

To whom it may concern,

## India's National Treasure, the Dancing God Pt. Birju Maharaj Tours Japan

*The living legend of India, Pt. Birju Maharaj will tour Japan from the 8th to 20th May, 2014 after 26 years, with his foremost disciple, Saswati Sen, his son, Deepak Maharaj, and the rising star, Mahua Shankar. The troop will perform in Tokyo on 11th May and Osaka, 17th May.*

### Birju Maharaj Japan Tour

**Tokyo: 16:00 Sunday, 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2014 at Theatre1010**

**Osaka: 16:30 Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2014 at Creo Osaka**

Pandit Birju Maharaj is the seventh torch bearer of the Kalka-Bindadin *gharānā* (family lineage) of kathak dance. The family lineage is originated in the Mughal court of the last *nawāb* of Awadh, Wajid Ali Shah. Endowed talent and with his experience in the Mughal courts, Maharaj enhanced the level of kathak dance from an ethnic dance to a performing art, adding the traditional elements to the contemporary taste. With Maharaj's contribution, kathak dance is celebrated as a refined performing art both in India and abroad today.

Maharaj, when he was twenty-eight years old, was awarded Sangeet Natak Akademi Award by India's National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama, and in 1986, he was offered Padma Vibhushan (the second civilian award of India). Other than these awards, Maharaj has been awarded numerous domestic and international awards, including Soviet Land Nehru Award by the USSR, Rajiv Gandhi Peace Award by the Indian government, and Lifetime Achievement Award by the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival. The late sitar maestro, Ravi Shankar had a close friendship with Maharaj, and the renowned *tabla* (Indian drum) player, Zakir Hussain frequently tours with Maharaj.

In addition to the classical dance stage, Maharaj worked for Indian cinema. For Satyajit Ray's *The Chess Players* (1977), Maharaj directed the choreography and offered a song, *Kanha Main Tose Hari*, and for *Vishwaroop* (2013), he received the Best Choreographer Award. Other famous films Maharaj contributed are *Gadar* (2001) and *Devdas* (2004). The Bollywood celebrity, Madhuri Dixit, respects Maharaj as her *guru* (mentor). As an achieved dancer, choreographer, composer, poet, singer, percussionist and *guru*, Maharaj—the perfect artist and maestro—is loved by kathak dancers and lovers across the borders.



Kathak dance is one of the seven Indian classical dance forms. In ancient India, the dance originally was a method of storytelling of Hindu myth, as its derivation '*kathā*' means a story in Sanskrit language. The storytelling had evolved into the dance form in Mughal court and was used to be inherited from generation to generation until the early 1950s. However, in the latter half of the twentieth century, kathak started to be taught in schools and established its place as a performing art due to the art revival movement led by some intellectuals and artists such as Rabindranath Tagore, Madam Menaka, Uday Shankar (the late sitar maestro, Ravi Shankar's brother) and others, among which is Pandit Birju Maharaj.

Kathak dancers wear ankle-bells (*ghunghroo*), which sounds with the dancer's foot work and plays the rhythm such as tap dance. Swift yet graceful body movements and spins are also typical features of kathak dance. Some dance scholars mention that flamenco originates from kathak dance. It may be popularly remembered that a celebrated British contemporary dancer, Akram Khan has introduced his original works which contains some aspects of kathak dance.

With his Japan tour, Maharaj delivers you stories through his graceful body movements, sophisticated expressions, and the sound of his ankle-bells on his complicated rhythms.

**Contact: The Committee for Pandit Birju Maharaj's Japan Tour**

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**Official Website:** <http://birjumaharaj.miyabi-kathak.com/> (Tokyo), <http://indiakansai.com/maharaj/> (Osaka)



### Saswati Sen

Saswati Sen initially had her dance training with Reba Vidyarti, a legendary dancer. Having entered in the Kathak Kendra, the national dance school, she has learnt with Birju Maharaj for more than forty-five years. Saswati appeared in *The Chess Players* (1977), responding an eager request by the director, Satyajit Ray. For *Romeo and Juliet* (2004), an international collaboration project with Luis Bank from Holland, she played the main role and choreographer. With the success of the project and her career, Saswati was awarded Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 2004. Especially, her *abhinaya* (expression) is highly acclaimed. Saswati now works as the most talented dancer and supports Birju Maharaj, teaching at and working as the secretary for Kalashram, the art school of Maharaj.



### Deepak Maharaj

The second son of Birju Maharaj, Deepak Maharaj started learning dance with his father from his childhood. Deepak made his stage debut when he was nine years old, since then he toured with Birju Maharaj in India and abroad. Inheriting rhythmic sense from his father, Deepak enchants audience with his energetic footwork and presence.



### Mahua Shankar

Born into a family of artists, Mahua Shankar started her dance training with Birju Maharaj from her young age. She appeared in dance sciences of popular Bollywood films, *Gadar* (2001) and *Devdas* (2004). Endowed traditional beauty and unique presence, Mahua is a top kathak dancer of young age.



### Masako Sato

Having learnt flamenco in Japan, Masako Sato moved to Delhi in 1995 to enter into Kathak Kendra, where she began learning from Birju Maharaj from 1997. As a member of Maharaj's company, she participated in a number of performances. Masako returned to Japan in 2005 and founded her dance school, Miyabi Kathak Dance Academy in the following year. She is a member of the Shinjuku Artist Association.



### Nalini Toshniwal (Osaka)

Nalini Toshniwal started her dance training with Manak Dutt Jodhpuri when she was eleven years old, and obtained a master's degree in kathak dance from Chandigarh University. She had founded Ruchika Indian Dance Academy in 1990 in Ajmer, India, which was shifted to Japan in 1992, since when Nalini has worked mainly in Osaka and Kobe, introducing kathak dance and Indian culture to Japan. She is a member of the International Dance Council.

### Chandrachur Bhattacharjee (Sitar)

Chandrachur Bhattacharjee is an acclaimed Kolatta-based sitar player and composer. He often accompanies Birju Maharaj's tour.



### Utpal Ghoshal (Tabla)

Utpal Ghoshal is a tabla player and accompanies Birju Maharaj. His clear tabla sound is with an established reputation.

### Tokyo

Director: Takumi Harada

Lighting Technician: Masanori Ichigaya (Rekooland Co.,Ltd.)

Sound Engineer: Yoshiyuki Kanamori (Oasis Sound Design Inc.)

Organised by the Committee for Panit Birju Maharaj's Japan Tour, Cooperated by Miyabi Kathak Dance Academy, Under the auspices of The Indian Embassy in Japan, The Japan-India Association, The Japan Foundation, Discover India Club, NPO Nichi-In Koryu wo Moriageru-kai

### Osaka

Organised by the Committee for Panit Birju Maharaj's Japan Tour, Cooperated by Ruchika Indian Dance Academy, Namaste Works, Under the auspices of The Indian Embassy in Japan, The Consulate General of India, Osaka-Kobe, Japan, Indian Chamber of Commerce in Japan, Kansai Japan India Cultural Society