

True to the course

● PRIYADESRHINI S

"My aim is to present ancient texts from India across the world to a global audience. All my work has layered music with a multitude of artists collaborating with me," says New Jersey-based Bharatanatyam exponent Baladevi Chandrashekar, who was in the city to launch her academy, Shree Padma Nrityam Academy of Performing Arts Inc. (SPNAPA), in Kakkannad. She also performed her production "Padmavathy, an avatar" at the academy.

A committed teacher of Bharatanatyam, she started her training under Guru Jayalakshmi Narayanan in Hyderabad. Baladevi then went on to learn under Dr Padma Subrahmanyam in Chennai, who awarded her the titles 'Bharata Nritya Seva Mani' and 'Nrityasali-completed the course in 108 Karanas'.

Baladevi has produced nine critically-acclaimed dance productions based on her extensive research. In a rare honour, the UNESCO head office in Paris hosted her production – "Brihadeeswara – form to formless, through the eyes of a Devaradiyal – a temple dancer" in 2018. This show is based on the 1,000-year-old Brihadeeswara temple.

Excerpts from an email interview:

Have you performed in Kerala before? Your Kerala connect.

● I have presented one of my works "Karna-Destiny's Child" at the Soorya Festival and Swaralaya in Palakkad. I believe that Kerala as a State is known for diversity and inclusiveness. All classical dance forms in India have their connection to the oldest treatise on dance, *Natyashastra*.

How would you describe your learning under Dr Padma Subrahmanyam?

Grace personified
Baladevi Chandrashekar during a performance

Baladevi Chandrashekar, who launched her dance academy in the city, says Bharatanatyam does not have to be diluted to be more popular



● Dr Padma Subrahmanyam, my revered guru, has been an inspiration to my individualistic dance style. My style is strongly backed by intense research and methodology from authentic texts and constant collaboration with senior gurus and scholars in this field.

As artistic director at the Bharatanatyam School in Princeton, what are the challenges you face? Could you tell us about the innovations that you have brought in?

● I take great joy in developing an interest in our literature, dance and music among the younger generation. The challenge is to keep a sustained interest and I have been able to keep that interest alive both in my Academy and the universities that I have been engaged in teaching. Like my productions, I have constantly innovated with music, paper presentations, large exhibits on dance related subjects, seminars and live performances across diverse regions.

You have developed a new dance technique.

● While I strictly follow the tradition of Bharatanatyam and the treatise on *Natyashastra*, I have devised a sound technique in imparting to students this valuable knowledge. All my productions have elaborate classical music detailing that will engage audiences across the world. While I present strictly *margam* format *kutcheris*, I also actively engage in solo, thematic productions in Bharatanatyam without compromising on the techniques which are operatic-Bhanika style. A strong grounding in the traditional *margam* is imperative for ongoing development. Two of my works "MLV favorites" and "Krishnarpanam" are based on the *margam* format.

You talk about the relationship between ancient temple architecture and Bharatanatyam. Please elaborate

● All my dance choreography, along with basic units of *adavus* and technique, incorporates the core components of the 108 karanas, which are temple sculptures.

The state of Bharatanatyam in USA?

● The state of Bharatanatyam is mature in the USA since there are well equipped gurus and enthusiastic parents who are willing to invest time to learn this ancient art form to ensure its beauty and vibrancy. We do not have to dilute the art form to make it any more popular.

● I take great joy in developing an interest in our literature, dance and music among the younger generation