



## Dancing Queen Mythili Prakash

**I**t is 10 a.m. in Toronto, and I am well into my day as Mythili Prakash is ending hers half a world away in Chennai, India. I reached her by phone to talk with her about what it is like to be the youngest of four featured dancers in the Kalakshetra Annual Arts Festival in India, as well as what keeps this 25-year-old on her toes as a dancer of Hindi inspired dance.

Currently in the midst of an Indian tour through Chennai and Madras, she tells me that Hindi inspired dancing has made a resurgence over the last few years, and has grown steadily since India gained its independence from the British. "It has evolved a lot, allowing dancers to put their own personality into it, a blend of contemporary practices and issues," she says.

A daughter of a dancer herself, Prakash comes by her talent honestly and confesses that, "Now it is a real part of me, I grew up with it. There was a time when I had a complete fascination with it. My parents pushed me a little bit because the discipline part gets a little tough when you're younger." Her mother danced and toured before she was born and started a dancing school just prior to Prakash's birth. For as long as she could remember, she was surrounded by dance and has been doing Bharatanatyam dance herself for nearly 21 years.

She describes her dancing as a cultural art form that draws more on the "spiritual than religious. It is not static at all; it is not like older folk dancing where things stay the way they have always been done." She explains it as a real blend of traditional practices and the expression of the dancer herself.

Over last two years she has been jet-setting around the world with her dancing and after this tour will continue with shows in the U.S., U.K. and hopefully Canada, as well as an upcoming performance this September in Paris at the Musée Guimet.

As for festivals like the Kalakshetra Arts Festival in India, she says the festival season is certainly growing as it used to start in December and run about three weeks. Now, each year it seems to get a little longer, she says, finishing about mid-January.

Looking forward to some more downtime she says "actually I think I haven't spent more than two months in one place the last two years." She is looking forward to a time when she can practice just for the sake of practicing and for the sheer love of dance than for performance.

When asked about doing what she loves as a career, she says, "I don't feel like that has happened yet. I am not seeing it as a job or a career—that was actually my concern before; I didn't want it to be a source of pressure or of stress like, 'Oh my God, I have to do that next program or whatever.'" She describes her dancing as "a way of life." Prakash tells, "It channels my creative energy... even the non-physical, the higher metaphysical and spiritual plane it forces you to occupy. There are so many things that inspire you. It's a totally an all-encompassing thing."

WORDS ANDREA BENNINGTON  
PHOTO SMALLZ & RASKIND