

**AAKASH  
ODEDRA  
COMPANY**



**Press release**

**Aakash Odedra Company and Bagri Foundation announce  
*Samsara***

**A major international dance collaboration between two extraordinary soloists**

**World premiere: Asia TOPA Festival in Melbourne, 5 to 7 March 2020**

**Chinese premiere: Shanghai International Dance Center, March 2020**

**UK premiere and tour: opens June 2020**

Aakash Odedra Company has announced its next major project, *Samsara*, a collaboration between Aakash Odedra and Hu Shenyuan, two of the finest exponents of culturally-specific dance forms from their countries of origin, India and China, on the world stage.

Odedra has attracted global attention for both his virtuoso Kathak performances and his contemporary choreography. One of the outstanding dancers of his generation in China, Shenyuan was the standout performer when he appeared in Yang Liping's *Under Siege* at Sadler's Wells in 2016.

*Samsara* is inspired by Wu Cheng'en's classic 16<sup>th</sup> century Chinese novel 'Journey to the West' which depicts the journey of Buddhist philosophy from India to China, in turn inspired by the real life monk Xuanzang who undertook a pilgrimage in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The story of cultural exchange and common philosophy will be key to Odedra and Shenyuan's interpretation.

*Samsara* has been made possible by the generous support of the Bagri Foundation, a family foundation dedicated to promoting the arts and culture of Asia. Aiming to challenge, engage and inspire, it gives artists and experts from across Asia, or those inspired by the continent, wider visibility on the global stage and supports a diverse programme of film, visual arts, music, dance, literature, courses and lectures.

Alka Bagri, Trustee of the Bagri Foundation says: *“To be able to support two extremely talented dancers and choreographers as part of this one-of-a-kind commission is a real privilege. With our aim at the Foundation to support new generations of talent that celebrate traditional Asian arts in a contemporary way, this felt like a perfect fit. We have been able to see this collaboration come together over the past year and are extremely excited to help bring this story to the world stage.”*

Anand Bhatt, Aakash Odedra Company’s producer, says: *“When two exceptional dancers like Aakash and Hu make a decision to work together, it really feels like you had the best day in the office. This very special project exemplifies the creative case for diversity. Aakash and Hu will work with exceptional collaborators and we are very excited by the range of international and home partners and supporters engaging with us. In particular support from London-based Bagri Foundation has enabled us to work with exceptional artistic collaborators and given us technical resources we would not otherwise have had. Our other partners in England include Arts Council England, Curve in Leicester (always special as it is where we started and we are based in the City); Birmingham Hippodrome (Aakash’s original home town) and the Royal Ballet in London.”*

*Samsara* is co-commissioned by Curve, Leicester and Birmingham Hippodrome. Aakash Odedra is Associate Artist at both venues.

Chris Stafford and Nikolai Foster, Chief Executive and Artistic Director of Curve, say: *“We are delighted to support Aakash and his team in this new production. Aakash has long been part of the fabric of Curve as an Associate Artist and we are really excited*

*about this inspiring collaboration by these exceptionally talented artists which our audiences here in Leicester can enjoy here at Curve in 2020.”*

Fiona Allan, Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Birmingham Hippodrome added:  
*“We’re incredibly excited about this new collaboration, which will appear in Birmingham as one of the signature artistic works of the China West Midlands 2020 programme. Having supported Aakash’s most recent international work #JeSuis, which enjoyed great success in the UK and beyond, we are delighted to see one of our Associate Artists take another step forward with this new production.”*

*Samsara* will open at Asia TOPA Festival in Melbourne on 5 to 7 March 2020 followed by its Chinese premiere later that month. It will premiere and tour in the UK from June 2020.

See the *Samsara* trailer here:

[https://www.dropbox.com/s/qtgmb4pnbt726he/Samsara\\_Trailer\\_2019.mp4?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/qtgmb4pnbt726he/Samsara_Trailer_2019.mp4?dl=0)

**ends**

### **Notes to editors**

1. Co-producing/commissioning partners of *Samsara*: Asia TOPA; Arts Centre Melbourne; Birmingham Hippodrome; Curve Leicester; the Royal Ballet; Shanghai International Dance Centre, Theatre National de Chaillot.
2. Supporting partners of *Samsara*: British Council; Jacob’s Pillow; Peacock Contemporary Dance Company (Kunming, China); Playking Foundation; Sidney Myer Fund; Victoria Government.
3. 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. We create dance works through a synthesis of Kathak, contemporary and Bollywood-Jazz which push boundaries, responding to and drawing inspiration from contemporary issues. Bilingual in classical and contemporary dance we use the voice of British-Asian experience to translate ancient and contemporary movement languages to 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 Company 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/](http://aakashodedra.co.uk/)

4. **Aakash Odedra** is a dancer, choreographer and teacher. Born in Birmingham, UK and 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. Aakash has received numerous awards and bursaries, including a Dora performance award (Canada), Danza&Danza award (Italy), Audience Award Dance Week 2013 (Croatia), Infant Award 2014 (Serbia), Bessie Award (Best Male Performer, 2014) and a Sky Academy Arts Scholarship.
5. **Hu Shenyuan** 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, and 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.

6. **Bagri Foundation**, established in 1990, is a family foundation spanning three generations. It is inspired by creative, unique and unexpected ideas that weave the traditional and the contemporary of Asian culture. The Foundation is driven by curiosity and a desire to learn and supports a myriad of exciting artistic programmes that challenge, engage and inspire. Through a diverse programme of film, visual arts, music, dance, literature, courses and lectures, it gives artists and experts from across Asia, or those inspired by the continent, wider visibility on the global stage. [www.bagrifoundation.org/](http://www.bagrifoundation.org/)
7. **Birmingham Hippodrome** is an independent, not-for-profit, registered charity (No. 510842) welcoming an average 500,000 visits annually making it the most popular single auditorium in the UK. Birmingham Royal Ballet and DanceXchange are resident partners; the theatre presents all of Welsh National Opera's repertoire, and welcomes the best in international dance, major touring dramas, West End musicals and one of the UK's biggest pantomimes. As a charity with no public revenue subsidy, Birmingham Hippodrome earns its share of box office and receives generous support from the business community through sponsorship and other partnerships; from individuals through donations and memberships; and from grant-making Trusts for special programming and infrastructure projects. It is a major employer and plays a leading role in the Southside Business Improvement District. Hippodrome Projects delivers three strands of work: community, learning and artistic ambition.

8. Almost one million people annually engage with **Curve** through performances and projects at its home in Leicester, across the UK and internationally. Under the leadership of Chief Executive Chris Stafford and Artistic Director Nikolai Foster, Curve has developed a reputation for producing, programming and touring a bold and diverse programme of musicals, plays, new work, dance and opera. All of this is presented alongside a dynamic mix of community engagement, artist development and learning programmes, which firmly places audiences, artists and communities at the heart of everything the venue does.  
[curveonline.co.uk](http://curveonline.co.uk)
9. **Arts Council England** is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. It supports a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to visual art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2018 and 2022, ACE will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country. [artscouncil.org.uk](http://artscouncil.org.uk)

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