Ragamala Dance Company

*Written in Water*

Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy, Artistic Co-directors

Post-performance discussions with the artist.

*Funded in part by the Wetzel Family Fund for the Arts, the Amy and Henry Nachman 1951 Fund for Visiting Performing Artists in Dance, a gift from Kathryn and Richard Kimball ’78, and Hopkins Center Members.*
Tonight’s performance is presented without an intermission.

Concept and Choreography
Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy

Choreographic Associate
Ashwini Ramaswamy

Musical Composition
Amir ElSaffar and Prema Ramamurthy

Development of the Musical Score
Amir ElSaffar, Aparna Ramaswamy and Ranee Ramaswamy, with the musical ensemble

Visual Art
Original paintings by V. Keshav
Additional artwork by Nathan Christopher
Historical image provided by the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge

Dancers
Aparna Ramaswamy, Ranee Ramaswamy, Ashwini Ramaswamy, Tamara Nadel, Jessica Fiala

Musical Ensemble
Amir ElSaffar, trumpet, santur and vocal; Preethy Mahesh, vocal; Rohan Krishnamurthy, mridangam; Arun Ramamurthy, violin; Kasi Aysola, nattuvangam

Lighting Design
Jeff Bartlett

Sound Engineer
Maury Jensen

Lighting Supervisor/Production Manager
Mat Terwilliger

Video Director
Rob Simmer

Commissioned by The Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi (Lead Commissioner and Developmental Partner); and Opening Nights Performing Arts at Florida State University, Tallahassee.

Created in residence at the Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography (MANCC) at Florida State University, Tallahassee; The Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi; an NPN residency at The Yard in Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts; and the Cowles Center for Dance and the Performing Arts in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Special thanks to Dr. Vasudha Narayanan at the University of Florida; Dr. Mark Elliott, Senior Curator at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge; and Dr. Savitri Puram (bhakthadasi.blogspot.com).

Support for the creation and touring of Written in Water was provided by a 2016 Joyce Award from the Joyce Foundation, the Doris Duke Performing Artist Awards program, and grants from New Music USA (made possible by annual program support and/or endowment gifts from Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, Baisley Powell Elebash Fund, Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation), the National Endowment for
Program continued

the Arts, the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation), the Carolyn Foundation, and Caroline Amplatz Giving.

Additional support for Ragamala’s work comes from The McKnight Foundation; the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation; Target; Delta Air Lines; The Dr. Dash Foundation, whose mission is to preserve and promote rich Indian heritage and culture; The Goodale Family Foundation; the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund; and members of Ragamala’s “Rasika Circle.”

Program Notes

In Written in Water, we explore the concept of spiritual ascension through the second-century Indian board game Paramapadam (a precursor to Snakes & Ladders), the 12th-century Sufi text The Conference of the Birds, and the Hindu mythological story Ksheerabthi Madanam, the churning of the seven seas.

We have drawn upon The Conference of the Birds to frame the arc of Written in Water. The protagonists of this Sufi epic progress through seven valleys, representing states of being. With Written in Water, we mirror their journey through a world of psychological complexity, traversing experiences of spiritual longing, human love, unity with others, detachment from material life, and finally ultimate oneness with the divine.

In the first movement of Written in Water, we experience human life, love, and struggle, explored through the framework of the board game Paramapadam. The gameboard serves as a physical and metaphorical framework through which the seekers/dancers navigate snakes and ladders representing the heights of ecstasy and the depths of longing.

In the second movement, we explore the human quest for the divine. The mythological story of Ksheerabthi Madanam is a metaphor for a world in chaos. Amidst this dynamic tension between good and evil, Vishnu stands for the perfect center toward which humans strive.

In the final movement, we journey toward transcendence—toward unmediated union with the divine.

In developing Written in Water, we played the game hundreds of times, using the floor as the board and our bodies as the game pieces. The projected images are from original paintings by Chennai-based visual artist Keshav, specially commissioned by Ragamala for this work. Written in Water was developed through an ongoing collaboration in which choreography, music, and visual art were constructed simultaneously in a constant artistic dialogue that spanned two years.

—Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy
About the Artists

Ragamala Dance Company was founded in 1992 by Ranee Ramaswamy, and recently completed its 25th season under the leadership of Ranee and Aparna Ramaswamy (mother and daughter). Ragamala creates work that conveys a sense of reverence, unfolding mystery and universal celebration.

Hailed by The New York Times as “soulful, imaginative and rhythmically contagious,” Ragamala has toured extensively, highlighted by the Kennedy Center (Washington, DC), Joyce Theater (New York), Lincoln Center (New York), Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival (Massachusetts), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), American Dance Festival (Durham, North Carolina), Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, International Festival of Arts & Ideas (New Haven, Connecticut), Cal Performances (Berkeley), Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates), Just Festival (Edinburgh, UK), Bali Arts Festival (Indonesia), Sri Krishna Gana Sabha (Chennai, India), and National Centre for Performing Arts (Mumbai, India), among others.

Ragamala’s 2018–19 season features performances at the Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth College, Walton Arts Center (Fayetteville, Arkansas), Texas Performing Arts at UT-Austin, Kennedy Center (Washington, DC), Harris Theater for Music and Dance (Chicago), Reif Center (Minneapolis), Middlebury College (Vermont), Fox Cities Performing Arts Center (Appleton, Wisconsin), and the O’Shaughnessy (St. Paul, Minnesota).

For upcoming tour dates or to subscribe to Ragamala’s e-newsletter, please visit www.ragamaladance.org, info@ragamaladance.org, 612-824-1968. Exclusive representation by Laura Colby, Director, Elsie Management, www.elsieman.org, info@elsieman.org, 718-797-4577.

Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy (artistic directors/choreographers/principal dancers) explore the dynamic tension between the ancestral and the contemporary, highlighting the fluidity between the secular and the spiritual, the inner and the outer, the human and the natural, rhythm and stillness. As mother and daughter, each brings her generational experience to the work—the rich traditions, deep philosophical roots and ancestral wisdom of India meeting and merging with their hybridic perspectives as Indian-American artists. As protégés and senior disciples of legendary dancer/choreographer Alarmél Valli, known as one of India’s greatest living masters, Ranee and Aparna’s training in the South Indian classical dance form of Bharatanatyam is the bedrock of their creative aesthetic.

Most recently, Ranee and Aparna were awarded 2018 Guggenheim Fellowships and selected as 2017 Research Fellows by the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center (Italy). Their choreographic work has been commissioned by Lincoln Center (New York), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), Krannert Center (University of Illinois), Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center (University of Maryland), Opening Nights Performing Arts (Florida State University), and the Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, National Dance Project, MAP Fund, The McKnight Foundation, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, New Music/USA, USArtists International and the Japan Foundation; and developed in residence at MANCC and a residency at The Yard.

Ranee currently serves on the National Council on the Arts, appointed by President Barack Obama. She is the recipient of a 2014 Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, a 2012 United States Artists Fellowship, a 2011 McKnight Distinguished Artist Award, a Bush Fellowship for Choreography, and 14 McKnight Artist Fellowships for Choreography and Interdisciplinary Art, among others.

Aparna is the recipient of a 2016 Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, a 2016 Joyce Award, a Bush Fellowship for Choreography, and three McKnight Fellowships, among others. Described by The New York Times as “thrillingly
About the Artists continued

three-dimensional... rapturous and profound,” she was selected as one of Dance Magazine’s 25 to Watch for 2010. She is an empaneled artist with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and her solo work, with live music, has toured the US and India with support from the National Dance Project and USArtists International. In summer 2018, she premiered a solo work commissioned by the American Dance Festival. She is currently working with composer/violinist Colin Jacobsen on a new work commissioned by and for the Silkroad Ensemble, to premiere in 2019 with performances at UC-Santa Barbara, the Soraya at Cal State Northridge and Cal Performances (UC-Berkeley).

Amir ElSaffar (composer/trumpet/santur/vocal) has distinguished himself with a mastery of diverse musical traditions and a singular approach to combining Middle Eastern musical languages with jazz and other styles of contemporary music. A recipient of the 2013 Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, ElSaffar has been described as “uniquely poised to reconcile jazz and Arabic music without doing either harm” (The Wire) and “one of the most promising figures in jazz today” (Chicago Tribune). He currently leads four critically acclaimed ensembles: Two Rivers, which combines the musical languages and instrumentation of Iraqi Maqam and contemporary jazz; the Amir ElSaffar Quintet, performing ElSaffar’s microtonal compositions with standard jazz instrumentation; Safaafir, the only ensemble in the US performing and preserving the Iraqi maqam in its traditional format; and The Alwan Ensemble, the resident ensemble of Alwan for the Arts, specializing in classical music from Egypt, the Levant and Iraq. In addition, he has worked with jazz legend Cecil Taylor, and prominent jazz musicians such as Mark Dresser, Gerry Hemingway, Marc Ribot, Henry Grimes and Oliver Lake. ElSaffar has appeared on numerous recordings, and has released six under his own name: Maqams of Baghdad (2005), Two Rivers (2007), Radif Suite (2010), Inana (2011), Alchemy (2013), and Crisis (2015). www.amirelsaffar.com

Smt. Prema Ramamurthy (composer) has been an outstanding vocalist and composer for more than four decades. She was initiated into music by her parents, the late Sri S. Nagaraja Iyer and Smt. Jayalakshmi, and her grandfather, Sri S. Srinivasa Iyer. Ramamurthy has had further intensive training under the great maestro “Padmavibhushan” Dr. Mangalampalli Balamurali Krishna, specialized in the art of pallavi singing from Vidwan Sri T. V. Gopalakrishnan, and learned the art of singing padams and javalis from the veteran musician Mrs. T. Muktha. An A-TOP Grade Artist of All India Radio and Doordarshan 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.

V. Keshav (visual art) has been a cartoonist for the Indian national daily newspaper The Hindu since 1987. With no formal training in art, his quest in Indian art led him to discover the treasures in temples and the symbolism used in the Indian epics. He began a journey into symbols, fascinated with the way abstract ideas could be communicated in simple metaphors that have stood the test of time. In 2006, his one-man show Krishna Leela was presented in Chennai, and later in Bangalore. For the past several years he has been painting a Krishna a day (#krishnafortoday) and sharing it on his blog and social media. Keshav has a master’s degree in commerce from Madras University. “Cartooning is my profession, painting is my passion.” www.kamadenu.blogspot.com

Ashwini Ramaswamy (choreographic associate/dancer) has studied Bharatanatyam with Ragamala Dance Company’s Artistic Directors, Ranee and Aparna Ramaswamy (her mother and sister), for over 25 years; she now has the honor of studying under the legendary Alarmél Valli in Chennai, India. Celebrated for her ability to “[weave] together, both fearfully and joyfully, the human and the divine” (The New York Times), Ashwini is a founding member of Ragamala, and has toured nationally and internationally. She is the recipient of
About the Artists continued

grants and fellowships from the McKnight Foundation, Minnesota State Arts Board, Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, Jerome Foundation, USArtists International, and the New England Foundation for the Arts’ National Dance Project. Ashwini’s choreography was among the “Best of the Year” in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, Big Dance Town, and Minnpost, and has been presented by the Joyce Theater (NYC), Triskelion Arts (NYC), Cowles Center (Minneapolis), The Yard (Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts) and Just Festival (Edinburgh, UK), among others. The St. Paul Chamber Orchestra’s Liquid Music Series has commissioned a new work from her to premiere in 2019, which she will create in part during a residency at the Baryshnikov Arts Center (NYC). She is Ragamala’s Director of Publicity and Marketing, and currently serves on the board of Arts Midwest.

Tamara Nadel (dancer) is a disciple of Ranee and Aparna Ramaswamy and founding member of Ragamala. She has toured with the company throughout the US and in Russia, Taiwan, Indonesia, Japan, UK, UAE and India. She is a McKnight Fellow in Dance, and a recipient of grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board, Jerome Foundation, Minneapolis Jewish Federation and Metropolitan Regional Arts Council. Most recently, she premiered a solo created for her by choreographer Ranee Ramaswamy, rooted in the writings of the Sephardic Jewish poets of Golden Age Spain, at Beth El Synagogue (Minneapolis). Tamara is Ragamala’s Director of Institutional Development, and currently serves on the board of Arts Midwest.

Jessica Fiala (dancer) has studied with Ranee and Aparna Ramaswamy since 2006 and has toured with Ragamala throughout the US and in India, the UK and the UAE. In recent years, she has also performed works by Ashwini Ramaswamy, Jeremy Bensussan, Vanessa Voskuil and Kaleena Miller. Jessica holds a master’s in museum studies and cultural studies from the University of Minnesota, and has presented research at conferences at the University of Naples “l’Orientale,” the University of Shanghai, the University of Pittsburgh, Pomona College and Hong Kong Baptist University. Her writing is included in the anthology The Ruined Archive and the journal Diálogos com a arte and she was research coordinator for the 2015 International Award for Public Art.

Preethy Mahesh (vocal) has been accompanying eminent dancers since 2003. She belongs to the traditional school of music initiated by respected guru Sangitha Kalanidhi Shri D.K. Jararaman, and later came under the tutelage of Tanjore Shri S. Kalyanaraman. She is a graded artist of All India Radio. She has several recordings to her credit, many in collaboration with dancer Smt. Priyadarsini Govind. She has toured widely as an accompanist to many of India’s most renowned dancers, performing at prestigious festivals and venues around the world with such performers as Alarmél Valli, Vyjayanthimala Bali, Priyadarsini Govind, Revathi Ramachandran, Rukmini Vijaykumar, Shobana, the Dhanajayans, and Ragamala Dance Company. She is the recipient of the Best Dance Vocalist award from Sri Krishna Gana Sabha (Chennai, India), and the Bharatalaya Trust honored her with the title Gana Kokilam.

Rohan Krishnamurthy (mridangam), described as the “pride of India” by The Times of India and “international mridangam player” by USA Today, is a musical ambassador specializing in Indian and multi-percussion. He received advanced training from the esteemed Indian master Guruvayur Dorai. Distinguished as a soloist, composer and collaborator, Rohan has performed with legendary Indian musicians and Grammy Award-winning artists such as Glen Velez, Anoushka Shankar and Vishwa Mohan Bhatt. An acclaimed educator, Rohan earned a Ph.D. in musicology from the Eastman School of Music.
in New York. He has presented and taught at renowned institutions, including the Eastman School of Music, Harvard University and A.R. Rehman’s K.M. Conservatory of Music (India). He directs the award-winning RohanRhythm Percussion Studio, which has attracted dozens of students from around the globe. Rohan holds a patent for a novel drum-tuning system that is now available worldwide. www.RohanRhythm.com

**Arun Ramamurthy (violin)** is a versatile violinist and educator based in Brooklyn, NY, and is a disciple of the celebrated Carnatic violinist brothers Dr. Mysore Manjunath and Sri Mysore Nagaraj and the esteemed violinist Sri Ananthakrishnan. He has distinguished himself as a multifaceted artist, performing internationally in both traditional Carnatic and Hindustani settings as well as bridging genres with his own innovative projects. Arun has been fortunate to perform with artists like Dr. M. Balamurali Krishna, Sudha Ragunathan, Anindo Chatterjee, T.N. Seshagopoloan, Amir ElSaffar and Marc Cary, among others. Arun’s music has brought him to such prestigious stages as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, Celebrate Brooklyn and more. Arun is co-founder and Artistic Director of Brooklyn Raga Massive, a globally recognized collective of forward-thinking musicians rooted in and inspired by the classical music of India. Through BRM, Arun has curated and performed in a multitude of concerts incorporating music from all over the world. www.arunramamurthy.com

**Kasi Aysola (nattuvangam)** is the co-founder/co-artistic director of Prakriti Dance. Kasi is a Bharatanatyam dancer, choreographer and **nattuvanar who trained under his guru, Viji Prakash, for over ten years. Kasi has been privileged to learn from leading exponents such as: Guru T.K. Kalyanasundaram, Mythili Prakash, Harikrishna Kalayanasundaram, Ajith Bhaskaran Dass, C.V. Chandrasekhar, Bragha Bessel and Sudha Chandrasekhar. Kasi has performed solo and group work in the US, India and abroad, and has toured with the Shakti Dance Company and Dakshina/Daniel Phoenix Singh Dance Company. A versatile and composite artist, Kasi continues to further his study of classical Indian dance and music. He is a Kuchipudi disciple of the late guru Sri Vempati Ravi Shankar. He continues his learning in Kuchipudi under Smt. Yamini Saripalli. He also learns Carnatic music under Smt. Vanaja Dasika.

**Jeff Bartlett (lighting design)** has been honored to light Ragamala Dance Company since A Canticle of Mary in 1994. He has lit many of the company’s signature works, including *Song of the Jasmine, Sacred Earth*, 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. A 2008 Artist of the Year in City Pages magazine, his design work has also been recognized with a 2015 St. Paul Cultural Star award, a 2014 Knight Arts Challenge Grant, 2010 and 2005 Sage Awards for Dance, and a 2003 McKnight Theater Artist Fellowship. Jeff is production manager and resident lighting designer at the Weitz Center for Creativity at Carleton College.

**Connecting Artists to the Community**

While at Dartmouth, Ragamala Dance Company taught a Bharatanatyam master class, and dancers and musicians visited classes in the departments of Music and Asian Society, Culture and Languages. Members of the group also shared a lunch with Dartmouth students, performed in the School Matinee Series and will participate in post-performance discussions. For more information about Hop Outreach and Arts Education programs, call 603.646.2010 or visit hop.dartmouth.edu/online/outreach.
Upcoming Events

Simone Dinnerstein and Pam Tanowitz Dance
New Work for Goldberg Variations
Fri & Sat • January 11 & 12 • 8 pm
Bach’s towering musical work, performed live by one of its most nuanced interpreters, is translated into Intricate, witty, unpredictable dance work.

Camille A. Brown & Dancers
ink
Thu • April 4 • 7 pm & Fri • April 5 • 8 pm
A vivid survey of love and resilience in the African diaspora by award-winning “force of nature” (NYT) choreographer and her company.

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