

WORLD PREMIER of Nan Melville's Documentary Film

Nrityagram: For the Love of Dance

Thank you for your interest in the documentary *Nrityagram: For the Love of Dance*. The world premier screening will kick off the Dance Films Association's **38th Dance on Camera Festival** on January 25th, 2010 at the Mark Morris Dance Center in Brooklyn, NY.

Included in this kit:

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About the film maker Nan Melville

Images

DVD

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NRITYAGRAM: FOR THE LOVE OF DANCE

Documentary World Premier at DFA'S Dance on Camera

New York City, New York, January 15, 2010 – *Nrityagram: For the Love of Dance* will open on the first night of the Dance Films Association's **38th Dance on Camera Festival, 2010**. <http://www.dancefilmsassn.org/DanceOnSpecial2010.html>. The screening will be held at the Mark Morris Dance Center in Brooklyn, NY.

Nrityagram, literally a "dance village", was built in 1988 by Protima Bedi, near Bangalore in India. When dance photographer Nan Melville first photographed the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble 14 years ago, she fell in love with the talented dancers. Since then she has become a great friend of Nrityagram, photographing many of their New York performances. After visiting the beautiful school she decided to make a documentary film about Nrityagram. She has traveled to India three times to film life in the dance village, and research archival materials.

Her mission is to capture for posterity the story of the dance village and the dancers, and how they promote and develop the Odissi dance form. Odissi is now in a phase of expansion to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Nrityagram stands poised at the cutting edge of this growth and is prepared to become a significant player in the development that lies ahead.

Said Ms. Melville "Dance institutions in India are still very reliant on individuals for financial support. The documentary would be used to promote awareness of Nrityagram, and as a tool to assist Lynne Fernandez, Executive Director, with fundraising for the school." She has personally underwritten the documentary so far – but will be unable to finish it without additional funding. It is her hope that people will be inspired by the Nrityagram story and will offer monetary support.

Anyone interested in learning more about the Documentary Project or in donating in support of the film can go to www.nanmelville.com/nrityagram.

Nan Melville is an accomplished photographer and videographer. She has been based in New York City, USA since she left South Africa in 1986. There are very few internationally known dance photographers, but Nan is one of them. Her video experience led to an interest in documentary film making. She has produced a documentary on the Saeko Ichinohe Dance Company, and is now working on the Nrityagram documentary.

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Story of the documentary

Nan first met the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble when they were far from their home base near Bangalore in India. She was assigned by the New York Times to photograph their debut performance in New York in 1996. The rave review that followed launched them on the cultural scene.

She was so enchanted by the dancers, and the concept of Nrityagram - a village devoted to dance -, that she jumped at Protima Bedi's invitation to visit the school in India – and subsequently decided to make a documentary film about the Nrityagram Dance Village and Ensemble. She has become a great friend of the members of Nrityagram, photographing many of their New York performances, and putting up dancers on her sofa when hotels overflowed. She has traveled to India three times to film life in the dance village, and research archival materials.

Her mission is to capture for posterity the story of the dance village and the dancers, and how they promote and develop the Odissi dance form. Nan is passionate about this project and has invested well over \$10,000 of her own money to date. She is immensely grateful to the sponsors who have provided funding, and is hopeful that with further monetary support she will be able to expand the promo being screened tonight into a full length documentary. Dance institutions in India are still very reliant on individuals for financial and cultural support. The documentary would be used to promote awareness of Nrityagram, and as a tool to assist Lynne Fernandez, Executive Director, with fundraising for the school.

The Odissi dance form is now in a phase of expansion to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Nrityagram stands poised at the cutting edge of this growth and is prepared to become a significant player in the development that lies ahead. It is the hope of the makers of this film that the Nrityagram Dance Village and Ensemble will have the support needed to endure for a very long time.

Background on Nrityagram and Odissi dance

Odissi Classical Indian Dance Form

The Odissi dance form from the state of Orissa is said to have originated approximately 2000 years ago. Odissi was originally a temple dance meant to entertain the deity. The movements in Odissi mimic the serpentine poses and minutely detailed gestures of Hindu gods in ancient temple sculptures. During the British Colonial period in India, colonial administrators discouraged all forms of Indian dance because many in the Victorian Age saw dance as immoral. An act banning female dancers from performing in temples was passed and dance was banished from social life. The patronage of the princes for dance waned and Indian classical dance was not appreciated or taught for decades. Odissi and other Indian dance forms went into decline, nearly disappearing.

In the 1930s, the Indian nationalist movement worked to gain independence from British rule and to revive all forms of Indian art. By the time India achieved independence in 1947, dance was firmly established as an art form worthy of practice. A number of individuals were instrumental in lifting Indian classical dance out of obscurity, and whose influences are still felt to this day. One such individual was Protima Gauri Bedi, a socialite who devoted herself to learning the Odissi dance form after seeing the guru Kelucharan Mohapatra dance in 1975.

The Dance School

In 1988, with the help of many supporters, Protima built Nrityagram – a dance village – in Hessaraghatta, near Bangalore in India. The dance village is home to an all-female dance ensemble of the same name. Company members live together and study their art with master gurus in the *gurukul* (house of the guru, or teacher).

Since her death in 1998, her vision has not only been continued, but has been expanded upon. Surupa Sen and Bijayini Satpathy work to expand the language of the Odissi dance form based on their study of the Natyashastra - the root of all dance in India, as well as through the incorporation of choreographic techniques adapted from world dance. Surupa has pushed the boundaries of Indian dance and gained international recognition for the dynamic imagery of her choreography. She is constantly in search of ways to create new imagery and movement, and won an award for her contribution to Odissi choreography.

Odissi is a demanding art. Training for the dancers takes place eight hours a day, six days a week. In this holistic community, in addition to intensive dance training, the dancers learn literature, mythology, poetry, Sanskrit, music, aesthetics, history of dance, philosophy, spiritual thought, and dance theory. They also participate in workshops in martial arts, yoga, mime, meditation, sculpture, etc. The end result is a dance company whose synchronicity and skill in Odissi is unparalleled, and whose dancing reveals none of this effort.

Residential dance training programs are offered free to select students for a period of three to six years, so that they can concentrate fully on their studies without the distraction of financial concerns. In order to revitalize and preserve the Odissi tradition, the most promising students are trained to be Odissi teachers.

Nrityagram has contributed notably to the propagation of Odissi in India. Vasanta Habba, a cultural event organized by Nrityagram, is known as the “classical Woodstock of India”.

More than just reviving Odissi in India, Protima’s efforts promoted the study and popularity of Indian dance abroad. Dancers from Nrityagram have carried the message of Indian dance to the United States, Canada, UK, Denmark, Dubai, Holland, Portugal and Japan. Wherever they perform they are greeted with enthusiasm and praise.

About the film maker Nan Melville

Nan Melville is an accomplished photographer and videographer. She has been based in New York City, USA since she left South Africa in 1986. There are very few internationally known dance photographers, but Nan is one of them.

She has been assigned to photograph international figures and performers, and often travels abroad on photo assignments. Her photographs are syndicated world-wide and have appeared in many overseas publications - both magazines and newspapers.

As more of her clients began requesting video work, Nan expanded her expertise into videography. She is much in demand to film performances as she has the unique ability to capture an event in both still and video simultaneously.

Her video experience led to an interest in documentary film making. She has produced a documentary on the Saeko Ichinohe Dance Company, and is now working on the Nrityagram documentary.

You can see Nan’s work at www.nanmelville.com.

Images Included in this Kit



Logo, Nrityagram:
For the Love of Dance
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Nan Melville
626x788px

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Logo, Nan Melville
Photography & Video
2195x1000px



Polaroid Image Transfer of
Bijayini Satpathy
1389x2100px

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Statue in Nrityagram Village
1406x2100px

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Nrityagram Dance Ensemble
2100x1398px

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