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Art in Motion

By SAVIA RAJAGOPAL



Introduction: A visionary, a poet, an artist, a performer - the titles are varied but the man behind it all abhors being stifled by a label. Meet Hari Krishnan, Artistic Director, inDANCE Productions in a candid *tete-a-tete* as he discusses his upcoming performances, his artistry and why he refuses to be type casted.

"Recipes for Curry" - what lies behind this evocative name for your upcoming work?

Our company, inDANCE is presenting a suite of four world premieres from Oct 18-20 at the Enwave Theatre. The name is a title from one of those works. *Recipes for Curry* is a sly title for a layered and textured work that subverts the context and content of identity politics as a real-time lived experience. It exposes the diasporas' construction of multiple personae and investigates issues surrounding race and representation.

What are your personal expectations from this year's performances?

We are forcing ourselves to further extend and blur the boundaries of contemporary dance in Canada. Here is dance that compels 'established' notions/aspects of Indian art into a dialogue with our contemporary lives in Canada. It is about exploring and owning our hyphenated realities. We always expect to fight marginalisation. We should not tolerate creating art on the fringe. We aim to main-stream South Asian art and culture, because there is Bollywood AND BEYOND....

What can audiences expect from Recipes for Curry?

A sexy, exhilarating, highly-energetic, and subversive evening of Canadian contemporary dance, stemming from South Asian sensibilities. A delicious taste of all that is truly Toronto!

What is the essence of this year's performances? Briefly describe each suite/ segment from your perspective.

Breaking Through Surface

Canada's dance legend Margie Gillis has choreographed *Breaking Through Surface*, a new solo on me. We have been working together for three years now. This is the first time that Ms. Gillis has created a solo for a South Asian dancer. Like many of Ms. Gillis' breathtaking solos, this is a compelling creation of luscious movement from the inside out, hence the title. Music for this work has been commissioned from Montreal based avant-garde composer Ganesh Anandan.

Yogurt and Venom

This is a work I co-choreographed with Allen Kaeja, a master of Contact Improvisation. We dance an explosive, ferocious duet, blending Contact Improvisation and Bharatanatyam. The product of our collaboration relies specifically on the use of spontaneity, physicality, partnering and movement drawn from the core of our personal identities and experiences. Acclaimed music visionary Eric Cadesky and Sarah Shugarman have composed the music.

Inverse

I choreographed this work as a frenetic and lyrical quartet for dancers Beth Despres, Hiroshi Miyamoto, Masumi Sato and Kamen Wang. Grace and bravado, pulse and impulse clash and coalesce in this dynamic new creation for interpreters from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. *Inverse* visually addresses the dissonance of bringing the disparate together. Music has been commissioned from Dora award winner Phil Strong.



Recipes for Curry

Recipes for Curry is my latest work for eight dancers. This work is an inventive exploration in contemporary Bharatanatyam



choreography. Following the success of inDANCE's critically-acclaimed satirical work *Bollywood Hopsotch*, *Recipes for Curry* is an extension of my subverting cross-cultural politics into choreography. An international collaboration between five Canadian dancers and three British dancers, this work references hybrid identity, cultural misappropriation, sexual/gender displacement, cosmopolitanism, and fluid/inflexible race issues. The piece intends to disturb and provoke discourse. Performed by stellar dancers Nalin Bisnath, Kalidass, Emily Cheung, Beth Despres, Hiroshi Miyamoto, Aakash Odedra, Masumi Sato, and Shane Shambhu. My dancers are always an inspiration and this work in particular is infused with their life experiences. Music for this work has been composed by renowned composer Timothy Sullivan. It's been deeply satisfying to use elements of Bharatanatyam and the dancers' personal vocabularies as a topographic springboard to map this piece.

Is there any underlying theme that brings together all four segments?

All four works are an extension of who I am, as the South Asian-Canadian Artistic Director of inDANCE, which is a CANADIAN contemporary dance company. As South Asian-Canadians, we wear many hats and share many sensibilities. Cultural familiarities collude with new challenges almost daily, and this is part of our social reality as people of colour. Creating contemporary work is my personal response to our anxieties around art, race, immigrant experiences and diasporic cultural identities. All four works resonate with, and in one way or another and reflect these thoughts and feelings.

How did the collaboration with critically acclaimed Margie Gillis come about?

I have admired Margie Gillis for over a decade now, and am completely enamoured with her sensitive, passionate and poetic artistry. To me, she is that unique soloist who brilliantly portrays the trials and tribulations of the human condition with such majestic candour. Working with Ms. Gillis for three years, has been an incredible and unforgettable journey.

The show also has several big names in terms of musical credits - how much of an impact does the music have on setting the tone for your performances?

One of my imperatives is that in order to create meaningful dance, one requires great music. This is also true when I present classical Bharatanatyam. For every new work, I insist on collaborating with the best and most appropriate composer or musician. For this production, we are privileged to work with five of Canada's accomplished composers for contemporary dance -- Ganesh Anandan, Eric Cadesky, Sarah Shugarman, Phil Strong and Timothy Sullivan.

Working with such a diverse group of hugely talented artists can sometimes create creative differences. Did you experience any of those instances during your collaborations?

The cardinal rules of successful collaboration emphasize trust and mutual respect. I have had immense fun working on this production with my inspiring collaborators. Each one of them brings their own unique and original edge of their craft and life experiences into the mix, making the creation of all four works a deeply meaningful journey for all of us. When differences do arise, there is always negotiating a gentle give and take.

A lot of collaborations between different artists involve some level of give and take and most feel the "learning" is continuous. What have you taken from working with so many talented artists?

Collaborations are part of a larger, continuous artistic imperative in which I seek to challenge and reinvent, thus growing myself and my art. I see such interactions as an integral component for the growth of my company and my personal artistic path. In some ways, the real core of our company lies in the "give and take" - aesthetic, personal, social - that "colors" our productions. Whether it is *Recipes for Curry*, or our performances of traditional South Indian court dance, I really feel it is the people we work with who make us the dynamic Canadian dance company we are today. This production has indeed been a learning experience for all of us, and reflects the national and global directions in which our company has expanded over the last few years.

After last year's performances, do you feel any pressure at all to match, if not supersede expectations?

Each choreography is different and needs to be enjoyed on its own terms. So I am confident that our audiences will come into the theatre and let the work speak for itself. So the pressure for me is not so much to 'supersede' the previous production, but to ensure that the each production is excellent and offers the audience the best possible aesthetic experience.

Have you at any point felt any conflict within the contemporary and the more traditional elements of your artistry?

Over the past 10 years, I have been creating a dance language that expresses my unique Canadian/Indian/Singaporean identity. Radical innovation, an uncompromising standard of technical excellence, and most importantly, a socio-political consciousness characterize my company's repertoire and its approach to dance-making. I actually don't like to characterize my life or art in terms of compartments like "traditional" and "contemporary." As a dance-maker I always oscillate between past, present and future. inDANCE produces some very cutting-edge, post-modern work that brings Indian dance into conceptual and technical dialogue with western Modern Dance. But I do not see this as "conflicting" with my performances of traditional work. They mutually affect each other, and in some senses must do so, because I embody and practice both. I am very uncomfortable with "split personality" art - I do what I do, but don't like to use labels like "traditional" and "contemporary," "East" and West"- which ultimately, are relative, and mostly stifling.

If there's anything that one could associate with inDance productions - what would it be?

Unpredictability - the surprise factor. We believe in challenging clichés and stereotypes. Our goal is to produce work that is a bold tapestry, full of adventurous risks. Dancers who work with inDANCE come from a variety of dance backgrounds and bring to the company technique and aesthetic expertise that moves the company in ever-expanding directions. The company produces invigorating and progressive dance productions that challenge dominant discourses about culture. The experimental approach of our company addresses and entertains a diverse range of audiences.

As you inch closer towards the opening night, what's playing on your mind?

Perfecting, polishing and perfecting even more!

Have you considered or given any thought to what is next in store for you?

inDANCE has a very busy year ahead with performances and new projects in Toronto, across Canada, in the US, Europe and Asia. We invite all mybindi.com readers to visit our website www.indance.ca for more information, free clips and music, or email us at indance@sympatico.ca to be a part of our e-mailing list. We would love to stay connected and entertain you....



**October 18-20, 2007 at 8pm
Enwave Theatre (Harbourfront Centre)**

**For tickets, please call (416) 973-4000 or visit
<http://www.danceworks.ca/tickets.html>**

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