

***Elephant House Project
Symposium at Macquarie University***

***Department of Anthropology, Department of
Contemporary Music Studies and Asia Network***

Saturday March 1st 2008

10.30am to 3.00pm

Museum & Art Gallery

Vice Chancellors Building

Macquarie University

...Background to the Elephant House Project

The Elephant House Project is a project conceived and delivered by the Lingalayam Dance Company in partnership with Sutra Dance Theatre, and in association with Critical Path, Macquarie University and Casula Powerhouse. This project has been assisted by the NSW Government through Arts NSW and the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

The Elephant House Project is designed as a project of study, experimentation, collaboration, dialogue and demonstration, to build a connected environment of intercultural discipline and reception. There are four pools of activity, streamed together by the organisations and individuals involved.

- Creative development collaboration for “Drowning in Rasa”. Lingalayam Dance Company (Australia) with Sutra Dance Theatre (Malaysia) and Alex Dea (Indonesia)
- Casula Powerhouse will present a preview of the work to emerge from the creative development, including an opportunity to meet the artists and a glimpse behind the scenes.
- 3 day workshop at Critical Path (Sydney) involving artists of Lingalayam, Sutra and several independent choreographers across a range of practices.
- Symposium at Macquarie University. A conversation between artistic and scholarly perspectives regarding current dance and music practise, lineage and transmission of Indian and other traditions.

EHP will create new interfaces and dynamic dialogue. It aims to generate connections, to stimulate opportunities for further research and art making, and it aims to enable a shared and deeper understanding of the dance and music of India.

...Macquarie University

Macquarie University is home to a critical concentration of scholars specialising in Indian studies, in the disciplines of Anthropology, History, Music and Cultural Studies. The symposium is hosted by the Department of Anthropology, in the Division of Society, Media, Culture and Philosophy in collaboration with the Music Department. Of particular interest to attendees of this symposium, the Anthropology Department runs a second year course convened by Dr. Ram called India: Power and Performance. One of Dr. Ram’s PhD students working in India, is Ms. Dalidowicz, who will present her work on Kathak at the symposium. The Anthropology Department has a strong regional focus on Asia and a strong research focus on traditions of performance and aesthetics in Brazil, indigenous Australia, Turkey, Greece, India and Pakistan. The Department of Modern History runs a third year course called South Asian Worlds, convened by Dr. Adrian Carton, on the ways in which South Asia shaped the modern world. Anthropology and History collaborate in running the Asia Network at Macquarie University as a forum of academics – anthropologists, political scientists, historians, and music scholars, to name a few – holding regular symposiums for invited and open attendance.

...The EHP Symposium @ MQ

The Transmission of Music and Dance in Indian Modernity: A Conversation between Artistic and Scholarly Perspectives.

The aim of the EHP symposium at Macquarie University is to provide an opportunity for a conversation between practitioners engaged in transmitting Indian dance and music, and the academy. The Symposium presents an opportunity to connect theoretical research to current dance and music practice by bringing together dancers and academics. An effort has been made to engage academics who are themselves involved in research on dance/music, and are also apprenticed to dance/music traditions. While the experiences and traditions under consideration focus on India, the symposium seeks to involve dance practitioners and academics who work with dance and music traditions from different parts of the world.

The key creators and participants in the Elephant House Project, together with the diverse choreographers and dancers engaged in the Critical Path component of the project will participate in the symposium. (Critical Path is a choreographic research and development centre for dance artists in New South Wales. As an initiative of ArtsNSW, Critical Path brings together Australian and International artists in a laboratory environment where risk-taking, play and experiment are encouraged.)

¹ Due to delayed opening of new performing arts centre at Casula, this event will take place at Critical Path Choreographic Lab, Rushcutters Bay, Sydney. The event is organised in association with Critical Path and produced by Casula Powerhouse.

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Themes/Content of Elephant House Project Symposium - General

Indian dance and music, along with poetry and drama, lie at the source of Indian aesthetic traditions, and has made a crucial contribution to Indian modernity, as well as to nationalist self-understanding. The texts and the model of pedagogy (the 'guru-shishya' model) are very old, and are still invoked by contemporary practitioners. Indian nationalist discourse itself draws on the continuity of expressive practices with the distant past. However, such claims do not sit well with contemporary scholarship, or with 'post-modern' scepticism about the authenticity of contemporary practices. Such claims also leave Indian dancers and musicians open to charges, from western art critics and funding bodies, of failing to 'innovate', of merely reproducing a static tradition, and of failing to prove themselves to be 'contemporary'. The model these critics are appealing to is one that, more or less automatically, equates modernity with the West, and contemporaneity with the experiences of modern western dance.

The symposium provides an opportunity to address such dilemmas by critically opening up the terrain to an appreciation both of the wider politics involved, as well as the aesthetic and embodied experiences of those immersed in the arts. Appreciation of the politics involves widening the frame of reference to a longer history where terms such as past/present, tradition/modernity, continuity/innovation, have been shaped by colonial and postcolonial relations of inequality. Addressing these wider terms, re-framing modernity in ways that are not exclusively western, can help re-frame the discourses for music and dance in countries such as India and has resonance well beyond Indian contexts, inviting comparisons with other parts of the world.

The symposium aims to further conversation between practitioners and scholars by seeking the insights that can come only from the actual embodied experience of performing, teaching and learning skills in dance and music. How does the experience of time, of aesthetic values and of artistic coherence in such practices help inject new terms into academic and scholarly discourses on history and culture? What is the blend of continuity and innovation encouraged by the mode of transmission that has been codified in India as the Guru-Shishya relationship? How does the concept of rigorous practice over time, so central to the transmission of complex bodily knowledge in a wide variety of traditions, help us to address the issues relevant to the humanities, the social sciences, and to the arts?

The questions have been framed in a way that will allow a wide range of experiences to be represented and to enter into conversation at the symposium. For example, scholars engaged with bodily areas of knowledge such as music, dance and midwifery have often found it necessary to engage in 'apprenticeship based' research. Speakers, panel presenters and discussion participants will build their contributions based on their areas of research, practical experiences, relevant connections and observations.

The symposium is structured in two parts in order to focus on specific areas as well as enable interrelation.

***EHP Symposium -Part One:
The Guru Shishya Parampara***

In its idealised form, the Guru, as understood in India, is not merely the teacher of dance or dance traditions. The dance, the text, and the music are the carriage of a more fundamental offering – an offering of wisdom, guidance and rigour through the experience of learning. Expression through movement and song is both a discipline of technical skills as well as the currency of profound communication. Lessons and insights through story are often mythological in substance and pragmatic in guidance.

How has the relationship between teacher and student been modified by the vast social changes of the twentieth century? What are the diverse ways in which dance and music being taught in the present, both in India, in the Indian Diaspora, and as part of the western arts scene? What notions of lineage and authority are at work in the arts in the twentieth century's construction of modernity? How does a focus on practice and learning shift the terms of debate and scholarship?

***EHP Symposium - Part Two:
Past and Present, Tradition and Innovation.***

Part 2 of the symposium explores the wider histories of colonialism, nationalism and modernity that shape the flows of people and practices from South Asia. Speakers will address the definition of tradition, but also the obdurate experience of persistence and coherence that informs those immersed in the practices. How do we bring together the historical perspective and the perspectives of practitioners? Are there other terms we can employ to mediate between the two? And how do the varied experiences of the Diaspora in its real and imaginary relationships to homeland bring fresh dimensions to these questions?

Speakers:

Anandavalli is one of those privileged few who have had that rare opportunity to be taught and nurtured by the foremost Gurus in the field of Bharatha Natyam and Kuchipudi (two of the seven classical dance forms of India). Anandavalli migrated to Australia in 1984 and founded the Lingalayam Dance Academy in 1987. In 1996 she established the Lingalayam Dance Company as a permanent base for the graduates of the academy whose aim was to become proficient and professional in this ancient art form. www.lingalayam.com

Iqbal Barkat teaches communications, media, film & video at various institutions in Sydney. He is currently pursuing his PhD at UWS and writing a book on Media Production which will be published by OUP in 2009. Iqbal runs his own media production company, Filigree Films Pty Ltd. Iqbal has directed a feature, documentaries, shorts, corporate videos, music videos and theatre pieces. Iqbal has also collaborated with many musicians and dancers providing visuals for their performances. His filmic works for the Lingalayam Dance Company provides a contemporary exegesis of the ancient Indian texts and forms that are the basis of all of Lingalayam's dances.

Dr. Ian Bedford is a Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Anthropology. He has forty years of research and life experiences in both India and Pakistan. His research interests focus on religion – both Hindu and Islam – politics and music. He has published a number of papers on music, including 'The Interdiction of Music in Islam' (The Australian Journal of Anthropology, 2001, 12:1) and a forthcoming review article in The Australian Journal of Anthropology on A.Weidman's Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern. The Postcolonial Politics Of Music In South India.

Gillian Bottomley, Emeritus Professor, is Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Anthropology. Her extensive work on Greek diaspora in Australia includes a sustained interest in dance and diaspora, a theme which forms part of her monograph From Another Place (1992). She is the Vice-President of the International Dance Council (CID), the official UNESCO umbrella organisation for dance organisations around the world.

Ms. Monica Dalidowicz is a student of the Kathak style, and her PhD research is 'multi-sited' as she follows the transnational movements of her guru between teaching dance to students in both the United States and in Kolkotta. Her work raises questions of the relation between the everyday embodiment of culture in our movement, and the specialised skills transmitted by formalised aesthetic traditions, as well as the way in which local histories of the body inform and re-shape the globalising process of transnationalism.

Dr Alex Dea is an American-born Chinese composer trained in Western classical music and received a Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology from Wesleyan University, with a specialty in Javanese gamelan music. As an ethnographer-composer, he lived with his 104-year old guru for the last 15 years, learning from and documenting the last remaining masters of classical Javanese music, dance, and theatre. He travels extensively throughout Asia maintaining artistic contacts and observing different music systems. He is involved in new dance collaborations with Indonesia's contemporary and classical artists. Recent work focuses on multi-media performances combining sacred bedhoyo dance video from his ethnographic research.

Ramli Ibrahim is described by international dance connoisseurs as one of the finest artistes of his generation. Ramli Ibrahim has set stages ablaze from Sydney to Khajuraho and Paris for more than three decades. His rigorous training in ballet, modern dance, and Indian classical dance reflects not only his diverse technical accomplishments, but also his multifaceted approach to the arts. He has been instrumental in transforming the dance scene in Malaysia and is known for single-handedly establishing Odissi as a recognisable and widely appreciated dance form in the country. As artistic director and principal choreographer of the Sutra Dance Theatre, he has conceived stunning works with a personal signature and distinctive Malaysian identity. www.sutradancetheatre.com

Dr Adrian McNeil lived, studied and has performed in India for many years. He has made a number of recordings for national television and radio. A guitar student since childhood, Adrian began training in Hindustani music in 1980 as a disciple of Pt. Ashok Roy. He has intensively studied the musical instruments sarodh and Hindustani classical music for twenty five years according to the strict precepts of the guru-shishya parampara traditional training method. He is also a disciple of Prof. Sachindra Nath Roy and also of the expert vocalist and musicologist Dr. Ashok Ranade, both based in Mumbai. His latest CD was recorded in Mumbai with the well known tabla player Aneesh Pradhan and was released this year by the respected Underscorerecords based in Delhi. He has published extensively on Hindustani music and his book on the cultural history of the sarodh is the most authoritative study of the instrument.

Dr Pal Nyiri's areas of interest are human mobility (particularly migration and tourism) and the cultural politics surrounding its management and containment. Dr Nyiri's courses have focused on migration, ethnicity, diasporas, transnationalism, tourism, transnational religion, and contemporary China.

Tess de Quincey is a choreographer and dancer who has worked throughout Europe, Japan and Australia as a performer, teacher and director. Formerly a dancer with Min Tanaka and his Mai-Juku Performance Co in Japan 1985-91, her performance work is based in the BODY WEATHER philosophy and methodology (www.bodyweather.net) founded by Min and his company. Tess has created an extensive body of interdisciplinary artworks in different terrains from the city to the desert both nationally and internationally. In 2000, Tess formed De Quincey Co. which is Australia's leading Body Weather company (www.DeQuinceyCo.net).

Dr Kalpana Ram is the Head of the Department of Anthropology. Her main area of research has been with fishing and agricultural Dalit communities in south India, in which she has explored the historical and contemporary transformations of work, puberty and maternity. In addition, she has published a series of articles on dance as a form of embodied memory, in relation to questions of nationalism, gender and the Indian diaspora. This work draws on experiences of learning Kuchipudi dance and working on the Board of Management with Padma Menon and her Kailash Dance Company in Canberra in the 1990s, as well as her own experience of migration. Some of this work draws also on the research among fishing and agricultural communities of south India where 'dance' has a very different set of meanings.

Neville Roach AO is a graduate of the University of Bombay, India, where he majored in economics and political science from St Xavier's College. Mr. Roach is highly respected as a business and community leader who has made a significant contribution to the IT industry, initially with IBM from 1965 to 1980 and then with Fujitsu where he rose to the position of CEO and later Chairman. Mr Roach has also made significant contributions to the Education and Research sector, the development of social policy, especially relating to immigration and multicultural community relations, and Australia's overseas relations - especially with India. He is currently Chairman Emeritus of the Australia Business Council and has been instrumental in many government and private sector initiatives that have promoted and implemented closer ties and mutual benefits for Australian and Asian businesses. In January 2008, Neville Roach became the first Australian to receive the Indian government's prestigious Pravasi Bharatiya Samman award.

Dr Wang Yiyan is Senior Lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Sydney. Her major research interests are in the areas of modern and contemporary Chinese literature, comparative literature, Chinese diaspora studies and critical theory. She is the author of *Narrating China: Jia Pingwa and His Fictional World* (Routledge 2006). She has been working on issues related to multiculturalism and cultural citizenship through case studies of Chinese-Australian artists.

We would like to thank the following:

The dancers and artistic associates of Lingalayam Dance Company, Sydney and Sutra Dance Theatre, Kuala Lumpur for supporting this initiative in so many ways, including their performances today.

The academic staff of the Departments of Anthropology, the Department of Contemporary Music Studies and the Asia Network at Macquarie University, for their generosity and enthusiasm.

Also from Macquarie University, Susan Omundson, Koki de Silva, Peter McCarthy, Bronwyn Forster and staff of the Museum.

Neville Roach
Tess de Quincey
Filigree Films – Iqbal Barkat & Vincent Tay

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