



# Written in Water

*A production of*  
**Ragamala Dance Company**

**Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy**  
*Concept and Choreography, Artistic Directors*

Friday Evening, October 20, 2017 at 8:00  
Power Center  
Ann Arbor

13th Performance of the 139th Annual Season  
27th Annual Dance Series  
Traditions and Crosscurrents

Tonight's performance is sponsored by Masco Corporation Foundation.

Funded in part by the Arts Midwest Touring Fund, a program of Arts Midwest that is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, with additional contributions from Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs and the Crane Group.

Media partnership is provided by Ann Arbor's 107one and Michigan Radio 91.7 FM.

Special thanks to Jennifer Boyak, Clare Croft, Sreyashi Dey, Cara Graninger, and Chaula Thacker for their participation in events surrounding this evening's performance.

*Written in Water* appears by arrangement with Elsie Management.

In consideration of the artists and the audience, please refrain from the use of electronic devices during the performance.

The photography, sound recording, or videotaping of this performance is prohibited.

## CAST

*Dancers* / Aparna Ramaswamy, Ranees Ramaswamy, Ashwini Ramaswamy, Tamara Nadel, Jessica Fiala

*Musical Ensemble* / Amir ElSaffar, *trumpet, santur, and vocals*; Preethy Mahesh, *vocals*; Rajna Swaminathan, *mridangam*; Arun Ramamurthy, *violin*; Kasi Aysola, *nattuvangam*

## CREATIVE TEAM

*Concept and Choreography* / Ranees Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy  
*Choreographic Associate* / Ashwini Ramaswamy

*Musical Composition* / Amir ElSaffar and Prema Ramamurthy

*Development of the Musical Score* / Amir ElSaffar, Aparna Ramaswamy, and Ranees Ramaswamy, with the musical ensemble

*Visual Art* / Original paintings by Keshav

*Additional Artwork* / Nathan Christopher

*Historical Image* / provided by the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge

*Lighting Design* / Jeff Bartlett

*Sound Engineer* / Maury Jensen

*Lighting Supervisor and Production Manager* / Mat Terwilliger

*Video Director* / Rob Simmer

*Written in Water* is approximately one hour in duration and is performed without intermission.



Following this evening's performance, please feel free to remain in your seats and join us for a post-performance Q&A with members of the company.

## FROM THE CHOREOGRAPHERS

In *Written in Water*, we explore the concept of spiritual ascension through the second-century Indian board game *Paramapadam* (a precursor to Snakes & Ladders), the 12th-century Sufi text *The Conference of the Birds*, and the Hindu mythological story *Ksheerabthi Madanam*, the churning of the seven seas.

We have drawn upon *The Conference of the Birds* to frame the arc of *Written in Water*. The protagonists of this Sufi epic progress through seven valleys, representing states of being. With *Written in Water*, we mirror their journey through a world of psychological complexity, traversing experiences of spiritual longing, human love, unity with others, detachment from material life, and finally, ultimate oneness with the divine.

In the first movement of *Written in Water*, we experience human life, love, and struggle, explored through the framework of the board game *Paramapadam*. The game board serves as a physical and metaphorical framework through which the seekers/dancers navigate snakes and ladders representing the heights of ecstasy and the depths of longing.

In the second movement, we explore the human quest for the divine. The mythological story of *Ksheerabthi Madanam* is a metaphor for a world in chaos. Amidst this dynamic tension between good and evil, Vishnu stands for the perfect center toward which humans strive.

In the final movement, we journey toward transcendence — toward unmediated union with the divine.

In developing *Written in Water*, we played the game hundreds of times, using the floor as the board and our bodies as the game pieces. The projected images are from original paintings by Chennai-based visual artist Keshav, specially commissioned by Ragamala for this work. *Written in Water* was developed through an ongoing collaboration in which choreography, music, and visual art were constructed simultaneously in a constant artistic dialogue that spanned two years.

— Ranee Ramaswamy and  
Aparna Ramaswamy

## ARTISTS

**Ragamala Dance Company** was founded in 1992 by Raneer Ramaswamy. Now in its 25th season under the direction of Raneer Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy (mother and daughter), Ragamala creates work that conveys a sense of reverence, of unfolding mystery, and of universal celebration.

Ragamala has been hailed by *The New York Times* as "soulful, imaginative, and rhythmically contagious." Ragamala has toured extensively, highlighted by the Kennedy Center (Washington, DC), Joyce Theater (New York), Lincoln Center (New York), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), American Dance Festival (Durham, NC), Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, International Festival of Arts & Ideas (New Haven, CT), Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates), Just Festival (Edinburgh, UK), Bali Arts Festival (Indonesia), Sri Krishna Gana Sabha (Chennai, India), and National Centre for Performing Arts (Mumbai, India).

For upcoming tour dates in the US and abroad, or to subscribe to Ragamala's e-newsletter, please visit [www.ragamaladance.org](http://www.ragamaladance.org).

**Raneer Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy** (*artistic directors/choreographers/principal dancers*) are artistic directors, choreographers, and principal dancers of Ragamala, founded by Raneer in 1992. As dance makers and performers, they explore the dynamic tension between the ancestral and the contemporary, making dance landscapes that dwell in opposition — secular and spiritual life, inner and outer worlds, the human and the natural, rhythm and stillness — to find the transcendence that lies in between. As mother and daughter,

each brings her generational experience to the work — the rich traditions, deep philosophical roots, and ancestral wisdom of India meeting and merging with their hybridic perspectives as Indian-American artists. As protégés and senior disciples of legendary dancer/choreographer Alar mé Valli, known as one of India's greatest living masters, Raneer and Aparna's training in the South Indian classical dance form of Bharatanatyam is the bedrock of their creative aesthetic.

Raneer and Aparna's work is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, National Dance Project, MAP Fund, The McKnight Foundation, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, New Music/USA, USArtists International, and the Japan Foundation, and has been commissioned by the Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), Lincoln Center Out of Doors (New York), Krannert Center (University of Illinois), Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center (University of Maryland), Opening Nights Performing Arts (Florida State University), and Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi (UAE); and they have developed work in residence at MANCC (the Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography) and an NPN residency at The Yard. Most recently, Raneer and Aparna were selected as Research Fellows by the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center (Italy).

Raneer currently serves on the National Council on the Arts, appointed by President Barack Obama. She is recipient of a 2014 Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, a 2012 United States Artists Fellowship, a 2011 McKnight Distinguished Artist Award, a Bush Fellowship for Choreography, and 14 McKnight Artist Fellowships for Choreography and Interdisciplinary Art.

Aparna is recipient of a 2016 Doris Duke Performing Artist Award and a 2016 Joyce Award. Described by *The New York Times* as “thrillingly three-dimensional...rapturous and profound,” she has received three McKnight Artist Fellowships for Dance and Choreography and a Bush Fellowship for Choreography, and was selected as one of *Dance Magazine’s* “25 to Watch” for 2010. Her solo work, presented with live music, has toured the US and India with support from the National Dance Project and USArtists International. Aparna is an empaneled artist with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and serves on the Board of Trustees of Dance/USA.

**Amir ElSaffar** (*composer, trumpet, santoor, maqam vocals*) has distinguished himself with a mastery of diverse musical traditions and a singular approach to combining Middle Eastern musical languages with jazz and other styles of contemporary music. A recipient of the 2013 Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, Mr. ElSaffar has been described as “uniquely poised to reconcile jazz and Arabic music without doing either harm,” (*The Wire*) and “one of the most promising figures in jazz today” (*Chicago Tribune*). He currently leads several critically-acclaimed ensembles: Two Rivers, which combines the musical languages and instrumentation of Iraqi maqam and contemporary jazz; the Amir ElSaffar Quintet, performing his microtonal compositions with standard jazz instrumentation; Safaafir, the only ensemble in the US performing and preserving the Iraqi maqam in its traditional format; The Alwan Ensemble, the resident ensemble of Alwan for the Arts, specializing in classical music from Egypt, the Levant, and Iraq; and his newest project, the Rivers of Sound ensemble, featuring 17 musicians from

a broad spectrum of traditions, from maqam to American jazz. In addition, he has worked with jazz legend Cecil Taylor, and prominent jazz musicians such as Mark Dresser, Gerry Hemingway, Marc Ribot, Henry Grimes, and Oliver Lake. Mr. ElSaffar has appeared on numerous recordings, and has released six under his own name, *Maqams of Baghdad* (2005), *Two Rivers* (2007), *Radif Suite* (2010), *Inana* (2011), *Alchemy* (2013), and *Crisis* (2015). For more information, please visit [www.amirelsaffar.com](http://www.amirelsaffar.com).

**Smt. Prema Ramamurthy** (*composer*) has been an outstanding vocalist and composer for more than four decades. She was initiated into music by her parents, the Late Sri S. Nagaraja Iyer and Smt. Jayalakshmi, and her grandfather, Sri S. Srinivasa Iyer. Ms. Ramamurthy has had further intensive training under the great Maestro “Padmavibhushan” Dr. Mangalampalli Balamurali Krishna. She has also specialized in the art of *Pallavi* singing from Vidwan Sri T. V. Gopalakrishnan, and has learned the art of singing *padams* and *javalis* from the veteran musician Mrs. T. Muktha. Ms. Ramamurthy is 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 US, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Australia, Mexico, and South Africa.

**Keshav** (*visual art*) has had a passion for drawing since childhood. He does not have formal training in art. He learned from museums and art books, and was influenced by the Renaissance masters and the impressionists. After seeing the work of the Indian Master Ravi Varma, his interest turned toward Indian art. In 1983, he began contributing his drawings to

*Ananda Vikatan* — a vernacular magazine that was a guiding light for all artists/ cartoonists in South India — and sketching performing musicians at the Music Academy in Chennai. In 1987, he began contributing cartoons to the national daily newspaper *The Hindu*. He eventually joined the staff at *The Hindu* as cartoonist, where he has remained for over 28 years. Meanwhile, he continued with his passion for the arts. His quest in Indian art led him to discover the treasures in temples and the symbolism used in the Indian epics, and he started to see Indian art and what it communicated in a new light. This led him into the world of Krishna. He began a journey into symbols, fascinated with the way abstract ideas could be communicated in simple metaphors that have stood the test of time. In 2006, his one-man show *Krishna Leela* was presented in Chennai, and later in Bangalore. He paints in oil, watercolor, acrylics, charcoals, and pastels. For the past several years he has been painting a Krishna a day (#krishnafortoday) and sharing it in his blog and social media. Keshav has a master's degree in commerce from Madras University. "Cartooning is my profession, painting is my passion." For more information, please visit [www.kamadenu.blogspot.com](http://www.kamadenu.blogspot.com).

**Ashwini Ramaswamy** (*choreographic associate/dancer*) has studied Bharatanatyam with Raneer and Aparna Ramaswamy — her mother and sister — since the age of five. She now has the honor of studying under Bharatanatyam legend Alarmél Valli. *The New York Times* describes Ashwini as "imbuing her refined, sculptural muscularity with a tranquility that contrasts with the springy exuberance of her feet...there is a continual flow of energy coursing through her limbs." Ashwini has toured

extensively with Ragamala, performing throughout the US and in Russia, Taiwan, Indonesia, Japan, UK, UAE, and India. She is a McKnight Artist Fellow for Dance, and the recipient of grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board, USArtists International, Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, and a Jerome Foundation Travel Study Grant. Ashwini's choreographic work has been presented by Augsburg College, Ritz Theater, and Red Eye Theater (Minneapolis, MN); and Triskelion Arts (Brooklyn, NY). Her most recent project, *Kirana*, co-created with Raneer and Aparna Ramaswamy, was presented at The Joyce Theater (NY) in 2017. She is currently collaborating with Raneer and Aparna on their forthcoming work, *Body, the Shrine*. Ashwini will be the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra's Liquid Music Series' Artist in Virtual Residence in 2017–18, followed by a commissioned work to premiere in 2019. She is Ragamala's director of publicity and marketing, and holds a degree in English literature from Carleton College. She currently serves on the board of Arts Midwest.

**Tamara Nadel** (*dancer*) is a disciple of Raneer and Aparna Ramaswamy and a founding member of Ragamala. She has toured extensively with the company, highlighted by Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, American Dance Festival, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, NYU Abu Dhabi (UAE), Just Festival (Edinburgh, UK), National Centre for Performing Arts (Mumbai, India), Sri Krishna Gana Sabha (Chennai, India), and tours to Japan, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Russia. She is a McKnight Fellow in Dance, and a recipient of grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board, Minneapolis Jewish Federation, Metro Regional Arts Council, Rimón: the Minnesota Jewish Arts Council, and a Jerome Foundation Travel Study





Grant. She is currently working with choreographer Raneer Ramaswamy on a solo work rooted in the writings of the Sephardic Jewish poets of Golden Age Spain. Tamara is Ragamala's director of institutional development, and holds a degree in religious studies and dance from Macalester College. She served on the City of Minneapolis Arts Commission from 2008–10, and is currently on the board of Minnesota Citizens for the Arts.

**Jessica Fiala** (*dancer*) has been studying with Raneer and Aparna Ramaswamy since 2006 and has toured with Ragamala throughout the US and to India, the UK, and the UAE. She is a teacher at the Ragamala School and has taught across the US and in Bangkok, Thailand. She holds an interdisciplinary master's degree from the University of Minnesota in museum studies and cultural studies, and has written about Bharatanatyam, museum history, and public art. She has presented research at conferences at the University of Naples "l'Orientale" (2013), University of Shanghai (2016), and University of Pittsburgh (2016), and participated on a panel for the Society of Dance History Scholars' Beyond Authenticity and Appropriation conference. Her writing on museums is included in the anthology *The Ruined Archive* (2014) and she was research coordinator for the 2015 International Award for Public Art. She is a research associate at Lutman & Associates.

**Preethy Mahesh** (*Carnatic vocals*) has been accompanying eminent dancers since 2003. She belongs to the traditional school of music initiated by respected guru Sangitha Kalanidhi Shri D.K. Jararaman, and later came under the tutelage of Tanjore Shri S. Kalyanaraman. She is a graded artist of All India Radio. She has several recordings to her credit,

many in collaboration with dancer Smt. Priyadarsini Govind. She has toured widely as an accompanist to many of India's most renowned dancers, performing at prestigious festivals and venues around the world with such performers as Alarmél Valli, Vyjayanthimala Bali, Priyadarsini Govind, Revathi Ramachandran, Rukmini Vijaykumar, Shobana, and the Dhanajayans. She is the recipient of the "Best Dance Vocalist" award from Sri Krishna Gana Sabha (Chennai, India), and the Bharatalaya Trust honored her with the title Gana Kokilam.

**Rajna Swaminathan** (*mridangam*) is an accomplished *mridangam* (South Indian percussion) artist, and a protégé of *mridangam* maestro Umayalpuram K. Sivaraman. She has performed with several renowned Indian classical musicians, most notably her mentor and eminent Carnatic vocalist, T.M. Krishna. Since 2011, she has been studying and collaborating with eminent musicians in New York's jazz and creative music scene, including Vijay Iyer, Steve Coleman, Miles Okazaki, and Amir ElSaffar. Culling from her experience incorporating experimental and polyrhythmic methods from creative music into her artistic practice, she formed the ensemble RAJAS, which collectively explores new textural and improvisational horizons at the nexus of multiple musical perspectives. Ms. Swaminathan is also active as a composer-performer for dance and theater works, most notably touring with the acclaimed Ragamala Dance Company, and collaborating with playwright Anu Yadav. She holds degrees in anthropology and French from the University of Maryland, College Park. She is currently pursuing a PhD in cross-disciplinary music studies at Harvard University. For more information, please visit [www.rajnaswaminathan.com](http://www.rajnaswaminathan.com).



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**Arun Ramamurthy** (*violin*) is a versatile violinist, composer, and educator based in New York. A disciple of the celebrated Carnatic violinist brothers Dr. Mysore Manjunath and Sri Mysore Nagaraj, Mr. Ramamurthy has become one of the country's leading Indian classical and crossover musicians, performing internationally in traditional Carnatic and Hindustani settings and cross-genre creative projects. He has been fortunate to perform with artists including Dr. Balamurali Krishna, Sudha Ragunathan, Anindo Chatterjee, T.N. Seshagopalan, Mashkoor Ali Khan, Marc Cary, and Awa Sangho. He leads the Arun Ramamurthy Trio, an ensemble that brings a fresh approach to age-old South Indian classical

repertoire and raga-inspired originals. Praised by *All About Jazz* as "a beautiful, exotic, ear-opening listening experience," his trio's debut album *Jazz Carnatica* was picked by NPR's *New Sounds* as a "Top New Release." He is a co-founder and vice president of Brooklyn Raga Massive. He created the concert series Carnatic Sundays at Cornelia Street Café, an iconic jazz venue in New York's West Village. He teaches students ranging from beginners to professional musicians, and has taught workshops at music schools, universities, conservatories, and summer music programs. For more information, please visit [www.arunramamurthy.com](http://www.arunramamurthy.com).

**Kasi Aysola** (*nattuvangam*) is the co-founder/co-artistic director of Prakriti Dance. He is a Bharatanatyam dancer, choreographer, and nattuvanar who trained under his Guru, Viji Prakash, for over 10 years. Mr. Aysola has been privileged to work with leading exponents of Bharatanatyam such as C.V. Chandrasekhar, Sudha Chandrasekhar, Bragha Bessel, Ajith Bhaskaran Dass, Harikrishna Kalayanasundaram, and Mythili Prakash. He has performed as a soloist in the US and India and has toured with the Shakti Dance Company, Dakshina Dance Company, and Blue13 Dance Company. A versatile and composite artist, he has furthered his study of varied Indian dance and music. He studies Kuchipudi dance under Sri Vempati Ravi Shankar and Yamini Saripalli, and Carnatic music under Vanaja Dasika.

**Jeff Bartlett** (*lighting designer*) has been honored to light Ragamala Dance Company since *A Canticle of Mary* in 1994. He has lit many of the company's signature works, including *Song of the Jasmine*,

*Sacred Earth*, *1,001 Buddhas: Journey of the Gods*, *Yathra/Journey*, *The Transposed Heads, Body and Soul*, *Bhakti*, *Stree*, and *Irah*. A dance lighting specialist based in Minneapolis, Mr. Bartlett has lit scores of artists in hundreds of productions over more than two decades. A 2008 "Artist of the Year" in *City Pages* magazine, his design work has also been recognized with a 2015 St. Paul Cultural Star award, a 2014 Knight Arts Challenge Grant, 2010 and 2005 Sage Awards for Dance, and a 2003 McKnight Theater Artist Fellowship. He is production manager and resident lighting designer at the Weitz Center for Creativity at Carleton College.

Support for the creation and touring of *Written in Water* was provided by a 2016 Joyce Award from the Joyce Foundation, the Doris Duke Performing Artist Awards program, and grants from New Music USA (made possible by annual program support and/or endowment gifts from Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, Baisley Powell Elebash Fund, Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation), the National Endowment for the Arts, the Association of Performing Arts Professionals (with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation), the Carolyn Foundation, and Caroline Amplatz Giving.

Additional support for Ragamala's 25th anniversary season comes from The McKnight Foundation; the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation; Target; The Dr. Dash Foundation, whose mission is to preserve and promote rich Indian heritage and culture; The Goodale Family Foundation; the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund; and members of Ragamala's Rasika Circle.

*Written in Water* was commissioned by The Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi (Lead Commissioner and Developmental Partner) and Opening Nights Performing Arts at Florida State University, Tallahassee.

*Written in Water* was created in residence at The Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography (MANCC) at Florida State University, Tallahassee; The Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi; an NPN residency at The Yard in Martha's Vineyard, MA; and The Cowles Center for Dance and the Performing Arts in Minneapolis, MN.

Ragamala gives special thanks to Dr. Vasudha Narayanan at the University of Florida; Dr. Mark Elliott, Senior Curator at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge; and Dr. Savitri Puram ([bhakthadasi.blogspot.com](http://bhakthadasi.blogspot.com)).

## UMS ARCHIVES

This evening's performance marks **Ragamala Dance Company's** second performance under UMS auspices, following the company's UMS debut in April 2013 in a performance of *Sacred Earth* at the Power Center. Amir ElSaffar makes his fourth UMS appearance this evening, following his UMS debut in March 2013 at Hill Auditorium with *Two Rivers*. He most recently appeared under UMS auspices earlier this week leading the *Rivers of Sound Orchestra* at the Power Center.

## **LOBBY INSTALLATION**

*Six Yards of Memory: A Photographic Retrospective*

Printed on and named after the length of a sari, this installation depicts the history and repertoire of Ragamala Dance Company. The piece was created to commemorate the company's 25th anniversary season.

# UMS 101

## **A new collaboration between UMS and Ann Arbor Public Schools Community Education & Recreation!**

Curious about UMS, but haven't taken the plunge? Want to learn more about an unfamiliar artist or genre? UMS and Ann Arbor Public Schools Community Education & Recreation (Rec & Ed) are teaming up to offer pre-performance classes created especially for first-time UMS attendees, for curious audience members, and for anyone who simply enjoys attending performances with a group. Each UMS 101 class will be facilitated by an expert and feature conversation, interactive exercises, and mini lectures that will help you better understand the genre and have a more enjoyable UMS performance experience. The classes will bring you together with other audience members who are curious about the performing arts and want to learn more.

Registration for UMS 101 includes a ticket to the performance, workshop fees, transportation to/from the performance venue, and light snacks before the performance. Class sessions will take place at Pioneer High School, and group transportation will be provided to and from the performance venue via coach.

Please visit the Ann Arbor Rec & Ed website to register at [bit.ly/UMSClasses](http://bit.ly/UMSClasses).

### **Jazz: Zakir Hussain & Dave Holland**

Wed, Nov 1 // 5:30 pm  
Registration fee: \$69

### **Classical Music: New York Philharmonic Young People's Concert**

Sat, Nov 18 // 12 noon  
Registration fee: \$55

TONIGHT'S VICTORS FOR UMS:



# Arts Midwest Touring Fund

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# Masco Corporation Foundation

*Supporters of this evening's performance of Written in Water.*

## **MAY WE ALSO RECOMMEND...**

- 11/1 Zakir Hussain and Dave Holland
- 11/7 China NCPA Orchestra
- 3/9–10 Company Wang Ramirez

*Tickets available at [www.ums.org](http://www.ums.org).*

## **ON THE EDUCATION HORIZON...**

- 10/21 You Can Dance: Ragamala Dance Company  
(Ann Arbor Y, 400 W. Washington Street, 2–3:30 pm)
- 11/1 UMS 101: Zakir Hussain and Dave Holland  
(Pioneer High School, 601 W. Stadium Boulevard, 5:30 pm)  
*Paid registration required; please visit [bit.ly/UMSClasses](http://bit.ly/UMSClasses) to register.*
- 11/18 UMS 101: New York Philharmonic Young People's Concert  
(Pioneer High School, 601 W. Stadium Boulevard, 12 noon)  
*Paid registration required; please visit [bit.ly/UMSClasses](http://bit.ly/UMSClasses) to register.*

*Educational events are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.*