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APR 23–26 / 2025

একসঙ্গে AKSHONGAY

CITADEL
LIVE 24/25

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PHOTO BY JOHN KANE

একসঙ্গে / AKSHONGAY

April 23-26, 2025 | The Citadel: Ross Centre for Dance

Choreographers and Performers: Nova Bhattacharya,
Louis Laberge-Côté
Lighting Designer and Stage Manager: Marc Parent
Music: Phil Strong (1963-2022)
Sound Design Support: Debashis Sinha
Creative Advisors: Marie-Josée Chartier, Andrea Nann
Text: Nova Bhattacharya
Costumes: Cheryl Lalonde, Joanna Yu

একসঙ্গে / Akshongay premiered in 2013, expressing themes of love, friendship, heartbreak and togetherness. Embodying the collaborative relationship of its creators' it evolves alongside them, bringing us to this moment, inside a passionate, dreamlike world.

Three development periods for this work were conducted in residence at La Barn and Le Centre Q with Creative Consultant Tedd Robinson (1952-2022). Dan Wild (1965-2020) served as Rehearsal Director from its premiere to 2016.

Nova Dance is a Creative Incubator Artist with Citadel + Compagnie.

Running time – 55 minutes, no intermission. This performance uses haze

Akshongay is the Bengali word for "together." Our stories—our love stories; our cultural and dance backgrounds; our passions, regrets; our present, and past; our creative relationship and friendship—together, all these elements form the essence of *Akshongay*.

As we return to *একসঙ্গে* / *Akshongay* 12 years since its premiere and 8 years since its last performance, we reflect on how our bodies and spirits have evolved. This remounting is a recognition of the aging and the wisdom, resilience, and tenderness that come with time. The pandemic has further underscored the preciousness of this journey, reminding us that we began this work while living in different countries, separated by distance but united by a shared vision. We also hold the loss of Dan Wild (2020), Tedd Robinson (2022) and Phil Strong (2023). These three artists—Tedd, with his mischievous rigor that expanded our creative boundaries; Phil, weaving the threads of our emotions into the soundscape; and Dan, whose passionate interpretations inspired our deepest expressions—remain ever-present in our hearts.

We hope that as audiences experience this renewed version of *একসঙ্গে* / *Akshongay*, they too will find resonances—whether through changes in their lives, or their own experiences of love, loss, and togetherness.

Presentation History

April 2013 – DanceWorks (Premiere)

March 2014 – Kalanidhi International Dance Festival

June 2014 – Canada Dance Festival

February 2015 – Burlington Performing Arts Centre

August 2015 – Prismatic Festival Nova Scotia

February 2016 – Citadel + Compagnie





Nova Bhattacharya Choreographer and Performer

Nova Bhattacharya is an award-winning, barrier-breaking, artist and cultural leader based in Tkaronto. Her inspiration is found in identities, hybridities and diversities, manifesting creations that resonate with technical virtuosity and lush, vivid imagery. She's always been a rebel reinterpreting traditions and reinventing rituals. In 2008, she founded Nova Dance, embedding the principle that building for the margins ensures inclusion for everyone. The Company offers a space for vital conversations and serves community with kindness, compassion, and generosity. Nova's recent choreography *Svāhā!* features a cast of 22 performers proficient in more than 29 dance forms currently practiced on Turtle Island. The epic work embodies her vision of a diversiform company where the perceived boundaries of culture and technique are dissolved and bodies from the margins are centered. Nova believes that dance expresses the essence of our humanity.



Louis Laberge-Côté Choreographer and Performer

Louis Laberge-Côté is Associate Professor at Toronto Metropolitan University since July 2018. He is a Toronto-based dancer, choreographer, teacher, and rehearsal director. An acclaimed performer, he has danced nationally and internationally with over thirty companies and has been a full-time member of Toronto Dance Theatre (1999-2007) and the Kevin O'Day Ballett Nationaltheater Mannheim (2009-2011). He has created over eighty choreographic works, which have been presented and commissioned in Canada and abroad. His work has garnered him a Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding Choreography and eleven other individual and ensemble nominations for Performance or Choreography. He acted as Chair of the Canadian Alliance of Dance Artists - Ontario Chapter (2005-2007), Vice-President of the Canadian Dance Assembly (2013-2017), and Chair of the Dance Committee at the Toronto Arts Council (2013-2018). He is currently the President of Healthy Dancer Canada. He holds an MFA in Creative Practice from the University of Plymouth (UK) and Transart Institute (USA). Laberge-Côté continues to be a sought-after interpreter and investigator of new dance creations.



Marc Parent Lighting Designer and Stage Manager

Marc Parent has been a lighting designer for more than thirty years. Specializing in contemporary dance, he has collaborated with many choreographers in both locally and internationally, including Daniel Léveillé, Danièle Desnoyers, José Navas, Lucie Grégoire, Jocelyne Monpetit, Peggy Baker, and more. Additionally, Marc works in theatre with directors Denis Marleau, Martin Faucher and François Girard.

In the world of Contemporary and Neo-Classical Ballet, he has designed lighting for international choreographers, including Kader Belarbi (*La Bête et la Belle*), Mauro Bigonzetti (*Les Quatre Saisons*), Didy Veldman (*TooT, Le Petit Prince*) et Stijn Cellis (*Noces, Cendrillon, Le Sacre du Printemps*), Annabelle Lopez Ochoa (*Vendetta : storie di mafia*), and most recently, Ivan Cavalleri (*Gisèle, Roméo et Juliette*) and Jayne Smeulders (*Cendrillon*). Marc was nominated twice for Lighting Design by l'Académie québécoise du théâtre and received 2 Dora Mavor Moore Award in 2013 and 2016 for 'Outstanding Lighting Design in Dance'. He is currently a freelance Lighting Designer for Dance and Theatre.



Phil Strong Music

Phil Strong was a composer and sound designer, and a prominent creative collaborator on the Toronto dance scene. He spent a decade as principal composer for Toronto Dance Theatre, and created scores and sound design for Fujiwara Dance Inventions, Nova Dance, BoucharDanse, Kaeja d'Dance and many others. Phil's work also included scores and sound design for films by Ali Kazimi, Su Rynard, and Moze Mossanen, and installations by John Oswald, Sara Angelucci and Edward Burtynsky. He produced award-winning album recordings for Laurel MacDonald and Mary Jane Lamond. Phil passed away in December 2022, and he is greatly missed in the Toronto creative community.



Debashis Sinha Sound Design Support

A stalwart and consistent presence in the Canadian sound world, Debashis Sinha has realized projects in theatre, dance, media arts and music across Canada and internationally. He is a winner of multiple awards and nominations for his work on theatre stages, including a 2022 Dora Award for Outstanding Achievement in Design (Opera category), and is a 2024 finalist for the Siminovitch Prize, Canada's largest prize for excellence in the theatre arts. Sinha's live sound practice on the concert stage has led to appearances and residencies at MUTEK.JP/MX, ISEA, NeurlPS, Madrid Abierto, Akademie der Künste, Poesiefestival, and other venues. He is currently an assistant professor at The Creative School, Toronto Metropolitan University.



Marie-Josée Chartier Creative Advisor

Marie-Josée moves easily between her roles as choreographer, performer, director, vocalist and teacher in the fields of dance, music, opera and multi-media. Her pieces have been presented in festivals/dance series in Canada, Europe, Latin America and were the subject of documentary films. Since 2003, Marie-Josée directs/stages contemporary opera and multi-media productions that have toured internationally. Awards include: Jacqueline Lemieux Prize (2015); K.M. Hunter Artist Award (2001), 9 Dora Mavor Moore Award nominations; Dora recipient *for fifty-one pieces of silver* (2002) and two Doras shared with the collective URGE for *And by the way Miss* (2005). In 2003, she formed Chartier Danse as a cornerstone for large scale productions and partnerships in Canada and abroad. www.mariejoseechartier.com.



Andrea Nann Creative Advisor

Andrea dances to reach across distance and to experience herself and others in celebration of possibility, plurality, imagination, originality, and belonging. She is a contemporary dance artist, deep listener, founding artist of Dreamwalker Dance Company, and founder/co-creator of Conscious Bodies, an embodied community practice. Andrea is a graduate of York University's Department of Fine Arts and has contributed to the creation of new works by over 70 dance and theatre creators from across Turtle Island. She danced with Danny Grossman Dance Company for 15 years and has been recognized for outstanding choreography, performance, contributions to the performing arts sector and for her work in community actioning. For Andrea, dance and embodiment can shift attitudes and ways of being, tuning us into what makes each of us distinct, to what we share, and ultimately how we can live together in wonderment and peace.



Cheryl Lalonde Costume Designer

Born and raised in Toronto, Cheryl Lalonde now resides in the paradise known as the Madawaska Valley. Leaving the city during the pandemic created an opportunity for Cheryl to begin exploring creative avenues of a more personal nature including quilting, felt work, knitting, and chickenology. She has returned to the city for only a few projects to work with artists she feels particularly attached to. Having collaborated with Louis on the premiere of *The Art of Degeneration*, she is delighted to be part of his other creative explorations, growth and developments. Other recent collaborators include Lina Cruz (Fila 13), Natasha Powell (Holla Jazz), Jennifer Dallas (Kemi), and Sylvie Bouchard (BoucharDanse).



Joanna Yu Costume Designer

A Set and Costume Designer working in Theatre, Film, and Dance. Over the past 15 years, Joanna has designed and collaborated on over 100 productions; 44 of them World Premieres. Joanna's designs have been seen on stages across Canada and internationally in Germany, India, and the UK. Joanna is a board member of Associated Designers of Canada, ADC659 and founding member of the IBPOC Designers Circle. She is a graduate of York University's Theatre Design and Production program. She was born in Hong Kong and raised in Thornhill, Ontario. She currently resides in Stratford, Ontario as a guest and settler on the traditional lands and waterways of the Anishanaabe, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Wendat, and the Attiwonderonk.

Thanks to: Laurence and the wonderful team at Citadel + Compagnie for welcoming *Akshongay* back with open arms; Marc for lighting us beautifully and agreeing to call sound cues; Deb for passionately honouring Phil's legacy; and Marie-Josée and Andrea for deepening our understanding of *Akshongay*. And to Michael and Mark, our respective partners whose presence is integral to the journey.

Nova Dance is grateful to have been a Creative Incubator resident artist at The Citadel: Ross Centre for Dance since 2020. The invaluable support of this program has deepened the content and calibre of our work, while also expanding opportunities for its dissemination. By offering sustained access to space, resources, and a nurturing creative environment, the Residency and Creative Incubator Program has been a vital partner enabling us to experiment, collaborate, and grow alongside a community that shares our love for dance.

NOVA dance

Nova Dance is a Toronto-based contemporary dance company known for its bold, diversiform aesthetic. Founded by Nova Bhattacharya in 2008, the company creates genre-defying works that reflect a dynamic range of movement and storytelling traditions. With choreography shaped by culturally rooted perspectives and a spirit of constant experimentation, Nova Dance forges new pathways in Canadian performance. From intimate solos to expansive ensemble creations, the company brings together artists, stories, and communities through emotionally resonant, visually striking works.

At the heart of Nova Dance's practice is a deep commitment to equity, curiosity, and care. Through mentorship programs, cross-cultural collaborations, and community-engaged initiatives, the company cultivates intergenerational dialogue and artistic leadership from the margins. Nova Dance invites audiences into shared spaces of transformation, where movement becomes a vessel for storytelling, connection, and renewal.

Full-time Staff:

Nova Bhattacharya, Artistic Director

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Neena Jayarajan, Associate Artist

Rachana Joshi, Company Dancer & Administrative Support

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The Theatre Centre

Citadel + Compagnie is an artistic and community entity with a dual purpose.
It is at once both place and people.

The Citadel: Ross Centre for Dance is a remarkable building nestled in the Regent Park neighbourhood of Toronto. Since 2012, The Citadel has established itself as an open and welcoming space for artists to rehearse, create and perform, and where the community can learn, communicate, and share.

The Citadel plays host to a range of presentation platforms and residency programs for some of Canada's most interesting choreographers and dance companies. It is also the home of the Citadel Dance Program, providing free dance education to local children and youth, and neighbour Toronto Council Fire's Indigenous dance program, First Fire.

Compagnie de la Citadelle is the professional dance company within Citadel + Compagnie. Founded in 2000, the Compagnie is known for its creative processes and intimate performances of classic works and new creations. Through remount initiatives, the Compagnie also dedicates itself to the preservation of important Canadian dance work, making available iconic repertoire to a new generation of dance artists.

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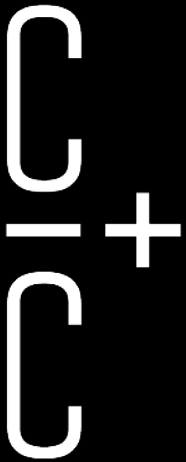
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25 Years and Beyond

For 25 years, Citadel + Compagnie has been driven by a passion for sharing exceptional dance with diverse communities and opening meaningful dialogue between artists and the public.

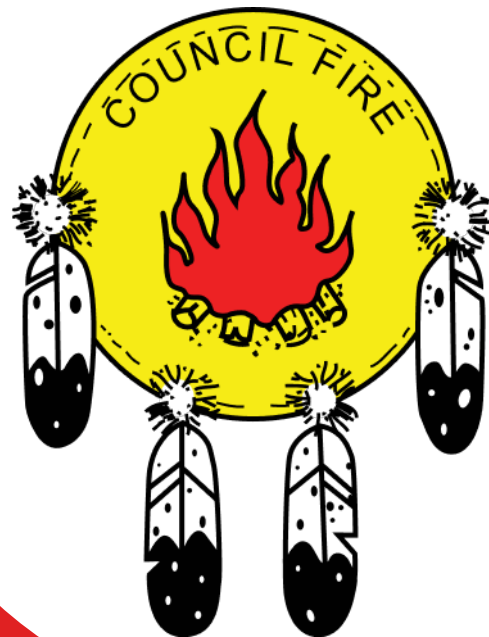
We are deeply committed to the development of Toronto's dance community, and this is what moves us to create, present and inspire.

This commitment is expressed through our dance company, **Compagnie de la Citadelle**, our presentation series **Citadel LIVE**, and the cultivating of the next generation of dancers through our **Citadel Dance Program**.

Citadel + Compagnie is a force within the Toronto dance community, and we need your support to continue our extraordinary programming well into the future.

CLICK HERE to help us finish this anniversary season strong by raising \$50,000 by June 30, 2025.

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