

A photograph of three dancers in traditional Indian attire performing Ragamala Dance. They are seated on a dark stage against a dark blue background with a faint, stylized floral pattern. The dancer in the foreground is wearing a white and black sari with gold jewelry and has her hands in a prayer position. The other two dancers are behind her, one in a red and gold sari and the other in a red and gold sari, both looking towards the left.

UMS PRESENTS

SACRED EARTH

Created and Performed by
Ragamala Dance

Ranee and Aparna Ramaswamy
Co-Artistic Directors

Wednesday Evening, April 24, 2013 at 7:30
Power Center • Ann Arbor

65th Performance of the 134th Annual Season
22nd Annual Dance Series

Photo: Ragamala Dance, *Sacred Earth*; photographer: Hub Wilson.

Concept and Choreography
Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna
Ramaswamy

Original Artwork
Anil Chaitya Vangad (Warli)
Ranee Ramaswamy (Kolam)

Original Compositions
Prema Ramamurthy

Development of Score
Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna
Ramaswamy
with Lalit Subramanian, Anjna
Swaminathan, Rajna Swaminathan

Dancers
Aparna Ramaswamy*
Ranee Ramaswamy*
Ashwini Ramaswamy*
Tamara Nadel*
Amanda Dlouhy
Jessica Fiala

*soloist

Orchestra
Lalit Subramanian, Vocals
Suchitra Sairam, Nattuvangam
Rajna Swaminathan, Mridangam
Anjna Swaminathan, Violin

Light Design
Jeff Bartlett

Technical Director
David Riisager

Video Projection Design
Perimeter Productions (Robert C.
Hammel, Michele Blanchard,
Caitlin Hammel)

Photography
Ed Bock



Following this evening's performance, please feel free to remain in your seats and join us for a post-performance Q&A with members of the company.

Tonight's performance is funded in part by the Arts Midwest Touring Fund, a program of Arts Midwest, which is generously supported by the National Endowment for the Arts with additional contributions from Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs.

Media partnership is provided by *Between the Lines* and *Metro Times*.

UMS would like to thank Clare Croft, Grace Lehman, and the Ann Arbor Y, and the U-M Museum of Art for their support of and participation in events surrounding Ragamala Dance.

NOTES ON TONIGHT'S PROGRAM

Sacred Earth explores the interconnectedness between human emotions and the environment that shapes them. Inspired by the philosophies behind the ephemeral arts of *kolam* and Warli painting and the Tamil Sangam literature of India, *Sacred Earth* brings both internal and external landscapes to life.

Each morning, women in southeastern India perform the silent ritual of *kolam*, making rice flour designs on the ground as conscious offerings to Mother Earth. This daily ritual creates a sacred space and becomes a link between the intimate home and the vastness of the outside world. The indigenous Warli people of western India revere the land and live in perfect coexistence with nature. Using their everyday lives as inspiration, their dynamic wall paintings find the spiritual in the everyday. For the Tamil Sangam poets of South India, the Earth was sacred. Recognizing that human activities are interwoven with all of creation, they drew parallels between inner and outer landscape and used the natural world as a metaphor to examine the intricacies of human emotion.

As *Sacred Earth* builds from silent, meditative beginnings, the performers create a sacred space to honor the divinity in the natural world and the sustenance we derive from it. We surrender to the beauty of this sacred earth that has been given to us to safeguard, cherish, and pass on to our future generations.

THE POETRY OF SACRED EARTH

The Tamil Sangam poets (300 BCE – 300 CE) saw divinity in the physical world, which they divided into five *tinai*s (landscapes): *kurinji* (mountainous region), *mullai* (forest), *neythal* (seaside), *marutham* (farmland), and *paalai* (desert). Recognizing that human activities are interwoven with all of creation, they drew parallels between inner landscape and outer landscape and used the natural world as a metaphor to examine the intricacies of human emotion. The *tinai*s thus become more than geographical realms. Each region's particular qualities – flora and fauna, climate and seasons, music and culture, people and daily life – are interwoven with the area's emotional tones to create a distinct portrait of mood and setting. Characters in Sangam poetry are never named, rather they represent ideals – paradigms of the human condition.

Agalakillen:

(An invocation from the 8th-century poet Nammalvar in praise of the divinity of the natural world)

Soloist: Raneeramaswamy

As the moon wears his shadow is Vishnu
to his love.

Washed by the rising waves,
Vishnu lifted up and married the Earth
goddess.
Now not a spot of earth is ever troubled
by the sea.

Praise to you, Bhudevi, sacred earth, who
dwells in the oceans,
Adorned in beauty by the mountains.
It is with reverence that I set my foot
upon you.

Excerpts from the Paripattal:

Soloist: Aparna Ramaswamy

Endure forever, O beauteous Land!
May the Clouds never fail but ever pour
In plenty, so that the River great
May never be dry but ever full.

Kurinji:

Soloist: Aparna Ramaswamy

Bigger than the earth, certainly,
Higher than the sky.
More unfathomable than the waters
Is this love for this man
Of the mountain slopes

Where bees make rich honey
From the flowers of the *kurinji*
That has such black stalks

– Tevakulattar, *Kurunthokai* 3

Mullai:

Soloist: Raneeramaswamy

On his hills
The *mullai* creeper that usually sprawls
On large round stones
Sometimes takes to a sleeping elephant
At parting,
His arms twine with mine
He gave me inviolable guarantees
That he would live in my heart
Without parting
Friend, why do you think
That is any reason for grieving?

– Parananar, *Kurunthokai* 36

Neythal:

Soloist: Aparna Ramaswamy

I am here:
My loveliness
Eaten away by pallor
Is lost in the woods by the sea.
My lover is comfortable in his hometown.
All the guarded secrets of our love
Are all over the village square

– Venputhi, *Kurunthokai* 97

Marutham:*Soloist: Tamara Nadel*

There was a time when
 My friend gave you
 Bitter neem fruit and
 You called it
 Sweet lump of sugar.
 But now she gives you
 Sweet water
 From the ice-cool springs
 Of Pari's Parambu hill
 Cooler in this month of *Thai*
 And you call it hot and brackish.
 Is this the way
 Your love has gone?

– Milai Kanthan, *Kurunthokai 196***Kurinji:***Soloist: Ashwini Ramaswamy*

What could my mother be
 To yours? What kin is my father

To yours anyway? And how
 Did you and I meet ever?
 But in love our hearts are as red
 Earth and pouring rain:
 Mingled
 Beyond Parting

– Cempulappeyanirar, *Kurunthokai 40***"Prithvi Suktam" (Hymn to the Earth), from the Adharva Veda:***Soloists: Rane and Aparna Ramaswamy*

May this Earth, whose
 surface undulates with
 many gradients, and
 sustains an abundant
 variety of herbs and plants
 of different potencies and
 qualities, support all human
 beings, in all their diversity
 of endowment, in mutually
 supportive harmony and
 prosperity

ARTISTS

Aclaimed as one of the Indian
 Diaspora's leading dance ensembles,
RAGAMALA DANCE
 seamlessly carries the South Indian classical
 dance form of Bharatanatyam into the 21st
 century. Artistic directors/choreographers
 Rane and Aparna Ramaswamy – mother and
 daughter – are protégés of legendary dancer
 and choreographer Alarmel Valli, known as
 one of India's greatest living masters. Rane
 and Aparna retain roots in the philosophy,
 spirituality, mysticism, and myth of their
 South Indian heritage, while using their art
 form as a rich language through which to
 speak with their own voices as contemporary
 American choreographers. They see the
 classical form as a dynamic, living tradition
 with vast potential to move beyond the
 personal and spark a global conversation.

Now in its 21st season, Ragamala's
 work has been supported by the National
 Endowment for the Arts, National Dance
 Project, MAP Fund, Japan Foundation,
 USArtists International, and a Joyce Award
 from the Joyce Foundation/Chicago, and has
 been commissioned by the Walker Art Center

in Minneapolis and the American Composers
 Forum. Ragamala has been selected as an
 empaneled artist by the Indian Council on
 Cultural Relations, the cultural diplomacy
 arm of the Government of India.

Ragamala has toured extensively, both
 nationally and internationally. The company's
 2011 performance at the Kennedy Center in
 Washington, DC was hailed by *The New York
 Times* as, "movingly meditative... [Ragamala]
 showed how Indian forms can provide some
 of the most transcendent experiences
 that dance has to offer. This is an excellent
 company." Additional highlights include the
 American Dance Festival (Durham, NC), New
 Victory Theater (New York, NY), Music Center
 of Los Angeles County (CA), Lied Center
 (Lawrence, KS), Phillips Center (Gainesville,
 FL), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis, MN),
 Bali Arts Festival (Bali, Indonesia), Open
 Look Dance Festival (St. Petersburg, Russia),
 Festival of Spirituality and Peace (Edinburgh,
 UK), and National Centre for Performing Arts
 (Mumbai, India). In March of 2013, Ragamala
 premiered its newest work, *1,001 Buddhas:
 Journey of the Gods*, at the Cowles Center for
 Dance in Minneapolis.

Ragamala's 2013-14 season will
 be highlighted by *Song of the Jasmine*, a

new work conceived and choreographed by Aparna Ramaswamy and created in collaboration with jazz saxophonist/composer Rudresh Mahanthappa. *Song of the Jasmine* is commissioned by the Walker Art Center (Minneapolis) and co-commissioned by the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center (University of Maryland). This new work will premiere at the Walker in May of 2014, followed by a national tour in 2014-15.

Please visit www.ragamala.net for further information about Ragamala.

UMS welcomes Ragamala Dance who makes their UMS debut this evening.

RANEE AND APARNA RAMASWAMY (artistic directors/choreographers/principal dancers) are disciples of legendary Bharatanatyam dancer and choreographer Alarmél Valli, known as one of India's greatest living masters. Raneer and Aparna's work has been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, National Dance Project, Japan Foundation, USArtists International, and a Joyce Award from the Joyce Foundation/Chicago, has been commissioned by the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the American Composers Forum; and has toured extensively, highlighted by the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, American Dance Festival in Durham, NC, Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland, and National Centre for Performing Arts in Mumbai, India. In 2011, they were jointly named "Artist of the Year" by the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*.

Raneer has been a master teacher and performer of Bharatanatyam in the US since 1978. Since her first cross-cultural collaboration with poet Robert Bly in 1991, followed by her founding of Ragamala in 1992, she has been a pioneer in the establishment of non-Western dance traditions in Minneapolis and in pushing the boundaries of Indian classical dance on the global scene. Among her many awards are 14 McKnight Artist Fellowships for Choreography and Interdisciplinary Art, a Bush Fellowship for Choreography, an Artist Exploration Fund grant from Arts International, two Cultural Exchange Fund grants from the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, and the 2011 McKnight Foundation "Distinguished Artist" Award. Most recently, Raneer was the

recipient of a 2012 United States Artists Fellowship, and was nominated by President Barack Obama to serve on the National Council on the Arts.

Aparna's choreography and performance have been described as "a marvel of buoyant agility and sculptural clarity" (*Dance Magazine*), "thrillingly three-dimensional," and "an enchantingly beautiful dancer," (*The New York Times*). Among her many honors are three McKnight Fellowships in Dance and Choreography, a Bush Fellowship for Choreography, an Arts and Religion grant funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, two Jerome Foundation Travel Study Grants, an Artist Exploration Fund grant from Arts International, and two USArtists International grants from the MidAtlantic Arts Foundation. In 2010, Aparna was the first Bharatanatyam dancer/choreographer to be named one of *Dance Magazine's* "25 to Watch." She is an empaneled artist with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and her solo work *Sannidhi* is currently receiving touring support from the National Dance Project. Most recently, she performed a critically acclaimed solo concert at the Music Academy in Chennai – one of India's most prestigious dance venues. Aparna serves on the Board of Trustees of Dance USA, and has a BA in International Relations from Carleton College.

ANIL CHAITYA VANGAD (visual artist) is a traditional painter of the *adivasi* (indigenous) Warli craft, which has been in his family for three generations. Since 1991, his work has been exhibited at prominent festivals, museums and arts centers throughout India, highlighted by the Mumbai Festival (Mumbai), Government Craft Museum (New Delhi), Sarojini Naidu Hall (Hyderabad), Swobhumi Craft Mela (Calcutta), Shivaji Nagar Hall (Pune), Gandhi Shilp Bazar (Mysore), Neerja Modi Visual and Performing Art Center (Jaipur), Gramotsav, (New Delhi), and Mahalaxmi Saras (Mumbai). His many commissions include murals at the Bank of Muskat (Banglore), and the home of the Chairman of the Bhoruka Corporation (Bangalore), and he has led workshops at the International School of Bangalore and the National Traditional and Folk Artist Camp in Jaipur. He resides in the village of Ganjad in Maharashtra, India. addiwashi.blogspot.com

SMT. PREMA RAMAMURTHY

(composer) has been an outstanding vocalist and composer for more than four decades. She hails from a family of musicians from Bellary, India, and was initiated into music by her parents, Late Sri S. Nagaraja Iyer and Smt. Jayalakshmi, and her grandfather, Sri S. Srinivasa Iyer, the then Zamindar of Bellary. Prema has had further intensive training under the great Maestro “Padmavibhushan” Dr. Mangalampalli Balamurali Krishna. She has also specialized in the art of “Pallavi singing” from Vidwan Sri T. V. Gopalakrishnan, and has learned the art of singing “Padams & Javalis” from the veteran musician, Mrs. T. Muktha. One of the most sought-after artists of South India, Prema is an A-TOP Grade Artist of All India Radio and Doodarshan TV. She has won critical acclaim as a composer, and has performed in many of the top venues and festivals of India, the US, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Australia, Mexico, and South Africa.

AMANDA DLOUHY (dancer)

has studied Bharatanatyam under Ranee and Aparna Ramaswamy since 2004. She has toured extensively with Ragamala since 2005 – performing throughout the US and in India, Indonesia, and the UK – and teaches in the Ragamala School. She has a BA in history from the University of Minnesota and currently works as program assistant at Nonprofits Assistance Fund in Minneapolis. Amanda is a recipient of a 2011 McKnight Artist Fellowship for Dancers.

JESSICA FIALA (dancer)

began training with Ragamala in 2006 and has toured with the company throughout the US and to India and the UK. In recent years, she has also performed locally with Kaleena Miller and Vanessa Voskuil. Jessica completed a master of liberal studies focused in museum studies through University of Minnesota in 2008. She is a tour guide and blogger for the Walker Art Center and most recently presented research at the MeLa conference “The Postcolonial Museum” in Naples, Italy. Outside Ragamala, Jessica works for the Caux Round Table and Lutman & Associates.

A disciple of Ranee and Aparna Ramaswamy, **TAMARA NADEL** (dancer) has been performing with Ragamala since 1994, touring extensively with the company throughout the US and in Russia, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, India, and the UK. Tamara is the recipient of a McKnight Artist Fellowship for Dancers, Metropolitan Regional Arts Council Next Step Fund grant, Minnesota State Arts Board Career Opportunity Grant, and Jerome Foundation Travel Study Grant. She has been studying Carnatic music under Lalit Subramanian since 2011. Tamara served on the City of Minneapolis Arts Commission from 2008–10. She is Ragamala’s development and outreach director, and holds a degree in religious studies and dance from Macalester College.

ASHWINI RAMASWAMY (dancer)

has studied Bharatanatyam with Ragamala’s artistic directors Ranee and Aparna Ramaswamy – her mother and sister – since the age of five. She has toured extensively with Ragamala, performing throughout the US and in Russia, Taiwan, Indonesia, Japan, the UK, and India. Ashwini is a 2012 McKnight Artist Fellow for Dance, and the recipient of two Minnesota State Arts Board Artist Initiative Grants for Dance. She was recently accepted for one-on-one study with Bharatanatyam legend Alarmel Valli, one of the greatest living masters of the form. Ashwini is Ragamala’s director of publicity & marketing and holds a degree in English literature from Carleton College. She currently sits on the board of Arts Midwest.

LALIT SUBRAMANIAN (vocalist)

has been trained by renowned musicians such as Tiruvarur Sri S. Girish (grandson of the legendary Sangeetha Kalanidhi Smt. T. Brinda and torchbearer of the prestigious Veena Dhanammal style of Carnatic music), Neyveli Sri R. Santhanagopalan, Smt. Rajalakshmi Pichumani, Pandit Shekhar Kumbhojkar (disciple of Hindustani music stalwart Padmashree Pandit Jitendra Abhisheki of the Agra-Jaipur Gharana), Pandit Anand Godse (tabla exponent), and Ustad Anwar Qureshi (ghazal exponent). Lalit has won many awards and performs at various venues in the US and India, both as a solo vocalist and as an accompanist for dance performances. He has been a junior artiste at All India Radio as

a Hindustani vocalist, and holds a graduate degree in Carnatic music from India. Lalit has been working with Ragamala since 2008.

SUCHITRA SAIRAM (*nattuvangam*) is a highly committed artist in the Kalakshetra style of Bharatanatyam with over 25 years in the field, and was principally trained by Smt. Padmini Chari. Suchitra has pursued advanced training under the renowned artists Sri M.V. Narasimhachari and Smt. M. Vasanthalakshmi, and The Dhananjayans of Chennai, India for over 20 years. All of these artists have been great guides and inspirations to her as an artist, teacher, and arts presenter. In addition to her many performances as a soloist and in group works, Suchitra teaches a small group of committed students in St. Paul, MN, and is a nattuvangam artist. Suchitra holds a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from MIT, and an MBA from the University of Texas at Dallas.

RAJNA SWAMINATHAN (*mridangam*) is an accomplished artist in the field of South Indian classical percussion – *mridangam*. She is a disciple and protégé of *mridangam* maestro Umayalpuram K. Sivaraman, and has accompanied many renowned musicians widely in the US, Canada, and India. Rajna works with several dancers and performs lecture demonstrations and workshops at universities and prominent percussion events. Rajna has a base in classical piano and has also learned Bharatanatyam (South Indian classical dance) for some years. Rajna recently graduated from the University of Maryland (College Park) with a degree in cultural anthropology, and will be completing a French degree in May. She is active as a composer and frequently collaborates on crossover projects with artists in the creative jazz scene and other contemporary genres.

ANJNA SWAMINATHAN (*violin*) is a budding artist in the field of South Indian Carnatic Violin. A disciple of the late violin maestro Parur Sri M.S. Gopalakrishnan and Mysore Sri H.K. Narasimhamurthy, Anjna has been trained in both Carnatic classical and Western classical styles of violin. She has worked with many professional dance companies, as a musician and composer, most notably, Ragamala Dance (Minneapolis), with whom she has been performing for the

past three years, The Spilling Ink Project (Washington, DC), and Dakshina/Daniel Phoenix Singh Dance Company (Washington, DC). She is currently an undergraduate student of performance studies at the University of Maryland in College Park.

JEFF BARTLETT (*lighting design*) has been honored to light Ragamala Dance since *A Canticle of Mary* in 1994. He lit the first performances of *Sacred Earth* at the Cowles Center in Minneapolis in 2011; other signature works for the company include *1,001 Buddhas: Journey of the Gods*, *Yathra/Journey*, *The Transposed Heads*, *Body and Soul*, *Bhakti*, *Sthree*, and *Ihrah*. A dance lighting specialist based in Minneapolis, Jeff has lit scores of artists in hundreds of productions over more than two decades. His design work has been recognized with 2010 and 2005 Sage Awards for Dance; a 2008 "Artist of the Year" listing in *City Pages*; and a 2003 McKnight Theater Artist Fellowship. Jeff is production manager at the Weitz Center for Creativity at Carleton College.

ED BOCK (*photographer*), a photographer and artist, has been creating promotional images for Ragamala Dance since 1991. For over 35 years Ed has done commercial assignment image work for many top corporations based in Minneapolis and around the country. More recently he has been exploring painting and mixed media art. www.edbockeditions.com

PERIMETER PRODUCTIONS (Robert C. Hammel, Michele Blanchard, and Caitlin Hammel – *video projection design*) is a design/film production collective committed to finding new ways to make art available and accessible to a broader audience through developing arts programming on video, working with artists to help them discover new ways of reaching their audience, telling stories of individual artists, or documenting how the arts can change lives. Recent films include *Solo: 1x2*, a feature-length dance documentary, *Dhvee: a Bridge Between Cultures*, and *The Path is Hidden*, both featuring Raneer Ramaswamy and Ragamala, *Out of the Shadows*, a film about Interact Center and *Daisy's Dilemma*, a ScreenDance film. Perimeter worked on the video projection design for Flying Foot Forum's

Heaven at the Guthrie and are in production on several projects with Carl Flink's Black Label Movement. A documentary on *Sacred Earth* is in preproduction.

DAVID RIISAGER (*technical director*) began working with Ragamala in 2000, and has been the company's touring Technical Director and Light Designer since 2004. He has designed Ragamala's *Sethu* (Bridge) and *Dhvee* (Duality) at the Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), as well as several touring productions. David is also a freelance light designer and currently works with many small theaters in the Minneapolis area. David works for The Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis as electrician, follow spot operator, tour master electrician, and assistant lighting designer. Previously, he spent four years as production manager at The Southern Theater in Minneapolis.

The creation and 2011-12 US tour of *Sacred Earth* were made possible in part with funds provided by the National Dance Project of the New England Foundation for the Arts (with lead funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and additional funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Community Connections Fund of the MetLife Foundation, and the Boeing Company Charitable Trust).

Additional funding for *Sacred Earth* was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, The American Composers Forum's Live Music for Dance Minnesota program (in partnership with the American Music Center, with funds provided by the McKnight Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation), and generous support from members of Ragamala's Rasika Circle.

Additional support for Ragamala's work is provided by the Japan Foundation, the MidAtlantic Arts Foundation through USArtists International, the McKnight Foundation, Target, the General Mills Foundation, the RBC Foundation - USA, the Fredrikson & Byron Foundation, Bombay Bistro, the Minnesota State Arts Board, the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund (as appropriated by the Minnesota State Legislature with money from the Legacy Amendment vote of the people of Minnesota on November 4, 2008), and generous donors to Ragamala's Board of Directors Institutional Growth Fund.