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Shahil Patel's Ishaara dance team made such an impression the judges during their first America's Got Talent performance, the team was asked to return. *Photos provided courtesy of Hitesh Patel.*

Metro DEO Patel Roots for Son on "America's Got Talent"

By Laura Kloth  
Staff Writer

(August 11, 2009) When young Shahil Patel began attending the University of California at Berkeley, his father, Hitesh Patel, Metro DEO, Project Management, encouraged him to celebrate his ethnicity by joining an Indian cultural group.

Shahil followed his dad's advice by teaming up with other Berkeley students whose passion for dancing resulted in the creation of Ishaara, a Bollywood-style dance group. Bollywood refers to India's booming film industry.

Ishaara's lively synchronized dancing, complete with bright traditional costumes, accompanied by popular tunes like "Jai Ho" not only brought the dancers scores of fans, but also earned them a spot among the quarter-final acts on NBC's "America's Got Talent," a program whose popularity is rivaling that of the iconic "American Idol."

"It's becoming really, really popular in America. People are recognizing the stars on the show," says the proud father.



DEO Hitesh Patel, Project Management, says he was very surprised his son took up Bollywood dancing and became so good at it because young Shahil hadn't dance since kindergarten.

Due to a confidentiality agreement, Shahil Patel is not allowed to discuss the show, but the former Berkeley soccer player, turned choreographer and team leader is elated about being chosen among the finalists, his father says.

The winner of the show is expected to receive \$1 million along with a contract to perform in Las Vegas.

**Hollywood meets Bollywood**

When Ishaara (means "sign" or "signal" in Hindi) was first introduced on America's Got Talent, Judge Sharon Osborne asked Shahil: So what are you going to do for us? Shahil boldly responded: "Hopefully, knock your socks off."

So far, it appears his team has succeeded by creating a stir for Bollywood dance garnering thousands of viewers by the show's end.

Ishaara will be performing live at one of the quarter-finals being aired on NBC every Tuesday evening for the next several weeks. Viewers get to text or call to place their votes at end of each program.

Ishaara's motto "Bollywood Meets Hollywood" is appropriate since their dance routines essentially fuse traditional Indian dance steps with more modern and Western dance styles.

Ishaara's Bollywood-style dancing has brought the team several dance trophies and a great number of fans across the world.



The team's unique style has impressed judges at university dance offs, where the team has picked up an unprecedented seven first place prizes under Shahil's leadership.

"I am very proud of Shahil's achievements given that he never had any dance training, and in only two short years, he created various dance stories, choreographed, and led eighteen dancers to perform together as a team and win so many first places – all whilst studying for a double major," said Patel.

Their professional appeal even brought the team a summer gig performing on many venues such as Carnival cruise ships and a DIRECTV corporate dinner event in San Francisco.

That's surprising to Patel who says, "Shahil never had an interest in Bollywood or any kind of dancing. In fact, I do not recall ever seeing Shahil dancing since kindergarten, even at parties."

Patel credits movies like *Slumdog Millionaire* and the popularity of Bollywood -style dancing for some of his son's success.

"A lot of this Hollywood meets Bollywood is going on and it's just starting to take off now," he said.

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7-uRbOq5aU>



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### A parent's pride

Just getting chosen to perform on "America's Got Talent" was a feat since Ishaara had to compete against over 100,000 applicants across the nation.

Typically, the 18-member dance team practices together during the college dance competitions about three to five times a week for about six months.

They create their own costumes and props, work out their own lighting and edit their own music. They even have their own website [Ishaaradance.com](http://Ishaaradance.com).

"They put so much effort into. Sometimes, I think they are better than professional dancers in terms of the time they put into it," Patel said.

Patel said he and his wife are very proud of their son, though they've encouraged him to keep up with his education. Shahil graduated in May from UC Berkeley with a double major in economics and psychology.

"We give him a lot of support – in fact we have traveled to Chicago, Philadelphia, Sacramento, San Francisco, in addition to L.A. to watch his performances," he said. "I think he would like to take this to a different level."

"America's Got Talent" airs on Tuesday and Wednesday.