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Tap dance your way through a career

By Nilakshi Bhattacharyya

Do you feel like tapping your feet whenever you listen to western music? Do you want to rock 'n' roll whenever you hear some jazzy music? May be you have it within you, the spirit of western dance. Have you ever thought of changing your liking for western dance to a career? Is it possible to do so in India?

"Yes, definitely. But in order to maintain it you have to be one level above good. There are a number of people who are making a living out of it, but only recently. Some are combining Indian dance with western. I think we have to thank films and television for popularising western dance. Appreciation of people have come from films which have copied western numbers and incorporated it in movies," says Dr Penelope Eastabrook Mirchandani, who teaches tap dancing in Delhi School of Music.

Agreeing with her says Ashley Lobo of

Danceworx, "Few years ago you couldn't even think of it. But now people are more open to the idea of western dance and their perspective about performing arts have changed a lot."

So what are the qualities that are needed to be a professional dancer?

"You have to have the natural ability to dance, sense of rhythm, have creativity and finally the ability to work very hard. Your mindset has to be right. You have to be exceptionally good to survive in India. If you are interested in choreography you must be creative and will have to think a lot to do new things all the time," adds Kiran Kalanaria of Studio d'ESPRIT who is in the field for the last nine years. He teaches modern jazz and ballroom dance.

Coupled with that one has to be flexible, not only physically but mentally as well. "It's very important because you have to unlearn things. That is applicable for all. For example, someone from the West comes to India to

learn Indian classical dance. The person has to unlearn everything about western dance that he/she learnt before and start afresh to be an Indian dancer. So is the case with an Indian dancer who wants to learn western dance. Then you have to slog, slog and slog," says Mirchandani with a smile.

After completing the training, one has many options open to them. They can opt for teaching, choreography, commercials, TV, musicals and music videos. Then there are fashion shows, product launches or even performing groups.

"Today, there are lots of opportunities open for people who know western dancing than that available a few years ago. If you are professionally trained and you have mastered the art then there is no limit to where one can reach as the industry is on the growth run at present and ideally speaking it will always continue to exist," adds Kalanaria.

Is there any scope for them to get scholarships to study abroad? "Yes, there is. They

have to apply to different schools there and when called they have to go there to take the test. It's tough to get a scholarship, but it entirely depends on the person. But we are trying to tie up with some universities abroad so that they can come over here and interview all those aspiring students who want to go abroad on scholarship. Talks are going on," says Lobo.

On an average, the fees per month is Rs 850 while some schools give a discount if you enrol for a three-month course. In Delhi School of Music you have to pay Rs 2,300 for the first quarter and if you continue after that you have to pay Rs 1,300 for the next quarter.

How much a professional western dancer can hope earn in a month? "Well, if you are good, you can earn as much as a high paying executive," remarks Lobo. Some of the established places where you can learn western dance are Delhi School of Music, Studio d'ESPRIT and Danceworx.