

citycollegecenterforthearts

presents



*"Saṃbhūya" is a Sanskrit word that means "through joint effort". I will bring my experiences as a practitioner of Bharatanatyam and neuroscience and articulate how the sciences and the arts are complementary ways of appreciating the world around us. Through aspects of Bharatanatyam, Saṃbhūya will present how the sciences and the arts can provide a united, holistic continuum for human understanding and bring people together.*

# Saṃbhūya

Understanding the Brain through Dance:  
A Bharatanatyam Recital

Friday, April 19, 2024

Aaron Davis Hall

**CITY COLLEGE CENTER FOR THE ARTS (CCCA)** hosts an ambitious, year-round calendar of student and professional performances. Our mission is to provide a creative arts center and focal point for The City College of New York, building a sense of community within the College, elevating the profile of Aaron Davis Hall in the greater New York area, and connecting the College to the surrounding community through the arts. Aaron Davis Hall, home to CCCA, features two theatre performing arts complex that presents public performances and exhibitions and serves as the cultural hub of upper Manhattan and Harlem. ADH is the only cultural facility of its kind between Lincoln Center and uptown Manhattan and is used by groups like New York City Opera, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Ballet Hispanico, Harlem School of the Arts, and so many other community based and nationally recognized organizations.

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## CUNY DANCE INITIATIVE

The CUNY Dance Initiative receives major support from the Howard Gilman Foundation and Mertz Gilmore Foundation. Additional support is provided by the SHS Foundation, Harkness Foundation for Dance, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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# PROGRAM

**Pushpanjali:** One topic that can be studied through Bharatanatyam is a study of how the brain perceives spatial information, and how we know where we are in space. This invocatory piece will introduce the nine directions (“*Navasandhi*”), and invoke *Ganesha*, the remover of obstacles, and *Shiva*, in his form of *Nataraja*, the God of dance.

*Ragam* (melody): *Nattai*

*Talam* (rhythm): *Aadi*

**Jatiswaram:** Another aspect of how our brains process information that can be studied through Bharatanatyam is how the brain initiates, terminates, and perceives movement. Bharatanatyam consists of a wide range of movements, from subtle, nuanced movements of the eyes and neck, to sweeping movements that cover considerable lateral space. In a *jatiswaram*, intricate sequences of movements (*jatis*) are combined with repetitive musical notes (*swaras* in Carnatic music).

*Ragam* (melody): *Thodi*

*Talam* (rhythm): *Aadi*

**Thevaram:** The study of Bharatanatyam is a study of symbols, and how the brain ascribes meaning to them. As a body of work, the *Thevaram* volumes consist of hundreds of hymns and thousands of stanzas written by three Tamil *Shaiva* saints in the 7th and 8th centuries.

Composers: Sambandar, Appar, and Sundarar

*Ragam* (melody): *Ragamalika*

*Talam* (rhythm): *Talamalika*

Set to music by: Sri. Jayan Nair

**Padam (Gaana Reengaram):** Studying Bharatanatyam could also help us understand how the brain processes emotions. The nine emotions (*Navarasa*) described in Bharatanatyam are love, laughter, sorrow, anger, courage, fear, disgust, surprise, and peace. In this *padam*, the dancer is requesting a bee to take her message to Lord *Shiva* who dances in *Thillai*.

Composer: Suddhanatha Bharathiyar

*Ragam* (melody): *Sindhubairavi*

*Talam* (rhythm): *Aadi*

**Thillana:** Both Bharatanatyam and neuroscience rely on an ecosystem of mentors, mentees, administrators, and institutions that carry forward the lineage of the arts and the sciences. This piece is a *thillana* that is composed by my *Guru* Smt. Maheshwari Nagarajan in praise of Sadguru Gyananda Swami. *Thillanas* consist of rhythmic patterns that are woven together at varying speeds and combinations.

Composer and choreographer: Smt. Maheshwari Nagarajan

*Ragam* (melody): *Behag*

*Talam* (rhythm): *Aadi*

**Mangalam:** We end with Mangalam, invoking auspiciousness to all as we go forth.

Poet: Purandara Dasa

*Ragam*: *Suruti*

*Talam*: *Aadi*

## GURUS

I am forever indebted to my *gurus* Smt. Maheshwari Nagarajan and Smt. Vanitha Jayan, co-founders of Nritya Kala Kendra. It is my honor to continue my training with my gurus based in my hometown of Ahmedabad, India. I also thank Smt. Nivedita Shivraj for teaching me Carnatic music and Sri. Vasudeva for teaching me Sanskrit. Through my gurus, I am honored to carry on the lineage of Bharatanatyam, my culture, and my tradition.

## MUSIC

The music you will hear today is in the classical South Indian musical style of Carnatic music. I am grateful to Sri. Jayan Nair for his voice and for setting the *Thevaram* to melody. Additional gratitude to Smt. Krishna Nair for *nattuvavgam* (cymbals), Sri. Manav Nair for *mridangam* (percussion), and Sri. Rajendran Nair for flute accompaniment.

## ABOUT THE PERFORMER



Sloka Iyengar, PHD is a neuroscientist and practitioner of Bharatanatyam, passionate about relieving suffering through the sciences and the arts. Her dance practice manifests in three ways:

- 1) Continuing to learn Bharatanatyam, music, and Sanskrit from her *gurus*
- 2) Creating works that articulate the convergence between the sciences and the arts
- 3) Developing the foundation to use Bharatanatyam for creative aging

As a scientist, Sloka works as a consultant for various organizations based in the US and India in the fields of mental health, epilepsies, and palliative care. She also teaches at The American Museum of Natural History and St. Joseph's University.

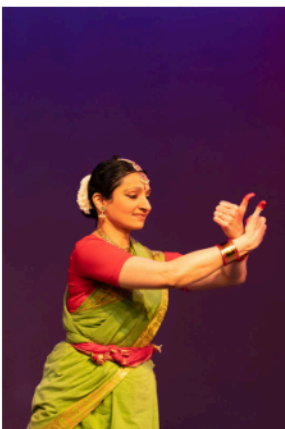
**Sloka would love to hear from you! Please reach out at:**

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