



BY  
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## 6Q – WHO? WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? WHY? AND HOW?

# BHARATANATYAM



*WHEN WE WERE INVITED to attend Shruti Sathish' dance debut, we felt honored and excited to learn more about the Indian culture but had no idea what to expect. Shruti's Bharatanatyam journey began at the age of six with Guru Dr. Sredhara Akkihebbalu, an accomplished artist and educator in the field of Bharatanatyam and Iyengar Yoga. Her grandparents flew from India along with family and friends from all over the country, joining her parents, brother Surya, local friends, and the community, to support and celebrate Shruti's achievement, and to watch the performance she had been training for the last nine years.*

*Her gracefulness, the vibrant costumes, intricate jewelry, melodious music, elaborate choreography, and her intricate storytelling through expressive movements captivated all 550 guests during her 3.5-hour solo performance. Not only did she prepare for the dance, but also shared stories and reflections on her journey during a speech at the end of her night. Her guru, friends and parents were also a part of the program with speeches and stories between costume changes.*

### WHAT

**Bharatanatyam is an Indian classical dance that expresses South Indian religious themes and spiritual ideas, with its roots in Hindu mythology and spirituality.** It often evokes deep emotional and spiritual connections, enhancing the overall experience for the audience.

Bharatanatyam Arangetram is a debut solo performance in the Indian classical dance. The Arangetram signifies a dancer's milestone achievement, representing the culmination of years of rigorous training and dedication for the dance. The performance showcases their proficiency in the art form and is a significant event in the dancer's journey. The length of a performance varies depending on the dancer and the choreography, but typically, it lasts for approximately two to three hours as an elaborate and formal performance showcasing the dancer's mastery of the dance form.



### WHO

The Arangetram is no small undertaking for the student, nor the family. Girls start as early as age 3 or 4 studying anywhere from 8 to 10 years before teachers deem them to be ready for their Arangetram. Bharatanatyam Arangetram is typically performed by individuals who have undergone rigorous training in Bharatanatyam.

The Bharatanatyam Arangetram guru, or teacher, plays a crucial role in the dancer's

journey. The guru imparts knowledge, teaches techniques, and guides the student in mastering the intricacies of Bharatanatyam. The relationship between the dancer and the guru is often deep and based on mutual respect. The guru not only imparts dance skills but also instills discipline, artistic expression, and a cultural understanding essential for the dancer's growth.



if you can't live without me, why aren't you dead yet?

## HOW

Bharatanatyam Arangetram involves meticulous preparation by the dancer. **The process includes mastering various dance compositions, perfecting intricate hand gestures, facial expressions, foot work, and body movements, all while understanding the nuances of rhythm.**

The dancer's abilities to express emotion, convey stories, and captivate the audience with their grace and beauty are put on full display during the Arangetram. The dancer uses nine emotional expressions during the dance: love (shringaara), laughter (haasya), kind-heartedness or compassion (karuna), anger (roudra), courage (veera), fear (bhayaanaka), disgust (bheebhatsya), wonder or surprise (adbhutha) and peace or tranquility (shaantha).



The Arangetram typically begins with a traditional invocation to the Hindu gods and goddesses, followed by a series of dance pieces that showcase the dancer's skills and mastery of the Bharatanatyam style. These pieces can include solo performances, group performances, and classical Indian stories brought to life through dance.

In addition to the dance performance, an Arangetram often includes speeches by the dancer's guru, family, and friends, as well as performances by musical accompanists, such as singers and instrumentalists. Speeches play a crucial role in acknowledging the significance of the event, expressing appreciation, and providing encouragement to the dancer. The guru, parents, friends, and distinguished guests often speak about the dancer's dedication, hard work, achievements, and offer gratitude to the community and blessings and encouragement for the future. The dancer also shares reflections on their journey, expressing gratitude, acknowledging challenges over-

come, and sharing their aspirations for the future.

Decoration plays an integral part of the event. Usually, religious themes and spiritual ideas are being depicted in the dance. It is a custom in Indian fine arts to set an altar that creates a divine atmosphere during performance. The altar is well lighted with a spotlight focusing on the brass Nadaraja idol, "God of Dance", wrapped in traditional dothi. Usually, many other special decorations throughout the theater and lobby are set up.



The timing of Bharatanatyam Arangetram varies for each dancer based on their individual training and preparedness. It usually takes place when the dancer has completed the required training and is proficient in the techniques and repertoire of Bharatanatyam. The timing can vary for different dancers and is often scheduled when they feel ready to present a solo performance at a professional level.

## WHERE

Bharatanatyam Arangetram originated from the Tamil culture in South India. The word Arangetram is derived from Tamil, where "it means ascending the stage. This debut solo performance tradition has deep roots in the history and culture of Bharatanatyam, which is one of the oldest classical dance forms in India. A description of precursors of Bharatanatyam from the 2nd century can be found in the ancient Tamil poem, while temple sculptures of the 6th to 9th century suggest dance was a refined performance art by the mid-1st millennium CE. **Sadiraattam, which was renamed Bharatanatyam in 1932, is the oldest classical dance tradition in India.**

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## WHY

The Arangetram is not only a personal achievement but also a cultural tradition that celebrates the preservation and continuation of this classical dance form. It provides an opportunity for the dancer to showcase her skills, artistry, and mastery of Bharatanatyam. It is often a community event, where friends, family, and well-wishers come together to support and celebrate the dancer's achievement, creating a memorable and supportive atmosphere.



*Shruti's strength, dedication and skill left a lasting impact. We left Shruti's dance debut in awe of her grace, talent and having experienced an immersion into the rich cultural heritage of India that showcased century-old traditions and art forms. I could not wait to share my experience with my Indian friend from New Zealand. To my surprise, her daughter, Suchi Bakta, also trained for her Bharatanatyam Arangetram with her Guru Smt Bana Shastri Ramanath. I loved learning that Suchi, six years after her dance debut is now a junior pre-med student at the University of Texas in Austin and dances for Texas Zobha, having joined the group in her freshmen year.*

*The **Bharatanatyam** is a truly amazing and special dance as it combines cultural immersion, artistic expression, community celebration, and spiritual connection, leaving a lasting impact on both the audience and the performer. Whether you are a dancer, a music lover, or simply interested in experiencing the beauty of Bharatanatyam, attending an Arangetram is an unforgettable experience. ■*

