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Celebrating sound in print

Mythili Prakash

From the US to India and the world

Mythili Prakash is one of the fastest rising stars of bharatanatyam today. She has toured internationally presenting her own original choreographic works and is a regular performer during the Chennai December Season. Her complete commitment to dance led her to take the big decision to move from her native Los Angeles to Chennai three years ago, "Since I moved to Chennai in 2006 my experience has been surprising all the way," she says. "I feel I'm in the right environment and am really happy with my decision. I had initially come to Chennai with the plan to stay for about five months. I had started a Masters in Fine Arts programme in the US after graduating in Mass Communications from the University of California, Berkeley, but being here it's like doing a PhD in bharatanatyam!"

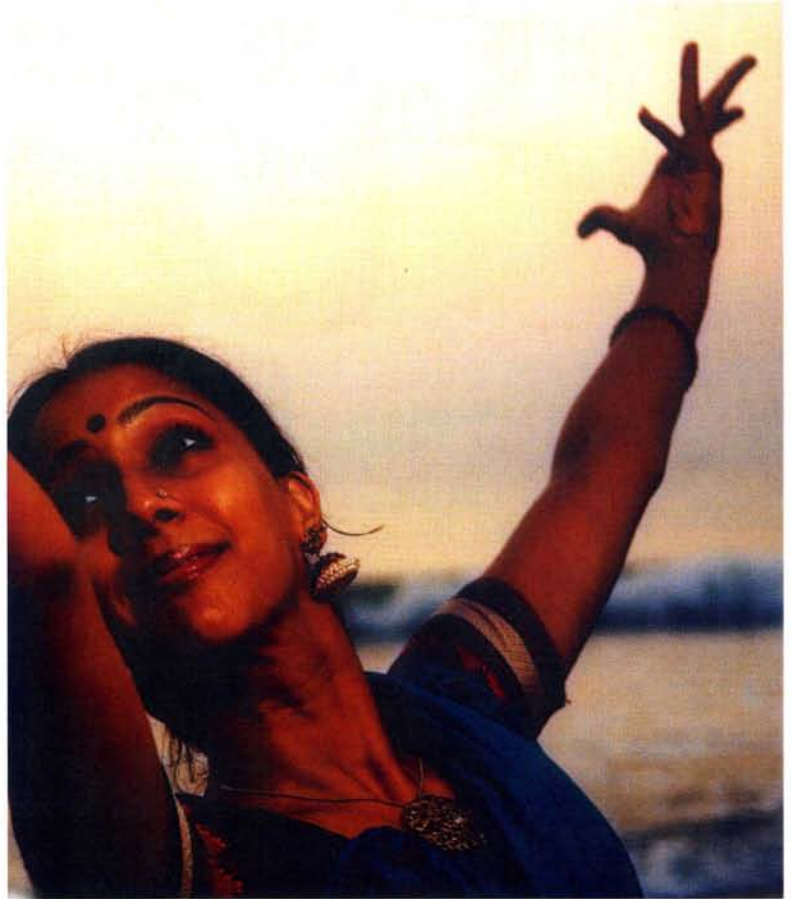
Mythili was no stranger to Indian stages before her move to India. She had presented her first solo performance in Mumbai at the age of eight and then would perform regularly during annual visits with her mother and guru Viji Prakash. She feels that her recent performance during the prestigious Madras Music Academy dance festival was an important milestone in her career. "I had already performed at the Music Academy before when I was awarded the MGR award in 2000 and an endowment in 2007, but I was excited and happy to be invited to be part of their dance festival this year because it means I am being acknowledged as an upcoming dancer."

Though Mythili has left her native California and moved thousands of miles away to a country she has never lived in before, she declares, "I feel completely at home here. My accent makes me blaringly American and it seems to get me attention but I feel both American and Indian."

What's it like to be an American dancer of Indian origin making waves on the Indian dance scene? Mythili's

"Being here it's like doing a PhD in bharatanatyam!"

experience has been a positive one: "At first, there was a bit of that NRI perception when I used to come and perform in India. But since I was a young dancer, it was a surprise and audiences seemed impressed and happy that the art form was being preserved so well outside of India. But there's also a feeling of is it fair for an outsider to come here and take opportunities from local dancers? But I, too, have been working on my dance for a long time and I think now that I have moved here, they respect and appreciate that and I don't feel like I'm treated as an outsider. Senior dancers and peers have been really supportive. I also feel lucky to have such inspiring mentors like Malavika Sarukkai and Bragha Bessell. I do a lot of my own choreography, so it's essential to have somebody to guide you and tell you what you're doing right or wrong every step of the way."



One of Mythili's aims is to introduce bharatanatyam to a wider audience, especially in the US where the dance form is little known outside of Indian cultural circles. Mythili had the opportunity to do just that by recently participating in 'Superstars of Dance', a television show produced by the American television network NBC. "It was a challenge because I only had a minute and a half to perform. But it was a great experience and I was happy to present bharatanatyam to such a wide audience."

