

Theater + Arts

Afro-Cuban and Indian cultures meet in choreographer's work



"Surya: The Eternal Rhythm" merges Afro-Cuban and Indian cultures in a show that features dance, poetry and music. It will take place April 2 at the Wolfson Campus Auditorium at Miami Dade College. (Vishwah Rajkumar / Courtesy)



By **Barbara Corbellini Duarte** · Contact Reporter

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Growing up in India, choreographer Ranjana Warier knew little about Afro-Cuban culture.

"I knew Cuba existed. That was it," she recalls with a laugh. "I knew there was Cuba, and I knew there was Africa, but I had no exposure whatsoever."

Today, Warier is the artistic director of "Surya: The Eternal Rhythm," a project that merges Afro-Cuban and Indian cultures through dance, poetry and music. The show, a 2014 winner of a Knight Arts Challenge grant by the Knight Foundation, will take place Saturday, April 2, at the Wolfson Campus Auditorium at [Miami Dade College](#).

"We all might talk differently, and we might portray things differently, but when you look deep down, it appears to be the same human spirit shining through different kinds of lights," she says. "That is actually very encouraging, especially in today's world. Many of us think we're quite different, and that's where conflicts start. But when you start understanding diversity a little bit better, you realize how close we are."

The project started with a poem by Miami-based poet Adrian Castro, who often writes about Afro-Caribbean culture, history and myths. Lissette Mendez, director of Miami Book Fair International, introduced Warier to Castro's poetry, and his work immediately absorbed her.

She was so moved by one poem, titled "Clay, Chalk and Charcoal" and inspired by the African religion Yoruba, that she based a new choreography on it.

"I lost track of how many layers I was adding one more layer, and as a dancer, I could just feel the rhythm."



Warier describes her choreography as a "visualization of Afro-Caribbean poetry through Indian dances." She uses classical and folk Indian styles, not Bollywood. Her show also features the Miami-based Afro-Cuban dance company IFE-ILE. Castro will read the poem before the show, and a panel discussion on the creation of the project will follow the performance.

While developing "Surya," Warier says she was surprised by how many similarities she found between the two cultures.

"I just want people not to be afraid to collaborate with people who might look very different from you," Warier says. "Maybe you use that experience to understand their cultures, and hopefully that brings more tolerance. And if not for anything else, it's good to know more about what else is out there."

"Surya: The Eternal Rhythm" will begin 4 p.m. Saturday, April 2, at the Wolfson Campus Auditorium at Miami Dade College, 300 NE Second Ave., in Miami Admission is free. RSVP at PoetryDance.com.

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