

## WORLD CLASS CHOREOGRAPHER UNITES DANCE COMPANIES ACROSS THE GLOBE

*Akram Khan and National Ballet of China's major collaboration*

**February 2008: Akram Khan**, the award-winning dancer and choreographer, and the prestigious **National Ballet of China's** major new international collaboration, *bahok*, premiered with great success in Beijing on 25 January 2008 at Beijing's leading theatre Tianqiao. After the UK premiere at Liverpool Playhouse on 7 March 2008 as part of Liverpool's Year as European Capital of Culture, *bahok* embarks on a global tour with performances in several other cities in the UK, Syria, Colombia, Spain, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, New York, Canada, Portugal, France, Abu Dhabi, Croatia, The Netherlands, Scandinavia and Mexico. This is a unique collaboration for both Akram Khan Company and China's classical ballet flagship company. Khan has drawn together the two companies' differing cultural perspectives and diverse dance styles making *bahok* one of the most exciting cultural events of 2008 anywhere in the world.

The collaboration with the National Ballet of China represents a continuation of Khan's interest in combining different dance traditions to create new and original dance vocabulary. *bahok*, a Bengali word meaning 'carrier', includes three dancers from the National Ballet of China and five dancers from Akram Khan Company. Together they come from many different cultures, dance backgrounds and traditions: Chinese, Korean, Indian, South African, Slovakian and Spanish. *bahok* was directed and choreographed by Khan and this is the first time he will not be appearing in one of his own productions.

*bahok* combines the dynamics of modern China, elements of Chinese folk dancing and Kathak, as well as western/modern and classical dance influences. Khan's long time collaborator multi-award winning composer Nitin Sawhney has created the music especially for *bahok*.



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Akram Khan is one of the most acclaimed choreographers working on the international stage today. He is also one of the most outstanding male dancers of his generation, renowned for his inter-cultural, inter-disciplinary collaborations and for challenging conventional ideas of traditional dance forms. He is the recipient of numerous awards and honours including an MBE for services to dance and in 2007 he was awarded 'Excellence in International Dance' by the International Theatre Institute. He has been an Associate Artist of Sadler's Wells since March 2005.

At only 33 years of age he has already created a substantial body of critically acclaimed work crossing different cultures, dance disciplines and traditions. His international collaborations to date have included major artists: Sylvie Guillem, the French prima ballerina; Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Flemish Moroccan contemporary dancer; and choreography for Kylie Minogue. A collaboration with Oscar-winning actress Juliette Binoche is also planned for 2008. Khan is celebrated for the originality of his vision, which has been informed by his training in the north Indian classical dance form Kathak and contemporary dance.

**Akram Khan said:** *"This is a fantastic opportunity to explore how different cultures express themselves through dance. Working in China has long been an aspiration of mine – it's one of the most dynamic and exciting countries in the world. It's so far been a fascinating exploration of dance language amongst a range of highly versatile and talented dancers."*

**Zhao Ruheng, Head of the National Ballet of China, said:** *"The National Ballet of China has always worked towards developing performing arts forms, but this is the first time our company have collaborated with a contemporary dance company on a thoroughly original creation. We were also honoured to work with the acclaimed Mr. Khan, a brilliant choreographer who uses dance to unite people and share experiences, without regard to national boundaries."*

**Alistair Spalding, Artistic Director, Sadler's Wells, said:** *"I'm delighted that Sadler's Wells is furthering its relationship with both Akram Khan as an Associate Artist, and National Ballet of China who saw great success at their last visit with us in 2003."*

**Co-producers:**

Sadlers Wells Theatre, London

British Council

The Liverpool Culture Company with Merseyside Dance Initiative

DanceXchange, Birmingham

Theatre de La Ville, Paris

Tanzhaus NRW Dusseldorf

National Arts Centre, Ottawa

China Now, London

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*Subsidised rehearsal facilities provided by Jerwood Space*

**Further information**

[www.kallaway.co.uk/akram-khan.htm](http://www.kallaway.co.uk/akram-khan.htm)

**Anna Cusden**

**Kallaway**

020 7221 7883

[anna.cusden@kallaway.co.uk](mailto:anna.cusden@kallaway.co.uk)

**Charlene Lim**

**Akram Khan Company**

Company Manager 0207 354 4333

[office@akramkhancompany.net](mailto:office@akramkhancompany.net)

## Akram Khan Biography

Akram Khan is one of the most acclaimed choreographers of his generation working in Britain today. Born in London into a family of Bangladeshi origin in 1974, he began dancing at the age of seven and studied with the great Kathak dancer and teacher Sri Pratap Pawar. He began his stage career at the age of 14, when he was cast in Peter Brook's legendary production of *Mahabharata*, appearing in the televised version of the play broadcast in 1988.

Following later studies in contemporary dance, he began presenting solo performances of his work in the 1990s, maintaining his commitment to the classical kathak repertoire as well as modern work. Among his best-known solo pieces are: *Polaroid Feet* (2001), *Ronin* (2003) and *Third Catalogue* (2005).

In August 2000, he launched his own company, and among his most notable company works are *Kaash* (2002) a collaboration with artist Anish Kapoor and composer Nitin Sawhney, *ma* (2004), for which he received a South Bank Show Award (2005); *zero degrees* (2005), a collaboration with dancer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, sculptor Antony Gormley and composer Nitin Sawhney, premiered at Sadler's Wells and was nominated for a Lawrence Olivier Award in 2006. *zero degrees* won Best Choreography in a Ballet or Dance Work and Akram won the award for Best Male Dancer in the prestigious annual Helpmann Awards held in Sydney, Australia on Monday 6 August 2007.

*Sacred Monsters*, a major new work featuring ballerina Sylvie Guillem, with additional choreography by Taiwanese choreographer Lin Hwai Min premiered at Sadler's Wells in September 2006. Another of his most recent projects is *Variations*, a collaboration with London Sinfonietta to celebrate the 70th birthday of Steve Reich, which premiered in Cologne in March 2006, and toured to Europe and America later that year.

Akram Khan was also invited by Kylie Minogue in summer 2006 to choreograph a section of her new *Showgirl* concert which opened in Australia in November 2006, and toured to the UK (London and Manchester) in January 2007.

Akram Khan's collaboration with Juliette Binoche premieres at The National Theatre, London, in September 2008.

## **National Ballet of China**

The only Chinese National ballet, the National Ballet of China (NBC) was founded on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1959. Originally known as the Experimental Ballet Company of the Beijing Dance School, it quickly grew under the influence of numerous Russian masters. Over the past forty-five years, the company has attached great importance to the exploration and the accumulation of ballet knowledge. Today the NBC has an extensive repertoire and has successfully trained many generations of outstanding artists. This winning combination has attracted the attention and praise of the international world of ballet and NBC tours internationally on a regular basis. At present, the NBC has over eighty professional ballet dancers, teachers and regisseurs and its productions tour all over the world. Many of its dancers have won gold, silver and bronze medals at major international ballet competitions.