

AKRAM KHAN COMPANY UNTIL THE LIONS



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ROUNDHOUSE

ROUNDHOUSE

WELCOME TO THE ROUNDHOUSE



Photo: Ella Pinney

In 1966, the Roundhouse opened its doors for the first time as a cutting-edge arts venue, beginning with the legendary launch of radical underground newspaper, the *International Times*. In 2016 we started our 50th anniversary year with the world premiere of *Until the Lions* from one of the dance world's most influential and respected figures, Akram Khan. After a world tour of in-the-round venues, the show returned to us in January 2019, but it is the special premiere, lovingly captured by our young film and broadcast team, that we are bringing to online audiences on the 27th August 2020.

Collaboration is very much at the heart of everything we do at the Roundhouse and *Until the Lions* is no exception. A production that was three years in the

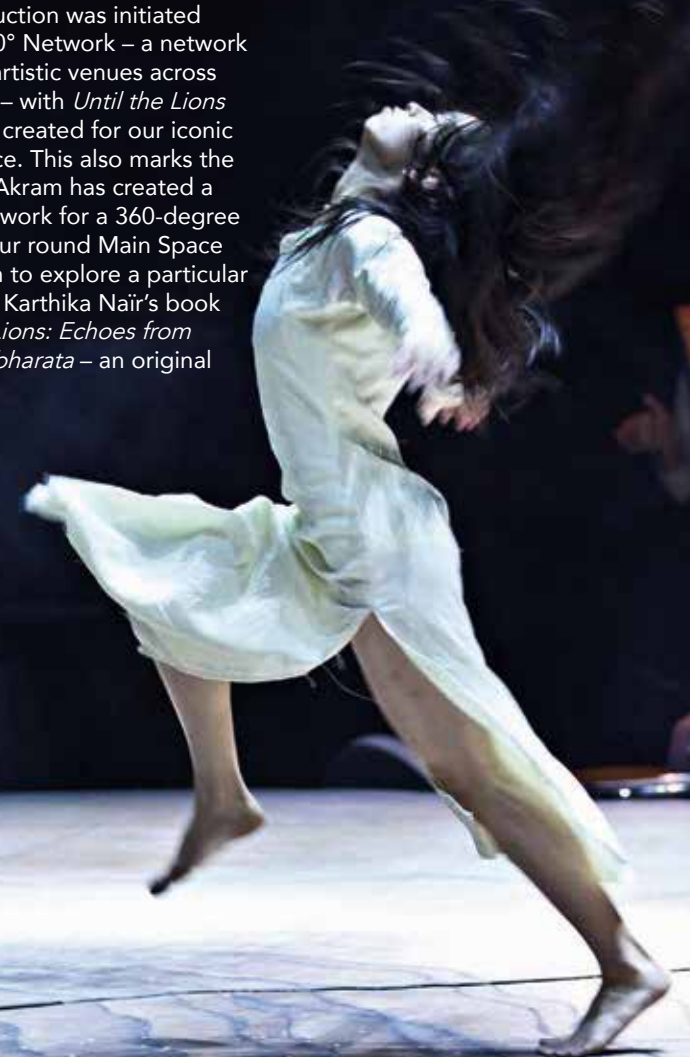
making before opening at the Roundhouse, we are delighted to be working in partnership with Sadler's Wells, as well as one of the most extraordinary and instinctive collaborators I have come across, Akram Khan. Akram has worked with world-class artists from music, film, dance and theatre and watching him in rehearsals last summer, I was able to witness his open and inclusive approach to the creative process first hand.

This production was initiated by the 360° Network – a network of round artistic venues across the world – with *Until the Lions* especially created for our iconic Main Space. This also marks the first time Akram has created a complete work for a 360-degree setting. Our round Main Space allows him to explore a particular section of Karthika Nair's book *Until the Lions: Echoes from the Mahabharata* – an original

reimagining of the epic *Mahabharata* – and pulls audiences into Akram's world, giving them a unique experience from every viewpoint.

I look forward to experiencing this premiere performance once again and I very much hope you enjoy it too.

Marcus Davey OBE
Chief Executive and
Artistic Director



AKRAM KHAN COMPANY UNTIL THE LIONS

World premiere: 12 January 2016, Roundhouse, London

This performance will last approximately 1 hour, with no interval

This production is a partial adaptation of *Until the Lions: Echoes from the Mahabharata*, a retelling in verse of the *Mahabharata* by Karthika Naïr (published by HarperCollins India, 2015 and Arc Publications UK, 2016)

Production initiated by the 360° Network of round artistic venues across the world

Produced during residency at Sadler's Wells and Curve Leicester

Co-produced by Roundhouse/Sadler's Wells, MC2: Grenoble, La Comète Châlons-en-Champagne, Théâtre de la Ville/La Villette Paris, Danse Danse/TOHU Montréal, Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg, New Vision Arts Festival Hong Kong, Taipei Performing Arts Center, Movimentos Festwochen der Autostadt in Wolfsburg, Brighton Festival 2016, Maison de la Culture d'Amiens, Concertgebouw Brugge, Le Manège de Reims Scène nationale, Holland Festival Amsterdam, Romaeuropa Festival and Curve Leicester

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Akram Khan is an Associate Artist of Sadler's Wells and Curve Leicester



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ENGLAND**

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ACROSS WORLDS

A consummate storyteller, risk-taking collaborator and genre-defying dancer, Akram Khan is one of the UK's most influential artists. Lyndsey Winship charts his journey to the top.

One evening in July 2012, 900 million people around the globe watched Akram Khan dance. Against the backdrop of a giant glowing orange sun, 50 performers with Khan at the helm flowed across a stage as Emeli Sandé sang 'Abide with Me.' This, of course, was the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games for which Khan was chosen to create a section of Danny Boyle's spectacular production.

He might not have been the biggest name on the televised bill but by that summer Khan was one of the UK's most in-demand dance-makers. He had already built a reputation as an electric performer and a choreographer with a singular voice, fusing

influences from his Bangladeshi heritage with contemporary dance and theatre.

Performing since his teens, two very different figures helped launch Khan's stage career. Peter Brook, the ground-breaking theatre director, cast 13-year-old Khan in his staging of the Sanskrit epic, the *Mahabharata*, which toured the world from the mid-1980s. Before that, though, Michael Jackson had provided the inspiration for Khan to enter and win a school talent show in which he danced a 'Thriller' routine. The experience saw him change, in his own words, from 'the Indian boy who was a bit weird, who nobody knew,' to the kid they'd call out to in the playground, saying: 'Hey Akram, wow, that was really cool.'

As a shy boy, with a stammer and a lisp, London-born Khan could have trouble articulating himself verbally but he found confidence in communicating physically. 'My body became my refuge,' he recalls. Part of the reason the boys at school didn't know him was because Khan wasn't always there. For a year he managed to bunk off school to secretly practice *kathak* for eight hours at a time in a garage behind his house in Wimbledon, leaving dressed in his uniform in

the morning and then doubling back through the garden. Khan's instinct to dance and the will to follow his own path was clear, even at a young age.

His parents were mortified when they discovered he hadn't been at school but his mother was appeased, a little, when she found out he was spending the time dancing. It was she who introduced him to folk dance as a child and then the north Indian classical dance form *kathak* at

seven. A storytelling tradition that grew from the temples and courts of medieval India, *kathak* uses expressive gestures and rhythmic virtuosity, with lightning-quick spins and fast-stamping feet.

Khan went on to study dance at De Montfort University followed by the Northern School of Contemporary Dance. It was here he discovered ballet and contemporary, and the work of Pina Bausch and DV8 Physical

Theatre, all of which 'confused' his *kathak* technique, resulting in his unique style. He graduated with top marks. 'It's always when you're lost that you discover something – or yourself,' he once said.

Khan set up his own company with producer Farooq Chaudhry as the millennium rolled around. In 2002, *Kaash* was the piece that really got people's attention, setting out his thrilling collision of cultures and showcasing a striking collaboration with British-



Indian sculptor Anish Kapoor and composer Nitin Sawhney. It was Khan's own performance that many in the audience found so compelling – a dancer of supreme focus and fluidity; a mass of coiled energy held together by an inner strength like the earth's magnetic core.

Since then, Khan's work has progressed on a number of parallel paths, expanding his range of influences, incorporating text and growing ever more confident in theatrical experimentation. There are works with Khan at the centre, such as 2009's *Gnosis* and the award-winning *DESH* (2011), inspired by a visit to his family's homeland of Bangladesh. Then there are full company works, harnessing the power of an ensemble of dancers including *ma* (2004), *Vertical Road* (2010) and *iTMOi* (2013). But perhaps most revealing is a series of collaborations that represent curious conversations with artists from different worlds and disciplines.

In *zero degrees* (2005), Khan meditated on life and death with Belgian-Moroccan choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, the production also featuring man-sized sculptures by artist Antony Gormley. He teamed up with French actress Juliette Binoche for *In-I* (2008) at the National Theatre, drawing out her dancing abilities. He coaxed another French icon, ballet dancer Sylvie Guillem, into her most intimate onstage performance in *Sacred Monsters* (2006), as they shared stories of childhood and anxieties about artistic life. And, most recently, he embarked on a blistering showdown with maverick flamenco dancer Israel Galván in *TOROBACA* (2014). Along the way, he has even found the time to choreograph part of Kylie Minogue's 'Showgirl Tour.' For him, collaboration acts as an essential form of communication.

Themes of home and identity are never far from Khan's work. His approach can be observational and wry, finding the poignant moments in everyday life, or it can be epic and trancelike, delving deep into dance with a sense of otherworldliness. A strong spirituality runs through his work, the 'vertical road' in that show's title referring to the path to enlightenment, as opposed to the horizontal road that is our march forward in time. Although his performances often have a visceral pull, Khan hasn't forgotten *kathak's* art of storytelling – the appeal of revisiting the *Mahabharata* for *Until the Lions* lies in addressing some of its universal themes, including love, injustice and revenge, but his narratives are usually fragmented and dreamlike.

The Olympic experience had an impact on the way that Khan now thinks about creation. 'Up until that point, I was interested in the space inside the body – and that's a huge world,' he observes. 'But suddenly it wasn't about the internal picture, and it was the bigger picture, and it was the space *outside* the body that I started to learn about.' *Until the Lions*, with its 360-degree setting, is a product of this new 'obsession' as Khan describes it.

For each new work, he often creates a new vocabulary and he continues to rove across

the borders of dance languages, his next major project being a reworking of the romantic ballet *Giselle*. At 41, Khan will soon wind down his dancing career and focus solely on choreography, which makes his performances all the more worth seeing now. When he dances, there's a power and soulfulness that is impossible not to connect with. As with all great artists, the feeling he conjures is

often beyond words; like the boys in the schoolyard, all you can say is, 'Wow, that's really cool.'

Lyndsey Winship is dance critic of the *Evening Standard* and author of *Being a Dancer*.

Written in 2016.





AMBA'S STORY

'Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter'

(African proverb)

Until the Lions is a choreographic response to the tale of Amba/Shikhandi in the *Mahabharata*, the classical Sanskrit epic that has been beloved by Akram Khan since his childhood. Poet and writer Karthika Nair reimagines this story and those of other marginal characters from the original in her new book *Until the Lions: Echoes from the Mahabharata*. Nair's retelling in verse gives voice, dignity and intention to these female characters whose lives and stories, as well as their roles as catalysts and witnesses, have remained largely unexplored.

In the *Mahabharata*, Amba is the eldest daughter of the King of Kashi. At the point of choosing her husband during a public *swayamvara* ceremony, she is abducted by Bheeshma, son of the Kuru king. An unparalleled warrior and archer, he defeats Amba's potential suitors including her true and secret love, Shalva.

Bheeshma has made a vow of lifelong celibacy (Bheeshma means 'he of the terrible oath'). Intending Amba as a potential bride for his half-brother, Bheeshma discovers that Amba loves another. He releases her, but Shalva spurns her because she has been won by another man to whom she now belongs.

Amba returns to Bheeshma and insists he right the wrong done

to her by taking her as his bride. Bound by his vow of celibacy, Bheeshma refuses, and Amba's pleas for justice fall on deaf ears. Amba swears she will be revenged on Bheeshma and dedicates the rest of her life to this purpose.

She undergoes years of extreme penance, which unbalances the universe. Finally Lord Shiva appears and tells Amba she will destroy Bheeshma in her next life. Amba burns herself to death, and is reborn as Shikhandi, a woman later given male form by a forest spirit.

Trained as a warrior, burning with the memory of Amba's vow, Shikhandi finally confronts Bheeshma on the battlefield on the tenth day of an apocalyptic war between the Kaurava and Pandava clans. Recognising Shikhandi as female in origin, and as the instrument of Amba's revenge, Bheeshma lays down his weapon, allowing the warrior Arjuna to attack him from behind Shikhandi. Pierced by Shikhandi's arrows as well as Arjuna's, Bheeshma falls, severely wounded, and awaits his death and the war's end, on a bed of arrows.

Until the Lions, though, imagines this final confrontation as one between Shikhandi (fuelled by Amba's spirit and boon) and Bheeshma. The two tortured souls alone, with no other adversaries or allies: it becomes the culmination of two lifetimes of loyalty through betrayal, devotion through wrath.

On the night after the eighteenth and final day of war, Shikhandi is murdered by the three surviving warriors from the Kaurava army, who, in their desperate rage, break all the rules of battle, and kill him in his sleep, thus denying his soul a place in heaven.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Film and theatre director Danny Boyle catches up with Akram Khan during rehearsals. We listen in to the former collaborators as they ponder sources of inspiration, questions of gender and the struggles of creating work.

Danny: Tell us why you are returning to the *Mahabharata* for your new production?

Akram: A female poet called Karthika Nair, who created *DESH* with us, approached me because she has written a collection of poems on female characters from the *Mahabharata*. When I appeared in Peter Brook's version, I was 13, and I don't remember the women being super celebrated. They were not the main protagonists. Looking back, I can see that it gave a very male perspective, which is often the case with mythology. I remember the women in the company being incredible actors but also treating me like a son because I was missing my Mum a lot. I got very close to these wonderful actors and it left me fascinated.

Danny: Okay, so you were 13, and in Peter Brook's theatre version of the *Mahabharata*? How did you find it?

Akram: Since I was the youngest actor, he would always ask me to run to the back of the auditorium to give me comments. I would expect revolutionary or constructive pieces of criticism but he would usually say something like, 'Akram, just step to your left a little,'

and then send me back down. That's just one anecdote but what was beautiful about Peter as a director was the stories he would tell after the show. This was very special. For the benefit of the actors, he would connect the *Mahabharata* to something he had experienced personally or a story he had heard. He would make things happening in present-day New York, for example, relevant to the *Mahabharata* – and he would tell them in such a phenomenal way.

Danny: So, he would tell stories to inspire the story you were all doing?

Akram: Yes, he didn't want the *Mahabharata* to feel mythological. Even though we were wearing costumes that were aesthetically of that period, he wanted to make it feel relevant. He played a lot with time.

Danny: Did you learn anything from him, his techniques?

Akram: I learnt as much as I could at that young age. I recently discovered that Joe Wright [the film director] and I were in the audition for the same role. Marie-Hélène [Estienne], Peter's right-hand, auditioned us both. I had no

acting training while Joe was busy training as an actor. I was very physical, though, and I think Marie-Hélène chose me because she knew Peter would be able to mould me. I was formless; I didn't have a way of speaking then but I was very comfortable in my body. The way I see things now, a lot of this has been inspired by Peter.

Danny: The last time I saw you rehearsing was for the opening ceremony of the Olympics. For those of us who don't know enough about contemporary dance, how do you go about inspiring your dancers – is it through vocabulary or by example?

Akram: Intention, especially narrative intention. When I'm rehearsing a new work, I do look at the technicality but all the performances must have an intention. They can't just be a series of steps or movements. There has to be a meaning behind what the dancers are doing, they have to know where they are going, and how they exit. It's very theatre-driven. Having said that, one of the questions that constantly challenges me is how literal I should make the work versus how much I leave ambiguous or suggestive. Does that bother you when you make a piece of theatre?

Danny: Well, one of the joys I find about going down to Sadler's Wells or somewhere similar to see dance is that I can let that go. Narrative structure is a very strict discipline in the world I work in – which is theatre, film or television – and you can only get away without it for a couple of minutes before you're lost ... So, did you read Karthika Nair's book before you conceived the production for the Roundhouse?

Akram: She sent me a couple of poems from her book written from the character Amba's perspective. What really inspired me is that the poems are written in a mathematical, physical, visceral way. They are phenomenally written but also phenomenally designed.

Danny: What I'm really interested in is how you start to work from there? In film or television, we begin with a read-through where we all share the text. I don't know how useful it is but it is the tradition, it settles everyone in, making them feel as though they're on the same page, literally. Do you do that?

Akram: Well, we sent the poems around to everybody and Karthika was also in the collaborators' meetings so we all started from the same place. But what is challenging is finding the right time to let go of the poetry. When you start a process like this, the work has to change and leave the page at some point. The words are there to inspire us but we're not serving them. We've had to free ourselves from the words so it's not too specific to Hindu mythology. It has to be universal. Basically, the piece is about love, betrayal, revenge ... that's it ... that's the essence.

The other thing is that the *Mahabharata*, through Karthika's poems, reveals so much about the way in which females are regarded in that society. The title of her book, *Until the Lions*, comes from an African proverb. The hunter will always tell the story until the lions can have their say. The victorious always write history – never the losers. What I loved about her approach is that she's taken it from the female characters, the unsung heroes, if you like. Amba is not necessarily

a hero but she's a strong woman who defies what society has – out of fear – come to regard as right and wrong. Isn't that so relevant to what is happening in the world today? Where people decide fundamentally what's right and wrong. In Amba's story, the character Bheeshma abducts her and puts her in a situation where nobody will marry her – he himself has made a vow of celibacy. She expects him to marry her. But he won't break his vow. She asks if his vow is more important than her life. Many years later, he reflects on the fact that since he didn't marry Amba, he could never marry anybody else. He's kind of acknowledging her as his equal, saying 'she's the one who tried to make an immovable object like me transform.'

Danny: It's an amazing story but keep talking because I remember reading that Amba then changes into the male form, Shikhandi. Is that right?

Akram: First, she goes to the mountain and prays. She's so still, though, that it affects the world and creates chaos. Shiva,



the supreme god, descends and asks what she wants because her stillness is unbalancing. She replies that she wants the tool to kill Bheeshma, who has made another vow never to kill women and children. Shiva directs her to commit suicide so she can be reborn as a girl but trained in a particular way to behave like a man. Then the night before she goes into battle with Bheeshma, she makes love to a spirit and they exchange genders. Only Shikhandi can kill Bheeshma, and the only way he wants to die is by her arrow. When he sees Shikhandi, he knows it is Amba. He knows this is someone who has thought of him across the course of two lifetimes.*

Danny: Wow. So, how many people are you performing this with?

Akram: I play Bheeshma. There's this wonderful creature-dancer, Ching-Ying Chien, who's playing Amba and another female artist, Christine Joy Ritter, performing Shikhandi. And then there are four musicians. My dramaturg Ruth Little and I are constantly

debating and questioning how much of the story to tell. We have to ask how we can simplify it without losing its complexity. When Ruth spent time with David Lan [Artistic Director] of the Young Vic, he told her that if people don't feel connected to a performance in the first ten minutes, then you've lost them.

Danny: The great British film director David Lean also said that you have to declare your intentions in the first ten minutes.

Akram: Originally, I was going to play this as a solo, all three characters, because I am fascinated by gender. When I was young, my school friends, who were more macho and played football, regarded me as ambiguous. I danced, I used to put on make-up and sometimes I'd wear my Mum's sari to play female roles. Do you find actors can be similarly ambiguous, shifting from female to male, or vice versa?

Danny: It's funny hearing you talk about your background because it's basically Billy Elliot.

And I come from a similar community to Billy Elliot: quite macho and working class. And our fear was always ballet. When you move into the arts, though, you get a chance to embrace the female side of yourself and there's a lack of posturing. I think great actors often have access to both genders and I've worked with many who've shown this quality. Recently it was Michael Fassbender who is known as a very intense, male actor but I found his movement to be quite female. I remember reading somewhere that young children can always tell the gender of another child, that they reveal gender through movement. And little children who have no real programming just instinctively understand that. I've no idea whether that's true but it made me think of your script, when your character Bheeshma recognises that Shikhandi is actually female. How will you dramatise that?

Akram: We're struggling right now. When we theatricalise the scenario, it's very clear but it lacks choreography. It's a real challenge to reveal these characters through dance, especially for people who don't know the story. Without words to hold on to, everything becomes

ambiguous so the choreography has to speak of this in some way – it's a really challenging piece to take into movement.

Danny: But when you watch dance, it's a relief not to have to hang on to narrative quite so rigidly. There's a feeling that you can watch something, and zone in and out with a wonderful freedom. You reset your brain and enjoy the experience of the story being told through the physicality of the performers in front of you. It's not quite like film or theatre actors who have to disappear into the story. With dance, you're always aware that this is being expressed through a dancer and I think that's a beautiful part of the process. You abandon yourself to it. I think the struggle that you're in is very important and has to continue otherwise the work is just indulgence. The very act of struggling with it all highlights your role. How do you do it, though, when you're both performing a role and directing the work? Do you film yourself and watch it back?

Akram: Yes, but I also have a rehearsal director, Jose Agudo, who learns my role. He can swap with me and step in and out of my role. And we film everything.

Danny: So, he will dance the section for you during rehearsals?

Akram: Yes, but my ego always gets the better of me because I know I can do it better. That isn't true, actually. It's just that when he does a section, and does it better, then I feel I have to do it better. He's a really strong dancer and makes me go one step further. What's incredible in this piece are the female dancers. They are really special. I'm 41 and enjoying taking a step back. The story is not told through my eyes – it's through Amba's eyes. I've never told a story with a female perspective in this way before.

Danny: How did you find those dancers?

Akram: I have worked with them previously on *iTMOi*. The dancer who plays Amba has both innocence and a dark side to her. And the dancer performing Shikhandi can really shift from female to masculine. They make me feel old when I'm near them.

Danny: I've recently worked with this extraordinary singer called FKA twigs, also a dancer. I keep thinking you must meet or collaborate.

Akram: Danny, have you ever worked on a play with just dancers?

Danny: No but I have a strong idea of doing a Shakespeare with dancers. I'd like to have a dancing chorus with this particular Shakespeare in mind. One of the other things I wanted to ask you is how you determine the length of your work – does the music dictate length or something else?

Akram: What dictates the length of a scene is what is happening with the bodies. Has what the body has to say stopped being interesting? The music then follows, the set, and everything else. Everything has to serve the body – the body is the script. We label scenes and each night we try different orders, treating it like a musical form. Some scenes need to be big, some less so. Two films – *Timbuktu* and *Birdman* – have fascinated me recently because of how their scenes roll choreographically from one to the other. This way of interconnecting different worlds and seeing the interconnection, well, I think we're trying to embrace a little of this in *Until the Lions*.

Danny: What's your favourite dance in a film or musical? Who do you admire?

Akram: I really enjoyed Billy Elliot ... there's Charlie Chaplin ... I love Fred Astaire, Buster Keaton, Michael Jackson.

Danny: I'd love to film a musical. I love Carlos Saura and Bob Fosse's stuff.

Akram: They're genius, of course. So, you want to film a musical?

Danny: For a film director, if you can make an original story musical where characters break into song, that's the most difficult thing to do. Song can be more challenging than dance because people do dance as part of normal life but to sing is so vulnerable and open. We once did a film called *Millions* about two kids growing up in the northwest and we should have turned that into a musical.

Danny: So, last question for now, have you worked in the round before?

Akram: No, it's very exciting yet bloody frustrating because it's easier to see a performance from one perspective. In the round, somebody will always see a different angle from the one you want him or her to see. That can be frustrating yet at the same time, you get to look at choreography three dimensionally. The Olympics was good preparation for this because it was also 360 degrees.

Danny: Hey, listen, it's a wonderful experience for the audience. Theatre in the proscenium arch remains theatre as spectacle – it's not really that immersive. In the round, it becomes immersive. You really feel part of it as the audience.

*Akram Khan refers specifically to Amba's story as told in Karthika Nair's *Until the Lions: Echoes from the Mahabharata*.





PRIMITIVE AND POWERFUL

Tim Yip, the Oscar-winning Art Director of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, talks about playful processes and shares an insight into the simple elegance of *Until the Lions*.

You last worked with Akram Khan on *DESH*. The visual design was such an integral part of this wildly successful show, transporting audiences to another place. How did you achieve this?

Akram has a very strong way of dancing, mixing modern and classic. We quickly decided to work together. When he asked me what he should create for his next piece, I said to dance as himself. So we visited his family's hometown in Bangladesh. We had a shared way of thinking by then, and I learnt the meanings behind Akram. For *DESH*, I created a scene that is a stage full of fabric, suspended from the ceiling, like the reflection of a river that runs through a village in Bangladesh. I wanted to reflect the feeling of missing your hometown in a modern, globalised world.

How do you both collaborate to develop design concepts for his shows?

To find the meaning of the content, we start by brainstorming.

Akram is a careful decision-maker. He takes a long time to sense the best means of expression. As he searches, I introduce different possible directions for him to choose from. Everything that happens in the design has to be used by Akram, and has to come from the movement of his body. He never needs a prop onstage without its own inherent movement. I create a space or an invisible force for him to react to with his body. We share a background of eastern and western cultures mixed together. It helps us to create a space rather than just an idea onstage.

You have compared the process to a game of table tennis?

Yes, there is something very playful about the way we work. The idea will evolve over time, as it shuttles back and forth between us. We need to share new thoughts and sometimes we need to wait. Sometimes he has a lot to say, sometimes I do. Of all the ideas we come up with, he always chooses what is right for the dance.

What has been the starting point for the visual design of *Until the Lions*?

The content is already defined. Even so, it is always very difficult to translate something like the *Mahabharata* for the stage. We are looking to a particular part of the epic story involving Amba/Shikhandi and her journey from a woman to a man as she takes her revenge on Bheeshma. The whole idea started in the round. I have put it in a primitive world, where only land and sky exist.

Can you give us an insight into the aesthetic for the production?

Simple, classic, no existing concept, no existing meaning of space, no clear time theme, no clear gender signals in the costumes, only space and content, leaving the body to tell the story. But we will use the set to create some of the highest moments.

Projection proved a potent ingredient in *DESH*. Will it play a similar role in *Until the Lions*?

While the content of *Until the Lions* is more complicated than *DESH*, I would rather give power to simple things. Simple things can have unlimited power onstage. Intricate things can remind you of their limitations. In order to give force to the floor, we have decided to cut out the sky to let the audience concentrate fully on Akram's choreography. It gives the work a simple elegance. We use projection only when it is absolutely the right medium for communicating the content.

Has designing the production in the round thrown up extra challenges or opportunities?

I have developed many different kinds of spaces for performance but this is the first time I have worked in the round. It creates a close experience. The illusions of traditional theatre do not apply in this environment.

You feel more awake here. Real time and set elements coexist with the performers. This language has become very powerful to me.

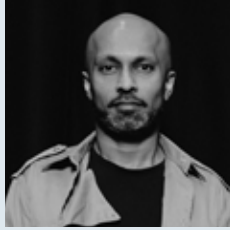
How else have you utilised the circular stage of the Roundhouse?

We have divided the space so that there is an inner circle and an outer circle – a beyond. The inner circle is the central performance space, while the outer circle is for Shikhandi and the chorus. It is like a Greek amphitheatre, simple, with three performers onstage and a chorus. At a certain moment, the inner space itself will become the performance.

Where do you hope *Until the Lions* will transport audiences?

To the simple world beyond everything, a very basic primitive space for the inner self. There is not yet culture, no memories, nor even any natural history. It is a dreamy, lonely place for our performer to go looking for desire and to take revenge.

BIOGRAPHIES



AKRAM KHAN

Artistic Director,
Choreographer and Dancer

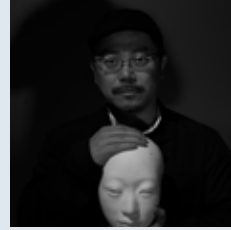
Akram Khan is one of the most celebrated dance artists today, building his reputation on the success of imaginative, highly accessible and profoundly moving productions such as *Until the Lions*, *Kaash*, *iTMOi* (in the mind of Igor), *DESH*, *Vertical Road*, *Gnosis* and *zero degrees*. As an instinctive and natural collaborator, Khan has been a magnet to world-class artists from cultures and disciplines such as the National Ballet of China, actress Juliette Binoche, ballerina Sylvie Guillem, choreographers/dancers Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Israel Galván, singer Kylie Minogue, visual artists Anish Kapoor, Antony Gormley and Tim Yip, and composers Steve Reich, Nitin Sawhney, Jocelyn Pook and Ben Frost. A highlight of his career was the creation of a section of the London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony that was received with unanimous acclaim.



KARTHIKA NAÏR

Writer

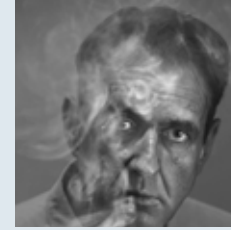
Karthika Naïr is the author of several books, including *Until the Lions: Echoes from the Mahabharata*, a reimagining of the Mahabharata in multiple voices, which won the 2015 Tata Literature Live Award for Book of the Year (Fiction). She was principal scriptwriter for Akram Khan's *DESH* (2011), *Chotto Desh* (2015) and *Until the Lions* (2016), an adaptation of her own book. Also a dance enabler, Naïr's closest association has been with Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Damien Jalet as executive producer of works like *Three Spells*, *Babel (Words)*, *Puz/zleand Les Médusés*, and as co-founder of Cherkaoui's company, Eastman.



TIM YIP

Visual Designer

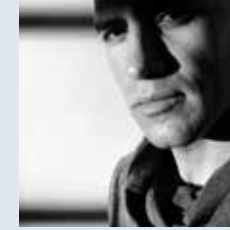
A renowned artist, Tim Yip has multidisciplinary works in costume and art direction, and visual and contemporary art. For his work in *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, Tim won the Academy Award for Best Art Direction and the British Academy Film Award for Best Costume Designer in 2001. Graduating from Hong Kong Polytechnic University with a degree in photography. In 2010, Tim created the visual design for Akram Khan Company's Olivier award winning production *DESH* and worked alongside Akram for his award-winning reimagining of the romantic classic *Giselle* for English National Ballet. They joined forces once again for the company's latest production, *Creature*. www.timyipstudio.com



MICHAEL HULLS

Lighting Designer

Over the last 25 years Michael Hulls has worked exclusively in dance, particularly with choreographers Russell Maliphant and Akram Khan, and established a reputation as a "choreographer of light". His collaborations with Russell Maliphant have won international critical acclaim and many awards. Michael has worked with Akram over many years on productions including *In-i*, *DESH*, *TOROBAKA*, *Until the Lions*, *XENOS* and most recently with his new production with English National Ballet, *Creature*. In 2009, Michael became an Associate Artist of Sadler's Wells. In 2010, his contribution to dance was recognised with his entry into the Oxford Dictionary of Dance. He won the Knight of Illumination Award for Dance in both 2009 and 2016. In 2014 Michael received the Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dance. www.michaelhulls.com



VINCENZO LAMAGNA

Composer and Musician

Vincenzo Lamagna is a musician, composer and producer based in London. His music is known for its visceral, emotive and edgy language that utilises an unconventional hybrid of electro-orchestral sounds. Vincenzo has carved a niche in the alternative contemporary dance world, where he has established himself as a major collaborator with some of the most acclaimed choreographers of this generation, Hofesh Shechter and Akram Khan. His most collaborations with Khan include *Until the Lions* and the award winning 21st-century adaptation of *Giselle* for English National Ballet. Most recently he created the score for the ballet Company's new production, *Creature*. His scores are a mercurial combination of acoustic and electronic music, recognised for their ferocious industrial undertones, haunted melodies and cinematic soundscapes. www.vincenzolamagna.com



RUTH LITTLE

Dramaturg

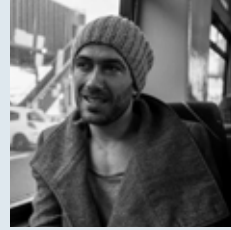
Ruth Little is a dramaturg, teacher and writer. She lectured in English literature at the University of Sydney, was literary manager at Out of Joint, Soho Theatre, Royal Court; artistic associate, Young Vic; associate director, Cape Farewell. Dramaturg for Akram Khan Company since 2010. Other roles include associate artist, Perth International Arts Festival; dramaturg, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui Shell Shock (La Monnaie), Jonathan Watkins Kes (Sheffield Theatres), 1984 (Northern Ballet), Le Patin Libre Vertical Influences, Threshold (Dance Umbrella), ENB Dust, Giselle; co-director Archipelago Folkschool; Dramaturgy for Dance residency leader, Banff Centre; guest editor, Dance Umbrella Definite Article; Dance Umbrella Lecture 2018.



SASHA MILAVIC DAVIES

Assistant Director

Sasha is a Welsh-Serbian theatre director, choreographer, and dramaturg. She trained at Ecole Jacques Lecoq and was a founding member and is an Artistic Associate of The Yard Theatre, London. Productions as a director include *The 5 Lives of the Overly Sad Milutin* and *My You* at Atelje 212 in Belgrade, for which she won the prestigious Muci Draskic award for Best Director. Sasha choreographed *Everything That Rises Must Dance* performed in the courtyard at Somerset House in 2018 and was invited to be part of Festival d'Avignon's Voyage de Kadmos Programme for emerging artists. She is also an Associate of Complicité.



JOSE AGUDO

Assistant Choreographer

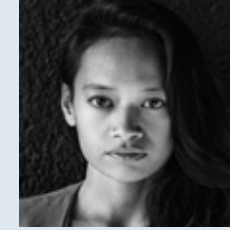
Jose started his career in Andalusia where he began performing as a Flamenco dancer. Slowly the world of contemporary dance became more visible as he worked throughout Europe. As a rehearsal director and assistant choreographer Jose has worked on several creations for Akram Khan Company, including *DESH*, *iTMOi*, *TOROBACA*, *Chotto Desh*, London 2012 Olympic Games opening ceremony, and Sylvie Guillem's farewell tour *Life in Progress*. Jose's independent choreographic commissions include Phoenix Dance Theatre, ZfinMalta, ACE dance and music, Cape Dance Company and Norrdans. This year, Jose premiered his first short film *Selah* with co-director Matthew Beckett, and performed in the international tour of *Silk Road*.
www.joseagudo.co.uk



CHING-YING CHIEN

Dancer

Ching-Ying Chien graduated from the National Taiwan University of Arts. As well as collaborating and creating work with a number of Taiwanese choreographers including Fang-Yi Sheu, Ching-Ying also worked as a physical model for Chinese fine art artist Cai Guo-Qiang. She began working with Akram Khan Company in 2013 and achieved the 'Outstanding Female Performance (Modern)' award at the UK National Dance Awards in 2016 for her performance in *Until the Lions*. She performs in the Company's latest production *Outwitting the Devil* whilst also presenting her solo *Vulture* internationally. In addition to performing on stage, Ching-Ying worked with director Adam Smith to shoot music videos for Plan B and The Chemical Brothers.



JOY ALPUERTO RITTER

Dancer

Joy Alpuerto Ritter was born in LA and raised in Germany. She started training in ballet and Philippine folk dance as a child. Graduating from Palucca School in Germany, Joy has been working with choreographers such as Christoph Winkler, Heike Hennig and Company's such as Cirque du Soleil. Joy's interest in urban dance lead her to expand her repertory to Hip Hop and Voguing. She has been touring internationally with Company Wangramirez and Akram Khan Company since 2012. Joy was nominated for 'Outstanding Female Dancer (contemporary)' at the UK National Dance Awards for her performance in *Until the Lions*.
www.joyalpuertoritter.com



SOHINI ALAM

Musician

Sohini Alam is a British Bangladeshi vocalist whose musical repertoire includes folk, modern, and traditional Bengali songs. She also composes and has branched out into multi-lingual music in bands, dance, film, and theatre. Sohini is lead vocalist for her band Khiyo and for Kishon Khan's Afro-Cuban-Bengali jazz band Lokkhi Terra. She is a co-founder of the arts company Komola Collective and was a musical director of the powerful documentary, *Rising Silence*. A third-generation vocalist, Sohini has performed at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club and WOMAD. She is part of the international female collaboration GRRRL and provided vocals for Akram Khan Company's *DESH*.
www.komola.co.uk





DAVID AZURZA

Musician

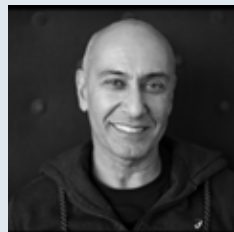
Born in 1968, David Azurza studied Fine Arts at the Madrid royal Conservatory. He is a member of several vocal groups and has experience as a solo singer in contemporary opera and symphonic repertoire. He has received several prizes and has a catalogue comprised of more than 100 works composed for children, youth and adult choirs. He is a teacher for choral vocal technique and singing. David also lectures and writes about the voice at Conservatories, Universities, Choral Federations and choral groups all over Spain as well as abroad.



YARON ENGLER

Musician

Yaron Engler is a drummer, educator and speaker. He has been involved in artistic and educational projects internationally and was a featured speaker at TEDxJaffa. Yaron has played a leading role in producing many of Hofesh Shechter's major productions. He composed the music for the 2016 Open Theatre Production of Shakespeare's Henry V and the opening piece of the 2014 Walled City Tattoo. Recent recordings include his album Release and After They Left. Yaron is the founder of the training company UpBeatPerformance. He is a Summa Cum Laude graduate from Berklee College of Music and holds a certificate in Body Mind Healing.



FAROOQ CHAUDHRY

Producer

Born in Pakistan, Farooq Chaudhry enjoyed an international professional dance career in the 1980s and 90s. He was awarded an Asian Achievement Award for his work as a dancer in 1988. After retiring from dancing, he graduated in Arts Management and, a year later, teamed up with Akram Khan to cofound Akram Khan Company. As the producer, he puts creativity at the heart of his leadership style, forming innovative business models to support Khan's artistic ambitions. Their partnership has evolved into one of the world's most foremost and successful dance companies. In addition to this work, he became the producer at English National Ballet in October 2013. Farooq is a member of the GREAT Culture and Sport Advisory Board and of the Strategic Advisory Committee for The Clore Leadership Programme, as well as a witness at the School for Social Entrepreneurs. The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs acknowledged him in a list of the world's top 100 cultural actors and entrepreneurs. He is a regular guest speaker at the University of Hong Kong and London Business School. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from De Montfort University for his services to dance in 2014.

MESSAGE FROM COLAS, SPONSOR OF AKRAM KHAN COMPANY

Since 2010, Akram Khan Company and Colas have been travelling the same road, side by side. *DESH*, *iTMOi*, *TOROBACA*, *Vertical Road*: each of the choreographer's works combines traditions and cutting-edge innovation, drawing upon the strength of deep roots united with the necessary evolution of a message anchored in today's society.

The clear break from the past appears at the very beginning of this piece, because, for the first time ever, Akram Khan conveys the voice of a woman, the author of *Until the Lions*, a work in which women have been placed at the heart of an epic Indian tale, a role traditionally bestowed solely upon men. Akram Khan reveals

his two heroines, then gradually transforms them into warriors determined to fulfil their destiny, thus restoring their status, as well as giving them a major role in the *Mahabharata* tradition.

Amba, the female character, does not have the right to combat the one who has offended her. A thirst for vengeance transforms her into a man-warrior, giving her the power to fight her battle and free herself. Above and beyond the narrative, the power of transformation is central to Khan's new choreography. Triggered by the characters' determination and obsession with their target, the desire to be at peace with our own ethics changes that which we take for granted and transformation becomes inevitable.

As is often the case, Akram Khan's intention has an eerie echo in the business world: transforming traditional codes is more topical than ever. Transformation is a necessary step in development, as both a source of impetus and a springboard to renewal.

In the current economic context, Colas has chosen to proudly assert its corporate values, as a responsible, innovative and pioneering enterprise, by mobilising its innovative talents to meet the need to reinvent ourselves.

Hervé Le Bouc
Chairman and CEO from 2007-2019

AKRAM KHAN COMPANY

In July 1999, in the foyer of the Southbank Centre's Queen Elizabeth Hall, an animated and curiosity-filled conversation took place between Akram Khan and Farooq Chaudhry. It laid the foundation stone for a dynamic collaboration, culminating in the creation of Akram Khan Company one year later. Inspired by Akram's early training in the Indian classical dance form *kathak*, and the hybrid language that organically emerged when this training encountered contemporary dance, a vision began to form, fuelled by a desire to learn and create through collaboration with the best people across all arts disciplines. The rules were simple: take risks, think big and daring, explore the unfamiliar, avoid compromise and tell stories through dance that are compelling and relevant, with artistic integrity.

In just over 19 years, Akram Khan Company has become one of the foremost innovative dance companies in the world. The programme ranges from *kathak* and modern solos to artist-to-artist collaborations and ensemble productions. The company has a major international presence and enjoys busy tours that reach out to many cultures and peoples across the globe. It is currently practitioner-in-residence at University of the Arts London, and enjoys artistic associations with Sadler's Wells, Curve Theatre in Leicester and other leading venues and festivals around the world.

akramkhancompany.net



ROUNDHOUSE WE CREATE TO TRANSFORM

London's Creative Engine

Built in 1847 as a railway repair shed, the Roundhouse became the heart of experimental theatre and cutting-edge music in the 20th century. Today, the building's iconic round shape continues to forge a special dynamic between performers and audiences.

Pushing the Limits of Creativity

We make really great work with some of the biggest names in music, and boundary-busting leaders in theatre, circus and spoken word. Great artists power brilliant experiences at the Roundhouse every single day.

Powering the Talent of the Future

Young creatives are at the heart of everything the Roundhouse does. Each year we help more than 3,000 people aged between 11 and 25 to realise their potential through opportunities in music, media and the performing arts.



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Thank you to the many
other Roundhouse staff
and volunteers who
contributed to this project

SADLER'S WELLS IS DANCE

Sadler's Wells is a world leader in contemporary dance. We present a vibrant year-round programme of dance of every kind – from tango to hip-hop, ballet, flamenco, Bollywood and cutting-edge contemporary dance – as well as bring the best British and international dance to our audiences in London.

We also commission and produce original work for our stages and tour it to major arts venues around the world. Since 2005 we have helped to create more than 100 new dance works.

Our goal is to grow the public's enjoyment and understanding of dance by making it relevant, meaningful and enriching. At the same time, we seek to develop the art form by supporting artists and the creation of exciting new work. Sadler's Wells is a registered UK charity.

Associate Artists

Our 16 Associate Artists, three Resident Companies and one Associate Company are at the heart of Sadler's Wells and represent the most exciting talent working in dance today. We support our associate artists and companies by commissioning new work from them, providing access to resources such as rehearsal studios, technical expertise, office space and a creative base.

Audiences

More than half a million people come to see a performance at Sadler's Wells theatres each year and more than 100,000 see our productions at venues around the world. The variety of our programming enables us to attract large audiences from diverse backgrounds and age groups with a wide range of cultural interests.

Our Theatres

Sadler's Wells has been presenting theatrical productions from a historic site on Rosebery Avenue, Islington, for over 300 years. Five previous theatre buildings have also all carried the name Sadler's Wells and occupied the site since 1683.

Our main theatre in Islington opened in 1998, after a major

fundraising programme, supported by lottery funding. Large-scale work by national and international companies is presented in this 1,500-seat theatre. The Lilian Baylis Studio, part of the Rosebery Avenue site, seats 180 and showcases small-scale work by established artists, experimental work, high-quality productions for young audiences and work by young artists and emerging choreographers.

At The Peacock theatre, our West End venue, we present popular dance styles from cultures around the globe, as well as circus and physical theatre.

On Tour

Sadler's Wells productions have travelled to every corner of the globe and to cities on every continent. Many of these new works have achieved critical and commercial acclaim and draw attention to dance as an important contemporary art form.

In the Community

We seek imaginative ways to engage the widest possible public with exciting learning opportunities that have the highest artistic standards, and are supported by Sadler's Wells world-class resources.



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