

## [The Globe Trotting Lord of Dance](#)

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### FINE ARTS

## The Globe Trotting Lord of Dance

An exceptional talent brings international recognition to South Indian Dance

Meera Vayapooree, Mauritius

His powerful & dynamic dance performances have made him one of Bharata Natyam's most important modern-day, international ambassadors. P. T. Narendran's enthusiastic energy, poise and grace combined with his masculine strength and flexibility bring a new dimension to this timeless dance form usually dominated by lady performers. For him, dance is more than art. It is life. "Practising and learning at least one art form, " he says, "is essential for bringing forth the finer qualities as a human being."

Narendran has carved out a name and a fan club on five continents. In Chennai alone, the Iyal Isai Nataka Mandram awarded him the Bharata Natya Kalaingan certificate in 1989, the Kalaimagal Sabha presented him with the silver trophy in 1995 and the Temple of World Peace gave him the Gnana Oli Thiru Thondar Award in 2001.

P. T. Narendran was born into a family of dancers in the Southern Indian state of Kerala. For more than five generations, his relatives had become famous performing a popular form of folk dance called Kai Kotti Kali. Kai means "hands." Kotti means "to clap." And kali means "dance."

It was Narendran's sister who first introduced him to dance. She was a highly

trained classical dancer and was his first teacher. His father was enthusiastic about his taking up dance and wielded a strong paternal will in motivating the boy during the first years of instruction.

His training reached maturity at the legendary Kalakshetra College of Fine Arts in Chennai under the eagle eye and in the loving presence of Rukmini Devi, Kalakshetra's founder.

Young Narendran graduated with first class honors at Kalakshetra and continued on there to obtain even more accolades at the postgraduate level. In 1989, upon the completion of his studies, he became the principal dancer at Kalakshetra.

Today, though he is a freelance performer and trainer, he is still the featured performer in the many dance dramas given at the renowned school. As a professional, he has performed at festivals in Europe, Russia, Australia, Thailand, South Africa, Malaysia, Reunion island in the Indian Ocean and most recently in Mauritius, where he was interviewed by Hinduism Today for this article.

Asked whether he has ever felt overwhelmed by having to perform the parts of Shiva, Vishnu and Rama, Narendran confides that dancing for him calls forth a total dedication from which emanates an all-abiding faith in God.

Although he is a well-seasoned dancer, he still has to cope with that all-too-real rush of adrenalin all performers must face before going on stage. To re-establish balance and calm during those times, he says he turns to Lord Ganesha. As soon as he thinks of the Remover of Obstacles, his attention turns within, away from the external worries and technical concerns. His concentration is immediately refocused on the performance. "This internalization is what we call the rasanubhava," explains Narendran. "It is an aesthetic experience, but it is not a trance."

"Bharata Natyam is attributed to the Sage Bharata Muni," explains Narendran. "Lord Brahma revealed to the sage a scripture called the Veda Natya or Natya Shastra, which is a treatise amalgamating the essence of all the other four Vedas. Bha is an abbreviation of bhava which means 'emotion or devotion.' Ra stands for

raga, which means 'melody.' And ta is short for talam, which means 'rhythm.' Bharata Muni speaks of the art form as dance drama, showing the opposite values of good and bad, good triumphing over evil. What is depicted must be pleasing to the eyes and ears, and the audience should not just be entertained but should learn something as well. The dancer represents the jivatma (soul) engaging with the Paramatma (the Supreme God)."

Narendran hopes to slowly turn away from performing, as he becomes more involved with teaching. Even now he is setting up his own school in Chennai. Only the future can tell if his imposing presence and commanding authority on stage as a dancer can be matched with a similar charisma as a teacher. Students can contact Narendran at [pt\\_naren@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:pt_naren@yahoo.co.uk)