

Praise this pairing of song and dance

REVIEW In "Soul to Sole," Indian dance meets American gospel singing, with surprisingly uplifting results.

By **CAROLINE PALMER**, Special to the Star Tribune

Midway through "Soul to Sole," now performing at the Ritz Theater in northeast Minneapolis, spoken-word artist Latisha Jones utters the phrase "intertwined with something divine." She aptly describes a work uniting the dynamic north Indian dance form of Kathak, performed by Rita Mustaphi's Katha Dance Theatre, with Twin Cities gospel star Robert Robinson's soaring vocals. It's an unexpected but successful combination that shows how joyous praisegiving transcends the boundaries of cultures and beliefs.

Kathak dance is percussive, defined by fast, often stamping footwork, swirling turns and dramatic gestures that convey a story. When paired with gospel songs performed by Robinson and a three-member chorus, the movement largely retains its original character, but Mustaphi also experiments with complementary -- and sometimes counterintuitive -- moments inside the different rhythmic structures. Although this

approach doesn't always mesh -- at times the music seems bigger than the choreography and the dancers occasionally fall out of sync with one another -- more often than not all of the elements coalesce into a genuinely uplifting performance.

Robinson's singular talent underscores his interpretations of traditional and contemporary songs, including the spiritual "O Freedom" and Paul Simon's "Bridge Over Troubled Water." Drummer Timothy Berry and pianist Joseph Samuel Reeves maintain a high energy level as they accompany the performers and enjoy the spotlight with their own lively "Soul Riff for the Children."

The seven Katha company members, wearing colorful costumes and bells strapped around their ankles, offer a few virtuosic turns, especially when confidently presenting an extended set of complicated and sustained patterns with their feet. And Mustaphi carries out her solos with a sense of serenity and control, subtly matching the story lines expressed with her hands to Robinson's words and emotional resonance.

The evening concludes with Bob Marley's anthem "One Love." The lyrics urge, "Let's get together and feel all right." "Soul to Sole" most certainly accomplishes this objective.

Caroline Palmer writes regularly about dance.