

STAGE & ARTS

Ananya Dance Theatre dances at the end of the world

REVIEW: With a grim look at the future, choreographer Ananya Chatterjea urges climate-saving action..

By **SHEILA REGAN** Special to the Star Tribune | **SEPTEMBER 23, 2019 — 4:02PM**

Students around the world went on strike Friday, demanding action around climate change. At the O'Shaughnessy in Saint Paul, Ananya Dance Theatre used dance to proclaim the same message.

The company's production of "Sutrajaal: Revelations of Gossamer" galvanized an enthusiastic crowd at the opening night performance. At one point, people sitting in the front row even jumped out of their seats to join in a dance party section of the show, in what seemed to be a preplanned bit of audience participation.

Is it preaching to the choir? Perhaps. It's unlikely anyone who came to the performance didn't already believe urgent action is needed around environmental issues. But this audience, thanks to an inspiring performance, was revved up and ready to take on the world.

Artistic Director Ananya Chatterjea, who choreographed and also danced in the piece, employed considerable world building in its creation, in part thanks to a strong team of designers. Chelsea Warren's set design and Tim Quinlan's animation especially helped to create an eerie speculative mood.

Carefully drawn characters played by the dancers populated the Global Feminist Funk Underground Club, in the Broken City. A mythical bird called Byengomi, performed by Alexandra Eady, and a rain spirit character named Ua, played by Kealoha Ferreira, fall in love in a beautifully sensual dance, eventually giving birth. Hui Wilcox, meanwhile, played a mournful karaoke singer whose spirit slowly broke down over the course of two solos.

Central to the story was a time-traveling seer named Ahiwa, played with intensity by Alessandra Williams who time traveled from a post-apocalyptic disaster to just before the city is destroyed.

Decked out in a plastic crown, Williams, accompanied by the poet character played by spoken word artist Tish Jones, wandered amid bodies covered in sheets of plastic at the performance's open. Then, with an omnipotent gaze, she watched the events from the past, occasionally interacting with time, like when she manipulated motifs of daily life like a rake, a bucket and a chair that were hung from the ceiling.

The individual story lines of the characters were less drawn in the last third of the performance, as the group congealed into a cohesive whole — fighting ferociously against the powers of environmental doom — to the audience's enthusiastic applause.

Ultimately, while Chatterjea employed some narrative elements, her structure is broader than each of the individual characters. Ambiguous in its determination of the world's future fate, its main aim was to stir action in those watching the show.

Sheila Regan is a Twin Cities critic and arts journalist.



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Alessandra Williams plays the seer Ahiwa in "Sutrajaal: Revelations of Gossmer" by Ananya Dance.

