

I hope the reader can experience more than the words in the story I write. Threading through his life events, the idea that seizes the mind is that the reader might not go beyond words if I do not create a thematic link for the Roy Verdonk persona.

He sings, 'kabhi kabhi mere dil mein khayal aata hai', a popular hindi song from a Bollywood film. I am all attention. Is it because he knew he was going to be in conversation with an Indian. No. His first girlfriend was an Indian. Unexpected. I mean, it is not everyday that you hear of a Dutch man dating an Indian, and specifically from North India at that. I am intrigued.



No tricks were needed to impress me. I was already hypnotised with the aura that preceded him. It is a corollary to the knowledge that he has accomplished a fifty hour dance run as a pre-qualifying round for an event scheduled for next year. And he went on to say that he swam a hundred lengths every day for one hour, among other achievements. Sadly, he has had to postpone his twenty fifth anniversary celebration. We have gained from his online classes on VTV, though, because they would have been out of reach in normal times.

He shares anecdotes, not all sequential, from his past and his story unravels. In the 1990s he transported stuff between Czechoslovakia and Holland to aid a Charity. He and his friend would spend nights in apartments when children had left for home. The Mayor was happy with their work so the trips were frequent. These apartments had home bars. He chanced to be at a bar where live music was playing and he became a regular there. He would park his car and sit listening to music, and watch people making 'such cool style of line dances, I had felt caged with line dances earlier but this was different'. The American mariners played and danced to music. At a concert in Holland, he learnt it was Country. This, he says, shaped his taste for music. When he knew only Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton in 1995, he heard music and musicians he had not heard before. He now knew Shania Twain and many others. *'My journey started with music not dance'.*

### 'A DUTCH GUY'



'Like in the Slumdog Millionaire, I am a simple guy'. 'I look around and feel good'. He says with humility, capturing the entire gamut of his struggles, efforts, choices, decisions and accomplishments in the gaze that moves proudly across the bar. Enjoying the fact that he is busy from morning to night, the dramatic expansion of his medium encompasses classes, dance parties, weddings, funerals, and everyday running of the bar. He wishes he had more time to create shows because that is where his creativity is challenged. Sourcing of material, cleaning and bookkeeping keep him busy. Time with his two lovely daughters and his wife, is most valuable, and he would not give it up for anything.

A theatre company offered him a choice of two roles, of being a producer or the lead dancer, in a tableau. In partnership with another talented artist, he chose to produce rather than play the lead dancer. The money was good in either choice he made. He then traveled with this production, 'The Devil Went Down to Georgia' to Southport, England, too, and won acclaim. Easier would have been to be cast in the lead, sweat and hard work aside, he chose well. He has also partnered with a big recording company, and has made a recording label VAN, and they were called the Chammps. Composing, 'Get in Line' was a good experience. His own company has produced shows since his first. A French choreographer, Guylaine Bourdages, approached him for a theatre production. He enjoyed working with her. These projects form a bedrock of accomplishments which have brought him joy and fame.

### 'Like in the Slumdog Millionaire, I AM A SIMPLE GUY'

On a scale of ambition to contentment, it is not easy to guess where Roy wants to head with an unlimited scope his spirit and talent offer. He spoke of how important it is to get children off screen time. They must not miss the joy physical fitness and dance routines have given us. There is enough good music and dances available and he would like to propose to schools that Line dances should be incorporated in the school curriculum, for *'Line dancers turn out better'*. It has to be a state decision and across nations. For his girls, he has this to say, *'if you want to look like a beauty, you have to work like a beast'*. A good dance routine conducted well, inculcates good discipline for school children.

Words express and also restrict the real flow of emotions. One can see that it hurts even now to talk about his biological family. His mother, who lived in Indonesia, then a Dutch colony, was the second wife of his father. After having left her for another woman, the third one in his life, he actually put an eleven year old Roy to a test of loyalty and asked him to choose between his mother and him. The little Roy walked away from his father, and neverlooked back. He stayed with his mother who had prayed and prayed for a child, and finally got Roy at the age of forty four. Just the thought of it hurts when I process this in my head. His father left for Australia to perform as a Pianist, 'Jerry Lee Lewis style', and never came back!! ?? He lost his mother early.

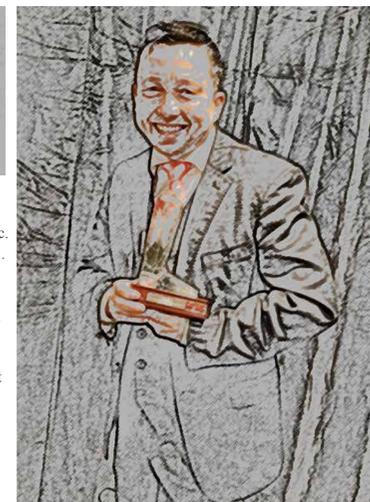


He speaks proudly of his Donkeys' life, a new father's nervousness and pride when his two babies were born, and of his dance students with eyes that glisten with happiness. His narrative evokes images of long dining tables during his work travels, where his extended dance family and his children and wife sit drinking and eating a celebratory meal. I bet you feel like a 'king' at such times, as Jessie rightly called you in one of your VTV classes.

He has particularly enjoyed his visits to America. The free and happy spirit that the people exude appeals to him. His travels and his career are peppered with funny incidents. One searches for words to mirror personal experiences especially if the comedy has to be transmitted in the way it was experienced. 'Are you with me' comes up several times when he is telling the, let's call it, funny 'used panty turns cap' tale, where his naughty friend was monkeying around in one. Of course his friend had to brush several times when he realised that though the big sized panty capped his head well, it was not the freshest. Ha ha!!!

He shares another incident where he and his colorful cowboy costume clad friends landed on the stage in the middle of a popular 'Serious,Hard, Hard Rock band'. The comical mismatched cost them embarrassment, as they ducked keys and stuff thrown at them. It turned into fun and laughter, because some of his friends in the audience recognised one of his friends. I am with you Roy.

### Are You With Me VTV DANCE NATION ROY VERDONK



Garth Brooks's live concert had started it all and created in him an 'untameable dance fever'. He and his friend Christina Bavius, who he lost early last year under sad circumstances, had started their dance career together after ingesting the magic created by beautiful Country and Pop music. He has had some huge successes with his own theatre productions with stars like Barry Stevens. He has trained twelve stardancers and more than hundred world champions in dance. To be in the Hall of Fame was an honour he cherishes. The Line dance magazine bestowed celebrity status on him. It feels good to be included amongst famous people. He says 'I'm not a rich man, but I feel very rich'. To be invited for events, from Vegas to Asia is a matter of esteem.

Amidst success came 'disaster' says Roy. His hip cartilage cushion between bones had worn out and he needed surgery. He sought a solution to this rare problem, and the doctor offered no comfort. 'The problem became psychological too' because he could not even tie his shoelaces. Surgery was the way out. He chose Belgium over Holland because they had done two thousand five hundred surgeries and Holland was relatively inexperienced with only a hundred and fifty. Resurfacing, as the procedure is called, can be done twice in a person's lifetime. His second hip was operated upon in Holland and now he has two metal hips.

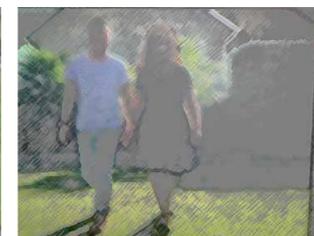
*This does not deter him from choosing tough options that set him apart from others.*



He mentions that it is important to deal with situations in a diplomatic way because egos are often at war and more often than not, pitfalls are inevitable. *'You cannot give the steering wheel away'* and temperaments have to be managed. He said this about his students and classes and I feel he steered his way through family situations with the same cognition he applies to professional and personal life. His brother from his father's first wife became a drug addict and would steal from Roy's associates, every time he visited him, and even from his own father's funeral. Mourners realised that their wallets were missing as did the Pastor. The father had died of cancer. The brother would disappear for months and Roy had to look for him in prisons and other notorious places, before they went to meet the dying father. After the funeral he disappeared into oblivion never to be found again.

With a Line dance family that has grown meaningful bonds across the world, and he feels lucky to be part of it, he cannot imagine having done anything else. He is human, and he has erred often, is 'grumpy sometimes' but this is the family he would like to meet or travel with. People have been calling him to find out how he is doing in these irregular times. In his words, 'there's drama, there's friendship', and this is his family.

*'I'M NOT A RICH MAN,BUT I FEEL VERY RICH'*



*'A day without dancing is a day without living'* is what he lives by. He and his choreographer friends have navigated social media during lockdown to live by the adage. We have experienced the application of 'Chakras' as he explains the centring of the physical through the internal. He feels that he needs transparency and 'no drama' in his life. Everyone wears a golden mask externally while the filtration happens internally, and about this he feels, much can be written. There is struggle and sadness in everyone's lives. The Line dance world endeavors to spread light, filling peoples homes and hearts with joy.

Natalina, who has been sitting and chatting with him in the bar, slips in to say 'hi' to me. Roy tells me that he treasures friendships like these where a friend meets him after twenty three years and they are as good as when they were doing their first few shows together. 'He is the best', says Natalina. An endorsement from a friend brings smiles to our faces.

LDf has helped everyone to nurture 'Faith, Hope and Love' he says. Ronnie Beard's song could not have been more apt. The 'asking' and the 'giving' are both equally challenging. They have helped him and many others around the world in these trying times, and to continue to do so with such 'high power' he says, has to be saluted. What the LDf does, brings a 'twinkle' to his eyes and his heart. His faith in humanity is restored when he sees the good work being done by them. This is why friendships that this sport brings go a long way.

He finds exhilaration in country music. Tasting cultures, sniffing diversity, teaching people and making them better in the art of dancing brings him happiness. He loves to dance for the love of it, and teach skills and technique for the twinkle it brings in students who want to perfect the art.

Once upon a Time

ARE YOU WITH ME  
by MONICA BHASIN

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