DANCE, DANCE

Preview of the many dance groups coming to State Theatre for national Dance Week

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Dancers flock to State Theatre for National Dance Week events

By Jim Catalano
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Dancers from all around New York will gather at the State Theatre this weekend for a full slate of events to mark National Dance Week.

More than 250 dancers, from the nearly two dozen participating companies, will showcase their talents in a variety of styles.

"This is probably the only place in the northeast that has several dance styles on one stage in a weekend," says Ram Seetharam, regional coordinator for National Dance Week. "Usually you only see one style, like ballet or modern. Here, you can see different cultures and different styles, so you get a taste of everything. It's like a feast for the eyes."

"It actually has one of the most unique programs in that it crosses all the cultural boundaries," says Barbara Thuesen, a longtime local dance educator who works with National Dance Week on the state level. "Everyone has the same equipment-two arms and two legs-but the difference in how all the various cultures use it is absolutely incredible."

Several new groups are coming to [the] event for the first time. "What makes this year different is that there are companies from out of town that we've never had before," says Carol Butler, the artistic director for the event, citing[:] Ajkun Ballet Theatre, Seiskaya Ballet and Ben Munisteri Dance Projects.

"Ajkun particularly wanted their dancers to have the experience of performing at the State Theatre, because it's such a unique theater to perform in," Butler says, "They travel in Europe and this [is] the beginning of their performing season and they felt it would be a good experience for them to dance outside of the venues they're used to."

Local dance groups are looking forward to the weekend, as well.

"I think people are excited that there are new companies," says Butler. "It's always interesting for dancers to look at other dancers of different caliber. It challenges them to keep up with what is going on with dance. If we just see our local people we don't push ourselves as dancers, so it's good to have other people come in to see what's going on outside of our area.

Butler will be participating with the Indira Seetharam Classical Indian Dance Group, founded by Ram Seetharam's late sister. "We had a rehearsal Sunday, and they were very excited. They're high school students who are very athletic, and they're very psyched out about the weekend.

Butler is new to that style of dance, but loves the challenge. "It's quite intricate dancing with the hand gestures and the eye movements and facial expressions and complicated rhythms," she says. "I'm learning and it's quite different. It's been less than [a] year and this is a hard piece but I decided to just go for it and perform. I want to help keep alive that heritage."

Thuesen offers some advice to enjoy the weekend's events. "The most important thing is to sit back and enjoy it because dance is a communication tool," she says. "It tells you something about the culture of the people who are doing it. You can identify if there's a restrictive sort of tension involved, or whether there's a freedom involved.["]

"Usually the theme of the piece should come across clearly-it could be humorous, or it could be serious, or it could be a story telling bits and pieces of a fairy tale or some kind of myth and legend. That's true in Indian dance-it's partially a religious ceremony and part stories, but so were some of the early ballets, like Cinderella. They all actually have morals and messages to them."

To learn more about National Dance Week, visit www.NDWIthaca.com. Ticket prices range from $7 to $20 for each session (see the next page for a full schedule), and are available via www.statetheatreofithaca.com. By calling 273-4497 and at the Clinton House Ticket Center.