

World Culture & Arts Festival Report 2004

The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Australia's inaugural World Culture & Arts Festival, held at Sydney Town Hall on Sunday 15 August 2004, was proclaimed unanimously as a great success. Ostensibly held on India's Independence Day, the music and dance concert with over 200 artists from cultures around the world, and an arts exhibition in fact celebrated the spirit of multiculturalism and the vibrancy of the ethnic arts community in Australia. It was opened by Indira Naidoo, popular ABC TV presenter and one of multicultural Australia's great success stories, with performances by the great Kamahl and the first Australian country music singer from India, Bobby Cash.

The performances opened with a north Indian classical Kathak-tarana presented by Natraj Dance Academy, moving straight on to the traditional Scottish Airs and Scottish Highland Bagpipe presented by Sydney Scottish Fiddlers and Blairgowrie Dancers and Soka Gakkai International's Blue Sky Choir. Throughout the night, the audience took in fantastic performances from "Los Chilenos" Cultural Folk Dance Group Spring season Fiesta Alarcon, the Kuuku-Yalanji tribe of North Queensland to acknowledge this nation's beginnings presented by Jeremy Donovan, the Academy of Turkish Music & Fine Arts, Natananallya Dance Academy's Bharatnatyam dances, Asim Gorashi's Sudanese peace songs, Traditional Polish dances presented by Syrenka and Argentinean and Uruguyan performances presented by the spectacular Grupo Raices. With dances from the four corners of India presented by Nupur Dance Group and Geetanjali School of Dance and Performing Arts, Khemara Angkor Dance Group Chhayam (long drum) and others from the different communities of the world, the World Culture & Arts Festival was a truly spectacular occasion.

Our special guests attested to this in their speeches. The Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP, Federal Shadow Minister for Population, Citizenship, and Multicultural Affairs, after recognising "in this magnificent representation of 19th century British colonial local government, particularly in this building" the Eora people as the traditional owners of the land, said, "I want to recognise Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's efforts to promote Indian culture and give us greater understanding but also their effort as manifested tonight by a variety of groups and other countries." Mr Ferguson after acknowledging that he had been witness to most of Bhavan Australia's activities said that India, being a diverse multicultural country with over 40 different official languages, is in a much better position to teach the multiculturalism to the world.

The Hon. John Brogden MP, Liberal Leader New South Wales talked about how superfluous he felt interrupting such fabulous performances. He then said, "It's a very great honour to join you this evening but there are many occasions where speeches from politicians are very appropriate. I think this is one of the less appropriate for one reason only – when you compare our speeches with the recent performances, we come last.... This 19th century magnificent representation of British colonialism comes alive with the sounds of multicultural Australia tonight. ... It's a very proud, proud occasion this evening and this World Culture Festival, as the title says it all, celebrates the best of the cultures of the world, not from other parts of the world, but here in Australia ... We have opened up our arms and continue to open up. ... It's great pleasure to be here. Thank you for inviting me and to be a part of it. ... Thank you for reinforcing yet again that Australia's multiculturalism is indeed one of the proudest achievements of our nation."

The Hon. Kayee Griffin MLC after conveying the apologies of the Premier of New South Wales The Hon. Bob Carr and extending his congratulations to Bhavan Australia and other involved in the organisation of this magnificent event said "this is something that's very representative of Sydney and the great groups of people that we have who bring us this wonderful entertainment you have seen tonight, who bring us a part of their heritage that we can appreciate, understand and get to know." She discussed her brief contact with the Indian culture and praised its values, exuberances and contribution to the multicultural fabric of Australia.

The Consul General of India, Sydney, The Hon Madhusudan Ganapathi said:

"The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan is the foremost socio-cultural, philosophical and educational institution in India.... It has been nearly a year since the inauguration of the Bhavan's Australia Kendra in Sydney by the External Affairs Minister of India on August 29, 2003... The Bhavan represents the multicultural dimension of Indian society. Its presence here is a recognition of the strength of the multicultural dimensions of Australia... Today's function has been an exceptional treat reflecting the multicultural fabric of Australian society. The performance of various multicultural strands in this World Festival of Culture and Arts is a tribute to the Bhavan's vision... I congratulate the Bhavan and the indefatigable energy of its President in putting up today's show. The President and the Executive Committee of the Bhavan deserve our warmest congratulations... Today India celebrates the 57th anniversary of its Independence Day and thus, the significance of today's event assumes a particularly special dimension. I convey my greetings to all Indians on this auspicious occasion..."

Gambhir Watts, Bhavan President said in his Word of Thanks address "Australia is a mini world where people from more than 200 communities from all over the world live together. Today we are seeing a micro world within this mini world. Here is a sample of a world family true to Bhavan's ideal of "the world is one family." He added that Bhavan believes that there are elements in all cultures which transcend all barriers and knit people together.

The diplomats who graced the event included (most accompanied by their partners) Mr. Madhusudan Ganapathi, Consul General of India, Mr Hertomo Reksodibubro, Consul General of Indonesia, Mr Ejaz Ahmad, Consul General of Pakistan, Mr. Cesar Bustamante, Consul General of Peru, Mr Recep Peker, Deputy Consul General of Turkey, Mr Tadeusz Zylinski, Consul General of Poland, Mr Vanlalhuma, Deputy Consul General of India, Professor Stuart Rees, Chair, Sydney Peace Foundation, Hans van der Bent General Director, Soka Gakkai International Australia, Neville Roach, Chairman Australia India Business Council.

Finally, the Festival included a souvenir of messages of support from such dignitaries as the Governor-General His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery AC who saw the Festival as portraying Mahatma Gandhi's observation that "our life is a long and arduous quest after Truth." The Governor-General saw this event as "conveying cultural experience, encouraging respect for difference, [and] opening up dialogue." The Hon. Gary Hardgrave MP, Federal Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs "once again" applauded the Bhavan and the Australian-Indian community's foresight and initiative by organising events such as today's "World Cultural Festival" and creating a multicultural celebration that invites and encourages participation from the broader

Australian community... and hoped that this event would build on the spirit of social cohesion and national unity in Australia, which has for many years, has been the envy of the world. The Premier, Hon. Bob Carr MP wrote to congratulate the Bhavan for fostering community harmony. The Hon. Prabhat P. Shukla, the High Commissioner of India to Australia, has had many interactions with the Bhavan in India and wrote to congratulate the Bhavan and acknowledged that such events are essential to celebrating diversity and promoting Indian culture and values. Stephan Kerkyasharian AM, Chair, Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural New South Wales, warmly applauded the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Australia for "showing the initiative to plan and stage this significant festival" and wrote "they have recognised clearly the value and potential of cultural diversity and attempted to tackle the challenges it offers in a very practical project." The Consul General of the Republic of Poland The Hon Tadeusz Zylinksi wrote in appreciation of the Bhavan's endeavour to organize this important multicultural event and greatly commended "their idea to bring artists from various cultural backgrounds to perform under one roof and to voice their conviction that the world is one family."

Our Sponsors included, Qantas, India Tourism Sydney, City of Sydney, Small Business Guru, Air India, Jaipur Bizarre, Graphic Innovators, Vision Asia, Airsonics Travel, Indian Airlines and others.