



The Leela Institute

# 2019 Annual Report



ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते  
पूर्णश्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om Purnam-Adah Purnam-Idam  
Purnat-Purnam-Udacyate  
Purnashya Purnam-Adaaya  
Purnam-Eva-Avashisyate  
Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

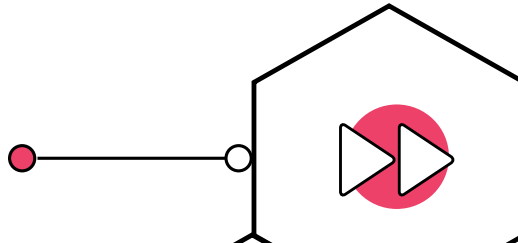
That is whole; this is whole;  
From that whole this whole came;  
From that whole, this whole removed,  
What remains is whole.  
Om, Peace, Peace, Peace.



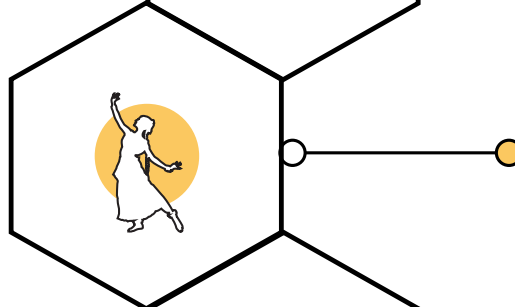
# Core Values

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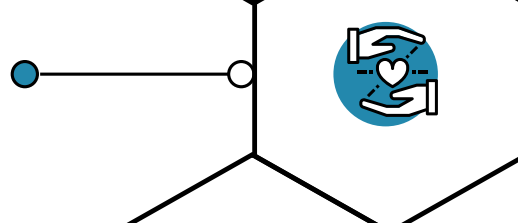
**ADVANCE**  
Advance the universal  
value of kathak



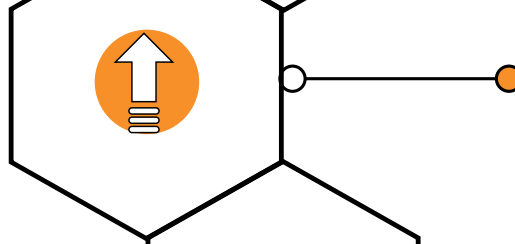
**ARTISTS**  
Place artists at the  
center of our work



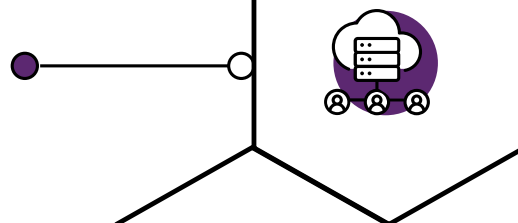
**RELATIONSHIPS**  
Center our work on  
relationships



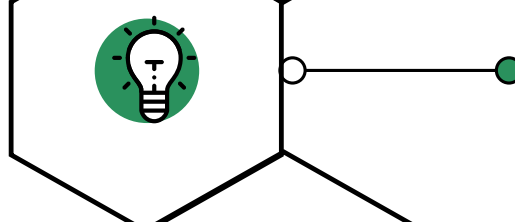
**ELEVATE**  
Elevate the standard  
of the art



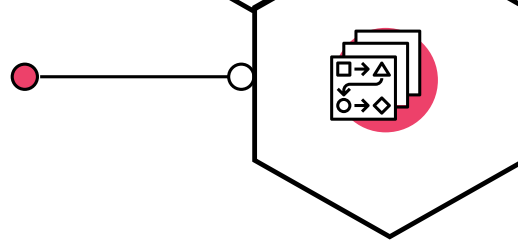
**COLLECTIVE**  
Ground our work  
in the practice of  
collective creativity



**INNOVATE**  
Innovate while  
remaining grounded  
in tradition



**TRANSFORM**  
Transform the field of  
kathak and beyond



# A Field-Wide Approach

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At The Leela Institute, we work to elevate and advance India's rich artistic and cultural heritage in the United States and globally. Our integrated approach aims to have a field-wide impact and includes three main components:

1. Our nationally and internationally performing dance company, the Leela Dance Collective, establishes Indian classical dance and music on the world stage by supporting the creation and performance of cutting-edge works of kathak dance.
2. Our educational institute, the Leela Academy along with its affiliate schools around the world, provides world-class education and pre-professional training in kathak dance and Hindustani classical music to dedicated and talented children and youth.
3. The Leela Endowment provides the financial infrastructure that is critical for the viability and sustainability of artistic traditions such as kathak dance and Hindustani classical music.





## About the Leela Dance Collective

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In 2016, five dancers - Rina Mehta, Rachna Nivas, Seibi Lee, Sarah Morelli, and Shefali Jain - met at a cabin in Lake Tahoe to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the passing of renowned kathak master and guru, Pandit Chitresh Das and to strategize for the future. That weekend the Leela Dance Collective was born with a mission to advance kathak 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 and a way for Das' senior disciples to create a platform that nurtured the voices of established and emerging dancers and facilitate collaboration amongst artists. In the five years since its founding, the collective has created and toured three acclaimed artistic works, reaching audiences across the world and becoming a leader in the field of Indian classical dance.



# Leela Dance Collective Impact

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4

Artistic Works

44

Artists

32

Performances

7910

Number of Audience Members



4125

Audience members in new markets



30M

Reached through media and digital platforms



46.9%

Percentage of performances presented by mainstream presenters



34.3%

Percentage of performances that were traditional kathak solos



# Leela Dance Collective Touring Works

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## **SPEAK**

Kathak and tap come together in this sensational collaboration that is rhythm, poetry, storytelling, music and dance. Created by Rina Mehta, Rachna Nivas and tap artists Michelle Dorrance and Dormeshia, SPEAK is a phenomenal statement about the power of dance and music to transcend all.



## **Son of the Wind**

Through dramatic storytelling, powerful movement, and exquisite staging and lighting, this tour-de-force dance drama highlights the contemporary relevance of a timeless story, bringing to life the story of Hanuman, the hidden hero at the heart of the great Indian epic, the Ramayana.



## **California Gharana**

California Gharana celebrates the living legacy of kathak legend Pandit Chitresh Das, offering three compelling pieces that embody his style, aesthetic and vision for the art form. Percussive feet, dynamic movement and rich music weave seamlessly together to tell the story of India – her history, struggles, spiritual discoveries, and evolution.



## **Continuum**

A spectacular celebration showcasing Indian classical dance and music in its full splendor, Continuum is a touring festival featuring performances, workshops and talks by a new generation of artists. These artists bring a contemporary voice and new dimension to India's classical art forms while entertaining and exciting audiences.

# From Calcutta to California and Back

Kathak master and guru, Pandit Chitresh Das was a pioneer in establishing kathak on American soil in the early 1970's. More than 40 years later, his disciples - born and raised in the United States as the children of immigrants - are emerging as kathak choreographers, artists and lineage bearers. Together they have created and toured critically acclaimed productions that are preserving and advancing kathak dance on the world stage. In 2019, two of these productions traveled from America to make their India premieres. The premieres marked a watershed moment for the Leela Dance Collective, bringing the legacy of kathak dance full circle.

## January 19, 2019

Son of the Wind

Royal Opera House, Mumbai

Presented by the Bhramara Festival of Dance

## February 20-24, 2019

SPEAK

Royal Opera House, Mumbai

G.D. Birla Sabhagar, Kolkata

Epicentre, Gurgaon

Presented by Showhouse India



2500

Audience  
Reach



28M

Press/Publicity  
Reach



135K

Digital  
Reach







## Fab India & SPEAK

The Leela Dance Collective's SPEAK India Tour was generously supported by India's famed textile retailer, Fab India. Specially-designed costumes and jewelry were provided by Fab India for the full cast to showcase on stage throughout the tour.



## Press Highlights

SPEAK and Son of the Wind garnered unprecedented coverage in the Indian press. Major publications such as The Times of India and regional periodicals alike, heralded SPEAK and Son of the Wind as trailblazing works in Indian classical dance. Take a look at some of the major publications that covered both productions.

The Times of India  
 Jet Wings Magazine  
 The Hindu  
 Bombay Times  
 Mumbai Mirror  
 Asian Age  
 T2, The Telegraph  
 Calcutta Times

Hindustan Times  
 Mid-Day  
 HT Cafe  
 Mail Today  
 Gurgaon Times  
 Sunday Pioneer  
 Patriot  
 Eastern Chronicle



# CONTINUUM

A Festival of Indian Classical Dance & Music

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April 20-21, 2019, San Francisco, CA

May 5, 2019, Denver, CO

Presented by Chhandam, The Leela Institute, Sureela







## ADVANCING LEGACIES

Continuum brought together a new generation of artists from the South Asian diaspora that represent the legacies and lineages of some of India's greatest masters of dance and music including Ud. Ali Akbar Khan, Pt. Chitresh Das, Pt. Swapan Chaudhuri, Smt. Sisirkana Dhar Choudhury, Pt. Ulhas Kashalkar, and many more.

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## THE TRADITIONAL SOLO

The Continuum artists are emerging as tradition bearers, both preserving and evolving the form. Continuum provided the artists with a platform to present their respective art forms in the traditional solo format, giving artists and audiences alike the opportunity to experience Indian classical dance and music in its authentic form and complete breadth and depth.

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## REACHING NEW AUDIENCES

After Continuum's resounding success in San Francisco, the festival is preparing for its next installments in Los Angeles and New York in 2021-2022. We are thrilled to be able to continue sharing the richness and depth of Indian classical dance and music with audiences and communities across the United States.

21 artists  
12 performances

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Seibi Lee, Kathak  
Debashis Sarkar, Vocals  
& Harmonium  
Jayanta Banerjee, Sitar  
Rachna Nivas, Kathak  
Ben Kunin, Sarod  
Rina Mehta, Kathak  
Raaginder Momi, Violin  
Jay Gandhi, Bansuri  
Saili Oak, Vocals  
Seema Mehta, Kathak  
Nilan Chaudhuri, Tabla  
Satyaprakash Mishra, Tabla  
Sarah Morelli, Kathak  
Samarth Nagarkar, Vocals  
Shefali Jain, Kathak  
Vivek Datar, Harmonium  
Jonathan Kay, Esraj  
Manoj Tamhankar, Harmonium  
Satish Tare, Tabla  
Ria DasGupta, Kathak  
Joya Kazi, Kathak



## Son of the Wind - Los Angeles Premiere

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*"The Artistic Directors of Leela Dance Collective have chosen an ambitious mission, to honor ancient traditions and bring them forward, made relevant to the present. There is no question that they are successful."*

- Mary Pat Cooney,  
Los Angeles Dance Chronicle



On September 14, 2019, after touring across the United States and India, we brought *Son of the Wind* to the iconic Ford Theatres in Hollywood for its Los Angeles premiere. Leela artists, students, staff, board and patrons rallied together like never before to bring India's epic, the Ramayana, to life, holding an audience of 1,000 in rapt attention under a full moon sky. The production garnered both audience and critical acclaim from the likes of the LA Times, Los Angeles Dance Chronicle, and National Public Radio, and provided a magical end to the 2019 season.

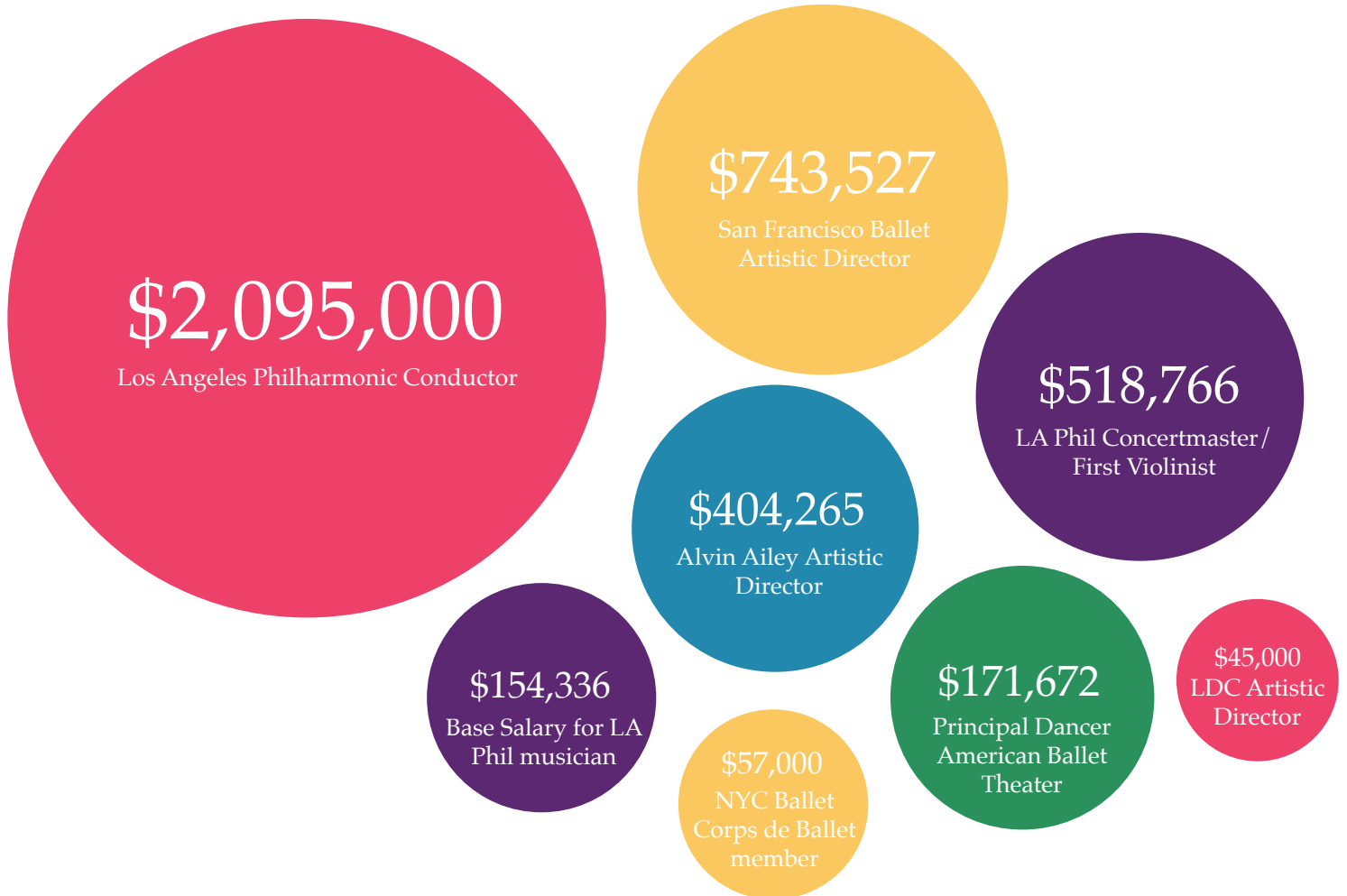


In Fall 2019, Leela joined the artist roster of the Music Center on Tour, a prestigious program designed to model artistic excellence, inspire creative thinking and introduce young K-12 audiences to diverse cultural traditions through performances in schools. Leela's arts education performance integrates lessons in South Asian geography and history, and even mathematics through kathak dance and Hindustani music, and reaches more than 5000 children in schools across Los Angeles county each year.

# Support for Artists

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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.\*



At Leela we are committed to establishing the financial infrastructure necessary for India's artistic and cultural traditions to thrive and take their place on the world stage. This means providing crucial financial support to those artists that embody and advance these traditions through their work. 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 has grown consistently year-over-year, and we achieved a 20% increase from 2018 to 2019.

# \$2,630

**2019 Average Annual Pay Per Artist**

\*Salary information taken from [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)



# About The Leela Academy

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The Leela Academy is committed to helping passionate and talented individuals achieve their full potential as artists, leaders, and global citizens through world-class education in kathak. Guided by a belief in the universal value of kathak dance, the Academy offers pre-professional training for aspiring dancers, open and recreational classes for dance enthusiasts, and a knowledge-rich education for children and youth. The Academy's approach and curricula are grounded in the philosophy and pedagogy of renowned kathak master, Pandit Chitresh Das, articulated through a set of nine fundamental principles. These principles demonstrate the rich and profound spiritual and philosophical underpinnings of the Indian classical tradition and serve as a foundation for the Leela Academy's programs and work.

## The Nine Principles

### 1. सदव्यवहार और तहजीब

Sadvyavahār aur tahzīb — Attitude and etiquette

### 2. प्रशिक्षण

Prashikshan — Study and training in abhinaya and the four elements of kathak

### 3. रियाज़ मेहनत के साथ

Riyāz mehanat ke sāth — Systematic practice with deep exertion

### 4. सर्वज्ञान

Sarvgyān — Complete knowledge of kathak

### 5. उपज

Upaj — Improvisation

### 6. शिक्षा प्रचार और सुरक्षा करना

Shikshā prachār aur surakshā karnā — To educate, promote, and preserve

### 7. त्याग और सेवा

Tyāg aur sevā — Sacrifice and selfless service

### 8. साधना

Sādhanā — Devotional practice for life

### 9. गुरु शिष्य परम्परा

Guru-shishya paramparā — Guru-disciple tradition

# The Leela Academy - Impact

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290

Students

26

Educators

1650

Cumulative Hours  
of Training

58%

Student proficiency  
and advancement



2

Average hours of training  
per student/per week



14.1%

Percentage of hours training  
with visiting faculty



8

Number of student  
performances



2000

Audience members  
reached



85%

Percentage of student attendance  
at professional performances





## Summer Camp & Youth Summit

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Each year, the Leela Academy partners with its sister schools, Chhandam and Sureela, to present a week-long summer camp and youth summit. This year's edition, held in the San Francisco Bay Area, gathered more than 30 children and teens from across the United States, providing them with the opportunity to study kathak dance and Hindustani classical music in an immersive learning environment; engage in insightful discussions on topics ranging from identity, immigration, gender, power, and more; and develop critical leadership skills through mentorship, peer-to-peer learning, and collaborative and direct action projects.

### **Faculty**

Rina Mehta, Rachna Nivas, Sarah Morelli

### **Teaching Assistants**

Carrie McCune, Cailey Salagovic, Pallavi Salvi, Chandana Srinivas





## Elevating the Voices of Girls

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Leela's youth programs empower and activate the voices of young South Asian American girls across the United States, giving them the tools and skills to speak for themselves and their communities. Through world-class training and mentorship in classical dance and music, we provide these young women with a nurturing environment that enables them to discover their own voices, connect to their cultural heritage, foster their creative abilities, and develop crucial leadership skills.

“My five years in kathak have been an amazingly transformative journey for me. I have become stronger mentally and hold myself more confidently and with courage now. It has also been very empowering to learn and be able to represent the rich history of my culture.”

- Shreem C., Leela student

“Seeing so many incredible women doing kathak has inspired me a lot and has taught me how to take leadership. Since I was young, my teacher has showed me how to be a leader and has empowered many women through dance.”

- Kaavya V., Leela student



## Kathak Open Source

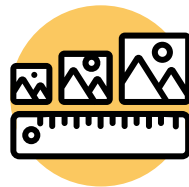
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This year, with support from the Sarva Mangal Trust, the Leela Academy embarked on a bold experiment that aspires to improve arts education, expand opportunity, connect educators and students, and facilitate the sharing of knowledge. The Kathak Open Source program aims to dramatically expand the reach of Leela's world class curriculum by providing a series of digital video and audio libraries in several languages featuring live classes, tutorials, musical tracks, and workbooks that guide and assist the learning and teaching process for students and educators worldwide.



### **ACCESS**

Providing unfettered access to world-class arts education resources for all



### **SCALABILITY**

Reaching hundreds and thousands of students all over the world



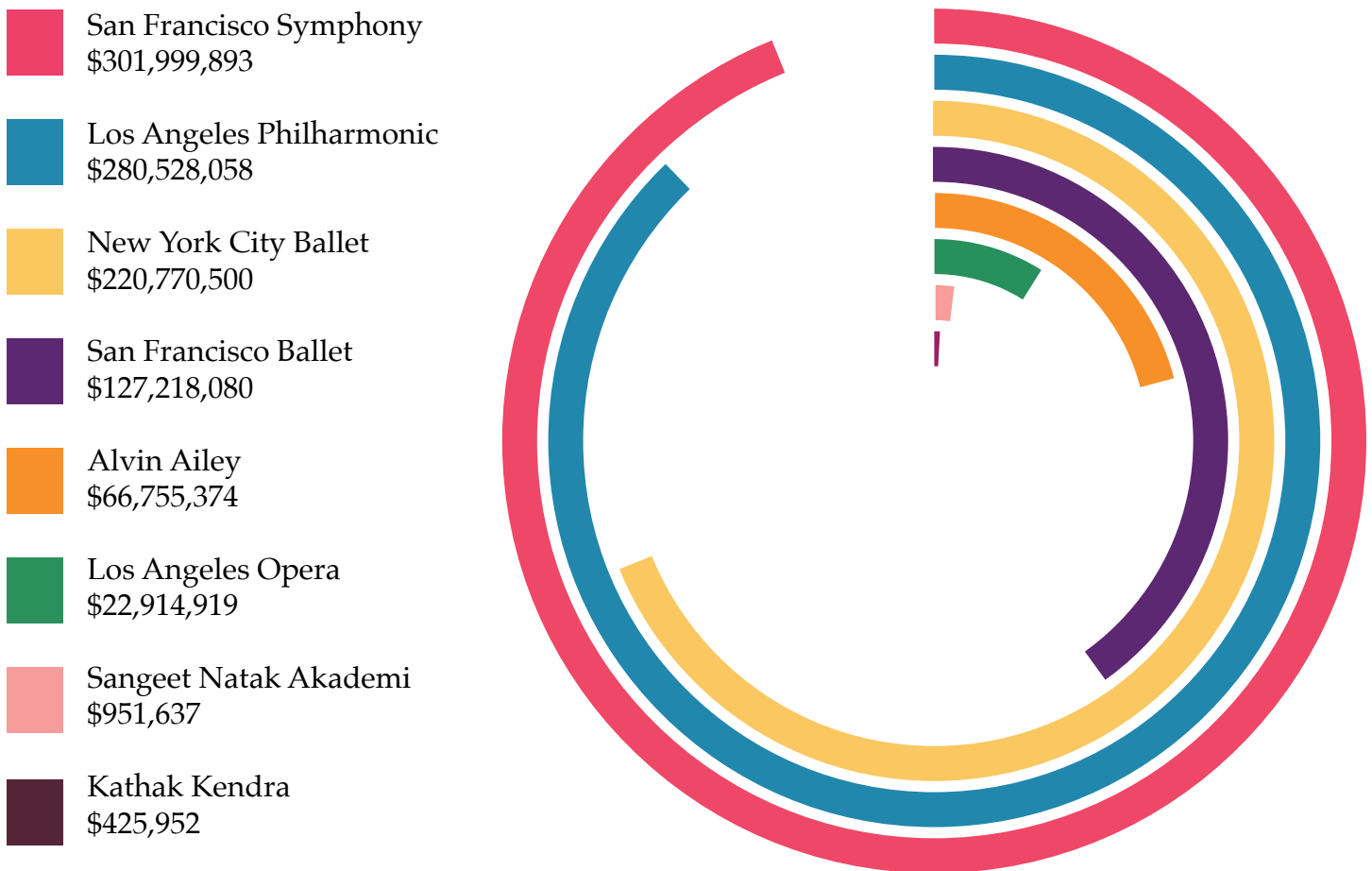
### **KNOWLEDGE PRESERVATION**

Facilitating knowledge preservation and exchange for future generations

# The Leela Endowment

A look at the infrastructure for classical dance and music in the West is instructive. Major cities across the United States boast acclaimed ballet companies, symphonies and operas, each supported by a large endowment and a strong community of donors. These endowments are a direct reflection of the value a community has placed on its artistic and cultural heritage. In stark contrast, while there are hundreds of Indian classical dance and music schools around the world, none of these are supported by a sustainable financial infrastructure. India's national dance and music institutes, although supported by financial trusts, provide meager support and pale in comparison to the need in the field. The Leela Endowment is the first and only self-standing endowment for Indian classical dance and music. To date, we have raised more than \$500,000 in seed funding to establish the endowment. Our aim is to raise \$5 million over the next two years and ultimately provide direct financial support to artists that are serving as tradition bearers and cultural ambassadors.

## Selected Endowments for Arts Organizations in the United States and India\*



\*Source: [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org) and organizational annual reports



*"This art form, especially the way Leela does it, is otherworldly, on another plane of existence. It's so important to get it out there."*

*- Ann Petersen,  
Esper A. Petersen Foundation*



“

“In the Indian shastras there is *vidya* (knowledge) and then there is *kala* (art)...*Kala* forms are the only forms which have the potential to generate energy in a person...therefore art is a lifegiving form... Funding art is equally important as funding food because they are the two things that give energy to the human existence - body and mind both.”

- Ravi Tilak, Co-founder & CEO, ALMEX USA, Inc

“...to have a deep passion is not a very common thing. When I see someone with that kind of tremendous passion, it melts me a bit...Pursuing art as a profession is risky, but when someone has a passion it needs to be supported. I stand with them, and I support and encourage them to go for it.”

- Ushakant Thakkar, Founder, CEO & President, The Kidney Center, Inc.

# The Leela Endowment Performance

## Portfolio Snapshot

(Jan. 1, 2019 - Dec. 31, 2019)

	Jan. 1, 2019	Dec. 31, 2019
Invested Funds	\$250,928	\$272,407
Cash	\$75,287	\$133,134

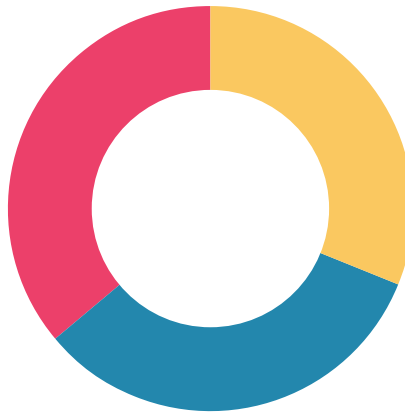
**Endowment Payout\***

**\$10,963**

## Asset Allocation

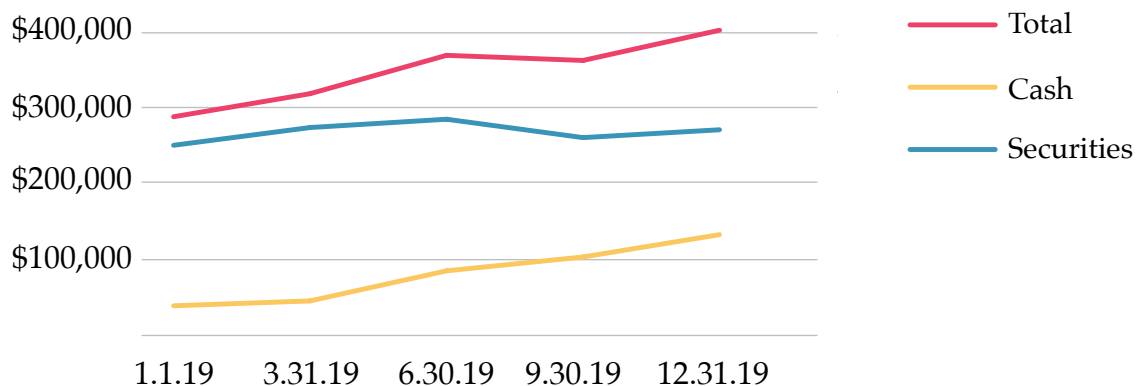
(as of December 31, 2019)

- Fixed Income - 35.9%
- Cash - 32.8%
- Securities - 31.3%



## Portfolio Performance

(Jan. 1, 2019 - Dec. 31, 2019)



\*The Leela Endowment's payout is based on an annual spending rate of 4%. Endowment funds support artist salaries, residencies and fellowships.

# The Leela Endowment Donors

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We are grateful to our donors who have contributed to the Leela Endowment, which provides critical direct support to artists that are advancing India's artistic traditions.

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

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

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

Preetha and Hari Nair  
Rachna Nivas and Prakash Janakiraman

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

Uma and Avadhesh Agarwal  
Anonymous  
Poonam and Prabhu Goel  
Mary and Dr. Clemens Lee  
Palayam Foundation  
Jyotsna and Sharad Patel  
Leah and Dr. Gary Schoolnik  
Nalini and Uka Solanki

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

Neelima and Milind Bhat  
Pratima and Navin Doshi  
Robyn Friend and Dr. Neil Siegel  
Vinita and Amar Singh

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

Bindu and Kumar Koneru  
Bala and R. Krishnamurthy  
Madhu and Babu Mehta  
Meena and Jitu Mehta  
Chandrika and Sumant Patel  
Seema and Amit Patel  
Dr. Ruchi Mathur and Dr. Mark Pimentel  
Indira and Yalamanchilli Rao  
Kinna and Dr. Nitin Shah  
Aruna and Dinker Shah  
Kusum and Harkishan Vasa  
Rita Singhal and Dr. Swamy Venuturupalli

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

Ronda Berkeley and Mel Green  
Chhandam Youth Dance Company  
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Minal and Neil Doshi  
Shobhana Gandhi  
Seema Katak and Shreeraj Karulkar  
Reena Kapoor and Anurag Wadehra  
Valarie Kaur and Sharat Raju

Shobha and Nitin Mehta  
Sanjay and Kanan Panchal  
Hetal and Kunal Sharma  
Raminder and Harpreet Singh

## **FRIENDS (\$100 TO \$999)**

Shobha Sudhir Banker  
Swati and Vijay Bhatt  
Shaila and Vijay Chauhan  
Hima Chintalapati  
Gita and Mukesh Desai  
Mandy Fazeli and Rashid Razavi  
Deepa Gupta  
Nootan and Arvind Halani  
Divya Jain  
Yogita and Ishwar Jasuja  
Seema and Kiran Kamat  
Anjana and Vikram Kamdar  
Tarala and Pravin Kapadia  
Kumud and Suren Kapadia  
Erica and Sathvik Krishnamurthy  
Pratibha Singhal Kumar  
Leepi Shimkhada and Ravi Mahalingam  
Bharathi and Kanaiya Mahendra  
Vandana and Kaushik Master  
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Nila and Arvind Mehta  
Mitali and Hitesh Mehta  
Rama and Jayant Mehta  
Lavina Mehta and Sathiyam Kutty  
Sheila and Kishore Naik  
Koji Oka  
Choudhary Patel  
Sharda and Mahesh Patel  
Mitula and Raj Patel  
Shriya and Prisha Patel  
Purnima and Jyoti Prakash  
Chhaya and Jairaj Samtani  
Vandana and Bhanu Sardesai  
Tara and Nirmal Sethia  
Aruna and Manohar Shinde  
Evanthia Spanos  
Cheryl Templeton  
Durga and Raghu Toppur  
Padma and H.P. Trivedi  
Sonal and Govind Vagashia  
Surekha Vashi



# The Leela Institute Donors

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We would like to thank those individuals that have provided the organization with the support necessary to advance our mission and programs, including direct programmatic support as well as Endowment donations.

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Pravin Patel  
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Keerthy Sundar  
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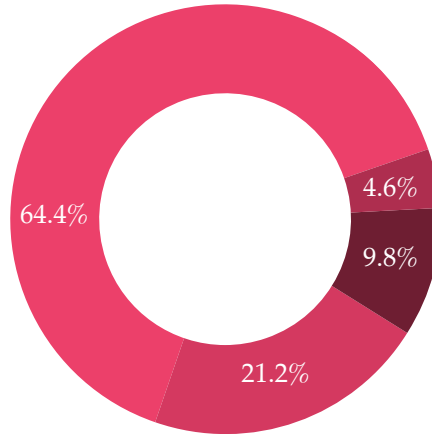
Anjana and Vikram Kamdar  
Tarala and Pravin Kapadia  
Kumud and Suren Kapadia  
Erica and Sathvik Krishnamurthy  
Pratibha Singhal Kumar  
Agnes Lee  
Elena and Victor Magno  
Leepi Shimkhada and Ravi Mahalingam  
Bharathi and Kanaiya Mahendra  
Roopa Maniar  
Santrupti Margad  
Vandana and Kaushik Master  
Maya and Hem Mathur  
Purnima Mehta-Taylor  
Geeta and Anil Mehta  
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Rama and Jayant Mehta  
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Shriya and Prisha Patel  
Purnima and Jyoti Prakash  
Chhaya and Jairaj Samtani  
Vandana and Bhanu Sardesai  
Joel Schoolnik  
Tara and Nirmal Sethia  
Tiffany and Amit Shah  
Farah Yasmeen and Salim Shaikh  
Suraj Shantakumar  
Bhavya Singh  
Evanthia Spanos  
Cheryl Templeton  
Durga and Raghu Toppur  
Sonali Toppur  
Padma and H.P. Trivedi  
Surekha Vashi

# Financials

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## Expense by Program Area

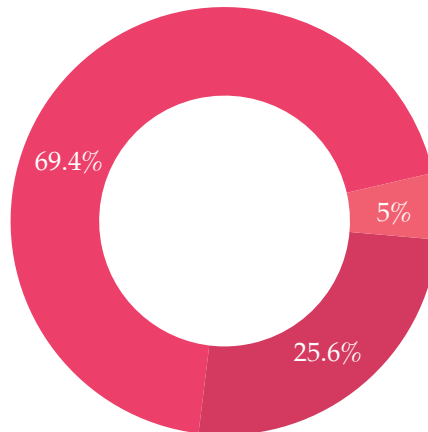
- Performance - 64.4%
- Academy - 21.2%
- Administration - 9.8%
- Fundraising - 4.6%



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## Income by Program Area

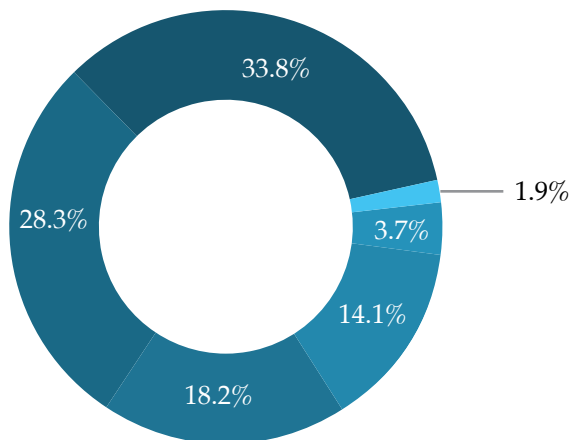
- Performance - 69.4%
- Academy - 25.6%
- General Support - 5%



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## Income by Type

- Grants - 33.8%
- Performance - 28.3%
- Academy - 18.2%
- Endowment - 14.1%
- Investment - 3.7%
- Individual - 1.9%



# Funders & Sponsors

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## Foundations

The Annenberg Foundation  
Association of Performing Arts Professionals  
California Arts Council  
Esper A. Petersen Foundation  
Ford Theatre Foundation  
Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture  
Los Angeles City Department of Cultural Affairs  
MidAtlantic Arts Foundation  
National Endowment for the Arts  
New Music USA  
Sarva Mangal Trust  
University of Denver

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## Corporations

Amgen  
Bank of America  
Boeing  
GE  
Google Benevity  
Intel  
Monali Jain Foundation  
Upaya  
Wells Fargo



# Team

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## Principal Artists

Seibi Lee  
Rachna Nivas  
Rina Mehta

## Soloists

Seema Mehta  
Joanna Meinl  
Cimeron Ahluwalia  
Sarah Morelli  
Shefali Jain

## Ensemble Dancers

Sonali Toppur  
Ahana Mukherjee  
Ria DasGupta  
Navneet Bal  
Joya Kazi

## Musicians

Debashis Sarkar, Vocals & Harmonium  
Jayanta Banerjee, Music Composition & Sitar  
Kalinath Mishra, Tabla

Ben Kunin, Sarod  
Satyaprakash Mishra, Tabla

## Leela Academy Faculty

Rina Mehta, Artistic Director  
Rakshitha Ballal  
Suchitra Paranjpe  
Ritu Joshi  
Chandana Srinivas

## Administrative Staff

Monika Ramnath,  
Executive Director  
Carrie McCune,  
Development and Operations Coordinator  
Shreya Mehta,  
Creative Director  
Chandana Srinivas,  
Digital Media Marketing Associate

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## Board of Directors

Harkishan Vasa, Chair  
Dinesh Mehta, Treasurer  
Ronda Berkeley, Secretary  
Dinker Shah

Nitin Shah  
Swamy Venuturupalli  
Trina Chaudhuri  
Anna Cross

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## Affiliates

Chhandam School of Kathak, San Francisco, CA  
Sureela Academy & Ensemble, Denver, CO  
Chhandika, Boston, MA  
M-Do Kathak Toronto, Toronto, CA  
Chhandam Nritya Bharati, Mumbai, India

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## Photo Credits

Margo Moritz  
JZLIM Photography  
Travis Broxton  
Steven Roby

Nitish Adla  
Lindsey Best  
Deborah Verholtz  
Donald Norris

