



Electronic Press Kit



# About the Company



*"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 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.

Nrityagram (which means 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.

Nrityagram is dedicated to creating excellence in Odissi through the traditional method of learning, the Guru-Shishya Parampara, a unique and sacred relationship between mentor and disciple, referred to as mentorship in modern times.

# About the Company

Our dance pedagogy is inspired by the Gurukula, an ancient Indian residential teaching paradigm where students and teachers live together in an integrated environment of practice, theory and discipline. Learning is a way of life and students have a rare opportunity to imbibe the spirit of the Guru by living with them and observing them at work.

Conceived this way, for almost 30 years, Nrityagram imparts not only technique in dance but nurtures a philosophy of being that embraces holistic practice, mindful living and the pursuit of excellence. The daily schedule includes a unique, scientific body-conditioning and training programme that is sourced from Yoga, Natyashastra, Kalaripayattu, Western fitness methods and Odissi body-conditioning exercises. This training method is designed to increase the performance lifespan of a dancer and is sought-after by accomplished dance and movement professionals from different disciplines.

With a student strength of over 100, we provide an environment that fosters the artistic, intellectual and personal growth of our dancers and prepares them for successful and productive lives as artists and citizens, as well as to become leaders in their professions.

The aim is to prepare dancers for careers that combine performance with teaching, community outreach, and leadership. To enrich their practice, dancers are taught yoga, meditation, and martial arts along with Sanskrit and ancient dance scriptures. Choreographers, musicians, writers, and theatre practitioners from all over the world visit, to perform and conduct workshops and seminars in their area of practice. This unique blend of traditional knowledge with contemporary understanding and application makes Nrityagram the only institution of its kind in the world and strengthens its position as a ground-breaking institution.



# About the Company cont.



The Nrityagram Dance Ensemble is regarded as one of the foremost dance companies of India. Led by Artistic Director Surupa Sen, the Ensemble has achieved worldwide critical acclaim, performing across the globe including an annual tour to the United States.

The Ensemble is devoted to bringing Odissi - one of the oldest dance traditions in the world - to audiences worldwide. Performed as far back as 200 BC as a sacred ritual dedicated to the gods, Odissi speaks of love and union, between human and divine, transporting viewers to enchanting worlds of magic and spirituality. Its lush lyricism reflects both the motifs of Odisha temple sculpture as well as the poetry from the deep wellsprings of Oriya music.

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 International Arts Funding organizations, Nrityagram's dancers not only explore creative expansions of tradition but are also able to commission fresh compositions from leading Indian classical musicians.

Nrityagram has presented seven full-length ensemble shows **Śrī: In Search of the Goddess** (2001), **Ansh** (2005), **Sacred Space** (2005), **Pratimā: Reflection** (2008), **Śriyaḥ** (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). All choreographed by Surupa Sen.

# Surupa Sen



SURUPA SEN (Artistic Director, choreographer) was the first student to graduate from Nrityagram.

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

For over two decades, Surupa has researched and expanded the dance vocabulary of Odissi, and developed an aesthetic style that distinguishes the dancers from the Nrityagram Gurukula (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 for World Music Institute's Dancing the Gods Festival and **Upadāna: 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 and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award 2018 - the highest honor for the Performing Arts in India. Surupa is Artistic Director and choreographer at Nrityagram.

# Touring Program



## Āhuti (2019)

{Sanskrit: Invoking | Pali: Offering}

Running Time: 100 minutes (with a 20 minute Intermission)

Featuring Nrityagram & Chitrasena dancers

**“exciting and illuminating”**  
**- *The New York Times***

On the heels of the tour revival of their international hit *Samhāra*, 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. **Performed with live music.**

### TOURING PERSONNEL

Performers: 9 dancers + 1 understudy, 5 musicians

Production/Technical: 1

Total: 16

View *Āhuti* Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/799600716>

View *Āhuti* Excerpts: <https://vimeo.com/799598547>

For full length contact: [sandyg@pentacle.org](mailto:sandyg@pentacle.org)

# About the Dance Forms



## 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.

## Kandyan

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.

# Guest Artists



## THE CHITRASENA DANCE COMPANY

Founded by Guru Chitrasena in 1943 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 them to audiences in Sri Lanka and across the world. Enabling a path for the female dancer, Chitrasena, together with his wife Vajira, Sri Lanka's first prima ballerina, 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 and presentation for the stage. Today his dance school and company is presided by wife Vajira and daughter Upeka, who continue to guide the Company to forge new paths and create the benchmark for Sri Lankan dance the world over.

For over seven decades the Chitrasena Dance Company has given life to compelling performances ranging from a rich repertoire of dance and drumming pieces, to acclaimed original ballets and productions inspired by ancient rituals and contemporary culture. **Karadiya** (1961), **Nala Damayanthi** (1963), **Nrithanjali** (1965), **Kinkini Kolama** (1978), **Shiva Ranga** (1984), **Chandalika** (1996) and **Bera-Handa** (2001) are some of the most-renowned. More recently, the Chitrasena Dance Company has brought to the stage **The Art of Chitrasena** (2006), **Kumbi Kathawa** (2007), **Dancing for the Gods** (2010), **Devanjali** (2015) and **Guru Gedara Festival** (2018). The creative partnership and the first collaborative production, based on an invitation extended to the Chitrasena Dance Company by Nrityagram led to the much-acclaimed **Samhāra** (2012).

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".



# Community Engagement Activities



Kandyan Class © Dan Mirilli courtesy of Moss Arts Center

## **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.

## **Introduction to Kandyan Dance Class**

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

## **Schoolltime Matinee: A Meeting of Two Cultures**

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.

**[Click HERE for Study Guide](#)**

## **Artist Talks and Panel Discussions**

Topics include but are not limited to classical Indian dance, *Āhuti* – featuring Odissi & Kandyan dance forms, Odissi and sculpture, Odissi dance music and rhythms, the poetry of the Gita Govinda, religion and dance, temple architecture and dance, the Natyashastra, storytelling through dance, costumes, body conditioning and injury prevention, gender studies, and the Nrityagram dance village.

**Post-show talks & tailored engagement activities are also possible. Contact Pentacle for details.**

# Virtual Offerings



## **Virtual Tour: Nrityagram Dance Village**

Go on a virtual tour of the Nrityagram Dance Village. Located outside Bangalore in Southern India, this lush ten-acre dance village founded by Protima Gauri in 1990, has been home to the internationally renowned Nrityagram Dance Ensemble for 30 years.

A rare opportunity to visit the grounds of this exemplary company that has been visited by notable personalities including Mark Morris, Mikhail Baryshnikov and Mick Jagger. The tour may include a brief view of rehearsals-in-progress and/or footage of performance excerpts not available online.

## **Artist Talk: Nrityagram & Chitrasena**

Join Surupa Sen, Artistic Director of Nrityagram and Heshma Wignaraja, Artistic Director of Chitrasena Dance Company from Sri Lanka, as they discuss their collaboration over the years, beginning with their first work Samhāra and their most recent collaboration, Āhuti, bringing Odissi and Kandyan dance forms together.

**Tailored virtual events are also possible. Contact Pentacle for details.**

# Press Quotes



*"These are among the world's greatest dancers."*

**- The New York Times**

*"So beguiling, you resist blinking in case you miss a moment!"*

**- The Herald**

*"Nrityagram's mastery of movement and spiritual depth are profound. Excuse my insistence, but if you love dance, you must see this company in action."*

**- Mikhail Baryshnikov**

*"One of the most extraordinary dance events of the year... The only proper response to dancers this amazing is worship."*

**- The New York Times**

*"Nrityagram is still the most exciting Indian classical dance ensemble I have ever seen."*

**- Fjord Review**

*"...New York City dance history was made!"*

**- Ballet Review**

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