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'Festivals of India' Seeks to Build Bridges of Understanding

by [Julie Levin](#) | [printable version](#) [ShareThis](#)
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As a young girl growing up in India, Ranjana Warier would often awake to the sounds of traditional Indian classical and folk music on the radio. To this day, she says, the rhythmic sound of the Chilanga, an anklet worn by dancers, is ingrained on her mind as a treasured part of her culture.

Now living in Davie, Warier is bringing a slice of her heritage to the stage in South Florida through a high-energy musical production called "Festivals of India." The show, featuring up to 60 dancers from her Rhythms School of Dance in Davie, will be held on August 21 at the Hollywood Performing Arts Center thanks to a \$2,000 mini-grant from the Broward Cultural Division. "It will be our first large-scale production, focusing on the vast symbolism of India," said Warier, whose dance school specializes in classical forms of Indian dance and has been open since 2004.

The 2½-hour production will present an array of classical, contemporary and folk dance, including such styles as Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi and Mohiniyattam and folk dances like Garba, Bhangra, Kerala folk, Tamil Folk and more. It will be mixed with music representing the vast regions and languages of India. The dancers, both professional and amateur, will wear traditional clothing.

Interspersed with the music and dance will be skits and narrations used to explain the different symbols in Indian culture. Warier says she is hoping the show will be a fun, but educational way to explore the differences in her homeland, which is loaded with colorful diversity.

The second most populous country in the world, India has a population of more than one billion people. "It is like a country within a country because there is so much variety of culture and so many types of festivals, whether they be patriotic, religious or regional," she said.

The show will explore the symbolism of seven well-know Indian festivals and try to demystify the myths that sometimes surround them. India's culture is one of the oldest in the world and has sparked an array of languages and traditions that are unfamiliar to many people. She would like her show to be a bridge that will foster understanding. "The purpose is to open up a window to explain this in a fun-filled way," said Warier, a classically trained dancer who began learning her craft at the tender age of 6.

"Festivals of India" is the story of a young girl from America who wants to learn more about India's soul and spirit. She travels through different parts of the country, visiting festivals and learning about the symbolism in all the rituals. Throughout the show, she discovers the strength of the "invisible thread" that binds the country together. She also learns about kinship, goodwill, tolerance and appreciation towards diversity. Warier says she sees many of

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the same elements here in South Florida, because the area has long been a diverse cultural melting pot, drawing people from all over the globe. "I want to show that in the end we are all human and all carry the same spirit," she said.

Warier says there are approximately 100,000 people of Indian or Indian/Caribbean origin living in South Florida. Last year, in Davie, she hosted a smaller show that explored Indian folk dance and drama. She has also worked with South Florida's Hindu temples to present an educational show about India's culture.


An engineer by profession who works fulltime as an IT security consultant, Warier loves to find ways to combine her artistic and technological talents. As result, she uses lots of technology in her shows, with music and video editing. She is also passionate about education – not just about dance, but about the treasures of India. "I always like to do something that combines these three elements in a unique way so that is an enjoyable, educational and intriguing experience, so that people will want to know more," she said.

The show will also include the choreography of Harija Sivakumar, Anisha Gulabsingani and Usha Verma.

Festivals of India will be performed at the Hollywood Performing Arts Center, 1770 Monroe St. in Hollywood, at 6 p.m. on August 21. Tickets are \$10. For more information, e-mail festival@erhythms.net or call 954-472-6004.



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