

"Corporate houses should promote classical dance & music"



(MARIE ELANCOVAN, born in Quebec, has come all the way to India for learning the classical dance at the feet of late Guru K J Govindarajan. Now an established exponent of Bharatnatyam, choreographer & Director of Parampara, a centre for classical dance & music, she speaks to AAKASH SPORTS related to her career and how she became interested in the Indian dance)

P K Chakravarty

How and why were you attracted to the dance form?

I was a student of religious studies at Montreal University when I decided to come to India. I simply fell in love with the beauty and purity of Bharatnatyam and its devotional aspect. Fortunately, I was introduced to Guru K.J. Govindarajan when he was on a visit to Montreal and I decided to come to India and learn Bharatnatyam from him. Answer to question 1-b

Was there any objection from your parents and relatives for plunging into a new world of uncertainties?

When I express my desire to come to India to pursue studies in Indian classical dance, there was no objection from my family. In fact, my parents were very encouraging though a bit apprehensive of knowing that their daughter will be living so far away from home. On the other hand, my relatives were skeptical on whether I'll be able to adjust to a completely different cultural atmosphere and environment. Some were finding the idea very interesting and believed that it will be a life enriching experience for me to go to India while others could simply not understand why I had this idea in the first place.

Answer to question 2

Yes, I had a lot of difficulties relating the hasta-mudras to the words of the song simply because I couldn't understand the languages in which the songs were composed. I used to connect with the bhava of the compositions and their overall meaning but memorizing and understanding each word was very difficult. Later, I made it a point to note down every word of the song along with its meaning before learning the dance choreography itself. Then, I would listen to the song several times and memorize the words I had written. In this way, learning the hasta-mudras depicted in the choreographies became a meaningful and easy task.



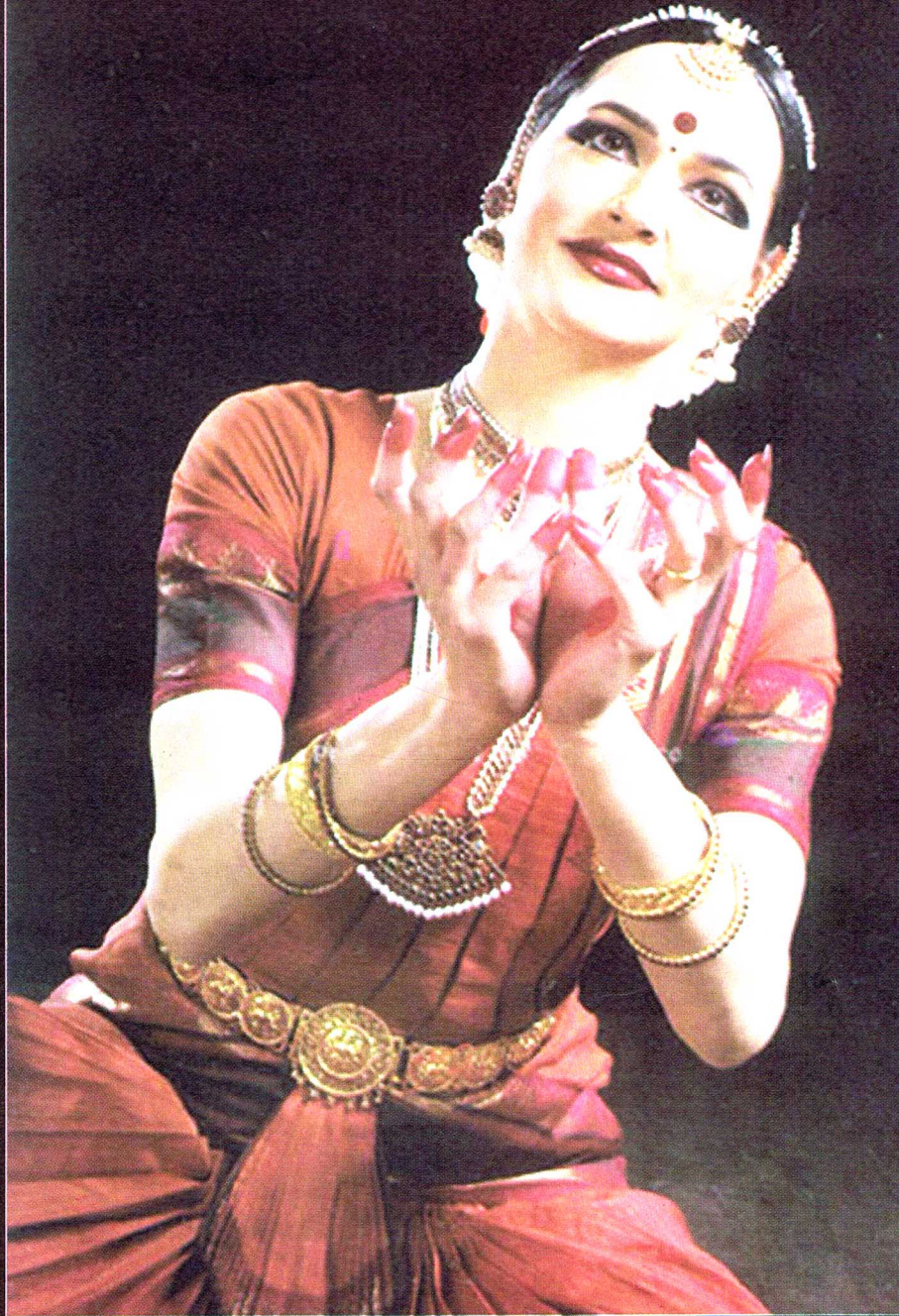
Answer to question 3

My mentor Guru K.J.

Govindarajan was my support and inspiration after I landed in India. For me, he personifies the perfect guru. He was always caring for others, extremely knowledgeable and very humble. It was a great experience to learn from him. I was looking forward to my dance classes with him and used to practice every day for 3-4 hours after the classes. I enjoyed this period of my life when I started tasting the richness of this magnificent dance form. The excitement of learning new steps and the liberating feeling of connecting with the artistic vision of my guru is something that I'll never forget. He was very encouraging during my initial training and has always been a great source of inspiration to me.

Answer to question 4-a

I firmly believe that there will always be a place for classical dance in India. There has been a growing interest and awareness towards classical dance in India in the past few years. From my experience as a teacher, I find it very comforting when mothers who come to enroll their children for dance classes at my institute share their childhood memories

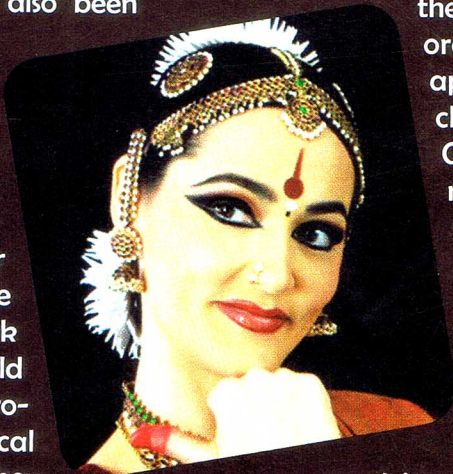


of learning Bharatnatyam with such passion.

Many of them dream of restarting their training afresh since they feel incomplete without dance in their life. So many other parents share that in their childhood they had this desire to learn classical dance but that no opportunities came their way and they have this feeling that they missed something. This is the



kind of echo that I received from my students' parents and it strongly reaffirms my belief that there will always be a place for classical dance in India. I think that the Government is doing a lot of good work to support artistes, both junior and senior. The government has been sanctioning grants for various artistic productions, providing funds to organize music and dance festivals and has also been awarding fellowships for the training of artistes or to promote research-work. As for the corporate houses, I think that they could do more to promote classical artistes as they are currently more involved in showcasing the talent of artistes from the commercial stream. As for the schools and colleges, they are certainly doing good work by inviting renowned artistes to perform and give lecture-demonstrations for the students of their establishment. It will be good if they also organize special evenings for their students and take them out to witness performances by well-known artistes at prestigious performing venues in the city since all those programmes are free and open to the public. It will provide the youngsters with a real experience of a live performance and will encourage them to attend such event more frequently in the company of friends and parents.



After all, we, as artistes need audience as much as we need performance opportunities.

Answer to question 4-b

The attitude of the youngsters to classical dances is mixed in today's context. I would say that a minority of youngsters are very passionate about classical dance while others have little or no interest about it. The youngsters

need to learn to value their own culture in order to learn to appreciate Indian classical dance. Globalization doesn't mean that we should forget our own roots and cultural backgrounds for aping the value-system and ideas of western

countries as it is the case for many youngsters today. I wish the younger generation develops a sense of pride in their own culture before exploring new cultural horizons.

Answer to question 5

There has been a growing interest and awareness towards classical dance in India in the past few years. From my experience as a teacher, I find it very comforting when mothers who come to enroll their children for dance classes at my institute share their childhood memories of learning Bharatnatyam with such passion.

To remain fit, I stay active throughout the day besides dancing and teaching dance. I believe that we, as human beings are made to be active and the concept of fitness should come to us naturally. One should enjoy exercising; walking and more importantly find a way to stay physically active at home or at any work-place.

As for my diet, I try to eat simple and nutritious food, avoid anything deep-fried and make sure not to overcook the vegetables, especially the green. I don't follow any diet as such but try to have meals which are light and well-balanced.

I also believe in keeping the mind free of negative thoughts as much as possible and to cultivate inner peace because for me beauty starts within.

Answer to question 6

To be frank, I was so determined to learn Bharatnatyam that I never had this feeling that I was struggling. For me, everything was an adventure full of ups and downs. Fortunately, with the support of my guru and his family, I didn't face many difficult situations. The real struggle was the one of believing in myself, having faith that I will succeed in mastering this beautiful art form. My guru is the one who opened my conscious to the value of the art and how to connect with it at a higher level. I learnt from my experience with him much more than just the grammar and technicality of the dance form. He gave me a lot of self-belief and inner strength and the courage to carry my journey forward even in daunting times.