

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 40

right newspapers and even bag the choicest arts grants going.

Take Mythili Prakash, for instance. A lead dancer in the Los Angeles-based Shakti Dance Company, her website says that she is pursuing a Master of Fine Arts degree at University of California, Los Angeles, and that she has a bachelor's degree in Mass Communications from University of California, Berkeley. She is also pursuing a full-time career in dance. Prakash's online itinerary, which shows her touring Europe this month, looks busier than most India-based professional dancers' agenda.

Krithika Rajagopalan is the assistant artistic director of Natya Dance Theater in Chicago. Her profile lists performances in prestigious venues across the nation like the Kennedy Center, as well as solo presentations for a number of high-profile people, including former President Bill Clinton. Rajagopalan also has a string of fellowships and grants under her belt.

And both Prakash and Rajagopalan have one thing in common. Their mothers are also dancers and run the dance companies that gave them their start. Prakash's mother Viji has been teaching and performing in the US for more than a quarter-of-a-century. Similarly, Hema Rajagopalan, Krithika's mother, started Natya Dance Theater in 1975. There are of course, several other accomplished second-generation dancers who fall into this category. Shweta Bharadwaj, who dances with the Angahara Ensemble, appeared on the cover of *Dance Magazine* along with her mother Ramaa a few years ago. Lakshmi Iyengar performs with her mother Malathi and the Rangoli Foundation for Art and Culture. Aparna Ramaswamy, who boasts an incredibly long list of grants, dances with Minneapolis-based Ragamala Dance Theater, founded by her mother Raneer Ramaswamy.

Most of these artists and their companies seem to perform true-to-tradition sequences with a few experimental works thrown in. The exception being the Ramaswamys who list mostly works of cross-cultural collaboration and whose website has photographs of dancers wearing costumes that resemble Nancy Reagan's inaugural gown more than a sari.

You may argue that these young Indian Americans have every reason to flourish given the fact that their mothers too were seasoned artists. But one can't say the circumstances aren't as unique, for, after all, the temple arts were propagated in India as matriarchal inheritances for centuries.

This does not, of course, mean that all second generation Indian Americans who take a shine to the arts come from artistic



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families. One only has to look at the number of debut concerts that take place all over the country every summer to be convinced otherwise. Dance and music schools around the country have seen thousands of students graduate and become cultural icons over the years in their respective communities.

The Chhandam School, which teaches Kathak, is more than 25-years-old. The Anjali Center for Performing Arts, based in Houston, recently turned 30. Anjali encourages the competitive edge among its students by selecting a 'Student of the Month' and also has a 'Hall of Fame' for senior students who have distinguished themselves in performance. The Triveni School

C.E.L.E.B. S.P.E.A.K.



I got the best of India from my grandparents. Every time I am in the country, I just think of them. They were what made my trips to India memorable.

—SANJANA JON, fashion designer

of Dance, in Massachusetts, has been in business since 1971. Katha Dance Theater, which operates in Minnesota, is fast approaching its 20th anniversary. The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, which offers a variety of north and south Indian music and dance courses in New York City, has recently completed its 25 years. And who can fail to acknowledge the Ali Akbar College of Music, which has been going strong since 1967, in California. The list goes on.

The next-generation students also have plenty of opportunity to showcase their talents in traditional settings. Budding and blossoming Carnatic musicians perform at the various Thyagaraja Aradhana festivals organized painstakingly by music enthusiasts across the nation. A wide assortment of other community and temple related occasions also provide venues for musical programs.

Indeed, the talent pool of the so-called NRI musicians is so large that even the famed December music 'season' in Chennai, India, that showcases the cream of the crop, has a special stage for them. The Hamsadhwani NRI Fest has been held annually for over a decade now. The NRI prefix that may have once been a pejorative is merely one of geographic distinction now.

No longer are classical dance and music the esoteric choice of the eclectic few—at least not in this country. If there is an interest, then rest assured there are the means to learn. And to want to pursue these ancient arts professionally is not a bizarre notion anymore. ●

SAM RAO



Students of Natyalaya School of Dance in Cupertino in a Kuchipudi dance outfit

Home is where the heart is

A way from homeland no longer means being deprived of the good things there. Take, for instance, our desi performing arts. American cities perhaps have a larger concentration of schools training in Indian performing arts than even those in India. In communities as small as the Bay Area in the West Coast, the increasing Indian-American population has seen a proliferation of Indian traditional dance and music schools over the past few years.

There are as many as 40 schools in the SF Bay Area, training in Indian classical dances like Kuchipudi, Kathak, Odissi and Bharatanatyam and music schools offering lessons both in Hindustani and Carnatic music. While Kuchipudi is represented in Cupertino by Jyothi Lakkaraju's Natyalaya Dance, Bharatanatyam promoters include Mythili Kumar in Monte Sereno, Vishal Ramani in Santa Clara and Katherine Kunthiraman in Berkeley. Sima Chakrovorthy in Hayward and Jyoti Rout's Jyoti Kala Kendra are known for their Odissi classes and Anuradha Nag's Tarangani School of Kathak and Chitresh Das' Chhandam School of Kathak have been around for two decades.

Carnatic music is also becoming increasingly popular with nearly 20 schools offering lessons. Prominent among these include Jayashree Vardarajan in San Jose and Lakshmi Kollavenu in Fremont. Long-time residents of SF Bay Area, Pandit Ali Akbar Khan and Ustad Zakir Hussain represent the Hindustani Classical music. In fact, the former's Ali Akbar Khan School of Music is among the first few music schools in the area. Pandit Habib Khan and his Sarawati Temple for Music in San Jose is also very popular. Srikanth Chari is one of the few prominent teachers of the ancient instrument Veena.

—Sam Rao

