

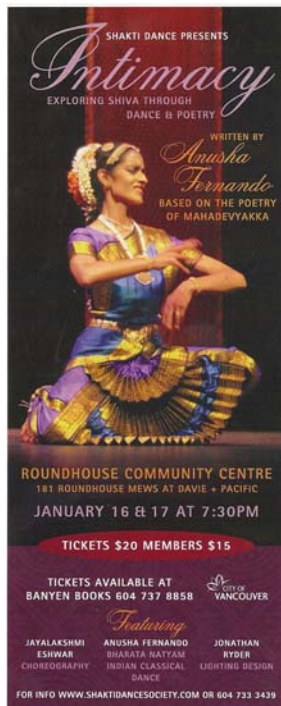


NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
December 22, 2008

INTIMACY: Exploring Shiva Through Dance & Poetry

7:30 pm Friday, January 16th & Saturday, January 17th - Roundhouse in Vancouver



VANCOUVER - Written and Performed by Anusha Fernando, **INTIMACY** is a unique and dramatic presentation of Bharata Natyam's traditional solo repertoire in praise of Shiva. Through dance, drama, and narration, this piece explores the relevance of the spiritual search of a 12th century female poet, Mahadevyakka. Despite obstacles, she dedicated her life to the truth.

This piece emphasizes what is timeless and universal in Bharata Natyam's repertoire. Great music, poetry and choreography! Based on the poetry of Mahadevyakka, this performance features the choreography of Jayalakshmi Eshwar and lighting design by Jonathan Ryder.

Tickets are \$20 each (\$15 for Shakti Members), and are on sale now at Banyen Books 604-737-8858 (www.banyen.com).

Shakti Dance Society gratefully acknowledges funding from the City of Vancouver for this production.

The Shakti Dance Society promotes the ancient Classical Indian Dance form of **Bharata Natyam** through performance, production, and teaching, with an emphasis on innovation within tradition. Shakti Dance strives to make **Bharata Natyam** understandable and meaningful to Canadians, and reflective of their experience through productions that illuminate both traditional wisdom as well as contemporary concerns.

For more information about the Shakti Dance Society, our classical Indian dance training, events, donations, and membership, call 604-733-3439 or visit our website www.shaktidancesociety.com or [join us on Facebook](#).

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1 backgrounder attached.

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BACKGROUNDER

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INTIMACY is the story of Mahadevyakka, a South Indian woman from the 12th century who wrote some of the most beautiful devotional poetry in praise of the Hindu God, Shiva, who was an intimate presence in her life. She called him Cenna-mallika, her Jasmine Lord. He was her lover or her only real husband.

INTIMACY explores what it means to be intimate with the divine by joining the traditional Bharata Natyam repertoire in praise of Shiva with the poetry of Mahadevyakka. In both cases, love for Shiva is an expression of awakening, a tool to empty the self and become fully alive. Shiva is the beat of the universe, the large container for all things. By marrying him, we embrace an expansive love and recognize our connection the universe.

According to legend, Mahadevyakka had been married to the chieftain of her village, but soon renounced her role as wife and daughter and began to live the life of a homeless mendicant married to god. She joined a sect of Shiva devotees called the Virashaivites. For them, spirituality was the direct experience of reality free from roles and rituals. They believed that to be someone or something was to be different and separate from god.

Throughout time, and in many different religious traditions, women have described their religious awakening in the terms of marriage and intimacy with the divine. Being married to the divine expresses an expansive union with the universe. The love that arises creates intimacy with oneself and all things.

"**INTIMACY** with the divine" is an integral part of the history, ritual and content of Bharata Natyam. The earliest dancers, called Devadasis, were wed to the god of the temple for whom they intimately danced. Unfortunately, the Devadasi tradition was not a liberating experience for women. In the guise of "marriage to god", many of these women were sold into slavery by their families and lived a life of ritualized prostitution and exploitation. Despite this historical reality, the training of a Bharata Natyam dancer always culminates in a symbolic marriage with god in a rite of passage called an Arangetram. The content of the traditional repertoire further expresses the centrality of "intimacy with the divine". The dancer seeks to embody god, become united with god or express her anguish in separation from god.

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