

# SBDC NEWSLETTER

2021-2022

Enriching education ~ nurturing talent ~ promoting innovation



## Message from Sujata Banerjee MBE

Thanking everyone for holding it together - despite the most dreadful start to the second pandemic year, carefully and gradually we managed to get to Hemantika which was hugely successful only because of everyone's persistence and hard work.

As you all know, I'm a strong advocate for dance education. Dance is arguably one of the most rewarding activities a person can add to their life and is a valuable skill with multiple benefits. Despite the various Covid restrictions this year we all remained connected through dance and because of our passion for dance. It engages people holistically in the process of 'learning'; brain engaged, body active, sixth sense charged up and listening even to the micro-beats sharpens our instincts. When you are engaged in an activity you may not know that the activity will be with you for a long time. Make Kathak your friend and it will remain with you for a long time in some form or other.

Dance has the most transferable skills and it keeps you brighter for much longer than many other activities. So be an ambassador for dance. I often say in class that it enhances different types of intelligence, including emotional, logical and spatial - developing a person completely.

As an organisation, in 2022, we would like to put our focus on two areas, which were the themes for this year's Hemantika: empowering Women and embracing sustainability in all our actions.

Let's do it together.

I welcome all students to the new term, have a wonderful festive season.

### Sujataji

Photo credit (above): Jahan Zaib Kahn



## Hemantika



Photo credit: Aleksandra Warchol

Fundamental to our humanity's expression is story-telling - voices from the past, voices of the invisible, voices of the natural world are often forgotten, unheard and ignored. SBDC's annual festival Hemantika (Seasons) brought these voices to life on the Artsdepot stage.

Over the last weekend in November dancers showcased their skill, passion, curiosity and light through their respective pieces. Day one's theme was 'Women'; each of the several pieces reflected on womanhood, from empowerment to quiet resilience. From the feeling of sisterhood from the youth group, to a Shiv invocation and a dance based on a 13th century Amir Khusro poem; the program was exciting, varied and thought-provoking. The final piece, Arpan, inspired by the book *Dear Zari* written by Zarghuna Kargar. The piece showed the grave reality of Afghani women from girls being forced into marriage, various punishments and slaving labour.

Day two's theme reflected on sustainability, its beauty, its destruction, and the impact of this. The grade 2 students became sea life creatures, showing the life of the oceans. Following this, the youth group skate-boarded onto their space and transformed into Kathak dancers on their own terms. Concluding this festival saw the return of Together We Can, reworked from its original 2016 version; performed by SBDC professional artists, it expressed the brutal suffering impacted by global warming. Their movement both campaigned and begged for change, which requires us to heal what is breaking in our world, and only through our togetherness.

**Vipul Bhatti, Grade 4 student.**



Photo credit: Pavlina Kratochvilova

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## Anoushka Shankar's Reunion: Confluence

In July, SBDC was invited to perform at the Southbank Centre as part of an outdoor event curated by sitar maestro Anoushka Shankar. The River Thames provided a perfect backdrop for one of the first post-covid live performances for audiences and performers alike.

SBDC presented a number of unique dances which ranged from classical Kathak group performances to a flamenco and Kathak fusion. All pieces were choreographed by Sujata didi and performed by SBDC senior students and dancers. Many were performed to the music of Ravi Shankar and Anoushka Shankar including a hard-hitting choreography portraying women power on Anoushka's soulful song 'Sister Susannah'.

**Ambika Kucheria, Former SBDC operations manager and grade 6 student.**



Photo credits: Ambika Kucheria

## Youth Group Update!

Earlier this year we held auditions for students to be part of the younger youth group. During this process Sujata didi had to hold auditions over zoom where Tulani and I were leading the audition workshop.



Photo credit: Aleksandra Warchol

The vision of bringing this youth group together is to introduce young talented individuals to a variety of different styles of dancing at an early age so that they expand in their movement range and remain engaged in dance. Since the audition, they have had the chance to work with contemporary and hip hop dancers as well as a professional skate boarder and of course, more Kathak.

Risk taking and pushing boundaries has been part of Sujata didi's teaching principle at SBDC for many years. Taking the risk to try and try harder not only contributes greatly to character building but also the students understanding of their limits.

Having seen a successful year of growth in the students we are glad to say we will be continuing this youth group next year with the audition on January 15th 5-6pm at St. Cuthberts.

We look forward to seeing the wonderful achievements of our youth group in 2022 and the new challenges and opportunities that may come their way!

**Jaina Modaisa, SBDC teacher and company dancer.**

## Journeys Dance Festival Hastings

Organised by 18 Hours

25th September 2021

*In September, we travelled to Hastings to perform an extract of our Swan Lake production along with a few other company pieces. It was our first time performing on stage together since the COVID 19 restrictions, so we were very grateful for the opportunity. It was also my first time performing outdoors by a beach, which made the whole show feel extra magical! The best part for me though, was getting to spend quality time with my SBDC family after the show. We had a delicious dinner together, then stayed in a hotel where we shared stories, partied and had a load of laughs!*

**Tulani Kayani-Skeef**

**SBDC teacher and company dancer**

**Photo credit: Tulani Kayani-Skeef**



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## Sujata Tells Us...Stories

*'Dance transcends time, connects generations, creates space and embraces well-being.'* Sujataji shares her views on the importance of dance, explores concepts of discipline, rhythm, choice and instinct, and uncovers layers of memory through storytelling. Tune into Sujataji's latest podcast "Sujata Tells" on Spotify to know more. "Gather around. Let me tell you a story", Didi would say, at the end of our weekly lessons in London..

And we would instantly be transported to the ancient Ghats of Varanasi, a youthful street in Kolkata or her memory of celebration after hours of Riyaz. In true Kathakar style, Sujataji's podcast presents collective stories of and for dance. She brings to life narratives about why one must dance, the beauty of dichotomy in rhythm, intangible movements, energy of emotions during a performance, conversations with world dance artists, and more! Be it listening to Didi's stories in person or through a digital platform, we are lucky to inherit her anecdotes and words of wisdom. Tune in to "Sujata Tells" on Spotify to discover this world.

Written by:  
Shalini Rao  
SBDC student from  
Germany and  
former  
newsletter editor



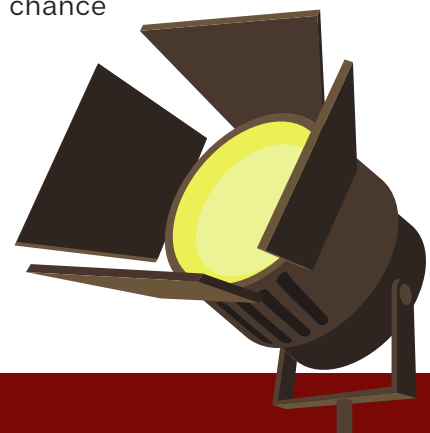
## Spotlight

Spotlight is a new initiative of SBDC - is to encourage and inspire our students more to take dance as a serious hobby.

At the end of each term we will put the spotlight on someone who would have shown commitment, dedication, hard work and consistently progressing in Kathak. The chosen student will get a chance to present a solo/duet performance in an appropriate SBDC event.

We presented our first 'spotlight' dancers at Hemantika this year when Aishani and Anusha Sinha of grade 5 and 6 performed a complex duet. The Sinha sisters (16 and 13) throughout the last 18 months consistently progressed and kept their practice regardless school work and other commitments.

**Sujataji**



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## Together We Can - a unique response to climate crisis



This year's Hemantika festival was focused on the theme of climate change, one of the most urgent issues of our time. If you are wondering how dance can contribute to understanding the climate emergency our planet is facing, you only need to have seen the show. I performed in the dance piece called Sea Life in which we danced as sea creatures whose habitat is under threat due to pollution. With our faces painted as turtles, dolphins and seahorses, we showed through movement the beauty of sea life and how it must be preserved.

The grand finale of the evening was the piece Together We Can choreographed by Sujata Banerjee. The brilliant group of dancers acted out the pain our mother Earth is experiencing. The fusion of strong footwork, intense body movement, haunting music and powerful words conveyed how the balance of our earth has been destroyed. As we follow the dancers' bodies in pain on stage, we are moved to rise up to save the earth from destruction. Because together we can.



Photo credits: Aleksandra Warchol

**Lila Priyadarshini**  
12 year old grade 2 student



## International Students

With all of us confined to our homes, coupled with the uncertainties and disruptions caused by Covid-19, we took the initiative to take our classes online. Lockdown was announced on 23rd March 2020, and we started teaching online from 19th March. This sudden change from classroom teaching to online with very little training posed a threat to the health of our institution. However, we continuously evolved and developed strategies which empowered our students. We have seen notable changes in our students who have maintained excellent technique and have developed transferable skills such as confidence and communication. Nevertheless, the biggest challenge we faced was keeping our students motivated. Sujata Didi introduced a structured routine which included activities such as weekly homework, individual feedback, and the summer challenge.

Photo credit: Jahan Zaib Kahn

This ensured that students kept up with practise but also engaged with the art at a more deeper level. Enrolment increased many folds. We had students not only from various parts of UK but also from USA, China, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Australia, Dubai and India to name a few.

**Pallavi Singh, SBDC school administrator.**



Newsletter compiled and designed by Anna Kirakowska  
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