

Dance Baby Dance...



All that Jazz

Smart and sensational dancer and choreographer Shiamak Davar takes us through the steps in the dancing journey of his life...

■ Lalitha Sridhar

"MY workshops are not about lectures and talking, they are about working out with me. I love to dance. It is a spiritual experience. It was not always

like this. Now things are different (fame, recognition, awards). I would also like you to know that I have been through very difficult times," says Shiamak Davar, National Award winning choreographer,

pioneering jazz ballet guru and founder of the *Shiamak Davar Institute of the Performing Arts (SDIPA)*, "Back in those days dance was not a 'boy' thing to do. People would point out how I was flinging my hands and

legs about all the time. Jazz dance - they would go *chaas?* *Jahaaz* (gestures like an aeroplane)?? I was put down by a lot of people. But now, everybody comes to my classes."

Articulate and witty, Shiamak is a performer all the way. He poses with the ease of a model and never gets too serious, even when he is discussing spiritual wisdom and quality consciousness. "My parents are educationalists and, unlike me, very highly educated! They thought dance was okay as a hobby but, darling, get into a business or something," he grins. "They were the typical father-mother, telling me to study, study. And I barely passed. They were worried about me! But, bless them, they always supported me and, today, they are happy. Now I am asked, 'what's your style, Shiamak?' I don't know. I do know it is genuinely different. When I dance I feel connected to God."

He almost did not do the choreography for *Dil To Paagal Hai*, "Gauri, wife of Shahrukh (Khan), is a very sweet thing. She was coming regularly to my classes, even when Shahrukh was a TV actor. Then she mentioned this movie that Shahrukh was doing with Yash (Chopra) Uncle. I was not very keen because the filmy kind of *jhatak-matak* is not my style of dancing. It's not 1-2, 1-2 and Cut! A pelvic movement can be subtle or vulgar. It need not be about thrusting and heaving and contracting the body. It can be done classily and nicely. In the end, I tried it (film choreography) because I just love Madhuri and the story centred around dance. I had preconceived notions about the film industry - that everybody turns up four hours late and there would be no discipline. I was wrong. I insisted on rehearsals with Madhuri, Shahrukh and Karisma. It was all possible because they were all thorough professionals. They were totally brilliant. Apart from all the fame, recognition and awards, I was very touched when Yash Uncle said, 'Shiamak's style has changed the form of film dancing.'"

SDIPA also conducts classes for street children, children of commercial sex workers, kids with *HIV-AIDS* and those from underprivileged backgrounds. Says Shiamak, "Last year we had a show with 700 of these kids. They were simply fantastic. When I was young, there was no school of the kind I have now set up. It is my dream and I want it to grow well. My instructors are all qualified and thoroughly dedicated professionals. I may not be present for the entire duration of the workshops, but I always keep tabs and check either in the beginning or in the end. I must clarify that there is no branch of *SDIPA* in Chennai, though I am told there are some people who have advertised themselves as my students. It is possible they were. But you cannot become a dance teacher after studying in my school for three months! Every movement has a meaning. Our classes are graded and scheduled systematically. You could tear a muscle if you do it the wrong way!"

"Be happy! It's the smartest thing you can do!" smiles the man who promises, "My next visit is when you call me!"