



KATHA DANCE THEATRE



PRESS KIT

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Katha Dance Theatre (KDT) is a Minnesota-based dance company and school rooted in Kathak, the Indian classical dance form. Rita Mustaphi founded KDT with the goal of making Kathak relevant and accessible across lines of generation, culture, and community. Over nearly four decades, she has built a reputation as an innovative, risk-taking artist; introduced Kathak to a worldwide audience and garnered countless awards for her choreography and leadership.

Kathak is an ancient dance form characterized by rhythmic footwork, graceful hand gestures, pirouettes, lyrical movements and storytelling. Conceptualized by Rita Mustaphi, KDT's repertory strives to modernize and diversify Kathak in ways that make it relevant and inclusive while still maintaining its authenticity and cultural integrity. Through incorporating cross-cultural influences and crossing boundaries of genre and form, KDT is at the forefront of Kathak's artistic evolution.

In addition to performances and education, KDT's programs include touring and outreach opportunities specifically tailored to suit the needs of individual communities. These programs deepen audiences' connection to the material, helping KDT more effectively fulfill its mission to make Kathak universally accessible. Outreach programming options include master classes, lecture/demonstrations, residencies and workshops in dance or folk art.

KDT often collaborates with artists outside of the traditional classical Indian arts. Past collaborators have included J.D. Steele, Ifrah Mansour, Robert Robinson, Larry Yazzie, Susana di Palma, and the legendary Pandit Birju Maharaj and Ustad Zakir Hussain, among many others.



ABOUT THE FOUNDER & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Rita Mitra Mustaphi is a native of Kolkata, India. Under her direction, Katha Dance Theatre is distinguished by its impeccable technique, its capacity to expand the Indian classical Kathak dance vocabulary and realize new works, and its collaborations across disciplines.

In 1978, in response to demands from the local Asian Indian community, she began teaching in the Twin Cities. As Rita puts it, "It was in 1987 that I realized my dream by founding a professional company and school of Kathak dance - Katha Dance Theatre (KDT). As with any endeavor, it took a tremendous amount of energy and drive to create something from nothing. In the U.S., I was exposed to a much wider field of dance styles. I

was fascinated, challenged and felt a strong desire to go back to North India to study Kathak dance more in-depth. I made several long-term trips to New Delhi, India to study under the guidance of living legend Pandit Birju Maharaj.

"This was a period of immense stylistic exploration and maturation for me. Maharaj-ji taught me to love dance as though it were human and to feel its all-encompassing beauty. Since then, I have constantly craved new movement experiences and opportunities to develop my skills and enhance the stories that I feel so passionate about. Dance is a place for investigation, experimentation, struggle, desire, taking risks, falling, and rising!"

From 1987 to 2005, while promoting traditional Kathak dance through various dance dramas as part of her work through KDT, she became interested in cross-cultural exploration through collaborations that she continues to pursue today. In her nearly 40 years as a professional dancer, she has choreographed more than 50 new works that performed locally, nationally and internationally.

Her selected awards include four McKnight Fellowships for choreography and dance from the Minnesota State Arts Board, a leadership award from the Council of Asian Pacific Minnesotans, a 2011 Lifetime achievement award from the India Association of Minnesota, a 2012 Education Award from the Ordway Center for Performing Arts in the category of Excellence in Vision, a 2021 Nari Shakti women's empowerment award from the Urvashi Dance, Music, Art and Culture Society and members of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, and most recently the 2025 Ernie Award from Dance / USA for her leadership and work behind the scenes of the national dance community. In 1994, Mustaphi was a company member at the Guthrie Theatre and has performed as a troupe member of Pandit Birju Maharaj at New York's Carnegie Hall. In 2017, she was invited to bring KDT to the prestigious Khajuraho Festival in Madhya Pradesh, India.

Adept in the classical Kathak vocabulary, her works are infused with contemporary sensibilities acquired from her intense interest in expression, rhythmic works and movement idioms. Her work covers an impressive range, from virtuosic traditional expressions of Kathak dance, to large-scale and arresting adaptations of classics, to boldly innovative creative collaborations with choreographers, designers and musicians from a variety of cultural and artistic backgrounds. She sees dance as a primary medium of artistic discourse, and through her gift for metaphor she combines poetic and emotional meaning into a satisfying creative blend.

THE COMPANY



Sarika Haris began her dance journey in India, where she studied Bharatanatyam, the South Indian classical dance style, for over nine years. She joined KDT as a student under Guru Rita Mustaphi in 1999. Her selected performance credits with KDT as a company member include *Kathak E-motion* (2023), *Shaamya - Of Equality* (2021), *The Hungry Stones* (2018) *Ritu - The Seasons* (2018), *Sufiana - the Sufi Ecstasy* (2016), and the lead role in KDT's original production of *Chandalika - The Untouchable*. A student of Kathak masters Pandit Birju Maharaj and Ms. Saswati Sen, she performed in India's Khajuraho Dance Festival in 2017. Sarika has been a KDT instructor since 2017 and a Company member since 2002.



Monica Singh-Shukla began her Kathak training under the guidance of Guru Rita Mustaphi at age 7, and joined KDT as a company member in 2006. She has studied Kathak with masters like Pandit Birju Maharaj and Ms. Saswati Sen. Her select performance credits with KDT include *Panchatantra* (2024), *Kathak E-motion* (2023), *Shaamya - Of Equality* (2021), *The Hungry Stones* (2018) *Ritu - The Seasons* (2018), *Sufiana - the Sufi Ecstasy* (2016), *The Rubaiyat - Life in a Day* (2014), *Karna - the Abandoned Hero* (2013), and *In Retrospect* (2012). Monica has served as a KDT instructor since 2012.



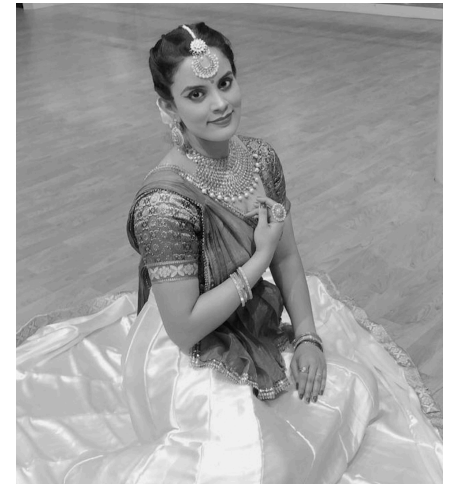
Mukta Sathe first learned Kathak from Guru Sanjeevani Kulkarni in India, where she later won the national "Swar Sadhana" competition. She joined KDT as a student in 2004, eventually becoming a company member in 2007. Since then, she has danced in countless KDT productions, including *The Hungry Stones* (2018), *Ritu - The Seasons* (2018), and *Karna - The Abandoned Hero* (2013). She has performed at Chicago's International Kathak Festival and in 2017, she performed in Karna at the prestigious Khajuraho Dance Festival in Madhya Pradesh, India. In addition to studying Kathak with masters like Pandit Birju Maharaj, Ms. Saswati Sen, and Kumudini Lakhia, Mukta has served as a KDT instructor since 2007.



Nivedita Sahni first studied Kathak at the Jaipur school of Kathak dance and the Kathak Kendra School in New Delhi, India. Locally, she has studied under Rita Mustaphi for over a decade and participated in workshops with the late Pandit Birju Maharaj and Ms. Saswati Sen. Her performance credits with KDT include *Shaamya - Of Equality* (2021), *The Hungry Stones* (2018), a leading role in *Pourush - The Masculine*, (2015), *Ritu - The Seasons*, (2018), *Sufiana - The Sufi Ecstasy* (2016), *The Rubaiyat - Life in a Day* (2014), and *Karna - The Abandoned Hero* (2013). Nivedita has been a member of KDT's Company since 2008 and is a Kathak instructor at KDT's school.



Rupa Nair began her dance career at Mumbai's Sri Rajarajeshwari Bharatha Natya Kala Mandir, where she studied Bharatanatyam for ten years and for which she has won awards at state and district-level dance competitions. Rupa joined KDT as a student of KDT in 2012, and has since studied Kathak under her guru Ms. Rita Mustaphi and masters Pandit Birju Maharaj and Ms. Saswati Sen. Her performance credits with KDT include *Panchatantra* (2024), *Kathak E-motion* (2023), *Ritu - The Seasons* (2018), *Sufiana - The Sufi Ecstasy* (2016), *The Rubaiyat - Life in a Day* (2014) and a leading role in KDT's 2015 production of *Pourush - the Masculine*. Rupa was also an instructor with KDT from 2017-2018.



Shilpi Chatterjee pursued her Kathak dance education in India for a decade before relocating to Minnesota, where she is continuing her training under the guidance of Guru Rita Mustaphi. She received awards at many district-level dance competitions in India and has showcased her talents with the Bengali Association of Minnesota. In 2021, she received the Jury Award at the Urvashi Dance, Music, Art, and Culture Society's international talent competition. Her performance credits with KDT include *Panchatantra* (2024), *Shaamya - Of Equality* (2021), *Black Candle* (2022), and *Kathak E-motion* (2023). She has participated in workshops led by the esteemed late Pandit Birju Maharaj and Ms. Saswati Sen. This is her fourth season as a member of KDT's Company.





Ishani Nandan began her Kathak training at KDT School over a decade ago under Mukta Sathe & currently studying under the guidance of Guru Rita Mustaphi. She attended workshops with Kathak legend late Pandit Birju Maharaj and his disciple, guru Saswati Sen. Ishani recently appeared in KDT's 2022 production of *Black Candle* in a featured role & also performed in *Kathak E-motion* (2023) and *Panchatantra* (2024). This is her second season as a member of KDT's Company.



Vibashreya Srivatsan began her Kathak journey at KDT in 2018 under the guidance of Guru Rita Mustaphi and has since taken workshops with masters such as guru Saswati Sen and guru Durga Arya-Krüger. She also studied bharatanatyam for over 15 years in Chennai, India. She has performed in KDT productions of *Kathak E-motion* (2023), *Ganga – A Choreographic Odyssey* (2024) and *Panchatantra* (2024). This is her second season as a member of KDT's Company.





Current Touring Repertory:

Prakritir Pratisodh - Nature's Revenge! embodies climate change through a series of breathtaking Kathak dance vignettes. In showing what happens when human actions drive the five basic elements of nature (earth, water, fire, air, & space; in Indian philosophy and Ayurveda considered the fundamental building blocks of the universe & human body) out of sync, *Nature's Revenge!* demonstrates how we can work together to bring them back into harmony. A work-in-progress version of the show was among the Star Tribune's top 10 most memorable dance performances of 2023.

Under Rita Mustaphi's direction, KDT has shaped and reshaped the Kathak landscape for close to 40 years. It remains dedicated to preserving Kathak dance and pushing the form's boundaries in an effort to make innovative, inclusive works. In so doing, KDT provides an essential cultural lifeline to all who wish to learn and perform Kathak thousands of miles from its place of origin.





Critical and Audience Consensus:

“Performed with unfailing graciousness, Katha Dance Theatre takes an evocative art form and makes it vibrantly real.” [...] “The complexity and power of Katha Dance Theatre’s stories are fully realized in their dynamic, percussive dance sequences.” - The Minnesota Star Tribune

“Katha Dance Theatre is dazzlingly proficient in the dramatic and virtuosic style of Indian classical dance, while being adept of taking English speaking audiences into the literary wellsprings of classical Indian dance performances.” - The Octopus, Champaign, IL

“Among the [Fall Forward Festival’s] highlights this year was Katha Dance Theatre’s ‘Prakritir Pratisodh.’ Gorgeous costumes, impressive articulate dancing and choreographer Rita Mustaphi’s philosophic touch made this work feel both timely and ancient.” - Sheila Regan, Star Tribune

“[...] the dancers from Katha Dance showed both their agility and technique and also their skill at storytelling through movement. Gesture and facial expression, in combination with the voiceover storytelling, create an experience that is both engaging and moving.” - The Twin Cities Daily Planet

“The choreography and the individual performances were uniformly splendid. However, what captivated me even more was the remarkable coherence of the movements of all the dancers. You all truly formed an organic whole [...] This was visual story-telling at its finest.” - Audience member, Minneapolis

“[Nature’s Revenge!] was a beautiful weaving of exquisite dance in a spiritual and ecological story. I appreciated ending on a hopeful message.” - Audience member, St. Paul

“There was a smile on my face throughout the entire performance! I am fond of that style of dance, the sets and costuming were magnificent, the dancers beautifully trained and the music a sheer delight. The joy of it all lasted days.” - Audience member, St. Paul



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Learn more at www.kathadance.org



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