

Building a cultural bridge

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Courtyard Dancers use works to reflect issues

PROFILE. Traditional and contemporary dance are often seen as opposites, the one a preservation of folk forms and the other an attempt to reject tradition and express modern ideas. But the Philadelphia-based Courtyard Dancers combine the two, taking a progressive approach to classical Indian dance.

"The Courtyard Dancers' work envisions the contemporary not as opposed to tradition, but as reinvention of tradition," explains Pallabi Chakravorty, the company's founder and artistic director, as well as assistant professor of music and dance at Swarthmore College. "Thus our work can be understood as legacies, connections and transformations. We are interested in a new vocabulary of movements that can retain much of what has stood the test of time, yet [are]

able to critique and reflect issues of global and local significance."

AT THE PAINTED Bride this weekend, the Courtyard Dancers present "Replaced Rituals," a work that, Chakravorty says, "gives us a way to think about our identities as shifting and merging as we search for the universal. Through music and dance from India, it celebrates cultural pluralism in a time of separatist politics."

That political message, Chakravorty says, is essential to the company. "In a world marked by violence, displacement and domination, my ensemble represents

interdependence, communication and a search to bridge cultural difference."

Chakravorty is especially interested in themes she

sees as connecting India and the U.S. "The south-Asian diaspora is influencing the cultural landscape in the U.S, just as American popular culture is influencing India," she says. "Traditional practices such as Indian dance can be molded to critically speak to contemporary issues."

PRIMARY AMONG the ideas that Chakravorty explores are issues regarding women's lives and labor.

"For me, choreography should not be a rarified realm isolated from the ebb and flow of everyday life," she says. "Women's desire and labor are both underrepresented themes in contemporary Indian dance works. I'm interested in finding the connections

between these two themes and their relationship to women's lives. I depict these themes by juxtaposing the beauty of the classical forms with pedestrian movements, everyday gestures and utterances to create dramatic portraits of ordinary lives."

Courtyard Dancers
Friday and Saturday, 7 p.m.
Painted Bride
230 Vine St.
\$7.50-\$15, 215-925-9914
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