



Devoted To Dance

by ADITI DESHPANDE

For a young Bharatanatyam student, arangetram is the culmination of several years of rigorous training. Meet Divya Ramesh who is currently preparing for her solo debut performance in August.

Aditi: Congratulations Divya! I know that your solo debut is round the corner. Why don't you tell me a bit about that?

Divya: An *arangetram*, which literally means 'ascending the stage' is a solo debut performance of an Indian classical dancer, having mastered the techniques of the dance form. It's quite like a graduation. I learn Bharatanatyam, one of the oldest Indian classical dance forms, and my performance in Singapore is taking place on August 31 at the NUS UCC Theatre. It's a two-hour performance, open to all and free as well!

Aditi: Tell our readers about yourself.

Divya: I'm a 10th grade student studying at the United World College of South East Asia in Singapore and I've always had a passion for performing arts- dancing, singing, music and acting!

Aditi: What is the preparation like for this kind of performance?

Divya: A student doing the *arangetram* has to be extremely dedicated and know what they're in for, because preparations for this performance are rigorous and require a lot of commitment.

I have been preparing for about a year-and-a-half, and the process involved coming home everyday after school, and then leaving straight for a two-three hour dance rehearsal after a quick snack. On Saturdays, it's early morning rehearsals which is serious hardship. But I am not alone in this. My teacher, Gayatri Sriram has given up hours of her free time just to focus on my dancing and I'm so grateful to her. My social life has been cut down quite a bit, and some other activities had to take a backseat: I suspended piano lessons for 6 months. This process has taught me how to prioritise things and I'm a lot more organised and focused now. Of course the amount of planning that went into this was like military strategy; deciding which school trip I could go on so that it didn't clash with rehearsals or visiting India for costumes and photoshoots!

Aditi: How are you feeling in relation to the performance? Nervous, excited?

Divya: I'm really excited about this performance and not too nervous, yet... I tend to get anxious on the actual

day of any performance. My dance school, Shruti Laya gave me a lot of exposure, but a two hour solo is a completely different thing! I'm really glad that my friends and family will be there encouraging me.

Aditi: After the *arangetram*, what are your plans for dance?

Divya: It'll just be the beginning of my solo dance career! I am definitely going to continue Bharatanatyam and I hope to perform more. I also plan to start learning other dance forms!

Aditi: When did you start performing?

Divya: I was dancing ever since I could walk. I've always loved performing, whether it's at a Diwali party or school play. I went to my first dance class - a ballet lesson - when I was three. But I simply refused to attend after a couple of lessons even though my mom bribed me with a frilly pink tutu.

I had my first Bharatanatyam lesson when I was five years old. It was completely my mother's idea as she has grown up with Indian classical art forms, and at first, I wasn't keen on learning it at all! But I really enjoyed it! I then moved to Singapore and continued with my current guru, Gayatri Sriram.

Aditi: Do you learn any other type of dance?

Divya: Currently, I am not formally learning any other dance types apart from Bharatanatyam, but I have attended various workshops. I perform other forms at school, like hip-hop, and have choreographed bhanga and Bollywood routines for school plays and performances.

Aditi: What are your other interests and ambitions?

Divya: Apart from dance, I am also interested in music. I play the piano and the oboe, and am part of my school's orchestra. I'm an iGCSE drama student and take part in school plays, and singing roles in musicals. I want to continue performing. My other interests include English literature, though I love chemistry and history! My mother is reading this over my shoulder and is insisting I should include Facebook in my interests as she claims it takes up a lot of my time! ☑



Aditi Deshpande is a 16-year-old, Grade 12 student at United World College of South East Asia, Singapore. A keen Bharatanatyam dancer who completed her arangetram last year, Aditi understands the rigours of the preparation for such a milestone! She is also actively involved in projects in and out of school such as Round Square and her school's economics magazine as well as helping out with the Magic Bus Organisation in India.