Arts are 'Eternal'

Afro-Cuban and Indian flair meet.

Growing up in India, choreographer Ranjana Warier knew little about Afro-Cuban culture.

"I knew Cuba existed. Thatwas it," she recalls with a laugh. "I knew therewas Cuba, and I knew therewas Africa, but I had no exposure whatsoever."

Today, Warier is the artistic director of "Surya: The Eternal Rhythm," a project that merges Afro-Cuban and Indian cultures through dance, poetry and music. The show, a 2014 winner of a Knight Arts Challenge grant by the Knight Foundation, will take place Saturday at the Wolfson Campus Auditorium at Miami Dade College.
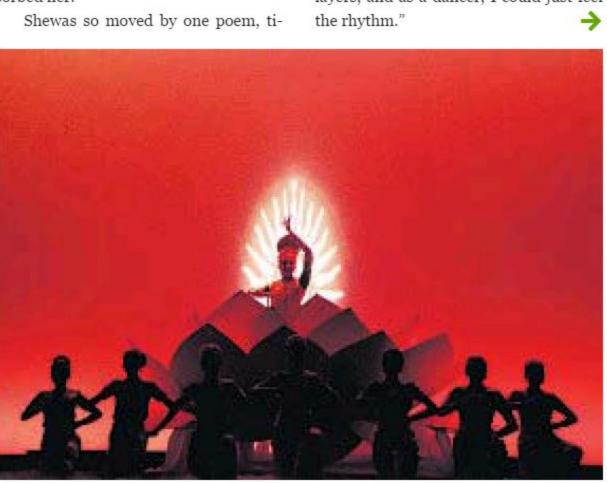
"We all might talk differently, andwe might portray things differently, but when you look deep down, it appears to be the same human spirit shining through different kinds of lights," she says. "That is actually very encouraging, especially in today's world. Many of us think we're quite different, and that's where conflicts start. But when you start understanding diversity a little bit better, you realize how close we are."

The project started with a poem by Miami-based poet Adrian Castro, who often writes about AfroCaribbean culture, history and myths. Lissette Mendez, director of Miami Book Fair International, introduced Warier to Castro's poetry, and his work immediately absorbed her.

Shewas so moved by one poem, titled "Clay, Chalk and Charcoal" and inspired by the African religion Yoruba, that she based a new choreography on it.

"I lost track of howmany times I read it. It's a like a Renoir, [in] that the longer you look, you start seeing the details and all the different things," Warier says. "I read it over and over, and each time I felt Iwas adding one more piece of the puzzle, not knowing what Iwas putting together. It seemed it had many layers, and as a dancer, I could just feel the rhythm." →

"Surya: The Eternal Rhythm" merges Afro-Cuban and Indian cultures in a show that features dance, poetry and music. It will take place Saturday.