

# Desi dancing *videshi ishtyle*

All over the world masala item numbers are cutting across cultural barriers to pull in foot-tapping enthusiasts, discovers Harsh Kabra

**O**N Sunday, July 7, 2008, a new world record was created in Trafalgar Square, London. Over 200 people danced to the title track of *Om Shanti Om* for five minutes under the aegis of Sapnay School of Dance, UK. No longer are Bollywood dances mere over-the-top interludes in our tales of star-crossed lovers.

And while Indian immigrant populations may have started it all, the phenomenon has spread far beyond the diaspora. Honey Kalaria, who started Honey's Dance Academy in 1997 in the UK and is known as UK's Bollywood ambassador, says, "I started with 22 students. At present, I have 1,800 students of all ages and cultural backgrounds. Initially, I had to explain what Bollywood was. Today, it is seen to be fashionable, trendy, colourful and vibrant."

Bollywood dancing is also eliciting interest as a calorie-burning, full-body workout. Sarina Jain, famous for her innovative Masala Bhangra workout, is the American pioneer. "It is the beat of the music, the culture that people are attracted to," she explains. "My students are mostly Americans who want to learn Indian dance, love the music and have lost weight or

gotten back into working out because of it."

Yogen Bhagat, an established Bollywood dancer, started Bollywood Step Dance in Los Angeles in 2005. "In the last few years, people of all ethnicities in America have been intrigued by Bollywood dancing," he says. "We have held numerous workshops where a majority of attendees are non-Indian. People want to learn it because they find it to be different."

Down Under, Anshu Srivastava, an accountant, has been running Bollywood Dimensions Dance School in Canberra for the last five

years. "Bollywood dancing is one of the hottest dances around in Australia," she exults. "I have students from diverse cultures, but nearly 80 per cent of my students are Australians."

One among them is Amanda

Bresnan, the Greens' candidate from the Australian capital for the House of Representatives at the upcoming federal election. She is also a part of the 50-strong cast of Srivastava's Bollywood productions. "Bollywood dancing has given me a great creative outlet," she says. "It is fun."

Hari Krishnan of Toronto-based inDANCE says, "In

Grooves Dance Company, which has branches in the UK, Canada, South Africa and Brazil, says she draws a huge array of Italians, Britons and Brazilians. "Some of my best dancers are Brazilians," she says.

Switzerland's well-chronicled love of Bollywood movies is also manifest in the Alpine country's fondness for Bollywood dancing.

Meissoun (Simone Gasser), a student

of Bharatanatyam

since 1997, says

she keeps a

busy schedule

teaching

workshops

all over

Switzerland,

South Ger-

many and other

countries. "In my

workshops, I mostly get

Europeans, a majority of

them women, of all ages."

That explains why the heart of the Finnish capital Helsinki

resonates with 'Helsinki-Bollywood' dancing at the High Heels dance studio.

In Ukraine, officials of Association

Ukraine-India never get tired of describing how the

market for Bollywood dancing is growing there.

Japan is witness to a growing

tribe of the likes of Masako Sato Kaori, who learnt dancing from Hindi film DVDs. Kaori, who holds a Master's degree in engineering and previously worked with Toshiba, showcased her skills in India in 2006. As Bollywood veteran Saroj Khan

says, "Thanks to the energy and appeal of Bollywood dance, many people wish they could step into the dancers' shoes." This yearning has transcended national boundaries.

timeslife@timesgroup.com



**"IT IS SEEN TO BE FASHIONABLE, COLOURFUL, TRENDY, VIBRANT"**