



Let the Crows Come

Commissioned by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra's Liquid Music Series

**Developed in residence at
The Baryshnikov Arts Center**

**NDP Touring Subsidy
available for engagements 19/20 +**

**Choreographer and Original Conception/Creative
Producer, Ashwini Ramaswamy**

**Music composed by Jace Clayton, Prema
Ramamurthy, and Brent Arnold**

**Dancers: Ashwini Ramaswamy (Bharatanatyam),
Alanna Morris-Van Tassel (Contemporary/
Afro-Caribbean), and Berit Ahlgren (Gaga)**

**Musicians: Jace Clayton (electronics), Brent Arnold
(cello), Roopa Mahadevan (Carnatic vocals),
Arun Ramamurthy (Carnatic violin), and
Rohan Krishnamurthy (mridangam)**

Length: 60 minutes, no intermission

World Premiere: November 2019

"As an artist of diaspora, I am a cultural carrier with an instinct to move within ancestral patterns. There is a continuum between what we perceive as real/tangible and what we accept as unknown/unknowable; this gravitation between the human, the natural, and the metaphysical—which are forever engaged in sacred movement—is a focal point in my work." – Ashwini Ramaswamy

Evoking mythography and ancestry, *Let the Crows Come* depicts crows as messengers for the living and guides for the departed. In a series of three dance solos, with music by three composers, this work explores how memory and homeland channel both guidance and dislocation. Using Bharatanatyam (south Indian classical dance) and Carnatic (south Indian classical music) as their point of inspiration, the participating artists explore deconstruction, iteration, and crossing cultures.

Music

Let the Crows Come evolved from a simple idea; when a DJ remixes a song he/she/they maintains its essence while changing its trajectory. To Ramaswamy, this mutation is reminiscent of being a second-generation immigrant – a person that has been culturally remixed to fit into multiple places at once. The original score by Prema Ramamurthy, Jace Clayton, and Brent Arnold will be played live by a hybrid musical ensemble of Carnatic classical, western classical, and electronic musicians seated on stage with the dancers. The soundscape will evolve with the movement, evoking a memory that has a shared origin but is remembered differently from person to person. **Instrumentation: vocals, mridangam (south Indian percussion), violin, cello, electronics**

Ritual

In Hinduism, there is a belief that crows play a major role in linking the living to the dead. In this sense, they bring to vivid life the spirits of the past. *Pitru Paksha* (meaning fortnight of the ancestors) is a period when Hindus pay tribute to their ancestors so that the departed souls can rest in peace. After burning a mixture of sandalwood and camphor, rice is offered to the crows. This single ritualistic practice is a microcosm of the supernatural relationship between the physical and non-physical worlds. The ritual offering of rice will be utilized as a theatrical device to connect the three dance solos.



Dance

Bharatanatyam is a living, breathing movement language with which to speak about the contemporary human experience. Originating in southeastern India and used for thousands of years to embody universal history via cosmogony, myth, legend, and history—Bharatanatyam has evolved into a potent tool with which to mediate between the spiritual and physical worlds.



Let the Crows Come weaves together three dance solos for three very different dancers; Ramaswamy selected **Alanna Morris Van-Tassel** and **Berit Ahlgren** – two highly technical modern dancers – to deconstruct, extrapolate, and retrograde Bharatanatyam (a technique totally foreign to them) into unique movement paradigms. *Let the Crows Come* begins with a Bharatanatyam solo by Ramaswamy performed to a Carnatic score composed by Prema Ramamurthy of Hyderabad, India. Ramamurthy's compositions are unparalleled for their complexity, depth of emotion, rhythmic patterning, and innovative use of melody. Building off of the ragas from the Carnatic solo, NYC-based cellist/composer Brent Arnold will provide the score for Van Tassel's solo using live and looped sounds in tandem with the Carnatic musical ensemble. This dance will use the intricate language of gesture from Ramaswamy's Bharatanatyam solo, translating the hand movements onto Van Tassel's body to create the dance's vocabulary. (Van Tassel's dance lineage comes from the Alvin Ailey legacy of American modern dance techniques.)

For the third solo, composed by electronic musician Jace Clayton (aka dj/rupture) Ramaswamy will take inspiration from a slow-motion video of the Bharatanatyam solo played in reverse. Through this process, she will have a different perspective from which to draw out unexpected movement possibilities for dancer Berit Ahlgren. (Ahlgren's dance lineage comes from the Gaga technique developed by Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin). Connected by a ritualistic call to the ancestors, the choreography unfolds the possibilities of an ancient dance language as it moves across time and space.

Source Texts

Equal parts physicality and expression, Bharatanatyam's narrative aspects require a textual thru line. The narrative framework of *Let the Crows Come* is derived from the following sources:

The Ramayana

The Hindu epic poem *Ramayana* (one of the largest ancient epics in the world) contains an origin story of the crow and its role as an emissary between worlds.

Brihatsamhita and Kakajarita

The *Brihatsamhita* and the *Kakajarita* are ancient Sanskrit texts that foretell coming events through careful attention to the cries, flight patterns, and behavior of crows.

Tamil Sangam literature

The Sangam poets believed that human emotions directly reflect the surrounding environments; in the selected poems, the call of the crow signals the return of a departed relative.

ABOUT THE CHOREOGRAPHER/COMPOSERS

As an independent choreographer and Choreographic Associate with Ragamala Dance Company, **ASHWINI RAMASWAMY'S** (Minneapolis, MN) work references ancient myths and ritualistic practices, global literature and poetry, and the mixed media contemporary culture she has absorbed for 35 years, drawing from myriad influences to express a personal identity that has universal resonance.

Celebrated for her ability to “[weave] together, both fearfully and joyfully, the human and the divine” (*The New York Times*), Ashwini has studied Bharatanatyam with Ragamala Dance Company's Artistic Directors Raneer Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy—her mother and sister—since the age of five. She now has the honor of studying under Bharatanatyam legend Alarmél Valli, one of the greatest living masters of the form. She has toured extensively with Ragamala, performing throughout the U.S. and in Russia, Taiwan, Indonesia, Japan, the U.K, and India. Ashwini is a McKnight Artist Fellow for Dance, as well as the recipient of three Minnesota State Arts Board (MSAB) Artist Initiative grants, a Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC) Next Step Fund grant, and two Jerome Foundation Travel Study Grants. In addition to MSAB and MRAC, her work is supported by the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation's (MAAF) USArtists International program, and the New England Foundation for the Arts' (NEFA) National Dance Project.

Ashwini's choreographic work has been presented by Augsburg College, the Ritz Theater, the Red Eye Theater, and the Cowles Center (Minneapolis, MN); Triskelion Arts, The Joyce Theater (New York, NY), The Just Festival (Edinburgh, U.K), and The Yard (Martha's Vineyard). Ashwini's newest project is commissioned by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra's *Liquid Music Series* and is created in part through a residency at the Baryshnikov Arts Center.

SMT. PREMA RAMAMURTHY (Hyderabad, India) is recognized as one of India's greatest living composers for Bharatanatyam. Ms. Ramamurthy has been an outstanding vocalist and composer for more than four decades. She was initiated into music by her parents, the Late Sri S. Nagaraja Iyer and Smt. Jayalakshmi, and her grandfather, Sri S. Srinivasa Iyer, and had further intensive training under the great Maestro 'Padmavibhushan' Dr. Mangalampalli Balamurali Krishna. She has also specialized in the art of 'Pallavi singing' from Vidwan Sri T. V. Gopalakrishnan, and has learned the art of singing 'Padams & Javalis' from the veteran musician, Mrs. T. Muktha. Ms. Ramamurthy is an A-TOP Grade Artist of All India Radio and Doordarshan TV. She has won critical acclaim as a composer, and has performed in many of the top venues and festivals of India, the US, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Australia, Mexico, and South Africa.

JACE CLAYTON (New York, NY) is also known for his work as DJ /rupture. Clayton uses an interdisciplinary approach to focus on how sound, memory, and public space interact, with an emphasis on low-income communities and the global South. His book *Uproot: Travels in 21st Century Music and Digital Culture* was published in 2016 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Recent projects include *Sufi Plug Ins*, a free suite of music software-as-art, based on non-western conceptions of sound and alternative interfaces; Room 21, an evening-length composition for 20 musicians staged at the Barnes Foundation; and *The Julius Eastman Memorial Dinner*, a touring performance piece for grand pianos, electronics, and voice. As DJ /rupture, he has released several critically acclaimed albums and hosted a weekly radio show on WFMU for five years. Clayton's collaborators include filmmakers Jem Cohen, Joshua Oppenheimer, poet Elizabeth Alexander, singer Norah Jones, and guitarist Andy Moor (The Ex).

Clayton is the UNC-CH/Duke Nannerl Keohane Distinguished Visiting Professor. He is a 2014 New York Foundation for the Arts Nonfiction Literature fellow, a 2013 Creative Capital Performing Arts grantee, and recipient of a Foundation for Contemporary Art artists award. He joined the Music/Sound faculty of Bard College's MFA program in 2013. Clayton has been an artist-in-residence with the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Eyebeam Art + Technology Atelier, and a USC Annenberg/Getty Arts Journalism fellow.

BRENT ARNOLD (Brooklyn, NY) is a cellist and composer whose music incorporates electronics, unorthodox instrumental technique, and elements of rock, jazz, folk, North African, Persian, and Arabic music. He is a founding member of Ghost Quartet with Dave Malloy and created the cello music for the acclaimed TV show *Louie*. He has played and collaborated with artists including The Antlers, Reggie Watts, Eyvind Kang, Jessika Kenney, Aditya Kalyanpur, Gelsey Bell, Brittain Ashford, Filastine, Baby Copperhead, Wayne Horvitz, Jherek Bischoff, Jessica Pavone, Sleater-Kinney, and Modest Mouse. He studied with violinist Michael White (Pharoah Sanders, John Handy) and cellist Walter Grey (Kronos Quartet).

ABOUT THE DANCERS



Brooklyn-born dancer, educator, choreographer and Producer, **ALANNA MORRIS-VAN TASSEL** (Minneapolis, MN) is one of *Dance Magazine's* "25 to Watch" for 2018. A featured dancer with Minnesota-based dance company TU Dance from 2007-2017, Alanna danced leading roles in works by Kyle Abraham, Gioconda Barbuto, Camille A. Brown, Ronald K. Brown, Gregory Dolbashian, Katrin Hall, Francesca Harper, Dwight Rhoden, and Uri Sands. Alanna is a 2015 recipient of a McKnight Fellowship in Dance and a 2016 recipient of a travel/study grant from the Jerome Foundation to participate in the New Waves! Festival in Port of Spain, Trinidad studying Afro-Caribbean dance and culture.

Alanna has returned to Trinidad and Tobago, commissioning a solo from Trinidadian choreographer, Jamie Philbert to premiere in 2019. Alanna developed "Yam, Potatoe an Fish!" as an Artist-In Residence with Art On Purpose (Arima, Trinidad); Brooklyn Ballet School; Creative Outlet Dance Theater (Brooklyn, NY); Tofte Lake Center (funded by the Jerome Foundation).



BERIT AHLGREN (Minneapolis, MN) seeks out personal challenges and risk-taking collaborators. Her work as both performer and independent movement researcher has taken her from Klamath Falls, OR, to Rishikesh, India. In addition to teaching gaga/people and gaga/dancer classes regularly in New York City and the Twin Cities, she's been a guest instructor at the Carleton College, Wesleyan University, and the University of Minnesota to share her knowledge in the Gaga Movement Language. While a company member of TU Dance from 2006-2014, she made significant creative contributions to the projects of resident choreographer Uri Sands. Ahlgren completed her M.F.A. in Dance from NYU/Tisch School of the Arts in May 2016, and involves herself with new media projects, collaborating with coders, filmmakers, and designers who are interested in the use of technology to uniquely supplement performance outside of the proscenium stage.

ABOUT THE MUSICIANS

ROOPA MAHADEVAN (New York, NY) is a versatile vocalist rooted in the South Indian (Carnatic) classical tradition. Born and raised in San Jose, California, Roopa underwent her major formative training in Carnatic vocal music in under Asha Ramesh, disciple of the late Sangeetha Kalanidhi D.K. Jayaraman and Sri Nanganallur Ramanathan. In 2007, Roopa was awarded the prestigious Fulbright Scholarship by the U.S. Department of State to receive advanced Carnatic vocal training in Chennai, India under Suguna Varadachari, a senior guru of the Musiri Subramania Iyer tradition. Roopa also enjoys performing R&B/soul music and theater and has lent her voice to several contemporary art projects, including two urban/R&B music albums Lovespeak, of Everyday People A Cappella and Bring Back the Nyte of Inphanyte Productions. She was lead vocalist for a track on Christopher Tin's album Calling All Dawns which won the 2011 Grammy for Best Crossover Classical Album. Through various ensembles, Roopa has been fortunate to perform at prestigious venues, including Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, Hollywood Bowl, and the UN. Roopa was also an inaugural 2013 Fellow of IndianRaga and is a frequent performer and instructor for their programs. Based in New York City, Roopa is the artistic director of the Navatman Music Collective, an innovative Indian Classical Vocal ensemble. She is also a regular performer with the Brooklyn Raga Massive. Roopa received her Bachelor's degree in Biology and Master's degree in Cognitive Science from Stanford University and balances her work in public health policy with a passionate pursuit of her art. (www.roopamahadevan.com)

ARUN RAMAMURTHY (Brooklyn, NY) is a multifaceted violinist and educator based in Brooklyn, NY, and is a disciple of the celebrated Carnatic violinist brothers, Dr. Mysore Manjunath & Sri Mysore Nagaraj and the esteemed violinist Sri Ananthakrishnan. He has distinguished himself as a multifaceted artist, performing internationally in both traditional Carnatic and Hindustani settings as well as bridging genres with his own innovative projects. Arun has been fortunate to perform with artists like Dr. M. Balamurali Krishna, Sudha Ragunathan, Anindo Chatterjee, T.N. Seshagopoloan, Amir ElSaffar, Marc Cary among others. Arun's music has brought him prestigious stages like Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, Celebrate Brooklyn and more. Arun is co-founder and Artistic Director of Brooklyn Raga Massive, a globally recognized collective of forward thinking musicians rooted-in and inspired-by the classical music of India. Through BRM, Arun has curated and performed in a multitude of concerts incorporating music from all over the world. (www.arunramamurthy.com)

ROHAN KRISHNAMURTHY (San Francisco, CA), described as the "pride of India" by *The Times of India* and "international mridangam player" by *USA Today*, is a musical ambassador specializing in Indian and multi-percussion. He received advanced training from the esteemed Indian master, Guruvayur Dorai. Distinguished as a soloist, composer, and collaborator, Rohan performed with legendary Indian musicians and Grammy Award-winning artists such as Glen Velez, Anoushka Shankar, and Vishwa Mohan Bhatt. An acclaimed educator, Rohan earned a Ph.D. in musicology from the Eastman School of Music in New York. He has presented and taught at renowned institutions, including the Eastman School of Music, Harvard University, and A.R. Rehman's K.M. Conservatory of Music (India). He directs the award-winning RohanRhythm Percussion Studio, which has attracted dozens of students from around the globe. Rohan holds a patent for a novel drum tuning system that is now available worldwide. (www.RohanRhythm.com.)

Exclusive representation by Elsie Management
Laura Colby, President
T: 718/797.4577
laurac@elsieman.org