

“Hard work is the mother of good luck!” That is the mantra that has guided Sarranyaa Sai Prashanth on her long road to fame. Bharata Natyam dancer, dance guru, choreographer, Carnatic musician, veena artiste, television host, voice over professional – these are just some of the hats that she dons.

Over the past decade and a half, Sarranyaa’s Nrithya Vidyalaya has emerged as a leading cultural academy, guiding and grooming thousands of children in music and dance. Her students have participated and received accolades in various cultural events and shows such as the prestigious Chidambaram Natyanjali, Mahabalipuram dance festival and the Yelagiri Kodai Vizha. They have made inroads into popular television programmes. In April 2012, they cornered the awards in almost all the categories at the Balar Chithra Kalai Vizha.

Simple at heart, strong in her convictions, but very amicable – that’s how the eBalak team felt about Sarranyaa Sai Prashanth while doing this interview with her. Do read on...

[Are you a first generation dancer?](#)

Yes, that’s right! My mother, Padmavathi, is a very good veena artiste and vocalist. My father is a good singer too, and my cousins are dancers. It was my mother who prompted and encouraged me to learn vocal music, veena and dance.

I was greatly inspired by Vyjayantimala Bali whom I consider a very professional dancer. My teacher, Kalaimamani Smt. Ranganayaki Jayaraman, has also wielded a strong influence over me.

[You are also a media professional. How did that happen?](#)

When I was in college, I felt I had plenty of time hanging on my hands. Jaya TV was conducting a screen and voice test; I thought I would give it a go and was selected. I have been working with Jaya TV for the past 12 years. It was not pre-planned.

[So has it been dance, music and media all the time?](#)

I actually did my first Post Graduation (PG) in Human Resource Management and worked with Reliance Infocom Mobiles for a while. Those were hectic days. I would work at Jaya TV from 6 to 6.30 in the morning, do a quick change, and rush to office. I dedicated my evenings for dance classes. My parents coaxed me to give up something. Since I was passionate about media and dance, I took a bold step and gave up my well-paid job.

Because I desired to continue with Jaya TV, I did a second PG in Journalism and Mass Communication from IGNOU. I secured a third PG in Bharata Natyam and vocal music from Madras University, and learnt graphics and animations at Image. For three years, I worked from home for a US-based company.

When I started my dance classes, I had just four students. Now, there are 300 students learning dance, vocal music and veena in our centres at Velachery, Adambakkam and Meenambakkam in Chennai, besides a host of online students.

I also give Tamil voice-overs for Walt Disney productions and other cartoon features such as Wild, Barbie, Storm Hawks and Hero, and for television channels like Discovery, Fox History and National Geography. It is a very challenging task as it is not enough if you just sync with the lip movement; you also have to match the original English voice, which is very good. But I enjoy doing it!

[Tell us something about your television programmes.](#)

My television debut came through A. R. Rahman's Vande Mataram album, produced by Bharat Bala. I danced for the song, "Sujalam Shubhalam." It was a fascinating experience. The shooting was in an old fort at Maheshwaram on the banks of the River Narmada.

The first television show I hosted on Jaya TV was "Sadhanai Penn" where I interviewed women celebrities like Chitra, Manorama, Mrs. Swaminathan, etc. This was followed by "Cine Clips", "Then Kinnai" and others. At present, I am doing live shows like "Hello Doctor."

[What is your "Park-le-Kutchery" all about?](#)

This is an open air cultural programme conducted every week in a park in Adambakkam, jointly by State Bank of India, Sharranyaa's Nrithya Vidyalaya and Vedatri Maharishi's Manavala Kala Mandram. We provide a platform for children below 15 years to showcase their talents in vocal, instrumental, dance, etc.

At the end of the show, we give a certificate to each participant featuring his or her photo on the front side and their family photo on the reverse. We provide a shawl to the child's mother which the child has to receive after prostrating at her feet. Our aim is to revive this tradition.

[What kind of challenges do you face?](#)

This is a very competitive world and the goal is to win the race. For this, I have to constantly update myself with the latest trends in dance; otherwise you are nowhere in the industry. I browse the net, talk to my teacher and peers, read...

Media will not entertain old stock in you. They expect something innovative all the time. I stand in front of the mirror and experiment with new styles in voice modulation, pronunciation, dialogue delivery and of course, my looks! I love the Tamil language and take great care with the pronunciation.

Some dancers are of the view that traditional Bharata Natyam has lost its appeal and fusion dance is the only way to woo the audience. Do you subscribe to this?

You can't jump to conclusions. We have taken our shows abroad to Colombo, Muscat and Dubai, and performed at the Chidambaram Natyanjali festival, the Tanjore Brihadeeswarar Natyanjali festival, etc. and they have all been well received. There is nothing wrong in providing variety but we should also carry our tradition forward.

Our best production so far has been "Navarasa Ravanaan." I choose the theme and do the script, the choreography and the Natuvangam for all our programmes. We are now working on our next production, "Bharatateril Bharati Ulla", a focus on the non-popular songs of poet Bharatiyar. This is purely a charity show for the Madras Cancer Institute, scheduled to be staged on January 6, 2013.

What other forms of dance do you like and why?

I like Kathak for its fast circling movements, Mohinyattam for its swing and grace, Odissi for its beautiful costumes and slow and gentle movements, Kathakali for the way the dancers carry their heavy costumes and make up, and the tribal bamboo dance which requires great skill and timing. I also like ballet for its toe movements.

How did you juggle dance and academics as a child?

The entire credit goes to my parents. They had drawn up a schedule with time allotted for all my pursuits – vocal music, veena and dance. I also learned drawing and painting from Santanu's Chitra Vidyalaya. I did find time to play and won several awards for sports too.

My dad used to wake me up at 5.30 am even during weekends. I used to cry those days but now I feel it was in my best interest. My parents never forced me to do anything; they made me enjoy whatever I did.

Besides teaching dance, do you play any other role in the lives of your students like friend, philosopher, guide...?

I enjoy a very good rapport with my students. I am very strict with them where their performance is concerned, but outside class, they are my friends. I talk to them a lot, as well as with their parents. At the same time, my students are very obedient, hard working and sincere.

Which other personality do you admire?

I have a great regard for my parents, my teacher, Smt. Ranganayaki Jayaraman, and whoever succeeds in their particular field. It is a very tough world, very competitive and not at all easy!