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## Stong hosts Indian dancer

By **STUART SHEPHERD**  
Last Friday night, the Stong College JCR was transformed into an exotic east Indian temple by means of western stage accessories in order to create the appropriate setting for a performance of classical Indian dance by York University's resident celebrity, Menaka Thakkar.

To an accompaniment of an effectively co-ordinated lighting program, specially recorded music by Indian musicians of Thakkar's acquaintance, a three screen slide show with images supplied by Thakkar herself, and a scripted narration by her brother, the solo dancer presented her personal interpretation of the dance drama "Geeta Govinda", based on a Twelfth Century Bengali love poem which takes the relationship between Lord Krishna and his beloved as its theme. The atmosphere projected by poem and dance blends devotional and erotic aspects in a way which would be unthinkable in a conventional Western

religious context. This apparent duality calls for a special interpretive skill from the performer, one which Menaka Thakkar possessed in no small measure. Her style of Indian dance combines physical aspects of the form as movement with a substantial measure of pantomime, allowing a tremendous range of expression and intensity in intimate performance situations.

She had astounding control of the purely physical aspects of dance performance. Her stylized gestures transformed gracefully and fluidly from one to the next, stopping now and again in a manner which seemed to defy natural laws of motion and gravity by freezing in contorted poses familiar from temple sculpture from the subcontinent, with head tilted, limbs and fingers oddly bent, and one leg back up and behind the other. Thakkar seemed as well to have developed the ability to detach her upper and lower body from the same control system when she wished,

demobilizing the latter to focus attention to more subtle movements or expression above the waist. The activities unique to the lower body, on the other hand, were a whole art unto themselves.

Thakkar's range of expression by means of facial expression and hand gesture (mudra) was equally well developed. In her interpretation of the reaction of Radha to the Lord Krishna's philandering, she was able to convey a tremendous array of emotion through the activities of her mouth and eyes alone: bashfulness, hurt, stealth, joy, tiredness, reproach, pride, longing. While the specific meaning of hand gestures were lost to anyone not familiar with their symbolic code, their purely visual characteristics conveyed messages of their own.

It is difficult to be quite so positive in assessing the contribution of the multi-media background to the dancing. While the stage decoration, lighting, and incense certainly enhanced the presentation, the music fades, flashing multiple images, and above all, the periodic intrusions of National Geographic-style narration disrupted a contemplative reaction to it. On the other hand, for a newcomer to the art form, this mode of presentation did at least provide a means of locating oneself in the dramatic development.

Of Menaka Thakkar's great artistry, however, there is little doubt. She is a performer of great poise, control, expressiveness, musicianship, and physical accomplishment. Though she attracted a fair sized audience to Stong College on Friday, there was still lots of space left empty in the hall. Hopefully there won't be such a waste next time she performs here.

## Stringband and Sylvia

By **MICHAEL HOLLETT**

No one shouted "play Four Strong Winds" as Sylvia Tyson brought her polished solo act to U of T's Convocation Hall Sunday. Instead, Tyson was allowed to shine without the shadow of husband Ian and the results were impressive.

Far from being a shy folkie, Tyson comes across as a hard-driving singer with a powerful voice.

She combines many types of music including country, folk, blues and even rock. The result is not an uncohesive mish-mash but a well-paced, well-mixed show.

Because of the terrific range and power in Tyson's voice she is able to perform all styles of music well. At times she sounds like Maria Muldaur (without the flirt), at times, like Linda Ronstadt. And there is always a bit of Buffy St. Marie's vibrato thrown in for good measure.

Tyson writes and sings for and about women rather than to them. She writes songs about waitresses, old women, lonely sisters and so on.

Tyson was supported by a great band who were easily able to follow on her ventures into many styles of music.

Nancy Ward-Barthly, who accompanied Tyson on piano and helped with vocals was especially impressive.

Stringband, one of the best bands around was the warm-up act. As usual they put on a fantastic show, making one wonder when they too will be headlining.

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