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Event information included at bottom of the article.

Submitted by Ananda Kali

Indian Classical Dance as Spiritual Expression

By Ananda Kali.

Guru Jyoti Rout, master teacher, dancer, and choreographer, is bringing a beautiful ancient East Indian dance form called Odissi to life in Taos.

Asked why her style of dance is so special, Guru Rout says, “It is directly connected to spirituality.” Classical Odissi Indian dance is unique among Indian dance styles in that it retains the devotional feeling it had when it was danced in the Jagannath temple in Puri, India more than 2,000 years ago. Odissi focuses on service, devotion and surrender.

And what makes Jyoti Rout so special? Simply put, she’s the real thing.

When you see Jyoti Rout dance, it’s as if you are seeing the temple statues come live. She is able to convey the spiritual juice, the essence and passion of the gods and goddesses as living forces. When she is dancing, the every day world is left behind, and the realm of the divine opens up. The atmosphere of the dance venue is transported entirely to another space in time. Joyti Rout’s speciality is this type of soulful expression called *Abhinaya*.

Abhinaya, as a spiritual discipline, helps dancers discover how emotions are put together from the inside. Like actors trained in Method Acting, dancers learn how emotions are constructed through recalling emotions and feeling the internal sensations in their own bodies. Odissi dancers are measured not only by the quality their physical dance form, but also by the depth, breadth and authenticity of their emotional expression.

In *abhinayas*, or dance dramas, dancers and choreographers explore a wide range of human emotions. The Odissi tradition often uses the theme of the divine couple Radha and Krisna, exploring the many types of love they feel for each other. The female Radha, represents the individual soul longing to merge with the male Krisna, the great oneness of being all souls hope to merge into. Dancers are sometimes challenged to discover feelings they may have never experienced before.