

MCA Stage 2014–15

Theater
Dance
Music

at the
Edlis
Neeson
Theater

Winter/Spring

Manual Cinema

Mementos Mori

Jan 15–18, 2015

Stan's Cafe

The Cardinals

Jan 22–24, 2015

Sònia Sánchez

Le Ça (The Id)

Feb 13–15, 2015

Mariano Pensotti

Cineastas (Filmmakers)

Feb 26–Mar 1, 2015

Joffrey Academy of Dance

***Winning Works: Choreographers
of Color***

Mar 7–8, 2015

The Seldoms

Power Goes

Mar 20–29, 2015

Ragamala Dance +

Rudresh Mahanthappa

Song of the Jasmine

Apr 10–12, 2015

International Contemporary Ensem-

ble (ICE): Anna Thorvaldsdottir

In the Light of Air

Apr 26, 2015

Creative Music Summit:

Nicole Mitchell

May 2, 2015

Renée Baker

May 3, 2015

Third Coast Percussion with

Glenn Kotche

Wild Sound

May 21–22, 2015

**Ragamala Dance
+ Rudresh
Mahanthappa
Song of
the Jasmine
Apr 10–12, 2015**



Photo: Daria! Sneed

Aparna Ramaswamy: Concept

Aparna Ramaswamy and
Ranee Ramaswamy:
Creation and Choreography

Rudresh Mahanthappa:
Music Composition

Dancers

Aparna Ramaswamy
Ranee Ramaswamy
Ashwini Ramaswamy
Tamara Nadel
Jessica Fiala

Ensemble

Rudresh Mahanthappa,
alto saxophone
Rez Abbasi, *guitar*
Rajna Swaminathan, *mridangam*
Raman Kalyan, *Carnatic flute*
Anjna Swaminathan,
Carnatic violin

Light Design: Jeff Bartlett
Set Design: Concept by
Ranee Ramaswamy and
Aparna Ramaswamy
Architectural Design: Anjali
Ganapathy
Technical Direction: Jeff Bartlett
and Louise Robinson
Bell procurement by Anju
Kataria and Khazana Gallery
Sound Design: Maury Jensen
Lighting Supervisor/Production
Manager: Mat Terwilliger
Stage Manager: Elise Erickson

**Edlis Neeson
Theater**

**Museum of
Contemporary Art
Chicago**

Running time is seventy-five
minutes with no intermission.

Generous support for MCA Dance is provided by David Herro and Jay Franke.

Touring support for Ragamala Dance and Rudresh Mahanthappa: *Song of the Jasmine* is made possible by the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project, with lead funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, with additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Support for *Song of the Jasmine* is also provided by the National Endowment for the Arts; the MAP Fund, a program of Creative Capital, supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; New Music/USA's Commissioning Music/USA program, made possible with generous annual support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and endowment support from The Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, The Helen F. Whitaker Fund, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The Rockefeller Brothers Fund, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the Francis Goelet Charitable Lead Trust; the RBC Foundation USA; The McKnight Foundation; Target; the General Mills Foundation; the voters of Minnesota through a Minnesota State Arts Board Operating Support grant, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund; Ragamala's Board of Directors Institutional Growth Fund; the generous support of Ragamala's "Rasika Circle," including Prakash and Usha Asirvatham, The Goodale Family Foundation, the Dale Schatzlein and Emily Maltz Fund of The Minneapolis Foundation, Raneer Ramaswamy and David McKay, Wallace and Margaret McKay, and Anonymous; and Friends of Ragamala.

Song of the Jasmine premiered at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in May of 2014. Walker Art Center, Lead Commissioner and Developmental Partner; Krannert Center for the Arts, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Lead Commissioner; Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, University of Maryland, Co-commissioner; Lincoln Center for Lincoln Center Out of Doors, Co-commissioner.



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Artists Up Close

MCA Stage's series of artist-centered talks, workshops, and open studios engages the public with the artists in intimate settings and provides a closer look at the creative process. Join us today.

MCA Studio

Earlier this week, as part of the Open Doors program, museum visitors were invited inside the theater to observe the artists working on the production.

MCA Talk

First Night

April 10

Audience members are invited to stay at the end of the performance for a conversation with Aparna and Ranee Ramaswamy, Rudresh Mahanthappa,

and musicians, moderated by Yolanda Cesta Cursach, Associate Director of Performance Programs.

MCA Studio: Master Class

April 11, 1–3 pm

Aparna and Ranee Ramaswamy draw on the philosophy, spirituality, and myth of their South Indian heritage as well as their keen experience with improvisation and music in this master class. Aparna is the first Bharatanatyam artist to be named by Dance Magazine as one among the “25 to Watch.” She recently gave a solo performance at the Music Academy in Chennai—one of India's most prestigious dance venues. Ranee is a 2012 United States Artists Fellow, recognized for cross-cultural collaborations with, among others, the poet Robert Bly.

Ranee Ramaswamy and
Ashwini Ramaswamy
Photo: Alice Gebura



From the Artists

by Aparna and Raneer Ramaswamy

As mother and daughter, we bring different generational experiences to creating dance. The rich traditions, philosophical roots, and ancestral wisdom of India meet and merge with the curiosity, openness, and creative freedom that come with living in the US. *Song of the Jasmine* combines jazz and Carnatic music by way of freely moving between the past and the present.

In this work, we delve into the concept of longing through the lens of recollection, appeal and total surrender. The jasmine, which in Indian tradition traverses the world of man and the world of the gods, conjures these emotions, embodying the spiritual and the sensual that we understand to be the lifeblood of the Indian psyche.

As Indian-Americans along with our collaborator Rudresh Mahanthappa, we are invested in moving heritage forms beyond the superficial juxtaposi-

tion of genres. Jazz and Indian music are often regarded as similar forms for engaging improvisation at their core. While this is the case, compositional strategies that seamlessly embrace both traditions with integrity and depth are a welcome and meaningful challenge. *Song of the Jasmine* is unique in bringing contemporary music's improvisational technique to the Bharatanatyam tradition, with every performance markedly different from night to night.

The creation of this work is also a true collaboration in that the choreography and music are constructed simultaneously in constant artistic dialogue, as opposed to one form working in subservience of the other. Composition in general, with regard to both music and dance, has always been an effective means of communicating the diasporic scenario. This work adds to the greater conversation of multiculturalism while enhancing and elevating the definition of American identity for present and future generations.

Rez Abbasi (guitar),
Rudresh Mahanthappa
(saxophone) V. K.
Raman (South Indian
flute)
Photo: Praba
Manivasagar



About the Work

Song of the Jasmine explores the interconnectedness of the spiritual, the sensual, and the natural that is the lifeblood of the Indian psyche.

The writings of the eighth century Tamil mystic poet Andal, whose *Sacred Sayings of the Goddess* erases any dichotomy between the sacred and the personal, guided the collaborators. These texts express deep longing, anguish, ecstasy, and the desire to merge the soul with the Supreme Consciousness. The intensity of emotion in the poetry inspired a dynamic world of contemporary interpretive possibility. As bi-national artists, Aparna and Raneer Ramaswamy, along with Rudresh Mahanthappa, are committed to entwining Indian and American artistic genres to speak to the cultural fluidity of today's hybrid reality. They seek to free themselves and their audiences so that they can approach the poetic, visual, and aural elements of the work as prisms—different upon each viewing.

Song of the Jasmine was born of a close collaboration in which the choreography and the music were constructed simultaneously in a constant artistic dialogue that spanned more than a year.

Selections from “Nachiar Tirumozhi”

. . . the state of bliss attained by the total surrender of body, mind and soul, or Atma, to the Paramatman, or the Divine Existence

He has invaded my heart; and while I pine and sigh for his love, He looks on indifferent as if it were all a play. I feel as if my bones had melted away

and my long javelin eyes have not closed their lids for these many days. I am tossed on the waves of the sea of pain without finding the boat that is named the Lord of the highest realm.

My vow to him courses through my body like a ripened blossom strung on your bow to release with keening motion the name of the only one capable of ocean-breaths dotted with song cleaved from between beaks. Draw the bow at me, loosening braids of reason until I am an untied string without a knot . . .

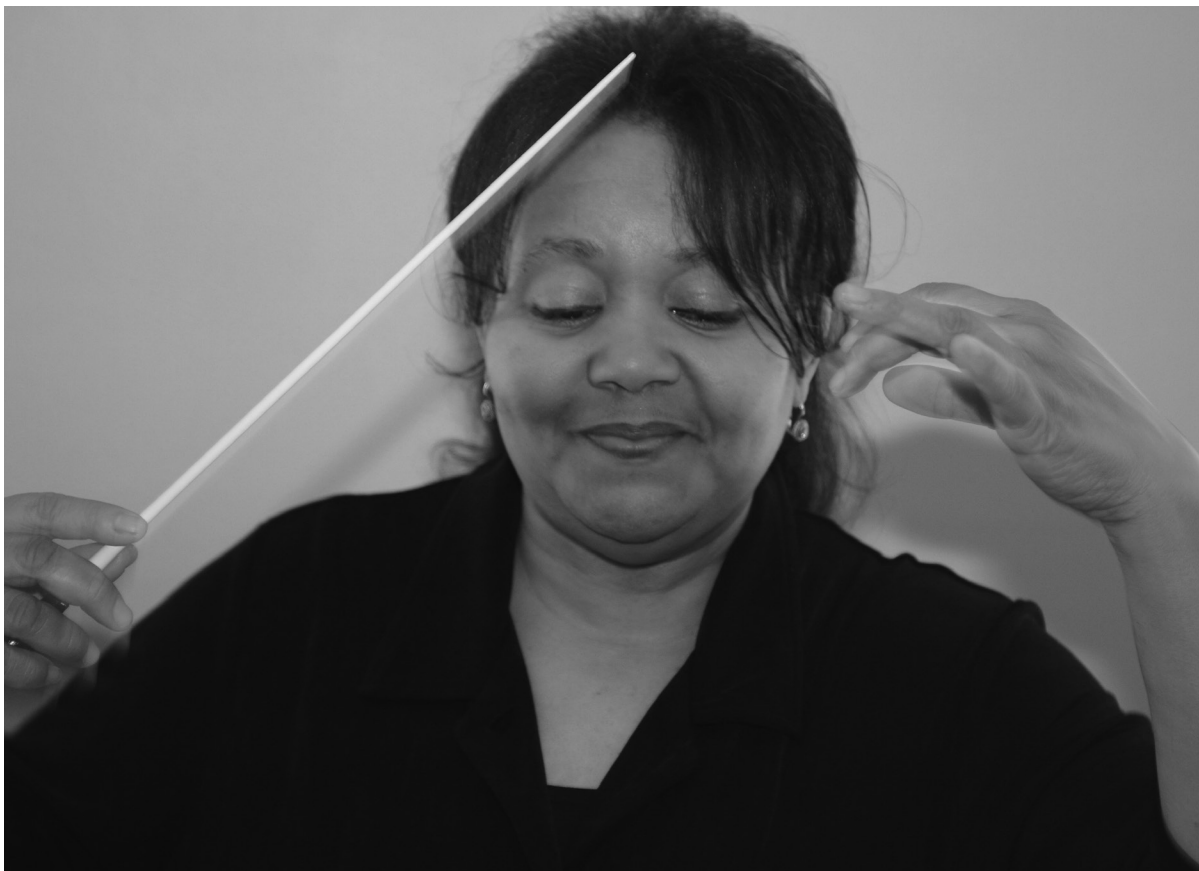
I have nothing left to give. I've expended all at Govinda's feet, who while dancing . . . plucked the stem of me in such heightened state. Frozen in ecstasy, is it fair to be further tormented? If the blazing lord of Arangam finds kindling of virtue, then he will reveal what's outside himself inside me.

—Translations by Subramanya Bharathi and the poet Ravi Shankar

About the mystic poet Andal

Andal refused to marry any mortal man—Krishna was the sole object of her affection. Her feverish urgency to unite with Him is likened to the unbearable urgency of a fish out of water. It is said that He was so pleased with her devotion that He appeared to her father in a dream, instructing him to bring Andal to the temple at Srirangam in southern India. Legend says that the moment she entered the sanctum of the temple, she was surrounded by a blaze of light and was absorbed into the image of Vishnu. She was only fifteen years old.

Creative Music Summit: Renée Baker May 3



Renée Baker

Sunyata: Towards Absolute Emptiness

Forward-thinking violinist and composer Renée Baker finds inspiration in one of the earliest Buddhist writings to reach Tibet, *The Book of the Dead* (*The Bardo*), in this chamber opera with dance, commissioned by the MCA. Baker and her magnetic Chicago Modern Orchestra Project are joined by vocalists Dee Alexander, Ann Ward, Saalik Ziyad, and Taalib-din Ziyad, and other special guests.

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using code DANCE
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Photo: Michael S. Baker

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About the Artists

Rez Abbasi

is active as a musician of South Asian and Western jazz forms. He performs with a range of groups such as Rudresh Mahanthappa's Indo-Pak Coalition and Kinsmen, and the Indian Juno-award winning vocalist Kiran Ahluwalia's ensemble. In 2013, Abbasi was voted Top Rising Star Guitarist by *Downbeat's* International Critic's Poll. He has released several albums as band leader. His quintet, Invocation, features Mahanthappa, Vijay Iyer, Dan Weiss, Johannes Weidenmueller, and Kiran Ahluwalia in its debut *Things To Come* (2009), which was included in *Downbeat's* Best Albums of the Decade. The same year he received the prestigious Chamber Music America NJW grant to compose for his quintet, with a focus on the Pakistan music form Qawwali. Additional releases include *Suno Suno*

(2011); the trio *Continuous Beat* (2012), with John Hebert and Satoshi Takeishi; and his 2014 recording by the Rez Abbasi Acoustic Quartet (RAAQ).

Jeff Bartlett

has served as lighting designer for Ragamala Dance since 1994's *A Canticle of Mary*. Additional lighting design for the company includes *Sacred Earth*, *1,001 Buddhas: Journey of the Gods*, *Yathra/Journey*, *The Transposed Heads*, *Body and Soul*, *Bhakti*, *Sthree*, and *Ihrah*. His lighting design in Minneapolis spans more than two decades and four hundred productions, and has been recognized with 2010 and 2005 Sage Awards for Dance, a 2008 Artist of the Year listing in City Pages, and a 2003 McKnight Theater Artist Fellowship. He is production manager at the Weitz Center for Creativity at Carleton College.

Photo: Daria! Sneed





Jessica Fiala

began training with Ranees Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy in 2006 and has toured with Ragamala throughout the US and to India and the UK, including performances at the Kennedy Center, the American Dance Festival, and the Soorya Festival. Outside of the company, she has studied rhythm tap and modern dance and continues to perform with choreographers Kaleena Miller and Vanessa Voskuil. Fiala holds a master's degree in museum studies and cultural studies from the University of Minnesota. Her research presentation for the MeLa conference in 2013, "The Postcolonial Museum," in Naples, Italy is being expanded for publication in the upcoming MeLa collection *The Ruined Archive* (2015). She is associated with the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis as a tour guide, blogger, and SpeakEasy facilitator. She is the International Research Coordinator for Forecast Public Art, a Research Associate at Lutman & Associates, and an Administrative Assistant at the Caux Round Table.

Raman Kalyan

is a leading flautist in the Carnatic style of music. He has released more than

sixty recordings and DVDs, including *Music for Deep Meditation*, which was number one on the iTunes world music charts and remained in the top fifty for six months. His prolific music recordings include commercial releases, Indian cinema, and the documentary by Martha Graham *The Flute of Krishna*. He also composes for live dance and theater productions. He received the Best Flautist Award by the Madras Music Academy for performances at the December Music Festival 2009 and 2013. For the *Miles from India* project, which toured to Paris, he performed with Glen Velez (Grammy winner) Dave Liebman (Grammy winner), Pt. Vishwamohan Bhatt (Grammy winner), Mandolin Shrinivas, Selvaganesh (*Remember Shakti*), Darryl Jones (Rolling Stones), John Beasley (*Finding Nemo*). He has also toured to the Montreal Jazz Festival and San Francisco Jazz Festival. He has performed with South Indian music legends Dr M. Balamuralikrishna, Dr N. Ramani, AK Palanivel, and renown vocalist KJ Yesudas. He is the founder/president of Indo American Academy of Classical Music.

Top left:
Photo: Alice Gebura

Bottom right:
Photo: Darial Sneed



Rudresh Mahanthappa

has been awarded a 2013 Doris Duke Performing Artist Award; a Guggenheim Fellowship; two New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowships; and commissions from the Rockefeller Foundation MAP Fund, Chamber Music America and the American Composers Forum. He has been named Alto Saxophonist of the Year in *Downbeat's* International Critics Polls, in *Jazztimes'* Critics Polls, and by the Jazz Journalists' Association numerous times. He has performed at Carnegie Hall; Royce Hall; the Chicago Jazz Festival (2013); jazz festivals of Montreal, North Sea, and Newport; and prestigious jazz clubs, such as Blue Note and Birdland. His latest quintet project, Bird Calls released its debut in February 2015, and features pianist Matt Mitchell, bassist François Moutin, drummer Rudy Royston, and trumpet prodigy Adam O'Farrill. Mahanthappa's 2013 album *Gamak* features guitarist David "Fuze" Fiuczynski, bassist François Moutin, and drummer Dan Weiss. His debut recording *Samdhi* (2010, ACT Music + Vision), was hailed by *JazzTimes* for fusing jazz and Indian music with modernist electronic music. Other projects include Apex, featuring Bunky Green; trios MSG and Mauger; the quintet Dual Identity, co-led with fellow altoist Steve Lehman; and Raw Materials, his long-running duo project with pianist Vijay Iyer. Mahanthappa also continues to partner with Pakistani-American guitarist Rez Abbasi and innovative percussionist Dan Weiss in the Indo-Pak Coalition. He has performed as part of drummer Jack DeJohnette's current group and collaborated with Carnatic saxophonist Kadri Gopalnath for his critically-

acclaimed 2008 CD *Kinsmen* (Pi). Mahanthappa is a Yamaha artist and uses Vandoren reeds exclusively.

Tamara Nadel

is a disciple of Ranees Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy. She is a founding member of Ragamala Dance and has toured extensively with the company throughout the United States and in Russia, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, India, and the United Kingdom. Nadel was a 2006 McKnight Artist Fellow in Dance, and has received grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board and the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council as well as a Jerome Foundation Travel Study Grant. She has been studying Carnatic music under Lalit Subramanian since 2011. She serves as Development and Outreach Director for Ragamala Dance and as teacher for the school. She holds a degree in religious studies and dance from Macalester College. Nadel also served on the City of Minneapolis Arts Commission from 2008–2010, and is on the Board of Minnesota Citizens for the Arts.

Aparna Ramaswamy

is Artistic Director, Choreographer, and Principal Dancer of Ragamala Dance with Ranees Ramaswamy, who founded the company in 1992. They are both protégés and senior disciples of legendary dancer and choreographer Alarmél Valli, known as one of India's greatest living masters in the South Indian classical dance form of Bharatanatyam. Aparna's choreography and performance have been awarded several honors, including three McKnight Artist Fellowships for Dance and Choreography, a Bush Fellowship for Choreography, an Arts and Religion grant funded by the

Creative Music Summit: Nicole Mitchell May 2



Composing for her electroacoustic Black Earth Ensemble, flutist Nicole Mitchell reframes movements for social change using science fiction and film in her work *Mandorla Awakening: Emerging Worlds*. The ensemble performs to a new film by visual artist Ulysses Jenkins, who discusses his collaboration with Nicole Mitchell following the performance.

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Photo: Bob Fila.

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Rockefeller Foundation, choreographic and travel support from the Jerome Foundation and Minnesota State Arts Board, and the Lakshmi Vishwanathan Endowment Prize from Sri Krishna Gana Sabha (Chennai, India). Her solo work, presented with live music, has toured the US and India with support from the National Dance Project and USArtists International. Most recently projects toured to Narada Gana Sabha (Chennai) and the National Centre for the Performing Arts (Mumbai). In 2010, Aparna was named one of “25 to Watch” by *Dance Magazine*. She is an empaneled artist with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (of the Government of India) and also serves on the Board of Trustees of Dance/USA.

as a student of Bharatanatyam legend Alarmél Valli, one of the greatest living masters of the form. She has toured extensively with Ragamala Dance, performing throughout the United States and in Russia, Taiwan, Indonesia, Japan, the United Kingdom, and India. She is a 2012 McKnight Artist Fellow for Dance, and the recipient of two Minnesota State Arts Board Artist Initiative Grants for Dance and a Metropolitan Regional Arts Council Next Step Fund grant. Recently she began choreographing. She serves as Director of Publicity and Marketing for Ragamala Dance. She holds a degree in English literature from Carleton College. Currently she also serves on the Board of Arts Midwest.

Ashwini Ramaswamy

has studied Bharatanatyam with Ragamala Dance's Artistic Directors Raneeramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy—her mother and sister—since the age of five. She has been accepted

Raneeramaswamy

is founder of Ragamala Dance and with Aparna Ramaswamy serves as Artistic Director, Choreographer, and Principal Dancer. They are both protégés and senior disciples of legendary dancer

and choreographer Alarmél Valli, known as one of India's greatest living masters in the South Indian classical dance form of Bharatanatyam. Raneé is a 2014 recipient of the Doris Duke Performing Artist Award and was appointed to the National Council on the Arts by President Barack Obama. Among her many awards are fourteen McKnight Artist Fellowships for Choreography and Interdisciplinary Art, a Bush Fellowship for Choreography, a 2011 McKnight Distinguished Artist Award, and a 2012 United States Artists Fellowship.

Anjna Swaminathan

is a disciple of the late violin maestro Parur Sri MS Gopalakrishnan and Mysore Sri HK Narasimhamurthy and has been trained in both Carnatic classical and Western classical styles of violin. She also is a theater artist and



Top right and
bottom left:
Photo: Darial Sneed

dramaturg, extending her interests in postcolonial thought, gender and queer theories, and Hindu Vedantic philosophy. Her hybrid practice includes various collaborations, for which she often develops scores and provides musical accompaniment for dancers and dance companies, most notably Ragamala Dance (Minneapolis), with whom she has collaborated for the past four years, as well as Ragamala's principal dancer and soloist, Aparna Ramaswamy. She also performs regularly with the ensemble *RAJAS*, curated by her sister and frequent collaborator, Rajna Swaminathan. It brings together contemporary musicians to explore new directions of composition and improvisation. Recently, she has been commissioned to create original music for playwright/performer Anu Yadav's powerful one-woman play, *Meena's Dream*, in Washington DC. In 2014 she was a participant at the Banff International Workshop in Jazz and Creative Music in Alberta, Canada. She holds a bachelor's degree in theater from the University of Maryland, College Park.

Rajna Swaminathan

Is a disciple and protégé of *mridangam* maestro Umayalpuram K. Sivaraman. She has accompanied many renowned musicians in the United States, Canada, and India. She has also performed extensively in the December Music Festival in Chennai. She frequently presents workshops on South Indian rhythm, most notably at the Banff International Workshop in Jazz and Creative Music, the Percussive Arts Society International Convention, and the KOSA International Percussion Camp. Over the past three years, she has been collaborating with distinguished artists in New York's jazz and creative music scene, including saxophonist Steve Coleman and pianist Vijay Iyer. She is active as a composer-performer for dance and theater works. Most notably, she has toured widely with Ragamala Dance, as well as with Ragamala's Artistic Director Aparna Ramaswamy in her solo work. Her most recent engagement as a composer is RAJAS, a nascent project that brings together contemporary musicians to explore new directions for composition and improvisation rooted in Indian musical concepts. She holds degrees in anthropology and French from the University of Maryland, College Park.

Ragamala Dance

Under the direction of Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy, Ragamala creates work that conveys a sense of reverence, unfolding mystery, and universal celebration. Now in its twenty-second season, Ragamala has been featured at the American Dance Festival (North Carolina), Lincoln Center (New York), Kennedy Center (Washington, DC), Music Center of

Los Angeles (California), University Musical Society (Michigan), Just Festival (Edinburgh, Scotland), Bali Arts Festival (Indonesia), Soorya Festival (Kerala, India), and National Centre for Performing Arts (Mumbai, India). Work for the company by Ranee and Aparna is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, National Dance Project, MAP Fund, The McKnight 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), the Krannert Center (University of Illinois), the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center (University of Maryland), and the American Composers Forum. Ranee and Aparna were jointly named "2011 Artist of the Year" by the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*. The ensemble's upcoming work, *Written in Water*, has been selected for a development residency at the Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography (MANCC). For more information, including upcoming tour dates in the United States and India, please visit www.ragamaladance.org. Exclusive representation is by Laura Colby, Director, Elsie Management.

Photo: Daria! Sneed



Thank you

Lead support for the 2014–15 season of MCA Stage is provided by Elizabeth A. Liebman.

Additional generous support is provided by David Herro and Jay Franke, Caryn and King Harris, and Lois and Steve Eisen and the Eisen Family Foundation.

The MCA is a proud member of Museums in the Park and receives major support from the Chicago Park District.

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As an internationally renowned institution devoted to contemporary culture, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago presents the most thought-provoking visual art and performing arts of our time. MCA Stage is a vibrant series presenting theater, dance, and music by leading artists from the US and around the world in MCA's three-hundred-seat Edlis Neeson Theater.

MCA Stage's groundbreaking performances are an integral part of MCA Chicago's artist-activated, audience-engaged programming. Along with the museum's exhibitions and educational initiatives, they encourage a broad and diverse community to experience and discuss the work and ideas of living artists.

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Program notes compiled
by Yolanda Cesta Cursach

Courtesy guidelines and information

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Validate your ticket at the coat check for \$12 parking in the MCA garage (220 East Chicago Avenue) or the Bernardin garage (747 North Wabash). Discounted parking is limited to six hours on the date of performance.

Lost and Found

To inquire about a lost item, call the museum at 312.280.2660. Unclaimed articles are held for thirty days.

Seating

Please switch off all noise-making devices while you are in the theater.

Patrons are seated at the management's discretion. Food and open beverage containers are not allowed in the seating area.

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General information

312.280.2660

Box office

312.397.4010

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mcastage@mcachicago.org

Museum hours

Tuesday: 10 am–8 pm

Wednesday–Sunday: 10 am–5 pm

Closed Mondays, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day

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