

## RAGAMALA DANCE COMPANY

### Written in Water

**Written in Water** is envisioned as a large-scale multi-disciplinary work in which dance, music, text, and painting provide a layered approach to artmaking and improvisatory live performance that aims to provoke emotional and visceral responses from the performers and audiences alike. It uses the 2nd century Indian board game *Paramapadam* (which was the original inspiration for the more familiar game Snakes and Ladders), as a fertile environment on which the work unfolds.

Drawing parallels between the psychological/moral complexity of the game, the rich Persian epic *Conference of the Birds*, and Sangam poetry of south India, Raneer and Aparna will bridge past and present to create a world formed by Indian and Sufi philosophy, spirituality, and thought, driven by the element of chance.

An original score will interweave South Indian Carnatic music composed by Prema Ramamurthy with composer [Amir ElSaffar](#)'s distinctive alchemy of Western music and Iraqi Maqam.

[“Written in Water” Research Sources and Glossary](#)

### WRITTEN IN WATER

Conceived and choreographed by Raneer Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy  
Featuring original musical compositions by Amir ElSaffar and Prema Ramamurthy  
Performed by an ensemble of five musicians and five dancers  
Length of work: 60 minutes, no intermission

#### **World Premiere:**

October 5 and 6, 2016 Opening Nights at Florida State University Tallahassee, FL

#### **Recent performances:**

January 28-31, 2017 The Cowles Center for Dance & the Performing Arts Minneapolis, MN

October 29, 2016 Valley Performing Arts Center Los Angeles, CA

Written in Water was commissioned by the Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi (Lead Commissioner) and Opening Nights Performing Arts at Florida State University. The creation of Written in Water was made possible, in part, by a 2016 Joyce Award from the Joyce Foundation, the Doris Duke Performing Artist Awards program, and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, New Music/USA (made possible by annual program support and/or endowment gifts from Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, Baisley Powell Elebash Fund, Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation), the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation), the

Fredrikson & Byron Foundation, and the Carolyn Foundation, and was supported in part by choreographic and production residencies at The Yard in Martha's Vineyard, the Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi, the Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography (MANCC) at Florida State University in Tallahassee, and the Cowles Center for Dance and the Performing Arts in Minneapolis, MN.

Press reviews:

- [Star Tribune](#)
- [Big Dance Town Blog](#)
- [Tallahassee Democrat](#)

Some program notes from the premiere of the show at FSU:

Under the direction of Raneer Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy, Ragamala Dance Company has been hailed by The New York Times as “providing some of the most transcendent experiences that dance has to offer.” In *Written in Water*, the dancers activate the space by negotiating snakes and ladders – which represent the heights of ecstasy and the depths of longing in Hindu and Sufi thought. The performance unfolds upon large-scale projections of original paintings by Chennai-based visual artist Keshav, projected on the stage floor. Featuring an ensemble of dancers and musicians, *Written in Water* is composed by Amir ElSaffar, known for his distinctive alchemy of contemporary jazz trumpet and Iraqi Maqam, and renowned south Indian composer Prema Ramamurthy.

#### FROM THE CHOREOGRAPHERS

In *Written in Water*, we explore the concept of spiritual ascension through the 2nd century Indian board game Paramapadam (upon which Snakes & Ladders is based), the 12th century Sufi text *The Conference of the Birds*, and the Hindu mythological story *Ksheerabthi Madanam* - the churning of the ocean of milk.

The game board serves as a physical and metaphorical framework for a world of psychological complexity in which dancers and musicians move freely between composition and improvisation. On this metaphysical map, the seekers/dancers activate the space by negotiating snakes and ladders as they journey through the seven valleys (or states of being) central to *The Conference of the Birds*.

In developing *Written in Water*, we played the game hundreds of times, using the floor as the board and our bodies as the game pieces. The projected images are from original paintings by Chennai-based visual artist Keshav, specially commissioned by Ragamala for this work. *Written in Water* was developed through an ongoing collaboration in which choreography, music, and visual art were constructed simultaneously in a constant artistic dialogue that spanned two years.

We would like to thank Christopher Heacox of Opening Nights Performing Arts, Carla Peterson and Ansje Burdick of the Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography (MANCC), and all of our friends and partners at FSU for their support in the creation of Written in Water. –Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy.

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