

Artist in Residence Application Rina Mehta

1. Please describe your work and artistic background

I began my study of Kathak, Classical Dance of North India, under internationally renowned Kathak master and guru, Pandit Chitresh Das almost a decade ago. In 2004, I began teaching at the Chhandam School of Kathak (Chhandam) and became an active participant in the Chitresh Das Dance Company's arts education programs. Two years later, I joined the Chitresh Das Dance Company and have since performed in the company's major annual productions including the critically acclaimed Pancha-Jati, Shabd, and Sita Haran. I recently completed my second tour in India with the Chitresh Das Dance Company performing at Birla Sabaghar (Kolkata), Mumbai's prestigious National Centre for the Performing Arts, the Shaniwarwada Dance Festival in Pune, and at the Bangalore Club in Bangalore, India.

An emerging soloist, I was also featured in CDDC's Parampara Series (presented in the SF Bay Area in 2008) and in the Mehfil-e Series (presented by the Fountain Theatre in Los Angeles in 2009) in solo performances. Most recently, I received the 2009 Alliance for California Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Grant for intensive training in the traditional kathak solo. I am currently a senior teacher at Chhandam and have most recently spearheaded the school's expansion to Los Angeles.

2. Briefly describe the work you would like to develop during this residency. Include the type of performance, number of performers, music, and any technical requirements specific to the work (sound, lights, set, rig, etc).

Kathak is traditionally a solo art form. A full length solo performance can last between two to three hours and follows a prescribed format with clear sections. For example a performance will begin with a vandana or an invocation followed by a thaata. In thaata, a dancer must depict his/her ability to utilize subtle movements of the neck, eyebrows, and wrists and explore the rhythmic cycle. A gat-bhao or story is a central component of the traditional solo, where the dancer demonstrates his or her ability in abhinaya or mime/expression. A solo performance will typically end with a tarana – a piece that juxtaposes the speed and spontaneity in Kathak with grace and lyricism, culminating with an improvised sawal-jawab (question/answer) with the musicians.

The dancer's technique and storehouse of knowledge must be strong and deep enough to allow the dancer to improvise within the parameters of the tradition. Upaj (improvisation) is an integral component of the Kathak solo. Adding another layer of complexity, the dancer is also expected to recite compositions and syllables with clarity, verbalize the story which they will depict through expression, and sing prior to demonstrating the meaning of the song through movement. A high degree of comfort with and knowledge

of the ongoing rhythmic structure, derived only through years of practice and training, are a prerequisite for the dancer. And of course, a tremendous amount of stamina is required to withhold the duration of the performance.

The tradition of the Kathak solo is in rapid decline. It is being rapidly replaced by Western-style choreography. Practitioners of the traditional solo are especially rare among the new generation of Kathakas in part due to the intense nature of training and discipline the solo requires. Preparation for this type of performance requires in depth and frequent study under the direct guidance of a master to ensure that the trainee receives proper physical and mental conditioning.

After almost a decade of intensive study with Pt. Das and four years as a CDDC member, I have begun to develop as a soloist. Most recently I was featured in solo performances in CDDC's Parampara Series (presented in the SF Bay Area in 2008) and in the Mehfil-e Series (presented by the Fountain Theatre in Los Angeles). The natural next step for me is to develop my full-length traditional solo performance. The residency at OACC will provide me with the time and resources necessary to develop this performance and simultaneously help to internalize and personalize this ancient tradition of India. The solo performance that this residency will culminate in will be a milestone in my training. The performance will also serve the field of Kathak and the Indian classical arts as a whole by educating new audience members on the traditional Kathak solo and deepening my skills and ability to pass this tradition onto future generations.

In addition to developing the Kathak solo, I will take the opportunity to work with Prasant Radhakrishnan, a fellow resident at OACC to develop a short collaborative piece that will be featured as a part of the traditional solo performance. The development of the collaborative piece will simultaneously necessitate that I delve deep into my own traditional art form and stretch my knowledge and understanding of the universal elements of dance & music.

3. In a few sentences, please tell us why you would like to participate in the residency and how your participation will further your artistic growth.

See above.

4. Please provide a brief description of your past attendance figures as well as strategies for reaching your desired audience.

The Chitresh Das Dance Company & the Chhandam School of Kathak have had tremendous success in reaching new audiences locally in the Bay Area, nation-wide and internationally. CDDC/Chhandam's annual school shows and home season performances reach between 1500-2000 audience members respectively and CDDC/Chhandam's year-round performances and programs reach between 50-300 audience members respectively.

CDDC/Chhandam employs a range of outreach and marketing strategies from in-house outreach to the Chhandam School of Kathak (400 students), advertising in ethnic press, outreach to mainstream press & fellow community organizations, and electronic and viral marketing.

5. Please give us some context for your work sample. Why are you interested in you creating this piece? Is it similar to or different from the work you're proposing?

The work sample submitted includes excerpts of performances with the Chitresh Das Dance Company & excerpts of solo performances. The performance that will conclude this residency will be a solo performance in some ways is similar to the excerpts of the solo performances in the work sample.

