

The Asian Arts & Culture Program at UMass Amherst Fine Arts Center

CONTACT: Sue McFarland, 413-577-2486 (aacp@acad.umass.edu)
WHAT: Song of the Jasmine by Ragamala Dance Company
Aparna Ramaswamy, Raneer Ramaswamy, & Rudresh Mahanthappa,
Creators
WHEN: Thursday, March 12
TIME: 7:30 PM
WHERE: Fine Arts Center Hall

One of the Indian diaspora's most acclaimed United States dance ensembles and a Guggenheim award winning saxophonist perform Thursday, March 12 at the UMass Amherst Fine Arts Center Concert Hall. Informed by the echoing past and the fleeting present, the two artistic directors of Ragamala Dance, Raneer and Aparna Ramaswamy, create evocative choreography that renews tradition and seamlessly carries the South Indian classical dance form of Bharatanatyam into the 21st century. **Song of the Jasmine** is a new work conceived by Aparna Ramaswamy and created in collaboration with renowned jazz saxophonist Rudresh Mahanthappa, two first-generation Indian-American artists whose bicultural identities have influenced their artistry in different ways. Their unique artistic perspectives converge on the common ground of creating art in which universal themes are intertwined with a transformative artistic vision, and in which innovation is rooted in a profound understanding and enduring respect for tradition. The performance begins at 7:30 p.m. and reserved seating tickets are \$35, \$30 \$20; Five College, GCC, Seniors and 17 & under are \$10. To purchase tickets please call Fine Arts Center Box Office at 413-545-2511 or go online at fineartscenter.com.

Under the direction of Raneer Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy, **Ragamala** creates work that conveys a sense of reverence, unfolding mystery, and universal celebration. Now in its 22nd season, Ragamala has been 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."* The company has been featured at the American Dance Festival (North Carolina), Lincoln Center (New York), Kennedy Center (Washington, D.C.), Music Center of Los Angeles (California), University Musical Society (Michigan), Just Festival (Edinburgh, United Kingdom), Bali

Arts Festival (Indonesia), Soorya Festival (Kerala, India), and National Centre for Performing Arts (Mumbai, India).

Song of the Jasmine premiered at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in May of 2014. An 11-city tour of the work began in August. *The New York Times* called the performance at Lincoln Center Out of Doors "soulful, imaginative and rhythmically contagious."

Additionally, few musicians share the ability of **Rudresh Mahanthappa** to embody the expansive possibilities of his music with his culture. The alto saxophonist/composer hybridizes progressive jazz and South Indian classical music in a fluid and forward-looking form reflecting his own experience growing up a second-generation Indian-American. Just as Mahanthappa's personal experience is never wholly lived on one side of the hyphenate or the other, his music speaks in a voice dedicated to forging a new path forward. Hailed by *The New York Times* as possessing "a roving intellect and a bladelike articulation," Mahanthappa has been awarded a Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, two New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowships, and commissions from the Rockefeller Foundation MAP Fund, Chamber Music America and the American Composers Forum. He has been named alto saxophonist of the year in Downbeat's International Critics Polls, Jazztimes' Critics Polls and by the Jazz Journalists' Association numerous times.

Co-commissioned by the Walker Arts Museum and four other arts organizations, the **Song of Jasmine** will presents an eclectic combo of artists--- five impeccably trained classical Indian dancers with jazz musicians Rudresh Mahantappa on saxophone, Rez Abassi on guitar and three Carnatic musicians: Raman Kalyan on south Indian flute, violinist Anjna Swaminathan and Rajna Swaminathan on mridangam (south Indian double headed drum). While the **Song of Jasmine** is an abstract work, it is guided by the writings of the 8th century Tamil mystic poet Andal. Her *Sacred Sayings of the Goddess* erases any dichotomy between the sacred and the personal and seamlessly interweaves the two as she expresses deep longing, anguish, ecstasy, and the desire to merge the soul with the Supreme Consciousness. The merging of the classical Indian choreography of Ragamala Dance and Rudresh Mahanthappa's jazz compositions promises to be just as soul moving as Andal's poetry!

<http://www.ragamaladance.org/> <http://rudreshm.com/>

The presentation of The Song of Jasmine was made possible by the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project, with lead funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, with additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Fine Arts Center's Asian Arts & Culture and Center Series are sponsored by Baystate Health & Health New England. The Asian Arts & Culture Program Season sponsor is the Pioneer Valley Hotel Group. Event sponsors are New England Foundation for the Arts and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. High resolution images are available at: <https://fac.umass.edu/Online/PressImages>

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