University of Florida Performing Arts

presents

Ragamala Dance

Sacred Earth

Tuesday, October 2, 2012, 7:30 p.m.

Phillips Center

Sponsored by

DHARMA ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION
Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy, Artistic Directors

RAGAMALA DANCE

presents

~ SACRED ~ EARTH ~

Concept and Choreography
Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy

Original Artwork
Anil Chaitya Vangad (Warli)
Ranee Ramaswamy (kolam)

Original Compositions
Prema Ramamurthy

Development of Score
Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy
with Lalit Subramanian, Anjna Swaminathan, Rajna Swaminathan

Dancers
Aparna Ramaswamy, Ranee Ramaswamy, Ashwini Ramaswamy, Tamara Nadel (soloists)
Amanda Dlouhy, Jessica Fiala

Orchestra
Lalit Subramanian (vocal), Rajna Swaminathan (mridangam),
Anjna Swaminathan (violin), Alison Kirwin (nattuvangam)

Light Design
Jeff Bartlett

Technical Director
David Riisager

Video Projection Design
Perimeter Productions (Robert C. Hammel, Michele Blanchard, Caitlin Hammel)

Photography
Ed Bock

Exclusive tour representation by Siegel Artist Management
www.siegelartist.com
About Sacred Earth

_Sacred Earth_ explores the interconnectedness between human emotions and the environment that shapes them. Inspired by the philosophies behind the ephemeral arts of _kolam_ and Warli painting and the Tamil Sangam literature of India, _Sacred Earth_ brings both internal and external landscapes to life.

Each morning, women in southeastern India perform the silent ritual of _kolam_, making rice flour designs on the ground as conscious offerings to Mother Earth. This daily ritual creates a sacred space and becomes a link between the intimate home and the vastness of the outside world. The indigenous Warli people of western India revere the land and live in perfect coexistence with nature. Using their everyday lives as inspiration, their dynamic wall paintings find the spiritual in the everyday. For the Tamil Sangam poets of South India, the Earth was sacred. Recognizing that human activities are interwoven with all of creation, they drew parallels between inner and outer landscape and used the natural world as a metaphor to examine the intricacies of human emotion.

As _Sacred Earth_ builds from silent, meditative beginnings, the performers create a sacred space to honor the divinity in the natural world and the sustenance we derive from it. We surrender to the beauty of this sacred earth that has been given to us to safeguard, cherish and pass on to our future generations.

Poetry of Sacred Earth

The Tamil Sangam poets (300 B.C.E. – 300 C.E.) saw divinity in the physical world, which they divided into five _tinais_ (landscapes): _kurinji_ (mountainous region), _mullai_ (forest), _neythal_ (seaside), _marutham_ (farmland) and _paalai_ (desert). Recognizing that human activities are interwoven with all of creation, they drew parallels between inner landscape and outer landscape and used the natural world as a metaphor to examine the intricacies of human emotion. The tinais thus become more than geographical realms. Each region’s particular qualities — flora and fauna, climate and seasons, music and culture, people and daily life — are interwoven with the area's emotional tones to create a distinct portrait of mood and setting. Characters in Sangam poetry are never named, rather they represent ideals — paradigms of the human condition.

_Agalakillen:_
An invocation from the 8th century poet Nammalvar in praise of the divinity of the natural world

_Soloist:_ Ranee Ramaswamy

As the moon wears his shadow is Vishnu to his love.  
Washed by the rising waves,  
Vishnu lifted up and married the Earth-goddesss.  
Now not a spot of earth is ever troubled by the sea.

Praise to you, Bhudevi, sacred earth, who dwells in the oceans,  
Adorned in beauty by the mountains.  
It is with reverence that I set my foot upon you.

Excerpts from the _Paripattal:_
_Soloist:_ Aparna Ramaswamy

Endure forever, O beauteous Land!  
May the Clouds never fail but ever pour  
In plenty, so that the River great  
May never be dry but ever full.
Kurinji:
Soloist: Aparna Ramaswamy

Bigger than the earth, certainly,
Higher than the sky.
More unfathomable than the waters
Is this love for this man
Of the mountain slopes
Where bees make rich honey
From the flowers of the kurinji
That has such black stalks

— Tevakulattar, Kurunthokai 3

Mullai:
Soloist: Ranee Ramaswamy

On his hills
The mullai creeper that usually sprawls
On large round stones
Sometimes takes to a sleeping elephant
At parting,
His arms twine with mine
He gave me inviolable guarantees
That he would live in my heart
Without parting
Friend, why do you think
That is any reason for grieving?

— Paranar, Kurunthokai 36

Neythal:
Soloist: Aparna Ramaswamy

I am here:
My loveliness
Eaten away by pallor
Is lost in the woods by the sea.
My lover is comfortable in his hometown.
All the guarded secrets of our love
Are all over the village square

— Venputhi, Kurunthokai 97

Marutham:
Soloist: Tamara Nadel

There was a time when
My friend gave you
Bitter neem fruit and
You called it
Sweet lump of sugar.
But now she gives you
Sweet water
From the ice-cool springs
Of Pari's Parambu hill
Cooler in this month of Thai
And you call it hot and brackish.
Is this the way
Your love has gone?

— Milai Kanthan, Kurunthokai 196
Kurinji:
Soloist: Ashwini Ramaswamy

What could my mother be
To yours? What kin is my father
To yours anyway? And how
Did you and I meet ever?
But in love our hearts are as red
Earth and pouring rain:
Mingled
Beyond Parting

— Cempulappeyanirar, Kurunthokai 40

“Prithvi Suktam” (Hymn to the Earth), from the Adharva Veda:
Soloists: Ranee and Aparna Ramaswamy

May this Earth, whose
surface undulates with
many gradients, and
sustains an abundant
variety of herbs and plants
of different potencies and
qualities, support all human
beings, in all their diversity
of endowment, in mutually
supportive harmony and
prosperity

About Ragamala Dance
Acclaimed as one of the Indian Diaspora’s leading dance ensembles, Ragamala Dance seamlessly carries the South Indian classical dance form of Bharatanatyam into the 21st century. Artistic directors Ranee and Aparna Ramaswamy — mother and daughter — are protégés of the legendary dancer and choreographer Alarmel Valli, known as one of India’s greatest living masters. Inspired by the philosophy, spirituality, mysticism, and myth of their South Indian heritage, Ranee and Aparna’s work retains roots in this collective history while bringing the eloquence of Bharatanatyam to universal themes. They see the classical form as a dynamic, living tradition with vast potential to move beyond the personal and spark a global conversation.

Now in its 20th season, Ragamala has toured extensively, both nationally and internationally. The company’s 2011 performance at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. was hailed by The New York Times as, “movingly meditative… [Ragamala] showed how Indian forms can provide some of the most transcendent experiences that dance has to offer. This is an excellent company.” Additional highlights include the American Dance Festival (Durham, N.C.), New Victory Theater (New York, N.Y.), Music Center of Los Angeles County (Calif.), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis, Minn.), Bali Arts Festival (Bali, Indonesia), Open Look Dance Festival (St. Petersburg, Russia), Festival of Spirituality and Peace (Edinburgh, U.K.) and National Centre for Performing Arts (Mumbai, India).

In the 2011-12 season, Ragamala toured Sacred Earth to 24 cities across the United States, with support from the National Dance Project. The company’s upcoming season is highlighted by:

Sept. 6-16, 2012: Sthree, Soorya Festival, three-city tour of India (Chennai, Bangalore, Madurai)
Sept. 28, 2012: Sacred Earth, Lied Center, University of Kansas, Lawrence
Oct. 4, 2012: Sacred Earth, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Feb. 23, 2012: 1,001 Buddhas (preview), St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota
March 23–25, 2012: 1,001 Buddhas (world premiere), Cowles Center for Dance, Minneapolis, Minnesota
March 27, 2012: 1,001 Buddhas, Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota
April 24, 2013: Sacred Earth, University Musical Society, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
April 27, 2013: Sacred Earth, Arts Center Signature Series, University of Texas, Brownsville

**Biographies**

RANEE AND APARNA RAMASWAMY (artistic directors/choreographers/principal dancers) are disciples of legendary Bharatanatyam dancer and choreographer Alarmél Valli, known as one of India’s greatest living masters. Ranee and Aparna’s work has been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, National Dance Project, Japan Foundation, USArtists International and a Joyce Award; commissioned by the Walker Art Center and American Composers Forum; and toured extensively, highlighted by the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., Music Center in Los Angeles, Calif., Krannert Center in Urbana, Ill., Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland, Bali Arts Festival in Indonesia and National Centre for Performing Arts in Mumbai, India. In 2011, they were jointly named “Artist of the Year” by the Minneapolis Star Tribune.

Ranee Ramaswamy has been a master teacher and performer of Bharatanatyam in the U.S. since 1978. Since her first cross-cultural collaboration with poet Robert Bly in 1991, followed by her founding of Ragamala in 1992, she has been a pioneer in the establishment of non-Western dance traditions in Minneapolis and in pushing the boundaries of Indian classical dance on the global scene. Among her many awards are 14 McKnight Artist Fellowships for Choreography and Interdisciplinary Art, a Bush Fellowship for Choreography, an Artist Exploration Fund grant from Arts International, and the 2011 McKnight Foundation Distinguished Artist Award. Most recently, President Barack Obama announced his intent to nominate Ranee to the National Council on the Arts.

Aparna Ramaswamy’s choreography and performance have been described as “a marvel of buoyant agility and sculptural clarity” (*Dance Magazine*), “thrillingly three-dimensional,” and “an enchantingly beautiful dancer;” (*The New York Times*). Among her many honors are three McKnight Fellowships in Dance and Choreography, a Bush Fellowship for Choreography, an Arts and Religion grant funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, two Jerome Foundation Travel Study Grants, an Artist Exploration Fund grant from Arts International and two USArtists International grants from the MidAtlantic Arts Foundation. In 2010, Aparna was the first Bharatanatyam dancer/choreographer to be named one of *Dance Magazine*’s “25 to Watch.”

ANIL CHAITYA VANGAD (visual artist) is a traditional painter of the adivasi (indigenous) Warli craft, which has been in his family for three generations. Since 1991, his work has been exhibited at prominent festivals, museums and arts centers throughout India, highlighted by the Mumbai Festival (Mumbai), Government Craft Museum (New Delhi), Sarojini Naidu Hall (Hyderabad), Swobhumii Craft Mela (Calcutta), Shivaji Nagar Hall (Pune), Gandhi Shilp Bazar (Mysore), Neerja Modi Visual and Performing Art Center (Jaipur), Gramotsav (New Delhi) and Mahalaxmi Saras (Mumbai). His many commissions include murals at the Bank of Muskat (Banglore), and the home of the chairman of the Bhoruka Corporation.
SMT. PREMA RAMAMURTHY (composer) has been an outstanding vocalist and composer for more than four decades. She hails from a family of musicians from Bellary, India, and was initiated into music by her parents, Late.Sri.S.Nagaraja Iyer and Smt.Jayalakshmi, and her grandfather, Sri S. Srinivasa Iyer, the then Zamindar of Bellary. Prema 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 & Javalis” from the veteran musician, Mrs. T. Muktha. One of the most sought-after artists of South India, Prema 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 U.S., Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Australia, Mexico and South Africa.

AMANDA DLOUHY (dancer) has been a student of Bharatanatyam by Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy since 2004. She has been touring with Ragamala Dance since 2005, performing throughout the U.S. as well as in India, Indonesia and the U.K., and teaches at the Ragamala School. She is a graduate of the University of Minnesota in history and currently works as program assistant at Nonprofits Assistance Fund in Minneapolis. Amanda is a recipient of a 2011 McKnight Artist Fellowship for Dancers.

JESSICA FIALA (dancer) has been performing with Ragamala since 2006 and has toured with the company throughout the U.S. and to India and the U.K. She has also performed locally with other noted choreographers in Minnesota. Jessica completed a master's degree in liberal studies with a focus in museum studies at the University of Minnesota in 2008. She is artist services program assistant at Forecast Public Art and volunteers as a tour guide and with the performing arts department’s SpeakEasy series at the Walker Art Center.

TAMARA NADEL (dancer) is a disciple of Ranee and Aparna Ramaswamy, and has been performing, touring and teaching with Ragamala since 1994. She has toured extensively with the company, performing throughout the U.S. and in Russia, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, India and the U.K. She is the recipient of a 2006 McKnight Artist Fellowship for Dancers, a 2011 Next Step Fund grant from the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council through a grant from The McKnight Foundation, a Minnesota State Arts Board Career Opportunity Grant and a Jerome Foundation Travel Study Grant for travel to India. Tamara recently began studying Carnatic music under Lalit Subramanian. She also serves as Ragamala’s development and outreach director, and holds a degree in religious studies and dance from Macalester College.

ASHWINI RAMASWAMY (dancer) has studied Bharatanatyam with Ragamala’s artistic directors Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy — her mother and sister — since the age of 5 and has toured extensively with Ragamala, performing throughout the U.S. and in Russia, Taiwan, Indonesia, Japan, the U.K. and India. Ashwini is a recipient of a 2011 Minnesota State Arts Board Artist Initiative Grant for Dance and a 2012 McKnight Artist Fellowship for Dancers, and was recently accepted for one-on-one study with Bharatanatyam master Alarmel Valli. Ashwini is Ragamala’s director of publicity and marketing and also works as a freelance publicist for the publishing company The Penguin Group in New York. She holds a degree in English literature from Carleton College.

LALIT SUBRAMANIAN (vocal) has been trained by renowned musicians such as Tiruvarur Sri S. Girish (grandson of the legendary Sangeetha Kalanidhi (Bangalore), and he has led workshops at the International School of Bangalore and the National Traditional and Folk Artist Camp in Jaipur. He resides in the village of Ganjad in Maharashtra, India. addiwashi.blogspot.com
Smt T. Brinda and torchbearer of the prestigious Veena Dhanammal style of Carnatic music), Neyveli Sri R. Santhanagopalan (one of the foremost Carnatic vocalists), Smt. Rajalakshmi Pichumani (renowned Carnatic violinist and vocalist), Pandit Shekhar Kumbhojkar (disciple of Hindustani music stalwart Padmashree Pandit Jitendra Abhisheki of the Agra-Jaipur Gharana), Pandit Anand Godse (tabla exponent) and Ustad Anwar Qureshi (ghazal exponent). Lalit has won many awards and performs at various venues in the U.S. and India, both as a solo vocalist and as an accompanist for dance performances. He has been a junior artiste at All India Radio as a Hindustani vocalist, and holds a graduate degree in Carnatic music from India.

ALISON KIRWIN (nattuvangam) has been studying with Ranee Ramaswamy and performing with Ragamala as a dancer since 1993. Alison gave her solo debut performance in Bharatanatyam (arangetram) in 1996, and has joined the company on several national and international tours. Alison finished her major in dance at the University of Minnesota in 1997 and recently graduated with a degree in horticulture from Dakota County Community College.

RAJNA SWAMINATHAN (mridangam) is an accomplished artist in the field of South Indian classical percussion — mridangam. A disciple and protégé of mridangam maestro Umayalpuram K. Sivaraman, Rajna is one of only a handful of female mridangam artists in the world. She has accompanied many renowned musicians widely in the U.S., Canada and India. She has also performed extensively at the December Music Festival in Chennai, India, and is the two-time recipient of the Best Junior Mridangist Award from the prestigious Music Academy in Chennai. Rajna works with several dancers and performs lecture demonstrations and workshops at universities and prominent percussion events, such as Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC). Rajna has a base in classical piano and has also learned Bharatanatyam (South Indian classical dance) for some years. Rajna received a 2012 Maryland Summer Scholars research grant from the University of Maryland (College Park) — where she is currently an undergraduate student of Cultural Anthropology and French — to pursue research into the incorporation of mridangam in the creative jazz scene in New York, exploring issues of hybrid identity, appropriation and cross-cultural exchange in music.

ANJNA SWAMINATHAN (violin) is a disciple of violin maestro Parur Sri M.S. Gopalakrishnan and Mysore Sri H.K. Narasimhamurthy. She performs solo violin concerts and provides violin accompaniment for music and dance performances. She has also studied Western violin and Bharatanatyam. In 2009, Anjna received a Master/Apprentice award from the Maryland State Arts Council to study songs that are unique to dance performances with her mother, vocalist Lalitha Swaminathan. Anjna has provided accompaniment for dance productions with companies such as Ragamala Dance and The Spilling Ink Project. In the summer of 2010, Anjna had her solo concert debut in India. Anjna is currently an undergraduate student of theater at the University of Maryland in College Park.

JEFF BARTLETT (light design) has been honored to light Ragamala Dance since A Canticle of Mary in 1994. He lit the first performances of Yathra at the Southern in 2008 as well as its recent performance at The O’Shaughnessy; other signature works for the company include The Transposed Heads, Body and Soul, Bhakti, Sthree, and Ihrah. A dance lighting specialist based in Minneapolis, Jeff has lit scores of artists in hundreds of productions over more than two decades. His design work has been recognized with 2010 and 2005 Sage Awards for Dance, in design; a 2008 Artist of the Year listing in City Pages; and a 2003 McKnight Theater Artist Fellowship. He has recently taken a new position as production manager at the Weitz Center for Creativity at Carleton College.
ED BOCK (photographer), a photographer and artist, has been creating promotional images for Ragamala Dance since 1991. For more than 35 years Ed has done commercial assignment image work for many top corporations based in Minneapolis and around the country. More recently he has been exploring painting and mixed media art. www.edbockeditions.com

PERIMETER PRODUCTIONS (Robert C. Hammel, Michele Blanchard and Caitlin Hammel — video projection design) is a design/film production collective committed to finding new ways to make art available and accessible to a broader audience through developing arts programming on video, working with artists to help them discover new ways of reaching their audience, telling stories of individual artists or documenting how the arts can change lives. Recent films include Solo: 1x2, a feature-length dance documentary, Dhvee: a Bridge Between Cultures and The Path is Hidden, both featuring Ranee Ramaswamy and Ragamala, Out of the Shadows, a film about Interact Center and Daisy's Dilemma, a ScreenDance film. Perimeter worked on the video projection design for Flying Foot Forum’s Heaven at the Guthrie and are in production on several projects with Carl Flink’s Black Label Movement. A documentary on Sacred Earth is in preproduction.

DAVID RIISAGER (technical director) began working with Ragamala in 2000, and has been the company’s touring technical director and light designer since 2004. He has designed Ragamala’s Sethu (Bridge) and Dhvee (Duality) at the Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), as well as several touring productions. David is also a freelance light designer and currently works with many small theaters in the Minneapolis area. David works for The Children’s Theatre Company in Minneapolis as electrician, follow spot operator, tour master electrician and assistant lighting designer. Previously, he spent four years as production manager at The Southern Theater in Minneapolis.

For additional information about Ragamala, please contact us at:
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To sign up for Ragamala's e-newsletter, please email us at info@ragamala.net

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