

presents

Aparna Ramaswamy's
Ananta, The Eternal

Dancers

Aparna Ramaswamy, Ranees Ramaswamy, Ashwini Ramaswamy

Musicians

Preethy Mahesh (vocal), C.K. Vasudevan (*nattuvangam*),
Sakthivel Muruganatham (*mridangam*), K.P. Nandini (violin)

Lighting Design/Lighting Supervisor/Production Manager

Mat Terwilliger

Sound Engineer

Maury Jensen

ARTIST NOTE

Our dance tradition of Bharatanatyam provides a rich and expansive lexicon that serves as our wellspring. With a history that goes back over two millennia, the form grows within and with each practitioner. Through this language, we celebrate body, mind, spirit, and ecstatic devotion.

In Sanskrit, the word *Ananta* conveys the concept of the infinite, the endless, and the limitless, expanding into infinity.

Ananta, The Eternal uplifts the eternal relationship between the deity and the devotee. The experience of beholding the image of God with one's own eyes is a central act of worship and charged with meaning—it is reciprocal and electric. The sacred is present in this auspicious moment; through the meeting of the eyes, one gains the grace of the divine.

In crafting this evening, I was moved to feature our relationship with our *guru*, Smt. Alarmel Valli, whose artistry expands into infinity. As an artist and *guru* par excellence, she has shaped our technique, elevated our thinking, imparted clarity of aesthetic, and mined the depth of *abhinaya*. As she has said many times, a true *guru* is like a banyan tree and the students are its numerous roots that drop to form individual trees. We are humbled to take root, yet always be a part of that magnificent tree. I have woven through this evening three pieces created and taught to each one of us by our *guru*.

Lastly, this evening is a love letter to my family. My mother and sister, Ranees Ramaswamy and Ashwini Ramaswamy, and I have been blessed to work in a creative partnership for decades, and we are filled with joy and humility to have the opportunity to share our infinite love for each other with you.

—Aparna Ramaswamy

THE PROGRAM

Ananta, The Eternal

Concept and Choreography by Aparna Ramaswamy
Texts selected from *Narayaneeyam*, *Srimad Bhagavatham*,
Krishna Karunamridam

Composed by Prema Ramamurthy

Performed by Aparna Ramaswamy and Ashwini Ramaswamy

The Hindu deity Mahavishnu is submerged in the waters of the primordial ocean, reclining on the body of the cosmic serpent, Anantasesha. When Anantasesha uncoils, time moves forward and creation takes place; when he coils back, the universe ceases to exist. Narayana is the creator of the corporeal world. He brought into existence the five elements, then the five senses, and finally all living beings and the natural world:

He wears the oceans on his waist, His bones form the mountains, His dancing hair the clouds, and His breathing awakens the universe. His veins are our rivers, His two eyes the sun and moon. The opening and closing of His eyelids causes the passage of day and night.

Vishnu's lotus-like feet provide divine grace and the path to *moksha*, or ultimate liberation. Your devotees worship and surrender to Your feet.

To restore cosmic balance in times of chaos, Vishnu descends to the Earth in each of his incarnations and restores equilibrium:

As Vamana, He transformed into Trivikrama, lifting His left foot and, with His big toe, tearing the sheath of the universe and releasing the River Ganga from the Heavens.

As Krishna, He is the Infinite and the Intimate. He saved the Yamuna River and its people from the snake-demon, Kaliya, dancing the snake into submission. And with His lotus feet, He dances exuberantly in blissful co-existence with humanity.

Your devotees worship and surrender to You; we all dance in ecstatic prayer—the chanting of
Your name—*om namoh narayana*.

Om Kara Karini

Choreography by Aparna Ramaswamy
Musical Composition by Dr. Balamuralikrishna
Musical Arrangement by Smt. Prema Ramamurthy, for the choreographer
Vocal percussion composition by Sakthivel Muruganatham

In India, since time immemorial, worship of Devi—the Divine Mother—has occupied a place of singular significance. Devi is the personification of cosmic energy, immanent in the physical world that surrounds us. In Her fearsome aspect, she destroys demonic forces that threaten world equilibrium. In Her gentle, radiant form, She is beneficent, whose grace bestows bliss and prosperity. She creates, annihilates, and recreates the universe.

Devi is worshiped in thousands of forms. She is one and She is many, simultaneously embodying the Intimate and the Infinite.

Vazhi Maraittirukkude

Choreographed and taught by Smt. Alarmel Valli
Composed by Gopalakrishna Bharathi
Performed by Ranees Ramaswamy

The 19th century poet Gopalakrishna Bharathi used his writing as social commentary. He was committed to illuminating the injustices of discrimination, highlighting that even God does not see caste or color.

In *Vazhi Maraittirukkude*, he writes of Nandanar, a man living in the 8th century. Forbidden from entering the temple because of his low caste, Nandanar is left outside, able only to try and catch a glimpse of the statue of Shiva through the temple gates.

After having traveled a long distance to the temple, Nandanar is devastated to find a huge stone statue of Nandi, Shiva's Bull, in front of the sanctum, blocking his view. Nandanar laments to Shiva,

*My view is blocked!
A bull like a huge mountain lies in front!*

*My low birth and sins have followed me even to this great city,
How will I attain salvation at your feet?*

*If I can only stand beside that chariot, I can catch a glimpse of you.
I promise I will never come into the temple.*

*If you only your bull moves one inch,
I can see you to my heart's content.*

*Won't your bull move a little?
Will I not see you, so my sins may be removed?*

In this poem, Nandanar represents the oppressed, Shiva the unattainable, and the bull an obstacle in his way.

Shankara Sri Giri

Choreographed and taught by Smt. Alarmel Valli
Composed by Maharaja Swathi Thirunal
Performed by Ashwini Ramaswamy

Shankara Sri Giri is an ode to Shiva Nataraja, who symbolizes the rhythms of the cosmos. His dance is the pulse of the universe, and He represents both the destruction of illusion and the creation of enlightenment. This piece embodies His many manifestations—from resplendent to austere, fearsome to benevolent—shown in contrast to the rapture and awe felt by the devotee. The dance of Shiva represents the human and the divine forever engaged in sacred movement.

Padam: Inthenthuvachithivira

Choreographed and taught by Smt. Alarmel Valli
Composed by: Kshetrappa
Performed by Aparna Ramaswamy

In this piece, a biting sarcastic woman asks her erring lover, who has returned hoping to win her back: "*What brings you here?*" she mockingly asks him. "*The woman you seek lives elsewhere.*" She asks whether he has lost his way in the bright moonlight, or whether he has lost his wits, bewitched by the seductive glances of her fish-shaped eyes. She speaks her mind, rejects his advances, and tells him to go.

Thillana

Choreographed by Aparna Ramaswamy
Composed by: Patnam Subramanya Iyer
Performed by: Aparna Ramaswamy and Ashwini Ramaswamy

Music and movement, rhythm and melody, spirit and energy are woven together in a celebration of life.

ABOUT RAGAMALA DANCE COMPANY

"Ragamala shows how Indian forms can be some of the most transcendent experiences that dance has to offer."

—The New York Times

Driven by the artistic vision of mother-daughters Ranees Ramaswamy (Founder, Artistic Director), Aparna Ramaswamy (Executive Artistic Director) and Ashwini Ramaswamy (Choreographic Associate), Ragamala Dance Company is committed to the idea that while history is time bound, the stories we share are timeless. Rooted in the South Indian dance form of Bharatanatyam, Ragamala's work is expansive – extending beyond the stage to embody their immigrant experiences and show a kindred relationship between ancient and contemporary within today's world.

Ragamala has toured extensively throughout the U.S., India, and abroad, highlighted by the Kennedy Center (Washington, D.C.), Joyce Theater (New York), Lincoln Center (New York), Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival (MA), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), American Dance Festival (Durham, NC), Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, International Festival of Arts & Ideas (New Haven, CT), Cal Performances (Berkeley), Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates), Just Festival (Edinburgh, U.K.), Bali Arts Festival (Indonesia), Sri Krishna Gana Sabha (Chennai, India), and National Centre for Performing Arts (Mumbai, India), among others.

For upcoming tour dates or to subscribe to Ragamala's e-newsletter, please visit,

www.ragamaladance.org

Or contact us at,

info@ragamaladance.org • 612-824-1968

Facebook: [@ragamala](https://www.facebook.com/ragamala) **Instagram:** [@ragamala_dance](https://www.instagram.com/ragamala_dance)

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For booking information, please contact,

Laura Colby, President, Elsie Management

www.elsiemanager.org • info@elsiemanager.org • 718-797-4577

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

Described by *The New York Times* as “*thrillingly three-dimensional... rapturous and profound*,” **APARNA RAMASWAMY (Co-Creator/Choreographer/Principal Dancer)** is a dancemaker and performer whose work reveres the artistic, philosophical, and intellectual depths of her artistic lineage, evolving ancestral and cultural knowledge in the diaspora as a catalyst for contemporary human thought. She is the life-long disciple of legendary dancer/choreographer Padmabhushan Smt. Alarmél Valli, one of India's greatest living masters.

As Executive Artistic Director of Ragamala Dance Company, Aparna has catalyzed a bold new vision for Bharatanatyam in the diaspora, charting new paths for South Asian dance in the U.S. Her work has been commissioned and presented by major festivals and cultural institutions—including the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, Joyce Theater, Harris Theater, Northrop, American Dance Festival, Silk Road Ensemble, Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi, and many others—and supported by the National Dance Project, MAP Fund, Wallace Foundation, Joyce Foundation, and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, among others. Aparna's *Fires of Varanasi: Dance of the Eternal Pilgrim* (created in collaboration with Raneer Ramaswamy) was commissioned to open the Kennedy Center's 50th Anniversary celebration with an outdoor, site-specific performance.

Aparna's choreographic work ranges from intimate solo presentations performed with live music, to large-scale, multidisciplinary theatrical works. Her honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship, Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, Bogliasco Foundation Residential Fellowship (Italy), Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center Research Fellowship (Italy), Joyce Award, four McKnight Fellowships for Dance and Choreography, and the 2022 Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award from Carleton College, among others. (www.aparnaramaswamy.net)

Hailed by *The New York Times* as “*a master of abhinaya... her careful art glimmers with the strangeness of the divine*,” **RANEE RAMASWAMY (Co-Creator/Choreographer/Principal Dancer)** is Founding Artistic Director of Ragamala Dance Company. As a dancemaker, performer, and culture bearer, Raneer's creative vision is driven by a profound commitment to the artistic lineage imparted to her through four decades of training under legendary Bharatanatyam dancer/choreographer Padmabhushan Smt. Alarmél Valli, intertwined with a pioneering spirit of innovation and collaboration across culture and discipline.

Since immigrating to the U.S. in 1978, Raneer has been a trailblazer, working tirelessly to create a place for her culturally rooted choreographic work on the major stages of the U.S. dance landscape. Her work has been commissioned and presented by the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, Joyce Theater, Northrop, Walker Art Center, American Dance Festival, International Festival of Arts & Ideas, and Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi, among many others, and supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, National Dance Project, MAP Fund, Wallace Foundation, and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. Raneer's *Fires of Varanasi: Dance of the Eternal Pilgrim* (created in collaboration with Aparna Ramaswamy) was commissioned to open the Kennedy Center's 50th Anniversary celebration with an outdoor, site-specific performance.

Raneer serves on the National Council on the Arts, appointed by President Barack Obama. Her honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship, Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, Bogliasco Foundation Fellowship (Italy), Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center Research Fellowship (Italy), United States Artists Fellowship, McKnight Distinguished Artist Award, Bush Choreography Fellowship, and 14 McKnight Fellowships for Choreography and Interdisciplinary Art, among many others. (www.raneeramaswamy.com)

ASHWINI RAMASWAMY (Choreographic Associate/Dancer) has spent over 30 years studying Bharatanatyam from her gurus - her mother Raneer Ramaswamy, sister Aparna Ramaswamy, and the legendary Smt. Alarmel Valli of Chennai, India. Her upbringing in both India and the U.S. has encouraged a hybridic aesthetic and vision, and her choreography has been heralded by *The New York Times* for “*creating space, not just for more generations but more ways of thinking*” and listed among the “Best of the Year” in *The Washington Post*. As a senior company dancer with Ragamala Dance Company, she has performed throughout the U.S. and internationally at venues including the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, American Dance Festival, Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi, and the Soorya Festival. Her choreographic work has been presented by the Cowles Center (Minneapolis, MN), Baryshnikov Arts Center (New York, NY), The Yard (Martha's Vineyard, MA), Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts (Scottsdale, AZ), BroadStage (Santa Monica, CA) and The Just Festival (Edinburgh, U.K), and received commissions from the Liquid Music Series, Great Northern Festival, Santa Monica College, and Macalester College; residencies at the Baryshnikov Arts Center, UNC Chapel Hill, Kohler Arts Center, National Center for Choreography, Bogliasco Foundation (Bogliasco, Italy) and Camargo Foundation (Cassis, France); and support from the National Dance Project, MAP Fund, USArtists International, National Performance Network, a Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship, and McKnight Foundation Artist Fellowships for Dance and Choreography, among others. (www.ashwiniramaswamy.com)

PREETHY MAHESH (Vocal) is a Carnatic musician who has been accompanying eminent dancers since 2002. She owes her art to her respected *gurus* Sri DK Jayaraman and Sri S Kalyanaraman. A graded artist of All India Radio she has performed extensively as a soloist and has recorded multiple commercially-available albums of dance music. She has performed in some of the world's best theaters with accomplished artists such as Priyadarsini Govind, Shobana, Padmabhushan Alarmél Valli, Revati Ramachandran, Parvati Ghantasala, The Dhananjayans, and Ragamala. In recognition of her contribution to the art, has been honored with the titles Gana Kokilam, Sangeetagna, and Nritya Sangeeta Varshini.

C.K. VASUDEVAN (Nattuvangam) is student of renowned Carnatic percussion maestro, Sangeetha Kalanidhi Dr. Umayalpuram Sivaraman, and has been trained by Padma Bhushan Smt. Alarmél Valli in the art of *nattuvangam*. Mr. Vasudevan has provided vocal support to several renowned dancers at the major festivals and theaters of India, and in Europe, the U.S., Canada, Japan, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. He has a diploma in *mridangam* from the Tamil Nadu Government Music College, and is a recipient of multiple honors, including the Vaadhya Kalaimani, Laya Kala Sironmani, and Rukmani Thala Samuthiram awards and the title Laya Vidyadara.

S. SAKTHIVEL MURUGANANTHAM (Mridangam) has been a preeminent performer on the *mridangam*, specializing in the accompaniment of classical dance, for 34 years. He learned traditional Gurukulavasam under the great Guru Shri Mayavaram G. Somasundaram Pillai and later under Guru Shri Bakthavatchalam, and Guru Shri M. Balachander. Mr. Sakthivel has accompanied preeminent dancers at leading festivals and theaters in India and worldwide, including Dr. Vyayanthimala Bali, Padmabhushan Alarmél Valli, Shri Leela Samson, and Priyadarshini Govind, and great *gurus* such as Shri K.J. Sarasa, Shri Udupi Lakshmi Narayan, and Shri Narasimhachari. His titles include Laya Vidhyadhara from Smt. Alarmel Valli's Deepashika, Natya Sangeetha Kala Bharathi from Bharath Kalachar, Laya Kala Vipanchee from Vipanchee Trust, Laya Kala Ratna, Laya Sironmani, and Mridanga Mamani.

K.P. NANDINI (Violin) is internationally renowned as a Carnatic vocalist and violinist. She is a disciple of Smt. Uma Prabhakar, and pursuing advanced training in vocal under Smt. Ranjani and Smt. Gayatri and in violin under Smt. Lalitha Raghavan. She has toured extensively throughout India, Europe, Asia, and North America, highlighted by performances in Norway, Italy, Germany, Belgium, France, Spain, Canada, U.S., Singapore, and Malaysia. Ms. Nandini has received multiple prestigious awards and accolades, including the Yuva Kala Bharathi from Bharat Kalachar, the M.S. Subbulakshmi Fellowship in Music from the Bombay Shanmukhananda, the prestigious Kalavanta award from the Karnataka Fine Arts Council, and the titles Bala Kala Rathna, Kalaimamani, and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, among others.

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