

FOR IMAGES AND MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Nicole Tomasofsky, Public Relations and Publications Coordinator

413.243.9919 x132

ntomasofsky@jacobspillow.org

**RAGAMALA DANCE COMPANY OPENS JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVAL
IN CELEBRATION OF CENTENARY OF LEGENDARY BALASARASWATI**

June 13, 2018 (Becket, MA)—Minneapolis-based Ragamala Dance Company opens the 2018 Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival with a vibrant, contemporary take on the South Indian classical dance form Bharatanatyam in the Doris Duke Theatre, June 20-24. Praised for a "visionary approach to an ancient art form" (*Dance Magazine*), Artistic Directors and Doris Duke Performing Artist Awardees Raneeramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy honor the legacy of legendary Smt. Balasaraswati in an opening solo performance and present the evening-length work *Written in Water*, featuring a live ensemble of internationally celebrated musicians.

"Smt. Balasaraswati brought Bharatanatyam to the United States and to the Pillow in 1962. It is fitting that we celebrate the centenary of this legendary artist's work with a performance by a U.S. based company founded by artists who, over five decades later, are some of this country's most skilled and innovative practitioners of this form. I have asked Artistic Directors Aparna and Raneeramaswamy to honor Balasaraswati legacy in a special way," says Jacob's Pillow Director Pamela Tatge.

The program opens with *Om Kara Karini*, a tribute to the late Smt. Balasaraswati on the occasion of the centennial of her birth. A pioneer of Bharatanatyam, Balasaraswati is noted for sharing the classical Indian tradition with the West through decades of solo performance and teaching. Balasaraswati made her U.S. debut at Jacob's Pillow in 1962. *Om Kara Karini* is conceived, choreographed, and performed by Aparna Ramaswamy in recognition of the worship of Devi—the Divine Feminine.

Written in Water, choreographed by the mother/daughter artistic team of Ragamala Dance Company, Raneeramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy, explores the heights of joy and depths of longing in Hindu and Sufi thought. Described as a "feast for the eyes, ears, and heart" (*Tallahassee Democrat*), the piece is divided into three distinct sections and follows the concept of spiritual ascension in partnership with musical composition by Doris Duke Performing Artist Awardee Amir ElSaffar and acclaimed vocalist Prema Ramamurthy.

The first movement draws on the ancient Indian board game *Paramapadam* (a precursor to Snakes and Ladders). The gameboard serves as a physical and metaphorical framework through which the seekers/dancers navigate snakes and ladders to examine fate and free will. The second movement explores the human quest for the divine. The mythological story of *Ksheerabthi Madanam*—the churning of the seven seas—is a metaphor for a world in chaos. Amidst this dynamic tension between good and evil, the Hindu deity Vishnu stands for the perfect center toward which humans strive. *The Conference of the Birds* frames the arc of *Written in Water*. The protagonists of this 12th century Sufi

epic progress through seven valleys, which symbolize states of being. Mirroring that journey, the final movement travels towards transcendence—and unmediated union with the divine. Each distinct section is carried through by an ensemble of classically trained Bharatanatyam dancers.

Lush paintings by V. Keshav of Chennai, India are projected throughout the space, transforming the stage floor into the *Paramapadam* gameboard. Iraqi-American composer Amir ElSaffar leads a musical ensemble with a distinct alchemy of Iraqi, jazz, and Carnatic instruments.

ABOUT RAGAMALA DANCE COMPANY

Ragamala Dance Company was founded in 1992 in Minneapolis, Minnesota by Raneer Ramaswamy. Now under shared direction with her daughter Aparna Ramaswamy, the company is in its 25th season of creating intercultural, collaborative performance works that forge together ancestry and continuity. The two generations work together to merge classical language of Indian dance with a contemporary western aesthetic, creating timeless pieces that freely move between the past and present.

Ragamala Dance Company approaches Bharatanatyam as an ancient but living, breathing language that communicates human experience in an accessible way. The company has been recognized with awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the National Dance Project, and many more. *The New York Times* lauds, “This is an excellent company...Ragamala shows how Indian forms can be some of the most transcendent experiences dance has to offer.”

ABOUT AMIR ELSAFFAR

Raised in Chicago to the sounds of Ella Fitzgerald and the Blues Brothers, Iraqi-American trumpeter, *santur* player, vocalist, and composer Amir ElSaffar has extended the boundaries of American jazz and Middle Eastern music by creating new sounds that combine both traditions. He performs actively in the U.S., Europe, and Middle East. As a composer, he established himself as an important voice in an age of cross-cultural music making. He has released five albums of his own and has played on countless others.

Ragamala Dance Company at Jacob’s Pillow

Doris Duke Theatre, June 20-24

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday at 8:15pm

Saturday & Sunday at 2:15pm

\$45, \$35, \$25

A limited number of \$25 Under 35 tickets are available; adults ages 18-35 are eligible. One ticket per person; each guest must show valid I.D. when picking up tickets at Will Call.

ALSO THIS WEEK

Royal Danish Ballet at Jacob’s Pillow

Ted Shawn Theatre, June 20-24

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday at 8pm

Saturday & Sunday at 2pm

Revered as the world’s third oldest ballet company, the Royal Danish Ballet returns to Jacob’s Pillow for the first time in over a decade to open Festival 2018 in the Ted Shawn Theatre. While the distinctive repertoire of Danish choreographer August Bournonville remains a cornerstone for The Royal Danish Ballet, in his ten years as Artistic Director, Nikolaj Hübbe has brought the company to an impressive technical level which masters a wide range of modern and classical ballets. Praised as “a masterclass in style” (*The Guardian*), leading principals and soloists perform excerpts from classical ballet’s enduring

masters, including Bournonville, Marius Petipa, and Jules Perrot, imbued with a rich Danish-Pillow history that dates back to the U.S. debut of the first group of soloists in 1955. *Tickets start at \$45.*

Inside/Out Performance Series: Oyu Oro Afro Cuban Dance Ensemble

Wednesday, June 20 at 6:15pm

FREE; LIVE MUSIC

Committed to the preservation of Afro-Cuban culture through dance, song, and music, Oyu Oro Afro Cuban Dance Ensemble was founded in 1998 in Cuba and re-formed in New York City in 2005 by Danys “La Mora” Perez, an international Afro-Cuban folklorist and dance ethnographer. The ensemble presents high caliber and authentic folkloric dance performances that represent Cuba’s unique history and cultural landscape. They explore traditional dance forms from the Yoruba, Congo, Carabali, Arara, and Dahomeyan cultures of West Africa; the rich Haitian influences that remain in Cuba of *tumba francesa, vodu, gaga, tajona*, and Haitian *bembe*; and the popular dances of Cuban heritage, including *rumba, conga, chancletas*, and *son*. *Presented in collaboration with the Center for Traditional Music and Dance.*

Inside/Out Performance Series: Esfane Crimean Tatar Ensemble

Thursday, June 21 at 6:15pm

FREE

Esfane Crimean Tatar Ensemble, based at the Crimean Tatar Cultural Center in Brooklyn, is a 40-member ensemble that preserves and promotes the cultural heritage and history of Crimean Tatars, the indigenous people of the Crimean peninsula. Their vibrant music and dance traditions have substantial similarities with other cultures around the Black Sea, but with a special flair that captivates the ear and the eye: uniquely accented 7/8 dance rhythms and precise, athletic dance steps that bring energy to any performance. As the only U.S. based group performing these dance traditions, they have danced in a variety of venues including Lincoln Center, the Lowell Folk Festival in Massachusetts, and the Ukrainian Tryzub Festival in Philadelphia. *Presented in collaboration with the Center for Traditional Music and Dance.*

PillowTalk: Scottish Dance: Yesterday & Today

Friday, June 22 at 5pm

Blake’s Barn

FREE

Alongside the U.S. debut of Scottish Janis Claxton Dance, historian Agnes Ness traces Scotland’s dance history and explores its current cultural scene.

Inside/Out Performance Series: Dance & Dialogue: Classical Indian Solos

Friday, June 22 at 6:15pm

FREE

Renowned classical dance soloists Barkha Patel and Vinod Para perform a showcase of classical Indian dance styles—Kathak and Bharatanatyam—with a talkback moderated by Associate Professor of Dance at Wesleyan University, Dr. Hari Krishnan.

Barkha Patel will perform a piece that epitomizes Indian classical Kathak dance. The audience is exposed to pure movement that emphasizes form, motion, and speed through stylistically rapid movement, pirouettes, claps, and footwork, accompanied by the sound of ghungroos (ankle bells). Following, Vinod Para showcases virtuosic Bharatanatyam technique in the world premiere of *Black Box 3*, created specially for the Inside/Out Performance Series. The work features complex footwork,

intricate gestures, architectural design, and a pulsating sound design of Indian, global percussion, and vocalized drum syllables.

PillowTalk: Nikolaj Hübbe's Royal Danish Ballet

Saturday, June 23 at 4pm

Blake's Barn

FREE

Now directing one of the world's most venerable dance institutions, Nikolaj Hübbe talks about his career and his summer studying ballet at the Pillow in 1985.

Inside/Out Performance Series: The School at Jacob's Pillow Ballet Program

Saturday, June 23 at 6:15pm

FREE

Dancers of The School at Jacob's Pillow Ballet Program are apprentices, trainees, pre-professionals, and early-career professionals with leading ballet companies from around the world. Their performance for Festival audiences includes classical solo, pas de deux, and ensemble variations, as well as a new ballet created on them for the 2018 Season Opening Gala by choreographer Annabelle Lopez Ochoa.

Program Director Anna-Marie Holmes is revered worldwide as a master teacher and artistic director/advisor. Joining her to coach and mentor The School's dancers are Erica Cornejo, Boston Ballet former principal; Anastacia Holden, Joffrey Ballet former soloist; Hope Muir, Charlotte Ballet Artistic Director; Viktor Plotnikov, choreographer; and Ayşem Sunal Savaşkurt, Principal Ballerina and Artistic Director of Istanbul State Opera and Ballet. Music direction and accompaniment provided by Ramona Pansegrau, John Sauer, and Michael Scales.

Sunday Master Class: Ragamala Dance Company

Sunday, June 24 at 10-11am

Doris Duke Theatre

Artists of Ragamala Dance Company will teach a 60-minute master class open to all intermediate and advanced dancers ages 16 and over. Quiet observation is welcome; \$15 per class or \$80 for a 6-class card. Participants younger than 18 will require a parent/guardian's signature on a liability waiver. *Pre-registration is required at jacobspillow.org.*

Sunday Film Event: Ingmar Bergman Through the Choreographer's Eye

Sunday, June 24 at 4:30pm

Blake's Barn

Four choreographers interpret the style of the Swedish director, writer, and producer Ingmar Bergman, who is recognized as one of the most accomplished and influential filmmakers of all time. *Tickets \$10.*

FESTIVAL 2018 EXHIBITS & ARCHIVES—ONGOING

Gotta Dance, Too!

Blake's Barn, June 20-August 26

Open Wed-Sat noon to final curtain (approx. 10pm) and Sun-Tues noon to 5pm; FREE

This select group of original movie posters follows up on the hugely popular 2014 *Gotta Dance* exhibit with a different set of rarities from the collection of award-winning design director Mike Kaplan. More

than 50 vintage posters feature classic films and stars like Fred Astaire, Josephine Baker, Gene Kelly, and other screen legends, excitingly illustrated in vibrant color.

Dance of the Ages

Ted Shawn Theatre Lobby, June 20-August 26

Open 60 minutes prior to every performance

FREE

Commemorating the 80th anniversary of *Dance of the Ages*, a culminating achievement by Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers, this exhibit also highlights a full reconstruction of the work to be performed by Adam H. Weinert at Jacob's Pillow, September 21-23. The exhibit features images, memorabilia, and costumes from the original 1938 production, many on view for the first time.

Paramodernities/Revelations

Doris Duke Theatre Lobby, June 20-August 26

Open 60 minutes prior to every performance

FREE

Netta Yerushalmy has created a new performance work entitled *Paramodernities* with its premiere on deconstructing classic dances by pioneering choreographers. Historic Pillow images from one of these, Alvin Ailey's iconic *Revelations*, are displayed here and juxtaposed with photos and text from Yerushalmy's 2018 re-examination, premiering August 8-12.

Jacob's Pillow Archives/Norton Owen Reading Room

Blake's Barn, June 20-August 26

Open daily, Wed-Sat noon to final curtain (approx. 10pm) and Sun-Tue noon to 5pm

FREE

This spacious, informal library and reading room allows impromptu visitors to view videos, browse through books, access the Pillow's computer catalog, or peruse permanent collections of Pillow programs and photographs from the Pillow's Archives. The Norton Owen Reading Room also features recent donations and more archival treasures from the Stephan Driscoll Collection. Jacob's Pillow Dance Interactive, available on a popular touch-screen kiosk in the Reading Room, provides instant access to rare film clips ranging from the present day back to the 1930s.

Collaborative Exhibition at The Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA)

Dance We Must: Treasures from Jacob's Pillow, 1906-1940

June 29-November 11

FREE

The Williams College Museum of Art has created an eye-popping new exhibit with costumes, set pieces, and other historic artifacts from the collections at Jacob's Pillow. On view through November 20, this exhibit offers a rare chance to see items from the dawn of American modern dance, tracing the evolution of this contemporary art form. *More information at wcma.williams.edu*

ABOUT JACOB'S PILLOW: Jacob's Pillow is a National Historic Landmark, recipient of the National Medal of Arts, and home to America's longest-running international dance festival, celebrating its 86th Festival in 2018. The Pillow announced its transition to becoming a year-round center for dance in June 2017 through a five-year strategic plan titled Vision '22. Each Festival includes more than 50 national and international dance companies and over 350 free and ticketed performances, talks, tours, classes, exhibits, events, and community programs. The School at Jacob's Pillow, one of the most prestigious professional dance training centers in the U.S., encompasses the diverse disciplines of Ballet, Contemporary, Musical Theatre Dance, Choreography, and an annual rotating program (Gaga in 2018). The Pillow also provides professional advancement opportunities across disciplines of arts administration, design, video, and production through seasonal internships and a year-round Administrative Fellows program. With growing community engagement programs, the Pillow serves as a partner and active citizen in its local community. The Pillow's extensive Archives, open year-round to the public and

online at danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org, chronicle more than a century of dance in photographs, programs, books, costumes, audiotapes, and videos. Notable artists who have created or premiered dances at the Pillow include choreographers Antony Tudor, Agnes de Mille, Alvin Ailey, Donald McKayle, Kevin McKenzie, Twyla Tharp, Ralph Lemon, Susan Marshall, Trisha Brown, Ronald K. Brown, Wally Cardona, Andrea Miller, and Trey McIntyre; performed by artists such as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Carmen de Lavallade, Mark Morris, Dame Margot Fonteyn, Edward Villella, Rasta Thomas, and hundreds of others. On March 2, 2011, President Barack Obama honored Jacob's Pillow with a National Medal of Arts, the highest arts award given by the United States Government, making the Pillow the first dance presenting organization to receive this prestigious award. For more information, visit www.jacobspillow.org.

###