

Homecoming with a spring in her steps

It's the dynamic nature of metros that influences London-based Shobana Jeyasingh's style of dance. Her company is touring India this month

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It took Bharatnatyam dancer Shobana Jeyasingh 22 long years to complete the circle: To come back to India after making London her home and tour with her renowned dance company. Shobana says it's corporate sponsorship and the British Council that made it possible, finally. She isn't letting the opportunity go waste.

The Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company is all set to perform in Bangalore, New Delhi and Mumbai this month. Shobana will also conduct workshops and talks. "As part of The British Council's initiative we are researching the possibility of creating a work which involves artists both from the UK and India," says 53-year-old Shobana.

It's easy to slot Shobana as yet another "fusion" spark, but with several awards, performances that are themed on current issues, and truly innovative choreography, you might as well prepare to eat your words. Over to Shobana on her journey with SJDC.

What is SJDC's dance ideology?

It's the ideology of cosmopolitan cities which harbour the desire to engage in an open dialogue with the differences (Shobana has experimented with Bharatnatyam and re-imagined it for her ensemble). Like cities, our dances use change to our advantage. It sounds like fusion, but I have to confess that I am a bit allergic to that word fusion. It sounds a bit too easy and predictable. We are not claiming to be "pure" in an academic sense so hopefully we will not annoy anyone!

What will the Bangalore show feature?

We are performing a double bill. The first piece is called *Autline*, inspired by Gautam Malkhani's book *Londonstani* where the characters are the disaffected Asian youth. It is a response to the



Choreographer Shobana Jeyasingh with a dancer from SJDC, Saju Hari

unease I felt after the July 7, 2005 London tube bombings. It was tough to be young Asian there. The work also has monochrome films specially commissioned from filmmaker Pete Gomes. It has Patricia Rosario, the Goan soprano singing live.

The second piece *Bruise Blood* starts with American composer Steve Reich's seminal piece inspired by the Harlem riots of the 60s — *Come Out*. It is then remixed by two other composers — one of whom is a beatboxer Shlomo Kahn. The beat boxing is performed live on stage. It is a three-part dance with three wholly different and distinct pieces of music. Both pieces will be performed by a company of eight international dancers.

Comment on the dance scene in India.

I have nothing, but admiration and

respect for the classical dance heritage and practice in India. That was always my first love when I grew up in Chennai. The contemporary and other experimental dance scene is also fascinating. I guess you can call me a dance junkie — I love it all.

Any favourites?

In India, I always admired Chandralekha. It was unforgettable watching Kamala Laxman performing when she was in her sixties. In Europe, I admire William Forsyth's work.

How has being a dancer influenced the kind of person you are?

I gave up dance to concentrate on choreography. I am not sure what kind of person this has made me!

Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company will perform on November 8 at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, 7.30 pm.