



Nrityagram: The Sound of Dancing Feet

Shaheryar Asghar, Arts & Culture Co-Editor

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On Oct. 21, 2025, the Weis Center for the Performing Arts filled with the glow of lamps, music and movement. The night carried a special meaning. It was Diwali, the Festival of Lights, when Hindus around the world celebrate hope, goodness and renewal. That same spirit of light and devotion came alive on stage as Nrityagram, one of India's most celebrated dance ensembles, performed "KHANKHANĀ: The Sound of Dancing Feet." It was an evening that went beyond performance. It was worship, storytelling and art all woven together with grace and meaning.

Even before the lights dimmed, the energy in the hall was different. You could sense anticipation in every corner. The stage was set in gold and bronze tones, the air humming with quiet reverence. When the first sound of ankle bells rang out, the audience seemed to breathe as one. As someone who grew up on the other side of the border, I had only seen such dances from afar, on television or in passing at festivals. But that night, I understood what makes this art form so sacred. It was not the dancers following the rhythm of the music; it was the music bending to their every step.

The performance opened with a worship dance dedicated to Lord Shiva, one of the three principal gods in Hindu mythology. Every movement felt like prayer, deliberate, still and alive. The dancers didn't just perform; they became the offering itself. Their bodies flowed like water, every hand gesture speaking its own language. The sound of the mridanga drum and the soft echo of ghungroos surrounded the hall, creating something between silence and sound, something deeply spiritual.

The second and third acts turned toward the human heart, toward love and longing. Through the story of Radha and Krishna, the dancers explored the beauty of connection, the ache of separation and the sweetness of devotion. The performance reminded me how storytelling lies

at the core of every South Asian art form, where words and gestures meet to express what language cannot. The dancers moved in perfect harmony, so intertwined with the story that you could no longer tell where one ended and the other began.

By intermission, the entire audience sat in quiet awe. Many South Asian students had come to celebrate the Diwali performance, and there was a shared pride in the room, a feeling of home and belonging. Yet what made the night even more powerful was how it brought everyone together. People from all faiths and backgrounds sat side by side, watching an art form that spoke of love, light and balance, things that belong to everyone.

After the break came the fourth act, which shifted from devotion to power. It honored the divine feminine, the mother, the protector, the one who restores peace when the world begins to crumble. In Hindu mythology, when gods fail to bring balance, it is often a goddess who rises to do so. The dancers embodied this transformation with strength and grace. Their expressions grew fierce, their movements bold. What began as calm and prayerful turned into a fire of energy and force. It was a reminder that softness and strength can live within the same body, the same soul.

The final act brought the evening back to love, but this time it was different, a love deeper, quieter, shaped by loss and understanding. The three dancers moved as though telling the story of life itself, the bonds that form, the changes that come, the letting go that must follow. When the last movement stilled and the music faded, there was a silence that said everything.

The applause that followed filled the hall. It was not just admiration but gratitude. Students, faculty and community members stood in unison, some clapping through tears. Julia Silvia, '27, who had attended a masterclass with Nrityagram earlier that day, said, "It's amazing how steady and balanced they are, especially during the slowest moments. It feels like time stops."

For Tamim Rahman, '29, who is from Bangladesh, the performance felt deeply personal. "It reminded me of home," he said softly. "It captured everything I grew up seeing, the colors, the rhythm, the soul."

That night, Nrityagram gave more than a show. They gave something lasting, a moment of connection that crossed borders, faiths and languages. Every step carried meaning, every gesture held a story and every silence between movements felt like a prayer. As the lights dimmed and the audience slowly left the hall, there was still a quiet glow that lingered, the kind that Diwali promises, the kind that art keeps alive.