

INDIA ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Arts 2 – Ragamala Dance Company

Louise Robinson

Narrator

Dan Rein

Interviewer



**MINNESOTA HISTORICAL
& CULTURAL GRANTS**

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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT Arts 2 – Ragamala Dance Company

The India Association of Minnesota (IAM) was formed in 1973 as the India Club of Minnesota. IAM is a not-for-profit organization that represents people with an interest in the culture and heritage of India to **build** a sense of cohesiveness within this community, **represent** the community to the population at large, and **serve** as the focal point for advancing the educational, cultural, and charitable interests of the community. The organization is statewide, though the largest numbers of its members live within the Minneapolis and St. Paul metropolitan area.

“Arts 2 – Ragamala Dance Company” is the seventh project in a series conducted over the past 17 years between the India Association of Minnesota and the Minnesota Historical Society. This project has the following goals:

- 1) Create an oral history of Ragamala Dance Company.
- 2) To preserve the recordings of dance performances by Raneer Ramaswamy and the Ragamala Dance Company.

Acclaimed as one of the Indian Diaspora’s leading dance ensembles, Minneapolis-based Ragamala Dance seamlessly carries the Indian classical dance form of Bharatanatyam into the 21st century. Artistic Directors Raneer and Aparna Ramaswamy retain roots in the philosophy, spirituality, mysticism, and myth of their South Indian heritage, while using their art form as a rich language through which to speak with their own voices as contemporary American choreographers. They see the classical form as a dynamic, living tradition with vast potential to move beyond the personal and spark a global conversation.

Ragamala has a unique & compelling story, with deep local roots & broad international branches. Yet the origins & early history of the company have never been formally documented. As Ragamala celebrates its 20th anniversary, it is vital to document its history & prominent place in the life of the Indian community, the dance community, & the broad fabric of people & cultures that make up our state of MN. Thus a key goal of the project is to digitize video recordings of the early years of Ragamala’s productions (1991-2002), which are currently stored in antiquated analog formats that are in danger of being lost as the technology becomes obsolete and to preserve them at the Minnesota History Center for posterity. This will enable all Minnesotans, not just people of Indian origin, to reap the benefits of the very highest quality of Indian classical dance presented in Minnesota over the years, into the future generations. The archive will also serve as a resource for historians and scholars of Indian music, history and culture in MN.

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Louise Robinson

711 W Lake Street, Suite 309, Minneapolis, MN 55408
louise@ragamala.net
612-824-1968

The Interview

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DR: I am with Louise Robinson and Louise, maybe you can start by stating what you do at Ragamala?

LR: Well, I am currently Managing Director of Ragamala. I have been in that role about three years now and so I - I have come in to help support Ranee and Aparna in the organization to do a lot of the management functions try to ease some of that load off of Ranee and Aparna so they can focus more on the-the art, the work they do, although you never take it totally off their shoulders but-but to ease it somewhat and then to help on a couple of specific endeavors to increase some larger donors from the community to or to identify some larger donors in the community to help connect with some of the larger dance presenters nationally and a little work with some grant writing though they handle that quite well internally already.

DR: How did you first become involved then with Ragamala?

LR: Well, I - I knew Ranee prior to Ragamala. I have known Ranee since the mid-eighties so somewhere between thirty and thirty-five years I think. I was working at the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council which at that point was still part of the Metropolitan Council and I think I was...I don't know the exact time period for Ranee I think it was [pause] possibly after she'd already met Valli but I am not positive of that. She was clearly doing some teaching work locally in the Indian community and some performing I believe but it clearly had kind of sparked her creativity. She was looking to kind of branch out and do a bit more and so was looking for some funding as an artist to support her work and to push her further. So she approached the Metro Regional Arts Council and at that time the MICA, Minnesota Independent Choreographers Alliance was going and so I was directing her there as well and our paths crossed there later too because I later left MRAC to go to MICA which was at that point becoming the Minnesota Dance Alliance, kind of changing its name. That's how I first met Ranee.

DR: So then what's your background in the arts then?

LR: Specifically, in dance, dance management. I'm-I've just danced all my life and danced in college and didn't...and came up to the Cities after graduating from St. Olaf and it was just when MICA was getting going. MICA was started-started...I-I...during my junior year of college and I was close enough to here you know, get the notices, things were going out, people were gathering so I wasn't in-in the first meeting of MICA but I was in very early in early meetings of MICA these kind of historic Saturday afternoon four to six...

DR: Hm...

LR: Meetings of the whoever wanted to show up and talk and I became Secretary early on with that organization, took the minutes and later had other roles but just decided that I didn't want a professional performing career but dance was my love and something I wanted to work in and so I got a general Liberal Arts degree and then just came up here and started getting experience. So, I got involved there and then worked with a couple of different dance companies; Nancy Hauser Dance companies something called Whispers of America Chamber Dance Ensemble which was headed by Margie Fagnoli, who has continued to be active in the community, Minnesota Jazz Dance Company with Zoe Sealy and then (event) ...and then I think from that I went to MRAC and eventually to the Minnesota Dance Alliance, where at first I was Program Director and later Executive Director.

DR: So it's always been an (involve) ... so moving to... working with Ragamala is just [chuckling] another progression?

LR: Yeah, [chuckling] it's a continuation. I kind of took time out to...from full time employment to have a family but I had at that point known Ranee several years. Actually so, we met at MRAC but we reconnected when I -I was-I had suggested she contact MICA which she did and was-was making some inroads there. She was among a handful of at that time kinda, what's the word I want to use? [Pause] You know, specific a choreographer from a specific genre that was kind of pushing the modern aesthetic of MICA. So, there was Ranee, there was Susana di Palma, Cassandra Shore, Rita Mustaphi, some others that were starting to knock on the door of what was...that bit started out of the modern dance community and they were and MICA was giving out these fellowships, McKnight Fellowships and of course other artists were interested as well. Even ballet was slightly outside the real core focus of the original organization so they were all kind of pushing it and Ranee was really among the first and ...And so she-she was there already working with MICA and making some inroads actually, getting they had a new Executive Director, Bonnie Brooks who is at the time taking all of this very seriously and going out we've got to figure this out, we've got to figure this out and Ranee was-was there and I think it probably maybe gotten a fellowship at that point in time but then the Program Director position of MICA opened up and I applied for that

and moved from MRAC over there and suddenly I was meeting up with Raneë again. And over a few years' time I moved from being Program Director into being Executive Director when a couple of people, Bonnie moved on, John Munger moved on and I was Executive Director and we took on Studio 6A as a performing space down in Hennepin Center for the Arts. It was one a well the-the ballet company did they dissolve for a while or just they had pulled back quite a bit and I remember in 6A was going to be you know out for grabs so to speak and it was like the dance community couldn't lose that space and-and MICA had for years and years been looking for a performing space and 6A, for the community at that time 6A seemed to suit what the community needed. So, we got 6A and converted it to a 100-seat performing space and opened three presenting programs "Extended Play", "Short Order" and "Bonus Track" in there. In the...around 1990 I (can) don't remember exactly but Raneë was came up...came and applied for the "Extended Play" performance series. Yeah I think in that second year and it was her big collaboration with Robert Bly called "Mirabai Versions" and she was programmed into that performing series and that piece premiered with Robert Bly live reading his poetry, at least the opening night. I am not sure if he did all nights but opening night and live music and after that performance Raneë was just, you know, it was like this huge shot of adrenaline for her. You know this concept she had that she had pulled off and was-was beautiful and was well received and she just I mean I think it was this little some light went off in her head like "Wow I did this and this is good and I want to do more of this." And that led directly to the formation of Ragamala and the next-the-the next performance was the premiere performance of the company which was "Ragamala Painting in Motion" I believe something to that effect at the Southern Theatre. So, we reconnected again there and then about that time or shortly thereafter I actually was leaving the Dance Alliance and she asked me initially to go on the Board of Ragamala which I-I felt I shouldn't do at the time. More of a ... because of a potential conflict with my husband's work but rather than that she said, "Would you just be my consultant- be the consultant for the company". So actually I was a consultant for the company from the very beginning and along the way a few different times she said, "Well, be the manager," but it just wasn't ever the right time. But as our daughters were getting a little bit older, looks like well we're getting close-we're getting close and so it was about three-three and a half years ago I finally said well yeah I think this will work-I think this will work. So, I have a long track record both with Raneë and-and with the company actually.

DR: Right, yeah and it's amazing and I am just curious here because you know there is you mentioned earlier that MICA was struggling with the idea of accepting these traditional forms of dance.

LR: Hm...

DR: Now were you involved in that opening it up because it sounds like it was struggling and they-they-they weren't quite sure how to wrap their head around it? But in the process I am wondering where you were in this process.

LR: Yeah well I wanna clarify we weren't struggling. I mean they were always wanting to involve. There was never a sense of we are a modern dance organization and that's what we want to be. MICA always felt of itself as very inclusive or wanting to be that but how you-how you make sense of that and how you do it intelligently and how-how you have people audition for fellowships and [chuckling] you run into the classic thing as-as I guess modern as someone who knows modern dance [laughter]. You know, people that feel they don't know dance at all are kind of like I don't know how to assess this. Well so then you think you know modern dance and then you look at these other more ethnic forms you feel like "Wow, now I don't know how to assess this." So that's what they were running into. How do we know what is good or not and you know bottom line you trust your instincts you know but-but that's a hard thing to get through and so Bonnie Brooks actually took it to heart and started taking video samples and sending them to people nationally to getting some-to get some feedback. So she took Ranees work and sent it to a woman by the name of Sukanya out east who was a performer, her mother had been a performer and you know at least knew, had a background and could give some critique. And she would change who the samples would go to so you didn't just have one person always giving the critique because people have different opinions. So that was one way they opened up and my role in this I was always active in MICA and the Dance Alliance through...from the beginning through going on staff so I was involved in different leadership committees for the organization. It was a very democratic organization so there was always what was called a steering committee that met with staff and would discuss these issues. So I was involved in that and involved in those discussions and helping those things along. But Ranees was actually [pause] one-one who very [clicking of tongue] subtly but determinedly you know kept knocking at the door. You know she was... she is not an aggressive person, in a negative sense in any way but-but she is persistent and she stays there [chuckling] and she goes I am still here. What [laughter] you know I still think I should have access, you know, you... how-how do I fit in here and-and that persistence worked for her and I really think she helped open the door for others as well who were also knocking but her style of just being there and staying there, not necessarily ruffling feathers, just being there. So you have to take her seriously.

DR: Yeah, exactly.

LR: Yeah.

DR: So then you had mentioned that you know you were aware when Ragamala [sigh] started.

LR: Hm...Hm... Hm...Hm...

DR: So how have you seen Ragamala itself change over the years and...?

LR: Hm... [Pause] Well, there have been tremendous changes. There's also been you know a lot of stability as well. But now the biggest change and the most integral change is-is the work. And again, it-it is what it always was but it's just so much more as well as so much stronger. And that in my reflection even [pause] I believe there's more firmly now than even a couple of years ago. It's really the combination of Ranee and Aparna and what they both bring to the work. I mean, you know, Ranee is just this you know always searching and always kind of out in the world finding things that intrigue her and are different than her and her art but- but get her juices flowing and want to work with it and want to explore with it. And- and though Aparna you know has ultimately embraced that. I think at first Aparna wasn't quite sure what her mother was up to [laughter] and- and maybe even I don't-I don't know for sure but maybe even questioned it more but went along with it, you know, and was, you know, curious enough and would see each step of the way be interesting and successful in its own right. But what I also think Aparna has done is keep Ranee rooted in the classicism of the form in a very positive way so that, I mean, I don't think the work would be what it is today without either of them. You know Ranee keeps pushing it forward and-and Aparna keeps it grounded and-and it's a real push-pull. And I don't think it would be as strong without either of those forces at work. And so, you know they spent probably you know half of the twenty years really exploring both where would Ranee want to go with it and how Aparna wanted to balance her and then they have spent another ten years kind of figuring you know really coalescing that. That's really rough but...

DR: Hm...

LR: You know, just say good (part) portion of the time really exploring and now a good portion refining. And in the past five years I'd say they've really been hitting their stride. I mean, they really know what they're trying to do and achieve with the work and so when an idea comes up they really kind of, you know, they know where they should start from and what the basic goal is and it's amazing. It's amazing to watch them work.

DR: Yeah, so when you say exploring can you call it further and when you say Ranee wants to explore so it's outside of the tradition?

LR: Oh yeah-yeah.

DR: The collaborations....

LR: She's-she's you know, she's fearless and she is so well grounded in her knowledge and belief of her work and Bharatanatyam that she's not fearful or intimidated or anything in

terms of going out and looking at someone else's work and going "Hey let's work together. What you do is cool, you know. What I do is cool too, you know, I think there is something that we can do together here." She-she [pause] brings no hesitation to that embrace and yeah I think yeah some artists and some many people you know were sometimes more protective of what we have and if we are not totally confident and secure in what we are doing then it is hard to embrace the other but she just is so, so secure in what she does with her work that she seemingly can go anywhere and-and just say "Hey, you know let's see what our work does for each other. And that-that's pretty incredible and I think pretty unique and is-is to my mind a big part of what's so successful about the work and watching her work, being in a studio watching her work with other artists, they are good at their collaborative process, is pretty amazing and in both of them. They both and-and you know true collaboration [pause] is much more seldom done than the word is used. [Laughter]

DR: I agree, I agree.

LR: So, you know, and-and they truly know how to collaborate and-and-and are good at it when they meet another artist that is truly a good collaborator. It's-it's remarkable. It's-it's an incredible experience to be in the studio and watch it happen.

DR: Oh yeah, I'm-I am sure because...

LR: Hm...

DR: I agree with you I think sometimes a lot of what happens is with you know you being a parent can understand this is, you see kids it's parallel playing...

LR: Right yeah.

DR: Rather than...

LR: Correct.

DR: than interacting.

LR: Interacting. Sure, sure.

DR: Yeah, so the beauty of creation is what you are saying happens when you see those two groups together.

LR: Hm... Hm...

DR: And something sparks...

LR: Exactly.

DR: And things happen.

LR: You are right. Right and they are really feeding back and forth off of each other and getting into it and kind of get lost in it and then they you know then they get to the end of that phase and it's like, "Oh, yes, yes, this is good." Yeah too much, too often collaboration is used really when one artist is hiring the other to work with them and provide a certain aspect in the piece and but collaboration is often used even in that circumstance and-and that's not really what it is. But they truly collaborate.

DR: Yeah.

LR: And look to do that and want to do that you know.

DR: How have you seen [background noise] throughout this time period since you have this you know you have great overview of things...

LR: Hm...Hm...

DR: How have you seen you know the audiences change over the years? Because...

LR: Oh!

DR: They have obviously grown...

LR: Interesting question. Yes, yeah. Grown and expanded and embraced the work and-and growing in their sophistication. [Pause] Yeah I'm no expert in audience and audience development and analysis whatever but just I would say [pause] the company and Rane and Aparna, the whole company has done such a good job of [pause] presenting a variety of work and presenting information about the work and doing many-many things in the community. I go often say, you know, it's a great organizational structure in many-many ways. You know they do a lot of teaching in schools, a lot of other outreach, a lot of work in the dance community. I mean they-they are not a one-trick pony. They do lots of things which helps them in many ways and it helps the audience in many ways because you see them working you know in a variety of settings and-and then the work they do presents you with the Bharatanatyam in a variety of settings and in variety of ways and context. So over time the audience gets educated, those that have kind of stuck with them over the years and there are a lot that have. And then those that come to it new [clicking of tongue] you know, I think the sophisticated or non-sophisticated audience member responds intangibly when you are met with something that just truly has integrity at its core and you may be able to articulate it or not but you get it and they really do have that integrity that reads and so I think the audience has been brought along with them on the journey I described a few minutes ago. Their-their exploration and then their coalescing and those that have been around have seen that happen and those that are new to it [pause] you get it in a different way, I mean, because you see where it's come, you see

the work that you are presented with and it's amaze... [inaudible] it is amazing that being a company that still is based primarily in-in the classic form of Bharatanatyam that they can attract the breath of the audience they do to the work it seems. To me everything is great. Maybe I shouldn't even say that it's amazing. It shouldn't be assumed [chuckles]. There is a part of me maybe because I remember those days when you know these forms were all considered very ethnic and very you know kind of segmented and it-it doesn't feel that way at this point. Again I think Ranee just as she was with the Dance Alliance has been kind of a pioneer and just putting it out their assuming why wouldn't people come, you know, they should come. This is great, they should come. And gosh darn it they come [laughter] you know and-and so it's great. You know the audience, you know, has its Indian component and the non-Indian component and (oh) and earlier on I remember Ranee making comments that well you know the Indian community tends to come primarily for the classic work and not the innovative work. I think that has softened some you know I think because the company has such a high profile, professional profile and the Indian audience recognizes it and sees that, takes great pride in that and so they do come for more of the innovative work as well, which is wonderful and vice versa. They're...They have kind of been cultivating western audience to see more of the classical work you know. Aparna will be presenting her solo show this fall at the Cowles and they bring Valli back every so often and Valli has been an interesting thread throughout all of this, coming back periodically and doing solo shows that always sell well both to the Indian audience and non-Indian. And-and Valli, it's one of her favorite places to perform as she has said now on a number of occasions because she can...she-she knows the audience truly appreciates it and-and-and gets it and...So, [pause] all of those disparate threads I guess.

DR: Correct.

LR: Talk a little bit about the audience here...

DR: I think...and Valli is Ranee's teacher and mentor?

LR: Right, Alarmel Valli being her Guru really, essentially that she met years ago and when Valli was brought to the University of Minnesota and Ranee saw that performance and was just blown away by it. And-and for years and years, ever since so for decades has made trips back to India annually to study. She and Aparna and now Ashwini as well, to continue their studies and so they really their style of Bharatnatyam is Valli's style and there are different styles just like there are different styles of ballet or modern dance or whatever. It's a... it's a specific style that they pursue and it is Alarmel's what she has developed over decades.

LR: So...

DR: Maybe you could talk a little bit about this, you mentioned their also the community involvement...

LR: Hm...

DR: That Ragamala...

LR: Hm...Hm...

DR: I...What it does in the community.

LR: Sure, yeah. Ragamala, both artistically and then as an administrator when I look at an organization, I love to see companies that do many things both again it-it's the artistic components [chuckles] or financial component you know-you know you get income they have always had... many-many different streams of activity. You know Ranee really started I think being asked by the local Indian community to-to teach. You know she had taken classes as a child in India and you know and was probably talking to someone about that and they said you should teach you know all of these all of our kids that are here now. We need someone to teach them these forms. So that's I believe how she got started originally and then did a I think a little I think a little performing as well, little solo things. You know I am not quite sure I know the exact... [Laughter]. You must have that from Ranee herself. So, she has a strong foothold historically in that community and-and we have always...the company has always kept a connection there but of course that transcended very easily and quickly and to doing work in schools in the metro area and then throughout the state and there were some State Arts Board programs that got Ranee moving throughout the state. And so, she did a lot of teaching in the schools once and-and probably what is also referred to as outreach activities which would be in addition to schools doing things like in nursing homes or I know they have been to the St. Joseph School for children many times and just different settings, going in and providing these experiences that are artistic and movements other physical and cultural you know, these experiences for various populations. So they have always been active doing that in addition to performing locally and recently performing a lot statewide again with some State Arts Board support which is wonderful. And of course then they moved into their national touring. About twelve years ago they started and that was initially through different connections with Indian organizations across the country but pretty soon they started doing other significant touring and now it's, you know, they're major national tour company with very high profile. And that's been the last few years really stepping into these more dance presenting institutions but they have maintained all this other work as much as anyone in the community has been able to maintain it. Schools of course lost a lot of funding so there is less school work and unfortunately outreach has been similar, there is less money for all of that but-but the company still do-does as much as the economy can-can support and looks for innovative ways to keep doing it as well and

looks for ways to con-continue to connect with the Indian community. She doesn't teach like through the temple regularly anymore but the school, the company has a school and a lot of people in the Indian community that want their children to learn these forms will come to the school. And we do, do things occasionally at the temple just to keep that connection going. And they do they teach in Rochester weekly believe it or not, make a trip down there and that's probably...primarily the Indian community there that has asked them to come down and teach a core group of students. So, they do you ...some companies are kind of one-trick ponies and you perform and you either couple that with touring or you couple that with school work. Ragamala has a lot going on. And really and has maintained all of that. So, yeah.

DR: For the past three years you are now...have been involved... [Background noise]

LR: Right.

DR: And so...

LR: On daily basis, yeah.

DR: Yes, on a daily basis. So I am just curious with you how has that changed, how you view things? You know, suddenly, you are thrown into the fire... [Background noise]

LR: Hm...

DR: And [pause]...

LR: Hm...

DR: How it's changed you?

LR: How it's changed me? [Laughter]

DR: Yeah, how it's changed you?

LR: Oh, well that's an interesting question. I don't think I was prepared for that one. I was focused on Ragamala.

DR: Yeah I know.

LR: [Laughter]

DR: But you are part of Ragamala and it does have an effect on you.

LR: Oh well, absolutely, [pause] well for me it's an- an... this will change again with my own family going off because I was always very upfront with Ranee and Aparna. So yeah it's ...I can imagine coming back ...coming back to my profession so to speak and-and-and

with Ragamala and getting immersed in Ragamala. I said but I will be honest, my family is still my priority. This is part-time for me and whenever I have to make a choice, you know, I will be honest, my choices, you know, my priority will go there. So, I-I have dove in but not a hundred percent yet and I see that happening a little bit more with my daughters out from, you know, underneath a bit but you know you start being able to get more immersed in-in the culture and the specific art form than I ever could before and I made my first trip to India last fall with the company when they performed. They went to Chennai and Madurai and Bangalore and it was fascinating to see the company and the work performed in that setting and very you know very successful, very well received which...and they performed there for the first time only a few years ago and I think it was a big risk that paid off really [chuckles] well for them but-but-but scary nonetheless. But-but you know it's a different performing climate, you know, the whole is much more informal which is very cool. But it's-it's a whole different thing and so is interesting for me to-to see that. And then you'll always have that reference now when I come back and think of how it's presented here. You know, the whole technical aspect of it is different [pause] different-different story you know. They and-and people you know... things... performances will be going on and people might walk on stage to move the microphone or some...

DR: [Laughter]

LR: Yeah, it's very you know and yet here...

DR: [Laughter] Very Indian.

LR: Yeah it's very...yeah it's totally different and it's so great for me to have exposure to that and I don't tour nationally very often with them but on...I've gone on a couple, the bigger things and-and you know and if finances allow I'll travel a little bit (may) more maybe in the future and again that's good for me to see- to see them in these settings where you know it's both wonderful but also challenging and see what the nitty-gritty is. I mean I have been in the field long enough to-to conceptually know but to them go and see them doing the work is-is good. So you know it-it's certainly as much as I have always loved Ranee and Aparna and the company it-it deepens my connection to-to the art and hopefully will do even more so and-and [pause] [sigh] to the work overall I think where it's taking me or what I am thinking right now out loud as I go along I mean I guess I'd love to comment on-on the company structure as a working organism is pretty unique. And that's been great-great, unusual, interesting for me to factor-to factor into-to find my place and it's really a working team, working organisms. And there's many of the dancers also have their administrative roles which is therefore...many of the dancers are-are employed and paid full time year round which is not the norm in dance and for me what's unusual about that is you know they're very good at what they do and you-you don't come in as the Managing Director as a one-person show or one-person operation

which is what I'm more used to being in many cases...is in kind of handling everything and so it's great, it's wonderful, it's also a challenge [chuckles] at times you know. I have to learn to-to know that, "Ok, I don't have to do that because that's Ashwini's area to take care of or Tamara's area to take care of and that's been kind of a learning curve for me. Great learning curve, wonderful but still [chuckles] learning curve... You know you have to-you have to kind of know that ok my focus should be here and for them it's been I think they have had to learn what my role is and I...we knew part of what it was and we of course didn't know part of what it was. I think part of...we knew that I would be working someone trying to find some larger donors in the community and helping with this the national contact touring and getting the contacts with the dance venues nationally as opposed to just filling in kind of this ethnic slot which had been done for a while. But I think Raneer and Aparna were also looking for someone you know they had operated for so long out there on their own and they'd done so well but they still really didn't know better are we doing it right or we making you know [laughter] we're making all these decisions as this and I think they wanted someone to come in and just be the third ear and third eye and so I was brought into a lot of discussions and conversations that I don't think anyone really would have ever mapped out on a job description but it was like they just needed another person there going ok, is-is-is this...are we on the right track here? So there has been a lot of that as well and-and so I learned a lot you know. Learned a whole lot about the whole operation and on a like I say on a daily basis. So, and-and look forward to- looking-look forward to being able to do it with a little bit of more abandon too with little more time.

DR: So it sounds like even your role is in you talked about how everybody (sighs) like either dancers who are actually part of the staff...

LR: Absolutely.

DR: And that-that your role isn't a normal role...

LR: Right.

DR: It-it sounds more like an organic process...

LR: Hm...Hm...

DR: That's going on here.

LR: Hm...Hm...

DR: That everybody is working on things.

LR: Everyone has their fields. I mean Ashwini does a lot of the promotion, publicity and Tamara does the grant writing and a lot of outreach. And Raneer is kind of general you

know research and development in many realms and-and-and loves to investigate international connections possibly. So she is always busy pursuing opportunities and Aparna is more on the ground with a lot of you know...of course all...Ranee and Aparna have all the art on them but-but Aparna of course is always negotiating with the artists that they are collaborating with and whole variety of things. So, I mean in...and I am purposely Managing director and not Executive director that was a very conscious choice because it really is Ranee and Aparna's show and I am there to support their vision and I am not there to lead the charge. And so that was a very purposeful decision in positioning but...but yeah the... I don't know if-if this is more or less unusual than other roles. I mean I'm-I'm often accustomed to being a one-person show in different things I do whether that's normal or not I don't know in-in the arts I think. You know so I have a staff again which is-which is nice and I did have that with the Dance Alliance but this is...there is an organic nature to this in- in how people (the) they are dancers and then they know the business as well which is pretty great [laughter]. And-and is a bit unusual and has everyone invested in it and is this organism as they tour, the whole organism [chuckles] goes-goes on tour with... with lots of benefits and a few drawbacks [laughter] you know.

DR: And I think it's you are always working no matter where...

LR: You are always working you know thank goodness for laptops, and internet access. You are always working but they are doing what they love and so you have other flexibilities which makes it works for everyone you know we are not just a nine to five or eight to five thing. Yeah, it's if you have to go do something you do it and then you come back and do your work. So, it's great. I will say you know this structure evolved out of some challenge. There was a challenge about twelve years ago financially. There were things hit a difficult spot with-with [chuckles] a different Managing Director. The only other time they've had a Managing Director and she'd I think she was new to the profession and-and didn't handle some things real well and as she was departing there was some debt to be addressed. And-and the dancers weren't doing all this other work at this-that-that point in time and everyone said, "Ok if we are going to make it we all gonna have to get on board and do our role," and they learned well. And now I don't think there'd ever be a reason to change out of this model. It's worked really well.

DR: So they...it rose out of a necessity...

LR: Exactly it did-it did but you know intelligent people and they and-and with passion and drive and determination and they [pause] made the best of it and made it work to the extent that there is no-there is no reason to change yeah.

DR: Yeah we think you know everybody being involved in the company and then doing the business aspect gives you a-a different perspective

LR: Hm... Hm...

DR: Than someone who just is familiar with business aspect?

LR: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. Yeah and vice versa you know if... yeah I mean anytime you just do one aspect of things you operate from what you know in that aspect of things but they function knowing the whole picture and-and so it's great and so when they go out on tour doing different activities you know they can speak as dancers, they can really speak as cultural representatives because they are that imbued with all the information and they can speak as people who had helped at an administrative company yeah.

DR: What do you see in the future for Ragamala?

LR: Hm... [Pause] well, as I say they've really just I think been hitting their stride in the last three to five years. So I mean I think they have got artistically this gift that they will keep working on, and keep pursuing, keep polishing so to speak and-and want to they're just-they've just in the last two years been getting into I think the national venues that they've been interested in which have included the Kennedy Center and now potentially Lincoln Center but you know Ann Arbor, Michigan and...it's a group of people that are often referred to as the M.U.P.(s), the major university presenters which-of which Northrop is our local... [Inaudible].

DR: Hm...

LR: And that is not all they want to do but it is...it represents the fact that these major national dance presenters embrace what Ragamala has achieved. And then from you know and that's just a platform and a place they have strived for-for many years. That's been kind of the goal. So now the goal is to continue to produce work that is worthy of that but also worthy of all these other places they've always gone to because we're doing even more work in I'd say Minnesota these days touring too with the help of some State Arts Board support and that's great. And going to other you know there are places nationally that they've been going to every three years. Really that maybe smaller presenters but still embracing the work and so I-I think it's-it's getting to the place where the work is embraced by all these different constituencies. And-and continuing that and then more international work. Raneer would love to do more international performing and residency and-and you know India has been an obvious choice. They have done sporadic. They have been in Edinburgh before which is where they are leaving for tomorrow. And they have been to Japan and they've been to Bali, Russia years ago. But they are really hoping to kind of make some other headway internationally so (pause) so I think it's continuing this...the [pause] the work that they have kind of landed on I mean I-I think they have kind of hit their stride and that you know then each project is its own goal, its own project. And then where you take it and who you share it with. So...

DR: So is there anything Louise that we haven't touched upon that you wanna add?

LR: [Pause] Hm... [pause] I had, if you've not...No, I think we have covered the different things that [pause] yeah had been in my mind.

DR: Ok.

LR: Yeah.

DR: It's gone well. Thanks a lot.

LR: Oh, thank you.

DR: Yeah.
