

leela dance collective





Photo Credit: Steven Roby

“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, LA Dance Chronicle

About the Company

Leela Dance Collective is an internationally touring dance company that advances kathak, classical dance from North India. Through traditional works and cross-genre collaborations, the Collective brings the richness and depth of Indian classical dance to contemporary audiences worldwide. Based in Los Angeles, Leela Dance Collective has garnered critical acclaim under the artistic direction of renowned kathak artists Rukhmani Mehta, Seibi Lee, and Rachna Nivas, and engages some of today’s leading dancers and musicians, as well as collaborative artists of other genres.

Leela Dance Collective’s works have been supported by leading arts funders including National Endowment for the Arts, Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, New Music USA, MAP Fund, and Hewlett Foundation. These works have been presented at prestigious venues across the United States and India including NC State LIVE, BroadStage, Maui Arts & Cultural Center, Kimmel Cultural Campus, and Royal Opera House, Mumbai.

Artistic Directors



Rukhmani Mehta

Rina Mehta brings a singular voice and vision to the art of kathak. An artist and an entrepreneur, she displays on and off the stage her depth of training with legendary kathak master, Pt. Chitresh Das, an unshakable grounding in tradition and a pioneering spirit. Described as “regal” and “brilliant” by critics, her performances and artistic work are paving a path forward for the legacy of Pt. Chitresh Das and kathak dance itself.



Seibi Lee

Seibi Lee is a consummate kathak artist known for her powerful mastery, refined musicality, and dramatic brilliance in character portrayal. Seibi is an ACTA master artist and gandabandan disciple of the iconic kathak legend Pandit Chitresh Das. She is one of the founders of Leela Dance Collective and has a passion for inspiring and educating the next generation of kathak artists through her work as a senior faculty member at Leela Academy.



Rachna Nivas

Rachna Nivas is an artist, choreographer, educator, and entrepreneur in Indian classical dance, bringing a relevant voice to kathak. Deemed “charismatic” and “revelatory” by the San Francisco Chronicle, Rachna is a fierce and passionate performer, and is a distinguished torchbearer of legendary master Pandit Chitresh Das’s treasured lineage. She is a founding artist of the Leela Dance Collective, producing powerful works through the collective creativity of trailblazers in kathak.



Photo Credit: Travis Broxton

Repertoire

Touring Works

SPEAK

A sensational kathak and tap collaboration created and choreographed by Rukhmani Mehta, Rachna Nivas, Michelle Dorrance, and Dormeshia. *SPEAK* carries forward the legacies of kathak and tap legends and elevates the voices of women artists who are finding common ground and creating a shared language across genre and culture.

Encounters with Beauty

A collaborative work that brings together Indian classical dance and Western contemporary chamber music featuring Salastina and music by composers Derrick Skye and Reena Esmail. These artists find ways to connect and bring cultures and communities together through music and dance.

ReSound: Kathak in the Streets

A celebration of kathak dance featuring pop-up street performances and workshops, conceived and choreographed by Rukhmani Mehta. This program is flexible and customizable, perfect for community and fundraising events, as well as outdoor or off-site programming.

View our [digital portfolio](#) for videos, photos, and press.



Photo Credit: Margo Moritz

“...an evening of rhythmic magic.”
– *Los Angeles Dance Chronicle*

SPEAK

Run time: 90 min | Cast: 4 dancers, 6 musicians

Indian kathak dance and American tap dance, continents and ages apart, share parallel stories of struggle and perseverance. They come together in this sensational collaboration that is rhythm, poetry, storytelling, music, and dance. *SPEAK* carries forward the legacy of iconic artists like Pandit Chitresh Das, Dr. Jimmy Slyde, and James Buster Brown, while bringing to the forefront the voices of powerful female artists. *SPEAK* was created and choreographed by Rukhmani Mehta, Rachna Nivas, Michelle Dorrance, and Dormeshia, and also features a musical cast of the world’s leading Indian classical and jazz artists.

[More info and videos of *SPEAK*](#)



Photo Credit: Margo Moritz

“Collaboration asks you to step outside of your comfort zone, reach and connect across differences and expand your art practice. At Leela, collaboration is how we rediscover and remake our art and ourselves.”

– Rukhmani Mehta, Artistic Director of the Leela Dance Collective

Encounters with Beauty

Run time: 75 min | Cast: 5 dancers, 5 musicians

Indian classical dance meets Western contemporary chamber music in Leela Dance Collective’s new collaborative work. Conceived of by kathak artist Rukhmani Mehta, this work weaves together evocative sounds of the string quartet and Hindustani classical vocals with the percussive footwork and dramatic movement of kathak dance. Commissioned in part by The Newman Center for the Performing Arts, *Encounters With Beauty* crosses genres, cultures, and communities.

[More info and videos of *Encounters with Beauty*](#)



Photo Credit: Margo Moritz

“ReSound came out of the pandemic. We wanted to revitalize our communities and our neighborhoods... to bring the joy of the dance to audiences... and to uplift our own spirits.”

– Rukhmani Mehta, interview with *San Francisco Classical Voice*

ReSound: Kathak in the Streets

Run time: 30 min | Cast: 4 dancers

ReSound: Kathak in the Streets is a celebration of kathak dance featuring pop-up performances and workshops in non-traditional spaces to engage, educate, and inspire audiences of all ages. Conceived of and choreographed by Rukhmani Mehta, this series was created in response to the global pandemic as a way to nourish local communities with live art and share the joy of kathak in public, outdoor spaces. The ReSound premiere offered 21 free events in 10 days at iconic locations including Union Square and Japantown Peace Plaza in San Francisco, and Grand Park and Santa Monica’s Third Street Promenade in Los Angeles. This festival-style work is highly customizable and can stand alone or complement a larger production.

[More info and videos of ReSound: Kathak in the Streets](#)

Touring History

2023

Seattle, WA Excerpts of *Encounters With Beauty*, Hyphen+Asian Showcase at WAA, September 5th

Venice, CA Excerpts of *Encounters With Beauty*, open rehearsal at Electric Lodge, August 6th

Los Angeles, CA Excerpts of *Encounters With Beauty*, preview performance at Doheny Mansion, April 8th

Vienna, VA Traditional kathak solo performance by Rachna Nivas at The Barns at Wolf Trap, February 25th

2022

Venice, CA Traditional kathak solo performance by Rukhmani Mehta at Electric Lodge, November 6th

Los Angeles, CA Traditional kathak solo performance by Rukhmani Mehta at Studio A Dance, November 5th

Denver, CO Residency for *Encounters With Beauty* at Newman Center for the Performing Arts, June 22-26th

Raleigh, NC *SPEAK* performance and educational residency at NC State LIVE, April 14th

Edmonton, Canada Traditional kathak solo performance by Seibi Lee at MacEwan University, April 8th

Los Angeles, CA Traditional kathak solo performance by Seibi Lee at UCLA Little Theater, April 3rd

San Francisco, CA Traditional kathak solo performance by Seibi Lee at the War Memorial Performing Arts Center, March 31st

2021

New York, NY Traditional kathak solo performance by Rachna Nivas at Dixon Place, October 21st & 23rd

Los Angeles, CA *Resound: Kathak in the Streets* at outdoor venues including Grand Park, Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade, Culver City Town Plaza, Pasadena's Memorial Park, and Oak Park Amphitheater, September 23-26th

San Francisco, CA *Resound: Kathak in the Streets* premiere at outdoor venues including Union Square, Japantown Peace Plaza, UC Berkeley Sproul Plaza, and Lake Merritt, September 17-19th

2020

Page, MN *SPEAK* virtual performance and residency at Page Theater, May 1st

Waimea, HI *SPEAK* performance at Kahilu Theater Foundation, February 16th

Hilo, HI *SPEAK* performance and educational residency at University of Hawaii at Hilo, February 14th

Maui, HI *SPEAK* performance and educational residency at Maui Arts and Cultural Center, February 12th

Touring History

2019

Tempe, AZ *California Gharana* at ASU Gammage, October 15th

Los Angeles, CA *Son of the Wind* at Ford Theaters, September 14th

Philadelphia, PA *Son of the Wind* at Kimmel Cultural Center, September 7th

Los Angeles, CA *California Gharana* at Ford Theaters, August 10th

Denver, CO *Continuum* at the University of Denver's Lamont School of Music, May 3rd

San Francisco, CA *Continuum* premiere at Z-Space, April 20-21st

Gurgaon, India *SPEAK* at Epicentre, February 24th

Kolkata, India *SPEAK* at GD Birla Sabhagar, February 21st

Mumbai, India *SPEAK* at Royal Opera House, February 20th

Mumbai, India *Son of the Wind* at Royal Opera House, January 19th

2018

San Francisco, CA *Son of the Wind* at ODC Theater, April 20th

Santa Monica, CA *SPEAK* at BroadStage, March 22nd

New York, NY APAP Showcase performance at Ailey Citigroup Theater, January 13th

2017

Irvine, CA *California Gharana* at Irvine Barclay Theatre, September 9th

Los Angeles, CA *California Gharana* at Aratani World Series, April 17th

Sonoma, CA *Son of the Wind* world premiere at Green Music Center, April 8th

San Francisco, CA *SPEAK* world premiere at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, March 24th



Photo Credit: Travis Broxton

Community Engagement

Some of our most rewarding experiences as artists come from the residencies we participate in across the country, connecting us to youth, seniors, students, artists of different genres, and people of all walks of life. Past residency activities have incorporated interactive lecture demonstrations, introductory dance classes, kathak and tap jam sessions, and matinee performances for children with study guides and other preparatory resources. We collaborate with presenters to design engagement activities that fit organizational and audience goals. Notable residencies include partnerships with NC State LIVE, Page Theatre, College of the Holy Cross, and BroadStage.

For Booking Inquiries:

Carrie Jennings
Manager, Leela Dance Collective
bookings@leela.dance
leela.dance
775.560.2598
[Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Youtube](#)

