

Board Blaster : unit tests for class X

October 2003 Rs 40

Educare

the complete career magazine

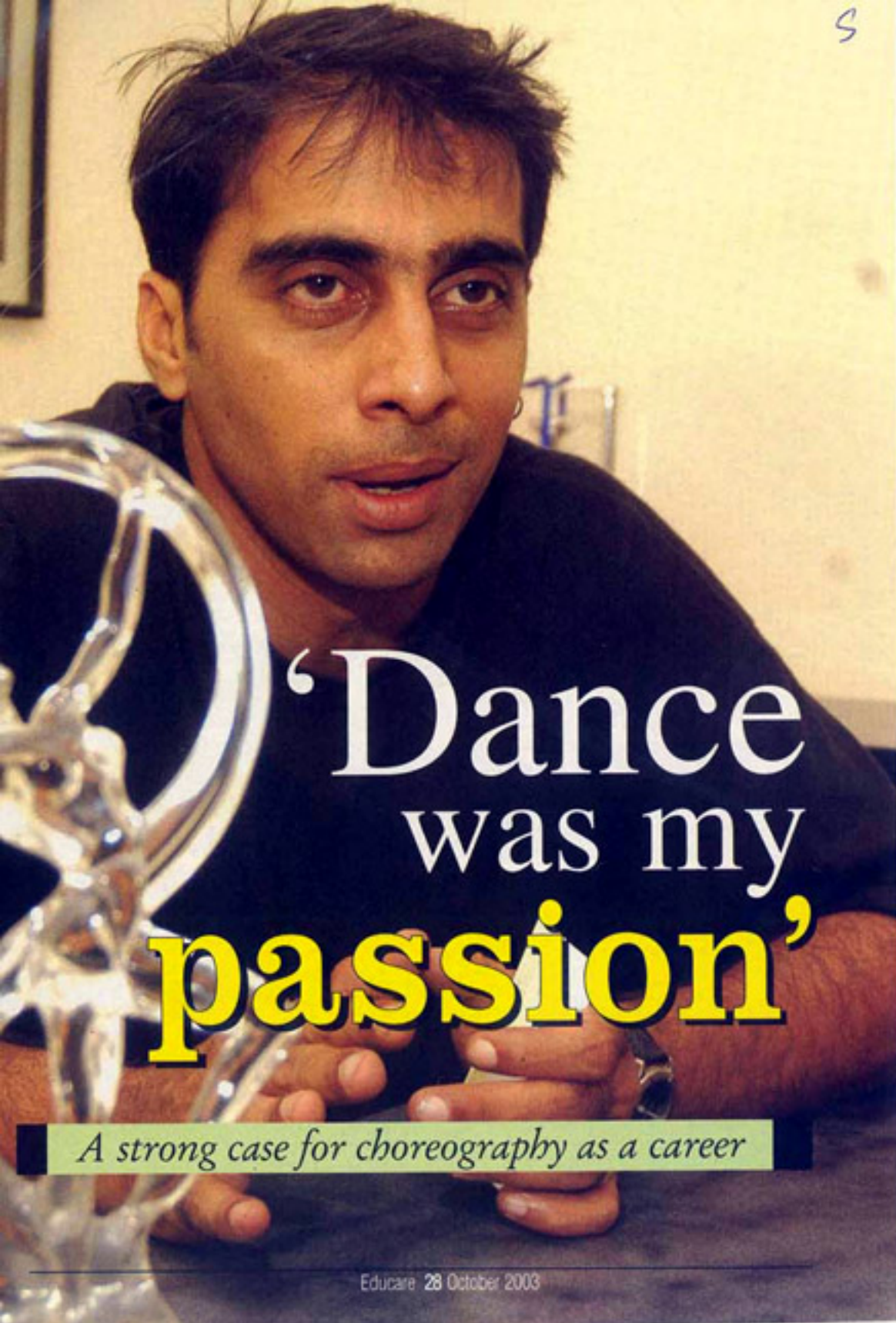
**Entrance tips
for NID, NIFT**

*...kheloge koodoge
banoge nawab!*

**A home away
from home**

Askley Lobo

choreography of success



'Dance was my passion'

A strong case for choreography as a career

ASHLEY LOBO chose his calling, western dance, at a time when there was hardly any opening in this field in India. Lobo, 36, did his schooling from St Mary's School in Mt Abu. Faced with the dilemma of choosing between his two passions — Air Force and dance — in the 1980s, he decided to pursue the unconventional career. He choreographed a number of productions such as George Pulinkala's West Side Story. In 1989 he went to Australia to get training in western dance from Bodenweiser Dance Centre and Sydney Dance Company, where he specialised in jazz.

A back injury put a break to his dancing movements for sometime. Though he returned to India in 1994 and took up a few choreography assignments, he focussed his energy on a garment business in Australia. However, it was the dancer in him that prevailed again, and he returned to set up Danceworx in 1999.

The school today trains 1,400 students every year and had posted a turnover of Rs 1.5 crore in 2002-2003. In an interview to MEHA MATHUR, Lobo shows the right steps to become a successful dancer and a choreographer

How did you get initiated into modern dance?

My mother Celia Lobo, an opera singer in Mumbai, got trained in

London. And when she came back she not just sang but ended up directing western musical theatre. When I came back from boarding school, my mother asked me to audition for a show. That was when it all began.

What is the scope for modern dance forms in India?

When I left India in 1989 there was no scope in India for western movements. India at that time had only Doordarshan. Exposure to culture outside India was very limited. Today there are 60 channels. Borders are becoming porous. People are rapidly exchanging ideas and culture. Indians are now embracing a lot of western stuff, sometimes the wrong things as well.

Did you get any inspiration in school? Were there any role models in school?

In school I was always involved in musical theatre and played lead roles.

Did you consider dance as a career option then?

I never thought I would end up being a dancer. Yes, we did a lot of shows and got Rs 100 per show. But we did it as a hobby. At that time, making dance your career was unrealistic.

So what was your dream career?

I wanted to join the Air Force. I was

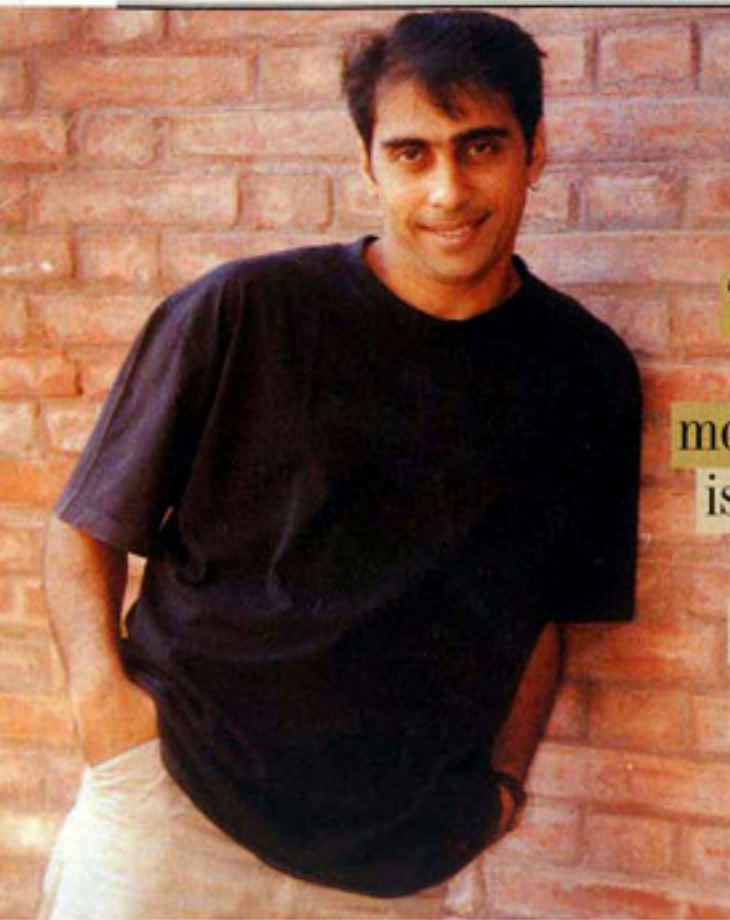


Photo: Anuj Kaushik

“How hard do you study for your monthly exam? Why is it important? Do you have the same approach to your dance classes?”

fascinated by aircrafts. My father was in the army. I even got through NDA. But I joined a production team and life changed. Once I said yes to the show, I couldn't have joined NDA. I had to make a choice. The decision was in favour of dance because I was really very passionate about it. I ultimately joined St Xavier's Mumbai to do economics.

When you took the decision, what was the turmoil in the house? Did the family take it positively?

I have been very fortunate because my mother has been very supportive. She was anyway doing things that were not the norm. She has always encouraged me to do things I believe in.

Was there the apprehension that dancing will not be as paying as army?

That's why I went to Australia. It wasn't paying then. At that time there weren't even any institutions that taught you western dance.

Why Australia?

The reason was that my sister was there, so it would be easier. Also, I had read that a lot of experimentation was happening with western music in that country.

How did that experiment help you?

Hugely. That experience is invaluable. You are by yourself. You have to do everything yourself. I worked from 9 am to 2 pm in a hospital, walked to the dance school, and from 3 pm to 9 pm I was learning dance. I was back at 10 in the night and would get up early in the morning to get back to work.

Which was your first big assignment and the most challenging one?

My first big assignment was in 1989, when I choreographed a musical called *Westside Story* for Modern School, Vasant Vihar. I would say the most challenging one is the play I am writing — *About Nothing*. In this I am tackling different aspects of life like death and love.

How easy or difficult is it to establish oneself as a choreographer, in terms of expenses, building up contacts. How did you go about it?

If you ask me, whether dance is a difficult career, my answer is no. In fact, compare the number of people who

graduate in western dance every year to the number of doctors and engineers graduating every year. Compared to the thousands of medicos who graduate, there would be just one or two western dancers graduating every year. So there is a huge demand. It's a more viable career today than medicine or engineering or anything, provided you treat it like a career and not as a hobby. Get the correct qualifications. Work hard. Learn all the skills.

What is the difference between the two? After all if it's your hobby, you are passionate about it.

The passion is always there. The difference is in approach. You may start off coming to dance class as a hobby, but may never think of it as a career. How hard do you study for your monthly exam? Why is it important? Do you have the same approach to your dance classes? Equally important, do your parents have the same approach to you with your dance? If they treat it as a hobby, you will get hobby results. If they treat it as a career, you will get career results.

Are movies the ultimate goal of every dancer and choreographer, or are there other options available?

Not necessarily. Though Bollywood is a big attraction, there are other avenues too. You can do events.

Every time a car is launched they want an event. Whenever there is a competition like Miss India or model hunt there is work for choreographers. Whenever an Indipop singer wants to release an album, they have to have a music video going with it. Then there's music theatre which is becoming increasingly bigger. The Indian government organises cultural exchange programmes.

I have just done my first film *Socha Na Tha*. But I am not driven by Bollywood or Delhi or Mumbai. My driving force is to do work that I enjoy, to do work that I am passionate about.

Is it a case of everybody trying to set up an entrepreneurship or is it advisable to first join a troop?

In any art form there exists the *Gurushishya parampara*. You learn from a guru because he has learnt from 10 gurus. If I have 10 teachers, then my student gets 10 teachers plus me. So I would say that first get educated. After you have got educated, expose yourself to as many dance forms, so that you can experience more... In art, as a teacher, if your students are less successful than you, at the end of the day, you have failed as a teacher. You should never have been in this profession. The only way my students can know more than me is that they have me plus 10 more. That way

they would have taken the art one step ahead.

Have you specialised in any particular western dance form?

There's the classical ballet, which we can say is the counterpart of Bharatanatyam. Then we have modern dance which is something what Uma Shankar does. Still classical, but some of the rules broken. Then you have jazz, which is what I have specialised in. That is like Bollywood dancing.

As a western dancer, do you feel the need to learn Indian dance forms too?

It always helps. There are certain things that are a must in all dance forms. Posture, stance, an understanding of your own centre of gravity. But in terms of styling they are completely different. So it can actually be a disadvantage if you are steeped in one particular Indian dance form.

But I would always advise that if you are a western dance specialist, you must expose yourself to various Indian dance forms. At the end of the career, you want to create a movement that is original — not western or Indian, but something that you have evolved. Second, dabbling in other dance forms stops you from being arrogant. It keeps you more accepting. ■