

Up, Up and Away!

Apart from promoting young talent by giving Meenakshi Venkatraman a platform, proceeds from this Samarpana event will be donated to SINDA

Excitement in the Venkatraman household as the news sinks in: Meenakshi has been selected as the Upcoming Artiste to perform in this year's Samarpana - the Asian Festival of Classical Dance in Singapore. And her mother Pushpa is doubly thrilled - Meena and her guru have decided on performing a repertoire dedicated to Devi (the mother goddess) and her many forms.

A keen student of Bharatanatyam, Meenakshi Venkatraman completed her Bharatanatyam debut (Arangetram) in the summer of 2014. Since then she has performed at the prestigious Madras season, as the famed annual city-wide Music and Dance festival in December-January is known. A performance at Samarpana is a feather in her cap, which is soon going to be packed with plumage at the rate the talented youngster is going!

A quick chat with Meenakshi and it is soon revealed that behind the creativity and the modesty is a bright and determined young woman. In the throes of a rigorous IB schedule, with subjects that will lead her on a path to engineering, Meenakshi is able to juggle the demands of regular dance practice as well as her passion for painting. "It just requires time management and discipline," smiles the youngster.

Trained by Gayatri Sriram, herself an acclaimed dancer and recipient of many honours, Meenakshi attributes her success entirely to her guru. "Gayatri aunty expects nothing short of perfection from me. It is an honour that she thinks me so capable, and it is my responsibility to ensure I maintain my form to that level."

And does she have any qualms about performing at the Esplanade under the Samarpana umbrella?

"It still feels unreal that I will be performing at this prestigious platform at the end of summer! I will be performing in Singapore as a soloist for the first time so my friends and teachers here will be able to attend. As well as a personal milestone, I

am in awe of the fact that this performance is also a golden opportunity to be amongst such talented and experienced stars, and for that I will always be grateful to my teachers."

Jyoti Ramesh, Director of Jade Group International Pte Ltd, the festival director, says that the upcoming artiste slot at Samarpana has been created solely to give youngsters a platform that is recognised internationally. "Talented dancers need multiple platforms to be able to build up their performing experience, and a key focus of Samarpana has been to encourage the youth to embrace classical dance forms. We want more and more youngsters to see classical dance forms as requisite training to develop your own dance story."

She adds, "This year, the net ticket proceeds of Meenakshi's performance will be donated to SINDA (Singapore Indian development Association), to affirm our commitment to the cause of encouraging youngsters in their vocation."

Meenakshi performs "Devi-Forms of the Feminine" on Saturday Aug. 22 at the Esplanade Theatre Studio. Tickets (\$10) are on sale from SISTIC (www.sistic.com.sg). Net ticket proceeds will be donated to SINDA. More information on www.samarpanafestival.net ☐

