

Folk, fusion dance to find X'pressions on May 31

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Cupertino, Calif.

SRIVIDYA Eshwar remembers the large number of parents coming up after her group's maiden dance performance for a school event in 2003, all asking for her dance studio location and timings. But Eashwar had not started a dance class yet. She was using her dance training only as a hobby.

But with relentless interest from parents, and support of her husband and kid, she started X'pressions in 2003, specializing in folk dances and "better quality" Bollywood dances. Now there are more students enrolled than she can accommodate and a vibrant annual showcase, attended by a full house of participants, parents, friends and well wishers.

Xpressions will be showcasing various folk dances from around India in a themed show called "Yatra—the Journey" on May 31 at the CET Soto Theater in San Jose. The event will start at 3.30 p.m. and will feature a full showcase of folk dances, several fusion and semi-classical

dances and also music performances by top local talents.

Speaking about X'pressions, Eshwar said, "Our first official performance in SF Bay Area was at the Diwali Mela in Great America Theme park in 2003, when we had about 20 dancers." Since then there has been no looking back, in the past six years more than 100 students from as young as five to adults having benefited from the training at Xpressions. Lessons are offered in the Cupertino, Saratoga and West San Jose areas by the teacher, but passionate students and parents drive down all the way from Milpitas and Fremont to take classes with her.

Trained in the classical arts in India, in the Tanjavur Style of Bharatanatyam under Guru S. Nagarajan at the Shri Raja Rajeshwari Kala Mandir in Mumbai, Eshwar also trained in folk dances under Guru Sawant who was associated with the Lokdhara Folk Troupe.

When asked why she prefers folk dance and music, the teacher said, "My experience as a teacher taught me that the classical style of dance is not something that every child can



X'pression dances led by director Srividya Eashwar



easily pick up. The discipline is very strict and sometimes students and parents get frustrated, when the training is added to the other multiple

activities that the students are involved in. Learning folk dances fills this spot in the students' lives, whereby they get to experience the culture and colors of India. Time spent in learning is not so stressful for the kids and they are exposed to the vibrant art forms of our country. They hear stories behind the origin of the songs and dances and learn and perform faster."

Many parents agree that the 5,000 year old traditional dances and music are way better than the Bollywood dances, especially as the kids get enough

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Srividya Eshwar
Founder, X'pressions

exposure too them (Bollywood) anyway.

Since the launch of the school, X'pressions have performed at many events and festivals, just as Eshwar herself had done at many places in India including youth college events in Mumbai, National Folk Dance Festivals at Delhi etc. Notable performances for Xpressions dancers include City of Cupertino and City of San Jose events, Diwali Programs at various places, fundraising programs for CRY, Ruchika etc.

In the last six years, X'pressions dancers have won numerous accolades and recognitions for their work. Whether folk or fusion dances, the dancers worked hard to put up quality work on the stage. Eshwar proudly recounts, "Some of my personal favorites are the 'Best Dance School and Best Choreographer' award at the Youthtsav Festival in 2005. And more recently the 'Best Choreographer' award at the

Holi Des Rangeela Contest."

Eyeing some more collaborative acts, Eshwar has also started teaching semi-classical style to the older and experienced students, which breaks the stylized structure and forms of the classical dance and adopts a more contemporary style of presentation. "I also pick up movie songs that have an authentic performing aspect and fuse various styles in order to present them. Students are taught dances that will help them accentuate grace and fluidity of movement, and deliver footwork with precision of rhythm and incorporate facial expressions to use the art of storytelling thru mime and gestures," she says.

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