



ArtSmarts

2005-2006 Wells Fargo School Matinee Series

NRITYAGRAM DANCE ENSEMBLE

Thursday, March 2, 2006 11:00am

Jackson Hall, Mondavi Center

Dear Educator,

We hope you find this CueSheet helpful in preparing your students for the school matinee presentation of **Nrityagram Dance Ensemble**. This guide, which is intended to be used in conjunction with the Ethnic Dance curriculum guide, provides information about the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble, its parent community, plus a brief country profile. Also included in the guide is a review of audience etiquette.

Mondavi Center gratefully acknowledges the institutional donors supporting the Arts Education Program during the 2005-2006 Season of Performing Arts:



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NRITYAGRAM DANCE ENSEMBLE

"One of the most luminous dance events of the year! Performed with a burnished grace, a selfless concentration and a depth that reflected their intensive training in dance, music, literature, language, and philosophy."

—The New York Times

The **Nrityagram Dance Ensemble**, which made its New York debut in 1996, has received rave reviews and is regarded by critics as one of the foremost Indian classical dance ensembles in the world. The all-female collective is much more than just a dance company: these dancers are the ambassadors of **Nrityagram**, literally “Dance Village.”

Nrityagram is the only dance village in the world, set up for the preservation and popularization of the seven Indian classical dance styles and two martial dance arts. Founded in 1990 by noted dancer **Protima Gauri**, Nrityagram is situated in the outskirts of Bangalore in southern India. Protima Gauri converted ten acres of farmland into an ideal setting for the study, practice and teaching of classical dance. Reminiscent of ancient *ashrams* (spiritual retreat centers) where *gurus* (teachers) imparted not only technique but also a philosophy of being, it is a creative space where dancers, musicians and choreographers live together, sharing their skills and developing their art. The dancers study yoga, meditation, the martial arts as well as Sanskrit, mythology, literature. The founders of Nrityagram believed that dance should be made available without any consideration of cost. Therefore, all residential students receive free lodging, board, and training for a period of three to six years. During this time, they learn from the greatest masters from all over the world. The aim is to have holistically trained professional dancers and teachers so that this vanishing tradition will be revitalized and preserved.

The outside world, too, is an integral part of Nrityagram. Choreographers, movement specialists, sculptors, painters, writers, musicians and theater people from all over the world,

frequently visit the village to perform and give workshops and seminars on their art. Nrityagram's proudest achievement is its annual spring festival, *Vasantahabba*, an all night performance of music and dance, the roster of which includes some of the greatest names in India, attended by over forty thousand enthusiastic spectators streaming in from surrounding villages—and beyond.

The Nrityagram Dance Ensemble has become a worldwide phenomenon. In New York they have performed at the Danny Kaye Playhouse, Symphony Space, and Central Park under the aegis of major presenters like World Music Institute and Central Park Summerstage. Since their 1996 New York debut, they have toured the United States annually. While dedicated to ancient practice, Nrityagram dancers are also carrying Indian dance into the 21st century. Funding from the New England Foundation for the Arts has allowed the company to develop new work, which explores creative ways to expand on tradition, and to commission music from leading composers of Indian classical music, like Pandit Raghunath Panigrahi of Orissa, and the brothers Ganesh Kumaresh from south India. Nrityagram Dance Ensemble's first full-length production, *Sri—In Search of the Goddess*, premiered in New Delhi in 2001. The most recent production, *Sacred Space*, premiered in Denver in 2005 and is currently touring the United States.

Sacred Space

In *Sacred Space*, the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble combines the spiritual and the theatrical in a dazzling new way—sacred yet sensuous, familiar yet exotic, graceful, easy, flowing motion coming from strict, rigorous training. A visually spectacular production, *Sacred Space* fuses creative movement, traditional dance, and martial arts with Indian mythology, Sanskrit poetry, and ancient epics.

Most Indian classical dance forms were temple rituals. Dance performed in the innermost sanctum of the temples constituted an intrinsic part of the rituals practiced (to bring the devotee into the world of God). Odissi is one such temple dance that became a performance art in the 20th century. As dance rituals were an oral tradition, much of the history and structure of the dance was lost. As late as the 1950s, a handful of gurus restructured the Odissi repertoire, based on a study of the sculptures from the temples of Orissa (a city in northeastern India). In *Sacred Space*, the restructured Odissi temple dance progresses from *mangalacharan* (an invocation), through *pallavi* (pure dance) and traditional *abhinaya* (interpretive verses), to *moksh* ('dance of liberation').

INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCE

The performing arts also have a long and distinguished tradition in India. *Bharata-natya*, the classical dance form originating in southern India, expresses Hindu religious themes that date at least to the 4th century AD. Other regional styles include *odissi* (from Orissa), *manpuri* (Manipur), *kathakali* (Kerala), *kuchipudi* (Andhra Pradesh), and *kathak* (Islamicized northern India). In addition, there are numerous regional folk dance traditions. (For more information, see the *Encyclopedia Britannica*). *Odissi* takes its name from the state of its origin, **Orissa**. Orissa's geographical position at the exact center of the eastern border of India, has influenced its culture and tradition a great deal, thus making its dance and music unique. Though dance originated in Orissa in the 2nd century BC, it was not until approximately 60 years ago that *Odissi*, in the form it is seen today, was reinvented, revitalized and redefined. Therefore, *Odissi* is a synthesis of the ancient and exotic and modern and intellectual. Today's *Odissi* is sourced from *Devadasi* or *Mahari* tradition (a tradition where beautiful young women were consecrated to the gods; they sang and danced in the sanctum-sanctorum of the temple as a part of the sacred worship), *Gotipua Nacha* (a tradition that was started, to popularize the Vaishnava philosophy, by dressing up young boys as women who sang and danced the devotional poems of Vaishnava poets), and the endless sculptures in various motifs carved on the temple walls of Orissa. *Odissi* is the only dance form to have another basic body position besides the centered 'Plie' stance. The second stance *Tribhangi*, literally meaning three bends and inspired by temple sculptures, is the feminine curvaceous sculptural position with the body weight on one foot. Therefore, *Odissi* creates an illusion of sculpture coming to life. Isolated torso movements, typical to the *Odissi* style only, help create these curves and therefore an eternal 'S' pattern is formed in the body and space.

Choreographer's Profile

Surupa Sen, (Artistic Director, choreographer, dancer) was the first student at *Nrityagram*, where she began her *Odissi* training with the late body language genius and major architect of *Odissi*, *Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra*. She also studied with *Protima Gauri*, founder of *Nrityagram*, and took workshops in *abhinaya* (narrative dance or 'mime') with *Smt. Kalanidhi Narayanan*. As a child, she studied the temple dance form of south India, *Bharatanatyam*, to which she attributes her pre-occupation with form and line. Attracted to choreography from her first exposure to western makers of dances, she participated in the *International Choreographer's Residency* at the *American Dance Festival* in 2000. Over the years she has worked on movement with *Theater der Klänge*,

Rob McWilliams, Maggie Sietsma, and Wolfgang Hoffman, as well as Ramli Ibrahim, Ranjabati Sircar, and Mahesh Mahbubani.

Surupa has performed, in solo recital and ensemble, all over India, the United States, Canada, Europe, the United Kingdom and Middle East. Her evening length work, *Sri: In Search of the Goddess*, consisted of both a non-traditional suite (Night, Fire, Dialogue with Death) and a re-working of traditional dance (Srimati, Srimayi, Sridevi). *Sacred Space* offers a new repertoire using an expanded traditional Odissi vocabulary.

Explore the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble on its official web site: <http://www.nrityagram.org/>



INDIA

Full Name: Republic of India
Capital City: New Delhi
Area: 3,287,590 sq km/1,269,338 sq miles (slightly more than 1/3 size of USA)
Population: 1,080,264,388 (July 2005 estimate)
People: 72% Indo-Aryan, 25% Dravidian, 3% other
Languages: English is used for national, political, and commercial communication; Hindi is the national language and primary tongue of 30% of the people; there are 14 other official languages: Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, Malayalam, Kannada, Oriya, Punjabi, Assamese, Kashmiri, Sindhi, and Sanskrit
Religion: 80% Hindu, 14% Muslim, 2.4% Christian, 2% Sikh, 0.7% Buddhist, 0.5% Jains, 0.4% other
Currency: Indian Rupee (Rs)
Natural Resources: coal (fourth-largest reserves in the world), iron ore, manganese, mica, bauxite, titanium ore, chromite, natural gas, diamonds, petroleum, limestone, arable land
Government Type: federal republic
Government Leaders: Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister (head of government)
A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, President (head of state)

About one sixth of all the human beings on Earth live in India, the world's most populous democracy. Its borders encompass a vast variety of peoples, practicing most of the world's major religions, speaking scores of different languages, and divided into thousands of socially exclusive castes. A civilized, urban society has existed in India for well over 4,000 years, and there have been periods when its culture was as brilliant and creative as any in history. The country is also known by its ancient Hindi name, Bharat.

Land and Natural Resources

Much of India's area of almost 1.3 million square miles is a peninsula jutting into the **Indian Ocean** between the **Arabian Sea** on the west and the **Bay of Bengal** on the east. There are three distinct physiographic regions. In the north the high peaks of the **Himalayas** lie partly in India but mostly just beyond its borders in Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet. South of the mountains, the low-lying Indo-Gangetic Plain, shared with Pakistan and Bangladesh, extends more than 1,500 miles from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal. Finally, the peninsular tableland, largely the Deccan, together with its adjacent coastal plains, makes up more than half of the nation's area.

Climate

In general, India's climate is governed by the **monsoon**, or seasonal, rain-bearing wind. Most of the country has three seasons: hot, wet, and cool. During the hot season, which usually lasts from early March to mid-June, very high temperatures are accompanied by intermittent winds and occasional dust storms.

Strong, humid winds from the southwest and south usually bringing very heavy rains that fall almost daily in the middle or late afternoon—the “burst of the monsoon”—herald the start of the wet season. It may begin as early as late May in the south. Eventually, the rains taper off, and by

late October cool, dry, northerly air has replaced the humid marine air over all of India except the southeastern third of the peninsula. This “retreat of the monsoon” marks the start of the cool season.

Temperature varies as does rainfall in different parts of India. Hill stations in the Himalayan region, such as Darjeeling and Simla, record the lowest temperatures, with annual averages of between about 54° and 57° F (12° and 14° C). In the Indo-Gangetic Plain, Delhi and Allahabad register an average of 79° F (26° C).

Plant and Animal Life

A wide variety of distinctive vegetation types occurs as a result of special ecological conditions. Tall **grass savannas**, with scattered acacias, grow on the moist soils of the Terai, the fringe of plains bordering the northern mountains. **Mangrove forests** are found in the brackish deltas of the east coast, and many types of palms grow in sandy or salty soils. Often impenetrable stands of bamboo sprout up in fields formerly given over to slash-and-burn cultivation.

The alterations in India's vegetation over the centuries have brought about many changes in the animal life. Today the dominant forms are **cattle, goats, buffalo, sheep**, and, in the drier regions, **camels**. While cattle are essential to the nation's economy, there is a religious taboo against their slaughter.

In the forests and the high, rugged areas where wild species are still dominant, the array of animals remains rich. Among large mammals are the **Indian elephant**, still regularly rounded up and domesticated in several areas; the **rhinoceros**, living almost exclusively in game sanctuaries; over a dozen species of **deer and antelope**; and **wild cattle, sheep, goats, and boars**.

Carnivores, or meat eaters, include **tigers and leopards; lions**, once wide-ranging but now confined to the Gir Forest on the Kathiawar Peninsula; the nearly extinct **cheetah**; and a variety of **bears**. **Monkeys**, especially langurs and rhesuses, are common even in cities. The **cobra** is the best-known reptile. Three species of **crocodiles** are found. There are about 1,200 species of **birds**, among them vultures, parrots, mynas, quail, and bustards.

People and Culture

Humans have lived in India for many thousands of years, but the time and place of the arrival of the first inhabitants is uncertain. Agriculturists settled in the area as early as the 7th millennium BC. Among the early arrivals were people who spoke languages of the **Dravidian** family. Between 2000 and 1500 BC Dravidian speakers moved from the northwest to the southeast of India. Around the same time a wave of migrants of inner Eurasian origin began to filter into India through passes on the northwestern frontier of the country. These invaders, known as **Aryans**, spoke languages related to those spoken by peoples in Iran and Europe. Over the course of centuries these people spread southwestward and eastward at the expense of other indigenous groups.

Throughout history new groups continued to penetrate India, mainly from the northwest: **Persians, Arabs, Turks, Mongols, and Afghans**. All of these peoples contributed significantly to India's ethnic mix. In the 16th century small numbers of western Europeans began arriving in India. Although they greatly influenced Indian culture, they had relatively little impact on India's ethnic composition.

This long history of migrations and invasions resulted in the numerous ethnic groups that make up the population of present-day India. Although the people tend to vary in appearance in different parts of the country, they collectively have come to be called Indians.

For additional country description, consult: "India." *Britannica Student Encyclopedia*. 2006.

Indian History

Pre-20th Century History

India's first major civilization flourished for a thousand years from around 2500 BC along the Indus River valley. Its great cities were Mohenjodaro and Harappa (in what is now Pakistan), which were ruled by priests and held the rudiments of **Hinduism**. **Aryan** invaders swept south from Central Asia between 1500 and 200 BC and controlled northern India, pushing the original Dravidian inhabitants south.

The invaders brought their own gods and cattle-raising and meat-eating traditions, but were absorbed to such a degree that by the 8th century BC the priestly caste had reasserted its supremacy. This became consolidated in the **caste system**, a hierarchy maintained by strict rules that secured the position of the Brahmin priests. **Buddhism** arose around 500 BC, condemning caste; it drove a radical swathe through Hinduism in the 3rd century BC when it was embraced by the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, who controlled huge tracts of India.

A number of empires, including the **Guptas**, rose and fell in the north after the collapse of the Mauryas. Hinduism underwent a revival from 40 to 600 AD, and Buddhism began to decline. The north of India broke into a number of separate Hindu kingdoms after the Huns' invasion; it was not really unified again until the coming of the **Muslims** in the 10th and 11th centuries. The far south, whose prosperity was based on trading links with the Egyptians, Romans and southeast Asia, was unaffected by the turmoil in the north, and Hinduism's hold on the region was never threatened.

In 1192 the Muslim **Ghurs** arrived from Afghanistan. Within 20 years the entire Ganges basin was under Muslim control, though Islam failed to penetrate the south. Two great kingdoms developed in what is now Karnataka: the mighty Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar, and the fragmented Bahmani Muslim kingdom.

Mughal emperors marched into the Punjab from Afghanistan, defeated the Sultan of Delhi in 1525, and ushered in another artistic golden age. The Maratha Empire grew during the 17th century and gradually took over more of the Mughals' domain. The Marathas consolidated control of central India until they fell to the last great imperial power, the British.

The **British** were not, however, the only European power in India: the **Portuguese** had controlled Goa since 1510 and the **French**, **Danes** and **Dutch** also had trading posts. By 1803, when the British overwhelmed the Marathas, most of the country was under the control of the **British East India Company**, which had established its trading post at Surat in Gujarat in 1612.

The company treated India as a place to make money, and its culture, beliefs and religions were left strictly alone. Britain expanded iron and coal mining, developed tea, coffee and cotton plantations, and began construction of India's vast rail network. They encouraged absentee landlords because they eased the burden of administration and tax collection, creating an impoverished landless peasantry - a problem which is still chronic in Bihar and West Bengal. The uprising in northern

India in 1857 led to the demise of the East India Company, and administration of the country was handed over to the British government.

Modern History

Opposition to British rule began in earnest at the turn of the 20th century. The 'Congress' which had been established to give India a degree of self-rule, now began to push for the real thing. In 1915, **Gandhi** returned from South Africa, where he had practiced as a lawyer, and turned his abilities to independence, adopting a policy of passive resistance, or *satyagraha*.

World War II dealt a deathblow to colonialism and Indian independence became inevitable. Within India, however, the large Muslim minority realized that an independent India would be Hindu-dominated. Communalism grew, with the Muslim League, led by **Muhammad Ali Jinnah**, speaking for the overwhelming majority of Muslims, and the Congress Party, led by **Jawaharlal Nehru**, representing the Hindu population. The bid for a separate Muslim nation was the biggest stumbling block to Britain granting independence.

Faced with a political stand-off and rising tension, Viceroy Mountbatten reluctantly decided to divide the country and set a rapid timetable for independence. Unfortunately, the two overwhelmingly Muslim regions were on opposite sides of the country - meaning the new nation of Pakistan would be divided by a hostile India. When the dividing line was announced, the greatest exodus in human history took place as Muslims moved to Pakistan and Hindus and Sikhs relocated to India. Over 10 million people changed sides and even the most conservative estimates calculate that 250,000 people were killed. Gandhi was deeply disheartened by Partition and the subsequent bloodshed. On January 30, 1948 he was assassinated by a Hindu fanatic.

Following the trauma of Partition, India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru championed a secular constitution, socialist central planning and a strict policy of nonalignment. India elected to join the Commonwealth, but also increased ties with the USSR - partly because of conflicts with China and partly because of US support for arch-enemy Pakistan, which was particularly hostile to India because of its claim on Muslim-dominated Kashmir. There were clashes with Pakistan in 1965 and 1971.

India's next prime minister of stature was Nehru's daughter **Indira Gandhi**, who was elected in 1966. She is still held in high esteem, but is remembered by some for meddling with India's democratic foundations by declaring a state of emergency in 1975. Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984 as a reprisal for using the Indian Army to flush out armed Sikh radicals from the Golden Temple in Amritsar. The Gandhis' dynastic grip on Indian politics continued when her son, **Rajiv** was swept into power.

Rajiv brought new and pragmatic policies to the country. Foreign investment and the use of modern technology were encouraged, import restrictions were eased and many new industries were set up. These measures projected India into the 1990s and out of isolationism, but did little to stimulate India's mammoth rural sector. Rajiv was assassinated on an election tour by a supporter of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers.

The dangers of communalism in India were clearly displayed in 1992, when a Hindu mob stormed and destroyed a mosque built on the alleged site of Rama's birth in Ayodhya. The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was keen to exploit such opportunities, and led several disparate coalitions to power. Despite the dangers of playing communalist politics, the BJP's traditionalist

Hindu stance attracted voters concerned about retaining traditional values during the sudden onslaught of modern global influences.

In 1998 India tested its first nuclear weapons. Despite international outrage, the nuclear tests were met with widespread jubilation and support for the BJP. But by April 1999, Prime Minister Vajpayee had lost his majority and was forced into a vote of confidence, which he lost by one vote. Sonia Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi's widow, was expected to lead the Congress Party to victory, but she was unable to secure a coalition and India was forced to the polls for the third time in as many years. The BJP was returned to government with a slimmer lead.

Tensions with Pakistan flared periodically despite top-level attempts at rapprochement, and natural disasters also took their toll. In January 2001, an earthquake in Gujarat killed about 20,000 people and left more than half a million homeless. In December of that year, gunmen storming the national parliament killed 13 people, while hundreds were killed in Gujarat a year after the earthquake in conflicts between Hindus and Muslims.

Recent History

The Kashmir situation threatened to escalate to all out war in 2002 with both India and Pakistan testing nuclear-capable warheads in the region. The United States and United Kingdom urged their citizens to leave India and Pakistan as diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis stuttered in the background. Fortunately, by late 2003 both countries had declared ceasefires and resumed direct air links and the Indian government had historic talks with Kashmir separatists.

In 2004, with fresh elections called, the BJP were expected to win re-election. The Congress party was again led by Sonia Gandhi and gained surprising support through an exhausting grassroots campaign. So successful was she that the dominant BJP was ousted for the first time in almost 10 years. Perhaps concerned for her wellbeing, Sonia Gandhi declined the Prime Ministerial role, sending shockwaves through her party. Instead she nominated India's first Sikh leader, an anti-corruption stalwart and economic reformist, **Manmohan Singh**, to lead the parliament.

The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami killed over 8500 people and caused large scale damage along the southeastern coast of the country. The central coast of Tamil Nadu, especially the Nagapattinam and Cuddalore districts, was hardest hit, with 373 villages affected and more than 300,000 people displaced. Basic aid and temporary housing made possible by the Indian government (and reinforced by a half-billion World Bank pledge) ensured a swift recovery. In fact, most of the damaged areas are now fully accessible with the exception of the Nicobar islands which are likely to remain off-limits to tourists for some time.

Information taken from

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/destinations/asia/india/essential?a=culture>

MAP OF INDIA



-map taken from Encyclopedia Britannica

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Talking with your teacher, friends and family about a performance after attending the theater is part of the experience. When you share what you saw and felt, you learn more about the performance. You can now compare ideas and ask questions and find out how to learn even more. Here are some questions to think about:

1. How would you describe the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble performance to a friend?
2. What feelings did you have while you watched the dancing and listened to the music?
3. What did you like best and why? Was the program different from what you expected?
How?
4. Did you have a favorite selection? A least favorite? Explain.
5. Do your parents or grandparents have an ancestral music and dance culture? Please describe!

This CueSheet was written by Anett Jessop,
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ATTENDING THE THEATER

What is expected of student audiences at the matinee:

- * Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately;
- * Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times;
- * Demonstrate appreciation for the artist's work by applauding at the appropriate times;
- * Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements;
- * Please eat lunch before or after the performance to avoid disruption;
- * Please turn off cell phones and pagers;
- * Flash photography is strictly prohibited;
- * Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee.

What you can expect of your experience in a performing arts theater:

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience: whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about, can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone's concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best possible work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, such as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful. Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s) of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performance invite audience participation.