



DANCE IT LIKE IT IS: EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH PROSENJIT KUNDU

By Aizaz Akram

"And Five, Six, Seven, Eight... Kick, Step, Twist, Step, Kick, Step, Twist, Step, Kick!"

My name is Aizaz and I'm a terrible dancer. When I entered Mr. Prosenjit Kundu's class at PeriDance NYC, I was armed with my experience of learning and practicing traditional bhangra alongside the famous NYIT bhangra team, coupled with my skills honed upon the NYC dance floors, where I've been known to tear it up. Ok, I'll be honest—that latter part of that statement isn't exactly true. However, I thought I could hold my own dancing amongst others in clubs; but as soon as the music started blasting in the PeriDance studio, I was left dumbfounded as the five-foot-five inch girl dancing to my to my right left me in the dust and extremely less secure than I'd felt upon walking in.

I live in the East Village in Manhattan and contribute to Sapna when something interesting is going on here in the five boroughs. When our content editor first told me about Prosenjit, it sounded like something I could tackle with ease. Prosenjit's a dancer and I enjoy dancing, so it made sense. So I decided to take up the offer and have a few words with "Tony"(as he is referred to by locals and friends), over some dosas on 28th and Lexington.

Initially, Sapna had asked for an interview to put up in the magazine. However, soon after speaking with Kundu, I thought it would help if I experienced his class and did a little write-up of it. Well, suffice it to say, Prosenjit is purely a master of his art and I'm nowhere near as good of a dancer as I thought I was.

So who exactly is Prosenjit Kundu? Well, I inquired, and now Sapna readers get a chance to look into the life of one of our own who's making it big on the dance scene.

Sapna: We'd like to know a little about you, Prosenjit. Who are you? And where'd you come from?

Prosenjit: Hi, my name is Prosenjit Kundu. I am half French, half Indian. My father is Indian and my mother is French and they met in France while my father studied restaurant and hotel management. I grew up mostly with my father. I finally moved to America when I was 10 years old, and at that point my dad had never really taught me anything about Indian culture so everything about it was kind of new to me.

I lived with my uncle and aunt here in the US, which was the first time I was introduced to Indian food, Indian culture. Everything was really foreign to me. It was kind of uncomfortable at first. I wasn't used to it. I just looked at myself as a regular ordinary kid... you know like, almost like any American child, white or black.

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Sapna: So you felt as if you were absent or devoid of any type of specific culture?

Prosenjit: Well, It didn't really bother me. I am who I am. Some people think it's very important to know their culture and for me, the important thing was the culture that I created for myself.

Sapna: So how did you get into dancing?

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[Kundu Video 2](#)

Prosenjit: I grew up in this town called Springfield, VA. Mostly a white neighborhood... there was some 'ethnicity involved' (laughs). So I had some black friends and I remember one day after school I went over to a friends place. The door was open so I went inside and I see these guys dancing and making routines. So, I sat there for a while and watched. I was about 15 years old at that time. My friends Vernon, Dunlap, and Brendan asked me to come and learn the routines with them and I was like "Nah, I don't know how to dance," but they urged me to try it out. So the first move I ever learned, and this is back in 1991, was the Running Man. I held onto a pillar and was trying to figure it out. I finally learned it and I was all excited, doing it for like 10-15 minutes. I ended up doing it for the next 6 hours; I was having so much fun. At that time I was running track and I was pretty successful, so I got some scholarships into colleges, but I didn't want to pursue college. I wanted to dance more. I just had fun dancing. My passion wasn't in track and field anymore; it was all in dance.

Sapna: So at what point around that age were you considering to go full time?

Prosenjit: Well, it was around my college years, I met a bunch of freestyle dancers that were also going to school with me, but studied modern and classical dancing. At that time I was a business major, but I took some dance classes like Ballet and African. I didn't really go to my other classes. The only reason I did go was honestly just for girls. There were a few cute girls in my business classes (laughs). My dance classes were full of girls, but I was

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pretty much there to learn. I honestly had a lot of fun dancing. Dancers tend to say stuff like “Yeah, the dancing classes are awesome because of the girls.” I never danced for the girls. I took dancing very seriously.

Sapna: At what point did you feel that it was becoming a career? At what point were you like “this is what I want to do?” When did you begin actively trying to get spots and gigs?

Prosenjit: Well, I wasn't sure because when I went to school I studied modern dance but my heart was more into hip-hop, breaking and house... more free style dancing. So I came to New York with \$500 and a suitcase. When I first moved here, I had that Modern style gig, but I had some side jobs like Christmas work at Macy's. I also worked at a restaurant. But, I got fired from every job I had (laughs). So I started teaching and that's when I started getting some money. Things started picking up after a year and I heard about this



audition to be in a Debelah Morgan hip-hop music video. She was a one hit wonder but there were around 400-500 people applying and I ended up getting it. It just came naturally to me. Since then, I started auditioning for this and that, and I just got a lot of gigs. I got into an agency and got even more work. Out of 10 jobs, I was getting about 7. With commercial work it's not about your skill, it's about your look. It's not so hard for guys, though. Girls have it tough because they have to look nice and sexy.

Sapna: Do you have a lot of competition when it comes to getting them?

Prosenjit: It depends. If they're looking for black guys then obviously I'm not going to get it. The same goes for if they're looking for white guys. Usually gigs in dancing are going to be black and white, and usually one or two brown people (laughs).

Through experiences and being in the scene, I don't know anyone who's jumped from one thing to another like me, though. I've choreographed for artists. I've danced on tours, for music videos, television and theater. I've been with some good companies, traveled the world. I've hit everything I've wanted to hit. The only thing I didn't get a chance to do was go on a major world tour. I tried for Madonna's world tour and almost made it. I made the final five dancers out of 3,000 people. They flew me out to Los Angeles where I competed along with 17 other dancers, including myself. They cut six, and I was one of them. I didn't make it, but it was still a major accomplishment for me.

Prosenjit: About a year and a half ago, I was visiting India and found out about this school in Mumbai called SDIPA, run by Shiamak Davar, a major figure in the dance scene out in India. It's more jazz and Bollywood types of dancing. They're not too familiar with hip-hop, so when I went out I taught two master classes, hip-hop and house. The Indians were very welcoming though. After I taught the class the students loved it and they were taking notes and wanted to copy my music. The students there have a method, whereas students here just come in and leave.

Overall though, I felt like a foreigner. I didn't really have any attachment to the country though. Because of the way I was raised it didn't exactly feel like home.

Sapna: What about bhangra?

Prosenjit: Ahh, bang-ra. Yea, I don't really care too much for it. It's cool, but after a couple of songs it's all right. Kind of like reggae... after a few songs, you know, it's like 'alright I'm done.'

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Sapna: What do you have planned next?

Prosenjit: Next I'm going back to Italy. They've asked me to come back out. I've got gigs here and there. I'm supposed to go down to Ohio and Texas for some gigs too. I want to finish up my website also.

Sapna: What's been the highlight of your career?

Prosenjit: The highlight of my career? It's hard because I've had a lot of gigs where I felt like I was on top of the world. One was on Saturday Night Live where I did a skit. I did a few commercials where I choreographed and did some free styling. I think mostly going to shows and dancing on stage, having people going crazy and wild watching us—it's my high. It feels comfortable; I feel very confident. Almost like me walking around my apartment naked (laughs).

Sapna: Our content editor, Saira, has a crush on you and was wondering what it's like when you go out and dance. Do the girls just flock towards you?

Sapna: Yea, she was like 'He's so hot and an amazing dancer, I bet the girls love him.'

Prosenjit: Sometimes... yea, sometimes I get girls who just come up to me and say stuff like asking me if they can sleep with me. It's happened (laughs). They use all sorts of dirty language. I can tell when a girl likes my style—they keep staring or smiling. Sometimes you get girls dancing. It's cool but, I don't know, I'm not really into taking advantage of it. I'm not a player or anything.

Sapna: Well that's all I really wanted to know (laughs)... would you like to say anything else to our readers?

Prosenjit: Just follow your dreams. It's hard sometimes, yea. Also, the deeper you get into something you enjoy, the more people you'll run into that don't want you to succeed. They'll try to keep you down. Always keep your head up high though. Surround yourself with people who are positive... who care about you, and try not to fall into negativity. Just doing dancing—there's a lot negativity. There are nasty people out there. That's about it though... Always remain humble, keep it cool. Yea yea yea!

The feeling of accomplishment is always a great one. After spending a few hours after the class in Uncle Ming's bar/lounge on 14th and Avenue B practicing my steps, (with Prosenjit, to save me some humiliation) I finally felt like less of an idiot and closer to achieving dancing master status. I met up with a few people from his crew and stood amazed as his friend inverted, flipped and spun himself about the dance floor. In an alternate universe, I am Prosenjit's friend, and there are 100 women watching me.

The PeriDance (PeriDance is located on 13th and 4th Avenue) class, which runs Wednesday night's starting at 8:30pm, offers hip-hop style dancing along with a mix of other related styles. He also teaches a few other classes the rest of the week. One class was enough to convince me, and if the videos below don't convince you to at least try it once, then you're missing out on one very attentive and caring teacher. One of his students, Jason Tam, told me "His style is great and I enjoy learning from him because he takes it back to the old school days. The other people here can't compare to him. It's so much fun to learn."

I've been looking for an alternative to jogging and running for a while now, and for the value and sheer entertainment factor, Prosenjit's class allows you to get a great workout and to live up your inner M.C. Hammer.

I need some parachute pants.