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DANCE

A celebration of dance

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Overseas students dance to jimmikki kammal at the dance mela organised by Keswick Public School in Madurai | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

Students from various countries participated in a dance festival at Keswick Public School that created cultural connections

Wearing long black *kurtas* and sporting Sungudi *dupattas* in bright colours, 30 students swayed with energy and grace to the tune of the 'Jimmiki kammal' song. With a smile on their faces, the young dancers entered the lit stage. They showed off a few more Bollywood and Kollywood dance numbers and it did not appear it was a routine they had learnt just in six days.

The rapid fire three-minute item was the grand finale to an hour-long show and the audience gave the group a standing ovation. Not because they performed like pros, but because the dancers included teenagers from the US, Germany and Hong Kong, who along with their counterparts from schools in Tamil Nadu, matched their steps effortlessly to the popular numbers.



Students of Kotagiri Public School perform Lambadi folk dance at the dance mela in Madurai | Photo Credit: **Special Arrangement**

Instant joy and bonhomie broke out on stage as the children hugged and greeted each other for successfully dancing to songs otherwise not known to them. Jonah Lai, a ninth grader from Confucius Hall Secondary School, Hong Kong, says he loves to challenge himself physically and mentally and that he felt there was something magnetic about the **dance** forms he learnt at the week-long dance workshop conceived and hosted by Keswick Public School (KPS) in the city. Odie Field, 14, from Mount Everett Regional School, Massachusetts, says “there was something inclusive” that drew him to the rhythmic steps.

The students were in town as part of World Education Alliance programme that aims to keep up the tradition of collaboration and cultural unity among students around the globe through various themes each year. “We chose dance as the coalition theme for the heritage value of our dance forms,” says Maureen Jayaraj, the **school** principal, who has sent her students to the Water symposium in China and a music workshop in the US in the past.

“The students found dance not only healthy but also creative and exciting. It gave them an insight into our culture and was also an escape from the stress of academic workshops,” she adds.

Stephanie Graham, Instructor of Fine Arts at Mount Everett who accompanied a delegation of five students says, “Our students have come to India for the first time and started with barely any skill at all. But two days into the workshop, they got inspired and enjoyed every moment of learning.”

The resource person was Chennai-based Kuchipudi dancer Ashritha Keshav Preetham, who initiated an understanding of movement and expressions in Indian classical dances to the eager learners. While the last ensemble of *filmi* dance was taught and performed for fun, she says the students are returning with a better knowledge base about our dances and culture and some may even find *gurus* back home and continue to practice. “While teaching, I saw spark, enthusiasm and curiosity in them and to lead the class was fun,” she says.

The six-day workshop concluded with the dance programme showcasing the students’ ability to learn. Each participating school presented a theme dance from their respective regions. The German team did a waltz combining fast twists and closed stance while the students from Hong Kong presented contemporary Chinese numbers. The American students took inspiration from the film *The Greatest Showman* and depicted various freestyle dances that originated in their country.

The Indian participants from Kodaikanal Public School staged a fusion of folk dances from Madurai. They rocked the stage with their energetic and flawless performance of *oyilattam*, *katta kaalattam*, *karagattam*, *panthattam* and *kaavadiattam*. The other highlights were the *jugalbandi* of Bharatanatyam and *kathak* by students of the host school and the Lambadi folk dance by students of Kotagiri Public School. Attired in colourful *lehengas*, they gave a vibrant performance dancing in harmony to the beats of drums.

“The workshop created friendships that will continue for years,” says Asha Von Ruden, teacher from US.

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