

Usha Shivakumar, vocal, began learning music from her mother, Saraswathy Sankaranarayanan. From 1989 to 2001, she further learned with T. Brinda, with Balasaraswati's brother T. Viswanathan, and with Lakshmi Knight. She toured the United States with Lakshmi Knight on five occasions. She is distinguished for her extensive repertoire of the music for *bharata natyam*, and her adherence to the Balasaraswati family style of music. Mrs. Shivakumar has a master's degree in music from the University of Madras, and lives and teaches in Mumbai.

T.R. Moorthy, flute, is the only exponent of the distinctive style of T. Viswanathan. Mr. Moorthy learned music from T. Balasaraswati and her mother, T. Jayammal, and was a member of Balasaraswati's musical ensemble. He performed with both Balasaraswati and T. Viswanathan in concerts throughout India and North America. Moorthy is highly regarded for the depth of his experience performing the traditional repertoire of *bharata natyam*. He lives and teaches in Chennai, and has a solo career.

Douglas Knight, mridangam, learned mridangam with Balasaraswati's brother T. Ranganathan from 1968 to 1978. Later, he studied with other teachers in India, including Kanchipuram Kuppaswamy Mudiliyar, Balasaraswati's drummer. He accompanied Lakshmi Knight in dance concerts in India and the United States for 25 years, and he has been performing with Aniruddha Knight for 20 years. A Guggenheim Fellow in 2003–04, Douglas Knight is the author of a forthcoming biography of Balasaraswati. He lives in Middletown, CT and Chennai, and performs and lectures internationally.

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108th Season, 122nd program



SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND DANCE

Beall Concert Hall
8:00 p.m.

Friday evening
May 2, 2008

THE WORLD MUSIC SERIES

presents

CLASSICAL MUSIC & DANCE OF SOUTH INDIA

featuring

***Aniruddha Knight & Ensemble
"From the Heart of a Tradition"***

***Aniruddha Knight, solo dance
Vegavahini Vijayaraghavan, vocal
Vidya Sankaranarayanan, nattuvangam & vocal
Usha Shivakumar, vocal
T.R. Moorthy, flute
Douglas Knight, mridangam***



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

PROGRAM

The sequence of performance items of the traditional *bharata natyam* concert is a carefully planned progression that introduces and integrates the two important components of the dance form, interpretive dance and pure dance. Interpretive dance is mimetic interpretation of meaning suggested by poetry; pure dance is rhythmic choreography based on a codified, precise vocabulary of body position and movement, including intricate footwork. During the concert meters (*tala*) and melodic modes (*raga*) are explored.

Alarippu

Talam: Khanda Capu

Alarippu introduces the three fundamental pure dance positions of standing, half-sitting and sitting, performed in three tempos. The short piece consists of choreographed sequences in pure dance, with no thematic content or verbal connotation. The composition is performed with several lines of text that are set in the appropriate meter.

Varnam: Danike

Ragam: Todi

Talam: Rupakam

Composer: Ponnaiah Pillai

Language: Telugu

This piece is set in *Sringara rasa* and is addressed to the form of Shiva worshipped at the Great Temple at Thanjavur, Brihadiswara. The song expresses the love and longing for Shiva of a heroine, embodying mankind, as related by the heroine's confidante who acts as a messenger, asking the Lord to come to his devotee.

The *varnam* introduces both elements of the dance form, and allows the dancer to exhibit the beauty of pure dance, alternated with narrative interpretations of the mood and meaning of the poetic text. In the first part of the piece, four lines of text and a concluding section composed in solfege are performed. After an introductory section of pure dance, each

ABOUT TONIGHT'S ARTISTS

Aniruddha Knight, solo dancer, was trained from infancy in music and dance by his mother, Lakshmi Knight, T. Balasaraswati's only daughter and principal student. He also studied the family musical repertoire with his great-uncle, National Heritage Fellow T. Viswanathan, and with his great-aunt T. Muktha. He is now a vocal student of his aunt, Vegavahini Vijayaraghavan. Knight's performance reveals the mastery of technique and improvisational skill that are the hallmarks of his family's music and dance style. But Knight is also representative of the face of young America: biracial, bicultural and, as an artist, completely contemporary. Knight began his career as a vocalist in concert with his mother during the 1990's. He gave his debut dance concert in Chennai, India in 1994 and his American dance debut at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in 1997. Since then Knight has performed throughout India and North America. He is the second Indian performer and the only traditional artist to receive support from the National Dance Project. Knight lives in Chennai and Middletown, CT.

Vegavahini Vijayaraghavan, vocal, is the daughter of the legendary singer T. Brinda who was among a handful of female musicians who transformed the role of women artists in South India during the 20th century. Mrs. Vijayaraghavan first learned music with her grandmother, T. Kamakshiammal, and continued learning with her mother. She then became a disciple of the renowned singer Ramnad Krishnan. She is now the sole repository of much of her family's extraordinary repertoire, including the padams and javalis which are the jewels of the musical repertoire of *bharata natyam*. Her repertoire represents several direct lineages of the musical tradition of South Indian "classical" music, as well as the separate musical tradition of *bharata natyam*. She first toured the United States in the 1960's. Mrs. Vijayaraghavan lives and teaches in Chennai.

Vidya Sankaranarayanan, *nattuvanar* (dance master) and vocal, learned music from her mother, Saraswathy Sankaranarayanan, and then from Lakshmi Knight, with whom she performed throughout India and the US, beginning in 1991. She began performing with Aniruddha Knight in 1994. Mrs. Sankaranarayanan is herself a performer of *bharata natyam*, a senior exponent of the distinguished style of K. Kittappa Pillai, a direct descendent of the codifiers of traditional *bharata natyam* at the Court of Thanjavur. She currently lives and teaches near Washington, DC.

PROGRAM NOTES

Historically, *bharata natyam*, like all the performing arts of India, was taught and practiced within families of professional musicians and dancers. Musical styles evolved, and repertoire was assimilated and performed within the family with central musical roles filled by family members. In this traditional setting, the dancer and accompanying musicians developed a common musical approach, highly evolved and always changing.

Aniruddha Knight and Ensemble present the sole remaining example of the hereditary practice of *bharata natyam*. The only grandchild of the great dancer T. Balasaraswati, Knight is the ninth generation of one of India's most distinguished families of professional musicians and dancers, and the last direct inheritor of his family's style and repertoire. His concerts, a suite of music and dance compositions partly choreographed and partly performed extemporaneously, follow the format established in the early 19th century in the Royal Court of Thanjavur.

Several specific characteristics distinguish Balasaraswati's art. The entire ensemble performs a single style of music, identified with the great musician Vina Dhanammal (1867–1938), Balasaraswati's grandmother. The dancer, also a musician, sings as he dances, and the musicians are intimately familiar with the dance vocabulary. Sections of narrative dance are unrehearsed and improvised, and the musicians proceed from one line of music to the next in response to a variety of signals from the dancer. Much of the pure dance Knight performs was composed and choreographed between 1920 and 1980 by Balasaraswati's teacher Kandappa Pillai Nattuvanar and his son, K. Ganesha Pillai. Compositions called *tirmanam* that are performed during the *varnam* are performed with a line of music and text, a practice exclusive to this style. *Tirmanams* in this style adhere strictly to principles of form and rhythmic conventions of drumming, including concepts of rhythmic shape and continuity formed by patterns organized in a variety of ways representing groups of four, three, seven, five, and nine pulses, presented in this order.

The practice of music and dance as a unified idiom demonstrated by Knight and his ensemble sets their performance of *bharata natyam* apart from all other contemporary styles.

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line is interpreted with narrative dance. Improvised melodic variations are performed as the dancer develops variations of interpretation. At the conclusion of narrative dance for each line of text, stamping follows that signals the start of the last section of choreographed pure dance (*tirmanam*). The dancer retreats to the back of the stage in a stylized "walk" before the next line begins. In the second section, using a line of text as a refrain, several lines of music are performed, in solfege and then with text. The dance reflects these changes through rhythmic pure dance interpretation of the solfege and narrative interpretation of the text.

Padams, Javali, Sloka

After the *varnam*, several lyrical songs allow the dancer to concentrate on the gestural aspect of a performance. Consistent with the improvisational nature of the hereditary practice of *bharata natyam*, the specific songs performed in this section of the concert will be selected by the artists shortly before or during the performance. The pace of the piece is set by the dancer. The slow, majestic *padams* are the most powerful in the family repertoire. Their musical settings, rich expressions of *raga*, reflect the influence of Aniruddha's ancestor Vina Dhanammal.

Tillana: Nardu Dru Dru Thom

Ragam: Mandari

Talam: Adi

Composer: Thanjavur Quartet

Language: Telugu

The *tillana* is the counterpart of *alarippu*, marking the conclusion of a recital. It is a rhythmic exposition of pure dance accompanied by melodic solfege, drum syllables, and a brief text.

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