



Available Dates: Wednesday June 2, 2010 and Friday June 4, 2010 all day

Introduction to Menaka Thakkar and Indian Dance:

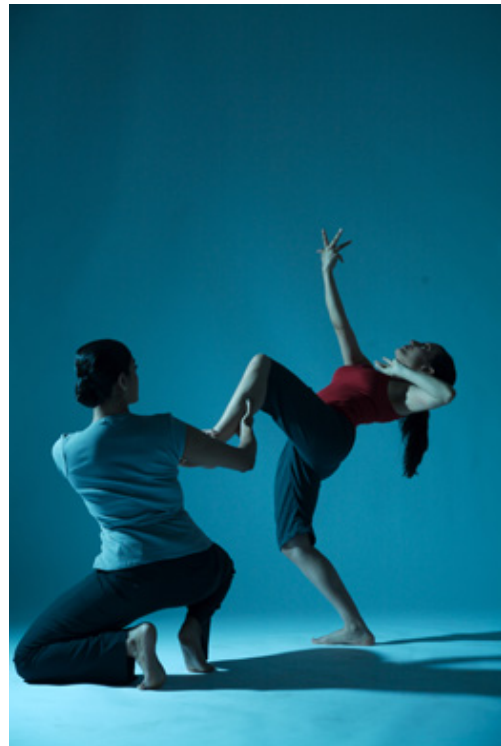
Indian dance is an integral part of the deep-rooted and ancient history of South Asia. Indian dance is increasingly appearing in professional choreographies of contemporary dance, and Bollywood dance is becoming a popularized component of the mainstream pop culture scenes.

This workshop with Canada's foremost master dancer and choreographer Menaka Thakkar is designed for adults and students to indulge and learn basics of the classical Indian dance and traditional Indian folk dances.

Bharatanatyam, and other Indian dance styles, are multidisciplinary in nature including emphasis on storytelling, narration, facial expression, eye movement, hand gestures (mudras), and music.

In this workshop, basic folk dances and movements are taught, and can be interpreted / adapted to fit all participants' needs and physical abilities. In every case, all participants have the opportunity to be physically and mindfully active while exploring South Asian art and history.

Since many people are familiar with Ballet technique, participants will also learn about the similarities and differences between modern and ballet dance forms with regard to how the body is used. The process of learning some Bharatanatyam technique becomes teaching new movements using the same basic principles of body positioning.



Workshop Breakdown:

The workshop will commence with a small talk about Indian dance. Then the movement begins with a brief warm-up. More structured dance sequences are then conducted. Each movement is introduced with a lead-up exercise and various dance sequences and steps are combined and added to music. Various segments from such folk dances as Garba Ras from West India, Ghummar from North India, and Kummi

from South India will be investigated. Additionally small classical South Indian Bharatanatyam dance excerpts will be explored with narration and traditional Bageshwari Raga music.

The workshop will highlight fundamental concepts such as:

- **body:** awareness (where one is in relation to another person, in the classroom, objects in the classroom), use of body zones (whole body vs part of body), use of body parts, locomotor movements (movement that takes you places) , non-locomotor movements (movement that does not take you anywhere), body bases (where are you moving from), symmetry vs asymmetry, gesture, isolation of body parts, weight transfer
- **space:** levels, pathways, directions, size of movement, positive vs negative, performance space
- **time:** freeze, tempo, rhythm
- **energy:** force, quality, effort, fluidity
- **relationship:** meet/part, follow/lead, groupings

About Menaka Thakkar:

Menaka Thakkar is a master dancer in three classical Indian styles – Bharatanatyam, Odissi and Kuchipudi. Now in her 66th year, Ms. Thakkar settled in Canada over 38 years ago at the peak of her career as an international soloist. She is credited (along with Kathak dancer, Rina Singha) as having been the first artist to introduce Indian culture to Canadian audiences.

In the early years Ms. Thakkar performed across Canada and soon began to train youngsters in classical Bharatanatyam. Eventually she began creating original choreographies that were performed in major venues across Canada. She opened the first school of Indian dance in Canada, Nrytakala which continues to train new generations of dancers and formed the Menaka Thakkar Dance Company comprised of graduates of her school. Many of the graduates have gone on to develop their own dance companies and solo careers in dance such as Winnipeg's "Manohar Dance Company", Natasha Bakht, Niharika Mohanty, and Nova Bhattacharya.

The Menaka Thakkar Dance Company became the first South Asian arts organization to be recognized by the Canada Council for the Arts thereby opening the door to other multicultural artists to receive funding. Today the Menaka Thakkar Dance Company, known as MTDC is Canada's premiere Indian dance company. It includes up to 20 professional dancers who have each studied with Ms. Thakkar from 16 to 26 years. Ms. Thakkar has created groundbreaking choreographies since coming to Canada which reflect both her exposure to western dance styles and her background in classical Indian dance. She has collaborated with many of Canada's most accomplished dancers including Claudia Moore, Danny Grossman, William Lau, Robert Desrosiers, Patrick Parson, Debbie Wilson and Grant Strate to create possibly some of the first fusion pieces in Canada and group choreographies for Indian dancers. In addition, Ms. Thakkar has also reached out to students of ballet at the National Ballet School through an

annual residency in which she has trained ballet students in classical bharatanatyam for the past 20 years.

Menaka Thakkar continues to oversee the company and school's operations as the Artistic Director and continues to develop uncompromising choreographies which consistently break new ground and change the face of Indian dance in Canada.

About Neena Jayarajan

Neena Jayarajan is the Assistant Artistic Director, Rehearsal Director and a lead dancer with the Menaka Thakkar Dance Company. She is a graduate of Nrtyakala – The Canadian Academy of Indian dance where she studied Bharatanatyam under Dr. Menaka Thakkar for 25 years. As a leading dancer for Canada's Menaka Thakkar Dance Company Neena has been trained in Odissi dance through Nrtyakala by Sujata Mohapatra and has been a part of summer intensives in Kalariapayattu with Shaji John, Body Conditioning with Natasha Bakht, Butoh with Jay Hirabayashi, Modern with Eddie Kastrau, Pantomime with Deb Kumar Paul, and Yoga for dancers with Navtej Johar. Her repertoire consists of traditional and contemporary works by Menaka Thakkar, Natasha Bakht, Chandralekha, and Kelucharan Mohapatra. She has toured internationally with MTDC for the past 10 years in such performances as Gita Govinda, Chitrangada, Moving to Rhythm, Riaz, and Voyage of Awakening.