

Malini Srinivasan

India: classical Bharatanatyam dancer, choreographer

Object: ankle bells

Sometimes the most beautiful gift also comes with sad thoughts from the past; and sometimes it brings with it the possibility of liberation.

What my parents brought to America was dance, a family of three children, and a strong will to bring India with them. My mother studied Bharatanatyam dance in India from a young age; she learned from her mother and from a great Guru. Ironically, though this art was passed on from mother to daughter, neither woman called herself a “dancer.” They were “dance teachers” because women of their community were forbidden from dancing after puberty; it was considered obscene for a woman to show herself on stage.

My mother and grandmother gave all the children in our family the gift of Bharatanatyam dance: the stories, the music, the colorful costumes, and, of course, the ankle bells that keep the rhythm. But more than anything, this gift of dance gave us a vibrant experience of being in our bodies. My mother and grandmother were always conscious that we should feel proud of this gift and be unafraid to dance.

I am the first woman of my family to become a professional dancer who experienced none of the approbation once attached to the act of dancing. As part of my participation in *What We Bring*, I am developing a performance that explores this process of passing down dance from mother to daughter. Through pure movement, hand gestures, and facial expressions, the dancer will tell the story of being given the gift of dance, and what it means to different women at different times.



Sometimes the most beautiful gift also comes with the heavy weight of the past; and sometimes it brings with it the possibility of liberation. And sometimes, the gift carries both.

Bio:

Malini Srinivasan is a Bharatanatyam dancer and choreographer and a disciple of Sri C.V. Chandrasekhar. She began studying Bharatanatyam with her mother and grandmother and lived in Chennai from 1999-2004 to pursue her study of dance and its allied art forms such as Nattuvangam, Carnatic vocal music, yoga, Sanskrit, and Tamil. Malini has choreographed solo and group Bharatanatyam pieces, including *Being Becoming*, *Ode to Love's Arrows*, and *Tejas-Luminous*. She has performed at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival (DC), LaMama Moves! (NYC), The Music Academy (Chennai), Wasserkiche (Zurich), and the New York Fringe Festival. Based in Queens, NY, Malini has been a visiting artist at several colleges across the U.S. and teaches at SUNY, Stony Brook, is a member of the dance faculty of Chhandayan, and is a teaching artist with City Lore.

For more information, visit malinisrinivasan.com