



AAKASH ODEDRA COMPANY

SONGS OF THE BULBUL

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR & DANCER Aakash Odedra

CHOREOGRAPHER Rani Khanam

COMPOSER & MUSICAL DIRECTOR Rushil Ranjan

SET DESIGNER & STAGE MANAGER Emanuele Salamanca

LIGHTING DESIGNER & DRAMATURG Fabiana Piccioli

COSTUME DESIGNER Kanika Thakur

REHEARSAL DIRECTOR Dheerendra Tiwari

MUSIC PERFORMED BY Manchester Camerata, conducted by Melvin Tay

VOCALS Sarthak Kalyani, Abi Sampa

CHORAL VOCALS Rushil Ranjan, Aakash Odedra

ADDITIONAL INSTRUMENTATION Janan Sathiendran (tabla),
Praveen Prathapan (bansuri)

ADDITIONAL COMPOSITION Abi Sampa, Danyal Dhondy, Shuheb Hasan,
Amaan Ali

MIXED AND MASTERED BY Andrea Gobbi at Gloworm Studios

MUSIC PREPARATION Danyal Dhondy, Max Guthrie

TOURING STAGE MANAGER Sheriton Swan

PRODUCTION MANAGER Salvatore Scollo

Zellerbach Theatre

Saturday, October 18 @ 2 PM

Saturday, October 18 @ 7:30 PM

There will be no intermission.

The 25/26 season dance series is co-sponsored by Arthur Kaplan, C'67 and Duane Perry alongside Lynn Jerath, W'95 and Kunal Jerath.

PROGRAM NOTES

"A tribute to my mother 'Kay'... my smiling bulbul who left her cage."

– Aakash Odedra

Birdsong is fleeting—like dance, it exists only in the present, vanishing as soon as it is sung.

In Persian culture, nightingales or "bulbuls" are deeply symbolic, representing the soul's yearning for unity with the divine. Their songs, often directed towards the rose, symbolize the earthly beauty and the divine beloved, capturing the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. Drawing inspiration from an ancient Sufi myth, *Songs of the Bulbul* tells the story of a bulbul trapped in captivity. Bound by its constraints, the bird's despair deepens as its final moments approach. Yet, it sings more sweetly as its end draws near, delivering one last heartbreaking song before its soul departs.

This tale of sacrifice and beauty explores freedom found only in the ultimate release. The work intertwines the graceful yet powerful art of Kathak dance and Sufi storytelling, creating a dialogue between the intense physicality of Kathak and the spiritual journey of Sufism. Through this collaboration, the piece seamlessly blends classical Indian music, Sufi poetry and orchestral elements, inviting audiences into a transformative experience that transcends physical and emotional boundaries. From Persia to the Indian subcontinent, from freedom to captivity, *Songs of the Bulbul* explores the soul's journey towards divine love and enlightenment. Odedra's performance poses a universal question: will we remain confined to the material world like the caged bird, or will we soar toward liberation and unity with the divine?

Songs of the Bulbul was created in association with Manchester Camerata and was created in part during a residency at the Pillow Lab at Jacob's Pillow.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Aakash Odedra (Artistic Director and Dancer)

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 (Chitraleka Bolar, Birmingham and Chhaya Kantaveh, India). Odedra formed Aakash Odedra Company in 2011 as a vehicle for commissioning solos and to develop his own choreographic work. As a soloist, he has performed over 300 full-length performances in 40 countries in the past decade. Notable commissions include *James Brown: Get on the Good Foot* (Apollo Theater, NY) and the opera *God's Little Soldier* (Theater Freiburg), The Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations and the closing of the London Cultural Olympiad. Odedra has received numerous awards including the Amnesty International Award for Freedom of Expression; Best Dance at the Eastern Eye ACTA Awards 2018; a Dora performance award (Canada); Danza&Danza award (Italy); and a British Empire Medal in the Queen's 2021 New Year's Honours for his services to dance.

Rani Khanam (Choreographer)

Khanam is one of the most sensitive and astute interpreters of Lucknow Gharana of Kathak today, performing professionally for the past thirty years. Her style reflects deep comprehension of the dance tradition which has set new dimensions and served as a source of inspiration for younger generations. While deeply rooted in tradition, she has evolved her own individual style in Kathak. Inspired by her intimate knowledge of Islamic and Sufi texts, she had the idea to perform a unique repertoire of Sufiana poetry (Qalam) and Islamic verses, which has earned her critical acclaim. As a choreographer, Khanam has won many accolades, and her choreography has received praise and encouragement from top dignitaries. Considered an exceptional dancer by both Indian and international art critics and creatives, Khanam has been honored for her pioneering work through awards such as the Women Achievement Award in 2022 and The India Foundation's award for Outstanding Kathak Dancer in 1991.

Rushil Ranjan (Composer and Musical Director)

Ranjan is a multi-disciplinary, genre-defying artist and composer based in London. His work across contemporary, Sufi and classical music has earned him a reputation as one of the most distinctive and extraordinary musical voices around today. As a classical crossover composer, Ranjan has had his works performed by the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the Firdaus Orchestra, the National Youth Choir and many other acclaimed classical artists and ensembles. He is also an artistic partner of the pioneering Manchester Camerata. Together with his longtime collaborator, Abi Sampa, he premiered the world's first Urdu Symphonic Poem to great critical acclaim. He was also awarded the PRS Foundation Composer's Fund in July 2023 to tour the work. As a composer for film and TV, Ranjan has built up an impressive list of credits and accolades, having scored award-winning and BAFTA-nominated films for Netflix, ITV, Film 4 and the BFI. Ranjan is also the progenitor, artistic director and composer of the Orchestral Qawwali Project, a musical collective that seamlessly reframes the spiritual rapture of Sufi music through its rich orchestral scores. Since its debut in 2020, the project has been heralded as something of a cultural zeitgeist, amassing millions of streams, views and critical acclaim from around the world. Under Ranjan's direction, the project has sold out venues around the world, including most recently the Royal Albert Hall, during the project's debut headline performance.

Aakash Odedra Company

Based in Leicester, England, 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.

The company aims to ensure that its dance work reflects excellence, removes barriers to access excellent dance and art, and makes art and dance education opportunities more widely available. Its mission is to create dance works through a synthesis of Kathak, Bharatanatyam, contemporary and Bollywood-jazz and push boundaries, responding to and drawing inspiration from contemporary issues. Bilingual in classical and contemporary dance, the group uses the voice of British-Asian experience to translate ancient and contemporary movement languages, telling new stories relevant to today.

Its location within Leicester's international communities has allowed the group to be more aware of and proactive about the opportunities of plural heritage and the importance of a culture of accessibility, social justice, messaging and making people feel welcome.

Aakash Odedra is an Associate Artist at Sadler's Wells, 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.

EPHRAT ASHERIE DANCE WITH ARTURO O'FARRILL

SHADOW CITIES

NOV 14-15

Exhilarating street and club dance meet Latin jazz grooves in *Shadow Cities*. Created and performed by Ephrat Asherie and jazz pianist Arturo O'Farrill, this commissioned world premiere explores the beauty, vastness and joy of being in between many cultures and identities.

GET TICKETS!



Nir Arieli