

A photograph of two male dancers in traditional Indian attire performing a dramatic pose on a stage. The dancer in the foreground is leaning back, with his arms extended, wearing a gold and red sari. The dancer behind him is also in a similar pose, wearing a gold and red sari. The background is a dark, smoky stage setting.

ASIA TOPA

JANUARY — MARCH 2020

ASIA TOPA CO-COMMISSION

AAKASH ODEDRA COMPANY, ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE
AND BAGRI FOUNDATION PRESENT

Samsara

AAKASH ODEDRA AND HU SHENYUAN

WORLD PREMIERE

5-7 MARCH

ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE

60 mins

Choreographers/Performers

Aakash Odedra and Hu Shenyan

Composer Nicki Wells

Drummer Beibei Wang

Vocalist Michael Ormiston

Costume K H Lee

Dramaturg Lou Cope

Lighting Designer Dr Yaron Abulafia

Set Designer Tina Tzoka

Technical Director Salvatore Scollo

Producer Anand Bhatt

General Manager Aoife Daniels

Marketing Manager Katie Paling

Company Administrator Courtney Beadle

Fundraisers Sam Roddan and Tina Smith

Digital Marketing Assistant Dmitry Kuleshov

Education Team Moving Together

Creative Consultant Australia Theresa Beattie

Special thanks to my Baba Ji

To my Gurus Nilima Devi, Chitrleka Bolar,
Shiamak Davar, Chhaya Kantaveh

Special thanks to Alka Bagri, Chelsea Pettit,
Elizabeth Horton

Thanks to Sade Alleyne, Stephen Armstrong,
Chris Bannerman, Renée Dudfield, Eulalia
Aygua de Farro, Courtney Beadle, Theresa
Beattie, Lewis Major, Michael Morgan, Animesh
Narain, Michelle Osorio, Pritesh Pancholi, Min
Qian, Emanuele Salamanca, Shane Shambu,
Melissa Ugolini, Laura Vanhulle, Subash Viman,
Lucy White, Cheng an Wu, Jennifer Ma, Jack
Riley, Simon Ryder, Oliver Savariego, Farooq
Chaudhry, Max Xun, Cindy Huang, Liu Ji, April,
Sabrina Chen Li, Anu Giri, Ben Hurley, Robin
Batt, Margaret Murray and Lucy Guerin Inc, Rong
Su, Zhi Xu, Zhibo Zhao, Mairylo Antonopolou,
Chris Sudworth, Emma Gladstone, Kerry
Andrews, Chris Stafford, Nikolai Foster, Fiona
Allan, Thierry Gourmelen, Emma Southworth,
Didier Deschamps, Jarmo Pentilla, Pam Tatge,
John Luckacovic, Eleanor Oldham.

Commissioned by Bagri Foundation

Co-producing/commissioning partners of
Samsara: Asia TOPA; Arts Centre Melbourne;
Birmingham Hippodrome; Curve Leicester;
the Royal Ballet; Shanghai International
Dance Centre, Chaillot- National theatre for
dance, Paris.

Supporting partners of *Samsara*: Bunjil Place;
Lucy Guerin Inc, British Council; Jacob's Pillow;
Peacock Contemporary Dance Company
(Kunming, China); Playking Foundation;
ResCen Middlesex University; Sidney Myer
Fund; the Victorian Government through
Creative Victoria.

Supported using public funding by the National
Lottery through Arts Council England.



Photo: Nirvair Singh

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Samsara is inspired by the many monks believed to have attempted the long pilgrimage that eventually led to the classic 16th century Chinese story *Journey to The West*. Their journey was both literal and metaphorical; physical and spiritual.

With universal themes of self-development, strength, fear and love, *Samsara* explores the journey individuals take to become themselves. With obstacles to overcome and demons to face, we leave behind many versions of ourselves and learn to love these versions while finding love for others.

Samsara traces a path across lands and through time, and explores the idea that if we let attachments go, and instead allow love or light in, we might find a place of truth and of peace.

Presented by Aakash Odedra Company and Bagri Foundation, *Samsara* is a duet created and performed by Aakash Odedra with Hu Shenyuan.

Drawing on contemporary dance, Chinese folk dance and the classical Indian dance form kathak, *Samsara* is an expression of cultural exchange where epic, mythological storytelling merges with personal experience from two globally opposite perspectives.

Both Aakash and Hu are regarded as the finest examples of their culturally specific forms of dance in their native cultures – UK/India and China respectively. Aakash has garnered worldwide attention for his impeccable and virtuosic kathak performances; and Hu is one of the outstanding performers of his generation, dancing for big name Chinese choreographers Yabin Wang and Yang Liping.

Their desire to perform is undiminished and they have found that despite not sharing a common spoken language (there is an interpreter in the room to help with technicalities), their bodies yearn to share movement, stories and to explore these ineffable frontiers between themselves. They are both aware of their own cultural histories and have a deep understanding and respect of each other's cultures. As India and China share historical trade routes, philosophies and poetry, creative exchange is a small obstacle to overcome.

This is the world premiere at Asia TOPA, Melbourne, Australia; the European premiere will take place at Birmingham Hippodrome, UK on 11 June 2020, followed by a UK and international tour through to March 2021.

“WHEN I MET HU THERE WAS AN INSTANT CONNECTION. WE WERE TWO BODIES BUT ONE SOUL. IT FEELS LIKE I’VE KNOWN HIM BEFORE; I CAN’T EXPLAIN IT. WE DANCE VERY DIFFERENTLY BUT IT’S ALSO SIMILAR TOO. AS SOON AS WE’RE TOGETHER OUR ENERGIES BECOME YIN AND YANG; WE BECOME ONE. THERE’S THIS UNSPOKEN WAY OF WORKING WHICH HAS ALLOWED US TO EXCHANGE ON A CULTURAL LEVEL”

– Aakash Odedra

“WHEN WE FIRST MET, WE DIDN’T NEED TO TRANSLATE WHAT WE WERE SPEAKING; IT’S A SHARED UNDERSTANDING FROM OUR DEEP RELIGIOUS PRACTISE. WE CAN READ A LOT FROM EACH OTHER JUST BY LOOKING INTO EACH OTHER’S EYES”

– Hu Shenyuan



Photo: Nirvair Singh

AAKASH ODEDRA COMPANY

Based in Leicester, Aakash Odedra Company exists to deliver exceptional creative experiences for audiences and participants and to help create a society that is happier and healthier through dance and the arts. We want to ensure that our dance work reflects excellence, removes barriers to access excellent dance and art, and makes art and dance education opportunities more widely available.

Our mission is to create dance works through a synthesis of kathak, bharatanatyam, contemporary and Bollywood-jazz that push boundaries, responding to and drawing inspiration from contemporary issues. Bilingual in classical and contemporary dance, the company uses the voice of British-Asian experience to translate ancient and contemporary movement languages and tell new stories relevant to today.

Our location within Leicester's international communities has allowed us to be more aware of, and pro-active about, the opportunities of plural heritage and the importance of a culture of accessibility, social justice, messaging and making people feel welcome.

Aakash Odedra is an Associate Artist at Curve Leicester and Birmingham Hippodrome. Aakash Odedra Company is a National Partner Organisation of Sadler's Wells and one of Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisations.

aakashodedra.co.uk

AAKASH ODEDRA COMPANY: OUR STORY

Born in Birmingham and living in Leicester, Aakash Odedra is a globally recognised and award-winning dancer and choreographer. His work forms the heart of the company, and Aakash has performed over 300 full length performances in 40 countries since he and producer Anand Bhatt formed the Aakash Odedra Company in 2011.

Awards include the Amnesty International Award for Freedom of Expression; Best Dance at the Eastern Eye ACTA Awards 2018; and a nomination for Best Stage Production at the 2019 Asian Media Awards for his production *#JeSuis*. Notable commissions include *James Brown: Get on the Good Foot* (Apollo Theater, New York) and in 2017 Aakash choreographed for the Royal Opera House production *Sukanya* composed by the late great Ravi Shankar. Aakash was also movement director for Curve Theatre's *Pink Sari Revolution*.

As a solo performer Aakash has received numerous awards including: Danza&Danza award (Italy); a Dora performance award (Canada); Audience Award Dance Week (Croatia); Infant Award (Serbia); Bessie Award New York (Best Male Performer); and a Sky Academy Arts Scholarship. He trained in bharatanatyam and kathak, then moved to India as a student of the renowned Bollywood choreographer Shiamak Davar. This was the start of a relationship with Shiamak Davar International, which has culminated in the extensive program of dance classes currently taught weekly to over a thousand people across the Midlands and London.

Aakash Odedra Company is a deeply-rooted, local community organisation. Founded and based in Leicester it produces projects and events to engage the local communities, while facing outwards to embrace the world. Constantly travelling the world, it draws inspiration from the audiences, artists and participants it meets and the local, regional, national and international partners it works with. The company celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2021.



Photo: Nirvair Singh

Aakash Odedra is a dancer, choreographer and teacher. Born in Birmingham, UK, he trained in the classical Indian dance styles of kathak (Nilima Devi, Leicester and Asha Joglekar, India) and bharatanatyam (Chitrleka Bolar, Birmingham and Chhaya Kantaveh, India). Aakash formed Aakash Odedra Company in 2011 as a vehicle for commissioning solos and to develop his own choreographic work. His debut full length solo *Rising* featured new short works created for him by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Akram Khan and Russell Maliphant. As choreographer he was commissioned to create a piece for *James Brown: Get on the Good Foot* (Apollo Theater, New York) and the Opera *God's Little Soldier* (Theater Freiburg), The Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations and the closing of the London Cultural Olympiad.

Hu Shenyan is an independent dancer and choreographer. He graduated from the Dance Academy of Central MinZu University before working in Beijing for LDTX Dance Company from 2012 to 2014. As a dancer, he played Yu Ji in Yang Liping's dance work *Under Siege* to great public acclaim. In 2017, Hu became the first young artist supported by Yang Liping Art Foundation, created his work *Roving* and established his studio Hu-Hu Dance. Hu's choreographic works include *Roving*, *The Moonlight Rainbow*, *So Close*, *With, ID*, *Ego*, *Super-Ego* and *The Flower of Freedom*. Several of his creations have been selected for the exhibition unit of the China Youth Dance Talents Training Program. His many awards include Best Performance Award at the 4th Beijing International Ballet and Choreography Competition; the Silver Award from the 16th Italian Rome International Choreography Competition and the Jury Chairman's Award at the 15th Seoul International Dance Competition in 2018.

Lou Cope is a dance & theatre dramaturg and facilitator who has worked across the UK, Europe and in the Middle East. As well as working with artists, Lou dramaturgs organisations, is Dramaturg in Residence at South East Dance and founder of CoAD - The Centre of Applied Dramaturgy (www.thecoad.org). Recent artistic collaborations include: Aakash Odedra on the Amnesty International Freedom of Speech & ACTA Award-winning *#JeSuis*; English National Ballet; Birmingham Royal Ballet; Gary Clarke on *The Troth* - winner of Herald Angel and Lustrum Awards, and COAL - UK Theatre & Critics Choice awards, and the forthcoming *Wasteland*; Jose Agudo; Stopgap Dance; Rhiannon Faith; & Hagit Yakira. Past collaborations include: Phoenix Dance Theatre; Scottish Dance Theatre; les ballets c de la b; Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Damien Jalet on the double Olivier Award winning *Babel (words)* designed by Antony Gormley; Cherkaoui and Gormley's *Sutra*. Lou is also a published writer, a workshop leader, and a podcast host.

Nicki Wells is a singer-songwriter-composer-producer; she recently gained a first-class honours degree in music, and has been working on her solo debut album as well as multiple collaborations with various artists and producers including the acclaimed Nitin Sawhney. She has featured on Sawhney's work from album recordings to performances in venues such as the Royal Albert Hall, the Royal Opera House and Sadlers Wells, and is featured on the recent BBC hit series *Human Planet*. In January of 2011, Nicki composed the score for Tanika Gupta's theatrical adaptation of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, receiving critical acclaim as it toured theatres and playhouses throughout the UK. Having already performed as a singer to sell out audiences in regions as diverse as Australia, the Middle East, Asia and Europe, she has astounded audiences all over the world with her incomparable ability to traverse the gaps between old and new, east and west and contemporary chic and classicism.

Beibei Wang is a genre-defying international virtuoso percussionist educated in both China and UK. Beibei has enjoyed a meteoric rise in the classical music world, receiving international praise for her performances. She was listed in the top 50 Chinese musicians in the *Sound of East* project by the Chinese Ministry of Culture, and was endorsed by the Arts Council, England, receiving an Exceptional Talent visa from the British Government. Following a successful world tour, Beibei now leads a traditional Chinese percussion programme to promote and preserve traditional Chinese percussion at SOAS University of London. She has successfully toured internationally to a number of music festivals and collaborated with leading orchestras, conductors and composers. Most recently, she toured China as a soloist with BBC Concert Orchestra and conductor Barry Wordsworth.

Michael Ormiston is an award-winning Mongolian Khöömii (Overtone) singer, a multi-instrumentalist, composer, inspirational teacher, workshop leader and therapeutic sound practitioner. He studied Khöömii in Mongolia with herdsman and the expert singer Tserendavaa. He's also studied with leading singers Tsengedorj, Ganbold, Gereltsolt and Tsogtbaatar. Michael teaches Khöömii at the SOAS world music summer school as well as individually, teaching ethnomusicology students at SOAS, Goldsmith College, University of London and Ateliers d'ethnomusicologie, Geneva. Working in conjunction with SOAS and the Embassy of Mongolia, Michael organised, lectured and performed at the inaugural European Mongolian Khöömii Festival in London. He wrote, researched and presented two radio shows for the BBC about traditional Mongolian and Siberian music. Michael's Overtones, instruments and compositions have featured in film, television programs, theatre and dance productions, including *The Golden Compass*, *Planet Earth*, *The Crucible* (Old Vic), and *Balled Frankfurt*.

Tina Tzoka is a set designer trained in architecture and philosophy. In 2007 she co-organised the 27th EASA meeting for 450 European architecture students under the theme City Index, in Elefsina, Greece. She has been a member of the City Index Lab working in the fields of architecture, city and new technologies, and organising numerous exhibitions, lectures and workshops. She began her career in theatre in 2008 as Eleni Manolopoulou's assistant, and since then has been a practicing set and costume designer in Athens, working for the National Theatre of Greece, the Festival of Epidavros, the National Opera in Greece, the Act Theatre Company, the Acropol Theatre, the Onassis Cultural Centre and other theatrical stages in Greece.

Dr Yaron Abulafia is an award-winning performance designer. He has designed over 200 performances, installations, concerts and TV shows internationally. His work has graced the stages of numerous large scale opera and theatre houses throughout the world, including the Deutsche Oper and Komische Oper in Berlin, Sadler's Wells and Royal Opera House (London), Grand Theatre Luxembourg, Poly Theatre Beijing and Shanghai International Dance Centre, Nederlands Dans Theater, English National Ballet, Rambert Dance Company and Compañía Nacionl de Danza in Spain. Yaron holds a PhD, a Master's degree in Scenography, and a BA in Theatre Studies. He is a published author and served as PQ (Prague Quadrennial) Ambassador and jury member of the 2019 Prague Quadrennial for Performance Design and Space.

KH Lee works as a freelance designer. He travels between Hong Kong and Shanghai for various styling, fashion design and costume design projects. He joined the fashion design industry after graduation from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in 1999. He worked as a fashion designer, in product development, and in pattern design and training. His specialisations include fashion design, fashion technology, product development and material studies. He joined two institutes for vocational training over 10 years and pursued a Master in Visual Arts at Hong Kong Baptist University, after which he joined the Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong (THEi) as a Teaching Fellow.

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