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Interview with Shaily Dadiala
President and Artistic Director, Usiloquy Dance Designs
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Q. Why did you found Usiloquy Dance Designs?

A. Because dance is the only thing I'm good at. (Laughs!) Truthfully, I studied to be a pharmacist but I was really bored, so I studied dance instead, which was my first love. Studying dance was something that was almost like a secret dream. I thought that, growing up in India, I had to study science, but I really wanted to study dance. I am glad that my parents gave me formal dance training in Bharatanatyam classical dance.

I kept dancing in India and my husband, Keval, told me to quit studying pharmacy and encouraged me to study dance full time. When we moved to the United States, I formed Usiloquy Dance Designs during my eighth year here and I haven't looked back since.

Q. What does the word "Usiloquy" mean?

A. It's a made up word. First, it is inspired from the word "soliloquy", a solo voice. I wanted my company to act as an ensemble, and I wanted to focus on the relationship between the dancers and the audience, hence the idea of "many voices."

Second, in my ancestral language, Punjabi, Usiloquy phonetically means "we people," and it again illustrates what the company is trying to accomplish.

Q. Where do you find the inspiration to dance?

A. It is the most exciting thing I can think of doing! I like discovering how Bharatanatyam can be used to tell stories, and to educate an audience. It is a classical art that is almost limitless. Every story I read in the newspaper or hear from a friend can be told through Bharatanatyam.

Q. Just what is Bharatanatyam?

A. Bharatanatyam is a dance form that is approximately 2000 years old. It is a complex juxtaposition of percussive foot movements, hand gestures, and exaggerated facial expressions.

It originated in the Hindu temples of southern India where it was practiced for centuries before it was ever performed onstage. It was always either a devotional dance for religion, or a dance done for royalty.

Today, it is performed in concert halls, schools, and community centers all over the world.

Q. Tell us about your desire to mix Bharatanatyam with modern music?

A. The dance and its movements are always authentic- we are always faithful to the classical techniques of Bharatanatyam. However, we create cross-cultural works or use other cultural idioms because we believe the art form is unlimited. That is why we sometimes dance to modern music, or tell stories from other cultures.

Q. How do you conceive of new works?

A. I usually have six to eight new works floating around in my head at a time. I am most influenced by people who have emigrated from one place to another and have created new lives in a new environment. Movements of people have always fascinated me.

Q. What do you find to be your greatest challenge as a dancer?

A. It is very physically demanding. It requires a lot of stamina. If you do it in the correct way, it is very athletic, yet it looks very delicate. Also, to look your best, you train daily for those seemingly few times you get to go before an audience and say "This is Bharatanatyam. And it's really, really, special!"

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Shaily Dadijala biography

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Shaily Dadijala was born in 1978 in Bardoli, India. At the age of 9, she felt called to study Bharatanatyam and to become a dancer.

Ms. Dadijala founded Usiloquy Dance Designs in 2008; she is the Artistic Director, Choreographer and Principal Dancer. She completed her B.A. in Dance specializing in Bharatanatyam from the Bruhad Gujarat Sangeet Samiti, India (1988-1994) and 2 year training in Hindustani Classical Music from 1987 to 1989. Ms. Dadijala choreographed and performed at several dance competitions and festivals in India between 1990 and 1996.

After moving to the USA in 2000, Ms. Dadijala taught in Queens, NY for a year before commencing Bharatanatyam classes in Levittown, PA in collaboration with the township recreation department in 2005. These classes with 3 levels of learning are currently taught in center city Philadelphia. Apart from the ongoing classes, Ms. Dadijala's teaching assignments have included workshops and Master classes at the Thomas Jefferson University and Temple University in Philadelphia and Desales University in Center Valley, Pennsylvania. In the fall of 2009, Ms. Dadijala was invited to design the curriculum and teach at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia.

Ms. Dadijala's choreography and performing work has included three evening length works of Bharatanatyam for Usiloquy. Primary among special commissions have been the Philadelphia Geographical Society Festival of India, International Cultural celebration at the Community College of Philadelphia and the Experience Asia festival at the College of New Jersey.

Ms. Dadijala currently lives in Philadelphia, PA with her husband, Keval.

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Fact Sheet For Usiloquy Dance Designs

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Usiloquy: 1. An ensemble; the opposite of soliloquy; many voices
 2. "We People" (phonetic Punjabi)

Year Founded: 2008

Performance Venues: Annenberg Center
 North Philadelphia Arts and Culture Alliance
 Philadelphia Magic Gardens
 Philadelphia Museum of Art
 The Kimmel Center
 The Painted Bride
 Wilmington Opera House

Educational Outreach: The Franklin Institute,
 Philadelphia Free Library
 The Philadelphia Zoo

2011 Funders: Philadelphia Cultural Fund
 Project Stream/Pennsylvania Council of the Arts
 The Samuel Fels Fund

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