

Poetry, Dance, Theater and Song

ଆଲିନିଡ୍ରିମ୍

she dreams in salt water tears
of an island in a bloodless sea
of blue ripples teasing a still sky

YaliniDream

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*"YaliniDream is contemplative, free and FUNNY! Rarely will one encounter an artist who so cleverly combines humor and discomfort. A true multi-disciplinary heroine who speaks volumes with her body and poetry; she is unselfish, respectful and ardent in her approach to movement and storytelling. To experience YaliniDream is to witness her undoing and self-restoration. Hers is a tale tied deeply to the spirit of the ancestors, devotion and God." --Andrea Rose Edmead
Dancer/Choreographer*

*"The first time I saw YaliniDream perform, I was moved to tears. Complex political themes are carefully crafted & presented brilliantly through song, dance and poetry. She uses her whole body and entire being to tell the story. There is no such thing as merely watching YaliniDream perform---the viewer is impacted and hopefully transformed." --Imani Henry
Activist/Writer/Artist*

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from YaliniDream's personal collection, collage by
Opie Snow

this page: photo top left
by Opie Snow
photo bottom left
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Performance Work

YaliniDream is a Sri Lankan Tamil raised in outside lands. She conjures spirit through her unique blend of poetry, theater, song, and dance: "Sick of bouncing between in between, I live in the borderlands where poetry is theater is love is movement is song is prayer is rebellion. I look to reshape reality seeking peace through justice in the lands of earth, psyche, spirit, and dream."

YaliniDream has

- toured nationally throughout the US as well as performing in Canada, Europe, & Sri Lanka
- performed from renowned venues such as Dance Theater Workshop & The Lincoln Center to subway cars to street protests to schools to experimental theaters to the hottest clubs in NYC's underground.
- served as director of Mango Tribe's NYC run of *Sisters in the Smoke* and the *Creation Myth Project* as well as Interim Artistic Director of the group.
- wrote and performed in *Strange Rain* which was part of the First National Asian American Theater Festival.
- Has made numerous radio appearances including *The Brian Lehrer Show* and *Democracy Now!*

Recognitions include:

- Jerome Foundation Travel & Study Grant (2008-2009)
- Poets & Writers Writing Workshop Grant (May 2008)
- Urban Arts Initiative Fellowship (2008)
- Panelist for the Leeway Foundation's Transformation Awards (2007)
- Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation Artists in Communities Residency (Asian Arts Initiative July 1st- September 22nd, 2006)
- New World Theater Residency (New World Theater, Amherst, Mass; June 20th-26th, 2006)
- National Performance Network (Asian Arts Initiative, Philadelphia; June 28th- August 12th, 2005)
- Network of Cultural Centers of Color Award (June 2005)
- Voices Breaking Boundaries Residency (Diverse Works Art Center, Houston; September 20th-25 2004)
- Henry Street Settlement Residency (Abron Arts Center, New York City; January 23rd-February 1st 2004)

photo by Ren Hsieh

YaliniDream's Directing/Facilitation Work

In addition to her performance work, YaliniDream directs and facilitates community based theater productions that bring under-represented voices to center stage. She works to create non-competitive spaces for marginalized communities to claim their voices, bodies, and stories using performance. Through experimental collective collaboration she seeks to build artistic work that reflects the strength of communities while cherishing difference.

Experience includes:

- In 2009 YaliniDream wrote curriculum for & facilitated a program for Central Brooklyn youth that used storytelling & dance as tools for HIV & teenage pregnancy prevention
- In 2008 YaliniDream directed and facilitated Suk Aur Dukh Ki Kahani --a storytelling & theater project with domestic workers -which was a part of the Culture Project's Women Center Stage Festival.
- As a youth worker YaliniDream has written curriculum and worked with Freedom Academy High School in Brooklyn, Youth Solidarity Summer, the Asian Arts Initiative's Youth Arts Workshop, and the Sadie Nash Leadership Project.
- In 2006 YaliniDream facilitated theater workshops with OIERR for Sri Lankan Tamils living in refugee camps in India.

"Whether it's community organizing, poetry, dance, acting, or directing, YaliniDream exudes a relentless, loving fire. With each creative path YaliniDream has paved she is loyal, unstoppable, magnanimous, and unique - with the nerve to make it all look so easy. Two snaps and Mahina booty bumps for YaliniDream - we love her."

*--Gabby Callender
Mahina Movement*

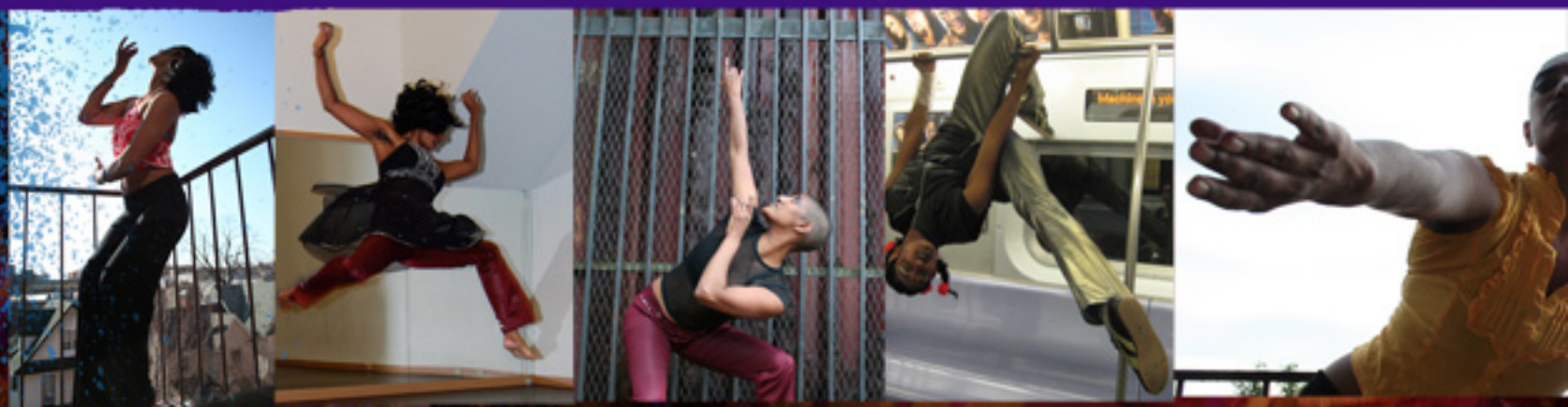
photos from the personal collection of YaliniDream & Barney Seng taken at the Asian Arts Initiative & the Sadie Nash Leadership Project

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What YaliniDream can Bring to Your Community!



Custom-Tailored Performances

45min – 1hr 30min

YaliniDream is available to create performances tailored to meet the needs of a specific community or event. She mesmerizes audiences with her unique blend of Spoken Word Poetry, Theater, Storytelling, and Song that employs a hybrid form of Dance influenced by South Asian traditions as well as US Urban dance such as Popping, Hip Hop, and Experimental House. Her performance will uplift and speak to the heart.

Theatrical Productions:

YaliniDream is touring 2 theatrical works:

Wounds Unkissed & Quiet Come Dawn.

- Wounds Unkissed is a vigorous performance piece that travels thru many spaces from the humorous conflict of a young girl's dilemma between sexy thoughts and bedtime prayers to a mother coming to terms with her daughter's sexuality to the heart wrenching stories of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

- Quiet Come Dawn is a spoken word aerial dance theater piece incorporating the specialized circus art Corde Lisse. The piece centers a queer love story between a healer and flying woman who live in a bleak reality where the birds are dying.

Community Workshops

Duration 1.5 – 3hours

YaliniDream provides custom tailored workshops that use performance and writing to explore community issues. Previous themes have included but are not limited to Arts and Activism, Community Based Responses to Violence; Get into the Groove: Owning How Our Bodies Move; Possessing Desire and Spirit, Rewriting Creation Myths, and Healing Violence

Community Intensives

Duration 6-8 weeks

YaliniDream provides community intensives that take place over 6-8 weeks. The purpose of an intensive is to engage large concepts through personal experience while claiming voice, body and story through performance. The thematic focus of the intensive can be catered to a community's specific needs. The intensive culminates in a collaborative performance created and performed collectively by the participants.

Photos Top L to R by: Ren Hsieh, Eman Rimawi, Ren Hsieh, Mitsuko Van Yoshitomi, Ren Hsieh

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Selected Theatrical & Collaborative Productions

Quiet Come Dawn Writer, Performer, Director; Spoken Word Aerial Dance Theater collaboration with Kiebpoli Calnek (Embody Aerial Dance, NYC)

Wounds Unkissed Writer, Performer; BAAD!'s Out Like That Festival (The Bronx Academy of Arts & Dance, NYC)

Sukh aur Dukh Ki Kahani Director; theater production with Andolan; The Culture Project's Women Center Stage Festival (The Puffin Room, NYC)

Strange Rain Writer, Performer; National Asian American Theater Festival; (Abingdon Theater, NYC)

To Catch Just One Tear Writer, Director, Performer (Asian Arts Initiative, Philadelphia ; University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka)

The Color of Power Writer, Performer; multi-media piece with Mango Tribe (Diverse Works Art Center, Houston)

Descendants of Freedom: A Futuristic Queer Hip Hop Odyssey Movement Director; theater production (BRIC Studio, NYC; Here Arts Center, NYC)

The Creation Myth Project Director, Performer, Writer; theater production with Mango Tribe (Henry Street Settlement's Abrons Art Center, NYC)

Sisters in the Smoke Director, Writer, Performer; theater production by Mango Tribe (HERE Arts Center, New York City; Vittum Theater, Chicago)

Sista Overpass: The Journey of "Becoming" Writer, Performer, Collaborator; theater production with Sista Overpass (The Blue Theater, Austin)

A Wife's Letter Performer, role: the wife; dance-theater production with Women in Motion Barbara Barker Center for Dance, Minneapolis)

"[YaliniDream's] writing is profound, provocative, and heart-wrenching... As a performer, she has an incredible presence onstage....Pradeepa Jeevamanoharan's choreography is intriguing, specific, and riveting throughout. The composer and cellist, Varuni Tiruchelvam, has a beautiful, striking presence and her music brings a powerful, magical resonance to the piece."

--Natasha Yannacanedo nytheatre.com review of Strange Rain, June 22, 2007



Photos Top to Bottom by: Eman Rimawi, Bran Fenner, Opie Snow, Eman Rimawi

Performance Experience

Spoken Word Performances

5 Corners Bar (Minneapolis), The Alchemist(NYC), APIA Poetry Summit (Boston), APIA Poetry Summit (NYC), Artists Against War, Asian American Writers Workshop(NYC), Asian Arts Initiative's 10year celebration (Philadelphia), Asian Arts Initiative's Grand Reopening (Philadelphia), Asian Arts Initiative's Rap Series (Philadelphia), Audre Lorde Project(Brooklyn), Astraea Lesbian Foundation (Brooklyn), Bar 13 (NYC), Bam! @Hyde Park Theater (Austin), Bamboo Girl Zine Benefit (NYC), Blue Stockings (NYC), Bodies in Motion (NYC), Bowery Poetry Club(NYC), Brecht Forum (NYC), CAAAV Celebration (NYC), Café Mundi, Celebration of Audre Lorde (NYC), Clemente Soto Velez Center for Art (NYC), Cooper Union (NYC), Drop the Rock (NYC), DRUM Benefit, Equal Ground (Sri Lanka), Equal Ground Benefit (NYC), Embora Movement Wellness Center(Brooklyn), Estro Flow(Austin), Estro Slam (Austin), Eye Sheds a Dream Flow (Minneapolis), Exit Art Gallery (NYC), Flowas (NYC), Fluid Movements (Minneapolis), Free David Wong Celebration (NYC), The Delancey (NYC), Gabby n Mo's (Austin), Galapagos Arts Space (NYC), GAPIMNY's 10th year Anniversary Celebration(NYC), Gay Day(Austin), Judson Memorial Church, Leslie /Lohman Art Gallery(NYC), Le Petit Versailles (NYC), Lesbians of Color Against Violence(NYC), Limbo (Brooklyn), Lincoln Center(NYC), the Loft (Minneapolis), Louder Than a Bomb(Chicago), Manavi (New Jersey), Mental Graffiti (Chicago), Mumia 911(Austin), National Youth Poetry Slam(Chicago), Nightingale's(NYC), Nuyorican Poets Café (NYC), Palestine Nakba 50 year Commemoration at United Nations (NYC), Poetic Healings (Austin), Political Playtime (NYC), Outpost (Brooklyn), Pop Slam (NYC), Rest of the Rainbow (Austin), Rivers of Honey(NYC), Soul Salsa(NYC), Texas Book Festival(Austin), Theater for the New City(NYC), Third World Within 9-11 (NYC), Tsunami Relief for Sri Lanka (NYC), Women Outloud, WOW Café (NYC), YSS Benefit (NYC) (and more!)

University Performances:

Brooklyn College, Bryn Mawr, Columbia University, Cooper Union, Cornell University, Fordham University, Georgetown University, Mt. Holyoke College, New York University, Northern Illinois University, Northwestern University, Oberlin College, Old Dominion University, Pomona College, Swarthmore, SUNY-Cortland, University of California Berkeley, University of California Davis, University of California Santa Cruz, University of Chicago, University of Illinois-Chicago, University of Connecticut (Stamford), University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, University of Pennsylvania, University of Peradeniya (Sri Lanka), University of Texas-Austin, University of Virginia, University of Wisconsin Madison, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, Vassar College, Wellesley College, Yale University (and more!)

Conferences/ Festivals:

APIA Women's Collegiate Conference, Asian American Studies Conference, BAAD's Out Like That Festival, Brave New Voices, Color of Violence II Conference, East of California's Asian American Studies Jr. Faculty Retreat, ECASU Conference, Esperanza Peace & Justice Center: MujerCanto Festival 2003(San Antonio), Frontera Long Fringe Festival, Frontera Short Fringe Festival Kriti Festival, Lincoln Center's La Casita, Looptopia Art Party (Chicago), MAASU Conference, Mi Casa Es Su Teatro, National Asian American Theater Festival, National Performance Network's Annual Meeting, North Star Fund's Annual Meeting, Oberlin's Biennial APIA Conference, Prism: Beyond Visibility! Queer of Color Conference, Rebellious Lawyers Conference, Sager Symposium, South Asian Literary Festival, South Asian Women's Literary Festival 2004 & 2007, Sri Lankan and Queer Conference, Student Encuentro, Thinking About Prisons: Theory and Practice, University of Texas's Women Studies Conference, Women of Color Film Festival (California), Women of Color Film Festival (NYC), Yale's Solidarity Conference (and more!)

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Theater Review of Suk Aur Duk Ki Kahani

By Linta Varghese

This piece originally appeared in Samar Magazine #29

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Sukh aur Dukh ki Kahani (Stories of Joy and Sorrow) began in 2004 when Chitra Aiyer approached [YaliniDream], and asked her to facilitate theatre workshops for members of Andolan, a New York-based organization mobilizing low-wage South Asian women workers. The following year [YaliniDream] started holding workshops for interested members of the organization. Just two years later in 2007, the theatrical performance Sukh aur Dukh ki Kahani began taking form. Finally, in April of this year, a production that was four years in the making culminated on stage at the Puffin Room in New York City.

The performance, comprising five interconnected monologues interrupted by song and movement, conveyed scenes in the lives of five Andolan members. Only the first piece, "My USA Story," is narrated in English. Three others, "My Aunty," "Shaku's Story," and "Freedom Fighter" are in Bangla. The remaining one, "Employer Exploitation, Prison and Hope," is told in a combination of Hindi and Marathi. Short vignettes help situate each monologue. Before Shaku's story of early marriage and the loss of two infants in Bangladesh, we see three women mimicking the motion of throwing a stone to see where it lands before hopping on invisible hopscotch boxes; Before Violet's story of her life as a domestic worker in the United States, all seven women stand on stage acting out the motions of washing dishes, vacuuming, folding clothes, and cleaning. With no translation between the four languages nor any narration over the vignettes, the audience is asked to literally hear and see each narrative, aided by the tone of the performer's voice, limited hand gestures, the sound of an accompanying cello, and snatches of English projected onto images on a screen at the back of the stage.

While the larger themes of worker exploitation in the United States, gender-based discrimination within the family, and the Bangladeshi war of independence provide necessary backdrops, the small details in the narratives are what animate each story. Speaking of her love for the aunt who raised her when she was a child in Bangladesh, Mursheda states that "the nights I talk to my aunty, I can't sleep." Violet evokes the condescension of her ex-employer by recalling how "he used to call me with his forefinger." Mukta conveys the dehumanizing circumstance of war when she tells the audience that on the afternoon two Bangladeshi collaborators took her son away after the war of 1971, "they didn't even allow him to have his lunch." Bhagirathi holds her hands out, palms up and gently flexing as she remembers cleaning the grand house of her Long Island employers "with bleach and Fantastik without gloves."

Photos by Jennifer Prithvee Samuel



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Though the lives of domestic workers are hidden behind the closed doors of private residences, there are periodic glimpses inside as cases of exploitation make their way to courts and into the media. While the publicity given to these cases is important for addressing the exploitative conditions of work and the fact of worker abuse, the domestic worker is often cast as nothing more than a victim. Someone who slaved away. Someone who was abused. Someone who will receive justice through the legal system.

Through the act of writing and speaking, the women in Andolan challenge these dominant, impoverished representations of themselves. Each story is taken directly from the writing of their own lives that the women undertook in the workshops facilitated by [YaliniDream]. As a product of self-reflection, contemplation and creation, Sukh aur Dukh ki Kahani, presents five women who narrate their lives into much more than that of helpless victims of exploitation who can only be saved by lawyers and the courts. By narrating their aspirations and losses, their lives in South Asia and the United States, and their experiences as women, workers and organizers the members of Andolan, the audience is forced to recognize the totality of each woman's life, not just that portion that marks her as a low-wage worker.

Sukh aur Dukh ki Kahani follows a long tradition of work that bears witness to injustice, a practice in which both the speaker and listener are implicated and transformed. The performance presented a clear vision of how witnessing can transform the speaker. In writing and sharing the stories of their lives, the women of Andolan publicly reclaim an existence beyond work, a necessary and powerful step in a world that tends to reduce people to crude economic beings. I was, however, left wondering what transformative potential lay for those watching the performance. Was witnessing itself a transformative act? Or was there something more that could have been asked of us? But perhaps the very act of asking these questions is the start of transformation itself.

Linta Varghese is a visiting professor at Vassar College in the Anthropology department. Her work focuses on the South Asian diaspora and neoliberalism.

Bottom Photos by Jennifer Pritheeva Samuel
Postcards: Photos by Jennifer Pritheeva Samuel; Design by Elisa Armea



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