

Dancer keeps in step with India

Story: MILLICENT WORRELL

In many ways, Michele Viswanathan of Bloomfield Hills is a normal teenage American. She wears jeans and sweaters, likes long hair and laughs a lot. She is 13 years old, and a ninth grader at Bloomfield Hills Junior High where she carries a 4.0 average.

But when she slips into her hand-woven, silk costume of India with its gold braid, jewels and ankle bells, she returns to a century-old tradition that excites the human spirit.

On Sunday, Dec. 4, Michele will give a performance of classical dances of India, called Bharatanatyam, at 3 p.m. in Groves High School auditorium, Thirteen Mile at Evergreen.

The art of dancing is, was, and probably forever will be, a special expression of man's culture. Here in the Western world, each generation "dictates" its own dance style so variations are typically dependent upon national moods.

It's not often that we are treated to artistry comprised on changeless dance sequences steeped in tradition.

MICHELE EXPLAINED, "The greatness of Bharatanatyam lies in its inspirational qualities. It's very essence promotes devotion among the people of India."

In Western terms, Bharatanatyam might be described as a "sculpture" dancing style. It is indigenous to south India, Madras in particular, where Adayar Lakshmanan teaches at the Kalakshetra School. The leading proponent of this exquisite dance style, he conducts most of his classes in "ideal" situations like under a banyan tree in order that the student may create a proper spiritual attitude.

Michele's innate, creative ability was honed sharply through intensive training period with Lakshmanan in Madras from July to October. She lived with a famous singer, Pattamal, and studied in an atmosphere conducive to purity of dance theory.

She said discipline and rigor characterized the dance sessions, which usually lasted from four to six hours a day.

She equated her "concentration" efforts with "perspiration" effects, but said that for her it was a labor of love.

SHE BEGAN dancing under the tutelage of Sudha when she was eight years old and has performed in several Dearborn churches, a Meadow Brook piano festival last year, ethnic festivals in Detroit and a TV news segment.

The only child of Lochani and Arunachalam Viswanathan, Michele was

born in India, but moved to Birmingham, England, at age two.

When she was five, the family moved to Dearborn and then finally to Bloomfield Hills.

She is proud of her lineage, which includes a renowned biologist on her maternal side and a famous cardiac surgeon on her father's side. Her father is a design engineer at Ford and her mother is assistant controller at Patten Advertising Co.

In July, Michele entered the Michigan United Teen Age Pageant where she earned first runner up trophy plus a \$500 scholarship to the Powers School of Modeling. She also received the "Good Citizenship" trophy, an

honor of which she is particularly proud.

THE UNDERLYING concept of Bharatanatyam she said is "a yearning of the human soul for union with the divine."

Based on Hinduism, which is founded on the "one Divine Power" premise, the many steps or segments are directed toward such mythological gods as Lord Shiva. Michele said artists usually realize as much pleasure and spiritual satisfaction in performing as their audiences does in watching.

The event is open to the public. Tickets are \$2 per person or \$5 per family. They are available by calling 626-6361.

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