

Ashley Lobo talks to FC2 about his new production that promises to be a whopper and a demonstration of how far they have come

NEXT STEP

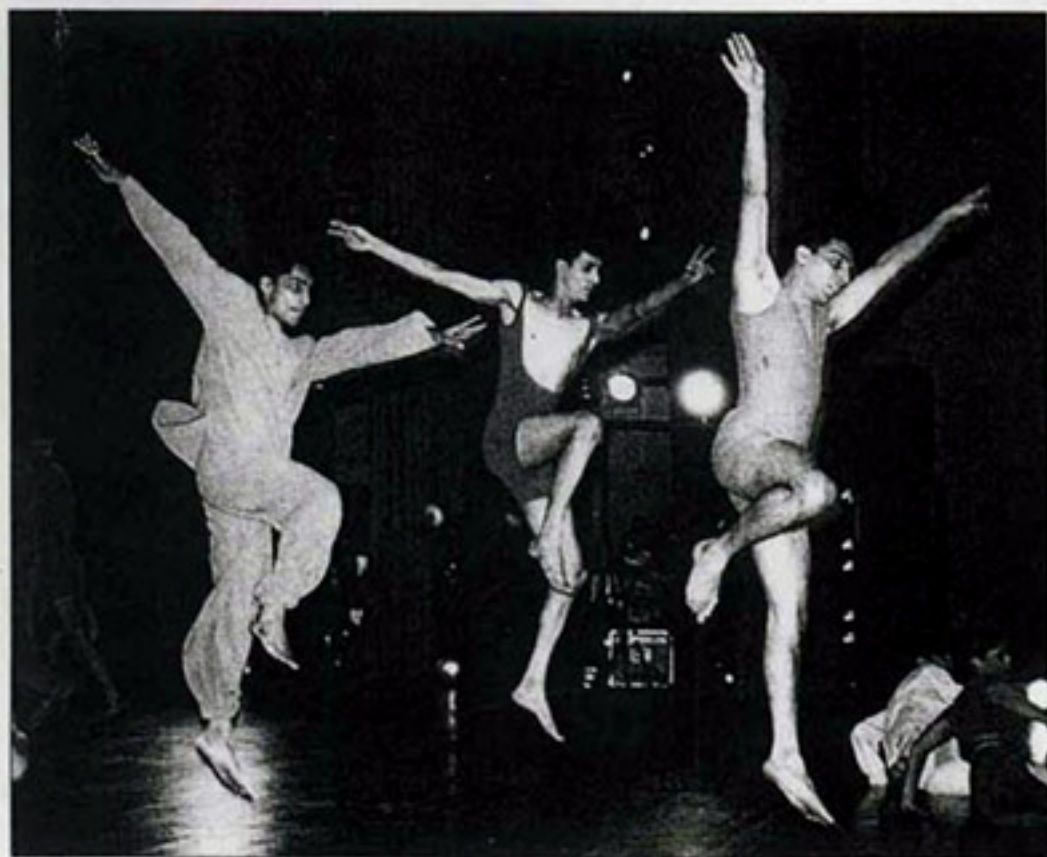
“**W**hat’s new and interesting about this production is that there is not just one specific style of dance...there’s something for everyone,” says Ashley who has been working on

That’s Dancing!, a musical revue for the last three months (“thrice a week since September, to every day now”) being performed in December.

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“Love for musicals is really a love for song and dance,” Ashley’s observation has been that most people, when talking about a musical they have just seen, barely remember the story, but always have an opinion about a favourite dance or song. So, in a bold departure from the norm, they propose to dispense with the story altogether and give the audience what they really want – song and dance.

“The whole show is set in a sort of ‘documentary’ format. The theme is the use of dance and movement in the different areas of entertainment,” explains the dancer who has provided variety, swings in tempo and changes in style to take the audience on a roller-coaster ride. The pieces have been taken from categories of movies, stage musicals, music videos, animation films and of course, Bollywood. Most of them will be well-known hits to which the audience can relate. Given the scope of the theme, they have put to use diverse styles of dance - jazz, classical ballet, contemporary, rock n’ roll, break dance and hip-hop. The music includes pop (Michael Jackson and Madonna, for instance) and fusion music from an album called *Rydhun*, which



includes music by Taufiq Mirza, Zakir Hussain and Shankar Mahadevan. The work on display consists of the work of nine choreographers, which includes overseas instructors (Jaan Freeman of the Freeman Repertory Company of New York, Anastacia Flewin from Sydney, Australia, a former dancer with the Sydney Dance Company who appeared in the film *Moulin Rouge*) and six company dancers. "I wanted to showcase the different applications of dance and movement to demonstrate that choreography



doesn't only involve 'steps'. It is the visual conceptualisation of music or in some cases, no music!" In addition, he wanted to give a chance to dancers from the company to choreograph and help them get started with their careers.

The revue involves acting as well. "To be a complete dancer or choreographer, one must have an understanding of how to act, mime, *et cetera*. Which is why the inclusion of pieces like *Evita*, *Cats*, *Grease*, *Animation*, *Body Rhythms* and some experimental work, was a natural choice. Dance without the inclusion of theatre, in my opinion, would be entertaining, but would lack soul."

"An artist should work from the point of information, not fascination." Explaining further, he emphasises the ideals that drive him while he teaches his dancers to strike the right balance between creativity and originality while absorbing influences, "Too often, we in the east see something from the west, get fascinated, and then do a cosmetic makeover of choreography. The same thing might happen the other way round as well, with someone from the west. Our long-term vision is to expose serious students to eastern and western philosophies of movement simultaneously with varied teachers in each field. Once they complete five to six years of dance education, they would be working from a point of information and through a more holistic understanding of both philosophies of movement. Fusion then, truly *is* fusion and each dancer or choreographer would have a movement philosophy within that fusion. In keeping with that, their curriculum includes studying yoga, different forms of strongly physical Indian dance, classical ballet, jazz and different schools of contemporary dance," he concludes.

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Surprisingly, serious conviction drives their outlook. "Dance is not just about learning steps. It's about understanding the body and the soul, creating one's own vocabulary within the parameters of a particular style or, ultimately, creating one's own. From a choreographer's point of view, it's not just about bodies on stage. There has to be complete understanding of a *frame*, that should include composition and layering in terms of colour and form, using lights, sets, costumes, music and most importantly, meaningful communication through physical vocabulary. Towards this end, the students are encouraged to read books on art, self-development, philosophy *et cetera*."

The school takes a step back to amplify its perspective, not to be taken in by smugness, "Every classical form has been carefully constructed technically, through years of experimentation and evolution. To 'break the rules' one must understand them fully first. This way, learning basic techniques of dance becomes imperative. It would otherwise be arrogance and only highlight ignorance. One must create thinking dancers not just clones." Driving his point home, he completes, "Otherwise, there would be no growth."

(That's Dancing! will be on at Kamani Auditorium from December 21 to 23 at 7.30 pm)