

[Indian Dancers Shine at French Cultural Festival](#)

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Avignon, France--once the summer haunt of Catholic popes-- is now the Mecca of performing theater. Hindu dance arts are now a necessity here, rather than just an exotic flavoring.

The legendary Avignon monastery transforms its cloisters and countryside each year into a versatile arena for world drama and dance called the Festival of Avignon. Hundreds of artists flock to this French cultural fête to publicly perform new creations and breathe in the wine-like bouquet of peer praise and adulation from media critics. This year, at the 49th Festival of Avignon, some 120 artists from India or Indian performing traditions attended, and many were elevated to the top tier of Avignon virtuosity and popularity. Hindu dance and dancers and Indian dramatists were the vogue. Thomas Erdos, a consultant to dance companies, predicts that this marks the real rise of Indian culture in Europe. "Today, Indian dance is no longer a nice curiosity, a nice fragrance from India. It has become a necessity. People in Europe are asking for it." One example of the new firmament of Indian performers is Raghunath Manet, who proclaimed himself the Indian Nureyev [the late Russian ballet master] and danced a wild Siva Tandava at the festival.