

THE MODERN NATYA COMPANY PRESENTS

# poets in conversation

**Virtual Premiere July 2025**

Filmed on June 11, 2025

Fremont Central Park

**presented by**

Performing Voices of Bhakti Fellowship  
(by Interfaith America)

**co-presented by**

Freemont Cultural Arts Council & Asian-Pacific Islander Cultural Center

## MODERN NATYA DANCE CLASS

Join **Swetha Prabakaran** for a weekly drop in class — all levels welcome

weekly classes @ The Sanctuary  
447 Minna Street, SF  
[pushdance.org](http://pushdance.org)



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MODERN NATYA  
COMPANY

## PUSHLAB PERFORMANCE WORKSHOP

*PUSHlab* is a 6-week workshop series culminating in a performance at *PUSHfest*

- ★ for teens and adults
- ★ all-levels welcome
- ★ Learn brand new Modern Natya choreography and perform with Modern Natya Director Swetha!



Auditions: Aug | Rehearsals: Aug - Sept  
San Francisco | Performances: Oct 4 & 5  
[WWW.SWETHA.PRODUCTIONS/PUSHLAB](http://WWW.SWETHA.PRODUCTIONS/PUSHLAB)

## PLOT SYNOPSIS

A poet appears in Cassandra's dream and teaches her how to use the arts to connect with the community's empathy in order to motivate them to work together and eradicate suffering.

LANGUAGE: TAMIL | RAGAM: DESH | TALAM: ADI

### SHOW TRANSCRIPT

Thubam nergayil yazhyeduthu  
nee,  
Inbam erkka mattaya- emakku,

Inbam cherkka mattaya-Nal,  
Anbila nenjil thamizhai padi nee,

Allal theerkka mattaya -kanne,  
Allal theerkka mattaya

Vanbum elimayum soozhum  
naatile ,  
Vazhvil unarvu cherkka -Yem  
Vazhvil unarvu cherkka -nee,

Andrai natramizh kuttin  
murayinai,  
Aadi kattu  
Aadi kattu

### ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

*When sorrow strikes , won't you take  
the harp,  
And add sweetness to my life-Won't  
you,*

*Add sweetness to me –Won't you,  
Remove the pain in my heart bereft  
of love,*

*By singing in Tamil, Darling,  
Won't you remove the pain.*

*In this world surrounded by  
meddling and simplicity,  
For adding feelings to this life –for,  
Adding feelings to my life –won't  
you,*

*Dance the steps of ancient Tamil  
dance-darling  
Dance and show us  
Dance and show us*

## ARTIST STATEMENT

In “Kasta Bhaisakthyeun Haami”, Jowahar Roka beautifully reframes exclusion as a pain that impacts everyone—the majority \*and\* the marginalized.

Social justice movements only succeed when there is empathy, understanding, and unity across groups. But how does one first realize that poetry is the right tool to cultivate that true shared understanding? That it has the power to break past the wall of superficial, intellectual sympathy?

Quite literally starting in one of my own dreams, I began envisioning a meeting of the minds. Two social justice oriented poets, two contemporaries on either side of a border, coming together to explain how the arts are the right tool to evoke the universal emotions that connect us all. Rooted in that emotional connection, we can then bridge different intellectual perspectives to build soulful alliances and cultivate meaningful solidarity.

And thus, our poets reveal to our young artist that the arts do not merely alleviate one's immediate suffering. That same art is what will successfully ignite the movements that extinguish long-term suffering.

**SOWMYA JUJJURI — DANCE CAPTAIN**

began her Kuchipudi training under the guidance of Smt. Priyadarshini Madhunapantula, later continuing her studies with Smt. Prashanti Harathi. She completed her foundational dance education with Anuradha Ganesh, the artistic director of Nartana Kuchipudi in Portland.



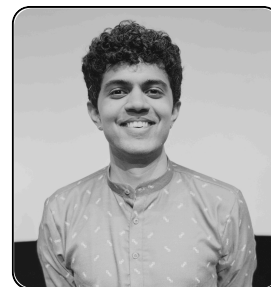
**SRINIDHI SRINIVASAN — DANCER**

is a Bharatanatyam dancer and choreographer. She has been studying the art form for over twenty years under multiple gurus, including Guru Subhashini Santhanam and currently under Guru Anwesha Das in Seattle.



**AKSHAYA ARUNKUMAR — VOCALIST**

is an accomplished carnatic vocalist, graded by All India Radio, Government of India. She trained under Padma Shri Smt. Lalitha Chandran of the Bombay Sisters and Smt. Sankari Krishnan. Akshaya actively performs as a vocalist for classical dance productions. Akshaya is the show music captain.



**ADITYA ISWARA — MRIDANGAM, KANJIRA**

is trained in Mridangam, Carnatic Music, and Bharatanatyam with an abundant sense of rhythm. He is a disciple of Sri Poovalur Srijji, for Mridangam and Kanjira, Sri Vittal Ramamurthy for Carnatic Violin, and a disciple of his mother, Smt. Vani Iswara for Bharatanatyam.

**ANIRUDH RAMAKRISHNAN — MRIDANGAM**

has been learning Mridangam from Shri. Gopi Lakshminarayanan for the past 8 years. He also learns carnatic vocal from Smt. Kasthuri Shivakumar of IAIM. In his free time, Anirudh likes to read books, play chess, bike, and participate in cross country.



**KEERTHI KRISHNAN — VIOLINIST**

is a violinist from the San Francisco Bay Area. He started his tutelage with Smt. Anuradha Sridhar and now continues under Smt. Sandhya Srinath. He is an avid accompanist and performer and has performed across multiple organizations in the Bay Area.





## about the directors

### Swetha Prabakaran

*choreographer*



As Artistic Director of The Modern Natya Company™, Swetha explores themes around third-culture/diasporic identity, femininity, and accessibility. She is a 2025 Voices of Bhakti Fellow (by Interfaith America), Center for Cultural Innovation Awardee, and AXIS Choreo Lab Fellow (by Mellon Foundation)

In June 2025, Swetha made history as the first South Asian choreographer in AXIS Dance Company's 38-year history. Other recent works have been presented at Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA), Dance Mission Theater, and many more.

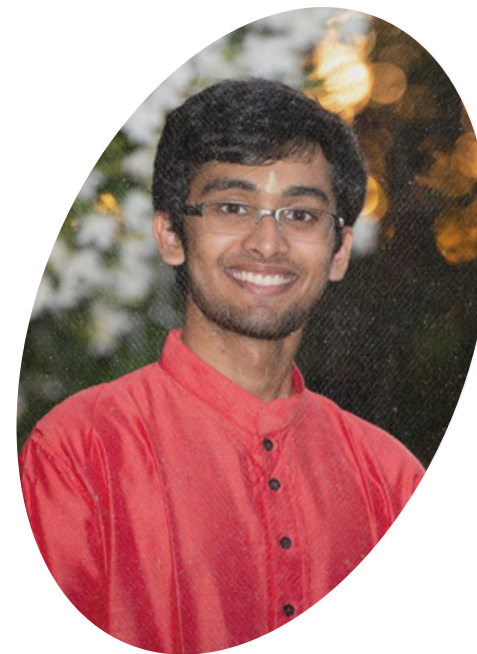
Swetha performed her Bharatanatyam arangetram in Tirunelveli, India under Smt. Subhashini Krishnakumar (a disciple of Smt. Kalaimamani K.J. Sarasa) in 2015. She completed undergraduate studies at UC Berkeley's Dance, & Performance Studies program before training in Disabled Dance pedagogy with AXIS and Dark Room Ballet.

## ABOUT THE DIRECTORS

POETS IN CONVERSATION

### Shrikrishna Shivakumar

*composer*



Shrikrishna Shivakumar started learning vocal music from his parents Smt. Kasthuri Shivakumar and Shri Shivakumar Bhat at age 4; he now receives advanced training from Sangeetha Kalanidhi Shri Neyveli R. Santhanagopalan. Shrikrishna has won many competition prizes including at Cleveland Thyagaraja Utsavam and the People's Choice award in Carnatic Music Idol USA.

Shrikrishna and Shrikanth—the Shri Brothers—have performed many concerts around the US and in India, including organizations like Dhvani, Brindavani, CCC, Lotus, iCarnatic, and SR Fine Arts.

Shrikrishna additionally learns mridangam from Vidwan Shri Vinod Seetharaman and had his arangetram accompanying Neyveli sir. Shrikrishna teaches young, aspiring students at the International Academy of Indian Music in the Bay Area.



**POETS IN CONVERSATION** was developed by The Modern Natya Company (a project of Swetha Prabakaran Productions) with the support of the Voices of Bhakti Fellowship by Interfaith America.

The performance filming was co-presented by the Fremont Cultural Arts Council & Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center (APICC) as part of the 28th annual United States of Asian America Festival, which is made possible thanks to the National Endowment for the Arts, San Francisco Arts Commission Grants for the Arts, Fleishhacker Foundation, and other generous supporters.

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**Directed and Produced by**

Swetha Prabakaran

**Music by** Shrikrishna Shivakumar

**Choreography** Swetha

Prabakaran with ensemble

**Dancers** Sowmya Jujjuri, Srinidhi

Srinivasan, Swetha Prabakaran

**Musicians** Akshaya Arunkumar

(Vocals), Aditya Iswara

(Mridangam), Keerthi Krishnan

(Violin)

**Featuring “Thunbam Nergayil”**

by Bharathidasan (1891-1964),

**Stage Manager** Kellyann Ye

**Videographer** Daniel Raphael

Ancheta

**Visual Designer** Anna Rizvi

**ASL Team** Christine Ganacial

(Deaf Interpreter), Harshada

Kadu & Rob Merin (Hearing

Interpreters), Nicole Carlos-

Watson (ASL Coordinator)

**Modern Natya Company Team**

Mr. Parth Nobel, Ms. Iris

McLeary, Ms. Harini Rajan

**Collaborators & Partners** Mr.

Ting Alvarez-Maquinta, Mx.

Janesta Edmonds & (MPWRD

Collective Team, Mr. Rohit

Kumar (Rohu Films)

**PUSH Dance Company** Ms.

Avery Rissling, Ms. Ashley

Gayle, Ms. Quinn Martinez

## Special Thanks

**Gurus and Mentors** Smt.

Subhashini Krishnakumar,

Smt. Kasthuri Shivakumar,

Shri. Shiv Kumar Bhat

**Voices of Bhakti Fellowship**

**by Interfaith America** Dr.

Preethi Ramprasad, Mr.

Nikhil Mandalaparth

**APICC Team** Melanie Elvena,

Piper Cruze Prolago, Jay Kim,

TJ Basa, Vinay Patel

**Fremont Cultural Arts**

**Council** Ms. Arathi Satish,

Ms. Knuti Van Hoven, Smt.

Anuradha Suresh, Ms. Julie

Gilson and the Fremont

Creates team

**Natya Rehab & Wellness** Dr.

Surya Ravi, DPT, Dr. Divya

Raghavan, DPT

**Community Partners**

International Academy of

Indian Music (IAIM),

Sri Paduka Academy,

Bay Area Indian Nurses

Association & Stanford

Medicine, Fremont Parks and

Recreation, Bay Area Asian

Deaf Association (BAADA)

## About the Company

*grounded in tradition.*

*groundbreaking in*

*methodology.*

**The Modern Natya**

**Company™** blends Indian

classical arts with Western

contemporary techniques to

explore social issues

important to the South Asian

diaspora. MNC uses film and

live performance to challenge

audiences to see

Bharatanatyam as a versatile

movement foundation that

isn't limited to “classical”

traditional performances;

rather, MNC's trailblazing

projects show how

Bharatanatyam can—and

should—be used as a

storytelling tool across

diverse media.

Learn more about The

Company on Instagram

[@modernnatya](#) or

[www.swetha.productions/modernnatya](http://www.swetha.productions/modernnatya)