Orissa, situated on the eastern coast of India, that were woven together to construct the “classicism” of modern day Odissi. Second, it shows that the modern history of Odissi parallels the ideology of dance classicism in India that drew on Sanskrit sources such as *Natyashastra*, *Abhinaya darpana*, and, specifically for Odissi, *Abhinayachandrika*. Third, it shows the deeper Hindu-ization of various indigenous/tribal dance practices due to the powerful impact of *bhakti* movement in medieval India. The last point is significant for understanding the contribution of Guru Jena’s work and for engaging with the larger context of the political and cultural complexities of Indian dances.

Royo uses lively visuals cross-cutting the local context of Orissa, the urban dance classes in Delhi, and the temple sculptures of Konarak and Hirapur for weaving her narrative. The visuals show the roots of Odissi that combine the *Gotipua*, *Mahari*, *Akbada*, and *Nacha* traditions. She mentions the works of important male gurus such as Debaprasad Das, Pankaj Charan Das, Surendranath Das, Surendranath Jena, and the legendary Kelucharan Mahapatra, who shaped the repertoire of modern day Odissi. The viewer also gets a sense of the institutionalization of Odissi from its community context in Orissa to the urban centers in Delhi, Kolkata, and Bhubaneswar. The lack of a female voice in shaping the dance repertoire is not insignificant here, despite the fact that important female dancers and choreographers such as Sanjukta Panigrahi, Alok Kanungo, Madhavi Mudgal, Protima Bedi, and Ileana Citaristi, among others, popularized the form.

But the most significant aspect of the film is Royo’s documentation of Guru Jena’s work, which draws on the temple sculptures of Konarak and Hirapur, and the relative marginalization of his work due to his aesthetic choices. She uses five signature pieces by Guru Jena, all rendered by his daughters, of which I will discuss *Konarakanti* and *Shakti Rupa Yogini* to analyze his particular approach. Both these compositions merge architecture and sculpture to give expression to a distinct Indian aesthetic that reveals the intimate dialogue between sculpture and architecture in temples and in dances. Royo uses the term *choreography* in relation to Jena’s works, but I am curious to know whether Jena used the term himself. Now that choreography has assumed a hegemonic status in the global discourse on non-Western dance practices, it is difficult to trace how dance language evolved in different cultural contexts. A survey of dance criticism that has appeared in Indian English newspapers since the 1950s is a case in point. In this regard interviews with Jena and his students/daughters would have been insightful.

In his work *Konarakanti* Jena re-imagines the Odissi repertoire and connects it to the temple structure at Konarak. He expresses through this and his other works the intricate visual designs that capture the relationships of the various celestial figures, animals, and everyday activities. Mostly expressed in linear or circular movements that reflect the architectural lines of the temple structures, his signature works highlight the iconographic or imagistic representations rather than spatial explorations. However, he emphasizes movement over statuesque postures (that are common to Odissi), thus creating a different conceptualization of time. The dense visual aesthetics in *Konarakanti* are in direct contrast to the iconography of *Shakti Rupa Yogini*. The latter work details the stark and

powerful images of the sixty-four yoginis that adorn the temple structure at Hiraapur. Jena draws on the medieval text *Shaktipurana* written by Sarala Das, the temple architecture, and the iconography of the yoginis to depart from the hyper-feminine sensuality of Odissi aesthetics. He creates an aesthetic of the grotesque emotion (*bibhatsa rasa*) that is considered transgressive to the classicism of Odissi, one that draws mostly from *sringara rasa* (erotic emotion). The powerful dance rendition by Pratibha Jena draws the viewer to the poetics of gesture and emotion, evoking a *tantric* world of magic and mysticism. Through close-ups and judicious camera movement, the film captures the aesthetics of *darshana* (divine gaze) evoked through the powerful yogini dance. The presence of an actual audience during the performance would have added to the sense of community and context. Last, we see guru Jena dancing and singing to the text of *Gitagovinda* (a twelfth-century text) from a seated position immersed in *rasa* (aesthetic emotion), revealing to this viewer the merging of the *bhakta* (devotee), the deity, and the dancer embodying beauty, truth, and *ananda* (bliss). This is a great addition to South Asian dance film archives and is a tribute to the late Surendranath Jena, who passed away recently.

Interpreting and (Re)Constructing Indonesian Dance and Music Heritage, another film by Royo, looks at the creation of an Asian hybrid: an intercultural collaboration of Balinese dance and Bharatnatyam from south India. Royo's separation of the dance performance from the documentary section works well to give us a view of the process of dance making by the Balinese team Ni Made Pujawati, I Negah Susila, I Wayan Dibia with the Bharatnatyam group Chitra Sundaram, Y. Yadavan, R. Pratap, and others. The project is an attempt to go beyond the binaries of east/west dance collaborations that typi-

cally blend non-Western forms with a Euro-American movement vocabulary (implicit in this is a tradition/ modern binary). This project blends two non-Western forms and in the process reformulates dominant notions of intercultural performance and contemporary dance.

The documentary shows the project in various stages. A segment with Indonesian dance scholar Dibia shows him working with student dancers at Roehampton University, where this project took place. The film then moves to Denpasar, showing the *Kecak* festival in its full grandeur. It gives us a window into how traditions that appear age-old are often modern inventions, such as the *Kecak*. It also shows Dibia's use of the chanting technique for inventing a contemporary vocabulary for Balinese dance. I only wish Royo had included interviews with the audience members after the performance, which could have added another layer to the complex negotiations of cultural spaces by the performers and the audience, especially as this event was staged in Roehampton.

The four dance segments, *Alarippu*, *Ashtadigpala*, *Jayaprana*, and *Abduction of Sita*, combine Balinese dance, music, and theatrical styles, especially *Legong*, *Arja*, and *Gamelan* with Bharatnatyam and Carnatic music. The dance piece *Jayaprana*, choreographed by Pujawati, tells an old Balinese story in the contemporary context of political corruption. The costumes and aesthetics of the dance form remain close to the traditional structure while the story is reinterpreted. *Alarippu* and *Ashtadigpala* are both beautifully crafted, with care taken to integrate Balinese with Carnatic music. The intrinsic relationship between Asian music and dance forms is not overlooked here, as one finds in much contemporary choreography. The most striking section in the *Ashtadigpala* interweaves gestures, musical cadences, and

bodies in motion and reflection to create a sense of unity in difference.

The last piece, *Abduction of Sita*, a story from *Ramayana*, is an obvious choice for the collaboration by the choreographers/dancers Sundaram and Pujawati as it is the common cultural thread that connects Bali and India. Sundaram uses the Bharatnatyam structure and Pujawati uses techniques from *Arja* theater to re-imagine this popular story in a Balinese-Indian idiom. However, it would have been more interesting if the choreographers could retell this story from a different perspective than the standard one. It was also interesting to see Sundaram, embodying Bharatnatyam, playing all the male characters while Pujawati enacts the female character of Sita and the golden deer. The documentary highlights the collaborative nature of the project and the careful negotiations and aesthetic choices that were made to make it successful. It was thoughtful and respectful of traditional repertoire as it forged new experiences for innovation and improvisation. The two striking dancers reconfigured structures of improvisation and innovation.

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DANCING FROM PAST TO PRESENT: NATION, CULTURE, IDENTITIES

edited by Theresa Jill Buckland. 2006. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. xii + 245 pp., illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95 paper.

DANCE AND SOCIETY: DANCER AS A CULTURAL PERFORMER. RE-APPRAISING OUR PAST, MOVING INTO THE FUTURE

edited by Elsie Ivancich Dunin, Anne von Bibra Wharton, and László Felföldi. 2005. 40th Anniversary of Study Group on Ethnochoreology of International Council on Traditional

Music. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, European Folklore Institute. 289 pp., illustrations, references, appendix. \$45.00 paper.

The large international participation of scholars, many of them young graduate students, in the recent CND/CORD/SDHS conference in Paris (June 21–27, 2007), along with new publications in the field and the spread of world dance courses in colleges and universities in many regions of the world, suggest the need for increasingly sophisticated research publications. New publications featuring the works of well-known senior scholars are cause for celebration by those of us attempting to meet research and student demand for new sources of information that feature new conceptual, theoretical, and methodological approaches. In the past few years scholars have produced an exciting array of monographs and collections of essays important to the field of world dance or dance ethnology.

In *Dancing from Past to Present* the editor, Theresa Jill Buckland, has shaped a volume that “has two principal goals. First, it aims to stimulate debate on the combined use of ethnographic and historical strategies in investigating dance as embodied cultural practice. Second, it aims to expand the field of mainstream dance studies by focusing on examples beyond typically Eurocentric conceptualizations of concert dance” (vii). Buckland has gathered together the work of eight scholars investigating an impressive variety of traditional dance cultures in order to add a historical dimension to ethnographic studies, which, following some past anthropological practices, often omit the crucial diachronic element from their findings.

As Buckland notes, most mainstream dance scholarship concentrated on Western theatrical and historical dance practices: dance as an art form. By contrast, “Anthropologists sought to understand the present