Electronic Press Kit
"I dream of building a community of dancers in a forsaken place amidst nature. A place where nothing exists, except dance. A place where you breathe, eat, sleep, dream, talk, imagine - dance. A place where all the five senses can be refined to perfection. A place where dancers drop negative qualities such as jealousy, small-mindedness, greed and malice to embrace their colleagues as sisters and support each other in their journey towards becoming dancers of merit."

“A place called Nrityagram.”

– Protima Gauri (October 12, 1948 - August 18, 1998)

One of the premier Indian Classical dance ensembles performing today, Nrityagram Dance Ensemble (pronounced NRI-thyuh-graam) has the unprecedented distinction of making The New York Times' “Best Dance of the Year” list two consecutive years in a row (2015, 2016). More than a dance company, Nrityagram was founded as a village devoted to dance. The all-female ensemble's daily life of intensive training and meditation brings to the stage compelling captivating performances that are at once sensual and lyrical.

The Nrityagram dance village is located outside Bangalore, India. It was founded in 1990 by Odissi dancer Protima Gauri, who converted ten acres of farmland into a setting for the study, practice and teaching of dance. At Nrityagram, dance is a way of life. Reminiscent of ancient ashrams where gurus imparted not only technique but also a philosophy of being, this is a creative space where dancers, musicians and choreographers live together, sharing their skills and developing their art. To enrich their practice, dancers are also taught yoga and martial arts along with Sanskrit and classical literature. As knowledge passes from guru to disciple, the continuity of the classical arts is ensured.
About the Company

A village of artistes dedicated to the practice and nurture of a 2000-year-old art form, Nrityagram is home to a school inspired by the Gurukula, an ancient teaching paradigm, and the dance ensemble.

The ensemble is devoted to bringing Odissi - one of the oldest dance styles in the world - to audiences worldwide. Although steeped in and dedicated to ancient practice, the Ensemble is also committed to carrying Indian dance into the twenty-first century. Enabled by grants from Arts Funding organisations, Nrityagram’s dancers not only explore creative expansions of tradition but are also able to commission fresh compositions from leading Indian classical musicians. They research, innovate, create original work, and perform to audiences across the globe.

The Nrityagram Dance Ensemble, is regarded as one of the foremost dance companies of India. Led by Artistic Director Surupa Sen, the company has achieved worldwide critical acclaim, performing globally including an annual tour to the United States. Over two decades, Nrityagram has presented seven full-length ensemble shows Śrī: In Search of the Goddess (2001), Ansh (2005), Sacred Space (2005), Pratimā: Reflection (2008), Śrīyaḥ (2010), Samhāra (2012) and Āhuti (2019); two full-length duet shows Saṃyoga (2012) and Songs of Love and Longing (2013) and two full-length solo shows Yadunandana (2017) and Vinati: Songs from the Gita Govinda (2021). All choreographed by Surupa Sen.
SURUPA SEN was the first student to graduate from the Nrityagram Gurukula (School) and is a founding member of the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble.

She began her Odissi training with the architect of Odissi, Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra. She also studied Odissi with Guru Protima Gauri, Abhinaya (expressional dance) with Guru Kalanidhi Narayanan and the Natyashastra under the supervision of Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam.

For over two decades, Surupa has worked to research and expand the dance vocabulary of Odissi, and developed an aesthetic style that distinguishes the dancers from the Nrityagram School.

Attracted to choreography from childhood, Surupa has focussed on making new dances using an expanded Odissi language, rooted in traditional Odissi and the Natyashastra. She has a keen interest in music and rhythm composition and has worked closely with Pt. Raghunath Panigrahi since 1999.

Surupa has choreographed seven full-length ensemble shows for Nrityagram, which are Śrī: In Search of the Goddess (2001), Ansh (2005), Sacred Space (2005), Pratimā: Reflection (2008), Śriyah (2010), Samhāra (2012) and Āhuti (2019); two full-length duet shows Samyoga (2012) and Songs of Love and Longing (2013); and two full-length solo shows Yadunandana (2017) and Vinati: Songs from the Gita Govinda (2021). She has also created two virtual shows - Vinati, a solo show for World Music Institute’s Dancing the Gods Festival and Upadāṇa: An offering for the Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival.

Surupa received the Raza Foundation Award in 2006, the Yagnaraman Award from Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, Chennai in 2008, the prestigious Nritya Choodamani from Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, Chennai in 2011. In 2019, she was awarded the Sangeet Natak Akademi Puraskar, the highest award for the Performing Arts in India.

Surupa Sen is the artistic director and choreographer at Nrityagram.
Āhuti (2019)
{Sanskrit: Invoking | Pali: Offering}
Running Time: 95 minutes (with a 20 minute Intermission)
Featuring Nrityagram & Chitrasena dancers
Performed with live music

On the heels of the tour revival of their international hit Saṃhāra, Surupa Sen collaborated with the Chitrasena Dance Company (pronounced Chithruh-say- naa) from Sri Lanka, for a new work in which Nrityagram’s Odissi dancers are joined by male and female guest dancers from this Kandyan Dance company.

TOURING PERSONNEL
Dancers/Performers: 9 dancers, 4-5 musicians
Production/Technical: 1
14-15 Total
About the Dance Forms

Kandyan Dance
Kandyan dance comes from Kandy, an area in the Central hills region in Sri Lanka. According to legend, the origins of the dance lie in an exorcism ritual known as the Kohomba Kankariya, which was performed by shamans from India, who came to the island on the request of a king suffering from a mysterious illness. After the performance of the ritual, the illness vanished and the local people adopted the dance.

Originally performed by dancers who were identified as a separate caste and aligned to the Temple of the Tooth, the dance declined when support from the Kandyan kings ended in the colonial period.

Kandyan Dance was adapted for the stage in the 1940s, by Chitrasena. His wife and dance partner, Vajira, was the first professional female Kandyan dancer, and together they established Kandyan dance as a performance art. Their popularity helped to reduce the caste barriers surrounding the dance and made it accessible to an urban, contemporary audience.

Odissi
For centuries, a temple has looked out at a turbulent sea, its walls dancing a prayer to the rising sun. Magnificent ruins like these, in Odisha in Eastern India, confirm that Odissi was performed as far back as 200 BCE. Originally a sacred ritual dedicated to the gods, Odissi is one of the oldest dance traditions in the world. Its sinuous forms, languorous limbs and rapt expressions frozen in stone tell of a past rich in dance, music, myth and legend.

Odissi speaks of love and union, between human and divine, transporting viewers to enchanted worlds of magic and spirituality. Its sensuousness and lyricism reflect both the motifs of Odisha temple sculpture as well as the poetry from the deep wellsprings of Oriya music.
Guest Company

THE CHITRASENA DANCE COMPANY

Founded by Guru Chitrasena with a vision to inspire and exhilarate through the traditional dances and drums of Sri Lanka, the Chitrasena Dance Company has always been at the forefront of transforming the traditional arts landscape of the island. Chitrasena is recognized for rescuing the traditional dances that were confined to village settings and presenting it to audiences in Sri Lanka and across the world. The Company was founded in 1943 and initially nurtured under the creative genius Chitrasena, and later together with his wife Vajira. They worked tirelessly for decades to carefully distill ancient rhythmic rituals, by reviving and refining elements of it while staying firmly rooted in the old, and developed an authentic dance language.


The Chitrasena Dance Company celebrated its 75th year in 2018, and the third generation is led by Heshma Wignaraja, Artistic Director and eldest granddaughter of Chitrasena and Vajira, who continues to take forward the legacy of her grandparents. Experimenting without compromise and using traditional dance language and form to push boundaries, the new work offers a fresh perspective, while upholding Guru Chitrasena’s philosophy that “the new is but an extension of the old”.

- The New York Times

“So beguiling, you resist blinking in case you miss a moment!”
- The Herald

“These are among the world’s greatest dancers.”
- The New York Times

“One of the most extraordinary dance events of the year… The only proper response to dancers this amazing is worship.”
- The New York Times

“The women of the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble are rock stars in the dance world! At Tuesday’s opening night, Mikhail Baryshnikov and Isaac Mizrahi were in the audience, and choreographer Mark Morris was on his feet at the curtain, shouting bravos!”
- The New York Post
Residency Activities

Introduction to Odissi Dance Class
This introductory class is an opportunity to learn the basic abstract movement phrases and body-training techniques specific to Odissi, as evolved and practiced at Nrityagram.

Kandyan Dance Class
This class will give participants the opportunity to learn about Kandyan, an indigenous traditional dance form from Sri Lanka.

Schooltime Matinee: Dance Village Odyssey
This one-of-a-kind cultural exchange transports students on a journey through time and space to Eastern India, the birthplace of Odissi (one of the world’s oldest classical dance forms) and to the island of Sri Lanka, home to Kandyan dance (an ancient folk dance ritual). Geared for young audiences, company members illustrate the breathtaking beauty of both dance forms, demonstrating how each reflects the culture of their homeland and thus the differences that set each apart. Accompanied with live music, this engaging show includes audience participation and introduces students to the language of Odissi and Kandyan dance – from body positions and movement vocabulary to nuances such as walks, spins and jumps. Study Guide Available.

Lecture Demonstration
Based on Odissi Dance from India and Kandyan Dance from Sri Lanka, The Lecture-Demonstration is an Introduction to Odissi Dance as evolved and practiced at Nrityagram & Kandyan Dance as developed and practiced by the Chitrasena Dance School.

Panel Discussions, Artist Talks and Post-show discussions are also available.
Contact

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