

TRAGAMALA

• DANCE COMPANY •

Fires of Varanasi

Projected Premiere Date: 2020-2021 Season

Creators and Directors: Raneer Ramaswamy, Aparna Ramaswamy, Ashwini Ramaswamy

Producer: [Ragamala Dance Company](#)

Light Design, Art Director: [Willy Cessa](#)

Stage Installation: [Manav Gupta](#)

Length: 65 minutes, no intermission

Touring Company: 5 dancers, 3 tech, 1 staff, musicians TBD

This project was created in part through Raneer and Aparna Ramaswamy's 2018 Guggenheim Fellowship and a residency at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center in Italy.

From the Artistic Directors:

In *Fires of Varanasi*, we evoke and embody the pilgrims whose feet rewrite the city's geography year after year. The dancers become the lingering echoes of ritual and ceremony, bridging the space between internal and external, the profane world and a sacred state of mind.

This project has grown out of our shared personal experience of the death of our father/grandfather away from his homeland. Reckoning with the experience of death in the diaspora is a reality for millions, yet the way in which each of us experiences it is intensely individualized. How do we maintain our traditions across time and place while interrogating the power structures that are embedded within them? Death is the ultimate remover of hierarchies, as gender, caste, and station are obliterated in the fire.

Fires of Varanasi is a large-scale, multidisciplinary dance work in which we explore the liminal spaces in the birth-death-re-birth continuum to understand human experiences of migration—physical, cultural, emotional. For us, the transformation of a body after cremation—and the remnants of bone found within the ash—is a powerful metaphor for the Indian ethos of resilience, and the profound belief in the tenacity of people and cultures.

Set to an original score and soundscape (we are actively speaking with several composers; currently the music is undecided), the dancers will bring to life the spirit of the sacred city of Varanasi, India—its cremation fires, and the ashes that drift through the waters of the Ganges River.

New Delhi-based visual artist Manav Gupta will design a large-scale stage installation, transforming thousands of Indian earthen vessels into an homage to the swirling waters of the Ganges.

We will work in close collaboration with renowned French light/set designer/art director Willy Cessa to create a multi-sensory experience that weaves together choreography, nature, and ritual. We feel that Cessa, who creates work for some of today's most dynamic dance and theater artists, will bring to life the beautiful and apocalyptic world of Varanasi to the stage.

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Raneer Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy, Artistic Directors