

passing by



DANCING

YOUNG INDO-AMERICAN DANCER
MYTHILI PRAKASH TALKS ABOUT
ALL THINGS CHENNAI

queen

It's 9 a.m. and, for a change, it's raining in Chennai. Everyone's out on the roads, making the most of the weather. But Mythili Prakash prefers staying indoors. In the cosy confines of her home, she practises Mysore Ashtanga Yoga and then Bharat-natyam *addavus* for an hour. Then, looking into a mirror in her temporary home in Gopalpuram, she rehearses her lines: "Pallavendra, kill me, kill me..." she says, stepping seamlessly into her character Sivakami. Her body language is perfect, as is her emoting. But then her 'L' rolls and a heavy American accent slips in. Prakash pauses, takes a deep breath and repeats the line till she is convinced she sounds more like Sivakami of *Sivakamiyin Sapadham* (by Kalki Krishnamurthi), if the character spoke English.

"I'm a bit nervous," says the

young Indian American classical dancer, who is set to make her debut theatre appearance two days later in the play written and directed by Gowri Ramnarayan (of JustUs Repertory in association with Madras Players). "Though Sivakami is a dancer, playing her part in a play is quite different."

The 24-year-old dancer's Chennai connection goes back to the late 80s when she began visiting the city with her mother, Viji Prakash who initiated her into dance. "Even today, when I pass the Music Academy, I feel nostalgic," she admits. For it was in the mini hall of this prestigious *sabha* that she gave her solo recital at the age of nine.

She's performed at many venues, but Chennai is where she likes performing the most. "Audiences here are both informed and knowledgeable," she notes. "They under-

stand and appreciate the finer nuances of dance but, of course, they also have their prejudices."

Her exposure to varied genres of dance has influenced the way Prakash conceives of and incorporates contemporary subjects into the traditional medium. For instance, at the International Dance Alliance Festival in the city (in July), Prakash and her troupe will present an item that pays tribute to the sun god. Aptly titled *Surya*, with verses from the *Aditya Hridayam*, the piece is Prakash's interpretation of one of the most powerful elements of nature.

Although her time in the city is usually packed with practice, performances and concerts, the dancer says she always finds time to binge on local delicacies. "I love the *onion rava dosa* at Saravana's," she chuckles. A self-confessed foodie, Prakash also likes to unwind at Zara. "When I eat the Continental food at Little Italy, it's hard to say which part of the world I am in. Chennai is so global in that sense." ■ by Akhila Krishnamurthy