

LARGE PRINT PROGRAM
Damrosch Park
Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts

Aparna Ramaswamy and Raneer Ramaswamy's
Ragamala Dance Company

Avimukta: Where the Seeker Meets the Sacred

Creators/Directors/Choreographers:

Aparna Ramaswamy and Raneer Ramaswamy

Choreographic Assistant:

Ashwini Ramaswamy

Dramaturg:

Raneer Ramaswamy

Original Compositions:

Prema Ramamurthy, Raneer Ramaswamy, and S. Sakthivel
Muruganantham

Development of Score:

Aparna Ramaswamy and Raneer Ramaswamy,
with the musical ensemble

Choreography of Bho Shambho:

(performed by Aparna Ramaswamy)
Padmabhushan Smt. Alarmél Valli

Dancers:

Aparna Ramaswamy, Raneer Ramaswamy, Ashwini Ramaswamy,
Kassiyet Adilkhankyzy, Jessica Fiala, Sri Guntipally,
Tamara Nadel, Garrett Sour, Alan Tse

Musicians:

Preethy Mahesh (Vocal), Lalit Subramanian (Vocal), C.K. Vasudevan
(Nattuvangam), S. Sakthivel Muruganantham (Mridangam),
Ramanathan Kalaiaransan (Violin), Sruthi Sagar (Flute)

Maulav Ganga (performed by Raneer Ramaswamy)
pre-recorded by Vidwan Sri T.M. Krishna (vocal),
with K. Arun Prakash (mridangam), R.K. Shriram Kumar (violin), and
Bhagyashri (tanpura), included by special permission from the artists

Lighting Design:

Willy Cessa

Associate Lighting Designer:

Mary Shabatura

Costumes:

D.S. Aiyellu

Production Manager/Lighting Director:

Mat Terwilliger

Sound Recording, Editing, and Mixing:

Kalaiarasan Ramanathan, Baba Prasad, Michael DeMark

Exclusive Representation by:

Laura Colby, President, Elsie Management

Anna Amadei, Vice President, Elsie Management

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Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth College

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Northrop at the University of Minnesota,
The Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center,
with support from Ranees Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy's
Guggenheim Fellowships

Creative Producer

Laura Colby, President, Elsie Management

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From The Creators

In Avimukta: Where the Seeker Meets the Sacred, the dancers are seekers engrossed in rituals of sacred contemplation that become an ecstatic prayer celebrating the inevitable dissolution of life. Avimukta is an intimate adaptation of our large-scale stage work, Fires of Varanasi (2021).

We began envisioning this project after the death of our father/grandfather away from his homeland of India. A devout Hindu, his desire was for his ashes to be scattered in the Ganges River in Varanasi just as our ancestors before him.

In the context of Varanasi, 'Avimukta' means 'the place where Shiva is always present.'

The experience of beholding the image of a deity with one's own eyes is a central act of worship and charged with meaning—it is reciprocal and electric. The sacred is present in this auspicious moment and through the meeting of the eyes, one gains the grace of the divine.

—Aparna Ramaswamy and Ranee Ramaswamy

Avimukta: Where The Seeker Meets The Sacred

Scene One

Darshanam, To See and Be Seen

The banks of the Ganga River become the altar to worship the sun every morning, bringing light and life, an end to the actual and metaphoric darkness.

Sankalpam, Conviction to the Deity of Cosmic Balance

Soloist: Ranee Ramaswamy

As the veil of darkness lifts, we prepare to glimpse Shiva, the reigning deity of Varanasi.

Scene Two

Liquid Shakti

The Power of the Ganga River

The Ganga River—mythologized as falling from heaven to earth—is a manifestation of Shakti, the female life-energy of Shiva. Bathing in the Ganga River is an essential daily act of the pilgrim in Varanasi, invoking the water as a giver of life, immortality, and healing.

The Myth of the Rivers

Soloists: Raneer Ramaswamy, Ashwini Ramaswamy, Aparna Ramaswamy

The Ganga is believed to feed thousands of rivers and water bodies, forever making the gods present and humans linked.

In His incarnation as Vamana, Vishnu transformed into Trivikrama, lifting His left foot and, with His big toe, tearing the sheath of the universe and releasing Ganga from the heavens. Shiva calmed Her ferocious waters by trapping them in His hair, releasing Her in small streams.

As Vishnu's incarnation of Krishna, He saved the Yamuna River. The water of the Yamuna seethed with the poison of the snake-demon, Kaliya. Nothing grew on the river bank; no bird or beast was spared. To save the river and the people, Krishna leapt onto Kaliya's head,

assuming the weight of the whole universe, dancing the snake into submission.

Ganga as Mother Goddess

Goddess Ganga is the liquid essence of life, the celestial river cascading from heaven to nourish humanity.

Goddess Ganga is worshiped through an immersive engagement with the river. The repetitive pouring of water by devotees recognizes the life-giving force of the water, the ability to wash away troubles, and the acceptance of old age and death. The devotee ultimately seeks the embrace of Mother Ganga to cross over into a place of joy after death.

Scene Three

The City of Shiva

Soloist: Aparna Ramaswamy

The cosmic dance of Shiva symbolizes the interplay of dynamic and static divine energy flow, containing the five principles of eternal energy—creation, preservation, destruction, illusion, and emancipation.

The ecstatic pilgrimage journey begins and ends at the Kasi Vishweshvara temple—the center of Varanasi, a city where people surrender their earthly bodies to death and receive spiritual bodies like Shiva himself.

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

Under the leadership of South Indian American artists Aparna Ramaswamy (Executive Artistic Director) and Ranee Ramaswamy (Founding Artistic Director), Ragamala Dance Company creates original dance works for the stage. Through creating multi-disciplinary dance works, engaging the community, and educating the next generation, Ragamala epitomizes intercultural and immigrant narratives that evoke a shared sense of humanity. Rooted in the South Indian dance form of Bharatanatyam, Ragamala seeks to realize the kindred relationship between ancient and contemporary that is urgently needed in today's world.

Founded by Ranee Ramaswamy in 1992, Ragamala has toured extensively throughout the U.S., India, and abroad, highlighted by 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 (U.A.E.), the Korzo India Dance Festival (The Hague, Netherlands), Just Festival (Edinburgh, U.K.), Bali Arts Festival (Indonesia), Sri Krishna Gana Sabha (Chennai, India), National Centre for Performing Arts (Mumbai, India), among others.

Ragamala's upcoming season includes performances at Dance Base in Edinburgh, U.K., The Yard in Martha's Vineyard, MA, and Northrop in Minneapolis, 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: <https://www.youtube.com/RagamalaDanceCompany>

Ragamala Dance Company will be holding auditions for classically trained Bharatanatyam dancers for a paid position as Company Dancer. For further information, please email info@ragamaladance.org

For booking information, please contact,
Laura Colby (President) or Anna Amadei (VP), Elsie Management
www.elsieman.org • info@elsieman.org • +1 718-797-4577

Artists' Biographies

Described by The New York Times as “thrillingly three-dimensional... rapturous and profound,” **Aparna Ramaswamy (Co-Creator/Choreographer/Principal Dancer)** is Executive Artistic Director of Ragamala Dance Company. She is a dancemaker, performer, and culture bearer whose work mines 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 and hand-picked protégé of legendary dancer/choreographer Padmabhushan Smt. Alarmél Valli, one of India's greatest living masters, who has selected Aparna as the artist to carry her artistic lineage into the future.

As Executive Artistic Director of Ragamala Dance Company, Aparna has catalyzed a bold new vision for Bharatanatyam in the diaspora, charting previously unimagined 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 many others—and supported by the National Dance Project, MAP Fund, Wallace Foundation, Joyce Foundation, and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, among others. In September 2021, Aparna's Fires of Varanasi: Dance of the Eternal Pilgrim (created in collaboration with Ranee Ramaswamy) was selected to open the Kennedy Center's 50th Anniversary celebration.

Aparna's choreographic work ranges from emotionally spacious yet intimate solo presentations performed with live music, to large-scale, multidisciplinary theatrical works. Her honors include a 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 the 2022 Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award from Carleton College, among others.

(www.aparnaramaswamy.net)

Hailed by The New York Times as “a master of abhinaya... her careful art glimmers with the strangeness of the divine,” **Ranee**

Ramaswamy (Co-Creator/Choreographer/Principal Dancer)

is Founding Artistic Director of Ragamala Dance Company. As a dancemaker, performer, and culture bearer, Ranee's creative vision is driven by a profound commitment to the artistic lineage imparted to her through four decades of training under legendary Bharatanatyam dancer/choreographer Padmabhushan Smt. Alarmél Valli, intertwined with Ranee's pioneering spirit of innovation and collaboration across culture and discipline.

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 the major stages of the U.S. dance landscape. Her work has been commissioned and presented by the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, Joyce Theater, Northrop, Walker Art Center, American Dance Festival, International Festival of Arts & Ideas, and Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi, among many others, and supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, National Dance Project, MAP Fund, Wallace Foundation, and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. In September 2021, Ranee's *Fires of Varanasi: Dance of the Eternal Pilgrim* (created in collaboration with Aparna Ramaswamy) was selected to open the Kennedy Center's 50th Anniversary celebration with an outdoor, site-specific performance.

Ranee serves on the National Council on the Arts, appointed by President Barack Obama. Her honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship, Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, Bogliasco Foundation Fellowship (Italy), Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center Research Fellowship (Italy), United States Artists Fellowship, McKnight Distinguished Artist Award, Bush Choreography Fellowship, and 14 McKnight Fellowships for Choreography and Interdisciplinary Art, among many others. (www.raneeramaswamy.com)

Ashwini Ramaswamy (Choreographic Associate/Dancer)

has spent over 30 years studying Bharatanatyam from award-winning artists Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy (her mother and sister), and their guru, the legendary Smt. Alarmél Valli of Chennai, India since 2011. As a founding member of Ragamala Dance Company, she has toured extensively, performing throughout the U.S. and internationally, including The Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center,

American Dance Festival, and the Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi. Her choreographic work has been presented by the Baryshnikov Arts Center (New York, NY), Broadstage (Santa Monica, CA), The Yard (Martha's Vineyard, MA), Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts (Scottsdale, AZ), and The Just Festival (Edinburgh, U.K), among others.

Ashwini has received commissions from the Liquid Music Series, Great Northern Festival, Santa Monica College, Northrop, Perelman Center, and Bates Dance Festival; residencies at the Baryshnikov Arts Center, UNC Chapel Hill, Kohler Arts Center, the National Center for Choreography, the Bogliasco Foundation (Bogliasco, Italy) and Camargo Foundation (Cassis, France); support from the National Dance Project, MAP Fund, USArtists International, National Performance Network, Minnesota State Arts Board, Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, South Asian Arts Resiliency Fund, a Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship, and McKnight Foundation Artist Fellowships for Dance and Choreography. Her work has been listed among the 'Best of the Year' in The Washington Post, Minneapolis Star Tribune, Minnpost, and as a critic's pick in The New York Times.

Smt. Prema Ramamurthy (Composer) has been an outstanding vocalist and composer for more than four decades. She received 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 & 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 U.S., Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Australia, Mexico, and South Africa.

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.

Kassiyet Adilkhankyzy (Dancer) A talented Kazakh-born Bharatanatyam dancer and entrepreneur based in New York City, seamlessly integrates her passion for Indian Classical Arts with expertise in International Relations. Internationally acclaimed for her unwavering dedication to Bharatanatyam, she founded Kassiyet Cosmetics, pioneering clean cosmetics infused with Indian Classical Arts. Guided by the renowned dancer Dr. Anita R Ratnam, she excels at the intersection of art, culture, and entrepreneurship.

Jessica Fiala (Dancer) began training with Ranee and Aparna Ramaswamy in 2006 and has performed with Ragamala throughout the US and in India, the UK, and the UAE. She holds a interdisciplinary master's degree in museum studies and cultural studies from the University of Minnesota and her research has been published in the anthology The Ruined Archive; the journals Diálogos com a arte, Public Art Journal, and the Journal of Somaesthetics; and the online publication Immerse. Jessica is also a research associate at the consulting firm 8 Bridges Workshop.

Sri Guntipally (Dancer) has been learning Bharatanatyam under Rane Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy since 2018 and performing with Ragamala Dance Company since 2020. As a company member, she has performed with Ragamala at the Kennedy Center in D.C., the American Dance Festival in Durham, NC, among others. Sri graduated from the University of Minnesota in 2023 with a summa cum laude majoring in human physiology and minoring in environmental sciences, policy, and management. She continues to work at the Evans lab studying the role of the kidneys in high blood pressure, and enjoys volunteering at Ronald McDonald House school.

Tamara Nadel (Dancer) is a disciple of Rane and Aparna Ramaswamy and a founding member of Ragamala, having performed with the company throughout the U.S, India, Russia, Taiwan, Indonesia, Japan, and U.K. Tamara has received grants and fellowships from the McKnight Foundation, Jerome Foundation, Minnesota State Arts Board, Rimon: The Minnesota Jewish Arts Council, Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, and the Brin Fund for Jewish Arts, among others. In 2022, she was selected by the Conney Conference on Jewish Arts at UW-Madison to perform *Haven't I Hidden Your Name?*, a solo choreographed for her by Rane Ramaswamy, illuminating the synergies between Hindu and Jewish mystical traditions. Tamara is Ragamala's Director of Operations and Vice President of the Board of Directors of Minnesota Citizens for the Arts.

Garrett Sour (Dancer) is a classical Cambodian dancer under the master teacher, Yousedy Peov and is a principal dancer and assistant instructor with Wattanak Dance Troupe. Garrett has also trained in different dance styles competing in many different competitions across the nation and has performed in South Korea representing the USA in the 13th Gangneung International Junior Art Festival. When Garrett is

not dancing, he is working towards his undergraduate degree at the University of Saint Thomas.

Alan Tse (Dancer) is a creative soul expressing his artistic skills through design, dance, and yoga. Born and raised in Hong Kong, Alan moved to the Twin Cities two decades ago. He has danced with Sole to Soul Dance Conversion, Ballet of the Dolls, and MotionArts, and has performed in works by Myron Johnson, Jim Liberthal, Pam Gleason, and more. Alan is currently a company member of Continental Ballet Company.

Preethy Mahesh (Vocal) is a Carnatic musician who has been accompanying eminent dancers since 2002. She owes her art to her respected gurus Sri DK Jayaraman and Sri S Kalyanaraman. A graded artist of All India Radio she has performed extensively as a soloist and has recorded multiple commercially-available albums of dance music. She has performed in some of the world's best theatres with accomplished artists such as Priyadarsini Govind, Shobana, Padmabhushan Alarmél Valli, Revati Ramachandran, Parvati Ghantasala, The Dhananjayans, and Ragamala. In recognition of her contribution to the art, has been honored her with the titles Gana Kokilam, Sangeetagna, and Nritya Sangeeta Varshini.

Lalit Subramanian (Vocal) is a vocalist proficient in both the South Indian (Carnatic) and North Indian (Hindustani) styles of Indian classical music. He is the disciple of renowned Carnatic musicians Tiruvarur Sri S. Girish and Neyveli Sri R. Santhanagopalan, and renowned Hindustani musician Pandit Shekhar Kumbhojkar. Lalit has won multiple awards and performs at various venues in the U.S. and India, both as a solo vocalist and as an accompanist for dance performances. He also plays the mridangam and the tabla and has trained under tabla artist Pandit Anand Godse. 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 Dance Company since 2008.

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 renowned dancers at the major festivals and theatres 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.

S. Sakthivel Muruganantham (Mridangam) has been a preeminent performer on the mridangam, specializing in the accompaniment of classical dance, for 34 years. He learned by 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.

Ramanathan Kalaiarasan (Violin) is the son of distinguished Mirudanga Vidwan Sangeetha Bhusanam Professor Thiru A.S.

Ramanathan. A disciple of Smt. Dhanadevi Mithradeve, he graduated with honors from Annamalai University, Chidambaram, India, with the title of 'Sangeetha Bhushanam.' He has over 25 years' experience accompanying leading dancers in India and abroad, and recording music and dance DVDs for E- Parampara Infotainment and Swathi Soft Solutions. He is a permanent staff member/performer with Padmabhushan Sri. V.P.Dhananjayan and Smt Shantha Dhananjayan's Bharatha Kalanjali. His honors include Best Violin Artist for Dance from Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, Best Accompanying Artist for Dance from VDS Arts Academy, and the Sudharani Raghupathy Endowment Award for senior musician from Natyarangam—the dance wing of Narada Gana Sabha, Chennai.

Sruthi Sagar (Flute) has earned a place for himself in the field of Carnatic Music. A disciple of Kalaimamani Dr. Sunder for more than fifteen years, he had his initial training on the Flute from Shri B. V. Balasai and his father Shri Sudarsana Rao. Sruthi Sagar has performed at prestigious venues and festivals throughout India and is a recipient of the Air India Radio first prize and other coveted awards such as Kuzhal Isai Chelvan, Yuva Kala Bharathi, and Yuva Kala Vipanchee. Since 2005, Sruthi Sagar has been a Central Government scholarship awardee, and recipient of a Young Achiever's Scholarship conferred by the Government of India. He has performed at the Olympic Games in London as part of the STACCATO Band.

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