

April, 14-24, 2020

Kathak: An American Story // LIVE series on YouTube

Company: Leela Dance NYC Initiative
 Venue: www.youtube.com/leeladancecollective
 Location: Global, NY

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Master of Tradition

Tune in at 6pm PST/9pm EST on www.youtube.com/leeladancecollective

The Leela Dance Collective's story traces back to the arrival of a young Chitresh Das in America in 1970 with the dream to teach kathak to Americans. His personal and artistic journey over the next forty-five years was checkered with struggles and successes. He established the critically-acclaimed Chitresh Das Dance Company and the Chhandam School of Kathak which at its height was the largest Indian classical dance school in North America. He boasted an extolled performance career and his work changed the course of kathak history.

The Collective's principal artists - Seibi Lee, Rachna Nivas, and Rina Mehta - trained with Das in the traditional guru-shishya parampara for almost two decades. They performed in his company and trained successive generations of dancers at his school. After Das' passing in 2015, they became some of the primary torch bearers of his lineage and their artistic works from SPEAK to Son of the Wind represent a direct continuation of his work to elevate kathak on the world stage. Together with fellow Leela Dance Collective Co-Founders and artists, Sarah Morelli and Shefali Jain, they are advancing a collective vision for kathak's future.

The Leela Dance Collective, in partnership with Chhandam on its 40th anniversary, is proud to launch Kathak: An American Story, a live-stream series chronicling kathak's evolution in America, as shepherded by Das. The series features eight segments from archival and contemporary productions including Class Tech (1984), Gold Rush (1990), Sampurnam (2004), India Jazz Suites (2005), and more along with notable solo performances of Das himself. Many of the dancers and artists featured in these productions and performances are today carrying forward the legacy of Indian classical music and dance around the globe. The Leela Dance Collective is proud to be a part of this rich history and community.

Currently on Episode 6:

Tune in tonight at 6pm PDT/9pm EDT for Episode 6 of our live stream series Kathak: An American Story. Don't forget to subscribe to our 8 episode series at www.youtube.com/leeladancecollective.

This episode features "Master of Tradition" (2008) - Pandit Das' exhilarating tour-de-force solo performance accompanied by an orchestra of renowned musicians, including Bhawani Shankar on pakhawaj, Abhijit Banerjee on tabla, Shweta Jhaveri on vocal, and Jayanta Banerjee on sitar. Highlights of this show include Das' charming expression in famed song, "Mohe Panghat Pe," his gut-wrenching rendition of "Draupadi Vrastra Haran," and his trademark closing song, "Shri Krishna Chaitano."

The traditional Kathak solo is the ultimate expression of an artist's many years of training and honing of their craft. It is a feat of strength and endurance; artistic creativity and finesse; pure dance and storytelling. Every aspect of the art form is shown in the solo including Vandana (invocation), Thaata (contrasting elegant and crisp stances punctuated with flourishes of footwork and turns), Bol/Paran (recitation and presentation of complex compositions), Thumri (often sung by the dancer and expressed with poignant gestures, and Gat Bhao (storytelling).

In these excerpts from the 3 sold out performances at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, we see the centered depth of Das' creativity, his razor sharp and agile rhythmic footwork and composition, and the great dynamic range of his dramatic expression.

Additional musicians include Rohan Mishra on sarangi, Seibi Lee on surmandal, Leah Brown on manjira, Rachna Nivas on manjira, Sarah Morelli on tanpura.

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