

Meet Apoorva Sonavani



My name is Apoorva Sonavani. I was born in central India. I am a watercolor artist, a percussion enthusiast, and a Kathak dancer. Kathak is a classical dance form from India. In my childhood, my parents enrolled me in a dance and music class for creating a treasure to be cherished for life. Being a single child, it also helped me make more friends. Those lessons connected me with the beauty of using the space around us in the most creative way. As a child, apart from academics, I always found comfort in a *mélange* of colors on canvas and the anklet bells which we tie around the feet before we begin dancing. My art helped me depict the rich culture that I was being raised in. This broadened artistic mindset helped me to solve problems, be open to new ideas, and find details in the smallest things.

I believe that once you start appreciating the nuances of art, it changes your overall perspective of looking at things around you, holistically making everything fall under one umbrella – Art! This has led me to evolve and perceive it barring any distinction of artform — dance to photography, painting to percussion, crafts to music.

Art has empowered my self-esteem and brought me closer to my community, because it is with art that I have been able to understand the traditions and the world around me. The name of my dance “Kathak” is derived from the Vedic Sanskrit word “Katha,” which means “to tell a story or

to do with stories.” I often find myself choreographing intricate moments depicting community practices around me. As a result, despite living seven seas away from my country, I carry my culture and traditions in the form of my artwork with me. When I paint, each painting carries some influence of things that were instrumental to me in childhood -- be it a flower that was my favorite or a rangoli, which is drawn outside the house during festivities. When I look back, art has made me who I am, helped me connect strongly with the community around me, and inspired me to be a torch bearer of my culture.

As a teacher, I always want my students to lay a foundation in art by finding their personal connection with art and knowing what about it relates the most to them. Learning this classical art form requires methodical training, but I believe that once students start diving deeper into theory, they should not fear to experiment with their own creativity. Ultimately, the knowledge passed down to you by your teacher will inspire independent, creative thinking to explore more and bring out the real artist in you.

About ‘*Kathak*’

Kathak is one of the eight major forms of Indian classical dance. The origin of *Kathak* is traditionally attributed to the traveling bards in the of ancient northern India known as *Kathakars*, or storytellers. Wandering *Kathakars* communicated stories from the great epics and ancient mythology through dance, songs, and music. *Kathak* dancers tell various stories through their hand movements and extensive footwork, their body movements and flexibility, but most importantly through their facial expressions. Stylistically, the *Kathak* dance form emphasizes rhythmic foot movements, adorned with small anklet bells (*Ghungroo*) and the movement harmonized to the music. The legs and torso are generally straight, and the story is told through a developed vocabulary based on the gestures of arms and upper body movement, facial expressions, neck movements, eyes and eyebrow movement, stage movements, bends and turns. The focus of the dance becomes the eyes and the foot movements. The eyes work as a medium of communication of the story the dancer is trying to tell. With the eyebrows the dancer gives various facial expressions. The difference between the sub-traditions, or variations, is the relative emphasis between acting versus footwork, with Lucknow style emphasizing acting and Jaipur style famed for its spectacular footwork. I was fortunate to be under the tutelage of a teacher who taught a mix of three styles – Benaras, Lucknow, and Jaipur.