

Overview:

“Fremont Choreographer Amit Patel is Reinventing Bollywood Dance His Way” is a seven-minute video featuring dancer and choreographer Amit Patel and choreographer Mona Khan. Various expressions of Bollywood dance are featured and the styles Patel calls “Bollywood Heels” and “Indian Contemporary.” Bollywood Heels is a mixture of Kathak gestures (Indian classical dance) and jazz dance performed in five-inch heels. Indian Contemporary fuses hip-hop, jazz and ballet with Indian folk and classical dance forms.

Episode description:

Outside, Amit, a young Indian American man with mocha skin and long dark brown hair dances with his arms overhead in smooth, flowing, twisting moves. Behind him the sun sets over the San Francisco-Bay. Then he speaks directly to the camera, with palm springs and an abstract metal sculpture in the background. A short montage of dance sequences follows. A group of young female dancers are dressed in white beaded crop tops, gold-trimmed sequined hip wraps over silky white pajama-style pants with black and gold-beaded diagonal stripes. In unison, they stretch their arms and bend. The festive, red background with curlicue design is reminiscent of a tree of life. Amit and two male dancers in a dance studio with a brick wall in the back dance Indian contemporary choreography. Amit, in a bedazzled tangerine tunic and loose pants, and his mother, dressed in black slacks and a purple top with black hair that falls to her hips, dance barefoot with wooden sticks on a quiet street.

When Amit says “Let’s go!” he motions for us to follow as he steps out of the frame, and another series of very quick shots of heavily produced dance performances play. Amit, wearing a white tunic and loose pant combo with an ash-gray wall behind him, rapidly twirls on a dance floor covered with chalky powder. His long hair whips about and white dust billows up around his feet and body. A dozen women, dressed in jeans, black mid-calf boots, and crop tops tied at the waist, raise their bent arms in a go-go style move, stomp and jerk tight to the side, against a colorful, geometric backdrop resembling a circuit board. A line of dancers in flowing gold lamé with arms interlocked take a wide swooping step to the front and side, swivel to profile and bend back in unison. Amidst a half-dozen performers in black bodysuits on a stark stage filled with red light, a dancer lifts and tosses a dancer to another. Dancers in regal black-gold costumes weave around wooden chairs on a stage. Sixteen dancers in billowy white costumes with long silk swaths form birdlike shapes when they move their arms. Five male dancers wear gold and white pants gathered at the ankles. Their hands are at their heads, elbows out.

We cut back to Amit dancing outside on a graffitied concrete slab that resembles a sidewalk in the middle of the East Bay’s rolling hills.

At the end of the concrete slab are the remnants of an old metal, square gate frame with an adjoining hinged triangular piece on the left. Amit dances, framed within the square structure. He wears his hair in a high ponytail; his T-shirt reads EQUALITY in a blocky rainbow font. A close-up of Amit in his high heels: white stiletto black high-tops. He faces the camera and does a grand plié, knees wide out to the side.

“If Cities Could Dance” opening sequence:

The screen divides into a horizontal triptych for the video series’ title sequence—on top is a street level view of a dancer’s leg and sneaker spinning and rotating across the frame; in the middle, a queer Black male vogue dancer flips his long braids as he swiftly waves his arms and the words “If Cities Could Dance” appear over his image; and on the bottom, three women dancers of color stand in line and arch back, cradling one another. The words, “our history, our culture, our moves” appear over a montage of quick cuts of dancers from across the country, including a jookin’ dancer, a Native American (Seneca and Muscogee Creek) hoop dancer in eagle formation; two Chicago footworkers dancing in sync; a trio of hip-hop dancers performing group choreography in front of a street mural with graffiti art; and a queer cis woman vogue dancer waving her arms and pointing her finger toward the viewer. The sequence culminates with a young Black male dancer running on the grass and launching into a grand jeté, as hand-written text “during the pandemic” is overlaid.

An overhead shot of the south San Francisco Bay appears: an industrialized area packed with tech buildings, banked by wetlands and golden brown foothills in the distance. We see a superimposed yellow outline of California with Fremont’s location pinpointed.

TEXT: Fremont, California – Bollywood and Indian Contemporary

Amit Patel: Dancer, Choreographer, Amit Patel Dance Project

Amit in a bedazzled poppy-colored top and loose pants. His peplum-styled top is fitted at the bodice, and flares out as he spins, revealing his midriff. He looks directly into the camera.

When he speaks of his parents, an outdoor photo of young Amit with his brother and parents is shown. There are mountains in the background.

We see quick shots of South Asian businesses; a close-up on naan and dipping sauces; Amit eating at an outdoor cafe; a row of neat homes; inside a grocery store; a small wooden Hindu goddess statue; teal and hot-pink bike wheels; three smiling youth riding bikes make a U-turn.

Amit in the jeweled poppy-colored costume dances joyfully in the street. His movement is bouncy as he weaves along the street's center double stripe in a skipping, grapevine step. He turns and travels in rapid spins toward the camera.

We see cars on the freeway, driving under an overpass.

Then, rows of palm trees.

A strip mall: Passage to India Bakery sign.

TEXT READS: Mona Sampath Khan, Founder and Artistic Director, Mona Khan Company

Mona, a young Indian woman with black hair worn down to mid-torso, is in her studio with arms outstretched, hands in lotus gesture with palms and pinkies up, and remaining fingers splayed. We see a close-up on her face outside in dappled light, then standing outside her studio in Adidas tee and grey sweats.

Five quick shots of different performances play as Mona narrates:

A line of teen dancers in profile undulate and quickly bounce with bent arms at sides; young women in white harem pants and jewel-tone tops dance in an energetic hip-hop style with fist pumps and side jumps; against a mandala backdrop, dancers in fuchsia and purple spring into a straddle jump, land, log roll, hop up and kick to the side; dancers in white, black, orange and gold move their hands in classical gestures; dancers in contemporary clothing do a modified pony step

TEXT READS: "Umrao Jaan" 1981

We see a close-up of a stunning grey-green eye lined in black, then a mouth, then her bejeweled hand partially covering her face. The camera pulls back to reveal her smiling eyes. A young Indian woman in an elaborately beaded white gown and long sheer yellow veil dances on a large patterned carpet, surrounded by many seated spectators. She dances with quick whipping movements of the arms and abrupt half turns.

TEXT READS: "Disco Dancer" 1981

Five male dancers wear snazzy outfits and gold headbands and carry electric guitars. Their dance is full of twisting moves and kicks. A young woman in a leotard dances between rows of dancers wearing flashy body stockings.

TEXT READS: "Tezaab" 1988

A dancer in a colorful handkerchief skirt and neon-pink crop top tugs on her ears and sashays forward. The camera cuts to the stage teeming with dancers in green beaded can-can skirts, then cuts to showcase a dancer in a neon-pink sequined fitted top, miniskirt and black leggings. The dancer's arms are straight and flexed at the wrist, and with legs in a wide stance, they take little hopping, staccato dance steps, flap arms up and down, and pivot. Cut to the ensemble, dancing in a raucously joyful celebration with lunging steps, and quick precise bending at the waist to dance with torso tilted. This sequence ends with the jubilant dancer in hot pink traveling with whip-quick turns and arms outstretched.

TEXT READS: "Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam" 1999

We see a large group of partnered dancers in classical dress, spinning and clapping overhead. Cut to a circle of male dancers in saffron turbans, in formal costume, dancing in an energetic, leaping style on a brilliant gold sunburst floor.

At Amit's line, "Connect to our roots" Amit and his mother demonstrate in their neighborhood street the Garba Raas dance with sticks. They have big smiles as they cross their arms and tap their sticks together overhead, then bend, swoop up, and tap overhead again. They repeat the pattern several times.

We see a photograph of a group of children in saffron dress. It shows a mix of beaming smiles and serious stares. Two boys stand out: a boy with an impish grin and huge brown eyes, looking sideways at the droopy child with eyes half-mast next to him.

Then, a photograph of Amit as a child holding two turquoise balloons at his head to look like Mickey Mouse ears.

Various photos of Amit as teen: smiling with his peers, all dressed in white linen; performing with the group in sequined costumes; in chartreuse, hands in lotus gesture; in shimmering purple belted coats, with huge smiles, arms in triumphant overhead V position; a close up of Amit shirtless, in profile, hand in stop sign gesture; sole aerial dancing; an intense expression in a modern ballet duet, limbs intertwined with partner.

The montage continues with video: a stage full of shimmying youth in shiny mango and chartreuse costumes, lots of pronounced hip movements to the side. The males dance with long striped poles. All freeze in a final pose as gold confetti erupts on the stage.

Cut to female dancers in black and gold, with sharply angled classic arm gestures. Wooden slat-back chairs adorn the stage, with a backdrop of gold hearts. The women weave their arms gracefully and dip as they dance.

The performance videos continue with a contemporary dance with eight men in camouflage pants and shirts, then several videos show groups in both classical and modern-styled costume and dance. A piece features a duet set against a simple wooden swing set on a stark stage; another focuses on the male dancer in khakis and open button-down shirt, dancing against a backdrop of a full moon reflecting off the ocean, his partner in the background. Another features a young couple in modern dress. They sink to their knees, gaze at each other, lean back onto their hips, spin to face the audience, smile, and sway in unison. Another classical piece features mostly female dancers with three men weaving in and out amongst them. The montage ends with a romantic photograph of Amit gazing intently at his female partner, as he dips and supports her in a backbend.

At Amit's line "I didn't necessarily resonate with that," we transition to Amit outside walking along train tracks. He begins to dance in a series of slow, sensual and feminine movements. Close up of his hands overhead, slowly circling at the wrist, sun glinting from behind. He pulls his hands away from each other, forming a classic gesture: index and middle fingers clamped to thumb, with ring and pinkie splayed out.

Kneeling between the tracks, he makes long luxurious stretching moves. The momentum of a twirling lasso arm movement brings Amit to standing. In slow motion, he pirouettes in modified passé—knee bent, foot flexed at the knee of the standing leg. He looks directly into the camera, his gracefully curved hand rests under his jaw, then moves to wrap around his face in a caressing framing motion. He then sweeps his hand around his chin in a rolling lotus move.

We cut to a close-up of Amit in stiletto sneaker heels, walking on an abandoned public works structure that appears like a secret sidewalk amidst scrub brush vegetation and foothills in the background.

Amit is in a classic dance position: left arm straight out to side, flexed at wrist, hands in Kathak gesture; right arm is curved over head with flexed wrist, palm up. He is in profile. With focus on the outward arm, he swings his arm toward us, waggles his head side to side, circles his head and his ponytail flips around him. He hops up into a wide straddle, pivots toward the camera, lowers, log rolls and pushes up into a straddle handstand. He lowers himself, kneels, circles with his torso, one arm grazing the ground. Standing tall with arms wound at wrists overhead, he lets each arm spiral down smoothly, following the movement with a crisp head swivel to each side.

The camera pans back to show Amit in a grand plié. In the foreground stands an elegantly withered pear tree.

The scene moves inside to Amit at his laptop, setting up a shot for a Zoom dance class. An iPhone is on a tripod. Shelves are in the background, filled with books and a collection of ceramic mugs. His hands form intricate gestures as he dances.

Amit is in silhouette at dusk. His arms are outstretched in front in a wavy conjuring motion. He undulates one arm away, then scoops it back and swings both arms overhead. He rolls his wrists, fingers splayed, and stretches out on a diagonal. Against the foothills in the distance, the sky is a rosy mauve, melting into violet.

Amit is in the kitchen with his mother preparing a meal: tearing cilantro, chopping tomato. They smile and laugh.

We see fast-moving drone footage of the San Francisco Bay's shoreline in Fremont.

Dancing along a boardwalk, just before sunset, Amit wears loose white pants, and a marsala tunic, belted and split on the sides. He dances robustly, almost flinging himself against the rails of the walkway. We see a close-up on his feet as he pushes up into a jump and twirls.

The screen splits into three sections: a young man in all black street clothes on the left; Amit in center; a young woman on the right in flowy carnation tunic, split on the sides. All are freestyle dancing.

In the studio, several dance students line the brick wall. Amit is flanked by two additional dancers. They move to rigorous, complex Indian Contemporary choreography in perfect unison. They pirouette and spring to the side, front legs crossing behind their right. Their arms are extended to the side with the hand in lotus position: palm and pinkie up, with remaining fingers splayed. Their left hands form the classic gesture: index and middle finger touching the thumb. They leap away, making crisp arm gestures up and to the side. Swinging one arm around in front creates momentum for 360-degree spin. In a wide stance the trio faces the camera. Arms in front, forearms touching, they make weaving motions with their heads. Arms out, their gazes follow the extension. They turn with outstretched arms, swoop down and jump back while still bent at waist. They straighten and pull back with one arm, as in drawing back an arrow. They make pirouettes, lunges, reaching and stretching on the diagonal. The dance continues with Amit's uniquely graceful and powerful mix of modern and classically stylized choreography. The constant arm movements are a blend of rounded and angled. Posture straight, with moves often led by the crown of the head, they incorporate spins and pivots, swooping and bending, peppered with classic hand gestures. The sequence ends with a rapid succession of three: hands in stop gesture with ring finger bent, then a deep squat down and jump up with index and middle fingers touching thumb, and finally the arms scoop away and back in to cross in front, forming the lotus.

We cut to the chalked floor: Amit in duet with a muscular, dark-brown-skinned dancer also wearing all white. Their dance includes weight sharing partnered moves and heavy footwork, creating subtle airborne smudges of white around them.

Credits appear on the bottom part of the screen. Additional featured dancers: Ishika Seth, Saffatt Al-Mansoor. Director, Producer, Additional Camera: Charlotte Buchen Khadra. Director of Photography: Elie M. Khadra. Editor: Kelly Whalen. Associate Producer: Masha Pershay, Alex Irwin. Production Assistant: Chinwe Oniah, Vivian Morales. Motion Graphics: Masha Pershay. Archival: Amit Patel Dance Project, Mona Khan Company. Special Thanks: Mona Khan, Chitra Selvaraj. Senior Producer: Kelly Whalen. Executive Producer: David Markus. Support provided by the Osher Production Fund. Funding for KQED Arts is provided by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Support is also provided by the members of KQED. A production of KQED Arts © 2020 KQED.

Content description written by Alyson Ayn Osborn.