



NRITYAGRAM DANCE ENSEMBLE & CHITRASENA DANCE COMPANY

ĀHUTI

PHILADELPHIA PREMIERE

FRIDAY, **MAY 5** @ 8 PM

SATURDAY, **MAY 6** @ 2 PM

Annenberg Center, Zellerbach Theatre

There will be an intermission.

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Media support provided by *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

PENN LIVE ARTS

22/23 SEASON

PROGRAM NOTES

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR/CHOREOGRAPHER/SOUND DESIGN Surupa Sen

MUSIC COMPOSER Pandit Raghunath Panigrahi

RHYTHM COMPOSERS Dhaneswar Swain (India), Presanna Singakkara (Sri Lanka), Surupa Sen

DANCERS (NRITYAGRAM) Pavithra Reddy, Abhinaya Rohan, Anoushka Rahman, Rohini Banerjee, Daquil Miriyala

DANCERS (CHITRASENA) Thaji Dias, Amandi Gomez, Kushan Dharmarathna, Geeth Premachandra

MUSICIANS (INDIA)

LEAD VOCAL & HARMONIUM Jateen Sahu

CHANTS & MARDALA (PERCUSSION) Rohan Dahale

BAMBOO FLUTE Parshuram Das

VIOLIN Siba Nayak

MUSICIAN (SRI LANKA)

KANDYAN DRUM Koshan Mapatuna

ASSISTANT CHOREOGRAPHER Heshma Wignaraja (Chitrasena)

MASTER TAILOR Ghulam Rasool

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER/TECHNICAL DIRECTOR/LIGHTING DESIGNER Lynne Fernandez

Āhuti

{Sanskrit: Invoking | Pali: Offering}

SANKIRTANAM (a prayer)

Wandering minstrels sing and dance in praise of Lord Krishna...

The lotus-eyed lord

with the flute in his hands

and a peacock feather in his hair.

The eternal lover,

the yogi,

the last refuge.

Protector of the universe,

He is the purest of all beings.

The only truth.

DANCERS Abhinaya Rohan, Anoushka Rahman, Rohini Banerjee, Pavithra Reddy, Daquil Miriyala

POORNĀRĀTĪ

In most South Asian traditions, the arts serve as a medium to attain the highest state of being. Temple rituals integrate dance as an essential medium of worship to invoke and propitiate the powers that govern the natural order of the universe.

Poornārātī, which means complete offering, seeks to invoke the principles of the Universe, both male and female, that we may dance in their Presence.

ODISSI DANCERS Pavithra Reddy, Abhinaya Rohan, Anoushka Rahman, Rohini Banerjee

KANDYAN DANCERS Thaji Dias, Amandi Gomez, Kushan Dharmarathna, Geeth Premachandra

INTERMISSION

INVOKING SHIVA

Attributed to Ravana, Sri Lanka's great warrior king, who was a devotee of Shiva, the God of dance and destruction.

Shiva!
From the forest
of your matted locks
descends
the celestial river Ganga.

A mighty serpent
garlands you lovingly,
the glittering gem
in his magical hood
radiates brilliance,
that anoints the faces
of the four-directions
with a delicate hue.

Adorned
only by the sky,
a new-born moon jewels your locks
and your forehead smoulders
with the fire of your third eye.

Your ceaseless drum song
pervades the universe,
as you dance
your fearsome Tandava.

Perfect consort to Himalaya's daughter,
you are the ever-compassionate
destroyer of evil.

Opening your third eye
you burnt to ashes
the God of Love
The five-arrowed Kamadeva,
disrupter of your meditation.

You are the Universe.
Invincible.
Infinite.
Eternal.

On you
I meditate.

Dance
on the funeral pyres
in my heart
and release me
from this universe.

DANCERS Thaji Dias, Pavithra Reddy

ĀLĀP

The Kandyan and Odissi dance traditions meet in space, to challenge, combine and embrace each other through musical conversation and rhythmic dialogue.

DANCERS Pavithra Reddy, Rohini Banerjee, Thaji Dias, Amandi Gomez, Anoushka Rahman, Abhinaya Rohan, Daquil Miriyala, Kushan Dharmarathna, Geeth Premachandra

ABOUT THE DANCE FORMS

Kandyan Dance

Kandyan dance comes from Kandy, an area in the Central Hills region in Sri Lanka. According to legend, the origins of the dance lie in an exorcism ritual known as the Kohomba Kankariya, which was performed by shamans from India, who came to the island at the request of a king suffering from a mysterious illness. After the performance of the ritual, the illness vanished, and the local people adopted the dance.

Originally performed by dancers who were identified as a separate caste and aligned to the Temple of the Tooth, the dance declined when support from the Kandyan kings ended in the colonial period.

Kandyan dance was adapted for the stage in the 1940s by Chitrasena. His wife and dance partner, Vajira, was the first professional female Kandyan dancer, and together they established Kandyan dance as a performance art. Their popularity helped to reduce the caste barriers surrounding the dance and made it accessible to an urban, contemporary audience.

Odissi

For centuries, a temple has looked out at a turbulent sea, its walls dancing a prayer to the rising sun. Magnificent ruins like these, in Odisha in Eastern India, confirm that Odissi was performed as far back as 200 BCE. Originally a sacred ritual dedicated to the gods, Odissi is one of the oldest dance traditions in the world. Its sinuous forms, languorous limbs and rapt expressions frozen in stone tell of a past rich in dance, music, myth and legend.

Odissi speaks of love and union, between human and divine, transporting viewers to enchanted worlds of magic and spirituality. Its sensuousness and lyricism reflect both the motifs of Odisha temple sculpture as well as the poetry from the deep wellsprings of Oriya music.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Chitrasena Dance Company

Founded by Guru Chitrasena with a vision to inspire and exhilarate through the traditional dances and drums of Sri Lanka, the Chitrasena Dance Company has always been at the forefront of transforming the traditional arts landscape of the island. Chitrasena is recognized for rescuing the traditional dances that were confined to village settings and presenting them to audiences in Sri Lanka and across the world. The company was founded in 1943 and initially nurtured under the creative genius Chitrasena and later together with his wife, Vajira. They worked tirelessly for decades to carefully distill ancient rhythmic rituals by reviving and refining elements while staying firmly rooted in the old, and developed an authentic dance language.

For over seven decades, the Chitrasena Dance Company has given life to compelling performances ranging from a rich repertoire of dance and drumming pieces, to acclaimed original ballets and productions inspired by ancient rituals and contemporary culture. *Karadiya* (1961), *Nala Damayanthi* (1963), *Nrithanjali* (1965), *Kinkini Kolama* (1978), *Shiva Ranga* (1984), *Chandalika* (1996) and *Bera-Handa* (2001) are some of the company's most-renowned productions. More recently, the Chitrasena Dance Company has brought to the stage *The Art of Chitrasena* (2006), *Kumbi Kathawa* (2007), *Dancing for the Gods* (2010), *Devanjali* (2015) and *Guru Gedara Festival* (2018). The creative partnership and the first collaborative production, based on an invitation extended by Nrityagram, led to the much-acclaimed production *Samhāra* (2012).

The Chitrasena Dance Company celebrated its 75th year in 2018. The third generation is led by Heshma Wignaraja, Artistic Director, and eldest granddaughter of Chitrasena and Vajira, who continues the legacy of her grandparents. Experimenting without compromise and using traditional dance language and form to push boundaries, the company's new work offers a fresh perspective while upholding Guru Chitrasena's philosophy that "the new is but an extension of the old."

Nrityagram Dance Ensemble

Nrityagram, which means dance village, is located outside Bangalore, India. It was founded in 1990 by Odissi dancer Protima Gauri, who converted ten acres of farmland into a setting for the study, practice and teaching of dance. Nrityagram is dedicated to creating excellence in Odissi through the traditional method of learning, the Guru-Shishya Parampara, a unique and sacred relationship between mentor and disciple, referred to as mentorship in modern times. Their dance pedagogy is inspired by the Gurukula, an ancient Indian residential teaching paradigm where students and teachers live together in an integrated environment of practice, theory and discipline. Learning is a way of life, and students have a rare opportunity to imbibe the spirit of the Guru by living with them and observing them at work.

Conceived this way for almost 30 years, Nrityagram imparts not only technique in dance but nurtures a philosophy of being that embraces holistic practice, mindful living and the pursuit of excellence. The daily schedule includes a unique, scientific body-conditioning and training program that is sourced from yoga, Natyashastra, Kalaripayattu, Western fitness methods and Odissi body-conditioning exercises. This training method is designed to increase the performance lifespan of a dancer and is sought-after by accomplished dance and movement professionals from different disciplines.

With a student strength of over 200, they provide an environment that fosters artistic, intellectual and personal growth of their dancers and prepares them for successful and productive lives as artists and citizens, as well as to become leaders in their professions. The aim is to prepare dancers for careers that combine performance with teaching, community outreach and leadership. To enrich their practice, dancers are taught yoga, meditation and martial arts along with Sanskrit and ancient dance scriptures. Choreographers, musicians, writers and theatre practitioners from all over the world visit to perform and conduct workshops and seminars in their area of practice. This unique blend of traditional knowledge with contemporary understanding and application makes Nrityagram the only institution of its kind in the world and strengthens its position as a groundbreaking institution.

The Nrityagram Dance Ensemble is regarded as one of the foremost dance companies of India. Led by Artistic Director Surupa Sen, the company has achieved worldwide critical acclaim, performing across the globe, including an annual tour to the United States. The company is devoted to bringing Odissi, one of the oldest dance traditions in the world, to audiences worldwide. Performed as far back as 200 BC as a sacred ritual dedicated to the gods, Odissi speaks of love and union between human and divine, transporting viewers to enchanting worlds of magic and spirituality. Its lush lyricism reflects both the motifs of Odisha temple sculpture as well as the poetry from the deep wellsprings of Oriya music.

Although steeped in and dedicated to ancient practice, the ensemble is also committed to carrying Indian dance into the 21st century. Enabled by grants from international arts funding organizations, Nrityagram's dancers not only explore creative expansions of tradition but are also able to commission fresh compositions from leading Indian classical musicians.

Choreographed by Surupa Sen, Nrityagram has presented seven full-length ensemble shows: *Śrī: In Search of the Goddess* (2001), *Ansh* (2005), *Sacred Space* (2005), *Pratimā: Reflection* (2008), *Śriyaḥ* (2010), *Samhāra* (2012) and *Āhuti* (2019); two full-length duet shows: *Samyoga* (2012) and *Songs of Love and Longing* (2013); and two solo shows: *Yadunandana* (2017) and *Vinati: Songs from the Gita Govinda* (2021).

Surupa Sen (Artistic Director, Choreographer)

Sen was the first student to graduate from Nrityagram and is now its Artistic Director and choreographer. She began her Odissi training with the architect of Odissi, Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra. She also studied Odissi with Guru Protima Gauri and Abhinaya (expressional dance) with Guru Kalanidhi Narayanan.

For over two decades, Sen has researched and expanded the dance vocabulary of Odissi and developed an aesthetic style that distinguishes the dancers from the Nrityagram Gurukula (School). Attracted to choreography from childhood, Sen has focused on making new dances using an expanded Odissi language rooted in traditional Odissi and the Natyashastra. She has a keen interest in music and rhythm composition and has worked closely with Pt. Raghunath Panigrahi since 1999.

Sen has choreographed seven full-length ensemble shows for Nrityagram: *Śrī: In Search of the Goddess* (2000), *Ansh* (2004), *Sacred Space* (2006), *Pratimā: Reflection* (2008), *Śriyaḥ* (2010), *Samhāra* (2012) and *Āhuti* (2019); two full-length duet shows: *Samyoga* (2012) and *Songs of Love and Longing* (2013); and two full-length solo shows: *Yadunandana* (2017) and *Vinati: Songs from the Gita Govinda* (2021). She has also created two virtual shows: *Vinati*, a solo for World Music Institute's Dancing the Gods Festival, and *Upadāna: An offering* for the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival.

Sen received the Raza Foundation Award in 2006, the Yagnaraman Award from Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, Chennai in 2008, the prestigious Nritya Choodamani from Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, Chennai in 2011 and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award 2018, the highest honor for the Performing Arts in India.

Pavithra Reddy (Odissi Dancer)

Reddy belongs to a neighboring farm and started her Odissi training in Nrityagram's rural outreach program in 1990. She was the first student to graduate from Nrityagram's rural outreach program. She learned Odissi under the tutelage of Surupa Sen and has worked with dancers and movement specialists from across the globe. Reddy joined the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble in 1993 and has performed solo and with the ensemble at some of the most prestigious venues across India and the world. In addition to being a full-time performer, Reddy is also one of the primary teachers at Nrityagram.

Abhinaya Rohan (Odissi Dancer)

Rohan initially trained in Bharatnatyam before enrolling at Nrityagram to learn Odissi. She has been part of the Day Scholar program and has studied under the tutelage of Surupa Sen. Rohan has performed with the ensemble since 2018.

Anoushka Rahman (Odissi Dancer)

Rahman initially learned Odissi in Kolkata, where she also completed a postgraduate degree in Odissi Dance. She joined Nrityagram 2018 and has studied under the tutelage of Surupa Sen. This is her first international tour with Nrityagram.

Rohini Banerjee (Odissi Dancer)

Banerjee is a senior disciple of Guru Sharmila Biswas, who trained her from age 12. She has toured extensively in India and abroad as a part of her Guru's company, and recently started her journey as a soloist. Banerjee was selected to be part of Nrityagram's *Āhuti* in 2021. This is her first tour with Nrityagram.

Daquil Miriyala (Odissi Dancer)

Miriyala joined Nrityagram's Village Outreach Program in 2010 and became a residential student in 2011, where she trained in dance while continuing her academic studies. She has learned Odissi under the tutelage of Gurus Surupa Sen and Pavithra Reddy. In 2021, she was selected to be a part of the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble and included in *Āhuti*. This is her first tour with Nrityagram.

Thaji Dias (Kandyan Dancer)

Dias is the principal dancer of the Chitrasena Dance Company and the youngest granddaughter of Sri Lanka's eminent dance duo, Chitrasena and Vajira. At seven, she started learning Kandyan dance from her aunt, Guru Upeka Chitrasena, and began touring with the dance company at 12, when she received the opportunity to perform along with Upeka Chitrasena at the prestigious Theatre Du Soleil, Paris as a guest of Ariane Mnouchkine. Since then, she has performed with the Chitrasena Dance Company in Sri Lanka, India, the Far East, the United States, Europe and Australia. She also teaches at the Chitrasena Kalayathanaya School.

Kushan Dharmarathna (Kandyan Dancer)

Dharmarathna joined the Chitrasena Kalayathanaya in 2000 as a scholar in Guru Vajira's Preserve the Dance program. He has been a part of the Chitrasena Dance Company since 2002 and has performed in most of the company's productions locally and internationally. Dharmarathna holds a BFA from the University of Visual and Performing Arts, Sri Lanka and is currently doing a Master in Performing Arts at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.

Geeth Premachandra (Kandyan Dancer)

Premachandra joined the Chitrasena Dance Company in 2000 and has been with the company ever since, performing extensively in productions both locally and internationally. He has a BA from the University of Kelaniya and a Master in Performing Arts from the University of Visual and Performing Arts, Sri Lanka. He also completed diplomas in education as well as education management at the National Institute of Management, which enabled him to pursue his passion for teaching dance as a lecturer. This is his first tour with Nrityagram.

Amandi Gomez (Kandyan Dancer)

Gomez has learned Kandyan dancing at the Chitrasena Kalayathanaya since she was seven years old and has performed in numerous productions of the Chitrasena Dance Company since 2013, including a lead character in the acclaimed children's ballet, *Kumbi Kathawa*, in 2015. Gomez holds a Bachelor of Law degree from the University of London. This is her first tour with Nrityagram.

Jateen Sahu (Lead Vocal, Harmonium)

Sahu learned Odissi singing under the tutelage of Guru Ramahari Das at The Music College, Odisha. He lives in Mumbai and has worked with Nrityagram since 2008. He is also a concert singer.

Rohan Dahale (Chants, Mardala)

Dahale began his training with Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra and has continued to learn from Guru Banamali Maharana for the past 12 years. He lives in Mumbai and accompanies Odissi dancers from the region. At present, he is a percussionist at the dance village and travels and performs with the ensemble.

Parshuram Das (Bamboo Flute)

Das is a disciple of Pt. Mohini Mohan Pattnaik. He graduated from the Music College, Odisha and in addition to freelancing as a music accompanist, he teaches at Utkal University of Culture, Bhubaneswar. He has been with the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble since 2002.

Siba Nayak (Violin)

Nayak has a postgraduate degree in Hindustani Violin from the Utkal University of Culture, Bhubaneswar. He freelances as a music accompanist and has worked with the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble since 2018.

Koshan Mapatuna (Kandyan Drum)

Mapatuna has been a part of the Chitrasena Dance Company since 2019. He has performed with his drumming guru, Prasanna Rupatillaka, as a member of the Prasanna Ru Dancing Academy since 2014. Mapatuna has a Bachelor of Performing Arts degree from the University of Visual and Performing Arts, Sri Lanka and is currently a guest lecturer at the same university in the percussion and music department. This is his first tour with Nrityagram.

Heshma Wignaraja (Chitrasena Dance Company Artistic Director, Assistant Choreographer)

Wignaraja has a degree in dramatic arts in dance from UC Berkeley. The eldest granddaughter of Chitrasena and Vajira, she returned to Sri Lanka after her graduation to work in the school and company established by her illustrious grandparents. She learned Kandyan Dance at the age of six and performed and toured with the Chitrasena Dance Company from the time she was 14 years old, but her real interest is in dance making. Wignaraja has choreographed seven shows for the Chitrasena Dance Company: *Barefeet in Motion* (2003), *Art of Chitrasena* (2006), *Guru Pooja* (2008), *Dancing for the Gods* (2010), *Ridmaranga – Vajira in Perspective* (2013), *Devanjali: Ritual_Rites_Reflection* (2014) and *Parampara: from generation to generation* (2017), a dance video installation. She has also worked as Assistant Choreographer with Surupa Sen on the Kandyan dance sections of *Samhāra* (2012) and *Āhuti* (2019). Wignaraja is the Artistic Director of the Chitrasena Dance Company.

Lynne Fernandez (Lighting Designer, Technical Director, Executive Producer)

Fernandez has worked as an actress and lighting designer with many notable directors, including Barry John, Joy Michael, Ranjit Kapoor and Lillete Dubey, and was one of the first professional lighting designers in India. Her theatre work has been presented at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, in the West End and off-Broadway. She came to Nrityagram in 1993 as a production and technical consultant to the newly founded ensemble. She stayed on as Technical Director and, in 1997, was appointed Executive Director of the Nrityagram Village, School and Ensemble. As Executive Director, she is responsible for administration, fundraising and project development. Her recent projects include Kula, a residence where arts practitioners can live and create new work, and a Performing Arts Centre comprising a theatre, an exhibition space and rehearsal studios. She has also overseen the emergence of the ensemble in the international arena.