

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

7th January 2014

Akademi announces CHOREOGATA bursary recipients premiering at Southbank Centre in February

Akademi are pleased to announce Urja Desai Thakore and Divya Kasturi as the successful recipients of a £4,000 prize commission; the *Choreogata Artist Development Programme*. Choreogata is a biennial open application choreographic competition for dance makers to create and perform original contemporary dance work. These two successful Choreographers will premier their work at the Southbank Centre, Purcell Room on the 27 & 28th February 2014.

Akademi, the UK's leading South Asian dance organisation, working in partnership with Kala Sangam and Gem Arts will showcase two new choreographic works by upcoming Indian dance choreographers. Both choreographers utilise their training in classical South Asian dance to bring new ideas to the presentation of the dance form. Following on from a successful twenty year collaboration between Akademi and the Southbank Centre, Mira Kaushik, Director of Akademi said: "I am delighted that Urja and Divya will be creating new work as part of Choreogata. This project reinforces Akademi's main goals of developing the work of emerging artists and choreographers. 'Gata' in Hindi means 'the path' and we are excited to support these artists at the start of their choreographic journey.

Divya Kasturi Choreogata prize recipient commented: **" I am thoroughly overwhelmed to be part of Choreogata . Thanks to the entire team and the partners involved. Akademi has been supporting my work since 2006 and it's always a joyous experience working with its efficient team. I also look forward to igniting relationships with the partners involved that would help me and work in the future. I consider this as a huge step forwards, endeavouring to push boundaries from my previous work and experiences.**

Urja Desai Thakore thanked Akademi for the opportunity to and expressed excitement to "present my work in a prestigious venue. I hope that this presentation at the Southbank Centre will enhance my profile as a choreographer and enable me to develop a full tour of my new dance piece, *Detox*.

Applications for Choreogata were considered by a joint panel of Akademi partners including Eddie Nixon, The Place, Wendy Nixon Southbank Centre and Emma Gladstone, Dance Umbrella reflecting the contemporary nature of the Choreogata project. Akademi aims to recognize and give long-term support to a future generation of artists creating the next generations of choreographers like Akram Khan and Shobana Jeyasingh.

The Choreogata programme will premiere at the Southbank Centre, Purcell Room on the 27 & 28th February 2014 along with First Light, a previous production choreographed by Seeta Patel.

Notes for Editors:

1. Founded in 1979, Akademi is a cutting-edge, progressive arts organisation with an international outlook, based in the heart of London. It works to enhance the practice, understanding and appreciation of South Asian dance across the UK within a contemporary

artistic, social and educational context. Its work is modern and holistic, informed by the traditions and rich heritage of South Asian dance and driven by the needs of South Asian dance artists in the UK.

2. A pioneer in its field, Akademi is known for its achievements in training, education and community work. It strives towards relevance, accessibility and excellence in all its initiatives, realising these aspirations through an energetic and varied programme of innovative projects that nurture the individual artist and encourage the diversity of South Asian dance forms.
3. Akademi (whose Director Mira Kaushik received an OBE for services to dance) currently serves an audience of millions through its dance and education programs and has recently celebrated its 30th Anniversary.
4. Southbank Centre is the UK's largest arts centre, occupying a 21-acre site that sits in the midst of London's most vibrant cultural quarter on the South Bank of the Thames. The site has an extraordinary creative and architectural history stretching back to the 1951 Festival of Britain. Southbank Centre is home to the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and The Hayward as well as The Saison Poetry Library and the Arts Council Collection. The Royal Festival Hall reopened in June 2007 following the major refurbishment of the Hall and redevelopment of the surrounding area and facilities.
5. Divya Kasturi is a multifaceted dance practitioner with more than two decades of performing experience. Trained in the two styles of *Bharatanatyam* and *Kathak*, Divya is also a *Carnatic* vocalist. She has provided vocals for various albums and films in India and she has worked with Sir Paul McCartney and Nitin Sawhney in the UK. A qualified electronics engineer, living in Stevenage, Divya completed her MA in South Asian Dance Studies at the Roehampton University with setting the record to have created the first virtual masters dissertation in the field of South Asian Dance practice-as-research. Divya has also had short stints of training in Western contemporary Dance technique at The Place. Divya has toured with Complicite's award winning theatre production, *A Disappearing Number*, in which she dances, sings and acts. Having completed a qualification in live events and productions, in association with Akademi, Divya aims to integrate her interdisciplinary skills into developing live performances. She was also chosen as an Escalator Dance Artist- an England Arts council initiative with Watford Palace Theatre as her main partner venue, while Dance East and Dance Digital are her supporting venues.
6. **Urja Desai Thakore** was born in Ahmedabad, India and studied for over 20 years with India's internationally acclaimed Kathak guru and choreographer Kumudini Lakhia, from whom she has gained an extensive traditional vocabulary with which to explore the narratives of modern society Urja received her bachelors' degree in Kathak dance from Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Maha Vidyalaya. Now living in Milton Keynes, her energetic choreographic style is highly regarded by both traditionalists and modernists alike. In 2007 she co-choreographed **Bells** for Akademi at the Trafalgar Square Festival, a large outdoor dance spectacle that brought together international talents from Delhi, London and Belgium. Urja has been teaching extensively for 8 years and has travelled all over the country leading workshops in Kathak to people young and old. Because of her wealth of experience, Urja is frequently invited to judge youth festivals and dance events. She received her Masters degree in South Asian Dance with

Choreography as major form Roehampton University in 2012. Advocating dance she is the Chair of the dance panel at Milton Keynes Arts Gateway and is a Committee member of ISTD.

7. **Gem Arts**

Gem Arts is a dynamic arts development organisation in the North East of England. We programme new and exciting culturally diverse arts by producing high quality concerts, live events, festivals, workshops and commissions with regional, national and international artists across all art forms.

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www.gemarts.org

8. **Kala Sangam**

Kala Sangam is a leading South Asian and collaborative arts organisation based at the Kala Sangam Arts Centre in Bradford. Kala Sangam exists to bring people together through the arts. Kala Sangam aims to increase understanding and appreciation of the cultural traditions of South Asia, whilst improving awareness of racial, cultural and social issues. Established in 1993, the company works with local and international artists to create and deliver collaborative work through performances, classes, workshops, and training courses. While most of the company's work takes place in West Yorkshire, its touring programme and outreach activities extend across the UK and internationally.

Kala Sangam Arts Centre, St Peter's House, 1 Forster Square, Bradford, BD1 4TY
(01274) 303340
Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/Kala.Sangam>
Twitter: http://www.twitter.com/Kala_Sangam

<http://www.kalasangam.org/>

9. Choreogata will be performed at 7.45pm on Thursday 27 February 2013 and Friday, 28th February at the Purcell Room, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Southbank Centre, ticket prices £13.00
Box office: 0844 847 9910

For further information please contact Nina Edwards at Akademi on 020 7691 3210 or nina@akademi.co.uk,

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