

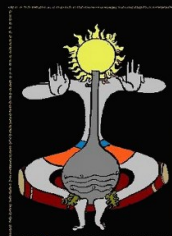


17th American Natya Festival

CURATED BY SOORYA PERFORMING ARTS

Friday, June 12, 2026 - Saturday, June 13, 2026 - Sunday, June 14, 2026

Lindbergh High School Auditorium



सूर्य *Soorya*
Dancers with Innovation



This event would not have been possible
Without the support of the
Missouri Arts Council and
Regional Arts Commission. Thank you!



Foreword

Dear Patrons,

We are delighted we reached the 17th year of celebrating the American Natya Festival in Saint Louis. Our dance festival makes Saint Louis a city of diverse art and artists.

This year we are excited to be hosting practitioners of the Indian classical arts from all over the US, including but not limited to, Raleigh, New Jersey, Austin, Delaware, San Francisco, Portland, Charlotte, Atlanta, Montgomery, Topeka, and local performances from St. Louis.

In addition to the performances, this festival is the culmination of the nation-wide circuit of Indian classical dance competitions hosted by Soorya Performing Arts—The American Natya Idol. We are hosting over 500 participants who have qualified for the national round, hosted here in St. Louis during the American Natya Festival.

None of this could have been possible without the vision of Guru Prasanna Kasthuri, and the support of our tireless volunteers who have spend hours assisting in the organization of this festival.

Thank you for being here to witness our hard work come to life. We hope that our audience will leave inspired by the many dance companies featured in our festival, marveling at the sustained growth of Indian classical dance organizations all across the United States. We are also honored to be able to provide our talented competitors with a platform to showcase their talents, and provide our winners with performance opportunities and a network to rely on as future performers.

We hope you enjoy this weekend of dance!

Board of Directors
Soorya Performing Arts

Soorya Performing Arts

A not-for-profit organization – devoted to Classical Dance,
Music, and Theater from India

Friday, June 12, 2026

Festival Opening Performances 6:00 PM - 9:30 PM

- Welcome Dances by Soorya Performing Arts
- Kuchipudi by **Meera Rathnagiri** (Wilmington, DE)
- Kathak Performances by **Sheela Mehta** (New Jersey / Mumbai)
- Thematic Bharatanatyam by the Students of **Vinita Subraman-
yam** (Austin, TX)
- Andhra Natyam by **Upasana School of Dance** (O'Fallon, MO)

Saturday, June 13, 2026

7:30 AM – 6:00 PM

American Natya Idol 2026 Competition

6:00 PM – 9:30 PM

- **ZERO** – Historical Dance Drama by **Prasanna Kasthuri** (Ballwin, MO)
- **Finding Joy** – Creative Dance Drama by **Surabhi Bharadwaj** (San Francisco, CA)
- **Kalyana Srinivasam** – Mythological Dance Drama by **Pallavi Madabhushi** (Charlotte, NC)

Honoring a Legacy of Artistic Excellence

A special ceremony recognizing individuals whose lifelong commitment to dance, teaching, and cultural preservation continues to inspire future generations.

Lifetime Achievement Honoree

- **Guru Shivagami Vanka** (Portland, OR)

Distinguished Service Honorees

- **Guru Pallavi Madabhushi** (Charlotte, NC)
- **Guru Surabhi Bharadwaj** (San Francisco, CA)
Soujanya Madhusudhan (Atlanta, GA)

Sunday, June 14, 2026

7:30 AM – 1:00 PM

American Natya Idol 2026 Competition

2:30 PM – 6:30 PM

- **Ghungroo** – Experimental Dance Production by **Samanvita Kasthuri** (New York, NY)
 - AMERICAN NATYA IDOL AWARD CEREMONY
 - **Agni Kusuma** – Intriguing Dance Drama by **Soujanya Madhusudhan** (Atlanta, GA)
 - **Navarasa Ramayana** – Epic Dance Production by **Sudha Raghuram** (Montgomery, AL)
- Group Dances by the Students of **Anil Karunakaran** (Topeka, KS)
- **Folk India** – A Collaborative Celebration featuring multiple folk dance groups from St. Louis and surrounding regions -
 - Thangaat group of dancers,
 - Karnataka Kolata Group,
 - Holi Dances
 - Assamese Bihu performances

PROGRAM

Day 1: Friday, June 12, 2026

Welcome Dances

presented by Soorya Performing Arts

Kuchipudi Dance Presentation

By Meera Ratnagiri (Wilmington, DE)

Meera Ratnagiri is a dedicated Bharatnatyam and Kuchipudi dancer. She began her Kuchipudi journey at the age of six under the guidance of her mother, Smt. Madhavi Ratnagiri. Meera received her initial training in Bharatanatyam under Smt. Lavanya Raghuraman, a disciple of the Dhananjayans. She now continues her advanced training under Sri SaiSantosh Radhakrishnan, a disciple of Guru Sri Adyar K. Lakshman. With the blessings of her gurus, she has won the Natyanjali competition organized by New Jersey Natya Sangamam (NJNS) on multiple occasions and has won first place at the coveted Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana competition in the advanced performance category in 2023. She has been awarded the title of “Nritya Tara” by House of Kala (WA) and has been invited to perform at prestigious venues such as Narada Gana Sabha, Brahma Gana Sabha, and the Bengal Association during the Chennai Margazhi season. She has also been invited to perform in Srirangam, Tiruchirappalli, and at cultural events throughout the United States.



Kathak Dance Presentation

By Shila Mehta (New Jersey, Mumbai)

Shila Mehta is a distinguished Kathak dance artist, scholar, performer, and pedagogue with over four decades of professional experience in performance, education, and research, which has helped shape Kathak into a global artistic language, deeply rooted in tradition, yet alive to the world around it.



Initiated into Kathak by Nrityacharya Prahlad Das and Pt. Chitresh Das was further nurtured in generations of Kathak artists who are disciplined in form, grounded in tradition and committed to sustaining the arts as a medium for personal and societal well-being. In the UK, this vision led to an Arts Council England-supported commission exploring neurodiverse experiences through Kathak in a digital film project, later incorporated into mental health teaching at the University of Hertfordshire, UK. She has performed extensively in India and abroad at prestigious festivals of national and international repute, including those organised by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, ICCR, and various State Academies. A landmark highlight of her international career was a solo tour across 17 cities in Germany under the Government of India's "Culture on Wheels" initiative (Indian Council for Cultural Relations, ICCR, New Delhi). Over the years, she has nurtured generations of dancers across continents, many of whom are now accomplished performers and respected teachers. A committed advocate of the Guru-Shishya Parampara, Shila Mehta continues to unite people worldwide through Indian classical dance, championing it as a powerful and still untapped resource for mental, emotional, and physical well-being. In recognition of this contribution, she was recently honoured with the President's Award at BAPIO, UK, for promoting holistic well-being through culture. Shila Mehta is set to be honoured with the Mitrahs Natyashree Award-2026 by Mitrahs Arts in June 2026 in the USA. As a research scholar, her work on 'Chaarani' ballad singing & its manifestation- 'Chaarani Kathak', incorporating Chaarani literature, is considered the first of its kind, for which she received a Senior Fellowship Award from the Government of India. She is also the curator of two major annual festivals, "Sanskriti Mahotsav", presented for the past twenty-four years as a tribute to the Guru - Shishya tradition, and "Vande Mataram", (for six years), a youth-focused initiative envisioned to take the performing arts beyond the stage - contributing significantly to cultural leadership and community engagement. A dedicated educator and the author of *Practicals in Kathak*, she is currently pursuing a PhD from the University of Mumbai on "*Transcendental Aspects of Indian Classical Dance*"—a doctoral research initiative aimed at generating knowledge to inform and influence cultural policy. Through her performances, research, pedagogy, and the digital series *Indian Classical Dance Pointers to the Art of Transcendence*, Shila Mehta continues to advocate Indian classical dance as a timeless path toward holistic well-being, self-realisation, collective harmony, and artistic excellence.

Thematic Bharatanatyam Presentation

*By the students of Vinita
Subramanyam (Austin, TX)*

Founded in 1982, Natyalaya School of Dance is one of Central Texas's premier institutions dedicated to the classical art of Bharatanatyam. For more than four decades, Natyalaya has trained generations of dancers in one of the world's most ancient and revered classical dance forms, nurturing both artistic excellence and cultural depth.



Students progress through a rigorous curriculum that includes Salangai Puja and Kalarchana levels, after which they may train for the prestigious **Arangetram**—a full-length solo debut performance accompanied by a live orchestra. Each year, **6–10 dedicated students** complete this milestone, marking their transition from student to artist and introducing their talent to the community.

Natyalaya dancers perform widely across Texas, at national festivals, and in several renowned sabhas during Chennai's December Season. They regularly compete at regional and national levels, earning numerous accolades over the years. Every summer, the school hosts **master classes and workshops** led by distinguished artists from India (including nattuvangam), enriching students' exposure to the broader classical arts world.

A hallmark of Natyalaya's creative legacy is its impressive repertoire of **30–35 dance dramas and thematic productions**, including original works such as *Alice in Wonderland – Indian Style* and *Meera: The Way of the Storm*. *These productions have earned acclaim for their innovation, storytelling, and artistic rigor.*

Advanced students also participate in a **biennial South India performance and enrichment tour**, where they perform in prestigious sabhas and festivals in India while attending workshops with eminent gurus.

Natyalaya is proud to partner with **Griffin College London** to offer diploma programs in Bharatanatyam Performance and Teaching, further expanding opportunities for students pursuing advanced artistic and pedagogical skills.

Andra Natyam Presentation

By *Upasana School of Dance (O'Fallon, MO)*



Smt. **Archana Upamaka** is an accomplished Andhranatyam performer, teacher, and choreographer dedicated to preserving the classical Lasya tradition of the Telugu-speaking regions of India. She received her training under the doyen of Andhranatyam and recreator of Perini Sivatanavam, the legendary

Padmasri Bharatakalaprapoorna Dr. Nataraja Ramakrishna, and his senior disciples **Sri Perini Ramesh**, **Dr. Perini Kumar**, and **Abhinava Satyabhama Dr. Kala Krishna**. Archana made her debut with her *Arangetram* in 1985 and later performed the celebrated dance drama *Navajanardhana Parijatham*.

Since 2009, Archana has been a cultural ambassador for Andhranatyam in the United States, presenting classical works at local and national Telugu association events to cultivate awareness and appreciation for the art form. She is the founder and director of **Upasana School of Dance** in St. Louis, Missouri, where she trains students in classical technique, abhinaya, and repertoire. Her students have performed at numerous cultural venues and festivals across the region.

As part of her commitment to revitalizing and sharing Andhranatyam's heritage, Archana recently presented **Andhranatyam Vaibhavam**, the first full-length Andhranatyam ballet production in the United States. The production received praise for its authenticity, choreography, and artistic vision, marking a significant milestone in bringing this classical tradition to global audiences.

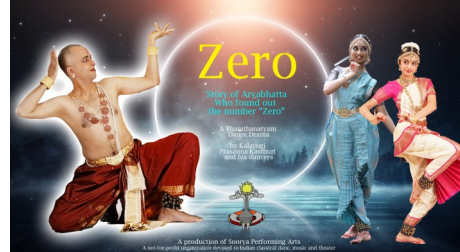
Archana's artistic interests center on the expressive depth of **abhinaya** and the choreographic possibilities within Andhranatyam. She also composes Indian folk dance pieces, believing that indigenous traditions enrich the broader landscape of Indian classical dance.

Archana currently serves as **President of NADAPADAM**, a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing international recognition for Andhranatyam, and as a **Board of Trustees member for Abhinaya**, a U.S.-based nonprofit supporting Indian classical dance. Alongside her artistic work, Archana maintains a full-time career as an **IT consultant at Bayer**, balancing professional excellence with her lifelong commitment to the arts.

Day 2: Saturday, June 13, 2026

ZERO — Historical Dance Drama

*By Guru Prasanna Kasthuri
and students of Soorya Per-
forming Arts (St. Louis,
MO)*



Prasanna Kasthuri hails from a family of literature and music and is the eldest son of Mr.

Raghusutha and Mrs. K R Padmaje. Both his parents were well-known literary figures of the Kannada language from South India. Prasanna is a reputed performer and a teacher of two classical dance forms – Bharathanatyam and Kathak. He is respectfully referred to as “Guruji” for his service to Indian performing arts.

Prasanna Kasthuri established Shantala Arts Academy in Bengaluru, India, in 1985. He presented several important performances in India. He holds a 24-hour nonstop Marathon Dancing record from 1986. He presented Kaavya Kinkini (1988), a repertoire in Bharathanatyam based on ancient Kannada literature; Subhadra Parinaya (1991) – a Sanskrit Dance Drama; Shringara Nayakaru (1994) – a production on Nine sentiments from the perspective of a man. He was invited to perform in Lasya Dance Company from the United Kingdom in 1990, and teach, train, and perform in Paris, France in 1991 for Soleil d'Or, a French dance company. Prasanna moved to the USA for higher studies and artistic exploration in 1994. Prasanna worked as a volunteer dance guru at Arathi School of Indian Dances from 1994 to 1996 in San Antonio, TX. He presented Silappadikaaram in the Lila Cockrell Theater in San Antonio, TX, in 2001. Later, Prasanna established Soorya Performing Arts in 2002 in St. Louis, MO, to promote Indian classical dance, music, and theater in the greater Midwest of the United States of America.

He headed many projects supported by the prestigious Regional Arts Council of St. Louis and the Missouri Arts Council. He created unique productions such as “Gokula Nirgamana” – the first Indian Opera ever performed outside India. In this production, dancers sang and moved simultaneously, a rare achievement in the field of Bharathanatyam. He collaborated with Grammy Awardee Pandit Vishwamohan Bhat to compose his innovative “Rainbow-II,” – a dance production based on famous English and American Poems.

He was invited to International Tap festivals held in Oklahoma and St. Louis and performed in Asian Festivals in Columbus, Ohio. Prasanna Kasthuri established Shanthala Arts Academy in 1985 in Bengaluru, India.

He promoted Indian classical dances in rural India by presenting his flagship - "Shanthala Nrityotsava," in the villages of "Nandi Grama" in the Taluk centers of Vijaya Pura and Kanakapura. Prasanna's brother, Pulikeshi, continued this sacred practice of supporting other artists by organizing Magadi Nrityotsava and later Shantala Nritya Vaibhava series.

When arriving in the USA, Prasanna observed that there were few opportunities for Indian classical dancers and decided to create an Indian classical dance festival. Prasanna initially converted his annual shows into a three-day dance festival called the St. Louis Indian Dance Festival. It was later renamed the American Natya Festival. Guruji Prasanna Kasthuri started American Natya Idol competitions and a Youth Dance festival to maintain the quality of youth presentations. The Natya Idol competition is now conducted in many parts of the country. Guruji Prasanna is an accomplished Carnatic vocalist and mrudangist. He established the Saint Louis Indian Music Festival, which invites senior Gurus from across the country to showcase their musical prowess.

Finding Joy — Creative Dance Drama

By Surabhi Bharadwaj (San Francisco, CA)



Surabhi Bharadwaj is the Artistic Director of Siddhi Creative and Siddhi Dance Academy, and a Bharatanatyam dancer, choreographer, educator, curator, and lighting designer with over a decade of professional experience. She trained under esteemed Gurus, including Guru K. M. Raman, Guru Radha Sridhar, Guru B. Bhanumati, and Guru Mavin Khoo. She has studied Karana movement techniques with Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam and Nirupama Rajendra, and is currently training in nattuvangam under Guru Prasanna Kumar. Surabhi holds dual Master of Fine Arts degrees: an MFA in Bharatanatyam from SASTRA University, Thanjavur, and an MFA in Dance: Design and Production from Saint Mary's College of California. Rooted in tradition yet guided by inquiry and experimentation, Surabhi's work bridges classical form with contemporary thought. Her performances and productions have been recognized by publications including *The New York Times*, *BroadwayWorld*, and *DanceTabs*.

As a performer and educator, she is committed to cultivating inclusive spaces within Bharatanatyam and creating work that is historically grounded while resonating with present-day audiences. Collaboration and community-building remain central to her artistic practice.

Her choreographic portfolio includes her signature snake dance, *Aadu Pambe*, and acclaimed productions such as *Ashrutam – The Unheard Voice*, *The Dream Tree*, *The Maze*, and *Finding Joy*. She has presented her work across India, Europe, and the United States. A recipient of grants from the Kenneth Rainin Foundation, Zellerbach Family Foundation (Community Arts), and Dancers' Group CA\$H Grant, Surabhi has held residencies at SafeHouse Arts, Deborah Slater Dance Theater, and Bangalore International Centre. She was awarded the title **Arsha Kala Chudamani** by Swami Dayananda Saraswati, is a two-time Isadora Duncan Dance Awardee, an ACTA Apprenticeship Mentor Artist, an Empaneled Artist of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, and a Graded Artist with Indian National Television.

Finding Joy is a Bharatanatyam ensemble work shaped by the dancers' own conversations and lived experiences — a shared laugh, an old memory, the comfort of community, and stories of ambition and belonging. Rooted in tradition and enriched with contemporary textures, the piece blends expressive storytelling with dynamic music, including konnakol and rap. Shifting between humor and quiet reflection, *Finding Joy lingers in the moments that stay with us and the connections that carry us forward*.

Nominated for the 2024–2025 Isadora Duncan Dance Award for Outstanding Achievement in Visual Design.

Choreography & Direction:

Surabhi Bharadwaj

Music Directors & Collaborators:

Maya Rau-Murthy – Konnakol & Rap

Vishnu R – Navtar

Conal Sathi – Keyboard

Recorded Excerpts from *Ashrutam – The Unheard Voice:*

Composed by Rohith Bhat and Sharat R. Prabath

Featuring:

Abhinandini & Anushree Padmanabha – Vocals

Vinod Shyam Anoor – Percussion

Suma Rani – Sitar

Parshwanath Upadhye – Nattuvangam

Varijashree Venugopal – Flute

Sangeeth Thomas – Keyboard

Pranav Dath – Rhythm Pad & Morsing

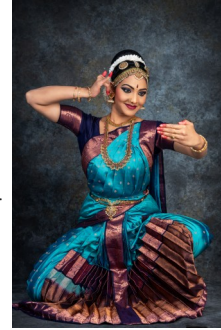
Prop Design & Construction:

Subhashinee Krishnamurthy

**Kalyana Srinivasam — Mythological
Dance Drama**

By Pallavi Madabushi (Charlotte, NC)

Pallavi Madabushi, a native of Hyderabad, Telangana, comes from a lineage steeped in the arts of music and dance. Guided by her mother and Guru Smt P.B. Krishna Bharathi, Pallavi has honed her skills over the years to become a proficient performer, choreographer, and instructor. Her journey has taken her to prestigious dance festivals in Singapore, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Dubai, and various states across the USA. Along the way, she has garnered several accolades, including the Singar Mani, Nrtiyaarchana, and GVR Foundation Youth Award, along with an ICCRT scholarship from the Government of India in Kuchipudi.



In 2019, Pallavi attained her Master's degree in Kuchipudi dance from the Aria University, CA.

With the support of her Guru and family, Pallavi continues her artistic journey, both as a performer and a dedicated teacher, imparting her knowledge of this ancient art form to the younger generation in Charlotte. She established the Pallavi Academy of Kuchipudi Dance (PAKD) in Charlotte, North Carolina, a pioneering institution dedicated to Kuchipudi in the city. PAKD offers comprehensive training from beginner to graduation levels, culminating in Rangapravesams. Beyond dance graduations, students at PAKD can undertake certificate and diploma courses through the Sampada certification program. Our fundamental principle is to preserve and transmit the heritage of Kuchipudi to the next generations in its unadulterated form.

Kalyana Srinivasam

The Divine Wedding of Srinivasa and Padmavati

Kalyana Srinivasam narrates the sacred and enchanting story of Lord Srinivasa and Princess Padmavati, a tale of divine love, destiny, and devotion.

The story begins when Sage Narada seeks to determine who among the Trimurti—Brahma, Vishnu, or Shiva—is most deserving of the Yagna Phalam, the fruit of a sacred sacrifice. Sage Bhrigu is entrusted with this divine mission. After testing the three deities, he witnesses Lord Vishnu's unparalleled humility and declares Him the worthiest recipient.

However, the incident deeply wounds Goddess Lakshmi, who leaves Vaikuntha. Unable to bear the separation, Lord Vishnu descends to Earth as Srinivasa, beginning a divine journey that intertwines the celestial and earthly realms.

As destiny unfolds, Lakshmi assumes the form of Gollabhama, while Brahma and Shiva take the forms of a cow and calf, helping sustain Srinivasa during His meditation on Earth. Through a series of divine events, Srinivasa blesses a Chola king with rebirth as Akasa Raja, the future father of Padmavati.

Meanwhile, Yashoda, reborn as Vakula Devi, is reunited with her beloved Krishna in the form of Srinivasa, fulfilling her long-cherished maternal longing.

The story takes a romantic turn when Princess Padmavati encounters a mysterious hunter in the forest—none other than Srinivasa himself. Their brief meeting sparks a divine love destined by the heavens.

As Padmavati becomes consumed by thoughts of the stranger, Narada reveals the sacred purpose behind their union.

Disguised as a fortune-teller, Srinivasa foretells Padmavati's glorious future, while Vakula Devi formally approaches the royal family with a marriage proposal. Overjoyed, Akasa Raja and his queen gladly accept.

The tale culminates in the magnificent celestial wedding of Srinivasa and Padmavati. In the presence of gods, sages, and divine beings, with Brahma officiating the sacred rites, the grand union is celebrated as a symbol of eternal love, devotion, and the divine connection between heaven and earth.

Kalyana Srinivasam is a timeless celebration of faith, destiny, and the triumph of divine love.

Choreography -Guru Padmasri Dr. SobhaNaidu.

Director- Pallavi Madabushi

Performed by students of Pallavi Academy of Kuchipudi Dance

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD CEREMONY

A special ceremony recognizing individuals whose lifelong commitment to dance, teaching, and cultural preservation continues to inspire future generations.

This years' Lifetime Achievement Honoree is

Guru Sivagami Vanka



Sivagami Vanka is the founder and director of the Kalabharathi School of Dance in Portland, Oregon. The school was started in 1983 in Cleveland, Ohio, and then moved to Portland in 1987. Sivagami has been teaching children and adults for about 18 years, both in Portland and in other parts of the United States. Sivagami has established the reputation of being an exacting and dedicated teacher. Her love of this dance form is portrayed in her teaching and caring for her students. Her students often perform at leading events in the Portland-Vancouver area, such as the India Festival at Pioneer Square, the Rose Festival, A Taste of Beaverton, Good in the Hood – includes NAP artistes, the Caribbean Festival at PSU, A Multi-cultural evening at the Holt Center, Eugene, Gujarati Samaj, GPTM, and several other local cultural events. Kalabharathi students have about 300 concerts to their credit over the last 15 years. Many have graduated and continue to perform. Many travel from several US cities to come and learn dance from her. Many of them have returned to continue their learning and to perform with her in her productions. These well-acclaimed performances speak of her skill in training and encouraging young performers to achieve new heights in this dance form. As a dancer, she is known for her abhinaya (storytelling) and maturity in portraying various characters in her dances. She has given dance performances in several cities in India, Africa, the USA, and Europe. As a skillful choreographer, she has produced several elegant works that dealt with subjects ranging from ancient Hindu mythology to modern social themes. She is the recipient of numerous grants from the Regional Arts and Culture Council and has become a well-recognized ambassador for Indian classical dance for the community in Portland. Through collaborations with multi-cultural art groups, she has given her students opportunities for choreographic performances that have been well applauded by the community. She believes in dancing from the heart while nurturing a love for dancing in her young students. Her warm and caring disposition complements her rigor in eliciting the very best from her students.

Distinguished Service Honorees

Guru Pallavi Madabhushi (*Charlotte, NC*)

Guru Surabhi Bharadwaj (*San Francisco, CA*)

Soujanya Madhusudhan (*Atlanta, GA*)

Day 3 — Sunday, June 14, 2026

Ghungroo — Experimental Dance Production

By Samanvita Kasthuri

Samanvita Kasthuri is an emerging choreographer and dancer trained in the styles of Bharatanatyam and Kathak under Guru Prasanna Kasthuri at Soorya Performing Arts in St. Louis, MO. She has choreographed and presented her work at



numerous venues such as the St. Louis Contemporary Dance Festival, Festival of Nations, American Natya Festival, The Fabulous Fox Theater, Saint Louis University's Literary Arts Award Ceremony, Battery Dance Festival (New York), and Breaking Ground Festival (Tempe). She has also performed at many venues in India, such as Shantala Arts Academy, Delhi International Festival, Kartik Fine Arts, and the Indian Institute of World Culture. She received her minor in dance at Saint Louis University, along with a bachelor's in Psychology and American Studies. As a high schooler, she competed in the St. Louis Teen Talent competition, winning third place in 2017 for a Kathak piece, then second place in 2019 for a self-choreographed and composed Bharatanatyam piece called "Equal". She was a company dancer and teaching artist for Pack Dance Company from 2024-2025, setting a Bharatanatyam-Contemporary piece and teaching Contemporary Fusion classes. Samanvita has been a part of many projects in the St. Louis dance community, such as Dancers Making Moves in May 2025 and Space Station Dance Residency in 2024.

Samanvita is currently based in New York and is in school for a Master of Fine Arts in Dance at Sarah Lawrence College. Most recently, she was featured as an ensemble dancer in Jeevika Bhat's "Clothesline", an Indian-Contemporary dance production that premiered at the City College of New York in October 2025. Samanvita has created two pieces as part of her MFA studies, one of which will be presented in today's festival.

Ghungroo

Samanvita will be presenting a short dance production called "ghungroo". First premiered at the Bessie Schoenberg Theater at Sarah Lawrence College in May 2026, this piece is a confrontation of the need for Samanvita to create her own path as an Indian Contemporary dancer. The piece is largely inspired by her experiences as the only Indian classically trained dancer in her program, which is mostly made up of Western concert dancers.

“Ghungroo” takes you on a journey of introspection, loss, confusion, joy, community, and finally, a discovery of love.

This piece was originally set on undergraduate and graduate students attending Sarah Lawrence College, and has been recreated with Guru Prasanna Kasthuri’s Kathak students for this festival.

Music: “International Colouring Contest” by Stereolab; “NGC 224” by Mukta; “Making Music” by Zakir Hussain

Agni Kusuma — Intriguing Dance Drama

Presented by Soujanya Madhusudan (Atlanta, GA)

Smt. Soujanya Madhusudan is an accomplished Bharatanatyam exponent, respected educator, and creative choreographer who comes from a family of legendary artists. She is the devoted daughter-in-law and senior disciple of the late Guru Smt. Nagamani Srinivasa Rao, and her artistic lineage is deeply rooted in the revered Kalakshetra Bani. Her journey with Bharatanatyam began at the tender age of three, and she has been guided by a lineage of illustrious gurus, including Guru Smt. Suma Nagesh, Guru Smt. Nagamani Srinivasa Rao, and many other notable artists. Based in Cumming, Georgia, Guru Soujanya teaches Bharatanatyam across multiple locations in the USA and in Bengaluru, India. She is a pioneer in digital learning in classical arts, having launched online classes as early as 2009. Her students undergo rigorous training and are evaluated in both practical and theoretical aspects of the art form. A true polymath, she is also well-versed in Carnatic music, Yoga, and Sanskrit, which enrich every performance and class she conducts.



Deeply compassionate and inclusive, she works with children with special needs and actively encourages other teachers to do the same—believing that every child deserves the chance to learn this divine art. Her students have consistently upheld high standards in both technique and expression, earning national recognition in the United States and India. Among her students are recipients of prestigious honors such as the Young Arts Award and a finalist at the Overture Center’s Young Artist Awards, further affirming the artistic excellence and holistic mentorship they receive.

A notable collective achievement includes their participation in a historic Guinness World record event at the sacred Thillai Natarajar Temple in Chidambaram, where 7,190 dancers performed in unison, a proud moment of global recognition for Indian classical dance and their students' dedication. Her major works include: Sambhavani Yuge Yuge, Mudras, Navarasa Nayaki, Pratyaksha Daivame, Digvijayam, Sameepyam, Utpatti, Shakthi, Samvog, A Tale of Two Swings, Ram Abhirama, Agni Kusuma - From Flames to Flower. Soujanya has represented Indian classical dance at numerous prestigious venues, such as Nadaneerajanam (Tirupati), NRI Dance Festival, Shilparamam, SPICMACAY's Baithak Series, St. Louis Natya Festival, Cleveland Thyagaraja Festival, 2nd International Indian Dance Festival in Athens, Greece. In 2024, she represented Indian classical dance at the Paris Olympics Cultural Showcase. As a Dance Ambassador for Hidden Idol and a proud member of the International Dance Council – UNESCO, she continues to bridge cultural divides through art.

Her innovative educational programs — Adventure into Arts and Math in Dance — bring the beauty of Bharatanatyam and enrich young minds. Her contributions have been recognized with numerous honors: CCRT Scholarship from the Central Government of India (9 consecutive years), Karnataka State Government Scholarship (3 years), Graded artist of Doordarshan, Singaramani Award by Sur Singer Samsad, Bharata Muni Award – Karnataka Nritiya Kala Parishat. Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan Eminent Teacher Award, Natya Kalai Arasi by Hidden Idol (U.K), Best Dancer Award & Best Dance Teacher Awards by Sai Arts International. Beyond accolades, Guru Soujanya is committed to using art for social impact.

Agni Kusuma - From Flames To Flower

Agni Kusuma traces the sacred journey of fire — from its role as purifier and witness during Holika Dahan, to its transformation into joy, color, and renewal celebrated as Holi. Through Bharatanatyam, the dance drama reflects the blossoming of faith, truth, and inner awakening.

Concept, Direction & Choreography : Guru Smt. Soujanya Madhusudan

Music editor: Vid. Sri Pranav Swaroop

Voice Over : Dr. Jyothishmathi Swaminathan

Props and Design : Smt. Sushma Sanketh

Performers : Bharatha Darshana performing ensemble, Houston - Aditi, Ananya, Charvi, Kirti, Mahati, Mayukha, Megha Nandita, Raeshma, Sree Lakshmy, Shreyasi.

Navarasa Ramayana — Epic Dance Production

By Sudha Raghuram (Montgomery, AL)

Sudha Raghuram is the Director of Shivalaya School of Indian dance based in Montgomery, AL. She has more than 40 years of experience performing and teaching Bharatanatyam, a classical dance of India. She has also been trained in Kathak, a classical dance of North India, and folk dances of India. Sudha has received the Folk artists apprenticeship grant several times since the year 2000, awarded by the Alabama State Council on the Arts. She has also been featured in the TV program 'Journey Proud' by the Arts Council. She was selected in the Touring Artist program in 2018 and performed and conducted workshops in various schools across Alabama.



She is a board member of the Alabama Dance Council and was selected for the Bicentennial dance project in 2019. In 2019, she received the Alabama Folk Heritage award. She has received several project grants from the Arts Council and has successfully organized dance events and dance festivals in Montgomery. She has conducted dance workshops and presented solo recitals in the Alabama Dance Festival and Dance across Birmingham, events organized by the Alabama Dance Council. In 2022, she collaborated with the Korean Association, A-Keep, and choreographed dances for the play, 'The Fairy and Lumberjack,' staged in Davis Theater in Montgomery, AL. Several of Sudha's students have completed their dance debut or the first professional dance performance after 9 to 10 years of dance training.

Sudha and her students regularly perform for Indian cultural associations and multicultural events in schools and colleges. Sudha continues to collaborate with Alieep, the Korean association, in their dance drama productions every year. In July 2025, she performed for the Natya dance festival in St Louis, MO, and was a judge for the Natya Idol competition. In August 2025, supported by the Alabama Arts Council, her extravagant dance drama production, Ramayana-Bala Kanda, was a big hit in Montgomery.. Sudha Raghuram strives to enrich, educate, and entertain people in Alabama and other states in the USA by performing Bharatanatyam. According to her, it is dance and other art forms that will connect diverse people and foster understanding between them.



Bharatanatyam Performance

*By the students of Anil Karunakaran
(Topeka, KS)*

Anil Karunakaran began his initial training in Bharata Natyam and Mohiniyattam at the age of six from Guru Kalamandalam P.Kamalam of Kerala. He also received advanced training in Bharathanatyam and Kuchipudi from Regatta Girija Chandran, and RLV Anand, the best teachers from south India in Bharatanatyam, Mohiniyattam, and Kuchipudi. Anil has performed his entire school and college curriculum and has been first prize winner in Bharathanatyam and Kuchipudi State School and College youth festivals. He has been selected as the Kalaprathibha during his school and college years.

He is dedicated to promoting classical Indian dance in keeping with the strict traditions of this ancient art. Anil has been running “Pranavam School of Dance” in Overland Park, Kansas City and in Topeka, Kansas.

Anil Karunakaran’s students will be presenting “Pushpanjali”, “Ganesh Stuti”, “Kumara Kauthavam”, “Krishnaleela” and will be culminating with “Keerthanam”.

Folk India — Collaborative Creation

By local dance organizations based in St. Louis, MO

A collaborative celebration featuring multiple folk dance groups from St. Louis and surrounding regions - Thangaat group of dancers, Kalasiri from Kannada Shaale, Karnataka Kolata Group, Punjabi Bhangra and Assamese Bihu performances.



THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS!

This festival would not have been possible without the tireless effort from our volunteers, made up of students and parents who are part of the Soorya Family.

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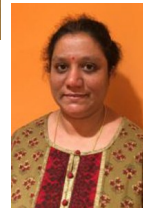
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