

Breaking away from the box

Ajay Joshi catches up with **Dimitrije Wentner** who is teaching students of Centre for Contemporary Dance as they prepare for their show *Liebe und Leben*

When otherwise the local art calendar is loaded with performances of traditional Indian dances, Centre for Contemporary Dance (CCD) is gearing up to showcase *Liebe und Leben* (Love and Life) on Dec 19 at 7 pm at Kala Chhaya, Patrakar Nagar Road, off SB Rd. Explaining the concept behind contemporary dance, CCD founder and dancer-choreographer Hrishikesh Pawar says: "To me, contemporary dance is about expressing emotions and also about challenging your body and mind to explore possibilities that it is capable of. I feel today, everybody prefers playing safe and showcasing themes that are commercially viable. There is no thrill element in watching such a performance."

Presently, CCD students are undergoing training by Austrian dancer Dimitrije Wentner who is here on an invite. Wentner (47) started dancing at the age of 14, but he was against the rigmarole of any rigid formal training. To him, dance was very individual, meditative and inclusive, and he wished to explore his own movements and feelings for rhythm. This urge saw him travel to more than 130 countries, adding newer dimensions to his work and experiencing different dances across the world. Finally in 2000, he decided to take formal classes in several genres of dance.



ALL YOU NEED IS BEING ADVENTUROUS: Dimitrije Wentner with a student

"After years of dancing my own style, incorporating moves that I saw, watching more advanced dancers, I hit the road and enjoyed extended stays in South America, where I learnt from many different masters, all of them non-professionals but dancers with the rhythm in their soul and blood," quips Wentner. "To me, contemporary is an independent dance form that derives its movements and wants to break away from the rigidity of classical forms," he adds.

Wentner has extensively travelled Asia and is greatly influenced by Indonesian contemporary dancer Hiroto. "Among Indians, I am impressed by the works of Akram Khan (who is very popular in Britain) and have heard a lot about Astad Deboo. I personally don't think you need any

formal dance training for contemporary dance though it may help. What is a must is a need to be adventurous, body flexibility, open mindedness and strong dedication to work and experiment," he adds.

Wentner has trained students from 16 to 50. He feels rhythm is present in all human beings. It is only a question of being made aware of it and to use it constructively and creatively. "I like to help people to bring out their inner self irrespective of age, shape or body formation. In the US, UK and Japan, contemporary dance is well present and is slowly being accepted. With a little prodding and training, there are great prospects to teach and practise this dance form in a culturally vibrant country like India," Wentner says while signing off.