

**AAKASH
ODEDRA
COMPANY**



Press release

Aakash Odedra Company and Bagri Foundation present the UK premiere of an epic new dance work, *Samsara*

Co-commissioned by Birmingham Hippodrome and Curve Theatre, Leicester

Two extraordinary soloists meet in a mythic landscape peopled with statues, Mongolian singers and a traditional drummer

Choreographed and performed by Aakash Odedra and Hu Shenyuan

11 June: Birmingham International Dance Festival, Birmingham Hippodrome

23 & 24 June: The Lowry, Salford Quays

20 & 21 October: Curve Theatre, Leicester

Further autumn tour dates to be announced

Aakash Odedra Company's next major project, *Samsara*, a collaboration between Odedra and Hu Shenyuan, premieres in the UK at Birmingham International Dance Festival on 11 June. Odedra and Shenyuan are two of the world's finest exponents of culturally-specific dance forms from their countries of origin, India and China.

Samsara takes as its starting point Wu Cheng'en's 16th century Chinese novel 'Journey to the West', one of the four great classical novels of Chinese literature. It tells the story of the legendary pilgrimage to India undertaken by the monk Xuanzang returning to China with the central tracts of Buddhist philosophy. Many monks followed in Xuanzang's footsteps and their journeys were both literal and metaphorical, physical

and spiritual.

Odedra and Shen yuan created *Samsara* with no spoken language in common. As both choreographers and performers they stage this story of cultural exchange and shared philosophy in a desert landscape peopled with eerie human statues, created by set designer Tina Tzoka. Yaron Abulafia's lighting conjures a mythic world which the two dancers enter and explore, first swathed in dark monks' habits, then pale golden robes, designed by K H Lee. They eventually meet in a series of exquisitely-patterned virtuoso duets of challenge, reflection and exchange. Figures in the shadows sing traditional Mongolian chants while a drummer adds visceral percussive power. The specially-commissioned score is by Odedra's regular collaborator Nicki Wells with dramaturgy by Lou Cope.

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, Shen yuan was the standout performer in Yang Liping's *Under Siege* at Sadler's Wells in 2016.

Samsara will receive its world premiere at the Asia TOPA Festival in Melbourne from 5 to 7 March 2020. Its planned Chinese premiere at the Shanghai International Dance Center in March is likely to be postponed until the autumn.

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.

Aakash Odedra is Associate Artist at Curve, Leicester and Birmingham Hippodrome, co-producers of *Samsara*.

See the *Samsara* trailer here:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/qtgmb4pnbt726he/Samsara_Trailer_2019.mp4?dl=0

ends

Listings information

Thursday 11 June at 8pm

Birmingham International Dance Festival, Birmingham Hippodrome – UK premiere
Hurst St, Southside, Birmingham B5 4TB

Box office: 0844 338 5000 /

<https://www.birminghamhippodrome.com/calendar/samsara-aakash-odedra/>

Tickets: £12 – £21 (discounts available)

Tuesday 23 & Wednesday 24 June

The Lowry, Salford Quays

Pier 8, The Quays, Salford, M50 3AZ

Box office: 0343 208 6000 / <https://thelowry.com/whats-on/aakash-odedra-samsara/>

Tickets: £11 - £15 (discounts available)

Tuesday 20 & Wednesday 21 October at 7.30pm

Curve Theatre, Leicester

60 Rutland Street, Leicester LE1 1SB

Box office: 0116 242 3595 / <https://www.curveonline.co.uk/whats-on/shows/samsara/>

Tickets: £10 - £26 (discounts available)

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. Aakash Odedra is Associate Artist at Curve, Leicester and Birmingham Hippodrome.
4. 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/
5. **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.
6. **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.

7. **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/
8. **Birmingham International Dance Festival (BIDF 2020)** is produced by DanceXchange and will take place from 5-21 June 2020. A biennial festival, this is the seventh edition since its inception in 2008. The festival is the Winner of Achievement in Dance, 2014 UK Theatre Awards and Winner of Event of the Year 2010 at the Heart of England Excellence in Tourism Awards. The festival brings showstopping dance and great choreography to Birmingham's theatres, streets and squares, and in 2018 attracted live audiences of 50,000 and online almost 300,000, plus almost 10,000 participants. The festival also stimulated over £1million visitor spend. BIDF is proud to be a signature festival for Birmingham and a highlight of the city's cultural calendar – bringing people together, providing new experiences, attracting visitors, and contributing to the local economy. BIDF enlivens the city and helps make Birmingham a distinctive, vibrant place to live, work and visit. www.bidf.co.uk
9. **Birmingham Hippodrome** is an independent, not-for-profit, registered charity 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. It also houses the 200-seat Patrick Studio, with extensive events facilities, and its own restaurant. As a charity with no public revenue funding, Birmingham Hippodrome 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. As a registered charity, ensuring it achieves its ambition to deliver One Million Hippodrome Moments every year, it deliver three strands of work through Hippodrome Projects: Learning & Participation; Community; and Artistic Ambition. www.birminghamhippodrome.com
10. 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

11. **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

24 February 2020