

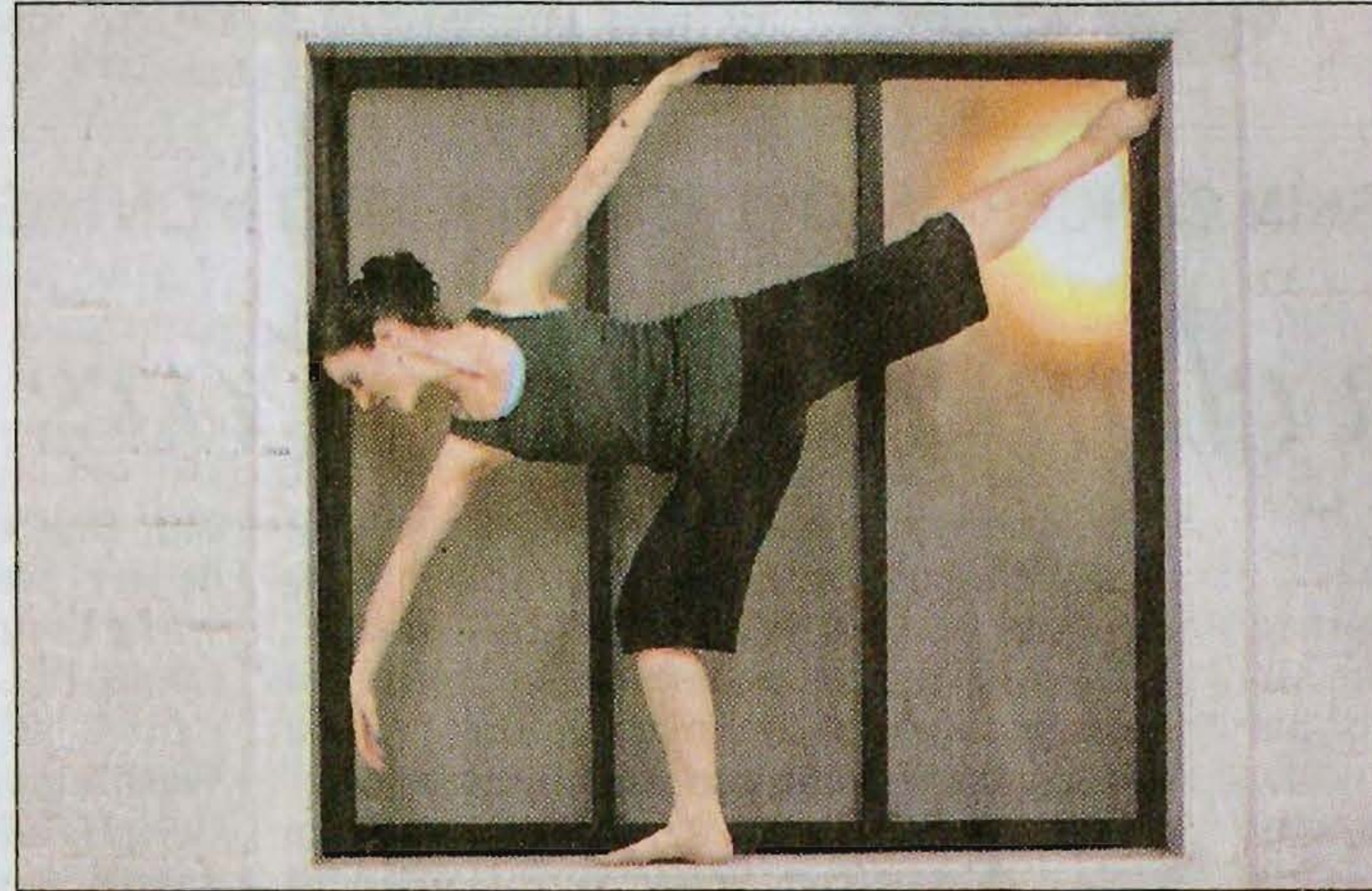
# Manhattan to Mumbai, on a soulful whirl

**Shreevatsa Nevatia**  
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FOR ALL of five weeks, dancer and choreographer Marin Elizabeth Leggat has given up her space in Manhattan to make room for herself in Bandra.

In the city to facilitate a workshop with dancers from the Terence Lewis Contemporary Dance Company, this US State Department cultural envoy has her task cut out. While teaching her students the nuance of American post-modern dance, she hopes to explore the relationship between religious beliefs and performance practices that influence the work of Indian contemporary dancers.

"I came into this project interested in the theme of spirituality," says Leggat. The question that she seeks to ask is not simplistic in the least — Our ideals,



SATISH BATE/HT

**Dancer Marin Elizabeth Leggat strikes a pose.**

our value system, and our basic worldview — can we transfer these as artistes onto the dance stage when we step out?

"These are just the kind of

questions that reside at the back of my mind and that's the lens that I use to look out at all of my experiences here."

M.E.L.D. Danceworks, a New

York modern dance company founded by Leggat herself, is said to be committed to dissolving cultural and religious barriers by exploring in their work, themes that can be defined as universal. And through a dialogue, Leggat hopes to transcend much the same boundaries here, thereby creating a space that makes the understanding of differences tenable. "It is an exchange of aesthetic philosophy and education," she says. And this exchange will culminate into a production and stage recital on July 3.

Leggat believes that the definition of what is resolutely Western or not is clearly beginning to blur. "Every modern dancer I know studies yoga. There is an attempt and an ac-



knowledge of how other cultures and philosophies influence our artistry. I don't believe that we are in a space of ethnocentric ideals and principles anymore."

The one thing that she is sure she will be

taking back with her is "an awareness to see and appreciate the minute details of life around you". The city, she says, has made her want to stop by and look. "How is this woman walking down the street with a basket on her head or how are these boys riding their bikes through traffic in the middle of a rainstorm, still seeming happy while I am in a cab and scared to death?" This wealth of information, she adds, is definitely a theme for the future.

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