



NOMINEE
2023 MELBOURNE FRINGE
FESTIVAL AWARDS

@ 2023 Fringe
Festivals of Adelaide,
Sydney, & Melbourne

Photo: Abhijit Pal

WHY RUNS THE ABHISARIKA

The how, why, when of running as a romantic pursuit.
(A performance of picture recitation)

Format: An audience interactive picture-recitation with images, spoken word poetry, Indian dance, and Indian instrumental music.

Duration: 50 mins + 5 mins (post-show audience interaction). No intervals.

Language: English.

Ideal Audience size: Intimate (< 200)

Audience: Suitable for audiences of all communities above 14 years of age.

No content warnings are required. No sensitive/ First Nations content

Venues: Blackbox, proscenium, gallery,

Available from: August 2023 onwards

Picture recitation is storytelling in verse while pointing at images that are simultaneously mentioned in the oral narrative.

Synopsis: The Abhisarika is one of the eight types of heroines mentioned in classical Sanskrit literature. Seven of the heroines wait for their lovers to come to them but the Abhisarika (not a passive character) runs out to meet her lover, sometimes even on dark stormy nights. Instead of narrating her love story, the performance ponders on her act of ignoring social conventions and risk-taking. This picture recitation explores the motifs of the Abhisarika's iconography as found in various mediaeval Indian miniature paintings (such as snakes, trees, lightning etc.) and tries to interpret her psychosomatic landscape through the lenses of contemporary neuroscientific research especially related to the neurotransmitter Dopamine (about which we hear a lot these days). Each motif has a different answer as to why the Abhisarika runs which is elucidated in a song. The audience is invited to interact and choose the motifs one after another and thereby decide the sequence of the performance.



Spoiler alert: In the last song, the set changes from showing the heroine running through a forest of trees to showing her running through a jungle of nerve cells of the brain and the classical Sanskrit concept of the Abhisarika (running and taking risks, proactively initiating her tryst with her lover) now seems equivalent to our modern understanding about dopamine running across our neural synapses which actually helps in executing her actions.

Conceptual underpinnings: Many forms of picture recitation were performed in India but are now nearly extinct. One of the reasons for the partial decline of picture recitation traditions in India has been European colonisation. Western connoisseurs collected the props used for picture recitation to add to their museum collections while neglecting the performers who were downcast as “folk artists” by Western scholars because they lived in villages and pastoral communities. Today this art form exists in a handful of versions within very small economically weak groups of artists. Inspired by the contemporary zeitgeist of **decolonization**, in my practice-led PhD at RMIT University (2020-2023), I have tried to imagine how this art form would have progressed and evolved to suit contemporary times had colonisation not occurred in India. Perhaps picture recitation would have been taught in art colleges of India just like painting and sculpture and would not have remained secluded in small groups of “folk artists”. Any art form survives only due to a sufficient number of practitioners as well as patrons. I try to decolonize the art form through practice, to inform audiences about the traditions of picture recitation, and to encourage creatives to take up its practice to infuse new impulses in this art form. To this end, after the performance, I interact with the audience for 10 minutes on the topic of decolonization and share my research with them.

Target Audience: Contemporary/ cross-cultural, Lovers of arts/science/ spoken word poetry, Opera, Museum and art gallery visitors, library members, People interested in Indian dance and diverse cultures, Indian diaspora, Senior school and university students and faculties of visual and performing arts, literature and creative writing, neuroscience, and microbiology departments.

Though related to science, the content is comprehensible to common people. Audiences witness how different images are revealed through the props and costumes in the various songs, are mesmerized by the rich visual illustration of the backdrops and feel intellectually stimulated by the blending of art, science, and literature. They realize the similarity between themselves (running daily through their goals and targets) and the Abhisarika from a bygone era. Old philosophical concepts merge with our new knowledge systems in the cyclical flow of time.



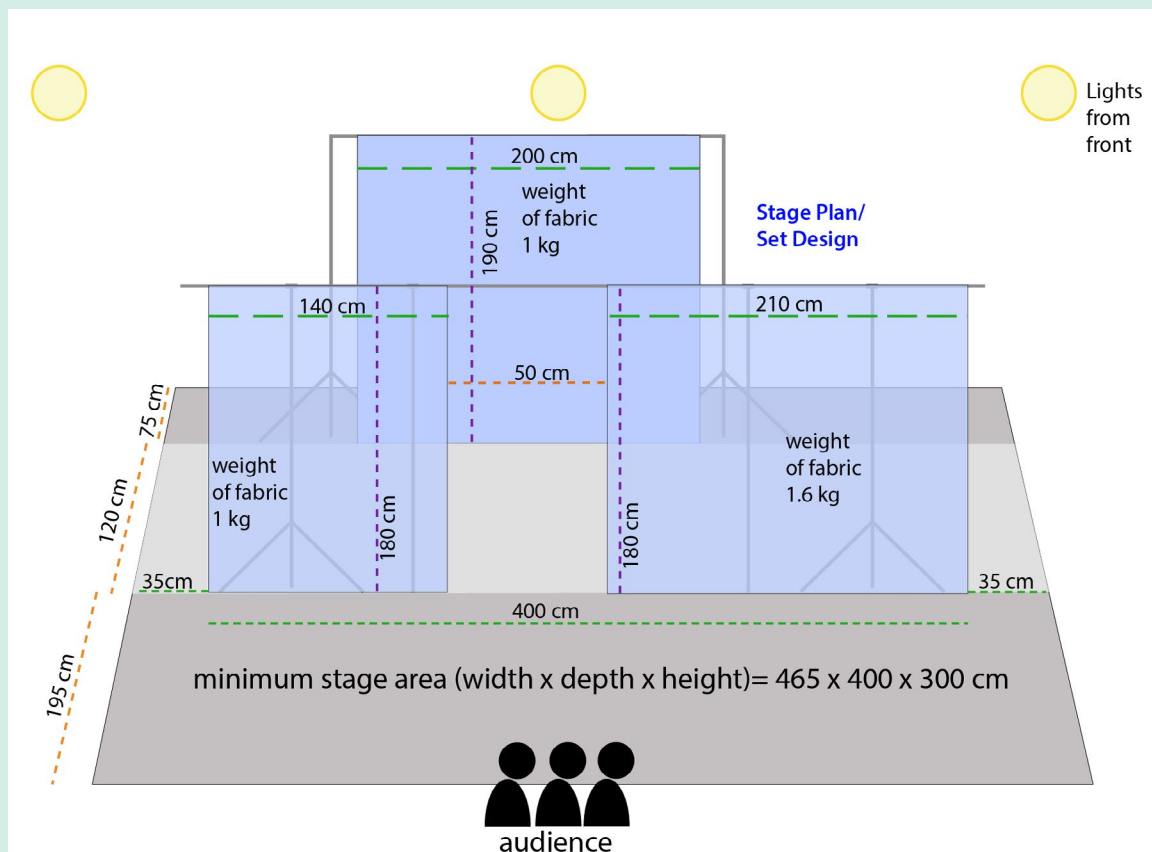
RADEL ELECTRIC TANPURA



My personal audio equipments: Electric Tanpura for a constant drone music (left) and wireless microphone head set with lavalier (right) which both need to be plugged in for amplification.



Photo: Abhijit Pal



Show logistics

- I am the solo female performer, crew, and producer of my project
- Set and props fit in 2 airline travel suitcases. I do not drive
- The show can be performed in daylight/open-air/indoors/flat floor/proscenium/blackbox/theatre/stage
- No tech support needed during the performance
- Music used is not copyrighted and needs no licensing

Must have Tech specs

Sound amplification [not required for small spaces of 50 people] + Even static white/ warm-white lights (see stage plan) + Even flooring and floor covering for open air events + 6 sand bags/ weights for my tripods & stands + powercable in stage area for my small steampress to iron backdrops

What I need from presenters

- Full marketing support
- Tech equipment & technician
- Tech equipment hire and return (if required)
- A power point, table, and chair in a small well-lit changing room
- Prior info about all costs and revenue sharing
- A few documentation photos

Per Performance Fee:

Negotiable + Travel costs
Royalties: Nil

Time Specs

Total time at the venue: **6.5 hours**
Install: 4 hrs (2.5 hrs to install, 1.5 hrs in green room)
Show: 1 hr
De-install: 1.5 hrs
(Backdrops can be set up earlier & stored backstage to reduce turn-around time to 20 mins between other shows during festivals)

About myself

I have a versatile visual arts practice and am transitioning to become a touring performance artist. I know how important it is to be flexible through my touring experience as a technician with a theatre in Germany. I am inspired by many stand-up artists who tour internationally and wish to embark on a similar journey. I seek to build long-term support for my genre of performance.

Contact: Priyanka Jain
+61431683826

Melbourne, Australia
visuoral.arts@gmail.com
www.jainpriyanka.com
Insta: visuoral_arts



In the amphitheatre at Kolkata Centre of Creativity, Kolkata, India. Photo: Kaushik Ghara.



In an open-air public space at Testing Grounds, Melbourne, Australia. Photo: Priyanka Jain

Marketing blurb:

Why Runs The Abhisarika – *The how, why, when of running as a romantic pursuit*

What goes on in the mind of a woman running out to meet her lover? What goes on in our brains when we run out to meet our goals?

Enjoy a unique visual and oral storytelling performance with Indian dance and English spoken word poetry about the simple neuroscience of passion.



In a theatre space at Parks Theatre, Adelaide, Australia. Photo: Lieke Hoeften



Scan/Click to view excerpts
of the performance.



Scan/Click for
audience reviews

AUDIENCE REVIEWS

**This performance solves the
problem of traditionalization.**

(John Napier, University of New South Wales)

*As a person with Indian heritage
who grew up in the West,
to experience this art form was
very educating, very healing.*

Would recommend it for teenagers

(Derrick Brown Appenzeller, University of Melbourne)

The combination of
The cosmic and the cellular
The contemporary and the ancient
Visual and oral
Memory and rhythm

Just stunning!!!!

(Nikos Papastergiadis
University of Melbourne)

**Definitely got my
Dopamine going!**

(Sumathi Krishnan, author)

**Belongs for everybody,
speaks to everybody's cultures,
its so specific that it becomes **universal**.**
(Annalouise Paul, dancer)

The writing

- is **so** beautiful (Roanna Gonsalves, University of New South Wales)
- reminds me of Allen Ginsberg's **beat** poetry (Dane Hunnerup, Creative Australia)
- is **Shakespearean** in its delivery (Andy Miller, Multicultural Arts Victoria)

Priyanka has nailed **neuroscience**
like no other artist, there was no
error message. (Emma Burrows, The Florey
Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health)

Enjoyed ^{the}
whimsical,
fantastical
side of the
mythology.

Picture recitation traditions around the world.



Moritatensänger
Zeichnung von Viktor Leyrer

Clockwise from top left: Patachitra scroll singers from West Bengal, India, Wayang Kulit leather puppetry performer from Indonesia, Pardadari performer from Iran, illustration of a Moritatensänger from Austria, a temple priest narrating from an Etoki scroll in Japan, a bard reciting stories from a wooden Kaavadi box in Rajasthan, India. (Images sourced from the internet.)