

# Blue13 Dance Company Presents "Shaadi": An Indian Wedding Celebration at Heritage Square Museum

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By Jeff Slayton



Blue13 Dance Company, led by artistic director and choreographer Achinta S. McDaniel, invites you to an outdoor, site-specific, audience immersive performance of **Shaadi** on Friday, September 17 and 18, 2021 at 7:30 PM (PDT) at Los Angeles's iconic Heritage Square Museum. The beautiful private grounds and Victorian mansions that are part of the Heritage Square Museum are located at 3800 Homer Street, Los Angeles, CA 90031 and the gates will open at 7:00 PM. (see important Covid related information below)

Shaadi is Hindi for "wedding" and the audience will be participants of the wedding party which will include drinks, music and a DJ to further enhance everyone's experience. The guests will also decide which cast members to follow during the performance and everyone will be in socially-distanced pods. The audience will follow either the bride, the groom, or even the rival ex from the "cocktail party" in the gardens, to the ceremony on the porches and to the personal drama taking place within the historic mansions.

Based in Los Angeles, Blue13 Dance Company's director is first-generation South Asian American and her choreographic style utilizes ballet, jazz, tap, modern, hip hop, Bhangra, Kathak and Bollywood. Her work relates stories filled with great precision, humor and brings out a variety of emotions from her cast of dancers.

In response to my inquiry regarding the genesis of *Shaadi* McDaniel said, "Shaadi means "wedding" in Hindi. In our many productions over the years, starting with our first big performance in LA (*Karishma* in 2006 at the Ford Amphitheatre), I've usually included some Indian wedding motif or nod

or blatant ceremony. Weddings and all the fanfare and events leading up to them are culturally quite significant. I will not speak for all Indians here, but for my family, Shaadis are huge joyous events to which to look forward. So much of the excitement is in the anticipation and planning, which brings family and friends together to create a singular experience for everyone involved. And this scheming always includes dance: Choreographed first dance, crafted groomsmen's dance, family *sangeet* dance, bespoke *baraat* procession, and even planning the DJ's reception playlist to maximize guests dancing the night away."

She because the world is slowly reemerging from the pandemic that she wanted to inspire a sense of hope and a place where people could feel safe and experience something that is familiar. "I want to inspire that same spirit of excitement and titillation in Angelenos that we feel as a family when preparing for a wedding. I get it from my parents. More than anything, the genesis of Shaadi came of my inherited desire to warmly WELCOME people, and to make a beautiful space in which they can reunite."

**Q: Were you inspired by the slow release of restrictions on Covid to present this work outdoors at the Heritage Square Museum? Or had you always planned to perform it there?**

**A:** "I had always wanted to create a choose your own adventure experience and flip the role of the audience into participant. No matter how many times I revisited the notion, it was not quite right- not the right time, the right venue... 10 years ago we moved to NELA, near Highland Park, and I drove up the 110 and passed Avenue 43. I had to pull off the freeway and investigate. What I came upon was an iron gate, behind which was a gravel road leading to a white spired church, charming 19<sup>th</sup> century homes flanking the path. I felt like I was imagining something. It was Brigadoon. When I walked into Heritage Square Museum, I had to close my eyes and catch my breath. I knew it was the perfect place, and what I had been waiting for."

After a full decade, the Heritage Square Museum still beckoned to McDaniel. Blue13 Dance Company's last performance was at The Wallis in 2020 and all their touring canceled. The company is eager to create something new and McDaniel did not want to have their return take place in a parking lot.

"Shaadi demands a grand setting, and there is nothing like the strange and magical, displaced Heritage Square. COVID restrictions are the reason we had the opportunity to create this special piece here at home in LA, and we are grateful." McDaniel said.

**Q: How was it to choreograph and rehearse at the museum?**

**A:** "The site has really created the inspiration for the piece and continues to shape my choreography and the dancers' improvisational response. There are glimpses of dancers through windows, and audience members in pods will enter the 19<sup>th</sup> century mansions at times to witness duets and solos and small group vignettes. I hope to evoke a longing for knowing other human beings and to be more than a bystander in others' worlds, and Heritage Square allows that to happen. In Shaadi, we see a neighborhood getting ready for a grand wedding, but also are allowed in to see what goes on behind closed doors before our hair is perfect and our diamonds are donned."

"It has been wonderful to be inspired by the museum grounds and architecture, but beyond that, just the spirit of the place. The feeling of a place that does not quite fit in time and locale really calls to my soul as an American daughter of immigrants."

"The dancing and architecture are seemingly in opposition at times, including an Indian wedding reception dance set to "Punjabi Wedding Song". We question what we equate with Victorianism. In the US, we might glorify the British monarchy and largely ignore the colonization of India by the British, and Victoria's moniker as the "Empress of India." I relish in the idea of subverting the Victorian through the American Heritage Square setting, particularly as an Indian dance maker, and with predominantly Black and Brown dancers manipulating the site. We also seek to challenge notions of "American" dance in this piece, employing contemporary work, classical Kathak, Bhangra and Bollywood."

**Q: Will the costumes reflect the era of the mansions on the museum grounds?**

**A:** "The costumes are part of responding to the site and part of the choreography. It is a wild array of Indian fabrics and bright colorful garb mixed with more mundane modern-day attire and Victorian hoop skirts and corsets."

**Q: Anything else that you would like the readers to know about the work?**

**A:** "I want the readers to know they will be spoken to, asked to dance, and invited to be a part of the show. The show will be different every time it is performed because of the audience's participation. I would like to invite everyone to embark on a celebratory and responsible experience with us. We want to keep our dancers and our audience safe and reunite with our fellow humans in this special way."

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Featured image: Blue13 Dance Company – (L-R) Kirby Harrell, Antonio Martinez, Monica Moskatow, Buckmaster Wright, and Adrianna Vieux – Photo by Robert Gomez.