

Chhandika Turns Five

On November 12th 2007, Chhandika officially turned five. I remember walking away from the Attorney General's office in downtown Boston with the official seal designating Chhandika as a 501 (c) (3) non-profit corporation, and feeling elated. We had 26 students in Cambridge, and three volunteers. Today, we have over 100 students in three locations (Cambridge,

Acton and Andover, with plans to add Lexington) and about 15 volunteers. We have collaborated with over 20 local educational and cultural partners. Chhandika's imprint on the local dance and South Asian scene is unmistakable. Thank you for your support in making this happen...and we look forward to many more years of success.

Thank you!

We wish to thank the anonymous donor whose generous contribution we received in early December.

We are truly grateful!

Classical Kathak Meets World-jazz



On Saturday, December 1st, 2007, world jazz ensemble Natraj performed with Gretchen Hayden, Chhandika's Artistic Director, at SpringStep in Medford, MA. Natraj melds classical Indian and traditional West African music with contemporary jazz, and this was their first collaboration with classical kathak dancer Gretchen Hayden. They performed to a near-full hall and enthusiastic audience. A good number were drawn to the event after reading a feature article on Ms. Hayden in that morning's edition of the Boston Globe.

The stunning, glass-enclosed arts building at SpringStep echoed with the soulful melodies of Phil Scarff's soprano saxophone, Mark Rivard's masterfully played string bass and the strains of Rohan Gregory's violin. What had the audience's

feet tapping, however, were the resonant beats of Jerry Leake and Bertram Lehmann's tabla, clay pot, West African drums and other percussive instruments, interspersed with the melodious and rhythmic jingle of Ms. Hayden's ankle bells.

While approaching Indian music and traditions in different ways and from different places, Ms. Hayden and Natraj found common ground in their mastery of the music's intricate rhythms, their impressive ability to improvise, and their capacity for innovation within tradition. Ms. Hayden once again showed herself to be an artist to the core, interpreting, adapting and creating on the spot while drawing from the seemingly endless well of her classical kathak repertoire.

For information on Upcoming Events, please see page 4.

Kathak survival tips for the 21st century

By Gretchen Hayden

An interactive series exploring the challenges facing kathak dance and students today. Join in this dialogue by emailing your comments to: info@chhandika.org

For the love of kathak and its many benefits

To appreciate fully what kathak dance is and what it has to offer, consider its unique qualities and vast scope. From its origin in ancient India to its dramatic emergence on today's international stage, the storytelling art of kathak blends classical theater with dynamic rhythms, spontaneous improvisation, and exquisite dance movements. It is:

- ❖ A highly sophisticated dance-theater
- ❖ A disciplined art form
- ❖ A mental and physical workout
- ❖ A form of meditation and yoga
- ❖ A rhythmic and musical experience
- ❖ A living tradition

The benefits of studying and practicing kathak are a combination of all those that come from doing classical dance, music, yoga, sports, cultural studies and more! Whether the study of kathak is a means to become a proficient dancer, to improve one's health or simply to enjoy an exhilarating activity,

kathak offers these benefits to all students:

- ❖ Better posture, body alignment and coordination
- ❖ Greater mental focus and ability to concentrate
- ❖ Improved bodily kinesthetic intelligence
- ❖ Greater mathematical and puzzle-solving abilities
- ❖ Precision of technique
- ❖ Enhanced sense of discipline
- ❖ Training in public speaking and presentation
- ❖ Heightened self awareness and improved expression
- ❖ Cultural understanding and appreciation for diversity
- ❖ Stronger self confidence
- ❖ Beauty and artistry
- ❖ Connection to history, philosophy and tradition
- ❖ For some, deepened spirituality
- ❖ Joy and inner fulfillment

Cast all your votes for kathak!

Join our classes!

Winter/Spring session begins January 6th, 2008

- ❖ Classes for children, teens, adults of all levels
- ❖ Three locations: Acton, Andover, Cambridge
- ❖ Beginners welcome at all times



Full schedule at www.chhandika.org



My Kathak Story

By Valarie Kaur

I first wandered into Pandit Chitresh Das' class at Stanford my senior year without knowing anything about kathak. Here was a man with wild hair and fire in his eyes declaring the fundamental integration of life, mathematics, story and dance! In that first class, he taught us tatkar (footwork) and pushed us to such a speed that there was no thought—only the pounding rhythm of the bells. From that moment, I knew I had found something I couldn't let go.

While I had discovered kathak in California, I found a home for myself when I came to Boston a few falls ago for graduate studies in religion. On Sunday mornings, Gretchenji's dance studio became a safe and nurturing space—a sanctuary—where I would leave my insecurities and anxieties at the door with my pranam and give myself over to the dance. I became part of a circle of dancers who took care of one another through classes and retreats and annual shows. And I learned how to become a storyteller—not only as a filmmaker and student of religion—but as a dancer.

As I moved into my mid-twenties and had my first encounters with cruelty and chronic pain, kathak became more than a dance—it became a form of prayer and meditation. As a Sikh whose tradition calls for her to recognize Oneness, I began to embrace the Hindu stories and Islamic styles of the dance as my own. I pushed the boudnaries of worship in my own religious tradition by singing and reciting Sikh scripture while dancing before the different faces of the One Divine—honoring Krishna's fierce strength, Padmasambhava's battle to convert his demons, and Shiva Nataranjan's endless dance. It did not matter to me how well I danced, only that I felt the divine within me. Kathak has now become the source of religious expression and healing in my own story.

Now as I spend a year in California, I miss Gretchenji's classes more than anything. So I walk the ocean in the mornings, offer Guru Sloka to the earth, sea, and sky, and dance. I can hear the bells fill the space around me and know that I am home.



Valarie Kaur
Photo by Sharat Raju

Meet the Development Committee



Meenakshi Verma Agrawal: Policy Analyst, Massachusetts Division of Health Care Finance and Policy. Chhandika Instructor and advanced student.



Bandita Joarder: Program Manager, Omgeo. Chhandika Board member and student.



Fauzia Hassan: Program and Human Rights Coordinator for Justice Resources Institute. Chhandika student.



Anjali Mitter Duva: writer, urban planner. Chhandika Executive Director and student.



Farhana Huq: Exec. Director of CEO Women. Chhandika Board member. Student and dancer at Pandit Das' Chhandam School of Kathak Dance.



Priya Sankalia: GIS Analyst/Project Manager, Applied Geographics, Inc. Mother of Chhandika student.

Events

- Saturday, December 1st** **Ragas, Rhythms and Grooves:** Gretchen Hayden collaborates with Indian/Jazz fusion group Natraj at the Springstep Center in Medford, MA. Performance at 8 pm. Tickets at www.springstep.org
- Sunday, December 15th** **Sangeet: Music/Rhythm/Dance/Drama:** A two-part concert featuring a sarod solo by George Ruckert and a kathak solo by Gretchen Hayden, accompanied by Pandit Ramesh Misra on sarangi and Nitin Mitta on tabla. Performance at 7:30 pm at MIT's Kresge Little Theater in Cambridge. Tickets available at the door.
- Sunday, January 6th** **Start of the Winter/Spring session**
- February 15th to 17th** **Winter Retreat:** An intensive weekend of dance for Chhandika's adult students. Location TBD.
- Sunday, April 6th** **Annual Show:** All of Chhandika's students perform at this annual event. Location TBD.

Details of time and location of all events available at www.chhandika.org

For information on events of the Chhandam Chitresh Das Dance Company in the Bay Area of California, visit www.kathak.org

How to support Chhandika

- ❖ Join a class
- ❖ Volunteer
- ❖ Help find a home and office for our music and dance center
- ❖ Donate equipment or services
- ❖ Send a tax-deductible donation made out to Chhandika at
194 Norfolk Street, #2, Cambridge, MA 02139

To discuss any ideas, please call Anjali Mitter Duva at 617-797-4612

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About Chhandika

The Chhandam Institute of Kathak Dance (Chhandika) is an organization of artists, musicians and scholars dedicated to maintaining and contributing to the rich tradition of kathak dance. From its origins in ancient India to its dramatic emergence on today's international stage, the storytelling art of kathak blends classical theater with dynamic rhythms and exquisite dance movement.

Chhandika offers classes for men, women and children; enriches the community through performances and demonstrations; and fosters personal growth and cultural exploration through its outreach activities. Chhandika is affiliated with the Chhandam Chitresh Das Dance Company (based in the San Francisco Bay Area) and the Nritya Bharati Institute (Kolkata, India).