

Indian classic

Juliette Levy

Each time the talented classical Indian dancer Menaka Thakkar performs, complimentary criticisms overflow magazine and newspaper articles. Moreover, audiences are left stupefied by her charming dancing.

"To be blunt about it, Menaka Thakkar virtually danced everyone else off the stage."

The Toronto Star, June 4, 1975
After one of her performances at McMaster University Teachers College Thakkar was noted to have,

"... captured the fantasies and imaginations of a surrendered audience ..."

Dance Review, 1973, Toronto, Canada

For Thakkar, it's a myth that artists undergo 'struggling years' before making it as a success, even then being subjected to the gruesome minds of critics. In fact Thakkar has mastered her craft so well that she was an immediate success after her first performance in Canada in 1972. What followed was a succession of performances whereby she danced from the east coast to the west coast of Canada covering every major Canadian city and went even further south dancing her way throughout the U.S.

For the past year Thakkar has been choreographing a production in honor of The International Year of The Child. It involves 17 Italian, Canadian, Chinese, Indian and West Indian children ranging from the ages of 5 1/2 to 13. Three of the Performers are York students Wan Yu Liv, who plays the swan, Aluman, the male crocodile, and Allen, the female crocodile. **Wise Monkey and Foolish Crocodile** is an adaptation of a Hans Christian Anderson Fairy Tale which Thakkar has ingeniously adapted to Indian dancing and music. The children have been rehearsing for 3 months and have absorbed the delicacy of Thakkar's teachings.

At a rehearsal at the Atkinson Studio on Saturday night the

children were fascinating as they conveyed the animals they represented with precision. Thakkar used an interesting technique in teaching them how to symbolize these animals. At first she asked them what they thought of various animals such as an elephant. When they defined it as merely 'big' she encouraged them to think of the way it moves its weight, the size of its feet, how it walks, the way it breathes, the way its trunk and tail moves. Finally she took them to the zoo so they could see the actual animals. In essence Thakkar extenuated their imaginations and comprehensions of animals. As a result they project the animals in a very convincing manner.

All of the performers have had basic training in dance, especially ballet. "The difference between ballet and Indian dancing," remarks an Italian Swan "is that I can relax when I dance in the Indian form and with ballet I'm so stiff and rigid that sometimes I ache." They all agree that there is a definite distinction between the two forms of dancing and a few would like to remain with Thakkar to learn Indian dancing.

The main performer, Nova Bhattacharya, who plays the monkey, is ten years old and has been a private student of Thakkar's for five years. Nova's greatest dream is to be renowned in classical Indian dancing like Thakkar. "It has so many expressions and Thakkar is a nice teacher. I want to be famous like her one day."

Appropriating such qualities has gained Thakkar the honorable title of 'Singar Mani'. She was awarded it in 1968 for her excellence performing Bharatanatyam and Odissi in 1970 by the Sur Aam Sad of music and dance in Bombay. After a performance by Menaka Thakkar all the complimentary criticisms fall into place.

On September 27 Ms. Thakkar will give one performance at the St. Lawrence Center. Tickets are still available.



Dancing animals—Menaka Thakkar and her young students rehearse at the Atkinson studio.

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