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Art Lifestyle

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Exclusive Interview with Pooja Uberoi- Artistic Director & Inspiring Leader

Pooja Uberoi is the Artistic Director and owner of IKIGAI USA and loves helping people follow their passion and create opportunities for artists in the USA and INDIA through dance, Yoga and Movement exploration. Pooja is the producer for a 10-day dance festival called NYC Dance Week which is now a Global festival for Dance and Fitness. Pooja was awarded the South Asian Women Achievers Award for the year 2017 in New Jersey for her achievements in bringing Bollywood Dance to the forefront in USA.

Pooja is trained in Bharatnatyam, Kathak, Jazz, Contemporary, Classical Ballet, Salsa, Street Funk and Contact Improvisation. Pooja has performed and choreographed extensively nationally and internationally representing her company. Pooja Uberoi is an experienced choreographer and has choreographed extensively for both stage and film. She has worked as assistant choreographer with Ashley Lobo in India while working at The Danceworx Performing Arts Academy. She has also choreographed for stage shows, corporate events, trade exhibitions, feature films and Live Broadway style musicals in India and USA. Pooja has also curated and conducted experimental/ collaborative projects with Indian and international collaborators, like 'Experimenta' while in India. Pooja has worked with some of the best teachers from all over the Globe including: –

Ashley Lobo (Australia/India): Jazz, Funk and Contemporary, Ronnie Shambik Ghosh (Hong Kong): Jazz, Yehuda Maor (USA): Ballet, Yuko Harada (Japan): Modern, Raymond Esterhuizen (Netherlands): Limón technique, Tino Sanchez (Spain): Contemporary, Anthony Noa (USA): Ballet, Jacquie Bird (USA): Old School and Broadway Jazz, Robin Merchant (Canada): Jazz Funk, Santosh Nair (India): Chhau, Mandeep Raikhy (India/ U.K.): Laban Contemporary, Caesar Augusto Moniz (Portugal): Contemporary/ Classical Ballet, Nik Hills (Australia): Contemporary, Jaan Freeman (USA): Horton Technique

Soraya Franco (Dominican Republic): Yoga Ballet/ Yoga Dance Therapy.



Pooja Uberoi is now recognized globally as a Bollywood dance director and choreographer and has been responsible for some of the biggest Bollywood musicals in India and the US. She has been part of some of the best Bollywood films such as Tamasha, Jab We Met and No one Killed Jessica. Classical Indian Dance is the South Asian science of dance, just as ballet is in Europe. Bollywood dancing fuses Classical Indian Dance with Jazz and Hip-Hop. It also includes the popular dance form of Bhangra. It's a mashup of many South Asian traditions, just as India is a mashup of traditions and so is New York City. Uberoi's life dream is to put authentic Bollywood Dance choreographed and performed by South Asian Artists on Broadway.

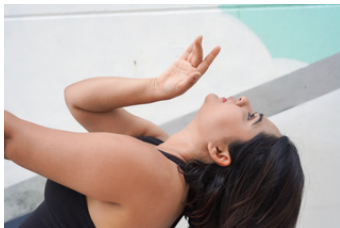
She has spent the majority of her career in the Dance, entertainment and Television industry, gaining experiences in areas such as Dancing, Teaching, and Choreographing, Producing Festivals and Musicals and Creating digital content for social media.

As a dancer, Pooja has been part of many dance and theatre shows touring India, Israel and the USA. She has also been part of a Fitness show by Reebok called "Bootylicious". She has choreographed for Sesame Street kids and has directed two Bollywood Musicals in India and USA which toured Israel, South Africa, China and Germany. She has choreographed many Bollywood musicals including a Kids Musical – "Wizwits" based on The Wizard of Oz.

Uberoi is focused on creating something unique and special for the dance world with her brand "BollyJazz" – a fusion of two styles of Dance: Jazz and Bollywood.

Pooja has been producing a dance festival in New York for the last few years called NYC DANCE WEEK which attracts artists from all over the globe to participate. She is also a curator for Funkar, a performance night for emerging artists in New York City. Uberoi curates this show to provide an opportunity to new dance movements and artists in New York by fully supporting their performances.

Pooja is currently expanding and setting up her yoga and dance school in Florida and continues to run her school in New York. She is working on creating and training instructors for her new style BollyJazz. IKIGAI USA, Pooja's company, also has its own movement wear called "Wear Ikigai", especially created by Pooja. Her vision is to create clothes that seamlessly allow various forms of movement that she has had the opportunity to explore over the years.



NY Glam: What are you currently working on? Tell us a little bit more about your company/organization.

I am working on expanding my Artistic Dance Company IKIGAI USA and setting up a school in Florida after establishing my work and classes in New York City. IKIGAI USA aims to develop and spread Indian Cultural and Bollywood Dance, Yoga and Movement through classes, workshops and events. I started with spreading the dance movement in India and have taught in New York, Israel, Mexico, Puerto Rico and now Florida. IKIGAI USA aims to create artists who can follow their passion and help spread joy through dance without having to compromise on a good life and value for their art. We aim to create love and appreciation for Dance and Movement through artistic excellence and exhilarating performances. – www.ikigaiusa.com

I also produce a dance festival called NYC Dance Week every year in June which is a ten-day dance and fitness festival for in-person and online classes and events. – www.nycdanceweek.org

NY Glam: What projects have been your favorites that you have been a part of and why?

I am most fascinated by Musical Theatre, Broadway shows and the art of storytelling. I am able to create and visualize stories and express them through

dance since the early days of my dance journey. Naturally some of my favorite projects are the 5 Broadway style musicals that I have created in India and New York and the most cherished out of them is Jhumroo – A Broadway-style, full-length Bollywood Musical created for the only Broadway-inspired theatre in India – Kingdom of Dreams.



NY Glam: What three social issues are most important to you and why?

Child abuse – I am very fond of children and strongly believe if we teach them well, we don't have to worry about the kind of adults they'll grow up into. I believe the art of dance helps teach a child to focus along with other aspects like creativity, and discipline, all of which are essential for success in any area of education. I could not receive dance education as a child because there really weren't many options for it in India. Hence, it's very important to me to make this available to other children.

Substance abuse – Drugs and other form of abuse are addictions which are crippling our society. If we can use dance and art to provide children and young adults a good outlet and give them this form of expression, we can help minimize the problem of substance addiction.

Bullying – Bullying is a very subtle form of abuse and it's least spoken about in our society. However, it is close to me as I have personally gone through bullying at various stages of life – in university and even at work. I know how bullying can completely destroy someone's confidence and courage to face life.

NY Glam: What was the most significant change you brought about in a project / organization?

During the creation of our musical in India, I was able to give an opportunity to many artists from a very small town in India – Karnal – where Dance Ballet, Broadway and Jazz are unheard of. I, along with my team, was able to completely replace a cast of old trained dancers with these freshly talented young dancers and helped them prove to their families that dance is a viable form of art and is a sustainable career for men and women alike. IKIGAI USA aims to highlight that belief and encourage through Dance in every country going forward.

NY Glam: What is the biggest lesson you have learned in your career?

Those who work hard are lucky and hard work can replace talent. It is possible to receive some opportunities and positions in your career thanks to a stroke of luck. However, only hard work and constant innovation can help one maintain that title, position and take it forward. Another very important aspect is community service – giving back to the society and learning from others is imperative to feel fulfilled.



NY Glam: What are the most important values and ethics of a leader?

Being able to influence your teammates and students

Integrity to self, art and your students

Being able to accept your mistakes and inspire others to do so

Empowering and loving your teammates and students, which also means you are able to tell them when they make a mistake.

NY Glam: How can one improve their leadership skills?

Learning to create dance is a type of leadership in itself. Improvisation, understanding movement and creating choreography helps me discover something new, something surprising in my body every day. And it has also taught me to be flexible and loving with my body while creating but also how to be firm when it comes to discipline and growth. The same principles can be applied to leadership.

NY Glam: What is your advice for those who would like to reach higher in their career?

One must start by understanding themselves and their leadership style. It helps us conclude what has worked for us and has given results.

Leadership qualities such as assertiveness, adaptability, intelligence, and conscientiousness are the most important. It is important to stay positive and empower your team and juniors and lead them to follow the path that is best for them and inspire them to perform better for themselves.

For dancers, the most important part is discipline and regular training along with self-exploration and studying. One must not stop being a student ever.

NY Glam: What are you an advocate of? What are your life passions?

Intellectual stimulation. I have always encouraged my students to explore, question, express, create and believe they can do anything they can see with their eyes closed. I have the gift of spotting great talent and encouraging them to explore their path of greater good. Sometimes students cannot see what their teachers and leaders can, and I have always helped my students with this aspect of their life. I can spot a star in the making.

I am extremely passionate about using art for social justice and to create thinking artists and empowering children.

NY Glam: What/who inspires you?

Growing up, I was always inspired by successful women like my mom and my aunt who would work hard and multi-task their work and families flawlessly. Until now I am inspired by women who inspire other women by leading and innovating.

Some of the women who I look up to today are: –



Dame Anna Wintour – a British-American journalist, who has served as Editor-in-Chief of **Vogue** Global Chief Content Officer for **Condé Nast**. She has become one of the most powerful women in fashion. Wintour's power has undoubtedly arisen from her ability to see her potential beyond the walls of Vogue magazine and the confines of the fashion industry

Priyanka Chopra for being one of the only South Asian women to make it in Hollywood in such a huge way without being born here. She has also indirectly opened doors for many other South Asians and women in general to follow their path and raise awareness to important issues.

Martha Graham – She truly explored the human body's potential for expression. She danced and taught for more than seventy years and makes us that believe age is just a number.

Jane Fonda – She led the very first aerobics movement and inspired many women to work out and focus on their fitness. With the first of her many Aerobics tapes, she inspired women around the world to throw on a leotard, tights and leg warmers.

Off-screen, she has been at the forefront of social activism for more than 50 years lending her voice to causes she believes in, ranging from women's rights to fair pay for workers who rely on tips, and most recently launching Fire Drill Fridays with Greenpeace USA, which stages weekly actions to educate and protest against the climate crisis.

There are many more people who inspire me because of what they do and how they live and the fact that they create a space for others to progress and also use their personality and power to help others and make this world a happier place.

NY Glam: What are five characteristics that make successful leaders?

Hard Work, Integrity, taking up Challenges, innovation, being a student for life.

NY Glam: What are your future plans/goals/projects?

I am working on expanding my Artistic Dance Company and making a mark with it across the United States and eventually in many parts of the world.

NY Glam: How can others get involved in your organization?

We are always looking for new instructors and Choreographers. If one is interested in training to teach a BollyJazz class we have a training program for them. Ikigai USA is always open to collaborating with different artists and companies to bring the spotlight on Indian Dance and culture through various events and Bollywood Nights in any city. One can also join me as a volunteer for helping with NYC Dance Week or participate as a studio.

NY Glam: What books would you recommend that have made an impact in your life, business, or success.

Built to last, how to win friends and influence people, The Magic of thinking Big, The Power of Now, The Alchemist and Your Soul's Purpose

NY Glam: What is your favorite hobby and why is this hobby important to you.

In recent times, I've developed an inclination for spinning and I love spending more time spinning. The music and rhythm keeps me going and pushes me to break new boundaries. At the end of the class, you feel really accomplished because you've managed to conquer something which looked tough in the beginning – just like life.

My Mantra: "They can steal your recipe, but the sauce won't taste the same. You are the secret sauce. Just be you!"



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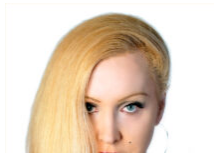
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