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# Aaja naachle ... for the lens

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INTERFACE, the International Festival of Alternative Contemporary Ex-pressions hosted by Sapphire Creations, offered many new experiences. Idan Cohen from Israel had, in 2010, charmed with a 'tomatina' to Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake. This time he picked on Krishna's mythical envy of Radha's golden complexion, to question identities, gender con-flicts and political borders.

Holi wasn't the only piece to mix modern with Indian. Game On from Sydney had an Australian dancing impromptu - or seemingly so - to the staccato beats and fluid bols of an Indian tabla player. Indian groups too, opened new vistas of Contemporary Dance in the land of Uday Shankar. And in the year Cannes screened Kalpana, Interface delighted with Dan-zlenz, conducted by Arshiya Sethi.

The dance scholar who'd started as a critic with TOI in Delhi, came alive to the unequal equation of dance and camera when she anchored DD's National Programme of Dance. A Fulbright scholarship opened the door for a serious understanding of the two art forms: on her return she set up Kri Foundation that collects, screens, even documents dance on camera.

The need for this activity became clear as Arshiya elaborated on what the camera does to dance. "Some choreographers compose for two - the dancer and the camera - while some compose for three, the third being the editor," she reminded those at MMB. The screenings included Bahudha, Sharira, Dancing with Gurus, Wall...

Bahudha approached the viewing and performing of dance through two sets of lenses - the eye and the camera. Going backstage with dancers Vik-ram Iyengar and Debashree Bhattacharya, it captured the totality of a performance and got the Jury Prize at New York's Dance for the Camera Festival 2007.

Sharira explored Chandralekha's spiritual approach to the art and ended with her asking, "Where does the body begin and where does it end?" Long after her departure from the world, her quest continues with every dancer going onstage.

This is the significance of Arshiya's work: it documents for posterity an art that was once described as 'available only when on stage.' "For long the eye was the most powerful lens recording dance," she says. "It stimulated the pen, brush and chisel, and for millennia dance was captured in painting, bas-relief and sculpture. But in modern times visual recording of dance got a fillip with the camera." Photography, cinema, and television are all fallouts of the lens-eye.

In the age of Aaja Nachle and Nachle Ve With Saroj Khan, we need to understand the dynamics of dance and the lens. Of how both need each other, augment each other, and increase the geographical spread, layering and nuances of movement. That's why we need Danzlenz and Interface.