



CAN  
ASIAN  
DANCE

# GRIT: SHORT DANCES

MAY 14 - 21 | ONLINE

# CAN ASIAN DANCE

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These films were shot in Toronto, Mississauga, Hamilton, and Tobermory, Ontario. We acknowledge, with deepest gratitude, the ancestral caretakers of these lands; the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Wendat, and the Chippewa First Nations.

**All works are 2021 world premieres commissioned by CanAsian Dance**  
**[www.canasiandance.com](http://www.canasiandance.com)**

## GRIT: Short Dances

A bit of grit under an oyster's shell can evolve into a luminous pearl, and Grit is the quality that allows a choreographer to take an abstract idea through a rigorous developmental process during a global pandemic to create a dance.

Five choreographers, Tanveer Alam, Mayumi Lashbrook, Kin Nuien, Elvina Raharja, and Purawai Vyas each took a burning idea and an Asian perspective, collaborated with talented filmmakers and dramaturgs, and transformed those ideas into the realm of the human body in motion, and onto the screen.

### Defined by Bone

Choreographer and Performer	Mayumi Lashbrook
Dramaturg	Nina Lee Aquino
Filmmaker and Editor	Henry Mak
Sound Designer	Yobi Alan
Costume Designer	Joyce Padua
Sound Recordist	Mikaela Demers

A story of adaptation and resilience, *Defined by Bone* gives an intimate look into a sliver of Canadian history. Mayumi unfolds an intergenerational narrative, intersecting dance and theatre. It brings together the muscles of Canadian history, the blood of Japanese ancestry and the bones of a story written in prejudice. *Defined by Bone* is a reclaiming of history, contextualizing what is carried forward in our communal mosaic.

To learn more about the prejudicial actions towards Japanese Canadians and honour those affected, here are a selection of resources: the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre (Burnaby), National Association of Japanese Canadians or the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre (Toronto).

*Thank you to: Tatsumi Sumioka, Nancy Sumioka-Lashbrook, Lisa Emmons, Tawiah M'Carthy, David Yee, Andrea Nann, Sylvie Bouchard, Denise Fujiwara, Kevin A. Ormsby, Kunji Ikeda, and Mark Madsen.*

### Chitra

Choreographer and Performer	Purawai Vyas
Dramaturg	Suma Nair
Musician (Nattuvanar)	Neena Jayarajan
Videographer and Editor	Sid Sawant; OnUp Productions

The sanskrit word, *chitra*, translates to picture and is the name of a lunar constellation that is symbolized by the transformative process in creating a bright jewel. Like the heat, pressure and tension needed in the creation of a bright jewel, my body has often experienced moments of discomfort, and confusion to seek balance, connection, and self-expression. Through the framework of rhythmic exchange, *chitra*, investigates a dialogue between a musician and dancer as well as an internal push/pull or confusion of a body negotiating between pre-conceived structures and the curiosity to explore beyond what is know.

## **Puan**

Choreographer and Performer	Elvina Raharja
Dramaturg	Queenie Seguban
DOP and Editor	Phil Kim
Sound Editor	ccourier139
Music Part 1	Bandung, Sound Editing and Composition by ccourier139
Music Part 2	Angel, Written and Performed by Naji (naji.land), Produced by The Kount

Puan (translation woman) is a coming-of-age performance exploring self-identity and womanhood as a young Indonesian woman. The project illustrates the journey to self-acceptance and liberation. This performance is inspired by my upbringing and my own healing journey, and I hope it can inspire you as well. Terima kasih.

*I want to express my immense gratitude to: CanAsian for this amazing opportunity and for trusting my artistry; Queenie, for the support and guidance as my dramaturg; Phil, for the excellent work shooting & editing this performance; Thane, for composing the music for this piece and supporting me; Naji, for allowing me to use one of his beautiful tracks; and Bo and Kosi, for being a part of the feedback session.*

## **Leher**

Choreographer and Performer	Tanveer Alam
Dramaturg	Harikishan S. Nair
Music	Gurumurthy Vaidya
Videographer, Projections, Editor	Robert Kingsbury
Venue	Collective Space, Toronto

Leher, which translates to Waves in Urdu, is inspired by a phrase that was often used by my guru Sandhya Desai in my early years of training – Kathak is like a river, it flows...

This short work begins my investigation of the anatomical specificities of the spine in relation to the Kathak technique, as well as the undercurrent of Angika Abhinaya (conveying meaning through the whole body), which is inherent to Kathak. This research is framed within the Hindustani classical music structure of the Bandish, in which poetry is set to melody and rhythm. The poetic lines of this Bandish, refer to a river and its movements. Parallels are drawn between the spine and the river: both flowing, expansive, and contained.

*My deepest gratitude to my gurus, mentors, and teachers for all of their teachings and knowledge. Thank you to my collaborators Harikishan S. Nair, Robert Kingsbury, and Gurumurthy Vaidya who have supported me through this research. Lastly, a huge thank you to CanAsian Dance Festival for supporting the beginnings of this creation.*

## Project Lullaby: CHOICE

Trigger Warning: This film portrays suicidal ideation

Co-Directors	Kin Nguien and Katrina Castro
Creative Director and Writer	Kin Nguien
Choreographers and Performers	Kin Nguien, AJ Velasco
Dramaturg	Karen Kaeja
Director of Photography	Katrina Castro
Cinematographer	Ian Simon
Editors	Katrina Castro, Ian Simon
Co-Producers	Kin Nguien, Ian Simon, Katrina Castro, AJ Velasco,
Production Assistants	AJ Velasco, Jonathan Yau
Locations	Bruce's Caves Conservation Area, Lion's Head Provincial Park, Makethefilms Studios

*Special Thanks to CanAsian Dance, Canuck Camera Corp., Pauline Chung, Ediya Daulet, Denise Fujiwara, Hayley Goldenberg, Adina Herling, Rachel Hunter, Kaeja d'Dance, Allen Kaeja, Mika Kaeja, Makethefilms Studios, Materialistic Inc., Neil Mcloughlin, Chris Morsby, Adrian Vendiola, Vybe Dance Studio, Sorah Yang*

*I am very grateful that CanAsian Dance has given me the opportunity to bring CHOICE to life. Thank you to my amazing team Kat, Ian and AJ, who worked tirelessly by my side and to Karen, who patiently guided us throughout the process. We hope this film leaves an impression in your hearts and will be the fuel for empathy and change towards the stigma of mental health in our society.*

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## ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Born and raised in Montreal, **Tanveer Alam** started his training in the Indian classical dance form of Kathak with Sudeshna Maulik and continues to study with guru Sandhya Desai. Alam also trains in Taal Vidya – the knowledge of Hindustani classical rhythms, with guru Pandit Divyang Vakil. He is a 2019 graduate of The School of Toronto Dance Theatre. Alam has performed in the works of Pandit Birju Maharaj, Janak Khendry, Rina Singha, Lata Pada, Brandy Leary, Noémie Lafrance, and Sanjukta Sinha. An emerging choreographer, he hopes to carry forward Kathak in relation to his own truths as a diasporic artist, as well as reflect on the different trainings his body holds. His work has been presented at Dance Ontario DanceWeekend, MAI – Montréal, arts interculturels, SummerWorks Festival, and Tangente to name a few. Alam has been supported by The Canada Council for the Arts, Toronto Arts Council, and Ontario Arts Council.

**Katrina Castro** is a well-versed individual who mainly works as a Filmmaker, Creative Director and Yoga Instructor. Driven by curiosity and intention, she found her love for storytelling in 2016 when she was integrated in Toronto's Dance Community. Since then, she has been able to work with artists, local brands and non-profits in directing, documenting and producing films and branded content. She aims to express relatable stories pertaining to social, political and cultural topics in their truest forms. Her work is meant to convey emotional and unorthodox experiences on different mediums in order to provoke self-dialogue.

**ccourier139** is an audio-based project established in Montreal Quebec. The persona is designed to weave sonic tapestries creative and emotional narratives within sample-based music. Using a broad array of sounds focuses on the similarities and sharing of emotional content between genres, styles and tones. The principle of the dream like sound is rooted in the concept of nostalgia for utopia, to return home to no place. This project is a branch of the musical creations by the multifaceted artist Thane Johnson. <https://soundcloud.com/ccourier139>

**Neena Jayarajan** is an independent dance theatre artist with extensive experience in bharatnatyam and odissi dance techniques. Her primary training was under the tutelage of Dr. Menaka Thakkar, and Sujatha Mohaptra. She served as the Assistant Artistic Director of Menaka Thakkar Dance Company for 7 years, as well as assistant teacher at nrtyakala for the past 20 years. She currently is an Associate Artist at Nova Dance involved in both creative and organizational roles. Neena completed her MA in Dance from York University and was a 2016 recipient of the Chalmers Arts Fellowship Grant. She made her theatrical debut in Theatre Smith's Gilmour's Metamorphosis. Neena currently sits on the board of CADA west and The Dance Current.

**Karen Kaeja** is a performer, choreographer, project instigator and mentor. She develops platforms for collaborative relationships between dancers and everyday people such as Porch View Dances. Co-Artistic Director of Kaeja d'Dance with Allen Kaeja she is in The Canadian Who's Who, with awards including Dance Ontario Lifetime Achievement Award, CDA "I Love Dance" Community Award, and Paul D. Fleck Fellowship. She was a finalist for the TAF Celebration of Cultural Life Award, TAF Muriel Sherrin Award, NOW's Best Local Choreographer and twice for NOW's Best Dance Company, plus 7 Dora Mavor Moore nominations. Commissioned and presented by performance series around the world, she collaborates with many of Canada's brilliant dance artists. [www.kaeja.org](http://www.kaeja.org)

**Phil Kim** began exploring dance and videography, separately, throughout his undergraduate years. There was no original intention to pursue a career in a creative field beyond university, due to parental influence (i.e. go to university to study for law school). It happened anyways. Phil now has freelanced as a videographer for just over 3 years, focusing primarily on dance videography. [www.kimfilms.com](http://www.kimfilms.com)

**Robert Kingsbury** is a multi-disciplinary artist practicing somatic and conceptual approaches to choreography. A graduate of York University's Fine Arts program, Robert works in the fields of videography, musical composition and dance, collaborating with a wide array of artists and performers. His choreographic work has been self-produced, presented at Summerworks, the Rhubarb Festival, Dance Matters, Guelph Dance, commissioned by DUO, performed by Toronto Dance Theatre & Cadence Contemporary Ballet. Robert has danced for many independent choreographers including D.A. Hoskins, David Earle, Brandy Leary, Andrew Tay, Padmini Chettur, Bill James, and Terrill McGuire. He has performed across Ontario, in Montreal, Berlin & NYC. Robert was honored to receive the 2011 Premiere's Award for Emerging Artist. Other training highlights include 8 intensives with the Trisha Brown Dance Company and an internship with Dancetheatre David Earle. Robert is a Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapist and practitioner of Somatic Experiencing.

**Mayumi Lashbrook** is an accomplished dance artist, choreographer, educator and arts administrator residing in Tkaronto (colonially named Toronto). She strives to increase connection and visibility in the Canadian dance landscape, with a specific focus on prioritization of marginalized voices. Mayumi is a graduate of the Ryerson University's Theatre Performance Dance program, the Co-Artistic Director of Aeris Körper, and a facilitator of Dreamwalker Dance's Conscious Bodies methodology. She has received choreographic mentorship from Peggy Baker, was an international resident in L'AiR Arts' interdisciplinary intercultural exchange program and is the subject and producer of feature film documentary Things I Cannot Avoid Saying.

With a string of firsts in Asian Canadian theatre, **Nina Lee Aquino** was the founding Artistic Director of fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company, organized the first Asian Canadian theatre conference, edited the first (2-volume) Asian Canadian play anthology, and co-edited the first (award-winning) book on Asian Canadian theatre. Currently, she is the Artistic Director of Factory Theatre and the President of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres. Awards for her work include the John Hirsch Prize, the Toronto Theatre Critics Awards for Best Director, Toronto Arts Foundation's Margo Bindhart and Rita Davies Cultural Leadership Award, and three Dora Awards for Outstanding Direction.

**Henry Mak** is a videographer, editor, motion graphics designer and director. He is a collaborator with Dreamwalker Dance Company, serving as Director of Video Content and Editor for the interactive web performance of *Firehorse and Shadow*. He edited and collaborated on *this is where I find myself today*, a dance film by Andrea Nann and the third year students in Ryerson's Dance Program. In addition, he has created performance videos with The Canadian Music Centre, music trailers with Slowpitchsound, promotional material for Litmus Theatre's production of *Brave New World* at Theatre Passe Muraille and mini-docs on Ins Choi (creator of *Kim's Convenience*) and Trey Anthony (creator of *Da Kink in My Hair*) and other content for the Toronto Fringe. Other groups he has worked with include MABELLEarts, Polynomials, Jay9 Dance Projects, and the collective Returning River, with whom he did backdrop projections and performance capture of *Point of Origin* which was presented as part of Public Energy Performing Arts' Pivot Series.

**Harikishan S. Nair** is an internationally recognized dance artist, teacher, choreographer and artist scholar trained in three different styles of Indian classical dance – Bharathanatyam, Kuchipudi and Mohiniyattom. Trained under Guru Girija Chandran, who taught him Bharatanatyam and Mohiniyattom, he began his Kuchipudi training, at the age of seven, with Guru Geetha Krishnakumar and continued under Guru Bijula, both of whom who are disciples of stalwart Guru Padmabhooshan Dr. Vempatti Chinna Sathyam. Harikishan's performances have taken him across the globe. He tours new choreographic works and conducts teaching workshops and master classes extensively in North America. He has gone onto perform and present his work at numerous dance festivals and dance productions in India, UK, Canada and the USA such as Inspiration 2013, Kalanidhi Dance Festival 2013, Next Step Festival 2013 and 2015, CAN ASIAN festival 2015, Horizon series 2014, Dance Ontario DanceWeekend 2016, 2017, 2018, Fall for Dance North Festival at Union 2018, Body Brake 9.0 2018, Vilya 2019(Pittsburgh), Myseum Intersection 2019, Nuit Blanche 2019 and so on to name a few.

Growing up in the Middle East, **Suma Nair** was initiated into the study of bharatanatyam under the training of Sujatha Suresh. She continues to practice, teach and perform the dance. Suma draws upon her training as an Indian Classical dancer to create the foundation to explore new forms of dance expression that combine Indian Classical and contemporary styles. With an education in Business Management and Mass Communications and experience in Event Management and Public Relations, Suma Nair blends her existing skill sets with a career in the performing arts. She is currently the Assistant Artistic Director at Sampradaya Dance Creations, an award-winning South Asian dance company based in Mississauga. She has also received training in documentary filmmaking from Algonquin College Ottawa, and has worked on several videos documenting artists and other professionals. Suma holds an MFA in Dance from York University and was awarded the Susan Crocker and John Hunkin Scholarship in Fine Arts for 2014-2015. Her works include *Kindred* (2016), *Hidden Lie* (2016), *Transcendence* (2016) and a remount of the work "Howzat" for Sampradaya Dance Creations.

**Kin Nguien** is a choreographer, performer and mental health enthusiast. She is a teaching faculty of Rhythm2Dance and an artistic director of KINAJ.co. Kin has taught and mentored dancers worldwide, including France, Denmark, Ukraine, to name a few. As a recipient of numerous dance choreography awards within Canada and Europe, Kin is regarded as a "versatile performer who moves with heart."

Her Project Lullaby film series has been awarded Best Production and has been featured in numerous film festivals, including +4 Film Festival and FORM Film Festival. Kin strives to break boundaries with her art and challenge the conventional. She creates with the intention to bring forward compassion and empathy, which serve as fuel for change within the society.

**Joyce Padua** is a Toronto-based freelance set and costume designer, cutter, and head of wardrobe. A recent BFA graduate of York University, her work as a cutter and head of wardrobe has been featured in several productions including shows with Factory Theatre, Canadian Stage, and Young People's Theatre. She is dedicated to creating art that opens doors and broadens horizons. Previous theatre credits include: Costume design: The Life and Death of Fred Herko (Rendezvous With Madness Festival), Orlando (Theatre@York), Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat (Crescent School), Wardrobe assistant: Much Ado About Nothing (Canadian Stage), Sweat (Canadian Stage) Head of Wardrobe: TOKA (Theatre Passe Muraille), 21 Black Futures (Obsidian Theatre Company), Acts of Faith (Factory Theatre).

**Elvina Raharja**, born and raised in Indonesia, is a multi-disciplinary artist currently working in dance and film, with current research on mental health, self-identity, and decolonization practices. Having lived in both Indonesia and Canada gives her a high cultural awareness and more drive to create representation for people like her. Elvina strives for authentic storytelling and honest expression in any of her endeavours. She aspires to be a producer and creative director that pushes for a safe space and inclusivity for everyone, especially in the dance industry. [www.elvinaraharja.com](http://www.elvinaraharja.com)

**Sid Sawant** is a Toronto and Mississauga based artist whose aspirations have led to both sides of production. After graduating with Honours from Cawthra Park's Regional Arts Program for Drama, followed by Humber College's Acting For Film and Television Program, Sid continued to keep a balance with all sides of production. His Producing credits include Massive Monster Mayhem (Nickelodeon - 2018) and, The Expanse (FX - 2018). As an Actor his films include three award-winning films; two features titled Street Soldiers (2016) and Dowry (2015) and a short titled SUN (2015). Stage credits include Mahesh Dattani's Where There's a Will (2018), Dance Like A Man (2014) & Seven Steps Around The Fire (2013). Sid Sawant's passion for the arts stems from his family and he is grateful for their continued support.

**Ian Simon** is a freelance cinematographer who's proficient in producing, directing and capturing short-form films, dance films, music videos, and commercials. He has been directing and producing films since 2017 after graduating from Seneca College. His journey began when working with the Toronto Dance Community in early-2017 to help dancers capture their art in film. As he progressed, Ian started to work with more artists outside of the dance community and started to build more relationships within the Film and Entertainment Industry which has helped him develop his unique style of mixing filmmaking techniques while capturing the art of movement.

**Gurumurthy Vaidya** hails from culturally rich belt in Western Ghats of Karnataka called Yallapura. He started his musical journey at the age of 12 with initial lessons in Classical Tabla from Pandit G G Hegde, Yallapura and later trained with well-known Pandit Basavaraj Bendigere of Dharwad. Later, he became a disciple of legendary master Pandit Ravindra Yavagal and continues to take guidance from the master. Gurumurthy is a graded Tabla artist of AIR and DOORDARSHAN. He has accompanied eminent artists like Vidushi Ashwni Bhide Deshpande, Sm Pt. Ulhas Kasalkar, Pandita N.Rajam, Pt. Ramarao Naik, Pt. Brijbhushan Kabra, to name few. He has performed in prestigious platforms across the country and abroad. To name few – Sawai Gandharva Festival Pune, Pt.Vishnu Digambar Paluskar Sageeth Sabha, Pt.Taranath Foundation, Pt. Vasanth Rao Deshpande Smrithi Sangeeth Samaroh Nagpur, USA, Muscat, Dubai, Bahrain. Gurumurthy popularised Laya Vinyasa, an ensemble of Tabla, Pakhawaj, Yakshagana maddale and Chende over many prestigious stages.

**AJ Velasco** is a professional choreographer, dancer, and educator from Toronto, Canada. He is a current teacher of Rhythm2Dance, program director for VYbE Dance Company, dancer of Footnotes Elite, and co-director and creative for KINAJ.co. AJ has had the opportunity to receive commercial work and teach internationally, learning and sharing his craft. He continues to strive for excellence, explore with openness, and collaborate with others in different art forms to create and tell stories.

**Purawai Vyas** began her training in Bharatanatyam at the age of eight and completed her *arangetram* (graduation) in 2015 under Guru Lata Pada at Sampradaya Dance Academy. She continues to train under Guru Lata Pada and has also had the privilege of taking workshops with highly acclaimed artists, such as, Guru Hari Krishna Kalyanasundaram, Priyadarshini Govind, Bragha Bessel, and Parshwanath Upadhye. Based in the GTA, she is a company dancer at Sampradaya Dance Creations, and of late has been able to be a part of creation processes with Nova Dance. She has been a part of multiple dance works in the Toronto community including *Nirguna (Night Shift)* [2019], *Devatraya Vandana (DanceOntario DanceWeekend)* [2018], *Punyah Krishna and Other Works (Sampradaya Dance Creations)* [2017], and Suma Nair's *Kindred (New Light/Ancient Light)* [2016]. Purawai graduated with a BFA in Dance along with a BSc. in Biomedical Sciences from York University in the spring of 2020. She has been the two-time recipient of the Manorama Thakkar Award for Indian Dance and has also received the IMASCO Performing Arts Award at York University. Currently, Purawai is exploring her practice and training in Bharatanatyam as a basis for creating contemporary works.

Alan Lieu, better known as **Yobi**, is a Canadian producer, audio engineer, sound designer. Born and raised in Winnipeg Manitoba, he got a start in music at age 17, DJing in local clubs. In 2009, Yobi moved to Toronto, Ontario to pursue his passion in audio engineering and production where he attended Recording Arts Canada and The Remix Project (9.0) for audio engineering and DJ. As he developed a refined taste and sound aesthetic after school, Yobi started taking more interest in music production as a self-taught musician and composer, Yobi uses samplers, turntable, field recordings, keyboard and music softwares as his main instruments. He is known for his dark, layered musical style that blends disparate cultural influences and genres including 90's British alternative/electronica and hiphop.

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