Aakash Odedra Company

Songs of the Bulbul



Image: Angela Grabowska

PERTH FESTIVAL

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Perth Festival acknowledges the Noongar people who continue to practise values, language, beliefs and knowledge on kwobidak boodjar.

Noongar people remain the spiritual and cultural birdiyangara of this place and we honour and respect the caretakers and custodians and the vital role Noongar people play for our community and our Festival to flourish.

We also acknowledge all First Nations people, whose contributions make our Festival culturally and artistically richer.

Our hearts are happy that you are here, on the traditional lands of Whadjuk, part of the Bibbulmun nation and its people.

Perth Festival Noongar Cultural Authority Council
Roma Yibiyung Winmar, Vivienne Binyarn Hansen, Richard Walley, Barry McGuire & Mitchella Waljin Hutchins

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Welcome

Aakash Odedra is one of the world's most exceptional artists. I first saw him perform here in Perth as part of Perth Festival in 2015, and the impact was immediate and lasting. His dancing has a rare clarity – precise, generous and emotionally open; staying with you long after the performance ends. After witnessing, over time, just how extraordinary Aakash is as an artist, I knew I had to include *Songs of the Bulbul* in my program.

Aakash has an outstanding ability to generate feeling through movement alone. Every gesture is charged with intention; every stillness speaks. His work reminds us that dance can be both exquisitely detailed and deeply powerful, capable of expressing vulnerability, strength and longing without a single word.

This piece invites us into that emotional space. It asks us to feel before we analyse, to listen with our bodies and to trust the quiet intelligence of movement. It is intimate, affecting and a beautiful example of why dance continues to matter so profoundly.

Anna Reece
Artistic Director



Aakash Odedra Company

Songs of the Bulbul

UK
AUSTRALIAN PREMIERE SEASON

13 – 15 Feb

His Majesty's Theatre
Karboordup / Perth

Duration 60mins

Fri – Sun 7.30pm

Join us after the show on Sat 14 Feb for a Q&A session. Hear directly from the artists and creators of the work.

50

Latecomers will be admitted at a suitable break in the performance.

Contains haze and strobe effects.

A Note on the Work

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

Aakash Odedra

Birdsong is ephemeral – like dance, it exists only in the moment – sung once, then lost to time.

Nightingales, or 'Bulbuls', hold a special place in Persian culture, with their song representing a spiritual seeker, yearning for union with the divine. Their passionate songs are often directed towards the rose, symbolising both earthly beauty and the divine beloved, and highlighting the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment.





Songs of the Bulbul is inspired by the ancient Sufi myth of a bulbul captured and held in captivity. The bird was bound ever closer and slowly perished through despair, singing more sweetly as its end drew nearer, until it uttered one final, heartbreaking and piercingly beautiful song just before it departed the mortal world. Thus ended the journey of the mythical bird, a tale of beauty born of loss and of freedom found only in the ultimate sacrifice. The beauty of this songbird's melody serves as a metaphor for the fleeting moments of dance and an artist's life. Rooted in the expansive music, dance and poetry traditions of Sufism, this work emerges as a sensitive dialogue between the ferocious physicality of Kathak and the spiritual journey of Sufism, a path seeking unity with the divine.

A sensitive, beautiful dialogue between Sufi and Kathak, music that seamlessly blends orchestral and Indian classical tradition and Islamic poetry, *Songs of the Bulbul* invites you to witness a transformation transcending physical boundaries towards enlightenment. Through a journey from Persia to the subcontinent, from freedom to captivity, and the soul's journey towards divine love and enlightenment, Aakash Odedra poses a universal question: Will we, like the caged bird, remain bound to the material world, or will we soar towards a higher existence of liberation and the divine?

Credits

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 & mastered by
Andrea Gobbi at Gloworm Studios
Additional composition on 'Yaare Mann' and 'Forest' by
Shuheb Hasan & Amaan Ali
Music preparation
Danyal Dhondy & Max Guthrie
Original Producer
Ali Robertson
Touring Technical Manager
Salvatore Scollo
Touring Stage Manager
Ryan Phillips
Images
Angela Grabowska

Australian tour producer
Far and Away Productions

AAKASH ODEDRA COMPANY

FAR & AWAY PRODUCTIONS

Supported by
Manchester Camerata and
Jacob's Pillow

Supported by the British Council

BRITISH COUNCIL

About Aakash Odedra Company

Aakash Odedra Company was founded in Leicester in 2011 by Anand Bhatt and Artistic Director Aakash Odedra, a choreographer and world-renowned British South Asian dancer. Based in Leicester, United Kingdom, Aakash Odedra Company exists to deliver exceptional creative experiences for audiences and participants, helping create a society that is happier and healthier through dance.

Bilingual in classical and contemporary dance, we use the voice of British-Asian experience to translate ancient and contemporary movement languages to tell new relevant stories. We want to ensure that our work reflects excellence, removes barriers to access high quality dance and makes dance education opportunities more widely available.

Our journey has taken us around the world with successful international tours of our captivating productions, including *Mehek*, *Samsara*, *Little Murmur and Rising*, which have left undeniable impressions on audiences across the globe. Our shows have played on some of the world's most prestigious stages such as Sadler's Wells, Lincoln Center and Shanghai International Dance Center.

Creative Biographies

Aakash Odedra Performer & Aakash Odedra Company Artistic Director

Aakash is a dancer, choreographer and teacher. He was born in Birmingham, UK, and trained in classical Indian dance styles under Shiamak Davar, Mumbai (Nilima Devi, Leicester and Asha Joglekar, India) and Bharatanatyam (Chitraleka 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, and as a soloist he has performed over 300 full length performances in 40 countries. Notable commissions include *James Brown: Get on the Good Foot* (Apollo Theater, NY) and the opera *God's Little Soldier* (Theater Freiburg), Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations and the closing of the London Cultural Olympiad.

Aakash 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); a British Empire Medal in the Queen's 2021 New Year's Honours for his services to dance; Best Show at Edinburgh International Festival 2024 and Achievement in Dance by UK Theatre Awards 2024. He was voted Best Male Dancer at the 2025 UK National Dance Awards and also won Best Male Classical Performance, the first ever time this award has been given to a non-ballet performance. In 2025 he was announced as an associate artist of Sadlers Wells.

Rani Khanam Choreographer

Rani, a renowned Kathak dancer of the Lucknow Gharana, has over three decades of experience and trained under maestros like Ustad Fattan Khan and Pt. Birju Maharaj. Her performances, known for their devotion, inspire and fulfill audiences. She has developed a unique style that respects tradition and inspires young dancers. As a guru, she follows the Guru Shishya parampara, teaching many students and creating acclaimed repertoires of Islamic and Sufi texts. With over 200 productions, her choreography has been praised by Indian dignitaries and international critics. She addresses social issues through her work, notably in her production *Black and White*, highlighting the rights of Indian Muslim women.

Rani's contributions to dance have earned her numerous awards, including the Women Achievement Award 2022 by Gandhi Smriti & Darshan Samiti, the National Integration Award 2017 and the Loreal Femina Women Award 2014. As the founder of AAMAD Dance Centre, an NGO promoting Kathak, she continues to cultivate and groom the finest dancers, leaving a lasting impact on the classical dance world.

Rushil Ranjan Composer & Musical Director

Rushil is a multi-disciplinary artist and composer based in London, known for his work in contemporary, Sufi and classical music. His compositions have been performed by prestigious orchestras such as the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

An artistic partner of the Manchester Camerata, Rushil, alongside Abi Sampa, premiered the world's first Urdu Symphonic Poem. In July 2023 he received the PRS Foundation Composer's Fund to tour this work. Rushil has also scored award-winning films for Netflix, ITV, Film 4 and the BFI.

As the artistic director and composer of the Orchestral Qawwali Project, he has reframed Sufi music through orchestral scores, gaining millions of streams and critical acclaim since its debut in 2020. The project has sold out venues worldwide, including the Royal Albert Hall during its headline performance. Rushil was announced as Royal Albert Hall's new associate artist in February 2025.

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