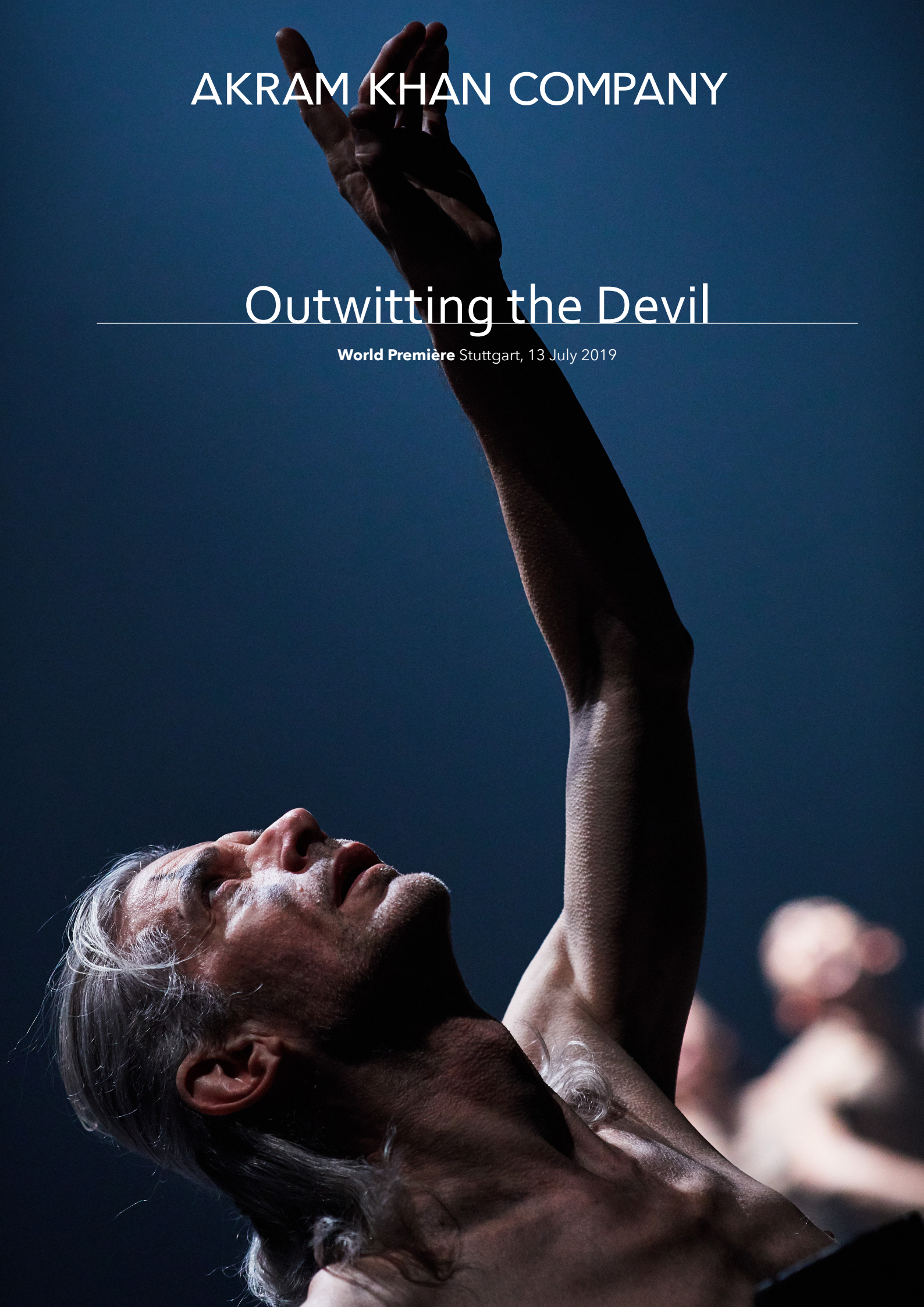
AKRAM KHAN COMPANY

Outwitting the Devil

World Première Stuttgart, 13 July 2019



Night after night I have the same dream:
I am young, immortal, an axe in my hand.
The young man cannot imagine the old man he will become.

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"As I arrive at the end of my dancing career, I have awakened to a new way of dancing. And that is to dance my ideas through the bodies of others, including older dancers, who carry their histories and complex emotional experiences within them. But what remains unchanged is my passion for exploring old and new myths in the context of our times." – Akram Khan

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The truth was a mirror in the hands of God.
It fell, and broke into pieces.
Everybody took a piece, they looked at it
and thought they had the truth.
Rumi

Outwitting the Devil is inspired by a fragment of the 12 broken clay tablets which together make up one of the world's oldest great works of literature, the ancient Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh. Akram Khan's new work embodies a violent chapter in young Gilgamesh's life, read and recalled by his older, dying self. It tells the story of Gilgamesh's domestication of and friendship with the wild man Enkidu, their journey to the vast Cedar Forest, home to wild beings and spirits, and the slaughter of its guardian Humbaba. Fuelled by strength and pride, Young Gilgamesh determines to establish his fame and fortify the city of Uruk as a monument to himself. But the killing of Humbaba and destruction of the forest and its animals angers the gods, who punish the young king by taking the life of his beloved Enkidu. Confronted with the truth and sorrow of human mortality, Gilgamesh passes into history, to become a fragment among the broken remnants of human culture and memory. *Outwitting the Devil* is a myth of all times, for our times.

Central to Tom Scutt's design for *Outwitting the Devil* is a large black wooden box; it suggests a table, and also a tomb - the first as well as the last supper. It is both a meeting place and a monument, and it sits among hundreds of fragments and remnants suggesting the ruins of human culture and the despoliation of the natural world. The idea of the first supper took us back to the origin stories of one of the world's first 'civilisations' – that of ancient Sumer – recorded in the Epic of Gilgamesh some 4000 years ago.

Gilgamesh may have been an historical king of Uruk in Southern Mesopotamia. His rule coincided with the rise of large walled cities, stratified urban culture, slavery, warfare, literary writing, and the creation of historical records. His culture was patriarchal and hierarchical; his gods took human form and were thought to have made mankind – like the tablets on which scribes recorded his timeless deeds – out of clay. But people, like clay tablets, like the great city of Uruk and Sumerian civilisation itself, fall and break. Among the fragments of the Epic unearthed in Iraq in 2011 was a clay shard containing 20 previously unknown lines from Tablet V. They describe Gilgamesh's awe at the abundance and biodiversity of the great Cedar Forest, and Enkidu's shame at having reduced it 'to a wasteland'. This is, in effect, the world's first environmental poem.

Outwitting the Devil is at once a memory and a confession, a puzzle pieced together in the dark that contains the story of who we once were, and may again become.

CONFESSION

I remember their screams
Their open mouths
Their faces to the sky
How they came apart
At the joints and the seams
Their faces in their hands
Their faces at night
Their faces in the ground,
I was strong to perfection
A raging bull
A terror
An axe
A prophecy

There was a forest
The smell of rain
I remember
How they fell and broke

I cut down the Cedar Forest
I carried the Forest guardian's head.
I remember they were tender
There were tender parts
Soft as the hand
Soft as the eyelash
Soft as the bone

Soft as the heart

– text by Jordan Tannahill –

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Duration: 1 hour 20, no interval

Artistic team & credits

Artistic Director/Choreographer Akram Khan

Dramaturg Ruth Little
Lighting Designer Aideen Malone
Visual Designer Tom Scutt
Original Music Score and Sound Design Vincenzo Lamagna
Costume Designer Kimie Nakano
Writer Jordan Tannahill
Creative Associate and Coach Mavin Khoo
Rehearsal directors Mavin Khoo, Azusa Seyama or Angela Towler

Material performed by Mythili Prakash or Pallavi Anand, Luke Jessop, Jasper Narvaez, Louis T. Partridge, Elpida Skourou, François Testory

Executive Producer Farooq Chaudhry
Technical Director Zeynep Kepekli
Technical Manager Michael Cunningham
Stage Manager Lars Davidson
Lighting Engineer David Salter
Sound Engineer Peter Thomas
Project/Tour Manager Mashitah Omar
Tour Manager Assistant Svitlana Bil

LED Light Tube manufactured and supplied by Light Contrast Ltd

Original material devised by Ching-Ying Chien, Andrew Pan, Dominique Petit, James Vu Anh Pham, Mythili Prakash, Sam Asa Pratt

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Co-produced by Théâtre de Namur – Centre Scénique, CENTRAL – Centre Culturel de La Louvière, Festival d'Avignon, Théâtre de la Ville – Paris, Sadler's Wells London, La Comédie de Clermont-Ferrand – scène nationale, COLOURS International Dance Festival 2019 – Stuttgart, Attiki Cultural Society - Athens, Greece

Supported by Arts Council England

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

Special thanks to Alistair Spalding, Vincent Thirion and Mélanie Dumoulin, Patrick Colpé, Meinrad Huber and Éric Gauthier, Olivier Py and Agnès Troly, and the teams at Sadler's Wells, CENTRAL – La Louvière, Théâtre de Namur, COLOURS Festival and Festival d'Avignon, Tamas Detrich and the team at Stuttgart Ballet, Mr. & Mrs. Khan, Yuko Khan, Aharya Dresses for Mythili Prakash's costume and all the collaborators and technicians who have worked on the project.

Press excerpts

"The performers, aged from 25 to 68, all exceptional, from different cultures and techniques - bharata natyam, contemporary, classical and traditional, hip-hop ... – develop a sophisticated choreography to the end of their toes. Graceful and sharp, between heaven and earth with its pliés at ground level and the eyes upwards, very animal too, the gesture captures, catches, bites, hugs, strangles. The swirling round dances raise a storm, about sacrifice and revenge. […] With Outwitting the Devil*, Akram Khan asserts an aesthetic and political turn."* – Le Monde

"This creation is a marvel, to which the Cour d'honneur has offered all the expected breadth.
The beauty of the choreographed body animates a telluric dance that seems to go back beyond time, beyond the Antique. The dancers are meeting a Michelangelo and a Delacroix. [...] The original electronic music by Vincenzo Lamagna echoes brightly in the courtyard. Its intense bass, diffuse sounds and convulsive rhythms, pulsate an immemorial Sabbath. The bodies bend to this contemporary music, at the same time archaic. An alchemy serving a story and a sensitive dramaturgy, understandable beyond words." – France Info

"A masterpiece, inspired by the myth of Gilgamesh. A show of great depth whose powerful echoes resonate with the news. [...] Between turmoil and bewitchment, the audience receive with full force the lessons of this story that hiccups and repeats itself tirelessly. A great storyteller, a conductor – at times of a demanding ritual, Akram Khan conjures everyone to challenge the subversive Devil, hidden in the darkest parts of the human being." – La Croix

"Minimalist yet mesmerizing fresco. […] The ecological dimension before the time of the poem, recalling the need to protect natural resources, inspired Khan to an inhabited choreography. […] Above all, the choreographer brings out older dances, Indian among others, or scenes seeming drawn from a carved bas-relief. Akram Khan avoids the pensum to connect to the movements of life." – Les Echos

"The effect of rhythms builds a hypnotic mechanics that conveys the fight as much as the terror. [...] One comes out of Outwitting the Devil *more aware than ever of the ephemeral nature of existence."* – La Provence

"Close to a restorative ritual, the show conjures up the founding myths to rejuvenate their key meaning. Through a carnal and expressive dance. [...] More than a catharsis (or purification of passions), Akram Khan's dance brings together and reconciles energies." – Paris art.com

"A show that begins as a twilight and continues as a devastating whirlwind, an immemorial landslide whose ferocious, animal dance is part of a telluric musical score, punctuated by the hell of sensations. [...] A moment of dance, music and text dazzling with power and gravity, a moment of absolute perfection." – Artistikrezo.com

"In this piece, cooperating with six exceptional international artists representing many different countries and cultures, Akram Khan explores new forms and styles with inexorable and unconditional ferocity. Moments of fast-moving, almost joyous folk-themed dances, arms held upwards as if thanking the gods for their very existence, offered slight respite and relief to the majority of the movement, often slow and deliberate, highlighting a profound sense of despair. […] A truly magnificent work of art!" – Dance Europe

Akram Khan

Artistic Director/Choreographer

Akram Khan is one of the most celebrated and respected dance artists today. In the last 22 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 *Outwitting the Devil*, *XENOS*, *Until the Lions*, *Kaash*, *iTMOi* (in the mind of igor), *DESH*, *Vertical Road*, *Gnosis* and *zero degrees*.

As an instinctive and natural collaborator, Khan choreography is the embodiment of shared exploration across multiple disciplines and cultures. 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 and indie rock band Florence and the Machine, 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*.

In recent years, Khan has moved into television, specifically documentaries. He has created 3 documentaries with Swan Films for Channel 4, the Sky Arts documentary series *Why Do We Dance*, and an episode of the Netflix series *MOVE*.

Khan has been the recipient of numerous awards throughout his career including two Laurence Olivier Awards, 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 nine Critics' Circle National Dance Awards. Khan was awarded an MBE for services to dance in 2005. He has recently been announced as the new Chancellor of De Montfort University, and 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, and Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts, London and Curve, Leicester.

Ruth Little

Dramaturg

Ruth Little is a theatre and dance dramaturg, a teacher and writer. She lectured in English literature at the University of Sydney, was literary manager at Out of Joint, Soho and the Royal Court theatres, and artistic associate at the Young Vic. Ruth was associate director of Cape Farewell from 2010-2016, and has been dramaturg for Akram Khan Company since 2010 (Gnosis, Vertical Road, Desh, iTMOi, Dust (ENB), Until the Lions, Giselle (ENB), Xenos, Outwitting the Devil, Creature (ENB)). She was dramaturg for Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui/Nick Cave (Shell Shock: De Munt|la Monnaie), Simon Beaufoy (The Full Monty: Sheffield Theatres), Le Patin Libre (Vertical Influences and Threshold: Dance Umbrella), Australian Dance Theatre (South), Animals of Distinction (Frontera). She was dramaturg for Banff Centre/The Only Animal (Slime) and created and led Banff Centre's Dramaturgy for Dance programme in 2018 and 2019. Winner of 2012 Kenneth Tynan Award for dramaturgy. Co-writer/Script Editor for Sky Arts Why Do We Dance? She was Festival Navigator at Perth Festival between 2016 and 2019. She has been a Research Fellow at Central School of Speech and Drama, MacGeorge Fellow Australia (2020), and a director at Cove Park, Scotland. Ruth is currently co-director of Archipelago Folkschool, a community boatbuilding project based in Scotland.

Aideen Malone

Lighting Designer

Aideen studied Drama and Theatre at Trinity College Dublin and Goldsmiths College, University of London. She works on a rich variety of projects in theatre, dance, opera, site specific and installation. She has previously worked with Akram Khan on *Polaroid Feet* and *Kaash* in 2002. In theatre, she has collaborated with National Theatre, Bristol Old Vic, Lyric Hammersmith, Manchester Theatre Royal, Clod Ensemble, Young Vic, amongst many others. Aideen also enjoys working with young people in education, and is currently a tutor at ALRA and St Marys, Twickenham. She is a director of Junction designing lighting sculptures and installations.

Tom Scutt

Visual Designer

Tom is a London-based Designer for the stage and live events. A graduate from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in 2006, he regularly works at most of London's major theatres including The National Theatre, The Royal Court, Almeida and Donmar Warehouse. On Broadway, Tom has provided set & costume designs for *Constellations*, *King Charles III* and *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. His work reaches across live music (Christine and the Queens, Sam Smith, MTV VMAs), dance (Hofesh Shechter - *Grand Finale*) and exhibition design (*Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* at London's V&A Museum). Tom is an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, an Associate Artist of the Donmar Warehouse and a resident at Somerset House Studios. 2019 will see his directorial debut for *Berberian Sound Studio* at the Donmar Warehouse.

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.

Kimie Nakano

Costume Designer

Kimie Nakano has designed costumes for Northern Ballet, Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet, Royal Danish Ballet, Companhia National 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*, *TOROBAKA*, *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, film-makers 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

Creative Associate and Coach

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*

Azusa Seyama

Rehearsal Director

Born and studied ballet in Japan, and at North Carolina School of the Arts in United States, Azusa danced with Ballet Austin, and several dance companies in United States and in Japan. She continued her studies at Folkwang University in Germany, and joined the Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch in 2000, having created pieces with Pina Bausch and performed in repertoire pieces such as Café Müller. Azusa also became a rehearsal director for Pina Bausch's repertoires, and has danced and worked as a rehearsal director with Fabien Prioville Dance Company. In 2014, Azusa choreographed a piece for Gold Theater in Saitama Japan. She participates in a transmission project by the Pina Bausch Foundation as rehearsal director for re-staging of Pina Bausch's piece to such as Bavarian State Ballet's and Royal Ballet of Flanders. She danced in Pedro Almodóvar's film Talk To Her (2002) and in Wim Wenders' documentary PINA (2011).

Angela Towler

Rehearsal Director

Angela has had a long professional career dancing with Richard Alston Dance Company and Rambert. She has worked with internationally celebrated choreographers including: Christopher Bruce, Wayne McGregor, Matz Ek, Jiri Kylian to name a few. She was nominated for a TMA award for Achievement in Dance and the Critics' Circle National Dance Award for Outstanding Female Performance. She has choreographed many works for Rambert and for BBC, ITV and live events. She is working with The Royal Ballet School, English National Ballet School teaching contemporary technique and also continues to work with leading companies. She joined Akram Khan Company summer of 2021 as Rehearsal Director.

Mythili Prakash

Dancer

Classically trained in the Indian Dance form Bharata Natyam, Mythili Prakash grew up in Los Angeles learning from her mother/dancer Viji Prakash, and is currently mentored by dancer/choreographer Malavika Sarukkai. She performed her solo debut at eight years old and has since presented her work worldwide. Her full-length solo choreographies include Stree Katha, Yamuna, Seasons of Love, Chandalika, Aikya, and Jwala- Rising Flame. She has also collaborated with musician Anoushka Shankar in Svatantraya, with director Gowri Ramnarayan in Yashodhara, and with brother/musician Aditya Prakash in MARA. She has worked wth Director Ang Lee in the film "Life of Pi," and was featured on NBC's Superstars of Dance.

Pallavi Anand

Dancer

Pallavi began training in Bharatanatyam with her mother Smt. Shalini Shivashankar (Director of Upahaar School of Dance, London) at the age of 5 and continued to complete her arangetram in 2008 in Bangalore, India. She received further guidance in Chennai at Bharata Kalanjali School of Natya, founded by the Dhananjayans as well as with Smt. Bragha Bessel. Pallavi has also explored Mohiniattam briefly and has started her training in Mridangam and Nattuvangam, aiding her sense of rhythm and musicality within dance. She was the winner of Akademi's YUVA 2016, South Asian Youth Dance Competition and has presented several solos, duets and group recitals in the UK, India, Canada, Latvia and Dubai. Pallavi continues to train and find her voice under the mentorship and guidance of Sri. Mavin Khoo.

Luke Jessop

Dancer

Luke trained in the UK at the University of Bedfordshire, and then went on to work with UK based companies 2Faced Dance (In The Dust) and Southpaw Dance Company (Carousel). In 2012 Luke moved to Brussels to work with Ultima Vez / Wim Vandekeybus, creating and performing in the works; *booty Looting*, *Talk to the Demon*, *Spiritual Unity*, *FEAR NOT* and *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* (Revival). In 2018, Luke founded Ion Tribe, a dance-theatre company with a focus on promoting scientific literacy through artistic productions. As of 2017 Luke is the artistic director of the movement festival, ConnectLAB, held each year in Brussels. When he is not creating, performing or teaching he is studying for his Bachelor's degree in biology.

Jasper Narvaez

Dancer

Jasper Narvaez started dancing Philippine folk dance at the Philippine High School for the Arts. He continued his training at the University of the Philippines and at the Ballet Philippines Dance School. In 2017, Jasper obtained a BFA with First-Class Honours at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. He has toured and performed in festivals in Europe and in Asia with AURA Dance Theatre and was the lead in Jukstapoz Company's *Fragile Matter*. He has worked with choreographers Birute Letukaite, Ismael Ivo, Christine Gouzelis, Laura Aris-Alvarez, Vangelis Legakis and various independent artists in Hong Kong.

Louis T. Partridge

Dancer

Louis started dancing at the age of 14, he began formal training at London Studio Centre through their associates programme. He then graduated from the Northern School of Contemporary Dance in 2020, having worked with choreographers such as Gary Clarke, Lea Anderson, Patricia Okenwa and the Hiccup Project. He later went to work as an apprentice for Tanzmainz working with various choreographers including Felix Berner and Koen Agustijien & Rosalba Torres Guerrero.

Elpida Skourou

Dancer

Elpida is 25 years old and was born and raised in Athens where she started dancing at the age of 4. In 2018, she graduated from the Greek National School of Dance (KSOT). During her studies she was chosen by Antony Lachky to perform in *Special Gala* with the Hellenic Dance Company. After her studies she participated in the Athens and Epidaurus Festival where she performed Christos Papadopoulos' *Exercise 27*. In 2019 Elpida joined Akram Khan Company for *Father: Vision of The Floating World* which was performed in Bangladesh in 2020 and was featured as part of Akram Khan's episode in the Netflix Series *MOVE*. Currently Elpida is a choreographic assistant and dancer for a RootlessRoot production for a collaboration with the Greek National Opera.

François Testory

Dancer

François is a French dancer, singer and actor who trained at Mudra. He was asked by Béjart to join the Ballet duXXe Siècle but François chose to run away, as he likes to say, to join the circus with the legendary Lindsay Kemp. François has performed with DV8, Gloria, Ballet Rambert, Punch Drunk, David Glass, Opera Erratica and Gecko Physical Theatre. He's sang in Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffman*, Bernstein's *On the Town* and with electro-band Coil Laniakia, Von Magnet as well as polyphonic ensemble Graindelavoix. François has collaborated with performance artists Rose English and Serena Korda and appeared in Jane Campion's *Bright Star*. Most recently, François created two solos: *Empire: A Song & Dance Consideration* and a monologue *Medea, Written in Rage*.