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How is Bhangra Performed?

In the 14th and 15th centuries, in order to pass time while working in the fields of Punjab, farmers sang songs about the village and danced. It typically involved vigorous kicks as well as lots of arm and shoulder movements. Today, Bhangra is performed at a very fast pace with elements of its choreography reflecting the daily activities of the farmers at work e.g. the swaying of the arms in the move 'Fasla' represents the swaying of crops (Fasla).

Depending on the style, props such as wooden instruments (Sapp and/or Kato) and sticks (Kundeh) may also be used. Stunts may also be performed which include a dancer sitting on someone's shoulders simultaneously to another person hanging from his torso by his legs.

The dance itself was traditionally performed within a circle, however modern Bhangra involves dancing in a plethora of different shapes.



Who performs Bhangra?

By tradition, Bhangra was predominantly performed amongst males as a means of celebrating the harvest festival (Vaisakhi). Overtime, Bhangra dance has been used to symbolise festivities and celebrations and is performed more frequently; for example at weddings.

Previously, women would not be involved in Bhangra but instead would participate in 'Giddha'. However modern day Bhangra involves both men and women.



What Shall I Wear?

One of the most distinguishing features of this dance is the traditional outfit that men wear to perform. It consists of a colourful cloth wrapped around their waist (Chadar/Lungi) coupled with a long shirt (Kurta) usually of a complimentary colour. A button-less waistcoat (Chugi) is worn over the long shirts and a turban (Pagh) is tied to cover their heads. The 'Pagh' worn by Bhangra dancers are tied with a fan design (Turla) and differ to those tied on a day-to-day basis by practising Sikhs.

Although it may not be common for men to beautify themselves with jewellery, in Bhangra, men will wear a necklace (Kenthā), earrings (Kaante) and brightly coloured strings decorated with pom-poms (Phumaniyan) around their upper arms and wrists. Occasionally, men will also have a small 'pocket square' sized cloth (Ramaal) attached to their little finger to enhance hand gestures.

Women performing Bhangra tend to wear a vibrant dress, common to the Punjabi culture, consisting of three garments: a top (Kameez), pants (Salwaar) and a stole draped over their head and/or shoulders (Chunni/Dupatta). Female costumes are decorated with striking jewellery such as earrings (Baliyan), head wear (Tikka), a necklace (Kenthā) and Bangles (Banga). Simultaneously hair is plaited through with a 'Parand' which not only acts as an accessory to extend but adorns the hair.

MEN & WOMEN

PUNJABI FOLK DANCING

BHANGRA

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Bhangra forms explained...

Bhangra is a traditional folk dance of Punjab and has always been an integral part of the Punjabi lifestyle. There are multiple forms of Bhangra such as Traditional Bhangra dance, Luddi, Gham Luddi, Jhoomar and Dhamal. All forms of Bhangra are unique in their own ways and carry their own style and grace.

Luddi/Gham Luddi - The dance of choice when celebrating victory in the fields. The dance movements are usually slow and integrated with traditional bhangra.

Jhoomar - A dance involving men performing Bhangra alongside the drummer to a slow yet rhythmic beat.

Dhamal - A folk dance form in Haryana consisting of brisk and quick steps. Men usually perform this dance outdoors only on moonlit nights.

In the UK, these different forms do not carry individual liberty but exist as elements or segments of the traditional Bhangra dance.



When words fail, music speaks!

The large barrel-shaped wooden drum (Dhol) is the most common, not to mention the most important instrument used in Bhangra. The 'Dhol' player (Dholi) will put a strap around his neck, to hold the drum, and use two sticks (Dagga and Tilli) to create a tremendous beat to which people can dance to.

Secondary to the 'Dhol' is a wooden instrument (Sapp/Chhikka). It is made of wood with many 'X' shaped small parts. The 'Sapp' is played by expanding and collapsing with both hands producing a unique clapping sound. This is often played by the dancers themselves during a performance.

Other instruments used in Bhangra are a one-stringed, high-pitched instrument (Tumbi) and tongs which produce a chiming sound (Chimta).

All of these instruments are played in harmony to create the incredibly inviting sound of Bhangra. The combination of these musical instruments sets spirits free allowing people to move their bodies in an energetic way, resulting in phenomenal feelings of joy and freedom.



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