

# 22

LEELA ANNUAL REPORT





# CORE VALUES



## ADVANCE

We advance the universal value of kathak



## ARTISTS

We place artists at the center of our work



## RELATIONSHIPS

We center our work on relationships



## ELEVATE

We elevate the standard of the art



## COLLECTIVE

We ground our work in the practice of collective creativity



## INNOVATE

We innovate while remaining grounded in tradition



## TRANSFORM

We transform the field of kathak and beyond

# LEELA DANCE COLLECTIVE

In 2022, Leela Dance Collective returned to live performances post-pandemic, rekindling the magic of in-person connection through our touring production *SPEAK*. This groundbreaking work brought kathak and tap dance into a dynamic dialogue, showcasing the vitality of cross-cultural collaboration. At the same time, we celebrated the profound artistry of kathak, with captivating performances by our artistic directors. Our commitment to growth extended beyond the stage as we continued to invest in training and artistic development through dedicated residencies to foster the next generation of talent. These efforts marked a year of renewal and progress, keeping kathak meaningful and impactful for contemporary audiences.



## IMPACT

---

7

cities

---

9

performances

---

24

artists featured

---

9.5K

audience members reached

# NOTABLE PERFORMANCES

March  
31

The Voice Within, Solo Work by Seibi Lee, War Memorial Performing Arts Center, San Francisco, CA

April  
3

The Voice Within, Solo Work by Seibi Lee, UCLA Little Theater, Los Angeles, CA

April  
8

The Voice Within, Solo Work by Seibi Lee, MacEwan University, Edmonton, Canada

April  
14

SPEAK, Performance and Educational Residency, NC State Live, Raleigh, NC

April  
18

Songs of India, Traditional Kathak Solo by Sarah Morelli and Sitar Solo by Jayanta Banerjee, Lamont School of Music, Denver, CO

September  
4

Leela Dance Collective performs California Gharana, Levitt Pavilion, Denver, CO

November  
5

Storytellers and Nomads, Traditional Kathak Solo by Rukhmani Mehta, Studio A Dance, Los Angeles, CA

November  
6

Storytellers and Nomads, Traditional Kathak Solo by Rukhmani Mehta, Electric Lodge, Venice, CA

# SPEAK

After postponing a national *SPEAK* tour in 2020 due to the pandemic, Leela Dance Collective was thrilled to finally bring this production to North Carolina in 2022 with the partnership of NC State LIVE. Featuring dancers Rukhmani Mehta, Rachna Nivas, Michelle Dorrance, and Dormeshia, *SPEAK* not only showcased the dynamic interplay of kathak and tap on stage but also extended its reach into the community. Through residency activities, Leela connected with local groups via an artist lecture, a kathak and tap class at North Carolina State University, and an electrifying kathak and tap jam session at the Cary Arts Center with over 40 participants of all ages. These engaging dialogues deepened Leela's mission to inspire through performance and education, bringing diverse audiences into the creative conversation.



*"These women welcome the collision of their individual genres, using their art as a container for the larger conversation about connection. They reach across the perceived divide, engages, entertains and educates"*

*– Amy Seiwert,  
Amy Seiwert Imagery*





## SOLO WORKS

In 2022, Leela Dance Collective showcased the power of kathak as a medium for personal expression through *The Voice Within*, a solo work by Seibi Lee. This deeply introspective performance wove together elements of Seibi's cultural and personal identity, weaving together stories from her Japanese mother, Chinese father, and Guru Pt. Chitresh Das. Through the haunting legend of Yuki no Onna, the celestial journey of Houyi and Chang'e, and the intricate rhythms of Pancham Savari, Seibi pushed the boundaries of her own artistic expression and that of kathak dance. With each movement and rhythm, *The Voice Within* offered audiences a glimpse into an artist's journey, demonstrating kathak's range and capacity for personal discovery, artistic innovation, and dramatic storytelling.





## TRADITIONAL KATHAK SOLO

Leela Dance Collective also celebrated the traditional kathak solo in its purest form with *Storytellers and Nomads*, performed by Rukhmani Mehta. Rooted in kathak's origins as a nomadic storytelling tradition, this performance reimaged the ancient bards who once traveled from village to village, sharing mythology and history through dance. With evocative expression and rhythmic dexterity, Rukhmani brought to life the dramatic retelling of Sita's kidnapping from the *Ramayana*, infusing this timeless epic with depth and vibrancy. By presenting traditional solo works in intimate spaces such as small theaters, museums, and private homes, Leela Dance Collective continues to preserve and elevate kathak's most authentic and improvisatory form, ensuring its legacy endures for generations to come.



## IN THE STUDIO: CREATING NEW ARTISTIC WORKS

In June 2022, Leela Dance Collective embarked on a five-day artistic residency at the Newman Center for the Performing Arts in Denver, to begin work on *Encounters with Beauty*. This residency provided an essential space for experimentation, collaboration, and growth, laying the foundation for a new work exploring the intersection of Kathak dance and Hindustani classical music with Western contemporary chamber music. Residencies like this are critical for fostering the creative process, allowing artists the time and space to explore uncharted paths and build new concepts from the ground up.



## NURTURING THE NEXT GENERATION

In 2022, Leela reconnected with the classroom environment post-pandemic, deepening its commitment to world-class kathak training through immersive residencies and retreats. Students had the opportunity to train intensively in the dynamic style of Pt. Chitresh Das, guided by Seibi Lee, Rachna Nivas, Rukhmani Mehta, and Sarah Morelli. Leela's educational programs emphasize technical mastery, and deep study of music, movement, rhythm, and cultural history, nurturing artistic excellence. With pre-professional and professional training, as well as open classes for all ages, Leela continued to support the next generation of kathak artists across Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, and Denver.



# LEELA YOUTH DANCE COMPANY

Activating the Voices of Young Indian-American Women  
Artistic Direction: Rukhmani Mehta

## YOUNG VOICES, POWERFUL FOOTSTEPS

The Leela Youth Dance Company (LYDC), champions excellence in kathak dance while empowering young Indian-American women to become cultural ambassadors and leaders within their own communities and beyond. In 2022, the company boasted 24 members and performed for more than 5,000 audience members across the country. With rigorous training and mentorship, this program encourages teens to develop confidence, discover their unique voices, and share their stories through the language of dance.

## MEMBERS

Ananya Bhardwaj  
Anika Pisal  
Anirra Kutty  
Anushka Bettigiri  
Anvi Joshi  
Avni Madhu  
Divija Keswani  
Kaavya Venuturupalli

Maanibha Sengupta  
Maanvi Dhadoti  
Mahika Goswamy  
Malika Saoji  
Maya Bhatia  
Monishka Tanwani  
Namita Nair  
Poorvi Sangli

Praajnya Gowder  
Pragya Agarwal  
Prisha Patel  
Sharra Kutty  
Shriya Patel  
Tvisha Soni  
Varnika Bhat  
Vismaya Nair

## 2022 HIGHLIGHTS

April  
1

Oakland Asian Cultural Center's Asian Pacific New Year Celebration, Oakland, CA

April  
14

Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center's Generations of Power Showcase, San Francisco, CA

May  
7

Archana: A Time to Heal, Thousand Oaks, CA

June  
5

Medhini: The Power Within, Traditional Kathak Solo by Graduating LYDC Member Sharra Kutty, Fremont, CA

July  
9-10

41st Annual Lotus Festival, Los Angeles, CA

August  
6

Azaadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, Cerritos, CA

October  
9

Foundation for Excellence Gala, Palo Alto, CA

“

*"The experience was a testament to my own resilience, and a reminder that with hard work and determination I am capable of achieving my goals."*

- Sharra Kutty



## YOUTH SPOTLIGHTS

Graduating LYDC member Sharra Kutty took the stage for her first solo performance, *Medhini: The Power Within*, at the Smith Center at Ohlone College. This full-length solo marked the culmination of years of dedication and hard work, carrying on the legacy of kathak dance and inspiring a new generation of dancers to follow in her footsteps.



“

“...Everytime I get up on stage, the lights shining on me, the audience looking up at me, I take pride in knowing that I have the privilege of representing Indian culture here in America.” - Varnika Bhat

LYDC member Varnika Bhat won a prize from the Havyaka Association of Americas for her essay, *Ameri-Kathaka*. In her piece, Bhat reflects on her journey in kathak and the significance of representing her cultural heritage as a young South Asian woman in America. Her achievement reflects the Youth Company's mission to empower young South Asian women to share their voices, build confidence, and become leaders in their communities through dance.

# LEELA FOUNDATION

In 2022, Leela Foundation continued to fundraise for the endowment, emphasizing our community's commitment to the preservation and advancement of India's artistic heritage. The endowment is a crucial step toward securing the long-term sustainability of Leela's work. We are deeply grateful to our community of patrons and donors for their generosity and support in making this work possible.

## IMPACT

---

**378**

donors

---

**\$870k**

raised

---

**\$26k**

awarded to artists

---

**10**

artists supported







“

*“This is a community that is built with such dedicated artists, whose time is probably better spent doing what it is that they do best - dancing, practicing, performing, bringing the art form in front of new audiences, and passing on the tradition by teaching!”*

- Pallavi Phene

## PATRONAGE MATTERS

The Leela Foundation is crucial for securing the future of Indian classical music and dance. Indian arts organizations often lack the financial stability necessary to sustain long-term growth. Most operate on a hand-to-mouth basis, with limited patron investment, making it difficult to professionalize operations, support artists, or cultivate the next generation of performers. The Leela Foundation represents a shift towards lasting financial security—an investment from our community in the preservation and advancement of our artistic and cultural heritage. It is a commitment to ensuring that these rich traditions not only survive but thrive for generations to come. This is the power of patronage—it safeguards the past, sustains the present, and paves the way for a vibrant future.



## ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

With the support of the endowment, Leela Foundation was able to host renowned Hindustani classical musician Jay Gandhi as an artist-in-residence in 2022. Jay's presence enriched our community through a range of activities, including accompanying our artistic directors in their solo performances, leading educational workshops for students, and participating in creative residencies. These experiences fostered an exciting exchange of ideas, sparking joy among students and audiences alike.

## ARTIST SUPPORTED

In addition to hosting Jay Gandhi, Leela Foundation has been able to support a range of Indian classical artists since its inception in 2020.

Jayanta Banerjee  
Joanna De Souza  
Ravindra Deo  
Jay Gandhi

Gretchen Hayden  
Rajib Karmarkar  
Ben Kunin  
Satyaprakash Mishra

Debashish Sarkar  
Madhuri Devi Singh

# ENDOWMENT PERFORMANCE

## Portfolio Snapshot

(Jan. 1, 2022 - Dec. 31, 2022)

	Jan. 1, 2022	Dec. 31, 2022
Invested Funds	\$545,624.91	\$779,617.00
Cash	\$256,331.01	\$91,666.00

Endowment Payout\*

**\$16.2K**

Annualized Rate of Return

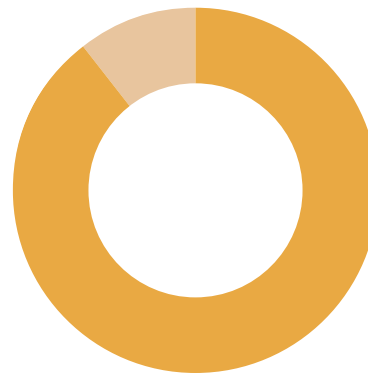
**-22.5%**

In 2022, global market turbulence led to a -22.5% rate of return for Leela. With COVID restrictions easing and inflation peaking, 2023 is likely to see a more positive market outlook.

## Asset Allocation

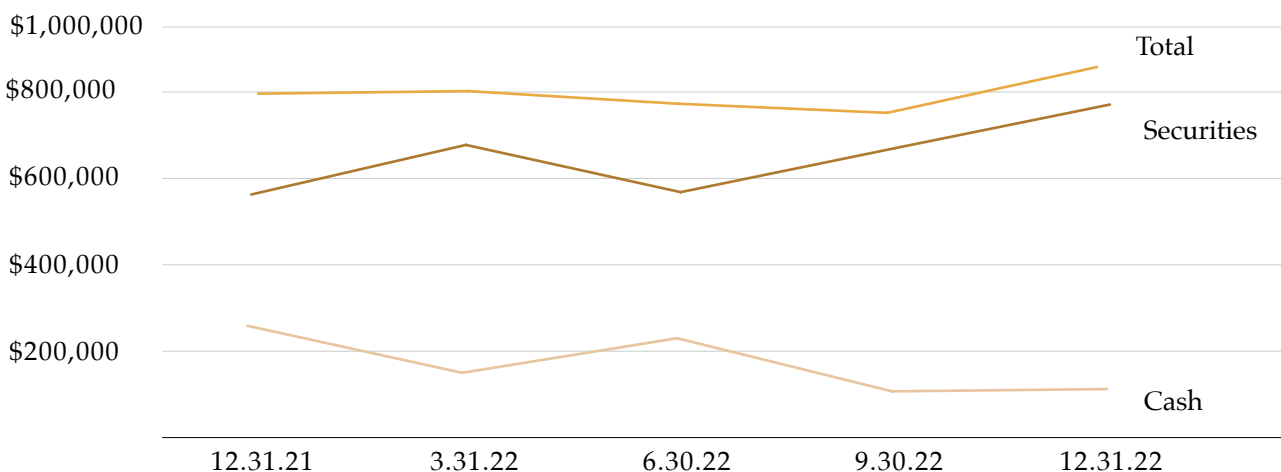
(as of December 31, 2022)

- Securities - 89.5%
- Cash - 10.5%



## Portfolio Performance

(Jan. 1, 2022 - Dec. 31, 2022)



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

# DONORS AND PATRONS

## Patron's Circle, Gold

Shruti Mahajan and Kashyap Deorah  
Tarsadia Foundation

## Founder's Circle (\$50,000+)

Anonymous  
Shaila and Dinesh Mehta  
Bina and Yogesh Nivas  
Dr. Irma and Dr. Ushakant Thakkar

## Leaders (\$25,000+)

Gita and Subramaniam  
Janakiraman  
Prakash Janakiraman and Rachna Nivas  
Ann and Leslie Petersen  
Leah and Gary Schoolnik  
Vinita and Amar Singh

## Advocates (\$10,000+)

Uma and Avadhesh Agarwal  
Anonymous  
Neelima and Milind Bhat  
Pratima and Navin Doshi  
Poonam and Prabhu Goel  
Minoo Gupta and Vikram Joshi  
Seema Kantak and Shreeraj Karulkar  
Meera and Jasvant Modi  
Preetha and Hari Nair  
Jyotsna and Sharad Patel  
Indira and Yalamanchilli Rao  
Seibi Lee and Joel Schoolnik  
Aruna and Dinker Shah  
Nalini and Uka Solanki

## Ambassadors (\$5,000+)

Shobhana Gandhi Chokhawala  
The DasGupta Family  
Gita and Mukesh Desai  
Bindu and Kumar Koneru  
Meena and Jitu Mehta  
Geeta Mehta  
Chandrika and Sumant Patel  
Narmada and Chunilal Patel

Sarah Morelli and Stephen Scaringe  
Robyn Friend and Neil Seigel  
Kinna and Nitin Shah  
Evanthia Spanos  
Kusum and Harkishan Vasa  
Rita Singhal and Swamy Venuturupalli

## Supporters (\$1000+)

Megha Agrawal  
Vikram Gore and Vidula Bapat  
Santanu and Susan Barua  
Lauri Bortz  
Robert and Shital Chatwani  
Anonymous  
Chhandam Youth Dance Company  
Neil and Minal Doshi  
Rajani Dinavahi and Abizer Gaslightwala  
Ronda Berkeley and Mel Green  
Salman Zaheer and Inji Z. Islam  
Meenakshi Kalpathy  
Anurag Wadehra and Reena Kapoor  
R. and Bala Krishnamurthy  
Deepesh Rai and Santrupti Margad  
Babu and Madhu Mehta  
Seema Mehta  
Mitali and Hitesh Mehta  
Shobha and Nitin Mehta  
Dayton and Naheed Misfeldt  
Shilpa Murthy  
Vasundhara and Pramod Nirmal  
Kanan and Sanjay Panchal  
Babita Panwala  
Mallika Parulekar  
Amit and Seema Patel  
Saroj and Gordhan Patel  
Jyoti and Jagdish Patel  
Pravin Patel  
Pallavi Phene  
Ruchi Mathur and Mark Pimentel  
Valarie Kaur and Sharat Raju  
Suresh and Marna Ramnath  
Monika Ramnath  
Shelly Mahendra and Lakshman Rao  
Manoj Rawat  
Pallavi Salvi

Chirag Shah  
Chandrika and Manu Shah  
Salimah and Shaheed Shamji  
Kunal and Hetal Sharma  
Ashley Gold and SeanJay Sharma  
Harpreet and Raminder Singh  
Khalil and Sonali Somani  
Usha and Sudesh Sood  
Chandana Srinivas  
Poonam Narkar and Ram Subramanian  
Keerthy Sunder  
Sonal and Govind Vagashia

## Friends (\$100+)

Akhtar Abbas  
Sanjay Almeida  
Gargi Amin  
Suresh Babu  
Doli Bambhania  
Shobha and Sudhir Banker  
Alex Le and Seema Barua  
Monica Batra  
Arvind Bhambri  
Bhanu  
Reena Bhatia  
Kumar Bhatia  
Swati and Vijay Bhatt  
Sunita and Mahesh Bhuta  
Jeffrey Bramble  
Niccolo Castania  
Shaila and Vijay Chauhan  
Madhu and Vijay Chheda  
Priyanka Chheda  
Hima Chintalapati  
Suma Chundururu  
Edward Clark  
Debra Cronin  
Gar Culbert and Anna Cross  
Samuel Culbert  
Oscar D  
Marzieh Daneshwar  
Nilima Dave  
Dhaval and Ami Dave  
Khushali Dave  
Preeti and Nalin Desai  
Heena and Indravadan Desai  
Nirmit Desai  
Mrinal Deshmukh  
Dinesh Dhawan  
Prashanthi Docca

## DONORS AND PATRONS

Reena Esmail  
Rashid Razavi and Mandy Fazeli  
Jyotsna Fotedar  
Aniruddha Gadgil  
Vinata Gangolli  
Oleg Gorelik  
Samta Gupta  
Deepa Gupta  
Nootan and Arvind Halani  
Puneet Hariharan  
Kusum Hegde  
Edythe Heus  
Suresh Iyer  
Vahinidevi Jaganath  
Achal Mehta and Bindiya Jain  
Divya Jain  
Neha Jain  
Yogita and Ishwar Jasuja  
Thomas and Carrie Jennings  
Candace Jennings  
Rehana Jiwani  
Bandita Joarder  
Piyush Jogani  
Neelesh Soman and Priyanka Joshi  
Sandip Panigrahi and Ritu Joshi  
Zini Joshi  
Priya Joshi  
Sangeeta Jukar  
Rajiv K Jain  
Manish Kalathil  
Kiran and Seema Kamat  
Anjana and Vikram Kamdar  
Kumud and Suren Kapadia  
Tarala and Pravin Kapadia  
Karin Karpin Kothari  
Sumedha Khanna  
Neha Kher  
Manpreet Komal  
Mona and Rupesh Kotecha  
Abhijit Kulkarni  
Preeti Kumar  
Sonali Lakhani  
Kala Lansberg  
Don and Michele Linn  
Kari Lopez  
Andy Luu  
Mallika Madakasira  
Satyajit Mahale  
Kanaiya and Bharti Mahendra  
Sabrina Mamun  
Manas

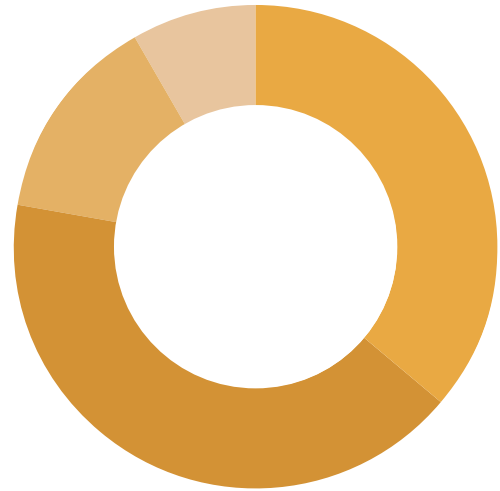
Roopa Maniar  
Vandana and Kaushik Master  
Gaurav and Prerna Mathur  
Hem and Maya Mathur  
Sathiyam Kutty and Lavina Mehta  
Geeta and Nishat Mehta  
Nila and Arvind Mehta  
Rama and Jayant Mehta  
Rukhmani Mehta  
Mahesh Mehta  
Meeta Mehta  
Purnima Mehta-Taylor  
Van Meyer  
Nicholas Miles  
Veena Mirpuri  
Surekha and Hasmukh Modi  
Timothy Moore  
Lata and Maruti More  
Janet Morton  
Arun Bharath and Purnima  
Mudnal  
Ahana Mukherjee  
Basabi Mukherjee  
Linda Murray  
Padmaja Murtinty  
Nicholas Myers  
Aishwarya Nagarajan  
S Nagle  
Sheila and Kishore Naik  
Vineet Nair  
Sameera Nandyala  
Kavitha Padmanabhan and  
Murugu Navaneetha  
Koji Oka  
Santhosh and Shuba Panicker  
Deepti Panuganti  
Choudhary Patel  
Deepa Patel  
Raj and Mitula Patel  
Sharda and Mahesh Patel  
Hetal Patel  
Sudhir Pendse  
Pritam Pewekar  
Praveena Pewekar  
Pranav Popat  
Purnima and Jyoti Prakash  
Priya Prasad  
Bijoy Purushothaman  
Radha Radkar  
Rajesh Raghunathan  
Anisa Rahim

Shyam Ramanathan  
Rekha and Ratan Rege  
Alka Sabherwal  
Manohar and Shoba Samat  
Amrutha Sampath  
Jairaj and Chhaya Samtani  
Mayuresh Saoji  
Vandana and Bhanu Sardesai  
Sonali and Shishir Saxena  
Cheryl Schuhmann  
Sujoy Sen  
Nirmal and Tara Sethia  
Seema Shah and Pankaj Shah  
Anang Chokshi and Tejal Shah  
Chokshi  
Seema Shah  
Surabhi and Ajeet Shah  
Aalap Shah  
Suraj Shantakumar  
Ashvin and Meenaxi Sheth  
Anis Sheth  
Shravida Shetty  
Ravi Mahalingam and Leepi  
Shimkhada  
Sandra Shimoda  
Aruna and Manohar Shinde  
Medha and Parikshit Shinde  
Shipra Shukla  
Vikram Sikand  
Bhavya Singh  
Varinder Singh  
Pratibha Singhal Kumar  
Anjana Sivakumar  
Salma and Shabir Somani  
Arathi Srinivas  
John Swieringa  
Cheryl Templeton  
Brinda Thomas  
Raghu and Durga Toppur  
H.P. Trivedi  
Umang and Vibha Vanjara  
Surekha Vashi  
Sakthivel Venkatesan  
Tamanna Verma  
Jean Von Berg  
Sarah Wong  
Rebecca Yeatman

# OPERATING FINANCIALS

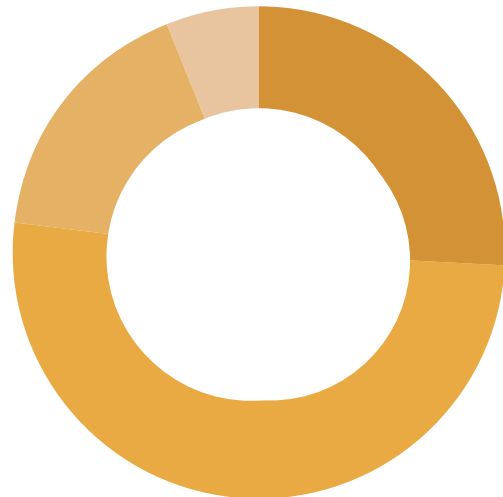
## Expense by Program Area

- Performances - 36%
- Academy - 41%
- Administration - 14%
- Fundraising - 8%



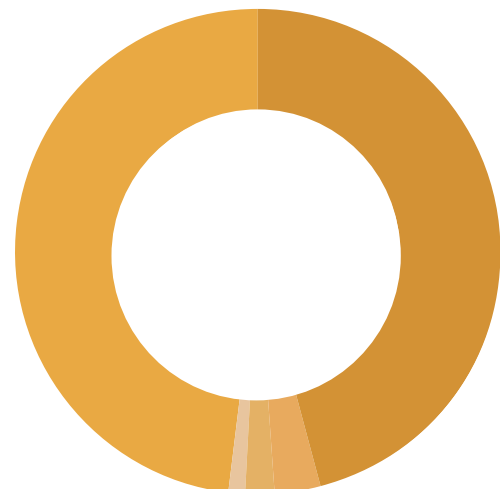
## Income by Program Area

- Performances - 26%
- Academy - 51%
- Administration - 17%
- Fundraising - 6%



## Income by Type

- Earned Income - 46%
- Endowment Distribution - 3%
- Individual Donations - 2%
- Corporate Support - 1%
- Foundation & Government Support - 48%



# OUR TEAM

## Board of Directors

Harkishan Vasa, Chair  
Ronda Berkeley, Secretary  
Dinesh Mehta, Treasurer  
Nitin Shah  
Swamy Venuturupalli  
Anna Cross  
Dinker Shah  
Sarah Morelli  
Bina Nivas  
Evanthia Spanos  
Minoo Gupta

## Artistic Direction

Seibi Lee  
Rachna Nivas  
Rukhmani Mehta

## Soloists & Faculty

Joanna Meinl  
Sarah Morelli

## Ensemble Dancers & Faculty

Sonali Toppur  
Ahana Mukherjee  
Carrie Jennings  
Ria DasGupta

## Apprentice Dancers & Faculty

Ayanna Kannan  
Sasha Salvi  
Seema Barua

## Faculty

Poonam Narkar  
Pallavi Salvi  
Shilpi Nikhil  
Katrina Yoshida  
Neha Tummala

## Resident Musicians

Jayanta Banerjee, Music  
Composition & Sitar  
Ben Kunin, Sarod  
Satyaprakash Mishra,  
Tabla & Pakhawaj

## Bookings and Company Management

Carrie Jennings

## Marketing

Shreya Mehta

## Administration

Lavina Mehta

## Investments

Saurin Munshaw

## Funders & Sponsors

The Annenberg Foundation  
Association of Performing Arts  
Professionals  
California Arts Council  
Culver City Performing Arts  
Dance Resource Center  
Esper A. Petersen Foundation  
Ford Theatre Foundation  
Grants for the Arts  
Los Angeles City Department  
of Cultural Affairs  
Los Angeles County  
Department of Arts & Culture  
MAP Fund  
MidAtlantic Arts Foundation  
National Endowment for the  
Arts  
New Music USA  
San Francisco Arts Commission  
Sarva Mangal Trust  
Tarsadia Foundation  
University of Denver  
Walter & Elise Haas Fund  
William & Flora Hewlett  
Foundation  
Zellerbach Family Foundation

## Corporations

Adobe Inc.  
Amgen  
Aparigrah Foundation

Atlassian  
Bank of America  
Blue Shield of California  
Blue Snap  
Boeing  
General Electric  
Google  
Intel  
Live Ramp  
Medtronic  
Monali Jain Foundation  
Palayam Foundation  
PDG Consulting  
Salesforce, Inc.  
Satya Tax Financial Reporting  
Inc.  
The Progressive Insurance  
Upaya  
US Bank Foundation  
VISA Inc  
Wells Fargo

## Photo Credits

Margo Moritz  
Catherine Heath  
Robert Orsa  
Rama Sivamani  
Redd Francisco

