



2018 Annual Report

The Leela Institute

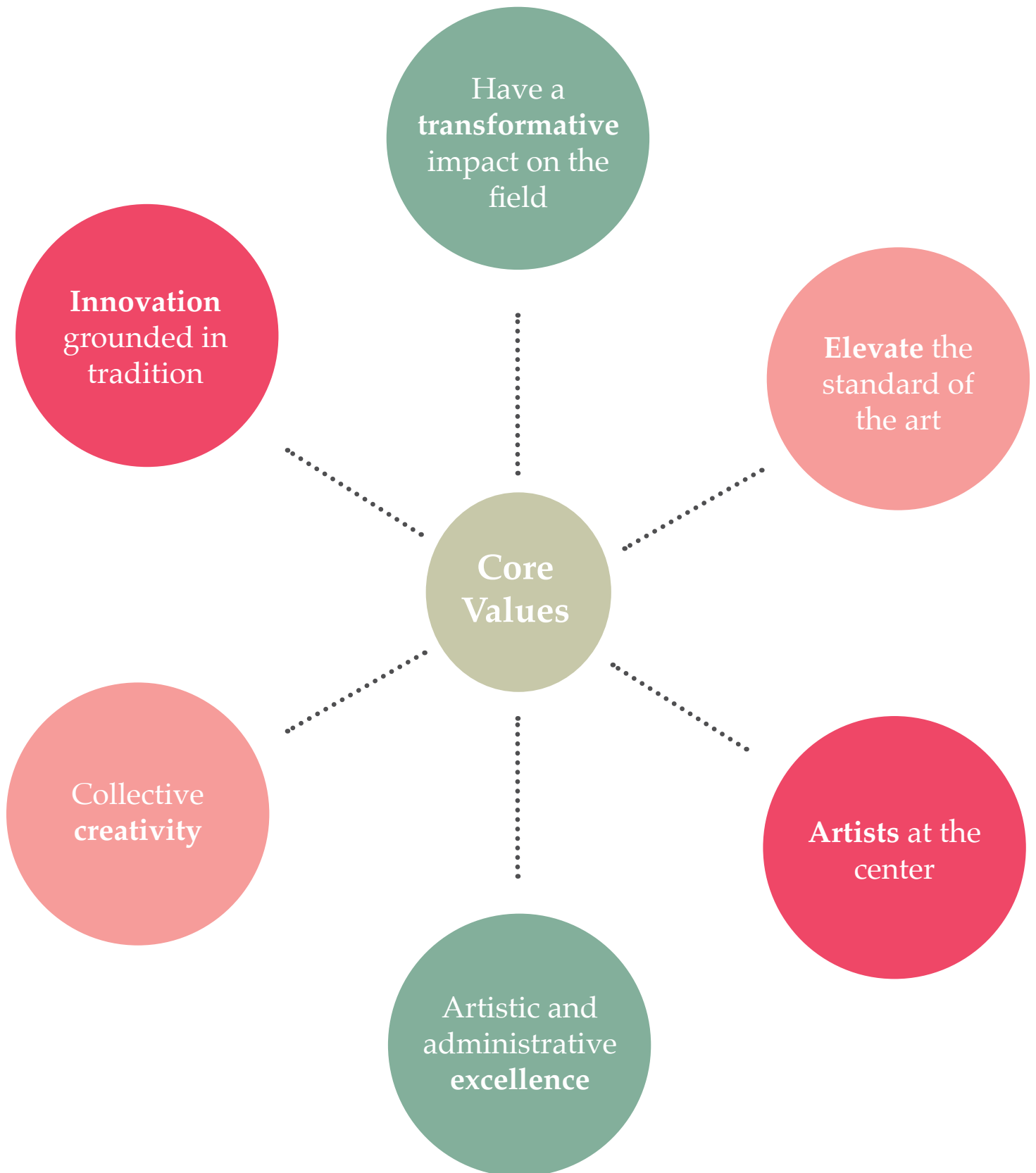


*"The purpose of creation, is lila...Lila is a purpose-less purpose, a natural outflow, a spontaneous self-manifestation of the Divine."
- Sri Aurobindo*



*"The world is a mere spontaneous creation of Brahman. It is a Lila, or sport, of Brahman. It is created out of Bliss, by Bliss, and for Bliss."
- Ram Shanker Misra*

Core Values



Field Wide Approach



The Leela Endowment
Securing the future for Indian classical dance and music



Leela Dance Collective
Elevating Indian classical dance and music on the world stage



The Leela Academy
Creating a new generation of artists, arts educators and audiences



Leela Dance Collective

The Leela Dance Collective was founded in 2016 by Rina Mehta, Rachna Nivas and Seibi Lee, senior disciples of legendary kathak master Pandit Chitresh Das, along with leading kathak performers Sarah Morelli and Shefali Jain. It is the only one of its kind Indian-American dance company that brings together leading kathak artists from around the world representing a multitude of voices to articulate a clairvoyant vision for kathak. The collective is distinguished by an artistic practice that centers around collaboration and collective creativity and a body of work that is at once grounded in tradition and boldly innovative. In the two years since its founding, the collective has already begun to make an indelible mark on the field of kathak and world dance.



Touring Works

SPEAK

"...an evening of rhythmic magic."
— *Los Angeles Dance Chronicle*



Son of the Wind

"With its technical brilliance, emotional power, and reverent yet creative reinterpretation of sacred epic, 'Son of the Wind,' ...was world-class transnational dance theater."
— *Dr. Philip Lutgendorf*



California Gharana

"An incredible display of dance and music. California Gharana shepherds the past into the future as it pays homage to legendary kathak artist, Chitresh Das and his legacy."
— *Audience Member*



The Traditional Kathak Solo

"The solo is a treat for those art lovers and connoisseurs looking for an immersive experience with India's ancient and timeless art form of kathak."
— *Audience Member*



Noteworthy Performances

January 12-15, 2018

Excerpts of SPEAK and Son of the Wind

Ailey Citigroup Theater

Association of Performing Arts Professionals 2018 Conference

New York, NY

March 22-24, 2018

SPEAK

The Broad Stage

Featuring Rina Mehta, Rachna Nivas, Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards, & Michelle Dorrance

Los Angeles, CA

April 23, 2018

Excerpts of Son of the Wind

Hewlett Foundation Retreat

Wave Street Studios

Monterey, CA

April 27-28, 2018

Son of the Wind

ODC Theater

Artistic Direction: Seibi Lee, Rachna Nivas, Rina Mehta

San Francisco, CA

July 1, 2018

Pilgrimage

State Bank of India

Featuring Leela Dance Collective in collaboration with Rafiq Kartal & Group

Jaipur, India

December 2, 2018

Amaya

West Coast Dance Theatre

Featuring Leela Dance Collective ensemble dancers, Navneet Bal and Joya Kazi

Los Angeles, CA



Impact

4

Artistic Works

31

Artists

19

Performances

Report on Indicators

5260

of Audience
Members



3560

Audience members
in new markets



1.2m

Reached through media
and digital platforms



47.4

% of performances
presented by
mainstream presenters



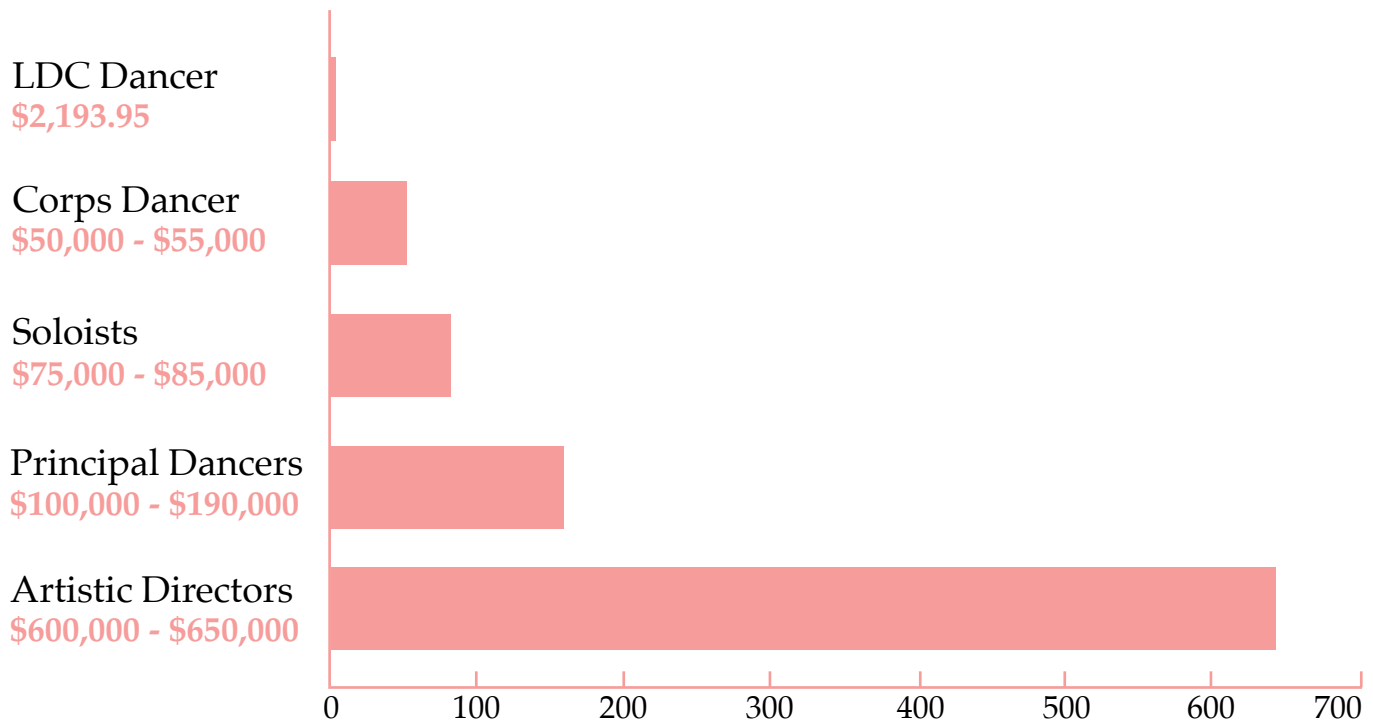
26.3

% of performances
that were traditional
kathak solos



Providing Support for Artists

The financial infrastructure for Indian classical art trails far behind that for classical art in the West. No place is this more evident than in the salaries available to ballet dancers and Western classical musicians as compared to the salaries available to Indian classical artists. Take a look at the salary ranges for ballet dancers in the West. For comparison, the 2018 salaries of Leela Dance Collective dancers are also provided.



At Leela we are committed to providing the financial support artists need to advance India's artistic traditions and cultural heritage with dignity, authenticity and success. As such we measure our annual pay per artist and are committed to increasing this number over time. We are proud to say that this number saw an increase by 24% between 2017 and 2018.

\$2,193.95

Average annual pay per artist

Growth of Leela Dance Collective

In 2016, five dancers met at a cabin in Lake Tahoe to commemorate the one year anniversary of the passing of Pandit Chitresh Das and to strategize for the future. That weekend the Leela Dance Collective was born with a mission to advance kathak dance and the rich artistic heritage of India. Leela was but an idea and an intention. Spurred by the dreams and passions of the five founders, it quickly became a working experiment, a way for Das' senior disciples to create a platform that nurtured the voices of emerging dancers, facilitated collaboration amongst artists, and established a sustainable infrastructure for the art form. The five Co-Founders agreed on a collective model, understanding that the traditional model, organized around a single artistic director was not going to serve the legacy. What unfolded over the next three years was nothing short of miraculous. In 2018, the collective welcomed eight dancers and four musicians into the Leela family!



Seema Mehta
Soloist



Joanna Meindl
Soloist



Cimeron Ahluwalia
Soloist



Sonali Toppur
Ensemble Dancer



Ahana Mukherjee
Ensemble Dancer



Ria DasGupta
Ensemble Dancer



Joya Kazi
Ensemble Dancer



Navneet Bal
Ensemble Dancer



Debasish Sarkar
Vocals and Harmonium



Jayanta Banerjee
Composer and Sitar



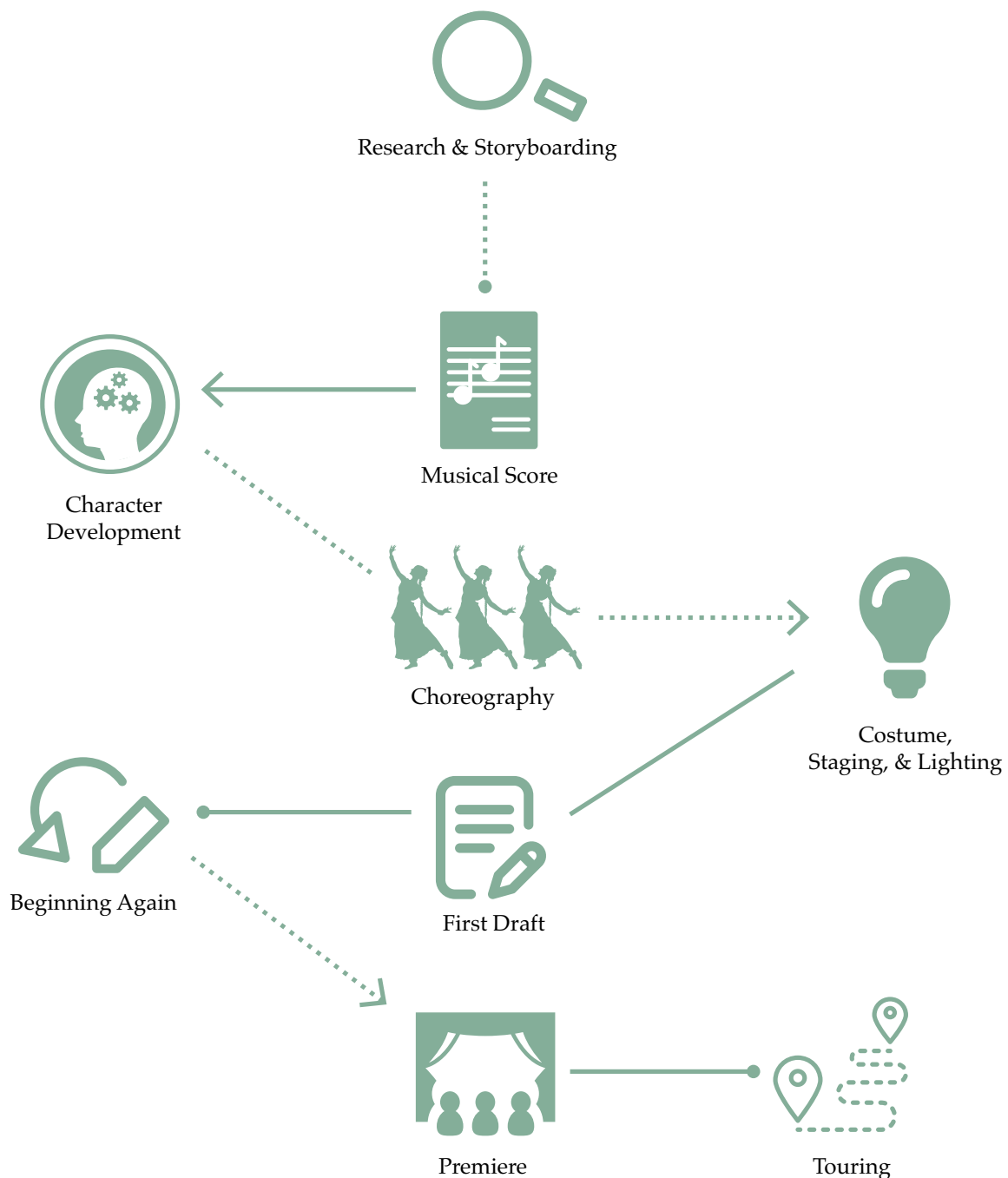
Satyaprakash Mishra
Tabla



Vaibhav Mankad
Vocals and Harmonium

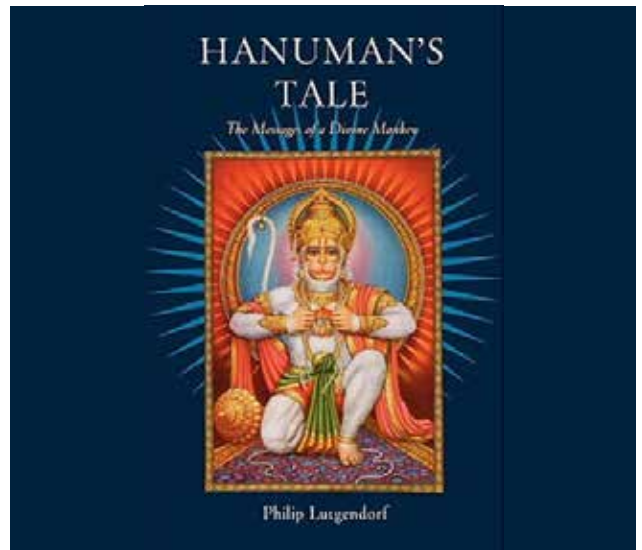
Behind the Scenes

The story of a production like *Son of the Wind* often begins with a mere idea, a spark of inspiration. What follows is a leap of faith into the unknown; jumping into and committing to a process that truly takes on a life of its own. The creative process that birthed *Son of the Wind* took almost two years and was led by Artistic Directors Seibi Lee, Rachna Nivas and Rina Mehta. In addition to being a way for the Leela Dance Collective to carry forward the legacy of Pt. Chitresh Das, *Son of the Wind* served as an opportunity for the collective to assert its unique artistic voice and innovative approach to kathak. We are proud to share the behind the scenes journey of this spectacular production with our fans and patrons.



Research and Storyboarding

The creative process for a show like *Son of the Wind* begins with research. The Artistic Directors spent months reading various versions of the Ramayana and texts on Hanuman. They studied dance ballads from those created by Pandit Chitresh Das to those created by great Indian artists such as Uday Shankar. This research informed the storyboarding process where each scene was laid out with key characters and narrative themes. The Artistic Directors chose well-known as well as rarer scenes that highlighted Hanuman's adventures and travails, stringing together scene by scene a unique take on the Ramayana.



The Musical Score

The template for the *Son of the Wind* score was developed over the course of six days. The Artistic Directors and musical team, led by Jayanta Banerjee began each day by delving into a scene - the intent, narrative and emotional arc, and tone. At times the creative process began with a musical idea while at others a dance composition or choreographic direction led the way. The team discussed the ideal raga, taal, tempo, movement vocabulary, choreographic ideas, and expressive themes. After a highly iterative process what emerged was a musical template for each of the six scenes. This template guided the development of the score over six months and the artists continue to refine the score as the show tours.



Character Development

The character development for *Son of the Wind* proceeded over six months prior to the show's first performance and continues to deepen with each performance. Casting and character development was informed by the Artistic Directors' desire to provide audiences with an intimate connection to the characters of the Ramayana. Cast members studied their characters deeply and worked over the course of months to capture the dimensionality of each - Hanuman's devotion to Ram along with his ingenuity and proclivity for mischief; Ravan's arrogance and his deep and intense devotion to Lord Shiva; Sita's innocence and purity along with her strength and steadfastness.





Choreography

The Artistic Directors worked over six months to create the choreography for Son of the Wind. The scene showing the Vanara Sena preparing for war provided the artistic directors with the opportunity to move beyond traditional kathak vocabulary and experiment with martial arts and combat movements. The scene depicting Mahiravan engaged in tantric worship allowed the Artistic Directors to combine folk dance vocabulary with traditional kathak movement. Scenes with heavy dialogue required integrating kathak vocabulary with theatrical expression in new ways. The final choreography is the result of a highly experimental, collaborative and participatory process. While the Artistic Directors provided the overarching vision and guided the process, dancers and musicians alike worked together to create the final choreography.



Costume Design, Staging and Lighting

Costuming, staging and lighting design are seemingly ancillary yet integral components of a dance-drama production, helping to create the emotional tone and landscape for the narrative and choreography. The Artistic Directors worked to ensure that the costume design exhibited a contemporary aesthetic with clean lines and a minimalist color palette, allowing for the audience focus to remain on the story. The staging and lighting design were constructed to be dramatic and bring in the audience.



The First Draft

In April 2017, the Leela Dance Collective premiered Son of the Wind at the prestigious Green Music Center in Sonoma, CA. The first performance of any new work often serves as test case where the Artistic Directors get critical feedback as to the impact and effectiveness of their creation. The first performance is where the Artistic Directors can accurately evaluate whether the narrative translates, the choreography communicates intent, the interstitials help thread the scenes together, and so on. This first performance and the feedback garnered is a crucial part of the creative process helping the artists understand what works and what doesn't.

Beginning Again

The best choreographers and artists rework their creations again and again. They continue to problem solve things that don't quite work, tighten choreography, eliminate drag, develop the narrative, and in general improve upon their initial drafts. After the first *Son of the Wind* performance, the Artistic Directors set to work once again. Over the course of five months, they refined the choreography, dramatically enhanced the staging, costume design and lighting, and strengthened the narrative. This second round of work is crucial and often defines the quality of the final production.



The Premiere

In April 2018, Chhandam presented the World Premiere of *Son of the Wind* at the ODC Theater in San Francisco, CA. More than 500 dance and music lovers, connoisseurs, and critics gathered to witness the spectacular unveiling of the work that had been in the making for almost two years. The performance brought the audience to its feet, inspired rave reviews and marked a milestone for the legacy of master kathak artist, Pt. Chitresh Das. The production is the first major work created by Das' disciples after his passing in 2015, featuring more than twenty dancers and musicians trained by him. The show's premiere in Das' home city of San Francisco represented not only a celebration of his legacy but also a harbinger for a bright future for kathak dance.



Touring

After a successful premiere in San Francisco, *Son of the Wind* was ready for a successful touring circuit in 2019 across the United States and India. In January 2019, the production made its India premiere at the Bhramara Festival of Dance held at the historic Royal Opera House in Mumbai. This fall, *Son of the Wind* makes its East Coast premiere at the Agama Festival being presented at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts in Philadelphia and its Los Angeles premiere at the spectacular Ford Theatres in Hollywood. The show will continue to tour the United States and India in 2020 and beyond, providing audiences around the world with the opportunity to experience the grandeur and spectacle of Indian classical dance.



The Leela Academy

The Leela Academy provides comprehensive education in kathak dance for students of all ages. Grounded in the pedagogy of renowned kathak master Pandit Chitresh Das, Leela's curriculum creates a rich and challenging learning environment for students. In addition to weekly classroom education with resident faculty, students at Leela receive invaluable opportunities to engage with India's finest classical artists in performance and in the classroom. A range of performance opportunities – in schools, classrooms and on mainstages around the world – supplement students' training and education. Leela's educational program reflects its commitment to helping passionate and talented individuals achieve their full potential as artists, leaders, cultural ambassadors and global citizens. The Leela Academy faculty are amongst today's leading Indian classical music and dance artists include Artistic Director Rina Mehta and Guest Faculty Seibi Lee, Rachna Nivas, Seema Mehta, Sarah Morelli, Satyaprakash Mishra and Vaibhav Mankad.



Impact

250

Students

16

Educators

2500

Cumulative Hours
of Training

Report on Indicators

46%

Student proficiency /
advancement



2.5

Average hours of
training per student /
per week



21.2

% of hours training with
visiting faculty



5

of student
performances



1150

Audience members
reached



71

% student attendance
at professional
performances



** The Leela Academy's scope of work includes its affiliate schools from around the world while its indicators are based on a sample student size based in Los Angeles school.

Integrating
music and
dance
education



Advances
in kathak
pedagogy



Training
a new
generation
of educators





Integrating music and dance education

Dance and music have always been fundamentally interwoven. Just as there is a piano in every professional ballet studio, it is our goal to have Hindustani music in every kathak class. We have begun laying this foundation by investing in our Visiting Faculty Program, which aims to bring world class musicians to the Leela Academy multiple times a year for intensive music training.



Advances in kathak pedagogy

As an oral tradition that is lineage based, kathak dance has a diverse and unstandardized pedagogy across styles and teachers. Even within a single gharana or school there is an incredible amount of diversity in teaching styles and techniques. At Leela, we are working to standardize our curriculum and teaching pedagogy in order to more effectively teach our students and scale our educational programs. In 2018 we incorporated assessments, practice guides, and performance requirements into our curriculum and developed an online student portal that makes a wealth of practice and training resources available to students for free.



Training a new generation of educators

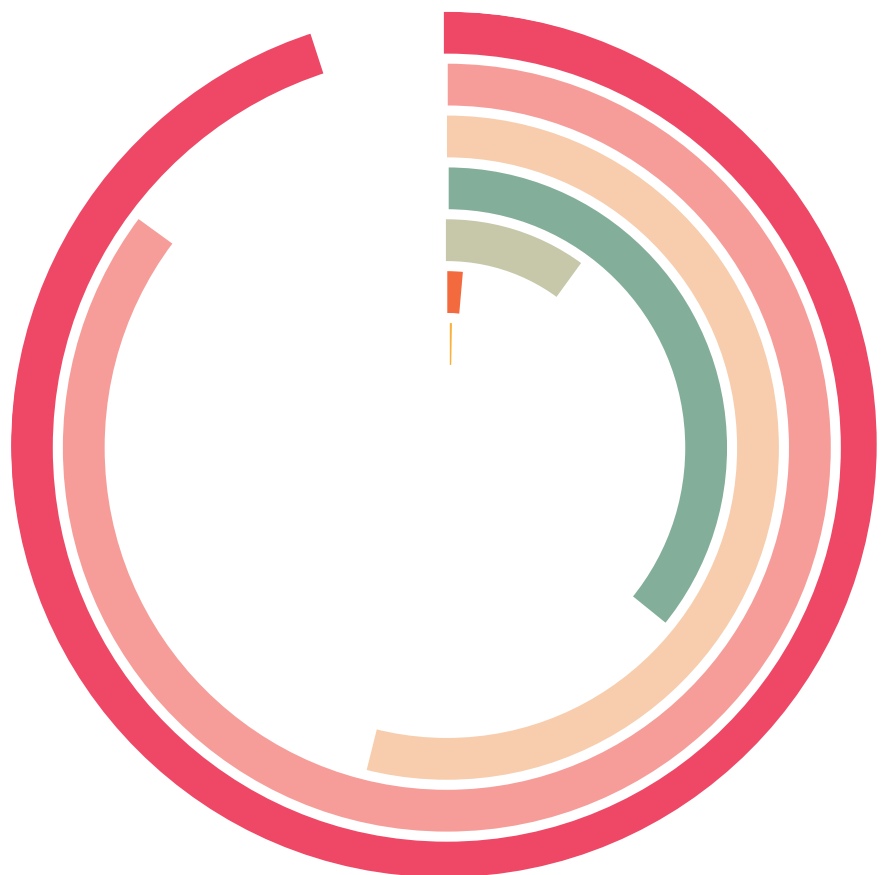
This year we celebrated the first graduating class of our teacher training program. This four-year program provided rigorous training in subject matter specifics and kathak teaching pedagogy along with extensive leadership development. It demanded a significant investment of time and resources from both the organization and those dedicated individuals that chose to undertake the task of becoming arts educators. In December, we welcomed four of these individuals to the Academy as faculty. We are looking forward to being a part of their development as new teachers in 2019.

A Future for Indian Classical Art

The financial infrastructure for Indian classical dance and music is severely lacking. In comparison, a look at the infrastructure for classical dance and music in the West is eye-opening. Every major city across the United States is home to a major ballet company, symphony and opera. These institutions are supported by major endowments that ensure a viable and strong future for art in America. These endowments are supported by a large community of individual patrons that firmly believe in the inherent value of art forms such as ballet, classical music and opera. Take a look at a snapshot of some arts endowments in the United States. For comparison, the endowments (or trusts) of India's national arts institutes - Kathak Kendra and Sangeet Natak Akademi - are provided.

Selected Endowments for Arts Organizations in the United States and India

San Francisco Symphony	\$284,000,000
Los Angeles Philharmonic	\$255,000,000
New York City Ballet	\$163,000,000
San Francisco Ballet	\$107,000,000
Pacific Northwest Ballet	\$18,148,000
Sangeet Natak Akademi	\$951,637
Kathak Kendra	\$425,952



The Leela Institute Endowment

In 2016, Leela launched a campaign to establish the first self-standing endowment for Indian classical dance and music. This endowment aims to galvanize community support for India's artistic traditions and cultural heritage, build the financial infrastructure necessary for Indian classical dance and music to thrive for generations to come, and provide those artists that are ambassadors for India's artistic and cultural treasures with the critical support they need. Between 2016 and 2018, the Leela staff and board were able to successfully raise more than \$500,000 in seed funding to establish the endowment. In 2019, the Leela Board of Directors will work to develop an investment strategy and spending policy. The organization anticipates being able to provide its first fellowships in Spring 2020.

\$524,562

Raised as of December 31, 2018



The Leela Institute Donors

FOUNDER'S CIRCLE (\$50K AND UP)

Anonymous
Shaila and Dinesh Mehta
Meera and Jasvant Modi
Drs. Irma and Ushakant Thakkar
Bina and Yogesh Nivas and Family
Gita and Subramaniam Janakiraman

PATRONS (\$25K TO \$49,999)

Rachna Nivas and Prakash Janakiraman
The Nair Family

LEADERS (\$10K TO \$24,999)

Anonymous
Anonymous
Uma and Avadhesh Agarwal
Poonam and Prabhu Goel
Nalini and Uka Solanki
Leah and Gary Schoolnik
Palayam Foundation
Mary and Clemens Lee

ADVOCATES (\$5K TO \$9,999)

Neelima and Milind Bhat
Pratima and Navin Doshi
Jyotsna and Sharad Patel
Chandrika and Sumant Patel
Aruna and Dinker Shah
Kinna and Nitin Shah
Hetal and Kunal Sharma
Kusum and Harkishan Vasa
Rita Singhal and Swamy Venuturupalli

AMBASSADORS (\$2,500 TO \$4,999)

Bala and Krish Krishnamurthy
Meena and Jitendra Mehta
Ruchi Mathur and Mark Pimentel
Indira and Yalamanchilli Rao
Vinita and Amar Singh
Robyn Friend and Neil Siegel
Madhu and Babu Mehta

SUPPORTERS (\$1,000 TO \$2,499)

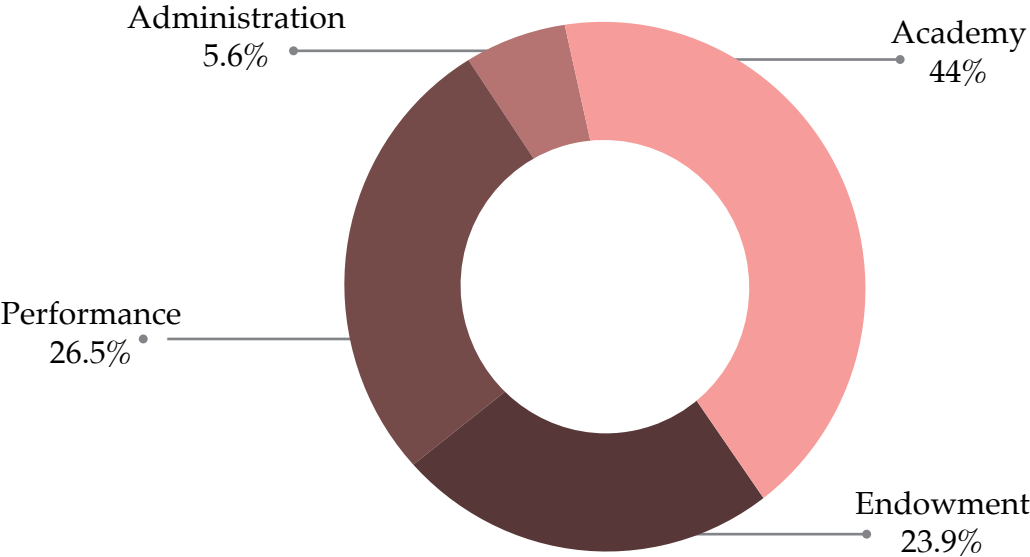
Chhandam Youth Dance Company
Ronda Berkeley and Mel Green
Minal and Neil Doshi
Shobha and Nitin Mehta
Kanan and Sanjay Panchal
Usha and Sudesh Sood
Valarie Kaur and Sharat Raju
Rajani Dinavahi & Abizer Gaslightwala
Reena Kapoor and Anurag Wadhera

FRIENDS (\$100 TO \$999)

Hima Chintalapati
Gita and Mukesh Desai
Deepa Gupta
Nootan and Arvind Halani
Divya Jain
Anjana and Vikram Kamdar
Kumud and Suren Kapadia
Erika and Sathvik Krishnamurthy
Bharathi and Kanaiya Mahendra
Roopa Maniar
Vandana and Kaushik Master
Mitali and Hitesh Mehta
Nila and Arvind Mehta
Rama and Jayant Mehta
Sheila and Kishore Naik
Koji Oka
Mitula and Raj Patel
Sharda and Mahesh Patel
Pranav Popat
Bhanu and Vandana Sardesai
Evanthia Spanos
Raghu and Durga Toppur
Cheryl Templeton
Shaila and Vijay Chauhan
Lavina Mehta and Sathiyen Kutty
Shriya and Prisha Patel
Anaya Doshi
Saanshi Panigrahi
Choudhary Patel
Seema Katak and Shreeraj Karulkar

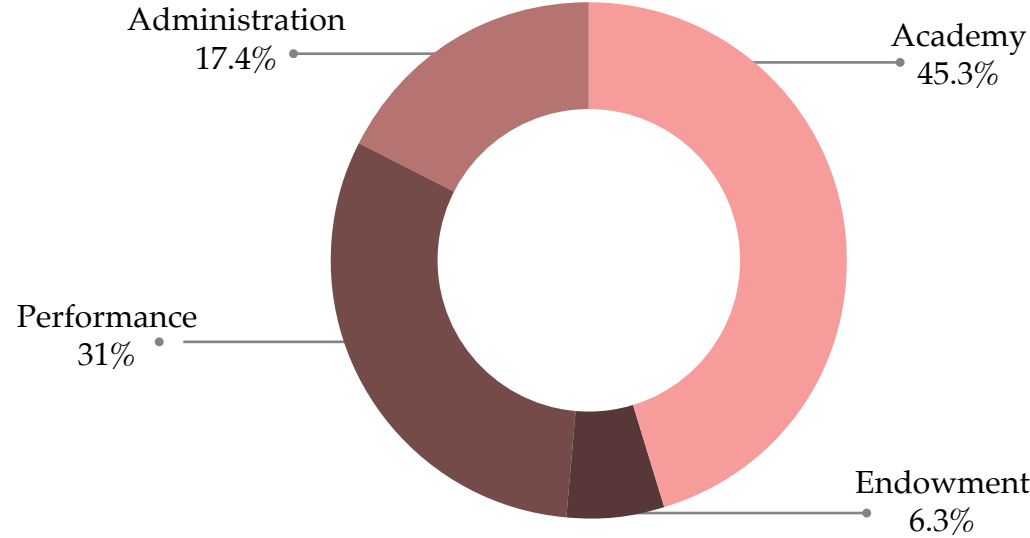
The Leela Institute Financials

Income by Program Area



Total Income \$176,423

Expenses by Program Area



Total Expenses \$132,253

Our Team

Principal Artists

Seibi Lee
Rachna Nivas
Rina Mehta

Soloists

Seema Mehta
Joanna Meinl
Cimeron Ahluwalia
Sarah Morelli
Shefali Jain

Ensemble Dancers

Ahana Mukherjee
Sonali Toppur
Ria DasGupta
Joya Kazi
Navneet Bal

Resident Artists

Seema Mehta, Kathak Artist
Jayanta Banerjee, Music Composition & Sitar

Debashis Sarkar, Vocals & Harmonium
Vaibhav Mankad, Vocals & Harmonium
Satyaprakash Mishra, Tabla
Ben Kunin, Sarod

Teachers

Suchitra Paranjpe
Rakshitha Ballal
Ritu Joshi
Vidula Gore

Board of Directors

Harkishan Vasa, Chair
Dinesh Mehta, Treasurer
Ronda Berkeley, Secretary
Dinker Shah
Nitin Shah
Swamy Venuturupalli
Trina Chaudhuri

Funders, Presenters, & Partners

Funders

National Endowment for the Arts
California Arts Council
Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation
Los Angeles County Arts Commission
New Music USA
The Esper A. Petersen Foundation

Presenters & Partners

Women Can Do It All - Monali Jain Foundation
Wells Fargo
Upaya
The Broad Stage
Alvin Ailey Citigroup Theater
University of Oklahoma
ODC Theater
Boston University Dance Theater
State Bank of India
Nevei Kodesh Center

Affiliates

Chhandam, Bay Area
Chhandika, Boston
Chhandam Nritya Bharati, Mumbai

M-Do, Toronto
Sureela, Denver



