

# The Milapfest dance camp at Liverpool

Anjana Anand

Milapfest's annual camp – Dance India 2012, was a much awaited event. I was one of the Bharatanatyam tutors (beginners level) along with Priyadarsini Govind (intermediate) and Leela Samson (advanced). What a treat it was to have veteran Kumudini Lakhia assisted by her senior disciples Prashanth Shah and Sanjukta Sinha for Kathak and Sujata Mahapatra for Odissi. This year was special for the Milapfest team led by Prashant Nayak and supported by Alok, Archana, Shyla, Pravinder, Yuvaraj and Lisa. It was the first year that Dance India and Music India – the week-long residential camp for dancers and musicians respectively – overlapped. This meant double the work for Milapfest and double the excitement for the participants.

We arrived in Liverpool a day before the camp began and settled into our hostel rooms at the beautiful Liverpool Hope University campus. I had expected more participants of Indian origin but was surprised to see that most of the dancers were Europeans who had learnt Indian classical dance forms in their respective countries over the years. During the first three days of the camp we were able to interact with musicians like Lalgudi G.J.R. Krishnan, Gaurav Mazumdar, Kousic Sen, Anil Srinivasan, Shashank and Rakesh Chaurasia and managed to attend some of their lecture demonstrations and concerts.

The highlight of the camp was the Indika Festival held for eleven nights. Every night we were treated to music and dance of the highest calibre. On some nights musicians performed

together in various combinations in just the spirit of coming together artistically. Dancers of different forms too came together to create magic for the students and art lovers present. It was not merely a display of artistic skill. These performances gave us a glimpse of the universality of each dance form that moves beyond its individual vocabulary to touch a common artistic chord. The students had a chance to see two more classical forms with Vyjayanthi Kashi and her talented daughter Prateeksha in a Kuchipudi duo presentation. Dr. Deepti Omchery Bhalla performed Mohini Attam and gave a vocal recital too. Milapfest also presented some of their talented students Arianna Ballabio, Lucretzia and Sooraj Subramaniam, recipients of scholarships to study in India. Milapfest's vision for the performing

Kumudini Lakhia (extreme R) at the session on Kathak



## A DANCER'S DIARY



Anjana Anand (centre) at Milapfest

arts includes finding opportunities for young artists to support themselves in full time careers in the arts.

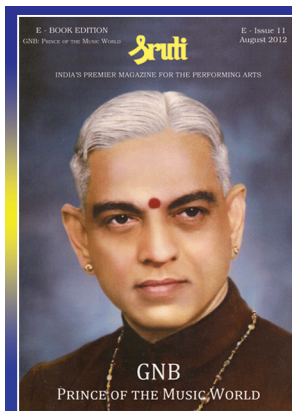
The classes with the students were intense and aimed towards improving technique. Although each group was taught an item, the idea of the camp was to strengthen their foundation and understanding of the art form. After the afternoon practice sessions, each tutor presented a lecture demonstration. The sessions were interactive and the students had a chance try out other dance styles. An early dinner at 6 pm was followed by a dance performance every night.

At 9.30 pm, we trooped back to our rooms, more than ready for bed to be up on our feet early next day.

Any illusions of waking up late were dispelled on the first day. At 6 am Leela Samson and Priya Govind were ready in their jogging tracks and sneakers for a morning run! Any calories we lost we made up at the breakfast buffet. And so the days flashed by and before I knew it, the closing ceremony of Dance India had arrived. All the students performed their individual pieces and shared their experiences with the gathering. One thing common to the sharing

by the students was the joy of being able to come together with fellow artists and live, think and breathe dance. Milapfest was not just about going away with one more item in the dance bank – it gave an opportunity for artists of every range and calibre to revitalise themselves. The synergy of the week only reaffirmed our faith in the magic and purpose of art. I looked at the sea of excited and happy faces in the auditorium and thanked my stars for my decision to be a dancer.

(Anjana Anand is a Bharatanatyam dancer and teacher)



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