UC SANTA BARBARA
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High-Octane Philanthropy

When Soham Tikekar and Nishu Viswanathan arrived at UC Santa Barbara as undergraduate students in 2012, they were surprised to find the area didn't have a cultural event that brought people together and bridged the gap between students and community. So they decided to build one.

The result was Dhadkan ("heartbeat" in Hindi), a student group that in 2014 would blend entertainment and philanthropy to present "Nachle Deewane," a night of Indian dancing and music in Santa Barbara.

Fast-forward six years and "Nachle Deewane" returns Saturday, April 20, at 5 p.m. at the Granada Theatre in Santa Barbara. The Indian dance festival features 200 dancers from across the country competing in two styles, Bhangra and Bollywood. Also performing is British Sri Lankan singer Arjun, one of the biggest South Asian stars in the UK.

"We chose those styles because we wanted to introduce variety into our show, and bring something different to Santa Barbara," said Viswanathan, who, like Tikekar, continued to work with Dhadkan after graduating.

Dhadkan, a registered nonprofit, will donate proceeds from the show to Asha for Education, which works to provide education to underprivileged children in India.

"We really wanted to go with a charity that's giving to education because we're all college students and want as many people to get an education as possible," said Erin Haque, a third-year biochemistry and molecular biology major who is co-

president of Dhadkan with Abhinav Tripathy, a third-year economics major.

“We’re a net-zero show,” Tikekar said. “We’re basically holding it to give back to the Santa Barbara community, and bring all the dancers from out of town.”

For those unfamiliar with Bhangra or Bollywood, calling them dancing nearly doesn’t do them justice. Although different styles, both are awash in color and energy. Bhangra, which originated in the northern state of Punjab, is an exhilarating exhibition of art and athleticism driven by a soundtrack that blends traditional music, hip hop, electronica and more.

Bollywood, meanwhile, uses different musical styles to tell a story, said Haque, who has been dancing Bollywood since she was 4.

“With Bollywood, you can play around with the type of emotions you want to do,” she said. “Bollywood is telling a story a lot of the time, and you have to really play into that. Bollywood is not just the dancing aspect, but being able to show emotion and express that as well. That part I love, because it’s like two in one, and there are a lot of different components that go into it.”

After selling out the Lobero Theatre five straight years, Dhadkan moves to the larger and venerable Granada Theatre. “We took a leap,” said Tikekar, adding organizers are expecting as many as 1,000 people to attend.

In truth, “Nachle Deewane” is a continuing giant leap for Dhadkan, whose 34 student leaders are responsible for every detail of the show. With 10 university teams competing — UCLA, UC Berkeley, UC Davis, UC San Diego, UC Santa Cruz, USC, Stanford, Penn State and Texas — producing the show is a huge undertaking. It’s also a blast.

“Most people haven’t been exposed to anything like it,” Tikekar said, “and it’s a very different show. It’s super, super high-energy because there are 200 performers, no one’s performing for more than eight minutes and those eight minutes represent 200 to 400 hours of practice. It’s a deep performance for every team that comes.”

About UC Santa Barbara

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of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.