



# ASHWINI RAMASWAMY'S

## *"Let the Crows Come"*

Thursday, March 23, 2023 | 7:30 p.m.  
Te Ata Memorial Auditorium

**W**elcome to the 22nd Season of the Davis-Waldorf Performing Arts Series. It is our pleasure to continue to provide exceptional entertainment and lead our region in affordable access to professional performing arts events.

The artists this season manipulate time and space, show us history and dreams, and share the world through their eyes. On stage this season will be stories of identity, struggle, growth, grief, celebration, memory, and hope. Behind the scenes, these teaching artists will deliver workshops, outreach performances, and masterclasses designed to inspire and educate. They will challenge young people to engage creatively with the world. They will remind us of how wonderful it is to be together.

I am grateful to the individuals and businesses in our community who support this series because they know the importance of the arts. The performing arts faculty can be better teachers and our students become more engaged learners because of this series. We are a better college because of the series, and Chickasha is a better town because of this series. Thank you for being here tonight and for your ongoing support. Enjoy!

**Katie Davis, MFA**  
**Professor of Theatre Arts**





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## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the Davis-Waldorf Performing Arts Series is to regularly present professional performing arts events, to facilitate student attendance at these shows as an important part of a liberal arts education, to provide affordable entertainment for our college family and our community, and to lead local arts education by creating access to high-quality, relevant, culturally diverse programming that broadens the aesthetic of each audience member.

## **STEERING COMMITTEE**

Five members from our Chickasha community join faculty, professional staff, and a student representative from the campus to form the steering committee that is responsible for strategic and season planning for this series.

The members of the 2022-23 Steering Committee are: Mr. Lewis Knisley, Dr. Christy Clift, Ms. Susan Gearhart, Ms. Amber Heilman, Ms. Kasey Sams, Assistant Professor Jeff Taylor, Ms. Amy Goddard, Dr. Jan Hanson, Mr. Jeff Rutherford, and Senior Theatre Arts Major Sami Barker.





# HONORS CREW

Students with an interest in the performing arts who have trained in lighting, sound, costumes, properties, and scenery and who maintain excellent academic achievement can be recommended by their advisors for an honors crew position. In these challenging roles, students work with visiting artists and professional production staff to present the performances of the Davis-Waldorf Performing Arts Series.

The members of the 2022-23 Honors Crew are: Sami Barker, Keane Harrison, Alexys Thompson, Jack Almeida, Rylee Trent, Romeo Black, Rain Gutzmer, Mabel Cremers, Abbee Mann, and Tylan Hamilton.



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# ASHWINI RAMASWAMY'S LET THE CROWS COME

"a fascinating, beautifully developed exchange of  
dance styles among three women"

- *The Washington Post 'Best Dance of 2021'*

"Ramaswamy's imagination united and flourished,  
creating space, not just for more generations but  
more ways of thinking."

- *The New York Times, Critic's Pick*



## **Concept, Lead Choreography and Direction:**

Ashwini Ramaswamy

## **Co-Choreography:**

Berit Ahlgren and Alanna Morris

## **Original Musical Compositions**

## **(Pre-recorded score):**

Brent Arnold, Jace Clayton, and Prema  
Ramamurthy, with additional compositions and  
score development by Rohan Krishnamurthy,  
Roopa Mahadevan and Arun Ramamurthy



**Artistic Advisors:**

Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy

**Abhinaya Coach:**

Ranee Ramaswamy

**Technical Director:**

Alexandra Vasquez-Dheming

**Costumes:**

Shanti Taylors and Carole Bruns Couture

**Jewelry:**

Khazana/Anju Khataria

“Ranee Ramaswamy, my mother and Founder/ Artistic Director of Ragamala Dance Company, began collaborating across form in the early 1990s. Aparna Ramaswamy, my sister and Executive Artistic Director, expanded this important work, forming a trajectory and values-based aesthetic. I am proud add to my own voice to this layered and thoughtful progression.

My work negotiates the multiple cultural planes where many of us exist; being from two distinct cultures is the energizing tension in my



choreographic process. Like a phantom limb, my Indian ancestry lingers with me, informing my artistic work and daily interactions; my upbringing in both India and the U.S. has encouraged an aesthetic perspective with a hybrid compass.

Evoking the timelessness of mythography and the cyclical essence of ancestry, *Let the Crows Come* utilizes the metaphor of crows as messengers for the living and guides for the departed — and in the process explores how memory and homeland channel guidance and dislocation.

Each artist has been specifically chosen for what they bring to the stage, and in creating this work we have communicated one-on-one and collectively to bring this project to life. I developed the visual language of *Let the Crows Come* from a variety of sources, including second-century Tamil Sangam poetry, ancient Sanskrit texts, and the Hindu ritual of Pitru Paksha. These sources allow us entry into a world where the human, the natural and the metaphysical — as well as past, present, and future — are forever engaged in sacred movement.



I would like to thank the commissioner of this project, Kate Nordstrum/Liquid Music, who has championed my work and pushed me to take exhilarating risks; my mentors/family members Ranee and Aparna, who are always willing to offer advice and guidance; and our guru in Chennai, India, Smt. Alarmél Valli, who has provided us with an art form and aesthetic direction that makes every creative endeavor possible.”

— **Ashwini Ramaswamy**

## DANCE

Bharatanatyam is a living, breathing movement language with which to speak about the contemporary human experience. Originating in southeastern India and used for thousands of years to embody universal history via cosmogony, myth, legend and history — Bharatanatyam has evolved into a potent tool with which to mediate between the spiritual and physical worlds. Let the Crows Come weaves together three dance solos for three distinct dancers: Ashwini selected Alanna Morris (trained in Modern dance and a researcher of African Diasporic dance forms) and Berit Ahlgren (trained in the Israeli dance form Gaga)



to deconstruct, extrapolate and retrograde Bharatanatyam into unique movement paradigms.

## MUSIC

Let the Crows Come evolved from a simple observation; when a DJ remixes a song, he/she/they maintains its essence while changing its trajectory. For Ashwini, this transmutation is reminiscent of being a second-generation immigrant — a person that has been culturally remixed to fit into multiple places at once. Reflecting the three dancers and three sections, the original score, by three composers — Jace Clayton (aka DJ /rupture), Prema Ramamurthy (south Indian Carnatic), and Brent Arnold (electro-acoustic cello) — is played by a hybrid musical ensemble of Carnatic classical, western classical and electronic musicians. The soundscape evolves with the movement, evoking a memory that has a shared origin but is remembered differently from person to person.



## RITUAL

In Hinduism, there is a belief that crows play a major role in linking the living to the dead. In this sense, they bring to vivid life the spirits of the past. Pitru Paksha (meaning fortnight of the ancestors) is a period when Hindus pay tribute to their ancestors so that the departed souls can rest in peace. After burning a mixture of sandalwood and camphor, rice is offered to the crows. This single ritualistic practice is a microcosm of the supernatural relationship between the physical and non-physical worlds.

## SOURCE TEXTS

### **The Ramayana**

The opening musical interlude references The Hindu epic poem Ramayana — one of the largest epics in world literature, with multiple meanings to unravel and compositional layers to decipher. One interpretation contains an origin story of the crow and its role as an emissary between worlds.

### **Brihatsamhita and Kakajarita**

The Brihatsamhita, by Hindu polymath Varahamihira, is an encyclopedic book covering





wide ranging subjects including divination, astronomy, planetary movements, eclipses, rainfall, clouds, architecture, crops, matrimony and rituals. Kakajarita is an ancient Sanskrit text that foretells coming events through careful attention to the cries, flight patterns, and behavior of crows.

### **Tamil Sangam literature**

The Sangam poets of South India believed that human emotions directly reflect their surrounding environments; the first poem in Let the Crows Come uses the call of the crow to signal the return of a departed relative or loved one; the second is interpreted by Ashwini as a message of tolerance from the ancestors to future generations.




# ABOUT THE PERFORMING ARTISTS

**ASHWINI RAMASWAMY** (*lead choreographer/dancer*) is committed to maintaining the beauty, technique, rigor, and values embedded in her Bharatanatyam lineage while forming a personal vision for collaborative, multidisciplinary performance experiences. Like a phantom limb, her Indian ancestry lingers within her, informing her artistic work and daily interactions; Ashwini's upbringing in both India and the U.S. has encouraged an aesthetic perspective with a hybrid compass. She has spent over 30 years studying Bharatanatyam from award-winning artists Raneer Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy (her mother and sister), and their guru, the legendary Smt. Alarmél Valli of Chennai, India since 2011. As a founding member of Ragamala Dance Company, she has toured extensively, performing throughout the U.S. and internationally. Her choreographic work has been presented by the O'Shaughnessy, Cowles Center, Baryshnikov Arts Center (New York, NY), The Yard (Martha's Vineyard, MA), Scottsdale




Center for the Performing Arts (Scottsdale, AZ), and The Just Festival (Edinburgh, U.K), among others. Ashwini has received commissions from the Liquid Music Series, Great Northern, Santa Monica College and Macalester College; residencies at the Baryshnikov Arts Center, UNC Chapel Hill, Kohler Arts Center, the National Center for Choreography, the Bogliasco Foundation (Bogliasco, Italy) and Camargo Foundation (Cassis, France, 2023); support from the National Dance Project, MAP Fund, USArtists International, National Performance Network, Minnesota State Arts Board, Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, South Asian Arts Resiliency Fund, a Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship, and McKnight Foundation Artist Fellowships for Dance and Choreography. Her work has been listed among the 'Best of the Year' in The Washington Post, Minneapolis Star Tribune, Minnpost, and as a critic's pick in The New York Times.

**BRENT ARNOLD** (*composer, cellist*) Brent Arnold is a composer and cellist who also works as a music director, conductor, producer, and orchestrator. He studied classical cello with Walter Gray (Kronos Quartet) and jazz with Michael White (Pharoah Sanders). He



has written numerous pieces for concert, film, theater, dance, and opera, often combining the cello and other acoustic instruments with electronic processing and improvisation. He has toured his solo music in North America, Europe, and Japan. His solo album *Night, Exquisite* was called "a journey" and "a beautiful record" by *Vice* magazine and "Cinematic and lushly coherent" by *Time Out New York*. He is a founding member of Ghost Quartet with Dave Malloy, Gelsey Bell, and Brittain Ashford. He has worked and collaborated with artists including Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe, Ashwini Ramaswamy, Filastine, Eyvind Kang, Jessika Kenney, Walid Ben Salim, Jessica Pavone, DJ/rupture, Andrew Drury, The Antlers, Randall Dunn, Zola Jesus, Rob Rusli, Wally Shoup, Wayne Horvitz, Steve Von Till, Reggie Watts, Aditya Kalyanpur, and many more. [brentarnoldmusic.com](http://brentarnoldmusic.com)

**JACE CLAYTON** (*composer, DJ*) Jace Clayton is an artist and writer based in New York, also known for his work as DJ /rupture. He is the author of *Uproot: Travels in 21st Century Music and Digital Culture* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) and was awarded a 2020 Andy Warhol Foundation Art Writers Grant to support *Behold the Monkey*, his upcoming book on contemporary art, faith, and social media. Clayton




is currently Assistant Professor of Visual Arts at Columbia University and Interim Director of the Sound Arts Program. Clayton has performed in over three dozen countries, both solo and as director of large ensemble performances. Since 2018 his work has been exhibited internationally. Most recently, he composed an original soundtrack for Riotsville USA, a film which debuted at Sundance in January.

**ROHAN KRISHNAMURTHY** (*co-composer, percussion - mridangam, khandjira, ghatam*) Indian-American percussionist, composer, and educator Dr. Rohan Krishnamurthy is one of the leading voices of Indian classical and cross-genre music in the South Asian diaspora. Acclaimed a “musical ambassador” by The Times of India, he received mridangam training from the legendary maestro, Sri. Guruvayur Dorai, tabla with Pt. Swapan Chaudhuri at the Ali Akbar College of Music, and drum set with Alan Hall at the California Jazz Conservatory. Distinguished as a soloist, composer, and collaborator, Rohan performed with legendary Indian classical musicians and Grammy Award-winning global artists. Rohan leads The Alaya Project, an Indo-jazz-funk collective featuring celebrated saxophonist Prasant Radhakrishnan and keyboardist Colin Hogan. The group’s recently




released debut album has been praised by Jazziz Magazine, NPR, San Francisco Chronicle, and more. Rohan holds a Ph.D. in musicology from the Eastman School of Music and directs the RohanRhythm Percussion Studio with students from across the globe. Rohan is the recipient of international awards and grants including commissions from the San Francisco Arts Commission, Zellerbach Foundation, and Goethe Institute (Germany). He has taught at renowned institutions and his patented RohanRhythm drum tuning system is available worldwide.

**ROOPA MAHADEVEN** (*co-composer, vocals*) is a leading second-generation Indian classical and crossover vocalist in the American diaspora known for her powerful, emotive voice and collaborative versatility. She leads Roopa in Flux, an ensemble featuring musicians in jazz, soul/R&B, free improv, and various global traditions, directs the innovative choir Navatman Music Collective, and sings for leading Bharathanatyam/contemporary dancers around the world. Trained in Carnatic music under Asha Ramesh and later Suguna Varadachari as a Fulbright scholar in Chennai, India, she has performed at diverse venues like Chennai's Music Academy, Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana, Lincoln




Center, MET Museum, Hollywood Bowl, Joe's Pub, Kennedy Center, Pioneer Works, and many more. She is a soloist on Grammy Award-winning *Calling All Dawns*, and has been in residence at Banff Center for Arts and Creativity, Hedgebrook, MASS MOCA, and Ryder Farm. With a grant from Creative Work Fund, she is currently working on a set of new Carnatic compositions amplifying stories of South Asian diasporic life.

**ARUN RAMAMURTHY** (*co-composer, violin*) is a multifaceted violinist, composer, educator and curator based in Brooklyn, NY. Rooted in South Indian classical "raga" music, Arun is a versatile musician, performing internationally in both traditional Carnatic and Hindustani settings, as well as blurring genres with his own innovative projects like the acclaimed Arun Ramamurthy Trio. He has shared the stage with luminaries like Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna, Sudha Ragunathan, Reggie Workman, Kenny Werner, Jamey Haddad, Amir ElSaffar, Hamid Drake, Adam Rudolph, Hamid Al-Saadi, Subhankar Banerjee, Martha Redbone, Awa Sangho amongst others. He has performed and recorded with a wide range of musical genres including Jazz, Arabic Maqam, Afro-Cuban, Malian, American folk, Western classical, and other



creative and improvisational styles. Arun's music has brought him prestigious stages like Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Bimhuis (Amsterdam), Kennedy Center, Celebrate Brooklyn, Sons d'Hiver Festival (Paris) and many more. As a composer, Arun has created new works for Arun Ramamurthy (CMA New Jazz Works commission), scores for theatrical productions such as Tom Stoppard's Indian Ink, composition for Indian classical dance, and for the pioneering musician's collective Brooklyn Raga Massive. Arun is a co-founder and co-Artistic Director of Brooklyn Raga Massive, a progressive genre-bending collective of musicians rooted-in and inspired-by the classical music of India. ([www.arunramamurthy.com](http://www.arunramamurthy.com))

**PREMA RAMAMURTHY** (*composer*) has been an outstanding vocalist and composer for more than four decades. She received intensive training under maestro Padmavibhushan Dr. Mangalampalli Balamurali Krishna, specialized in the art of Pallavi singing from Vidwan Sri T. V. Gopalakrishnan, and learned the art of singing Padams and Javalis from Mrs. T. Muktha. She has won critical acclaim as a composer and has performed in many of the top venues and festivals of India, the U.S., Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Australia, Mexico and South Africa.





*Let the Crows Come is commissioned by the Liquid Music Series and is made possible by the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project and the MAP Fund (both supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation), and was developed in part during residencies at the Baryshnikov Arts Center (New York, NY), and the National Center for Choreography at the University of Akron (OH).*

