

AKRAM KHAN COMPANY

XENOS

World Première Onassis Cultural Centre - Athens, 21 February 2018



Below is all the information for the *XENOS* programme, including text, credits, additional notes, and biographies.

You can access videos and images from our FTP that we will be regularly updating – make sure you download the latest marketing assets: <http://ftp.akramkhancompany.net> / Login: presenter / Password: presenter2014akc

Offering a rare insight into Akram's work, you can also share the remarkable digital journal captured by our video artist Maxime Dos throughout the creation: xenos.akramkhancompany.net



We kindly ask you to pay attention to the following communication requirements:

- Please make a note of the spelling of *XENOS* in capital letters.
- Our commissioner and sponsor logos (14-18 NOW & COLAS) must be included in all publicity materials including posters, brochures, flyers and programmes.
- The special message from COLAS must be included in the evening programme.
- Please credit the photographers accordingly.
- Note that all publicity materials must be submitted for approval with a minimum of five days' notice to: celine@akramkhancompany.net & hannah@akramkhancompany.net

*A story is always a rescuing operation... If I'm a storyteller it's because I listen.
For me, a storyteller is like a smuggler who gets contraband across a frontier.*

John Berger

Out of all the creations I have been blessed to be involved in, *XENOS* is the one that I find to be the closest in line with my personal journey as an artist.

The themes of reflection, death, rebirth, time, alienation, identity, memory, are all part of this creative process, and together with some incredible collaborators, I have embarked on this challenging journey, to give birth to *XENOS*.

Essentially, this work is a reflection of how I feel about our world today. It is about our loss of humanity, and how, through past and present wars, we are yet again confronted by the burning question of what it is to be human. How can we as humans, have such ability to create extraordinary and beautiful things from our imagination, and equally, our immense ability to create and commit violence and horrors beyond our imagination.

Prometheus saw this in mankind before we, as a species, ever recognised it.

- Akram Khan

Duration 65 minutes, without interval

Akram Khan's much anticipated new opus, *XENOS*, marks his last performances as a dancer in a full-length solo piece.

Creative Team

Akram has brought together a stellar creative team. Along with dramaturg Ruth Little and acclaimed Canadian playwright Jordan Tannahill, he teams up with set designer Mirella Weingarten, award-winning lighting designer Michael Hulls, costume designer Kimie Nakano, and composer Vincenzo Lamagna.

Akram is joined on stage by five international musicians: percussionist B C Manjunath, vocalist Aditya Prakash, bass player Nina Harries, saxophonist Tamar Osborn, and violinist Clarice Rarity.

*This is not war. It is the ending of the world.
This is just such a war as was related in the Mahabharata.*

Letter home from a wounded Indian sepoy

Title & theme

The title *XENOS* means 'stranger' or 'foreigner'. Akram and his world-class team of collaborators draw in this new solo work on the archives of the 20th century, unearthing the experience of colonial soldiers in the First World War.

Over 4 million non-white men were mobilised by the European and American armies during the conflict. Around 1.5 million of them were from India, mostly peasant-warriors from North and North-Western India, who fought and died in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. In service to the myths of Empire, dislocated from their homelands and cultures, their stories have until recently remained in shadow.

As Akram himself writes: "I will investigate specific questions that confront me more and more every day, like a shadow constantly following me, haunting me, whispering to me... Do we need to tell other people's stories in case they vanish? Who are the 'other' people? Are stories of human journeys told, retold, and told again, so we can eventually learn from our mistakes? Who are 'we', a collective or many individuals? What makes us human? Are we still human?"

Whose war?
Whose fire?
Whose hand is this?
Jordan Tannahill, *XENOS*



Akram Khan's *XENOS* asks a question which first arose 100 years ago during the global cataclysm of the First World War, and has continued to haunt our civilisation ever since: what is it to be human when man is as a god on earth?

Drawing on the archival traces left by some of more than a million Indian soldiers who fought for the British Empire and experienced slaughter on an industrial scale on its many fronts, *XENOS* is a lament for the body in war, and a memento mori for our own times of violent estrangement from one another and our world.

*Our hands are earth, our bodies clay and our eyes pools of rain.
We do not know whether we are still alive.*

Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*

The Great War was fought between nations, but its acts and outcomes were centred in the individual human body. For all its infamous battles, it was a war of exhaustion, labour, discomfort and boredom, punctuated by indescribable periods of carnage. It was a war of the hands, from the endless work of entrenchment to the digging of graves and tending of wounds, from the bayonet charge to the laying of barbed wire and communications lines, the lugging of provisions, the manufacture of artillery, and its relentless dispatch over hundreds of miles of incrementally shifting front lines.

The text for *XENOS*, by acclaimed Canadian playwright Jordan Tannahill, gives voice to the shell-shocked dream of a colonial Indian soldier in no-man's land. Many of the sepoy soldiers who died in conflict were buried abroad, while for those who returned home, often mutilated and traumatised, another form of erasure followed, as their stories were interred in archives following the rise of Indian nationalism and the rejection of colonial rule. Separated from their own histories, homelands, and countrymen, they became xenoi.

XENOS reveals the beauty and horror of the human condition in its portrait of an Indian dancer whose skilled body becomes an instrument of war. 'X' is no man and everyman, the unknown and the eternal soldier, alone in a foreign land, a stranger to himself and to an enemy he does not know. *XENOS* is a portrait of Homo deus brought back to his human origins in clay and fire. In the end we surrender not to gods, tradition or empire, but to the earth itself.

*Just his naked self, pinning down a shaking world,
A single rivet driven down to hold a universe together.*

Mary Borden, 'Unidentified'

Akram Khan's movement language shifts between classical kathak and contemporary dance on Mirella Weingarten's precipitous and symbolic set. His sepoy is a warrior-child, victim-perpetrator, maker and destroyer of myth, defying categories of duty, loyalty and gender. *XENOS* takes place on the border between East and West, past and present, mythology and technology, where humanity still stands in wonder and disarray.

Direct experience of conflict in the First World War is no longer known on earth. With the death in 2011 of the last surviving combat veteran, our own connection with the felt experience of the War is now possible only through indirect accounts: archival film, photographs, interviews, museum collections and inherited story fragments. But humankind has another archive in art and culture: the deep and shared reservoir of memory, beauty, and the hope that we may together find our way home.

- Ruth Little, dramaturg

Artistic team & credits

Artistic Director/Choreographer/Performer Akram Khan

Dramaturg Ruth Little

Lighting Designer Michael Hulls

Original Music Score and Sound Design Vincenzo Lamagna

Set Designer Mirella Weingarten

Costume Designer Kimie Nakano

Writer Jordan Tannahill

Rehearsal Directors Mavin Khoo and Nicola Monaco

Dancer Akram Khan

Musicians Nina Harries (double bass & vocals), B C Manjunath (percussions & konnakol), Tamar Osborn (baritone saxophone), Aditya Prakash (vocals), Clarice Rarity (violin)

Producer Farooq Chaudhry

Technical Director Richard Fagan

Production Manager John Valente

Technical Coordinator Peter Swikker

Stage Manager Marek Pomocki

Lighting Engineer Stéphane Déjours

Sound Engineer Julien Deloison

Technician Russell Parker

Project/Tour Manager Mashitah Omar

Props made by Louise Edge from LFX props & special fx

The original music score was devised in collaboration with Nina Harries, Andrew Maddick, B C Manjunath, Tamar Osborn, Aditya Prakash; and contains extracts from *Requiem in D minor K. 626* (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart), *Hanging on the Old Barbed Wire* (traditional composition), *Tu Karim* (traditional composition), *Chhap Tilak* (Amir Khusro), *Babul Mora* (Nawab Wajid Ali Shah), *Naiharwa* (Kabir).

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Co-produced by Onassis Cultural Centre - Athens, The Grange Festival Hampshire, Sadler's Wells London, New Vision Arts Festival Hong Kong, Théâtre de la Ville Paris, Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg, National Arts Centre Ottawa, The Center for China Shanghai International Arts Festival (CSIAF), Centro Cultural de Belém, Festspielhaus St. Pölten, Grec 2018 Festival de Barcelona, HELLERAU - European Center for the Arts Dresden, Tanz Köln, Edinburgh International Festival, Adelaide Festival, Festival Montpellier Danse 2018, Julidans Amsterdam, Canadian Stage Toronto, Romaeuropa Festival, Torinodanza festival / Teatro Stabile di Torino - Teatro Nazionale, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts New York, University of California Berkeley, Danse Danse Montreal, Curve Leicester.

Sponsored by COLAS

Supported by Arts Council England

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

Produced during residency at The Grange Festival, Hampshire and Onassis Cultural Centre - Athens (OCC).

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Akram Khan gratefully acknowledges Akram Khan Company staff team: Farooq Chaudhry, Jan Hart, Richard Fagan, Tina Fagan, Mashitah Omar, Clare Cody-Richardson, Céline Gaubert, Christine Maupetit, Amy Sharkey, Hannah Patel, Mai Tassinari, Nathan White, and all those who contributed to make the production successful.

To be included in the evening programme

Message from COLAS

Who decides to put a rifle in the hands of a dancer? Who takes hold of a single destiny and decides to break it? For his last solo work, Akram Khan embodies the voice of Indian soldiers engaged in WWI, anonymous soldiers killed in the trenches, confronted with the absurdity and randomness of a fight that was not theirs.

Dedicated to the forgotten soldiers of all wars, *XENOS* reflects Akram's characteristic style. From the story of an individual slowly emerges the question of the role that history plays in the development of humanity. What do we learn from our tragedies? Even more than in his other works, Akram's body is vector of thought, pointing us to a perpetual question: the two facets of the human condition, one noble and one black.

Colas and Akram Khan Company have been paving a path together for almost ten years now. I met Akram in London before I had ever seen his work. That evening, we talked about our respective journeys, our lives, as well as the meaning and value of the social link that roads provide. From each of our individual viewpoints, the link between populations and people seemed obvious to us. So, over the years, we have shared our worlds, thus forging a close personal relationship.

Hervé Le Bouc
Chairman and CEO of Colas

Press quotes

UK press

"A work of defining greatness, and a fitting farewell to a stage career that has illuminated British dance."

The Guardian ★★★★★

"A triumph of energy, empathy and intelligence."

The Telegraph ★★★★★

"A blaze of glory. Khan's striking, beautiful lament is an extraordinary way to wind down a solo dance career."

Time Out ★★★★★

"A work of incredible potency, of emotional and cultural depth that sings and surges with the confidence of an artist at the peak of his powers."

The Stage ★★★★★

"[Khan's] performance is as astounding as it is powerful."

The Times ★★★★★

"Most impressive of all is Khan's sheer stage presence and charisma."

Evening Standard ★★★★★

More press

'A visually arresting experience on a scale so grand that, at times, you don't believe your eyes. And, at its heart, a sobering exploration of the human experience of war and its ripple-like effects on humanity.'

Limelight, Australia

'Khan's performance is so visceral and nuanced that he becomes the everyman. We see ourselves on stage: victims of, but also complicit in, a collapsing humanity.'

Limelight, Australia

'A consummate work of anguish and exquisite beauty.'

InDaily, Australia

'One suspects as the lights come up at the end of Akram's extraordinarily wrought and skilful performance that it is one of such emotional, as well as physical intensity, that it leaves him as shattered and breathless as it leaves us.'

InDaily, Australia

'This is not just another work but life itself: it is a search for identity, a process that threatens to uproot every individual from his world and his fundamental ties.'

LIFO, Greece

'An essay on humanity with such intense reflection.'

Book Press, Greece

Akram Khan

Artistic Director/Choreographer/Dancer

Akram Khan is one of the most celebrated and respected dance artists today. In just over 18 years he has created a body of work that has contributed significantly to the arts in the UK and abroad. His reputation has been built on the success of imaginative, highly accessible and relevant productions such as *Until the Lions*, *Kaash*, *iTMOi* (in the mind of igor), *DESH*, *Vertical Road*, *Gnosis* and *zero degrees*.

An instinctive and natural collaborator, Khan has been a magnet to world-class artists from other cultures and disciplines. His previous collaborators include 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, writer Hanif Kureishi and composers Steve Reich, Nitin Sawhney, Jocelyn Pook and Ben Frost.

Khan's work is recognised as being profoundly moving, in which his intelligently crafted storytelling is effortlessly intimate and epic. Described by the Financial Times as an artist "who speaks tremendously of tremendous things", 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.

As a choreographer, Khan has developed a close collaboration with English National Ballet and its Artistic Director Tamara Rojo. He created the short piece *Dust*, part of the *Lest We Forget* programme, which led to an invitation to create his own critically acclaimed version of the iconic romantic ballet *Giselle*.

Khan has been the recipient of numerous awards throughout his career including the Laurence Olivier Award, the Bessie Award (New York Dance and Performance Award), the prestigious ISPA (International Society for the Performing Arts) Distinguished Artist Award, the Fred and Adele Astaire Award, the Herald Archangel Award at the Edinburgh International Festival, the South Bank Sky Arts Award and six Critics' Circle National Dance Awards. Khan was awarded an MBE for services to dance in 2005. He is also an Honorary Graduate of University of London as well as Roehampton and De Montfort Universities, and an Honorary Fellow of Trinity Laban.

Khan is an Associate Artist of Sadler's Wells, London and Curve, Leicester.

Ruth Little

Dramaturg

Ruth Little is a dance and theatre dramaturg, a teacher and writer. Her work has encompassed national arts organisations, remote rural communities, site-specific production and large and small-scale exhibitions and expeditions. She lectured in English Literature at the University of Sydney, and was Literary Manager at Out of Joint, Soho Theatre, the Young Vic and the Royal Court. Ruth was Associate Director at Cape Farewell from 2010-2016. She is dramaturg with Akram Khan Company (*Gnosis*, *Vertical Road*, *DESH*, *iTMOi*, *Dust*, *technê*, *Until the Lions*, *Giselle*) and has worked with Banff Arts Centre, Sadler's Wells, Barbican, and many others. Winner of 2012 Kenneth Tynan Award for dramaturgy, Ruth has a number of publications including *Art, Place, Climate: Situated Ethics*, *War in the Body*, and *The Meteorological Body*.

Michael Hulls

Lighting Designer

Over the last 20 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*, *TOROBACA*, and most recently *Until the Lions*. 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, as only the fourth lighting designer to be given an entry. In 2014 Michael received the Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dance.

Vincenzo Lamagna

Composer

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 recent collaborations include *Until the Lions* and Akram Khan's award winning 21st-century adaptation of *Giselle* for English National Ballet. His scores are a mercurial combination of acoustic and electronic music, recognised for their ferocious industrial undertones, haunted melodies and cinematic soundscapes.

Mirella Weingarten

Set Designer

After completing her studies in dramatic arts in London, Mirella Weingarten studied fine arts in Hamburg and Edinburgh, with teachers including Marina Abramovic. Since 1996, Mirella has worked as a professional theatre designer and as a director for opera and dance theatre. Her recent work has been seen throughout Europe and includes an extensive collaboration with Berlin Contemporary Opera, designing many of their award-winning productions. Working with kinetic sculpture and moving objects on stage has characterized her work throughout the past years. Since 2011, Mirella has been the Artistic Director of the arts and music festival Schlossmediale Werdenberg in Switzerland, a festival for contemporary and early music and audio-visual art.

Kimie Nakano

Costume Designer

Kimie Nakano has designed costumes for Northern Ballet, Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet, Royal Danish Ballet, Companhia Nacional de Bailado, English National Ballet, Van Huynh Company, The Royal Ballet of Flanders, Rambert Dance Company, David Nixon, Didy Veldman, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, José Agudo and Yabin Studio. Kimie's opera production credits include: *The Return of Ulysses* by John Fulljames for Royal Opera and *Tristan und Isolde* by Carmen Jakobi for Longborough Festival Opera. Her designs for Akram Khan Company include: *Vertical Road*, *Dust* (English National Ballet's *Lest We Forget*), *iTMOi*, *TOROBACA*, *Gnosis*, *Kaash*, *The Rashomon Effect* (National Youth Dance Company), *technê* (choreographed for Sylvie Guillem, *Life in Progress*).

Jordan Tannahill

Writer

Jordan Tannahill has been 'widely celebrated as one of Canada's most accomplished young playwrights, filmmakers and all-round multidisciplinary artists' (Toronto Star). His plays have been produced on major stages internationally and translated into eight languages, while his films and multimedia performances have been presented at festivals including the Toronto Int. Film Festival, the Tribeca Film Festival, and the Venice Biennial. In 2017, his play *Late Company* transferred to London's West End. Upcoming: his virtual reality performance *Draw Me Close*, produced by the National Theatre (UK) and the National Film Board of Canada, will open at the Young Vic in January 2019.

Mavin Khoo

Rehearsal Director

Mavin Khoo is internationally recognised as a dance artist, teacher, choreographer and artist scholar. His initial training was in Malaysia. He then pursued his training in Bharatanatyam intensively under the legendary dance maestro Padma Shri Adyar K.Lakshman in India. As a contemporary dance artist, he has worked with Wayne McGregor, Akram Khan, Shobana Jeyasingh and many others. Khoo founded mavinkhooDance in 2003. He was Artistic Director of ŻfinMalta Dance Ensemble between 2014 - 2017. He currently maintains his touring work as a mature artist with a focus on solo Bharatanatyam performances and specifically commissioned contemporary duet works. He also worked as rehearsal director for Akram Khan Company production *iTMOi* and worked alongside Akram on *Giselle* (English National Ballet).

Nicola Monaco

Rehearsal Director

After studying contemporary and ballet in Italy from the age of 19, Nicola had the opportunity to work for the award-winning Dutch dance company Emio Greco/PC from 2003 until 2008. In 2009 he moved to London and worked with choreographers such as Akram Khan, Gregory Maquoma, Tom Dale, The Featherstonehaughs and Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company. In 2013 he toured worldwide with Akram Khan Company, performing in *iTMOi* and *Kaash*. Nicola collaborated as a rehearsal director with the mavinkhooDance and ŻfinMalta Dance Ensemble directed by Mavin Khoo until 2016 and Paolo Mangiola in 2017. He also teaches workshops internationally and in 2017 received the qualification to teach the Double Skin/Double Mind methodology of ICK/Amsterdam.

Nina Harries

Musician - double bass & vocals

Nina Harries studied classical double bass at the Royal College of Music under Enno Senft of the London Sinfonietta, graduating in 2016, specialising in contemporary classical music. Alongside performing with orchestras, punk bands, folk ensembles and contemporary experimental ensembles, Nina is also a soloist and songwriter. She is celebrated for her rare skill at singing and playing simultaneously and has commissioned several works for bass and voice whilst at the RCM. Her own composition work incorporates theatre, cabaret and comedy, captivating audiences with original songs and poetry exploring the relationship between bass and the female voice.

B C Manjunath

Musician - percussions & konnakol

Manjunath revealed an innate musical talent as a young boy and he imbibed the best in Carnatic Talavadya from his parents. Manjunath has acquired several awards throughout his career including the Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar, the highest recognition for youth in the field of fine arts. He has since expanded his vocabulary and is well versed in Indian Classical, Modern Jazz and Contemporary classical music that he mastered by collaborating with performers at prestigious platforms in India and overseas with world renowned artists of these genres. Manjunath toured with Akram Khan Company's productions *ma*, *Gnosis* and *TOROBAKA*.

Tamar Osborn

Musician - baritone saxophone

Saxophonist and multi-wind player Tamar graduated from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in 2000. A strong classical background complemented by jazz studies has enabled her to perform in many different genres in her professional career. She currently works regularly with the Dele Sosimi Afrobeat Orchestra and jazz artists Sarathy Korwar, the Hackney Colliery Band, Emanative and Jessica Lauren. Past projects span the worlds of pop, theatre and world music, including Kelis, Van Morrison, Tanmoy Bose, FELA! at the National Theatre & Sadler's Wells, and Africa Express (a series of collaborative concerts between African and western musicians including Tony Allen and Fatoumata Diawara). Tamar runs her own project Collocutor as bandleader, composer and performer. Collocutor have three releases, 'Instead' (2014), 'The Search' (2017), and 'Black Satin' (2018).

Aditya Prakash

Musician - vocals

Aditya Prakash is an award-winning Indian classical vocalist and composer, best known for his powerful and emotive voice. Aditya has been performing classical Carnatic vocal concerts since the age of 13 and had the rare fortune of performing, touring and working with Sitar Maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar, from the age of 16. Aditya studied composition and performance under award-winning musicians during his Ethnomusicology studies at UCLA (University of California Los Angeles). Although firmly rooted in South Indian classical (Carnatic) music, which he studied under venerated Gurus in Chennai, his style is heavily inspired by North Indian classical music, Sufi music, jazz, and hip hop, which he brings out in his collaborative group Aditya Prakash Ensemble who create original compositions inspired from these styles.

Clarice Rarity

Musician - violin

Clarice studied at Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Royal College of Music. She realised that challenging performance conventions inspired her the most and at the early stages of her career, she focused on performing the works of contemporary classical composers such as John Cage, Boulez, Michael Finissey, Hans Abrahamsen and Master of the Queen's Music, Judith Weir. Clarice's interest in this repertoire led her to work with some of the most exciting young composers in the UK, including Oliver Leith, Lisa Illean. Clarice's performance highlights include working with the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group at Wigmore Hall and Birmingham Festival Hall and working at Viitasaari new music Festival with Ensemble Modern/IEMA in 2017, as part of a conducting masterclass week with Susanna Maliki.