

March, 1-2, 2024

## Leela Dance Collective presents Rachna Nivas' Reclaiming the Divine Feminine

Company: Leela Dance Collective  
 Venue: New York Live Arts  
 Location: New York, NY

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Leela Dance Collective, with support from New York Live Arts Independent Works program and CUNY Dance Initiative, presents Rachna Nivas' Reclaiming the Divine Feminine on Friday, March 1 and Saturday, March 2, 2024 at 7:30pm at New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th Street, New York, NY 10011. Tickets start at \$32 for students and \$42 for regular-priced tickets and are available online at <https://newyorklivearts.org/event/independent-works-reclaiming-the-divine-feminine/>.

Rachna Nivas' Reclaiming the Divine Feminine takes audiences into the dark and mystical realm of tantra and its radial hailing of supreme feminine power as the primordial energy that pervades all things in time and space. Through classical Indian kathak dance, live music, and special lighting and prop design, Nivas embodies the wildness of Kali - Goddess of time and death who represents the bold paradoxes of feminine wholeness: she is intoxicating and terrifying, beautiful and grotesque, ascetic and erotic, loving and rageful; she is the force that binds us and the force that sets us free.

According to Nivas, the tantric wisdom goddesses (mahavidyas) are some of the most radical yet invisible iconography of South Asian civilization. She says, "Tantra, which was birthed in tribal India, has been highly denigrated and stereotyped in the West to be about sex and freakish practices. It's tragic how little folks know about this powerful paradigm, even in India itself due to its unorthodox departure from patriarchal structures and what we consider 'wild' and 'horrific' imagery of a woman."

The phrase "divine feminine" has been gaining popularity recently, but Nivas hopes to expand and deepen its understanding. She says, "Tantra's 'divine feminine' is a rare concept in that she is not just a revered nurturing consort to a male deity, but rather an entirely independent and autonomous power, not depicted with a partner or even as a mother. My own life has taken me to deep self-inquiry and brought me to discover how profound and liberating these goddesses are. They have the power to transform and reclaim a woman's wild limitless nature."

Reclaiming the Divine Feminine is a project that germinated from Nivas' 6-month research journey for the Jerome Robbins Dance Division prestigious Dance Research Fellowship at New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. The 2022-23 theme being Dance and Ecology, Nivas presented a culminating talk and dance with live music titled Nature, Woman, and the Macrocosm: How Indian classical dance transmits a consciousness of indivisibility. It showcased the intersectionality of Indian classical dance with ecofeminism, interconnectedness, and non-duality. Curator of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, Linda Murray, says, "Rachna is one of the most accomplished Kathak practitioners working in the U.S. today. A radical artist whose practice is both deeply respectful of tradition but also interrogative, she keeps alive one of the most important lineages of Indian classical dance and is a crucial figure for understanding the integration of Indian culture into the American dance mosaic."

In addition to the NYPL, Reclaiming the Divine Feminine is supported by New York Live Arts under their Independent Works program and CUNY Dance Initiative.

Dispelling western myths of tantra and elevating the intersections of ecofeminism, interconnectedness, and Eastern principles of non-duality, Reclaiming the Divine Feminine illuminates a woman's treacherous path to transforming her shadows and reclaiming her wild limitless nature. With an opening act by Nivas' apprentice company dancers, and original musical score composed by India-based composer Jayanta Banerjee, this performance promises to haunt, provoke, and enchant.

Live Musical Artists: Jayanta Banerjee, sitar; Satyaprakash Mishra, table; Neha Tummala, vocals; Varshini Narayanan, Bansuri flute

#### About Rachna Nivas

Rachna Nivas is a performing artist, choreographer, educator, community organizer, scholar, and activist of Indian classical art. She is one of the most accomplished kathak dance practitioners of her generation. A radical artist whose practice is both deeply protective of tradition but also interrogative, she keeps alive one of the most important lineages of classical Indian dance. Called by critics "revelatory", "charismatic", "a dancer who radiates power and grace", her work is rooted in feminine consciousness and Eastern philosophies that challenges Eurocentric cultural paradigms. After rising to principal dancer in legendary master Chitresh Das' acclaimed company for 15 years, she is now co-founder and co-artistic director of Leela Dance Collective and is building her own solo body of work in a generative chapter of her artistic journey.

Rachna was a New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Research Fellow which became the genesis of her newest solo work, 'Reclaiming the Divine Feminine'. To complete this work, Rachna was awarded the 2023-24 CUNY Dance Initiative Residency. Her additional original works include 'Unedited', a risk-bound tour-de-force solo highlighting improvisation with live musicians; SPEAK, a cross-cultural collaboration bringing together leading women in kathak and tap;; Son of the Wind, a large-scale Ramayana dance drama. Notable tours of her works include LA's Broad Stage and Ford Theaters, San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Mumbai's Royal Opera House, New Delhi's Epicenter, Maui Arts and Cultural Center, Philadelphia's Kimmel Center.

As an educator and community organizer, Rachna is currently directing Leela New York's thriving training institution. She has taught in numerous educational residencies, most notably at Verdon/Fosse Legacy, Kuperberg Center for the Arts, New Orleans' Treme Center, Miami's Conservatory of Arts.

For more information, visit <http://rachnanivas.com>.

#### About Leela Dance Collective

Leela Dance Collective is a bi-coastal artist-led and women-led internationally touring dance company bringing the richness and depth of Indian classical dance to contemporary audiences worldwide through traditional works and cross-genre collaborations. Under the artistic direction of renowned kathak artists Rachna Nivas, Rukhmani Mehta, and Seibi Lee, the Collective has garnered critical acclaim engaging some of today's leading dancers and musicians, as well as collaborative artists of other genres. through groundbreaking productions like SPEAK, Son of the Wind, ReSound, and more. Past highlights include appearances at Ford Theaters, BroadStage, Kimmel Cultural Campus, Green Music Center, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, National Centre for the Performing Arts, Mumbai, Maui Arts & Cultural Center, and NC State LIVE. For more information, visit <https://leela.dance/the-collective/>.

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Schedule  
March 1, 2024: 7:30pm  
March 2, 2024: 7:30pm

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