

Bala Devi Chandrashekar to perform a piece on Padmavati

In conversation with *DT Next*, Kalamamani awardee Bharatanatyam dancer, Bala Devi Chandrashekar talks about her upcoming performance in the city on December 25, the process of choreographing the piece and lots more.

You have been performing for so long, won several accolades and awards for your work. Which is your favourite and personal piece?

■ My projects are based on intense research and many years of painstaking work. I thoroughly enjoyed the journey on each of them because each one is a very challenging subject without a primary source, so my work is ground up from the basics. I have had to seek and source out experts and scholars who can guide me in the right direction; my challenge is making sure each of these productions is seamless for the audience, whether it is a remote village near Budapest, Chile, Mathura, or Chidambaram. All of my nine productions are my favorite. I'm fortunate to be one of the few Bharatanatyam dancers in the world to have presented at UNESCO. I presented Brihadeeswara — one of my dance productions — at the UNESCO head office in Paris in June 2019 as a part of the world heritage week celebrations. The show was attended by over 500 art enthusiasts, including ambassadors and dignitaries.

Tell us about your upcoming show Padmavati: An Avatar. How did you put that together?

■ It's about Padmavati, a temple designer in Puri Jagannath temple, who is the centre of attraction in the immortal classic

Gita Govindam by poet Jayadeva. The union of Padmavati and Jayadeva is highly sublime and is held in high esteem and adoration by many. This presentation is juxtaposed with the amorous intimacy of Lord Krishna and Radha. This production is a beautiful lyrical dance-drama laced with romance. It is based on the theme of Vipralambha Sringara — anguish in separation and joy in the union of the divine couple Radha and Lord Krishna. The Gita Govindam is a poem of 12 chapters or sargas comprising 24 astapadhis or hymns. The theme closely follows Rasakreeda - ronde dance.

I had the guidance of many scholars that helped me conceptualize, researched, and choreograph the work with the help of senior scholars.

Were there any creative blocks while choreographing the piece?

■ The challenge of taking on such an intense subject and being able to present this topic to the audience invokes the emotion of internal contemplation on the divine creator - Lord Krishna. The production is based on Astapadhis, the dynamic challenges of ensuring the audience is constantly engaged with the choreography and using spectacular and truly riveting world-class music.

What can the audience expect from the performance?

■ Chennai's audience is special, and the Margazhi season is exceptional. Rasikas say they look forward to my performances and appreciate my in-depth topics, research, and scholarly subjects based on ancient philosophical and literary texts. Rasikas love that I collaborate with renowned scholars in their respective fields, carving messages from scriptures relevant to the contemporary world and actively presenting this form worldwide. I'm blessed to come from a family of philosophers and literary scholars. Rasikas love my ability through classical dance, my capability to interpret ancient philosophical and esoteric concepts and present them in a distinct classical style that is always contemporary in interpretation and communicates across cultures.

What are you looking forward to from the show?

■ Taking the audience with me on the journey of discovering Padmavati and Jayadeva's love for Lord Krishna and enjoying the beautiful ashtapadhis.

According to you how does Bharatanatyam tell a story?

■ I employ a solo thematic operatic style of presentation to narrate my story to the audience. I am the only one on the stage and enjoy the gauntlet of keeping the audience engaged during the show.

