

PRESS RELEASE: 30th September 2005

Negotiating Natyam

**A one-day Symposium exploring the practice, performance and perception of
Bharata Natyam**

Sunday 9th October 2005 at Linbury, Royal Opera House from 10am – 7pm

Negotiating Natyam is a one-day symposium that will bring together over 40 presenters including established dancers, choreographers, teachers, academics and writers. The day will include performance, presentation and discussion to explore the development of Bharata Natyam, well-known Indian dance form seen the world over, from the temple town of Tanjore to the suburbs of Manchester, in traditional as well as contemporary manifestations.

Bharata Natyam, has never been more popular. Its popularity has given it an iconic status, and for many people it represents the essence of what constitutes Indian culture and heritage.

In Britain today, as thousands of students continue to enrol in classes, and traditional and new approaches jostle for performance space, its popularity also means Bharata Natyam increasingly faces urgent, exciting and complex questions. How shall it maintain integrity without becoming a museum relic? How shall it be transmitted to the next generation so far removed from the cultural context in which it developed? How shall it be altered and used to be relevant, immediate and accessible to a wider dance world?

The Symposium will debate a range of concerns: political, technical and aesthetic to consider what may be distinctive and intrinsic, yet also adaptable about Bharata Natyam. The performances will range from traditional repertoire to contemporary interpretations by soloists and ensembles.

The Keynote address will be given by **Leela Samson**, one of India's foremost Bharata Natyam dancers, choreographers and teachers. Other contributors include: **Uma Chandratheva**, **Shobana Jeyasingh** (choreographer); **Chitra Sundaram** (dancer and editor of PULSE); **Sanjoy Roy** (dance writer); **Mavin Khoo** (dancer and choreographer) and **Piali Ray** (Director, SAMPAD).

- Ends -

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Notes to Editors:

1. Listings Information:

Akademi presents Negotiating Natyam

Sunday 9th October 2005 10am – 7pm

Linbury at the Royal Opera House, Floral Street, London WC2E 9DD

Tickets: £40 (Organisations); £30 (Individuals) & £20 (Concessions)

Box Office: 020 7304 4000 www.theroyaloperahouse.org

2. Negotiating Natyam

Bharata Natyam, as an Indian form already has a fractured history. Originally a temple and court form, it has a traceable history as 'Sadir Attam' of about 300 years; codified dance in India has a story going back hundreds of years leading to every form claiming to be 'thousands of years'. Banned during British rule in India, it was resurrected in the 1930s.

In the course of a century, Bharata Natyam has undergone two major upheavals, which have affected its technique, its intent and perception as a form. The first of these was its re-naming – to dissociate it from the courtesans and 'devdasis' who performed it – and the simultaneous transfer from its traditional, predominantly temple and court context to performance on stage.

The second significant development has been its hugely successful export –the increasing practice and performance of Bharata Natyam in contexts far removed from the language, culture and the earth of its origins – and the resulting impact of the globalised world upon its practice.

Conventionally focussed for content on the exploration of divine and erotic love, Bharata Natyam is also the form that has possibly been the most explored as a vehicle for other themes and cast in contemporary modes in Britain.

While some dance teachers and performers are concerned with transmission of culture and heritage far removed from India, other dance makers are concerned with the potential of Bharata Natyam as a simple dance language and vocabulary, available for ensemble work and recasting to speak to contemporary, wider audiences.

Keynote speaker Leela Samson has been recently appointed Director of Kalakshetra Foundation, in Chennai, a prestigious dance and music conservatoire and the pre-eminent academy for Bharata Natyam.

· Information about the company

Akademi is a cutting edge progressive South Asian dance organisation which has been promoting the practice, understanding and appreciation of South Asian dance across the UK for over 25 years. It works through facilitating development, producing performance, and creating education and community work. The term South Asian Dance is used to

describe the many dance forms and styles originating from the Indian subcontinent, including classical, contemporary, folk and popular dances and their diaspora avatars.

Akademi won the BBC'S Asia Awards, 2001 Achievement in Arts award for their spectacular site specific production 'Coming of Age'.

For more information on Akademi please see www.akademi.co.uk

· This event has been supported by the following: Arts Council England, Royal Opera House, Dance UK, SADA www.southasiandance.org.uk