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| Ibrahim, Ramli (1953--) |
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| Dancer-choreographer Ramli Ibrahim has a unique heritage as a Muslim who grew up in Malaysia, training in ballet, contemporary dance, and two Indian classical dance styles—bharatanatyam under Adyar K. Lakshman and odissi under the late Guru Deba Prasad Das. An engineering scholarship took young Ibrahim to Australia where he studied ballet. He later performed with the Sydney Dance Company and the Australia Dance Company. Ibrahim remarks, ‘I use a variety of genres as my tools. I refuse to be the slave of definitions.’[[1]](#endnote-1) However, his abiding passion is with odissi from which he innovates. Ibrahim’s work, remarks Leela Venkataraman, ‘defines categorisation . . . His creativity is an integrated experience transcending national, religious and racial boundaries.’[[2]](#endnote-2) Ibrahim is the recipient of the Fulbright Distinguished Artist Award, 1999, and two Lifetime Achievement Awards from Boh Cameronian (2003) and from Angarag (2006), and the Indian Government’s Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (2011). Most recently, he was recognized as a ‘Living Heritage’ individual by the Government of Malaysia (2012). |
| Summary  Dancer-choreographer Ramli Ibrahim has a unique heritage as a Muslim who grew up in Malaysia, training in ballet, contemporary dance, and two Indian classical dance styles—bharatanatyam under Adyar K. Lakshman and odissi under the late Guru Deba Prasad Das. An engineering scholarship took young Ibrahim to Australia where he studied ballet. He later performed with the Sydney Dance Company and the Australia Dance Company. Ibrahim remarks, ‘I use a variety of genres as my tools. I refuse to be the slave of definitions.’[[3]](#endnote-3) However, his abiding passion is with odissi from which he innovates. Ibrahim’s work, remarks Leela Venkataraman, ‘defines categorisation . . . His creativity is an integrated experience transcending national, religious and racial boundaries.’[[4]](#endnote-4) Ibrahim is the recipient of the Fulbright Distinguished Artist Award, 1999, and two Lifetime Achievement Awards from Boh Cameronian (2003) and from Angarag (2006), and the Indian Government’s Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (2011). Most recently, he was recognized as a ‘Living Heritage’ individual by the Government of Malaysia (2012). Contributions to the Field and to Modernism Ibrahim established Sutra Dance Company in 1983 in Malaysia. As Artistic Director and Chairman of Sutra Foundation, he notes that ‘*sutra* is the thread that binds the nation.’[[5]](#endnote-5) With Sutra’s multiethnic dancers—native Malays, Chinese, and South Asians, Ibrahim creates works from Indian dance and Malay indigenous forms like Makyyong and Menora, Malay marital arts form of Silat and other works that cross genres. Ibrahim remarks, ‘We can define contemporary aesthetic now from an Asian point of view and not from a Euro-American stance.’[[6]](#endnote-6) He feels no conflict in using various movement forms; however, problems arise with critics’ compartmentalizing tendencies. Ibrahim’s technique of layering different styles, odissi with contemporary dance, is a major choreographic strategy in his work. He is credited with making odissi accessible to global audiences.  Ibrahim’s choreography is noteworthy for his use of space, and the way he allows movement and music to resonate with the environment. Ibrahim draws effectively upon key concepts in Indian aesthetics such as *natya* (a combination of dance and drama), and *rasa* (human emotions as well as sensory taste of food and of artistic quality). Ibrahim tunes into the spiritual qualities underlying Indian classical dance, distinguishing this devotional quality from literal religiosity. He believes that the spiritual *rasa* of his creative dance rooted in odissi can communicate to audiences of any religious belief. Such elevated feelings are not confined to temples or mosques but can be accessed in any venue and via dance, as one form among others that can inspire transformative states.  Ibrahim has choreographed over forty dances using traditional and contemporary idioms. He created the piece *Spellbound* for twenty-two dancers with elaborate sets, lighting, and musicians from Orissa. Ibrahim has had a major impact on the performance scene in Malaysia organizing several key festivals including The Sutra Festival, the Alarippu to Moksha Festival, and the Under the Stars series, which provide platforms for experimental work by established and emerging artists. He is regarded as an ‘internationalist,’ a cultural ambassador of contemporary creative dance that he showcases with his Company across the world. List of Works: *‘Affirmations’—A Tribute to Tagore* (2012)  *Pray, Love, Dance* (2012)  *Vision of Forever*, India Tour, (2012)  *Alarippu to Moksha*, (2010, 2011)  *Stirring Odissi,* International Odissi Festival*,* (2008, 2011) |
| Further reading:  (Citaristi)  (Ibrahim)  (Puranam)  (Rajagopalan)  (Venkataraman) |
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1. Madhavi Puranam, ‘Connoisseur of Dance’, *The Hindu*, November 12, 2012 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Leela Venkataraman, ‘Dance Like a Man’, *The Hindu*, October 24, 2004 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Madhavi Puranam, ‘Connoisseur of Dance’, *The Hindu*, November 12, 2012 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Leela Venkataraman, ‘Dance Like a Man’, *The Hindu*, October 24, 2004 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. www.sutrafoundation.org.my [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Interview with Lalitha Venkat, on [www.narthaki.com](http://www.narthaki.com) January 2001 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)