

## **Brandy Leary**

**Artistic Director: Anandam Dancetheatre**

“I cannot begin to state the immense impact my Shastri fellowships have had on shaping and defining my career as a contemporary artist. The years spent in India exploring both Chhau and Kalarippayattu has been integral to my current choreographic career that has spanned continents and performance genres but bases its self in the physical and philosophical body of the Indian dance forms I studied under the Shastri fellowships.”

**Project:** a) Seraikella and Mayurbhanj Chhou: Explorations in Movement Relationships b) Traditional Kalarippayattu Training: A Base Language for Contemporary Choreographic Exploration

Brandy is a triple Shastri Indo Canadian Fellow, a Chalmers Professional Development Awardee, has been twice shortlisted for the KM Hunter Award in Dance 2009 and 2011, is a 2013 Multi-Disciplinary Dance Artist Nominee for the Soulpepper Dance Awards and has had her work supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, Hal Jackman Foundation, CreatiVenture Collective, Bata Shoe Museum, Ontario Arts Council, Toronto Arts Foundation and the Toronto Arts Council. She founded Anandam Dancetheatre as an umbrella structure for her performance projects ([www.anandam.ca](http://www.anandam.ca)) and is its Artistic Director. She is a founder and Co-Director of Collective Space (an alternative performance and rehearsal venue in Toronto’s west end) and is a Founder and Co-Artistic Director of CCAFT (Contemporary Circus Arts Festival of Toronto).



Brandy creates contemporary performances through dance based entry points. Her work has been produced in Canada, Europe, India, South Africa and the USA in theatres, urban environments, festivals, museums and isolated landscapes. She has lived between Canada and India for the past 15 years training, collaborating and creating in the traditional Indian performing languages of Seraikella and Mayurbhanj Chhau (dance), Kalarippayattu (martial art) and Rope Mallakhamb (aerial rope). And has also integrated these with western approaches in Canada.

Through her work explored during the Shastri support, Brandy managed to remove the bias in Canada about how an Indian dance should look and operate. This view often operates from a surface aesthetic, which in her opinion locks Indian dance into a constricting mold, one that is based in a colonial viewpoint that supports a lens of exoticism, otherness and narrow colonial narratives.

She has developed an international career as a contemporary choreographer and performer in the years since her Shastri fellowships. Brandy has developed a

relationship with Indian Institutions for Masters Level and continues to return regularly to India to study and collaborate with different artists and institutions as well as on her own projects. Her interest as a choreographer is in states of consciousness, and the way they are influenced by the body. She works with ritual dance and theatre forms, where the purpose of performance is transformation – the dancer is the means to change the audience's state of being. This all was mastered during her exploration on Indian Dance & Drama.

The work she develops incorporates divergent physical entry points and languages to create performances that occupy disciplinary grey spaces. Rooting them is her 15 years of immersion, study, performance and practice of the traditional Indian dance and movement forms of Chhau (Seraikella and Mayurbhanj) and Kalari (South Indian Martial Art) and extensive research into the ritual performances that surround these forms directly (as part of the forms themselves) and indirectly (geographically in their areas of origin). In North America and Europe her activities have involved contemporary approaches to circus arts, post contemporary dance techniques utilizing state work and improvisatory practices as well as choreographic intervention, installation and site specific experiments.

Her contemporary work is greatly influenced by the ritual performance structures, more than the physical vocabularies, of the forms she generally works with. These structures offer alternative systems and possibilities for how they organize not only the body in space but the relationships between dancers and choreographers, audiences and performers and between communities and art events. Through this line of inquiry her work engages with the underlying and subtle compositional structures to examine the porous nature and permeability of the space between the audience and artists in an exploration of how this space can operate outside European performance structures.

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