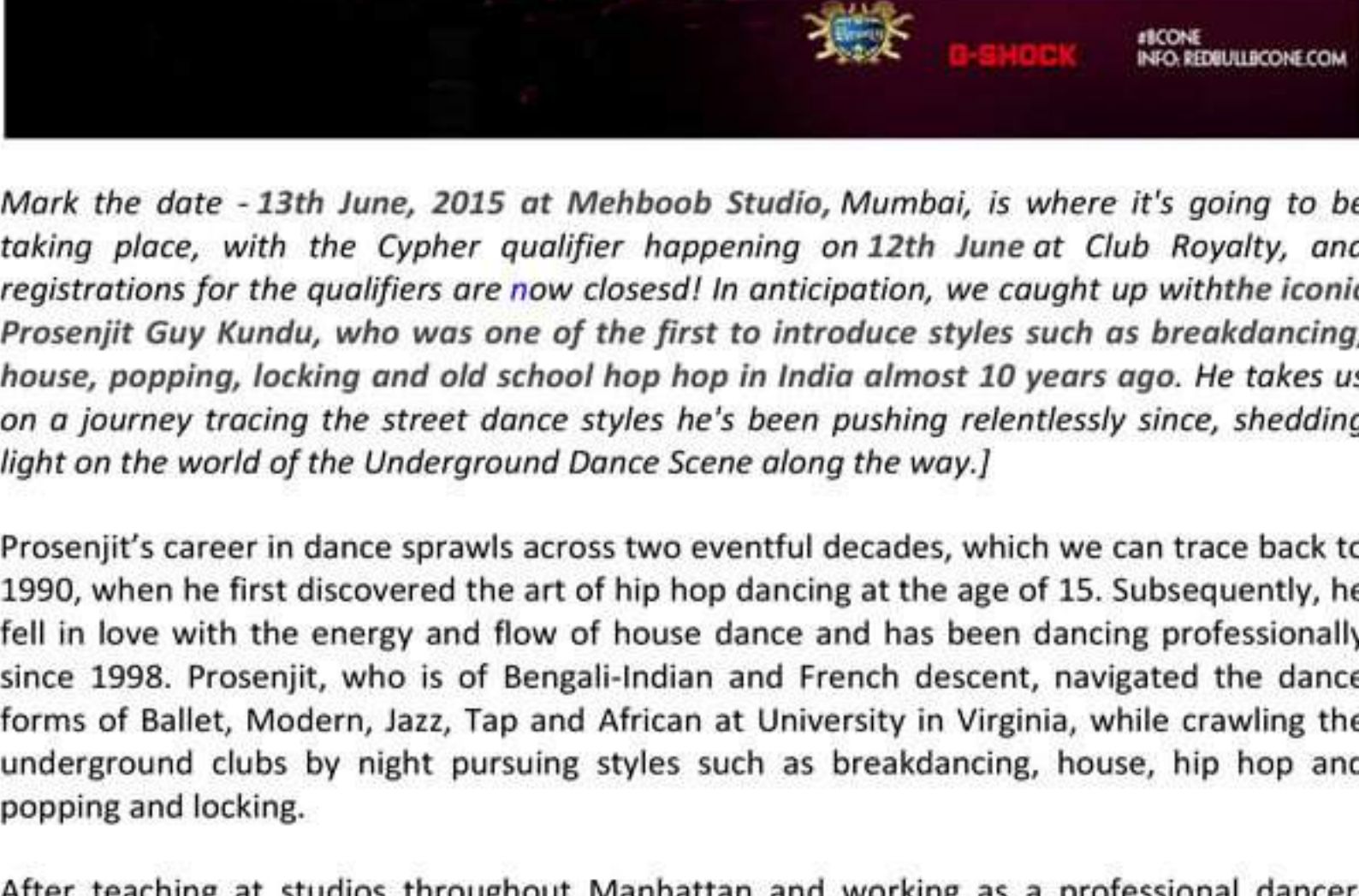


Despite the global craze, India's burgeoning music scene has always been more

about a slow boil as far as hip-hop is concerned, but with the battle for the world's premier 1-on-1 B-Boy World Championship coming to India for this first time ever this year, the conversation is about to change in a big way. Red Bull BC One Cyphers have been held in over 90 locations around the world, and 16 of the country's best B-Boys will battle it out at the Red Bull BC One India Cypher for the chance to represent India at the Red Bull BC One Asia Pacific Final 2015 in Seoul, South Korea on 17th October. Three members of the Red Bull BC One All Stars crew, namely RoxRite, Taisuke and Hong 10, will be judging the championship.



Mark the date - 13th June, 2015 at Mehboob Studio, Mumbai, is where it's going to be taking place, with the Cypher qualifier happening on 12th June at Club Royalty, and registrations for the qualifiers are now closed! In anticipation, we caught up with the iconic Prosenjit Guy Kundu, who was one of the first to introduce styles such as breakdancing, house, popping, locking and old school hip hop in India almost 10 years ago. He takes us on a journey tracing the street dance styles he's been pushing relentlessly since, shedding light on the world of the Underground Dance Scene along the way.]

Prosenjit's career in dance sprawls across two eventful decades, which we can trace back to 1990, when he first discovered the art of hip hop dancing at the age of 15. Subsequently, he fell in love with the energy and flow of house dance and has been dancing professionally since 1998. Prosenjit, who is of Bengali-Indian and French descent, navigated the dance forms of Ballet, Modern, Jazz, Tap and African at University in Virginia, while crawling the underground clubs by night pursuing styles such as breakdancing, house, hip hop and popping and locking.

After teaching at studios throughout Manhattan and working as a professional dancer, Prosenjit made his way to India, something he had been keen on for a while, to fuse together two passions he felt incredibly drawn to: his love for street dance, and his desire to delve deeper into his roots. Having carved a niche for himself along the way as a true pioneer of the dance forms in the country, it seemed only fitting to engage with him in light of Red Bull BC One; his flight from the US to India is where this journey begins:

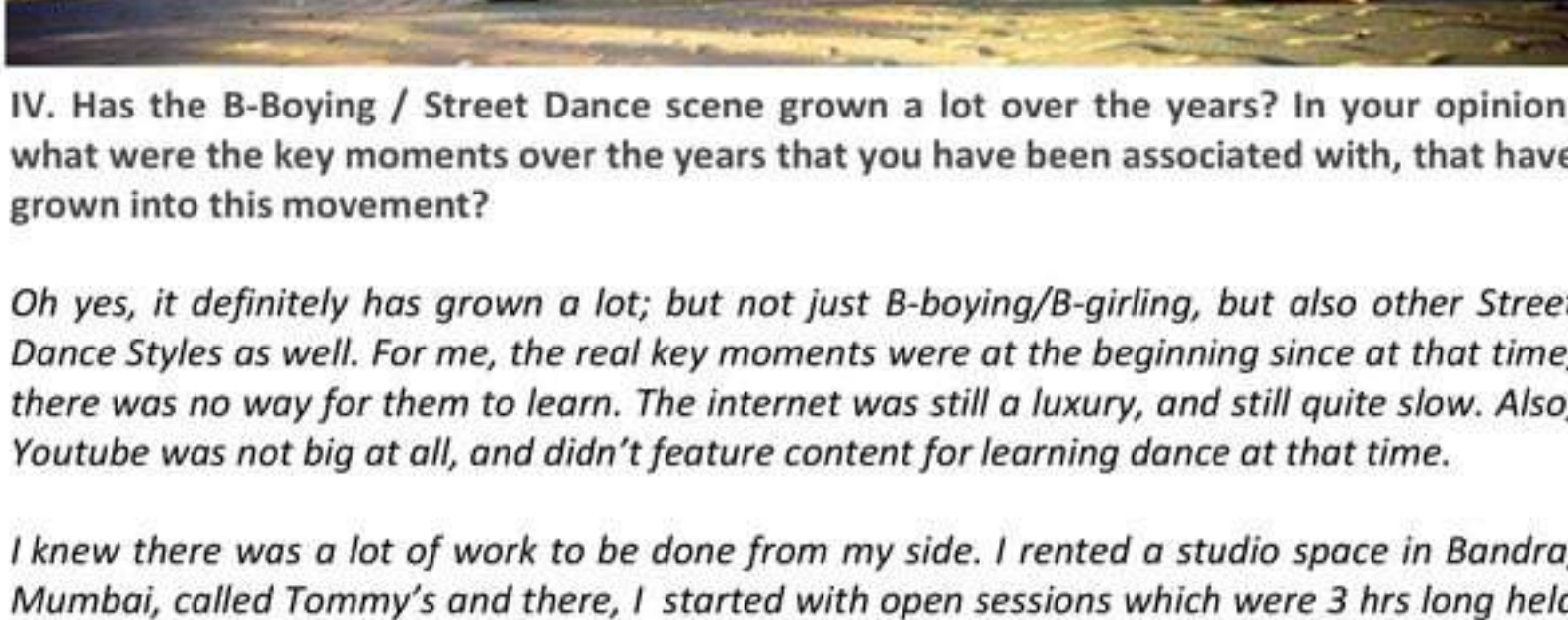
I. Back in 2005 you came to India from the US with an open ticket. What was the thought behind that?

Well, originally, I had come in 2003 to Mumbai to kind of scope out the scene. I was doing a week of teaching as well for Shiamak Davar, teaching Hip Hop, House and B-boying/B-girling workshops, but I knew I needed to come back to really create something because a week wouldn't cause much change, and I needed to target the right kids. So then I came back to Mumbai in December of 2005, with a vision to create a Street Dance Movement in India.



II. I remember meeting you during those early days when I took you to Xavier's college to meet some dancers. How did things kick off for you post that?

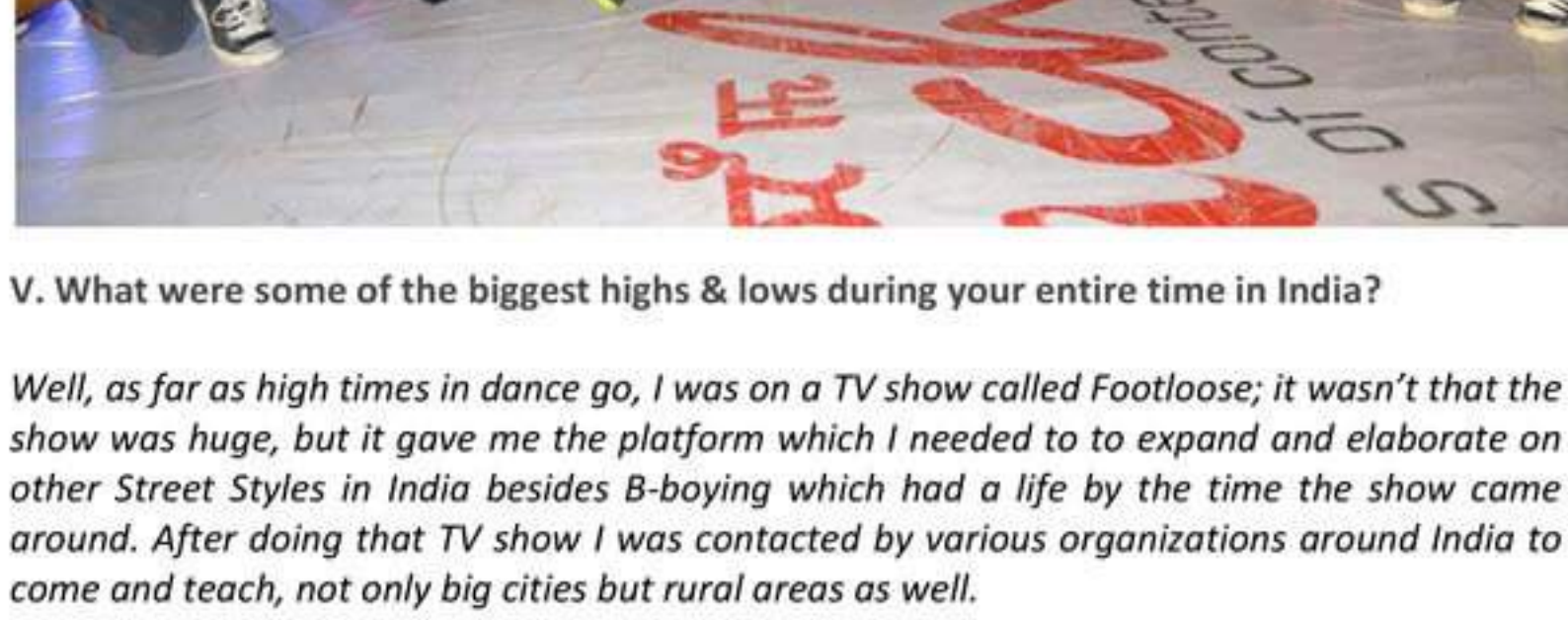
Yes, I do remember... sweating a lot on that train ride too (laughs). Well yeah, I ended up choreographing for Xavier's College for Malhar, the annual college dance festival. I incorporated all Street Dance Styles in the choreography from Old School Hip Hop, House, New School Hip Hop, Popping, Locking to B-boying/B-girling. It was a chance for me to expose students to this onstage and it was the first time that Street Dance was seen at this festival. It was from there that it caught on. It also helped that they won that year as well. Till today, the college dance festivals have incorporated Street Dance in their choreographies... 2006 is when it all changed.



III. Finding dancers now is relatively easy, was it hard to gather people during your first dance sessions in Bandra? How did that progress?

Yes, in the beginning it was very difficult, but none of these Street Dance styles were really there at that time, and there was no scene whatsoever so I didn't have any expectations. I did come across Bollywood dancers who would come to my dance sessions, but they didn't understand the feel of the dance styles, so while teaching them I realised they didn't get the concept of how to freestyle, which is an essential part of any Street Dance Style.

Again, I needed to come across the right people who understood what I was teaching. At that time, I got a lot of media attention since it was new to India. Being on TV and doing articles in papers, young kids who didn't dance but had the interest started to approach me about learning, and that is when it started to happen.

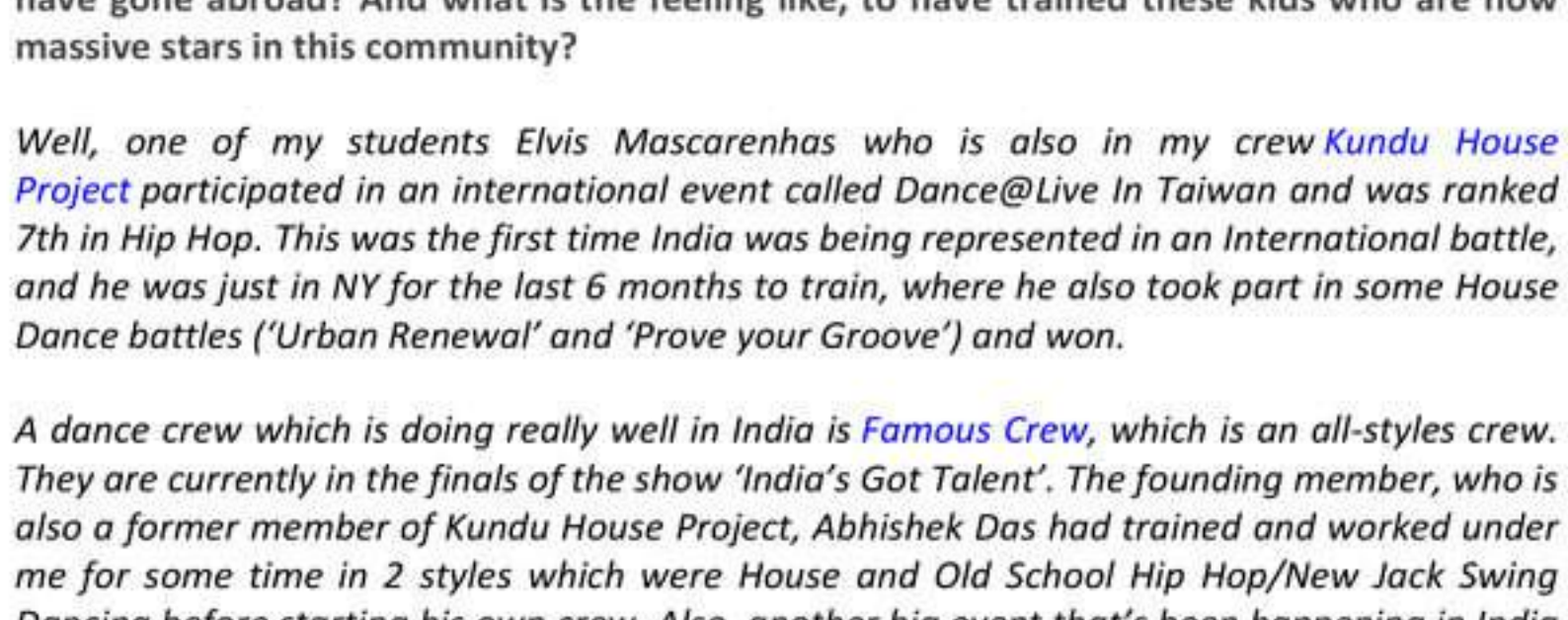


IV. Has the B-Boying / Street Dance scene grown a lot over the years? In your opinion, what were the key moments over the years that you have been associated with, that have grown into this movement?

Oh yes, it definitely has, grown a lot; but not just B-boying/B-girling, but also other Street Dance Styles as well. For me, the real key moments were at the beginning since at that time, there was no way for them to learn. The internet was still a luxury, and still quite slow. Also, Youtube was not big at all, and didn't feature content for learning dance at that time.

I knew there was a lot of work to be done from my side. I rented a studio space in Bandra, Mumbai, called Tommy's and there, I started with open sessions which were 3 hrs long held 3 to 5 times a week. During this session, I would generally offer a free class in various styles which would take up half the time of the session, and the rest of the time I would let people practise with what they learned and I would guide them with the info I'd given them.

More importantly, I tried to give them the tools and confidence they needed to create and expand. It was very new for folks since these sessions never existed before, and it was free too. I never asked for money, but I did ask if people could contribute towards studio fee since it did get costly, but it mostly came out of my own pocket. I did this for about a good year, I would say. It started small but grew to around 40-50 people at one time once the word got around.



V. What were some of the biggest highs & lows during your entire time in India?

Well, as far as high times in dance go, I was on a TV show called Footloose; it wasn't that the show was huge, but it gave me the platform which I needed to go to expand and elaborate on other Street Styles in India besides B-boying which had a life by the time the show came around. After doing that TV show I was contacted by various organizations around India to come and teach, not only big cities but rural areas as well.

I went to places like Imphal and Manipur to Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh and Mehsana, Gujarat... just places that most people don't go to or have even heard of, but these are some of the places where people were really interested in learning. This was definitely a pivotal point in India, with respect to the arrival of Street Dance. This was around 2011.

B-boying had already been around for five years, but I wanted to see other dance styles grow also... so again, this TV show helped because I was able to explain and give correct information. I also did over 40 free tutorials for Youtube for the Footloose Show which helped circulate information about these dances around India as well. I wouldn't really say I had any low times since it was all a learning process for me, but when I initially came I spent quite a bit of money towards developing the scene. It eventually took a toll on my day-to-day living expenses, so by the end I was broke and had to leave after 14 months in India to go back to the US to come up with a better plan so I could come back. I also wanted to save up some money, which is when I went to Canada and was teaching there for a while.



VI. Various dance crews have formed over the years and have participated in various contests across the globe. Which dancers/ crews have you personally worked with, who have gone abroad? And what is the feeling like, to have trained these kids who are now massive stars in this community?

Well, one of my students Elvis Mascarenhas who is also in my crew Kundu House Project participated in an international event called Dance@Live In Taiwan and was ranked 7th in Hip Hop. This was the first time India was being represented in an international battle, and he was just in NY for the last 6 months to train, where he also took part in some House Dance battles ('Urban Renewal' and 'Prove your Groove') and won.

A dance crew which is doing really well in India is Famous Crew, which is an all-styles crew. They are currently in the finals of the show 'India's Got Talent'. The founding member, who is also a former member of Kundu House Project, Abhishek Das had trained and worked under me for some time in 2 styles which were House and Old School Hip Hop/New Jack Swing Dancing before starting his own crew. Also, another big event that's been happening in India for the last few years has been Hip Hop International where the winning crew from each country goes to compete and represent their country in Las Vegas. These are just a couple of examples from the Street Dance community. It always makes me happy to see them all progress and to help create this movement in India, and it is humbling to be recognized internationally and within India.



VII. Which dancers do you think have massive potential and are now big?

I have seen quite a few talented dancers. It's really hard to say but some of the dancers that I'm quite impressed that I have seen are:

WAACKING- Tejasvi Patil (Mumbai), Sangram Kukhopadhyay (Kolkata), Neha Chaudhuri (Kolkata), Mekhola Bose (Kolkata)

B-BOYING/B-GIRLING/BREAKING- Shane & Shawn Mendes (Goa),

Arif Chaudhary (Mumbai), Karan Gaonkar (Mumbai), Jayanta Samaddar (Kolkata),

Shailesh Sonic Agre (Mumbai), Kim Mugen (Shillong)

OLD SCHOOL HIP HOP DANCE/NEW JACK SWING- Yash Mhatre (Mumbai),

Abhishek Das (Mumbai), Nimbel Funk (Chennai), Sambo Mukherjee (Kolkata)

LOCKING- Dimitri Deb Das (Kolkata), Hitesh Bhadari (Mumbai),

Nimbel Funk (Chennai), Mihir Karelia (Mumbai)

POPPING- Bhupendra Singh (Delhi), Aastik Tewatia (Delhi),

Harshvardhan Bhan (Kolkata), Tushar Kapoor (Mumbai), Proteek Modi (Jabalpur)

HOUSE DANCE- Charlie Frost Charlie (Delhi), Elvis Mascarenhas (Mumbai),

Sambo Mukherjee (Kolkata), Yash Mhatre (Mumbai)

KRUMPING- Shubhankar Gawade (Mumbai), Sachin Kotian (Mumbai),

Srishti Poojari (Mumbai), Abhishek Das (Mumbai)

VIII. According to you, what was lacking in the dance space in India before and how did you fill that gap? Do you feel that there is any change now? (If not, what is needed?)

I would say individuality was lacking. See, I just helped introduce Street Dance Styles in India and it has taken a life of its own. Through these dance styles, the kids have created opportunities for themselves. They have developed their own styles, their own crews, their own fashion and have broken down the social structure too.

At one time, these kids wouldn't be able to come to a club cause of their social status and now they are the cool kids at the party. Dance is a big part of the culture already, and now there are other dance forms that they relate to that they can express themselves through. I feel, through street dance, there has been a sense of community built within India, and a movement towards change.



IX. We have seen a lot of small & large competitions take place which were funded by sponsors & private investors over the last few years. What do you think Red Bull BC One will bring to the table?

Red Bull BC One will be giving opportunities to the kids to possibly compete and travel abroad. An opportunity that they wouldn't have otherwise. For many, dance brings hope and an event like this gives them that platform.

X. Who amongst the wild card entries of the India cyphers who do you think would win it? If you have been keeping an eye on all of them, could you tell us what you think of all of them? Also if you had to choose one winner, who would you suggest?

It's hard to say since I don't know all of the B-boys on the list, and haven't really kept up with all their progress, but I feel from what I have seen so far that B-Boy Shawn will take it.

XII. We have very few girls in the dance scene, could you tell us a few names who are really good dancers and we should keep an eye on?

Shradha Musick Kutty (Mumbai), Tejasvi Patil (Mumbai), Mekhola Bose (Kolkata), Neha Chaudhuri (Kolkata)

XIII. As you have seen the dance scene grow from scratch, where do you see India going in the global/local scene in the next 2-5 years?

The foundation has been laid and the roots are strong. In my opinion, India is already there as far as standards go, and they are only getting stronger by the day. For them this is just the beginning, and India is getting more and more attention from the West.

Mark my words... India will be a heavy-hitter in the years to come. They have the soul and they have the hunger, and with a combination like this, they will be on top of their game.

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Words: Aditi Dharmadhikari