



The Durga Project Among Battery Dance's 40th Anniversary Season Lineup in NYC

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Founded in New York's financial district in 1976, Battery Dance is an anchor in the cultural life of Manhattan and a global ambassador for dance, with signature performances in 65 countries across six continents. The Company celebrates its 40th anniversary season in 2016 with a world premiere and a diverse array of performances at home and abroad.

Two events will showcase the Company's artistry and its commitment to its lower Manhattan home base, where Battery Dance was born some 40 years ago:

- New York Season performances at The Schimmel Center for the Arts (3 Spruce Street) on May 10th at 2 p.m., May 11th at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. and May 12th at 7 p.m., followed by a gala reception at the House of Morgan on Wall Street.

- 35th annual Battery Dance Festival in Battery Park City from August 14th to the 19th, with a grand finale at Schimmel Center on the 20th (performances at 6:30 pm - schedule to be released soon).

The centerpiece of the New York season will be the world premiere of *The Durga Project*, which weaves together the movement vocabularies, sonorities and aesthetics of the U.S. and India into a choreographic fantasy of 30 minutes in length. Watch a sneak peek of the performance [HERE](#).

"Selecting an Indian theme for the Company's 40th Anniversary was a natural and fitting choice," said Jonathan Hollander, founder and artistic director of Battery Dance. "Battery Dance is the best-known American dance company in India, having engaged in 7 national tours (17 cities reached thus far) since 1992 and having hosted dozens of Indian dancers and musicians in New York and across the U.S.," Hollander explained. "The concept of Durga, or Shakti, the power and energy and magnificence of womanhood, underlies and informs the piece. And it follows other works that have been inspired by Indian music and with Indian guest artists such as Songs of Tagore and Layapriya."

Guest Artist Unnath H.R., one of the leading classical dancers of his generation in India, engages in a symbiotic process with Battery's Western-trained team of five brilliant and diverse dancers, yielding swaths of distinctive, yet undefinable, choreography that are like none other in the Company's repertoire. A commissioned score by award-winning composer Frank Carlberg adheres to the musical notes that define the Hindustani Classical Raga Durga, a late evening raga that pays tribute to the Goddess Durga, but spins his own melodic and rhythmic invention. Costume designer Solé Salvo applies her vision and skill to adorn the dancers in garments suggestive of a primitive time and place, in hues inspired by the spices of India. Calvin Anderson employs a variegated palette in his lighting design with sculptural chiaroscuro suggestive of the bas relief on Indian temples.

The international program will be complemented by works commissioned by European and African choreographers-"*Inter/Ago*," created in 2015 by Tadej Brdnik, the recently retired Martha Graham principal dancer and choreographer, who has danced with Battery Dance since 1998; and "*Observatory*," created in 2014 by Theo Nindwa, founder of South Africa's iKapa Dance Theatre, and since performed in tours of South America, Europe, Asia and at the first Cape Town International Dance Festival in December, 2015.

Tickets will be available beginning April 1 at the Schimmel Center Box Office. General Admission is \$25. Gala tickets for the May 12th performance are available through the company. For more information, visit www.batterydance.org.

The Durga Project Credits:

Artistic Director: Jonathan Hollander

Composer: Frank Carlberg

Dancer/Choreographers: Robin Cantrell, Mira Bai Cook, Clement Mensah, Bethany Mitchell, Sean Scantlebury

Guest Dancer/Choreographer: Unnath H.R.

Costumes: Solé Salvo

Lighting: Calvin Anderson

Testimonial for Durga Project:

"With its beautiful images and soulful music, The Durga Project evokes the sentiment of Bhakti (devotional love of the Goddess). The choreography is excellent, drawing inspiration from Indian classical dances and classical music, which go hand in hand. The human chain performed in the beginning with Bharatanatyam dancer and guest artist Unnath H.R. gradually gathers momentum, resolving into the pas de deux which offer imaginatively suggestive and iconic poses of Goddess Durga in motion. Hollander and his dancers from the U.S. and India have captured the essence of Shakti, the female principle of divine energy, in a meaningful manner.

Hollander's earlier choreographic works for Battery Dance -- Songs of Tagore, Layapriya, Seen by a River, Moonbeam -- and the more recent Into the Center, which I have seen in Malaysia, performed by Ramli Ibrahim and Sutra Dance Theatre, have been steeped in Indian concepts. They leave indelible impressions, and I feel confident that the Durga Project will have even greater success."

--Sunil Kothari, Indian dance historian and critic & recipient of Lifetime Achievement Award from Dance Critics Association of New York

History of Battery Dance and India:

For the past quarter-century, Battery Dance Company (BDC), founded and led by American choreographer Jonathan Hollander, has built and maintained a busy cultural bridge between India and the U.S. A big supporter of Indian culture, Hollander has introduced American audiences to some of the greatest exponents of Indian classical dance and has helped to create a fertile ground for contemporary experimentation and collaboration by creative artists in India and the U.S.

Hollander's relationship with India began in 1968, when he lived with an Indian family in Mumbai as an American Field Service Exchange Student. Interactions with Bharatanatyam dance guru Parvati Kumar The Jhaveri Sisters Manipuri Dancers; Mallika and Mrinalini Sarabhai; and with artist Dinesh Shah and sitarist Ravi Shankar began Hollander's life-long attachment to India and its dance, music and art forms.

Three months in India as a Fulbright Lecturer on Dance in 1992, a period in which Hollander taught dance workshops at Darpana and Kadamb Institutions in Ahmedabad, M.S. University in Baroda, Nalanda Dance Institute and National Centre for the Performing Arts in Mumbai, choreographed new works on Indian dancers, collaborated with designers from the National Institute of Design, and escorted his Battery Dance Company on a six-city tour, was the beginning of what was to become a pioneering mission.

Battery Dance went on to organize the first U.S. tours by the Jhaveri Sisters Manipuri Dancers and C.V. Chandrasekhar's Nrityashree. In 1995 Hollander curated a production that helped to re-establish the importance of India's male dancers in the classical traditions of Bharata Natyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi and Kathakali. PURUSH: Expressions of Man, featuring 10 of India's finest male dancers and musicians and 4 of their American counterparts, had its premiere at the Music Academy in Chennai; and a week later, at Lincoln Center, before traveling across the U.S. on an 18-city tour.

Songs of Tagore was also created that year, with Rabindranath Tagore's music performed by Samir & Sanghamitra Chatterjee of Kolkata, with costumes and scenic design by Sandhya Raman and Anil Revri. "Songs" enjoyed over 75 performances in the U.S., Poland, Hungary, Finland, and throughout India and Sri Lanka; and has been credited with a revival of interest in Tagore, especially among young people in India.

Battery Dance has continued facilitating U.S. tours by India's dancers and musicians up to the present time. In 1998, Jonathan Hollander co-founded the Indo-American Arts Council (IAAC). And ten years later, Battery Dance began hosting IAAC's Erasing Borders of Indian Dance Festival as part of its Battery Dance Festival.

Battery Dance returned to India in 2014 at the invitation of EmancipAction and Aspen Institute to help raise awareness around the problem of human trafficking. In both New Delhi and Greater Mumbai, Battery Dancers worked with 100 young survivors of trafficking and gender violence, both girls and boys. Battery Dance Teaching Artists employed the company's Dancing to Connect methodology, which has been used in 45 countries, to help the teens overcome trauma through the awakening of the wellsprings of their own innate creativity. The

Times of India and VERVE Magazine praised the company for exploring innovative ways of healing as well as having the heart and soul to bring smiles and confidence to the participants.

On the same tour, two members of the team broadened Battery Dance's reach by implementing creative workshops at Delhi Public School in Srinagar in the conflict area of Kashmir. This was the first time that the school experimented with a co-educational dance program, an unusual approach in a conservative Muslim community.

Pictured: Sean Scantelbury, Bethany Mitchell, Clement Mensah, Mira Cook, Robin Cantrell and Unnath H.R. Photo by Darial Sneed.

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