



Shakti Rising features
five powerful dance pieces

Description

A unique collaboration between Indian and Indigenous dance and music

By **Jacqueline van de Geer**

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Shakti Rising: Honoring our Stories, a dance presentation created and performed by **Amrita Choudhury** and **Barbara Diabo**, explores the cultural, political, and spiritual aspects surrounding the life cycles of two women, represented by Mother Earth. This is a unique collaboration between Indian and Indigenous dance and music. An intercultural, multi-lingual, and artistic performance, *Shakti Rising* follows the story of these women and their journey in today's world. Ancestral knowledge, profound life experiences, and issues related to marginalized and Indigenous communities are highlighted through five powerful dance pieces.



Amrita Choudhuri – Image: Arif Siddiqi

I had the pleasure to talk with Amrita Choudhuri in a short Zoom meeting and here is what she generously shared with me!

Jacqueline: *At what age did you start to dance?*

Amrita: I started to dance by the age of four. My mother, who was also a dancer, transmitted this knowledge to me. Dance is the foundation of Indian Culture. We learn how to dance even before we learn how to use our vocal chords! I owe a lot of my dancing skills to my mother and also to several ancient lineage-based teachers from whom I learned from throughout the years.

At sixteen, I started to teach dance and I have been performing and teaching ever since. For me, dance is a powerful tool for dialogue and communication. Although I am a technically trained dancer, my focus has always been more on creating awareness, giving voice to the voiceless and spreading joy, love and harmony through my dance productions. Dance for me is the extension of humanity and is life itself – it is a profound philosophy of life in motion.

Jacqueline: *Can you tell me how you and Barbara Diabo met?*



Amrita: Barbara and I initially met at a Maori dance workshop and then later at an Aztec dance workshop. After this, I invited Barbara to participate in my intercultural **Unity Dance** project in Ottawa, which featured five different cultures.

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In 2018, while I was planning the beginning stages of *Shakti Rising*, I invited Barbara for a possible collaboration. We met up in a cafe and I shared my ideas for this special project. We found that we had much in common culturally, spiritually, and as women. I was grateful and delighted when Barbara accepted to join the project. Thanks to a Canada Council for the Arts grant, Barbara and I commenced our special collaboration for *Shakti Rising: Honoring our Stories*.



Amrita Choudhuri – Image: Paul Eifert

Jacqueline: Which brings me to my next question: Can you tell me a bit about Shakti and this project?

Amrita: *Shakti* is the Sanskrit word for a strong feminine power and is represented by the powerful Goddess of creation and recreation in India. This performance is a powerful exchange between two women and their stories. It is not only their stories, it is many people's stories. We both come from communities that went through hardships and still do. At the same time, we acknowledge that most of us have known times of hardship. How can we rise from these stories, how can find the path of hope?

In my everyday life, I feel the presence of Shakti as a constant support, which helps in my evolution of being present in this feminine power. Barbara works from her Indigenous Mohawk culture with the powerful presence of



Sky woman, the creator and preserver.

Last, but not least, our performance is supported by two wonderful musicians: **Pedro Diaz** of Peruvian origin, and **Aditya Verma**, an Indian musician.

Jacqueline: *I can't wait to see this piece, when will it be happening?*

Amrita: *Shakti Rising: Honoring our Stories* will premiere on **Saturday, November 19** at 7 pm in the Vanier College Auditorium, 865 Sainte-Croix in Montreal.

amritadancecreations.com/shaktirising

Feature image: promotional visual for *Shakti Rising: Honoring our Stories*

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Originally from the Netherlands, **Jacqueline van de Geer** crossed the Atlantic Ocean in 2005 to live and work in Montréal. She has a bachelor's degree in visual arts and performance arts.

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1. Dance
2. Review

Tags

1. Amrita Choudhury
2. Barbara Diabo
3. Jacqueline Van De Geer
4. Shakti Rising: Honoring our Stories

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