

ON TOP

The world's her stage

Critically acclaimed Kathak exponent and contemporary dancer, ADITI MANGALDAS talks to SAVIA RAJAGOPAL about her passion for dance

What inspired you to take up classical dance as a profession?

I started dancing at five and it became a part of my being. My parents were encouraging and provided us with many opportunities. I was involved in music, art and dance. There wasn't even a discussion as to whether I should do this or that. Dance chose me. Though both my gurus- Kumudini Lakhia and Birju Maharajji, come from the same stream of dance, they had very different outlooks.

Tell us about your first professional performance.

I've been performing professionally since I was eight years old, in Smt. Lakhia's dance company. But my first solo performance was when I turned 17. I stepped onto the stage, and saw an entire row of family seated there in front of me - aunts, grandmothers, everyone! We are one 'weepy' family, and everyone was crying! [Laughs] Watching them, I started crying and ran off stage, although I've never suffered from stage fright! I was pushed back on stage and performed just fine after that.

You are known for making Kathak contemporary. What's your reaction to purists who believe that you're moving away from the traditional dance form?

I perform very classical based dance, but I am also interested in the contemporary art form. I don't like the word 'fusion'. I attempt to look at Kathak through a contemporary mind. One must have the courage for that. As long as I dance honestly, it doesn't matter what purists or impurists say!

How important is criticism for an artist?

I am a great believer in constructive criticism. Sometimes, when people say that I've lost my classical base, it pinches. Likewise, when someone looks at a piece and finds fault, it hurts the ego. Criticism is very important. But ultimately you have to do your own thing.

What are the differences between Indian and international audiences?

In India, we are used to narration. Abroad, in European countries, they prefer to have an open-minded performance, where you don't have to explain everything. They prefer the dance to speak for itself.

You've often mentioned the satellite role of women in Kathak. What does that mean?

In most dance recitals, the performance revolves around being happy or sad because of a man, thereby putting women in the role of satellites. It's great to do something for a man but a woman has many identities and is not a satellite that revolves around other masculine figures. They can take center stage too!

With hectic schedules, how do you balance your professional and family life?

Would you ask that of a man? My personal life and my dance are all intermingled. It is something that my family knows and accepts. It's a package deal. Dance and Aditi go together so no one really expects otherwise. I travel a lot but I believe in spending quality time too. I make it a point to spend time with my son, Karma Vivan. He's my sunshine!

Way beyond West...

"You can't deny history. We talk in English, don't we? Tradition is way beyond influences. Like Gandhiji said, one should keep the mind open like a window. The young should listen to Amjad Ali Khan, as well as hip-hop! "

