Mission and History

Katha Dance Theatre creates, performs and educates through the art forms of dance, music, poetry and storytelling. Rooted in Kathak, the classical dance style of North India, KDT is dedicated to making dance accessible, inclusive and relevant. It enhances the local community by bridging diverse cultures and audiences to contribute to life’s infinite artistic expressions.

Using a mixture of performances, touring, education, and outreach initiatives, KDT works to integrate the North Indian Kathak tradition into American culture. KDT’s company not only debuts new dance works each year, but also tours throughout the Midwest, nationally, and internationally to increase the form’s accessibility. Rita Mustaphi founded KDT in 1987 with the goal of making the traditional Kathak dance form relevant and accessible across lines of generation, culture, and community - work that continues today. In addition to providing world-class educational programming, KDT cultivates cross-cultural creative partnerships with diverse artists to create a genre-defying repertory that conveys universal themes, embodying the connective power of dance.

Through embracing multimedia and multicultural influences while still maintaining Kathak’s cultural integrity, KDT has remained at the forefront of Kathak’s artistic evolution since its inception over three decades ago. Past artistic collaborators include J.D. Steele, Ifrah Mansour, Pooja Goswami Pavan, and Zorongo Flamenco Dance Theatre. Kathak’s percussive nature, lyrical movements, and theatricality make it a uniquely vibrant and powerful form of artistic expression.
Rita Mustaphi is the Founder and Artistic Director of Katha Dance Theatre. Since KDT’s inception over 30 years ago, Rita has choreographed over 50 evening-length works that have been performed around the globe. A native of Kolkata, India, she began her study of dance in early childhood and eventually became a disciple Pandit Birju Maharaj, the legendary master of Kathak dance. After immigrating to the U.S. and teaching dance professionally for almost a decade, she founded Katha Dance Theatre in 1987 with the goal of making Kathak dance relevant and accessible to all. Since then, she has built a professional company and school that provide world-class performances and education to a growing community. Her cross-cultural collaborations and willingness to push artistic boundaries speak to her innovation as a choreographer and her singular ability to advance Kathak as an art form.

Rita is a roster artist for COMPAS, Creative Classroom’s global culture Program. She is a recipient of three McKnight Fellowships for choreography, a Leadership award from the Council of Asian Pacific Minnesotans, a 2011 Lifetime Achievement award from the India Association of Minnesota and a 2012 Education award from the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts in the category of Excellence in Vision. In 2021, she was selected to receive the Nari Shakti Award for Women’s Empowerment by the Urvashi Dance, Music, Art, and Culture Society in New Delhi.
Touring Information and Requirements

In addition to performances, KDT’s touring programs include educational and outreach opportunities specifically tailored to suit the communities in which they perform. These programs deepen audiences’ connection to the material, helping KDT more effectively fulfill its mission.

**Kathak Yatra: The Journey of Kathak Dance**

*Kathak Yatra* follows Kathak’s evolution through time, beginning with its inception in Hindu temples and culminating in its contemporary multicultural incarnations. It explores Kathak’s duality as both classic and modern.

**Shaamya - Of Equality**

Inspired by the poetry of the writer and activist Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976), *Of Equality* juxtaposes the experiences of today’s oppressed communities with those of Nazrul Islam’s time. Featuring music by legendary songwriter J.D. Steele and spoken word poetry by the artist/playwright Ifrah Mansour, *Of Equality* demonstrates that Nazrul Islam’s work remains relevant to today’s artistic and political climates, transcending time and place.

**Ritu - The Seasons**

*Ritu* is a vivid portrayal of the Indian seasonal cycle, which both expands and subverts American expectations. Based on the lyrical poem “Ritusamhara” by the great Sanskrit poet Kalidasa, *Ritu* depicts the six Indian seasons within beautiful and intricate Kathak movement, celebrating nature’s beauty through Kathak’s grace and subtlety.

**Technical Requirements**

KDT requires a proscenium stage that is 32 feet wide at the wings and 25 feet deep from the front of the curtain to last working line set. All stages must be smooth and level. For more details, please request our full technical rider.
“Performed with unfailing graciousness, Katha Dance Theatre takes an evocative art form and makes it vibrantly real.” ... “The complexity and power of Katha Dance Theatre’s stories are fully realized in their dynamic, percussive dance sequences.”
-The Star Tribune, Minneapolis, MN

“Katha Dance Theatre’s Indian dance-dramas transport audiences to another world. It is a joy to experience the elegance in their productions, choreographic precision, and artistic integrity. Furthermore, their ability to string together current themes in an ancient art form is extremely courageous and praiseworthy.”
-The Boston Group, Boston, MA

“Katha Dance Theatre is dazzlingly proficient in the dramatic and virtuosic style of Indian classical dance, while being adept of taking English speaking audiences into the literary wellsprings of classical Indian dance performances.”
-The Octopus, Champaign, IL

“Katha Dance Theatre’s pieces capture both the fragile emotions of oppressed women and their boundless inner strength that holds the key to their emancipation and happiness.”
- The Appleton Post-Crescent (Appleton, WI)
Contact

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