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KALANIDHI DANCE



Traditional Kuchipudi Dance from Maryland

Wednesday
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KALANIDHI DANCE

Traditional Kuchipudi Dance from Maryland

**Kalanidhi Dance Company,
directed by Anuradha Nehru
Kuchipudi - South Indian Classical Dance
Bethesda, Maryland**

Kuchipudi is a form of South Indian classical dance whose name is derived from the Southeastern Indian village where it first developed. *Kalanidhi* means "Treasure Chest of Art," and the Company's mission is to promote dialogue in the arts and to nourish creativity through interaction with artists of other styles and genres. Ms. Nehru has been recognized by Maryland Traditions—the folklife program at the Maryland State Arts Council—as a Master of Kuchipudi dance, a reflection of her significant role in fostering the vibrancy of this living tradition in the local community. Kalanidhi Dance Company has also received accolades far beyond Maryland: they have been well-received at major dance festivals in India, and by decidedly non-Indian audiences in the United States. Of their 2010 appearance at Joyce SoHo in New York City, New York Times dance critic Alastair Macaulay wrote:

"New York is internationally celebrated for ballet and modern dance. But I find it remarkable that of the five live performances I watched last week—which included ballet and modern dance, ranging from 1950s works to premieres—by far the freshest dancing, and much of the most enthralling choreography, came from a group from Maryland specializing in the Kuchipudi style of India."

It is believed that the tradition of Kuchipudi goes back over two thousand years, based on temple sculptures in the area. Kuchipudi is performed to South Indian Carnatic music performed on the mridangam (two-headed drum), tambura (a stringed drone instrument), violin, and sometimes flute. It is one of the seven forms of South Indian Classical Dance. There are two branches of the Kuchipudi dance tradition: the temple dance and the dance drama or street play. Young girls were given or married to the temple and trained in Kuchipudi as a form of active, performative prayer. The street play (or *yakshagana*) was performed by traveling troupes that went village to village to spread Indian religious faith. The content of these plays was entirely based on gods, goddesses, legends, and epics of South Indian culture.

By the fourteenth century, Kuchipudi traditions had begun to wane. At that time, Siddhendra Yogi (the so-called "Father of Kuchipudi") began training young Brahman boys in the art of Kuchipudi and standardizing the form. While Kuchipudi's expressive facial techniques and subtle body movements document and preserve the centuries-old body language of Andhra Pradesh women, Siddhendra Yogi's choice of exclusively training boys (because it was easier to travel with a group of males) caused the tradition to pass

from women to men for several centuries. Both branches of the tradition—temple and *yakshagana*—were supported by patronage, a system that ended with the invasion of British in the mid-nineteenth century. In the absence of patronage, dancers resorted to prostitution, generating a significant stigma around Kuchipudi, and the tradition went into a period of pronounced disarray until the end of British rule in the mid-twentieth century.

Kuchipudi traditions were revived and revitalized in the late twentieth century in Chennai (capital city of Tamil Nadu) by Padmabhushan Guru Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam, who founded the Kuchipudi Art Academy in 1963. Dr. Satyam is considered a significant force in the perception of Kuchipudi as a "classical" dance form, rather than a folk form. He is also credited with reestablishing Kuchipudi as a women's dance form, and for transforming the street play into a stage form akin to temple dance. Kuchipudi has become a more secular form in recent decades, though it remains firmly rooted in the faith, history, and folklore of Southern India.

Anuradha Nehru studied under Dr. Satyam at the Kuchipudi Art Academy and credits him for her decision to devote her life to the dance form. However, her journey to becoming a Kuchipudi dancer and teacher began less directly in Bharathanatyam. "My mother took me to an Indian dance performance and said, 'do you want to learn it?' and I said, 'yes,' and I took to it like a duck to water." As a college student in New Delhi, Anuradha discovered Kuchipudi dance and performed as a hobby. After college she met her guru in Kuchipudi, Guru Krishna Kumar. She studied with him for three years before enrolling at the Kuchipudi Art Academy and learning from the illustrious Dr. Satyam. "When I found myself a student of this man, that's when the bug really bit me. I fell in love with Kuchipudi."

Ms. Nehru is now settled permanently in Bethesda with her husband. She founded Kalanidhi Dance Company in 2005.

Clifford R. Murphy, PhD,
Director of Maryland Traditions at
the Maryland State Arts Council

The American Folklife Center was created by Congress in 1976 and placed at the Library of Congress to "preserve and present American folklife" through programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, public programs, and training. The Center includes the American Folklife Center Archive of folk culture, which was established in 1928 and is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the United States and around the world. Please Visit our web site <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/>.

