

PRESS KIT

Amrita Lahiri

DANCER • CHOREOGRAPHER

www.amritalahiri.com

Amrita Lahiri is an Indian classical dancer specializing in **Kuchipudi**, a form emerging from the south east of the country. Critics describe her as 'gifted with a radiant stage presence', and her dance performances and choreographies have been acclaimed for their elegance and dynamism. She is empaneled as an artist with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, and has toured as a soloist in India, USA, Switzerland, South Korea, Africa, and Southeast Asia, presenting Kuchipudi from its traditional origins to its contemporary forms. She presents the beauty and joy of dance, while maintaining the precision and soul of the classical Kuchipudi form.

Amrita began dancing at age 7 in Washington, D.C. studying under Anuradha Nehru until she shifted to New Delhi at age 15. After her solo debut (*arangetrum*) at the India International Centre in New Delhi in 1996, she continued to perform Kuchipudi, and also started learning Bharatanatyam under Leela Samson. Amrita toured extensively with Leela Samson's group Spanda, performing with her guru. While in New Delhi, Amrita studied under Swapnasundari and Seetha Nagajothy. In Chennai, she studied under Jaikishore Mosalikanti. Her dance reflects the influences of all of these outstanding gurus, and the experience of many performances. A noted critic writes, "Amrita Lahiri's inner composure is reflected in her dancing body, the Kuchipudi training under several teachers rather than creating a confused technique resulting in her imbibing the best from her gurus – each adding a dimension to her dance."

From this firm foundation of training, Amrita has innovated with choreographies of her own. Her recent choreographies are 'Chitra' (2012) based on Rabindranath Tagore's Chitrangada, which was described as "...true to Tagore throughout. The style of dance alone was Kuchipudi and yet it all gelled perfectly. It was as much a tribute to the skill of the dancer/choreographer as it was to Tagore." In 2014, she danced 'Murchhana' in New Delhi's Kamani auditorium. It was choreographed under the guidance of Odissi guru Sharmila Biswas. A noted critic wrote of Murchhana that it had a 'quality of delightful freshness'. In 2015, Amrita innovated with Kuchipudi group choreography, with a piece called 'Sharanam', on the theme of Shiva.

In addition to being an active performer and choreographer, Amrita has over 10 years of experience in arts management. Most recently she was the Head of Dance Programming at the National Centre for Performing Arts (NCPA) in Mumbai (2010-2013). She has also been teaching since 1999, designing workshops and classes that appeal to a range of participants. She writes on the arts, with several articles published in journals and magazines. Through her performances, writings, teaching and choreographies, Amrita strives to expand and share the specific beauties of Indian classical dance.

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Classical Kuchipudi

S O L O P E R F O R M A N C E

Amrita presents an evening of traditional Kuchipudi repertoire, including characteristic pieces such as 'shabdham', 'kalapam', and 'tarangam'. Kuchipudi has a lightness and dramatic quality that set it apart from other Indian classical dance forms. Amrita combines the grace and light-footedness of Kuchipudi, with a focus on depth of emotion, and attention to aesthetics of movement, music, and content. Having trained under several gurus, Amrita's traditional repertoire is vast and varied.

Duration: Shorter performances can be designed for approximately 20 minutes. A full-length evening's performance is 60-90 minutes.

Accompanists: Classical solo Kuchipudi performances are performed to live orchestra including a minimum of four musicians. However, recorded music is possible, especially for shorter performances in dance festivals or an artistic showcase.

To book a performance, contact
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CURRENTLY PRESENTING

Murchhana

T H E S P I R I T O F S A N G E E T

Created by Amrita Lahiri under the mentorship of Sharmila Biswas

Music composed by Sudha Raghuraman



Murchhana is based on stories from the oral tradition of the khol players (drummers) of rural Orissa. These stories have roots in ancient texts, but have evolved into many branches, having been told over generations.

The khol players of Orissa interpret sangeet (music) as a combination of the three – nritya (dance), geeta (song), vadya (instrument) – plus a fourth element – the life – which is interpreted as Murchhana.

The story begins with a dialogue between the singer and dancer comparing the physical body to sangeet. Just as a physical body is lifeless without its soul, in that same way, sangeet comes alive with Murchhana – its soul. The singer asks what is the use of physical expertise without spirit? And what is this spirit? What is it that makes sangeet worthwhile and takes it towards Moksha? It is Murchhana.

Duration: 60 minutes

**Performed as a solo dance production,
with four accompanying musicians.**



Chitra

T A G O R E T H R O U G H K U C H I P U D I

Choreography by Amrita Lahiri
based on Rabindranath Tagore's original writings

The Kuchipudi repertoire today has many famous pieces such as Bhamakalapam, Dashavatar, and Tarangam, which were originally part of larger dance dramas. The plays are abridged and formatted to suit the solo dancer in performance on stage. The interpretation of Chitrangada that Amrita presents in 'Chitra' is also a move in this direction. It is a solo version of Chitrangada, in which the dancer focusses mainly on the character of the warrior princess Chitrangada.

The emphasis is on internalized character development – satvika abhinaya – rather than costume – aharya abhinaya. Amrita also uses the technique of vachika abhinaya – or spoken dialogues – which is a trademark of the Kuchipudi style. While originally, in Kuchipudi, these were only spoken in Telugu, this piece uses English and Bengali.

This interpretation of Chitrangada retains the original storyline of Tagore's play written in 1913 (the same year that Tagore won the Nobel Prize for Literature): Chitrangada was the only daughter of the king of Manipur. As the only child, she was brought up like a man – she learnt the art of warfare, was skilled in archery, and was the compassionate savior of her people. One day, while she was in the forest hunting, she stumbled upon Arjun, the famous hero of the Mahabharata. For the first time, she falls

in love. She offers herself to him, and is rejected. Realising that he is turned off by her manly ways, she prays to the god of love, Madan, to transform her into a beautiful, seductive woman. Her wish is granted – her body is transformed into that of a beautiful woman.

She approaches Arjun once again, and this time, succeeds in seducing him. He is instantly smitten by her beauty and eager to be with her. Their romance blossoms, until one day, Arjun hears the villagers running through the forest in search of their saviour – Chitrangada. They praise her as the one who has the strength of a man, but the compassion of a woman – she is their warrior princess.

Arjun is intrigued. He asks his beautiful companion if she knows anything about Chitrangada. Chitrangada, now in the form of a beautiful woman, tells Arjun that the 'real' Chitrangada is repulsive. She does not have any of the beautiful and charming ways of a woman. Captivated by the idea of this unusual woman, Arjun insists on meeting the real Chitrangada, not realizing that she is right next to him. Chitrangada, with mixed feelings of disappointment and joy, requests the god of love, Madan, to take back his blessing and transform her back to her real warrior self. She presents herself, as she is, to Arjun.

In the first song, 'Mohini Maya Elo', Tagore evokes the theme of the story: 'Come unadorned beauty, come humble truth. Strike down the fortress of dreams and illusion, bring liberation, tear asunder the bondage of deception.' The final song is a remarkable poem describing Tagore's ideal woman, and his idea of the true man-woman companionship, relevant even today, 100 years after it was written. In it, Chitrangada says:

*I am Chitrangada, I am the king's daughter
Not a goddess, nor an ordinary woman
Worshipping me and placing me on a pedestal,
that is not me, not me,
Neglecting me and keeping me behind,
that is not me, not me.*

*If you keep me by your side in crisis and in wealth
If you allow me to stand by you in all hardship and strife
You will come to know me truly...*

(translation from Rabindranath Tagore, *the Singer and His Song* by Reba Som, 2009)

Duration: The main piece 'Chitra' from Chitrangada is 40 minutes.

Music: This performance uses original songs from Tagore's work in Bengali, as well as Carnatic compositions by Kuldeep Pai. It is performed as a solo production to recorded music.

Reviews

The Hindu, 4 April, 2014
'Jubilant harvest of laya, sur and talent'

"Amrita Lahiri's Kuchipudi, under Sharmila Biswas's mentoring with her guru Mosalikanti providing nattuvangam and indirectly ensuring retention of the Kuchipudi sensitivity in the student's praiseworthy endeavour, ushered in a quality of delightful freshness. . . Innovatively translated to Kuchipudi's graceful agility with twinkling rhythm (each sequence in a different cycle) and vibrantly emotive, Amrita's dance had its fine take-off point in Sudha Raghuraman's ragamalika music. . ."

Leela Venkataraman

FULL REVIEW AT
<http://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/dance/tarpan-dance-festival-featured-flawless-selection-of-youngsters/article5867732.ece>

The Hindu, 17 April, 2015
'Synchrony Matches Skill'

"Amrita . . . performed a jatiswaram in Amritavarshini, choreographed by Swapnasundari. The swaras were used beautifully, bringing out the essence of the lilting raga and the choreography creatively incorporated the movements to align to the swara patterns. The resultant visualisation was a depiction of falling raindrops, very poetic. . ."

V V Ramani

FULL REVIEW AT
<http://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/synchrony-matches-skill/article7109060.ece>



The Pioneer, 27 March 2014
'Bond with beats and melody'

"... hugely talented, Amrita launched her major item Murchhana (Spirit of Music), as mentored by the senior dance-guru Sharmila Biswas. With a low podium placed strategically on front-stage, Amrita both spoke and danced in a seamless manner."

Utpal Banerjee

FULL REVIEW AT
<http://www.dailypioneer.com/vivacity/bond-with-beats-and-melody.html>

The Hindu, 25 October 2013
'Classical evenings in Singapore'

"The last and final performance was intriguing to begin with. How could Tagore's immortal Chitrangadha be performed in the Kuchipudi style? And yet it was done, and how! The event, supported by the Tagore Society, Singapore, saw a wonderful performance by well-known dancer Amrita Lahiri. Interspersed with monologues and shortened to suit the time frame, its music remained true to Tagore throughout. The style of dance alone was Kuchipudi and yet it all gelled perfectly. It was as much a tribute to the skill of the dancer/choreographer as it was to Tagore."

V Sriram

FULL REVIEW AT
<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-fridayreview/classical-evenings-in-singapore/article5269441.ece>

The Hindu, 1 February 2013
'Of postures and rhythm'

"If the slight, slim figure of Amrita Lahiri presenting Kuchipudi managed to hold audience attention in this crowded setting, it derived from proficient dancing and excellently balanced wing support. The experimental Tarangam interwoven into Balamurali's varnam composition 'Amma Anandadayini' in Gambiranattai, was a winner, with grace-abounding postures and rhythmic interludes with electric pauses and changing accents making for a riveting fare."

Leela Venkataraman

FULL REVIEW AT
<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-fridayreview/of-postures-and-rhythm/article4366901.ece>

Narthaki.com
15 October 2013

"With an attractive stage presence, young and sprightly Amrita succeeds in highlighting the Vempati bani admirably with quicksilver movements and elegant postures. She strives to imbibe the spirit of the dance form that challenges her to rise to great artistic heights. With command over technique, Amrita has carved a niche for herself as a brilliant Kuchipudi exponent."

Sunil Kothari

FULL REVIEW AT
<http://www.narthaki.com/info/gtsk/gtsk86.html>

Reviews
(continued)



The Hindu, 16 August 2012
'Alluring Artistry'

"Amrita Lahiri staged an enthralling Kuchipudi recital in which the dancer appeared to be a source of inexhaustible energy. Symbiotic movements, sculpturesque poses and extremely soft footwork were the demarcating features of Amrita's artistry....Amrita's own choreographic ingenuity was discernible in the tillana that combined a traditional one with a couple of lines from Rabindranath Tagore."

GS Paul

FULL REVIEW AT

<http://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/dance/alluring-artistry/article3779554.ece>

Nartanam Journal
April-June 2012

"One of the more impressive Chitrangada versions was in Kuchipudi form and choreographed by Amrita Lahiri, ... this was the best work of the entire festival...Amrita's work eschewed heroics and overt histrionics for an internalized, simple, excellently rehearsed neatness."

Leela Venkataraman

Mumbai Mirror, 12 January 2012
'Steps to a Great Kuchipudi recital'

". . . All the items that she danced, choreographed by her present guru Jaikishore Mosalikati, combined complex footwork, clean lines, an unflagging pace and infinite grace. Her leaps and jumps were executed with the lightness of a gazelle; and one of the more awesome moments in the choreography was when the movement of her body exactly matched the meend of the bol "dheem" ... Amrita Lahiri's performance was refreshing and energising, and left us asking for more. Let's hope there will be more."

Shanta Gokhale

FULL REVIEW AT

<http://www.mumbaimirror.com/columns/columnists/shanta-gokhale/Steps-to-a-great-kuchipudi-recital/articleshow/16196706.cms>

Narthaki.com, 11 January 2012
'A warm program on a cold evening'

". . . Amrita has an attractive stage presence and a winning smile that endear her to the audience. . .

A Seshan

FULL REVIEW AT

<http://www.narthaki.com/info/rev12/rev1160.html>

Reviews
(continued)



Performance History

(ALL CLASSICAL SOLO UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED)

Upcoming

- November 2015: Esplanade, Singapore (collaboration with Gayatri Sriram)
- December 2015: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Chennai Natya Darshan Conference
- January 8, 2016: Music Academy Dance Festival, Chennai

2015

- 'Sharanam' premiere at Kapaaleeshwar Temple Panguni Festival, Chennai
- 'Murchhana' at Kalakshetra, Chennai
- 'Sannidhi' collaboration with Parwati Dutta in Mumbai for National Coast Guard Day

2014

- Udayaraga festival, Bhubaneswar, Orissa
- 'Chitra', Ananya Samarpana Festival, Bangalore
- 'Murchhana' premiere at Gandharva Mahavidyalaya's 'Tarpan' festival, New Delhi
- Goa Kala Academy, Panjim, Goa

2013

- Soorya Festival tour in South Africa and Botswana
- Indian Cultural Centre (ICC), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 'Chitra' in Singapore, Asian Festival of Classical Dance
- 'Sannidhi' with Parwati Dutta at DRDO Pune
- NaadRoop festival, Maharashtra Cultural Centre, Pune
- 'Sannidhi' with Parwati Dutta at Khajuraho festival
- Kota Rajasthan, SPICMACAY
- Ravindra Natya Mandir, Pu La Deshpande Academy, Mumbai
- 'Sannidhi' at Gujarat Educational Society, MGM Medical College, Four Seasons, Mumbai
- Nishagandhi Festival, Trivandrum
- Bombay International School, Mumbai
- Agro Koli Sanskruti Bhavan, Nerul, Navi Mumbai, Takshashila Dance Academy
- RK Swamy Hall, Mylapore Chennai, Dasyam Nrityotsav
- Jaikishore Mosalikanti's group performance at Music Academy Festival



Performance History (continued)

2012

- Panelist at Natya Kala Conference, Krishna Gana Sabha, Chennai
 - Chembur Fine Arts, Mumbai, Navaratri Festival
 - Kalamandalam, Kerala
 - India Habitat Centre, New Delhi
 - Navaneetham Cultural Trust, Thrissur
- Lecture demonstration, Asian Development Bank Spouses Association, Manila, Philippines
- Chhatrapati Shivaji Vastu Sanghralaya (Prince of Wales Museum), Mumbai
 - Mylapore Temple Festival, Chennai
 - Thane Festival, Mumbai
- Festival of New Choreographies, IHC, New Delhi
 - 'Sannidhi' at Kala Ghoda Festival, Mumbai
- 'Sannidhi' at National Centre for Performing Arts, Mumbai
 - 'Sannidhi' at Mahagami, Aurangabad
 - Horizon series, ICCR, Mumbai

2011

- National Centre for Performing Arts, Mumbai
- Yuva Mahotsav, Ravindra Natya Mandir, Mumbai
- 'Sannidhi' with Parwati Dutta at Ananya Festival, New Delhi
 - Happenings Festival, Kolkata
 - India International Centre, New Delhi
 - Darpana Academy, Ahmedabad
- Sangeet Natak Akademi, Nritya Sangam, Cochin
- Music Academy, Chennai, (Kishore Mosalikanti's Kuchipudi ensemble)

2010

- Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal
- Demonstration at SAARC Artists Camp, Seher
- Kalakshetra (Kishore Mosalikanti Kuchipudi ensemble)
- Kala Ghoda Festival, Mumbai

2009

- Ravindra Bharti, Hyderabad, Telugu University (Kishore Mosalikanti Kuchipudi Ensemble)
- Maharashtra Mahotsav, Ravindra Natya Mandir, Mumbai
 - National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai
- Ananya Festival, New Delhi (Kishore Mosalikanti Kuchipudi Ensemble)
- Umang series, National Centre for Performing Arts, Mumbai
 - Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sanghralaya, Mumbai
- Impresario Festival of New Choreography, New Delhi (Kishore Mosalikanti Kuchipudi Ensemble)
- Monte Verita, Ascona, Switzerland
- Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Switzerland
- Nalanda Nrityotsava, Mumbai





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Image Gallery

<http://amritalahiri.com/gallery/>

Video Links

<http://amritalahiri.com/videos/>