



# Bay Area Stringer

News, views and reviews, especially about the San Francisco Bay Area



DANCE, PERFORMANCE

## Oakland Ballet “Jangala”

by [Joanna G. Harris](#) • March 11, 2018

Oakland Ballet Company

**“Jangala”**

March 10, 13, 16, 17, 2018

Skyline HS, Oakland

(Other sites; Castro Valley HS, San Leandro HS)

### Indian Dance: Bharatanatyam and the Oakland Ballet

Graham Lustig, Artistic Director of the Oakland Ballet, grew up in London and learned the Rudyard Kipling's works, particularly “*The Jungle Book*.” With movement vocabulary from the south Indian classic dance form, bharatanatyam, Lustig has devised the story of Mowgli, a lost boy who survives in the wild. In this adaptation Mowgli's life starts in the city, proceeds to the wild animal scenes (is there a difference?), and then, with encouragement and affection, returns to city life.

“*Jangala*” was preceded on the program by the Nava Dance Theatre, a bharatanatyam dance company based in San Francisco. The six dancers, led by Nadhi Thekkekk, and six musicians gave us the story of “*The Little Elephant in the Room*.” It was a charming work, featuring a dance-conversation between two dancers, one convincing the other that the elephants home (the forest) is worth saving. The rapport between the dancers and musicians was elegant. The dancers face, hand and footwork conveyed the many emotions registered in the story. Nava can be seen at the SF Ethnic Dance Festival. Their web site is [www.navadance.org](http://www.navadance.org).

An alumnus of Ailey Dance, Sachit Babbar was the heroic Mowgli in Lustig's "*Jangala*." He is transformed from his city person to the wild child who is beset by the jungles animals, both cruel and kind. Eleven dancers from the Oakland Ballet Company, in splendid costumes, played all the roles. Baloo the Bear and Baghera the Panther (Calvin Thomas and Frankie Lee Peterson III) were particularly charming as those who rescue Mowgli from the power-hungry Tiger, Shere Khan (Tori Jahn). Eventually Mowgli prevails, having gained courage from his animal friends. A village woman, Messua, adopts Mogli and teaches him human ways, but he escapes back to the jungle with his wolf companions, Rasha (Samantha Bell), the mother wolf and her mate, Father Wolf (Christopher Dunn), who welcome him back since he has defeated Shere Kahn.

If you take children to the show, read "*The Jungle Book*" beforehand. Although the dance sections are clear and delightful, the story moves quickly and its more fun to know the characters and their animal selves. The production is marvelously costumed and scenic design is credited to Howard Siskiwitz, The extraordinary lighting is by JC Moore, ballet master is Bat Abbit and the Bharatanatyam Advisor is Renuka Srinivasan.

All the staff, cast and dancers and especially Graham Lustig are to congratulated for this extraordinary production. It is wonderful to know that Lustig, is including the Oakland community in his outreach and reaching that community where they live, in the various neighborhood high schools. This production however is work bringing to a larger audience at the Paramount or another venue so that many can enjoy it.

Joanna G. Harris

Sanchi Babbar, Mowgli, Nadhi Thekkekk, Messua, In Oakland Ballet's *Jangala*  
Graham Lustig, Choreographer



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## Wayne McGregor "Autobiography"

by [Joanna G. Harris](#) • March 9, 2018