

FEATURED

Peninsula International Dance Festival this weekend in San Mateo

By Rachel McCrea Daily Journal correspondent
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The San Mateo Performing Arts center is set to host the Peninsula International Dance Festival this weekend. Performances will feature Filipino folk dance, flamenco, tango, Mexican folkloric dance, hip hop, Afro-Peruvian dance, Bollywood, kathak and Native American dance from the Great Plains region. Peninsula Ballet Theatre will also be performing American ballroom, jazz and country dance.

For Charlotte Moraga, classical Indian kathak dance is tied to culture and spirituality.

As artistic director of the Chitresh Das Institute's Youth Company, her dancers are in one of the 11 dance groups performing at the inaugural Peninsula International Dance Festival.

Held on July 16 and July 17 at the San Mateo Performing Arts center, the festival was organized by the Peninsula Ballet Theatre in San Mateo.

"We have a rich cultural heritage here that should be, and deserves to be, highlighted and celebrated," Christine Leslie, executive director of the Peninsula Ballet Theatre, said.

Each participating dance company is based in the Bay Area. Performances will feature Filipino folk dance, amenco, tango, Mexican folkloric dance, hip hop, Afro-Peruvian dance, Bollywood, kathak and Native American dance from the Great Plains region. Peninsula Ballet Theatre will also be performing American ballroom, jazz and country dance.

The festival takes inspiration from the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival, an annual celebration that has not been held during the pandemic.

Carlos Carvajal is a former SFEDF organizer currently working as the artistic director emeritus at Peninsula Ballet Theatre. The San Francisco native said that the new San Mateo festival is a "rebirth" of the San Francisco one, though on a smaller scale.

"I have a feeling that it will be very successful ... there couldn't be a better place for it to be reborn, Carvajal said.

Organizers have been planning the event since March of this year. Leslie said that she is pushed by a desire to connect with the Peninsula community.

Five years after successfully branching out into hip-hop, PBT realized that they could serve the community through a wide variety of dance styles. The international dance festival was born from this idea.

“It’s just part of our expanded mission to be of more value to the community residents around here,” Leslie said. “It’s just part of our responsibility, and I have to admit, it’s our passion.”

Dancers who have faced COVID-19 restrictions and performance cancellations over the past two years are eager to get back onstage and perform live.

Chitresh Das Institute’s Youth Company will be performing classical Indian kathak with Moraga’s guidance. They are experienced in elite-level dancing and have performed internationally in Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Their last time performing at a similar event was at the 2019 San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival, and Moraga says she is excited to be a part of another festival. It’s easy to feel isolated in her line of work, she said, “like you’re in a well or a silo.”

Multicultural dance festivals help bring international dance companies together.

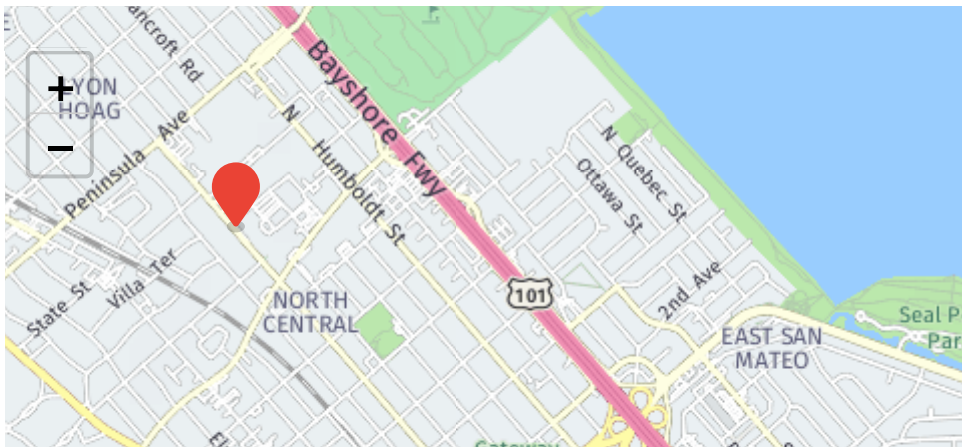
“When you come to a festival like this, there’s so many people that are doing the same thing [as you],” she said. “They’re really nurturing and elevating their cultural traditions ... so it’s a tremendous sense of pride, and belonging, and ... pure joy, and discovery.”

Leslie also shared Moraga’s feelings of unity among dancers.

“If you’re a dancer, you speak the language of every other dancer,” she said. “Sharing our craft and our art is just something about who we are and what we want to do.”

In the future, Leslie hopes to expand the Peninsula festival into a large-scale event featuring food, art and dance from around the world.

Performances will be 7 p.m. Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday at the San Mateo Performing Arts Center, 600 N. Delaware St. Tickets are on sale now at www.peninsulaballet.org.



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If You Go

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