

Choreographer Tells How She Drew Strength From Dance To Fight Cancer

By Urvashi Verma



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The Kalapriya Indian Performing Arts Center and the Columbia School of Dance, hosted "Anandam: The Blissful Dance and Dancing Through Cancer" workshop with Ananda Shankar Jayant Feb. 14-15 at the American Rhythm Center in Chicago IL.

Ananda Shankar Jayant, Padma Shri and Sangeet Natak Akademi award winner, is one of India's most renowned dancers choreographers and scholars of Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi.

Jayant talked to students, faculty and community members about her dance and experience with breast cancer.

More than 75 students, faculty and community members attended the two-day workshops and seminar where with unequivocal precision and grace, she performed and taught students the classical dances, and differences in the Indian classical styles of Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi, explaining the origin of all Indian classical dance styles and the intricate use of gestures in the storytelling which are integral to classical Indian dance recitals.

Among the highlights was her performance of Kuchipudi dance honoring Lord Krishna, which she performed on a brass plate not more than 2.5 feet in diameter.

After the workshops and performances she spoke candidly about her experience with the big "C" or breast cancer in her talk called "the Dance with the Big C" and how it impacted her personally and her formative healing from dance.

"Somehow when I was diagnosed, I was not scared to talk about the C word, even though in India it is still a sensitive topic, I just went to my core strength which was dance and continued with my life and scheduled dance, choreography and performances, I guess life as planned, she said.

"It was not easy for me to broadcast my condition; however I have learned that it was the only way to overcome it. I would encourage anyone tackling cancer to find their core strength whether it is writing, painting or even sewing. It will take you away from the disease and build your strength to overcome."

Today, in addition to continuing dance performances, choreography and numerous conferences Jayant is also helping families with how to deal with cancer. "I have learned a lot about how to overcome cancer and I am grateful that I can help other families. We work with them to teach them basics from diet,

rendering emotional support and even helping with wig hoping that we can create a conducive environment to their rehabilitation."

She is also the founder and artistic director of Shankarananda Kalakshetra and trains the next generation of Bharatanatyam artists.

She recently received world recognition as ATED – Technology, Entertainment, Design – speaker in 2009. Her ted talk is highly ranked as one of 12 incredible TED talks on cancer.

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