

**Aparna Ramaswamy's
Ananta, The Eternal**

**Saturday
Oct 25
7:30 p.m.
Main Stage**



Photo by Kyle Flubacker

*This performance runs 75 minutes,
without an intermission.*

**Aparna Ramaswamy's
Ananta, The Eternal**

Ragamala Dance Company

presents

Aparna Ramaswamy's

Ananta, The Eternal

Dancers

Aparna Ramaswamy, Raneer Ramaswamy, Ashwini Ramaswamy

Musicians

Vasudha Ravi (vocals), S. Sakthivel Muruganantham (*mridangam*),
C.K. Vasudevan (*nattuvangam*: vocal percussion and cymbals), K.P. Nandini (violin)

Voiceover

Raneer Ramaswamy

Lighting Design

Willy Cessa

Associate Lighting Designer

Garvin Jellison

Audio Engineer

Zack Rose

Production Stage Manager/Company Manager

Garvin Jellison

Commissioner

The Asia Society Texas

Developed in Part in Residence at

The O'Shaughnessy at St. Catherine University

Exclusive Representation by

Laura Colby, President, Elsie Management
Anna Amadei, Vice President, Elsie Management

ANANTA, THE ETERNAL

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.

This evening explores the eternal relationship between deity and devotee. The experience of beholding the image of a deity with one's own eyes is a central act of worship. Charged with meaning, it is reciprocal and electric. Through the meeting of the eyes, one gains the grace of the divine. The sacred is present in this auspicious moment.

ARTIST NOTE

Our lineage of Bharatanatyam, pioneered by our guru, the legendary Padma Bushan Smt. Alarmél Valli, sees dance, music, and poetry as one dynamic, interconnected language that is a profound means of self-expression. A saturation of these elements creates a shared experience of ecstatic joy for both the audience and the artist.

In crafting this evening, I feature our relationship with Alarmél Valli, whose artistry expands into infinity. As an artist and teacher par excellence, she has shaped our technique, elevated our thinking, imparted clarity of aesthetic, and mined the depth of abhinaya. In her words, 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 pieces created and taught to us by our guru.

Lastly, this evening is a love letter to my family. My mother and sister, Ranee Ramaswamy and Ashwini Ramaswamy, and I have been fortunate to work in a creative partnership for decades, and we share this evening with you with joy and love.

—Aparna Ramaswamy

THE PROGRAM

Songs of Praise: Expanding into Infinity

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 the moon. The opening and closing of His eyelids, day and night. Vishnu's lotus-like feet provide divine grace and the path to *moksha*, or ultimate liberation.

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

Songs of Grace: Invoking the Goddess

Choreography and performance by Aparna Ramaswamy

Om Kara Karini, a composition by Dr. Balamuralikrishna

Musical Arrangement by Smt. Prema Ramamurthy, for the choreographer

Vocal percussion composition by Sakthivel Muruganantham

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.

Songs of the Cosmos: Dancing the Universe into Existence

Choreographed and taught by Smt. Alarmel Valli
Shankara Sri Giri, a composition of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal
Performed by Ashwini Ramaswamy

Shiva Nataraja symbolizes the rhythms of the cosmos—His dance is the pulse of the universe. Shiva represents both the destruction of illusion and the creation of enlightenment. His many manifestations—from resplendent to austere, fearsome to benevolent—are felt by the devotee. The dance of Shiva represents the human and the divine forever engaged in sacred movement.

Songs of Longing and Liberation: Yearning for the Sacred

Choreographed and taught by Smt. Alarmél Valli
Vazhi Maraittirukkude, a composition of Gopalakrishna Bharathi
Performed by Raneer Ramaswamy

The tale of Nandanar and the bull is a meditation on the human longing for spiritual connection, the transformative power of faith to transcend both internal and external obstacles, and the enduring resistance against social exclusion.

This story unfolds as a powerful narrative of personal liberation—an individual's unwavering spirit challenging deep-rooted systems of discrimination through devotion.

The 19th-century poet Gopalakrishna Bharati used his work as a vehicle for social commentary, boldly shedding light on the injustices of caste-based discrimination. In this poem, he explores themes of marginalization, physical and societal barriers, divine intervention, and the ultimate possibility of spiritual union.

Songs of Rapture: Embodying Bliss

Choreographed by Aparna Ramaswamy
Thillana (Ragam Kamas), a composition of 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

Aparna, Ranee, and Ashwini Ramaswamy's artistry captures the depth of South Indian embodied ritual and underscores its resonance in the diaspora. Ragamala Dance Company advances the vision of the Ramaswamy family and stands as the nation's premier Bharatanatyam company, lauded for their evolution of a classical dance tradition into an introspective yet universal experience for today's world.

Founded by Ranee Ramaswamy in 1992, joined in artistic leadership by Aparna Ramaswamy in 2000 and by Ashwini Ramaswamy in 2017, the Ramaswamys form a visionary artistic matriarchy that is rooted in their Bharatanatyam lineage while pushing its boundaries. The Ramaswamys' choreographic work ranges from intimate presentations performed with live music, to large-scale, multidisciplinary theatrical works.

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), Korzo Festival (The Hague, Netherlands), Assembly @Dance Base (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)

YouTube: youtube.com/c/RagamalaDanceCompany

For booking information, please contact, Laura Colby, President, Elsie Management
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ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

Described by The New York Times as “*thrillingly three-dimensional... rapturous and profound*,”

APARNA RAMASWAMY 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 supported by the National Dance Project, MAP Fund, Wallace Foundation, Joyce Foundation, and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, among others. Her honors include a Creative Capital Award, 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 a Bush Choreography Fellowship, among others.

Hailed by *The New York Times* as “*a master of abhinaya... her careful art glimmers with the strangeness of the divine*,” **RANEE RAMASWAMY** is Founder and Co-Artistic Director of Ragamala Dance Company. Since immigrating to the U.S. in 1978, Ranee has been a trailblazer, working tirelessly to create a place for her culturally-rooted choreographic work on major stages throughout the US. Ranee’s decades of training under iconic dancer/choreographer Alarmel Valli is the bedrock of her creative aesthetic.

Ranee’s contributions to the field have been recognized by her appointment to the National Council on the Arts by President Barack Obama in 2011, on which she currently serves.

Ranee’s honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship, Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, Creative Capital Award, Bogliasco Foundation Fellowship, Rockefeller Foundation, Bellagio Center Research Fellowship, US Artist Fellowship, McKnight Fellowships in Choreography and Interdisciplinary Arts, and the McKnight Distinguished Artist Award, a Bush Choreography Fellowship, among others. Her choreographic work has been commissioned and presented by The Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Joyce Theater, Northrop, Walker Art Center, American Dance Festival, and NYU Abu Dhabi, among many others.

ASHWINI RAMASWAMY is Choreographic Associate and a Principal Dancer of Ragamala Dance Company, studying Bharatanatyam from award-winning artists Ranees Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy (her mother and sister), and the legendary Padma Bhushan Smt. Alarmél Valli of Chennai, India. Ashwini is committed to maintaining the rigor, physicality, humanity, and authenticity embedded in her Bharatanatyam lineage while forming a personal vision for collaborative, multidisciplinary performance experiences.

Her work was a Critic's Pick in the *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*, *Boston Globe*, and *Star Tribune*.

Ashwini has toured extensively to major venues throughout the U.S. and internationally both as a performer and a choreographer. She has received commissions from the Liquid Music Series, Great Northern Festival, Northrop, PACNYC, and Bates Dance Festival, among others. Residency highlights include Baryshnikov Arts Center, National Center for Choreography, Bogliasco Foundation (Italy) and Camargo Foundation (France); grants and awards include the National Dance Project, MAP Fund, USArtists International, a Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship, McKnight Foundation Fellowships for Dance and Choreography, and a Creative Capital Award.

WILLY CESSA (Lighting Design) has worked as a director, light director, and light and set designer since 2001. In 2007, he met Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui in Paris for the project La Zon-Mai at the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration. Since that time, they have collaborated on 13 projects for Cherkaoui's Antwerp-based company Eastman. Additionally, he has worked with multiple renowned artists and institutions, including Yabin Wang, Aakash Odedra, Wang & Ramirez, Damien Jalet, Fanny de Chaillé, Herman Diephuis, Esther Aumatell, Le Centre Dramatique Régional des Pays de la Loire, Cie Les Aphoristes, Cie KLP, Danse l'Afrique Danse!, and Franck Il Louise.

VASUDHA RAVI (Vocals) is a distinguished Carnatic singer and "A Grade" artiste of All India Radio, Chennai, acclaimed for her evocative artistry across India and abroad. She was felicitated by the Indian Finance Minister Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman during the Ayodhya Sri Rama consecration ceremony at Kanchipuram Kamakshi Temple, and honored by the Indian President Sri.Pranab Mukherjee for a collaborative performance with ace dancer Ms.Priyadarshini Govind. She has also collaborated with Padma Bhushan Alarmel Valli and Padmasri Malavika Sarukkai, blending tradition with innovation in every performance. Her musical journey includes productions with Maestro Ilayaraja, Sri Rajkumar Bharathi, and work at Maestro A.R. Rahman Studios. A globetrotter, Vasudha has performed at Musica Sacra (Germany), Les Sacrées Journées (France), and performed Carnatic Music with the Bavarian Youth Jazz Band, Germany.

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.

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.

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.

ZACK ROSE (Audio Engineer) is a sound engineer and audio professional, working primarily in public radio and podcasts for over 20 years. He has supported Ragamala recordings, events, and projects frequently since 2011.

GARVIN JELLISON (Associate Lighting Designer/Production Stage Manager) is a freelance lighting designer, stage manager, and production manager. Graduating from The Theatre School at DePaul University, he started his career in Chicago, working with Joffrey Ballet, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, and other local companies from storefront theaters to Chicago Shakespeare Theater. Garvin spent time on the road with William Shatner, Anthony Bourdain, Bill Nye, and stage-managed other personalities on tour while working for Innovation Arts & Entertainment in Chicago. Other long-term touring work included Production Management for *Wild Kratts Live!* and serving as Production Manager for Trinity Irish Dance Company. He was the Head Electrician at The Cowles Center for Dance and Performing Arts from 2020 until the venue closed in 2024, and is a proud member of IATSE Local 13. Garvin is part of Ragamala's staff as Company Manager.

Ananta, The Eternal was created with special commissioning funds from The Mayer Family, commissioning support from Asia Society Texas, a production residency at The O'Shaughnessy at St. Catherine University, and a grant from the Fredrikson & Byron Foundation. Ragamala's performance at BroadStage is supported in part by Payal Kadakia Pujji & Nick Pujji, Brett Egan, and David McKay & Raneer Ramaswamy.

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