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For Immediate Release



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## PREETI VASUDEVAN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL "STORIES BY HAND" RECEIVES WORLD PREMIERE AT NEW YORK LIVE ARTS, NOVEMBER 2-4

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"Stories by Hand," Preeti Vasudevan's autobiographical solo that combines language, music and dance to tell its witty, poignant, and tragic stories, will receive its world premiere at New York Live Arts, November 2-4. Vasudevan's collaborators include Paul Kaiser (literary dramaturg), Robert Wierzel (lighting designer), and Paul Jacob (composer).

Marking a radical deviation from conventional Indian narratives which rely on myths, legends, gods and goddesses for their story lines, Vasudevan's stories are acutely personal and contemporary. Through a seamless integration of classical Indian hand gestures, movement and language, Vasudevan deftly brings to life the people who shaped her emotionally, psychologically and spiritually, and her relationships to them. The result is a unique perspective on what it means to be an Indian woman living in the United States in 2017.

The hour-long dance is divided into three sections or "clusters." In "Relationships," Vasudevan combines her natural wit and empathy to contrast her grandparents' traditional Indian marriage with her own contemporary experiences with love and divorce in India and the United States. Vasudevan's Bharatanatyam training is called upon and explored in "Dancing Body," the second section, in which she portrays a temple dancer as she prepares for performance. Living in a contradictory world in which the dancer is both a deity and courtesan, her double-edged fate is embodied in movement suggesting the conflict between mortality and immortality, purity and dissolution, darkness and light. The third section tells of a close cousin's harrowing decision to take the life of his entire family and himself, and the spiritual and emotional effect it had on Vasudevan and her relationship to her young American-born daughter. Vasudevan's natural ability to play multiple roles, sometimes within the same scene while narrating the story in both English and Tamil, testifies to her fleet-footed intelligence and versatility as an actress and riveting dancer.

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## ABOUT PREETI VASUDEVAN

Now among the vanguard of dance artists to integrate eastern and western dance forms, Vasudevan's training as a child in Chennai, India included work with the revolutionary Bharatanatyam couple V.P. and Shanta Dhananjayan, who encouraged a spirit of experimentation in their students and a respect for the traditions of Indian classical dance while not being bound by them. Her connection to the Dhananjayans continued through her teens when at age 14 she became a featured soloist in their company, then touring nationally and internationally with solo works at 16, initially with her teachers' dances and then her own.

Exposure to Western contemporary dance, first in India where she studied with American choreographer Don Redlich and former Jose Limon dancer Sarah Stackhouse, and then in the United States, where she was mentored by the late ballerina Violette Verdy, opened her eyes to the similarities and differences between the forms, and their potential to enrich each other. These discoveries led her to Laban Centre in London, where she began to investigate how the past and the present, the classical and experimental could be seamlessly joined.

After receiving her MA in dance studies from Laban, she moved to New York City where in 2005 she founded Thresh, a performing arts collaborative. The company, which already has accumulated an award-winning repertoire of works, has performed at festivals in India, UK, Portugal, USA and was in residence at the Centre National de la Danse in Paris in 2007 and 2010. In 2013, Thresh received seven nominations at the META (Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards) awards for its production *Savitri* at the META Festival, India. In 2009, Thresh won three META awards for its full-length production, *The Absent Lover*, which was also featured at the Birmingham International Dance Festival UK.

Commissioned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art for its 2015 exhibition of the courtly arts of Deccan India, Vasudevan's *Veiled Moon* united traditional and contemporary storytelling techniques to visually translate the 18th century works of Muslim courtesan and poet Mah Laqa Bai Chanda. Critics hailed the work as challenging and hypnotic.

Among her other works are *Boxed*, choreographed for Jacques D'Amboise's National Dance Institute 2014 (NY); *Rain*, performed at Judson Church (NY) 2013; *Drumming a Dream*, a commissioned work for the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (2009) NY. She was part



of the Joyce Theater's Emerging Choreographer series at Joyce Soho in 2003. She was a presenter at the 2013 TEDxBarnard (Barnard College).

In Spring 2016, Vasudevan became the first Indian choreographer to be awarded a Resident Fellowship at the Center for Ballet and the Arts, NYU, where she began developing a series of duets with herself and New York City Ballet principal Amar Ramasar. Titled *Etudes*, the dance explores the possibilities of redefining the classical vocabularies of the dancers' respective art forms. A portion of *Etudes* was performed at the 2017 Jacob's Pillow's Inside Out Festival, while a complete version will premiere in 2019.

Bill T. Jones, recognizing the groundbreaking possibilities of Vasudevan's work, invited her to become a New York Live Arts Artist-In-Residence for 2015-17. *Stories by Hand* was created during her residency.

In addition to directing Thresh, Vasudevan is a dedicated dance educator; her groundbreaking educational website on Bharatanatyam: Dancing for the Gods is used internationally by teachers, practitioners, and students to understand Indian cultural expression through dance. In 2004, Vasudevan was selected to be on the American Dance Festival's faculty after participating in the Festival's International Choreographer's Residency Program the previous year. She directed storytelling-through-dance workshops as part of Yo Yo Ma's Silk Road Connect's 2014-15 program for New York City middle school children.

She has taught at many American universities, including Sarah Lawrence College, Columbia College Chicago, Barnard College, and Fordham University, and has led professional development courses on Indian Dance for New York City's public-school teachers through the Department of Education.

While an accomplished educator, Vasudevan remains a student of modern theatrical techniques, participating in Anne Bogart and Tadashi Suzuki's SITTI's intensives, where she receives rigorous physical and vocal training that she has incorporated into her own teaching and choreographic style.

She holds a Certified Movement Analyst certificate from the Laban Institute of Movement Studies in New York. She lives in New York City with her husband Bruno Kavanagh and daughter Ambaalika.

To watch a television interview with Preeti Vasudevan in which she speaks in-depth about her background and her ideas about Indian dance, [please click here](#).

## PERFORMANCE DATES AND TIMES

All performances, November 2-4, begin at 7:30pm. There will be a post-performance discussion between Bill T. Jones and Preeti Vasudevan on November 3.

## WHERE TO GO AND TICKET INFORMATION

New York Live Arts is located at 219 West 19th Street, New York City. Tickets begin at \$15.00, and can be purchased by calling the New York Live Arts box office at 212-924-0077, or online on the New York Live Arts website: [www.newyorklivearts.org](http://www.newyorklivearts.org)

## FUNDING CREDITS

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