

Shobana  
Jeyasingh  
Dance

# Bayadère The Ninth Life

Learning Resource  
Autumn 2017

**This Learning resource provides a support for the study and teaching of *Bayadère – The Ninth Life* in secondary schools and colleges, and most particularly at A-Level (Key Stage 5), following the AQA A-Level Dance specification. This is an interactive resource with links to dance videos and interviews.**

**Shobana Jeyasingh Dance offers workshops, masterclasses, CPD training and projects in schools, colleges, universities and community groups all over the UK. They are all overseen by experienced company dancers and educators and are easy to book.**

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## **Exclusive offer for Bayadère – The Ninth Life Autumn 2017 tour**

### **Schools ticket offer**

£8 per person (promo code SJD)

Thu 28 – Fri 29 Sept

The Lowry, Salford: 0843 208 6003

Mon 16 – Tue 17 Oct

Sadler's Wells, London: 0207 863 8000

Subject to availability

### **Exclusive workshop offer**

Book a minimum of 10 tickets  
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'This novel [...] take on [...] La Bayadère reconfirms [Jeyasingh's] status as one of the UK's more stimulating artists'

The Times



'This is by any measure a remarkable work: intelligent, thought-provoking, immensely accomplished in its choreography, staging and dancing'

Culture Whisper



'Jeyasingh choreographs her own Bayadère to magical effect. Subramaniam, a charismatic performer, create(s) moments of luminous beauty ...'

Critical Dance

*Bayadère – The Ninth Life* is a radical reimagining of Marius Petipa's legendary ballet *La Bayadère*. More than a re-telling, it searches for the roots of the bayadère temple dancer herself, and the allure she has exerted in Europe over the centuries.

Following its premiere at the Linbury Studio Theatre, Royal Opera House in 2015, this new production features the rich mix of Gabriel Prokofiev's specially commissioned score and a bold new design by Tom Piper, co-creator of the Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red poppy installation at the Tower of London.



Photography: Benedict Johnson

A large, bold, green number '1' that serves as a background for the title text.

# **Bayadère**

# **The Ninth Life**



Photography: Chris Nash, Dancer: Sooraj Subramaniam

# Beginnings

No ballet made as deep an impression on me as did Petipa's *La Bayadère* which I saw for the first time in the early nineties. Its impact on me was viscerally contradictory. On one hand there was much to admire in the movement and choreography. I had seen enough kitsch Bollywood dream scenes to be totally unfazed by the exotic set and the grand spectacle of the staging. However there was a constant stream of elements that pulled my attention away from the dance. At times I almost wished it were set in any other country apart from the one of my birth.

I had to double check that characters that moved with animal-like servility close to the floor with arms hanging by their sides indeed represented fakirs—spiritually-minded and disciplined ascetics (like John the Baptist perhaps) who shunned society. I quelled a deep desire to stand up and shout “This is an insult to fakirs!”. The invented gesture used as a greeting that was neither a salaam nor a namaste was equally distracting.

To an Indian, any mention of a dancing Golden Idol conjures up the bronze icon of Shiva, the perfect cosmic dancer. Like everyone else in the audience I was left exhilarated by the amazing skill displayed in this virtuoso solo. However my eye kept wandering to the mudra (hand gesture) that concluded the line of the arm. The mudra in Bharatha Natyam (the dance that has its origins in the temples of South India) is a culmination of a taut energy that radiates from the torso and informs the tips of the fingers, giving them an etched, incisive quality even when they seem to project easefulness. I had to adjust my aesthetic template to fit the soft-fingered un-stretched rendering of the mudra that I saw on stage.

And what of the figure of the bayadère herself with the very un-Indian name of Nikiya? How had a pale, willowy heroine with a pliant spine and harem pants come to represent Indian temple dancers for over 150 years? It was this question more than anything else that set me on my quest.

I wondered if a traditional dance-maker in India in 1866 would have composed a dance work set in Tunbridge Wells with a heroine named Kamala. Would their exotic ‘English’ Kamala have danced barefoot to the sound of drums surrounded by beautiful sets that evoked the English countryside with the silhouette of the Roman Colosseum in the background? Would all the men have worn tartan kilts in the belief that this was the national dress of the English? Would the depiction of Morris dancing have ended up looking like Flamenco?

Part of the answer to these questions lies in the fact that in 1866 the sense of cultural entitlement did not exist in India for the creation of such a dance work. It was a colonised country very much on the disadvantaged side of the cultural power balance. The power to observe, choose selectively, appropriate, and give legitimacy to one's own perspective without anticipating challenge or debate is one of the perks of political and economic power exercised on a global scale.

The other part of the answer to these questions lies in the fact that the East did not build a fantasy Occident like the perfumed Orient which Europe constructed for its own delectation and peopled with inhabitants such as The Indian Temple Dancer.

It was this vogue for the Orient that in 1838 led an enterprising French impresario to bring a group of dancers from a temple in Pondicherry, India.

It was a historic visit and they created quite a stir. Théophile Gautier, the celebrated French dance critic, saw them and recorded his mixed response to their alien-ness. The Indians stayed for over a year and performed in Paris, Vienna, Antwerp, Brussels, London and Brighton. But, as Gautier noted, their visit brought no changes to the European depiction of Indian temple dancers. As he watched Marie Taglioni portray a Bayadère in 1844 he wryly observed that the ‘genuine article’ did not really stand a chance against the ‘white gauze tutu’.

My work *Bayadère – The Ninth Life* lets the long lens of history dwell on the very European character of the bayadère and asks what she means to me as a contemporary Asian woman living in Britain. Gautier viewed the real Bharatha Natyam dancers from Pondicherry and found them not as he had expected. In a reversal of Gautier and in companionship with him, *Bayadère – The Ninth Life* is inspired by my encounter with the fictional Nikiya in Petipa's ballet.


— Shobana Jeyasingh, 2017







## Structure



*Bayadère – The Ninth Life* is an exploration on the theme of Orientalism that the classical ballet, *La Bayadère*, brings to light. Rather than a re-staging of the traditional ballet, Shobana's title refers to the last life, the last iteration of the work.

While the original ballet tells the tragic story of Nikiya, the beautiful bayadère and her lover Solor, Shobana's work condenses the intrigue of the ballet into the first act. The following two acts portray the uneasy relationship of 19th century Europe with the Orient and how contemporary dance may be able to reunite them.

Photography: Benedict Johnson

## **Section 1**

### **A young man sees the classical ballet, *La Bayadère***

A young Indian man is chatting online with one of his friends. He mentions that he recently went to see a classical ballet *La Bayadère* and describes its complicated love story, which is being danced at the same time behind him.

Whilst in the classical ballet, the love story is performed in three acts, in Shobana's work, it is condensed to one act in the first section. Nikiya, a beautiful temple dancer, and Solor are in love. However, the Rajah's daughter Gamzatti, is also in love with Solor, and her father orders Solor to marry his daughter. The wedding takes place. Despite her broken heart, Nikiya dances at the wedding where she is poisoned by a snake hidden in a basket of flowers and dies. Unconsolable, Solor drowns his sorrows in opium; in his drug fueled dream, he is reunited with Nikiya in the afterworld of the Kingdom of the Shades. In Shobana's production at the close of this act, the characters in the ballet 'capture' the young man and transform him into a bayadère.

## **Section 2**

### **Bayadères in Europe**

Through the words of Theophile Gautier, a French writer, we are introduced to the startling views of Europe towards far away colonial lands and exotic women in the 19th century. On stage, Shobana's dancers convey Gautier's uneasy curiosity while interacting with a modern-day male bayadère.

## **Section 3**

### **Kingdom of the Shades**

Using some of the motifs from the classical ballet's third act, Kingdom of the Shades, this section takes the ballet's original eternal dance into a different context. Chaos has descended on the stage; dancers are finally free to perform Shobana's unique contemporary dance movements. The young Indian man comes back on stage to film the dancers and enjoy this new iteration of dance.

# Main Themes



Photography: Bill Cooper

**Curriculum links to English, Citizenship, Art and Design, Geography, History, Music and Physical Education at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.**

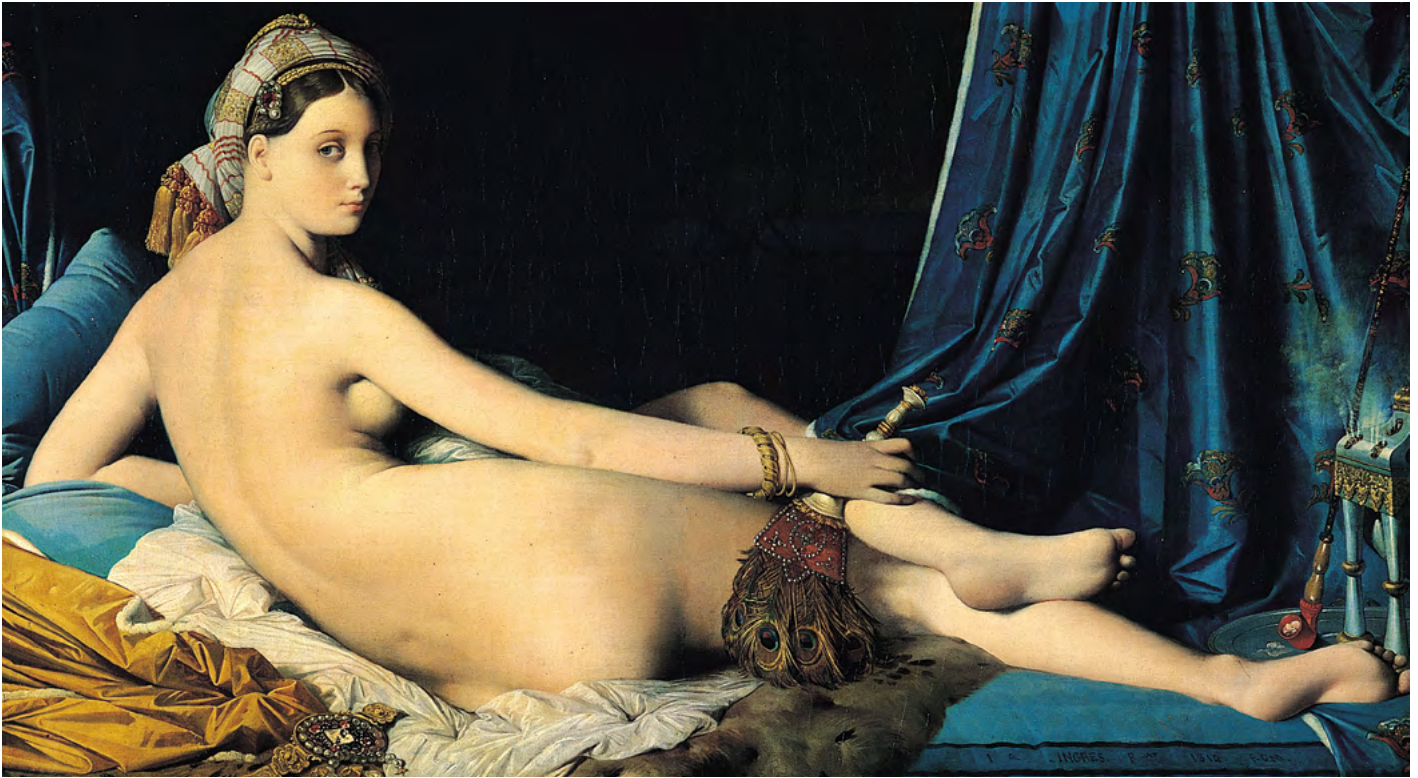
## Exoticism and Orientalism

*La Bayadère*, a nineteenth century ballet falls very much in to the category of Edward Said's famous critique of Orientalism. It conjures up a softly focussed 'East' and fills it with sinuous dancers in harem pants, high jumping Hindhu gods and tales of unrequited love and tragic death. It says more about Europe's relationship with the 'other' than anything about the India where it is set. Ironically enough a French impresario in 1838 (some twenty years before *La Bayadère* was choreographed in Russia) brought, for the very first time five authentic temple dancers from Pondicherry. This historic visit and the fevered response the Pondicherry dancers elicited as exotic celebrities in Paris, Vienna and London has just recently been researched and made public.

*Bayadère – The Ninth Life* references both the ballet *La Bayadère* and the visit of the temple dancers to Europe in 1838. It highlights Europe's love affair with the Orient but also how its legacy impacts on the British Asian diaspora as they too create an equally fantastical identity for themselves, erasing much of the difference between the East and the West in the process. – Shobana Jeyasingh

Bayadères, or Indian temple dancers, were first introduced to Europe through travellers tales such as Marco Polo's in the 13th century. They were fabled creatures, a mixture of sexuality and religion and an incarnation of something exotic, from the Orient. Orientalism, or the love in Europe for anything oriental or seemingly exotic, became very popular in the 19th century, especially in the visual arts. With the expansion of colonisation and the discovery of new lands and cultures, European artists were inspired by the remote cultural and artistic traditions different to theirs. As art historian Nancy Demerdash highlights: "We understand now that [Orientalism] reflects a Western European view of the 'East' and not necessarily the views of the inhabitants of these areas. We also realise today that the label of the 'Orient' hardly captures the wide swath of territory to which it originally referred: the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia. These are at once distinct, contrasting, and yet interconnected regions. Scholars often link visual examples of Orientalism alongside the Romantic literature and music of the early 19th century, a period of rising imperialism and tourism when western artists travelled widely to the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia."





Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *La Grande Odalisque*, 1814, Louvre Museum

In visual arts, paintings such as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *La Grande Odalisque* of 1814, displays the imagined grandeur of a middle-eastern harem. There are many regional discrepancies in the painting's details all conveying a sense of the exotic, while all belonging to very different cultural traditions. The peacock fan for example was preferred by Turkish, Greek and Middle-Eastern women, while pearls were traded from the South Pacific. The turban the young woman is wearing references peoples in current India and Pakistan while the hookah (smoking pipe) were in use throughout North Africa, the Middle East and the Far East.

Similar visual and cultural approximations were at the core of Petipa's *La Bayadère*, where ballet dancers wore a mixtures of middle-eastern harem pants while veiled in Indian fabrics and performed amongst sets that evoked both mosques, Hindu temples and many variations of 'exotic' architectures and equally referenced North Africa, India and the Middle-East.

"No European art form, perhaps, was more devoted to Orientalism than ballet", writes Joan Acocella in her essay about ballet and Orientalism. "[The ballet] makers were always scouting for exotic locales in

which, however incorrectly, to situate the material they had derived from French and Italian courts. [...] Marius Petipa, during his long tenure as chief ballet master of the Imperial Theatre in St.Petersburg (from 1869 to 1903), turned out a long line of Orientalist spectacles, including *The Daughter of the Pharaoh* (Egypt), *Le Roi Candaule* and *Le Corsaire* (Turkey), *The Talisman* and *La Bayadère* (India; in the latter, the temple explodes)."

The rich and evocative power of the exotic heavily influenced Théophile Gautier, a prominent French 19th century writer and arts critic. He met the group of Indian dancers in 1838 in Paris who went on to tour in Europe and wrote at length about his impressions of the dancers. His language denotes the strong attraction and perplexity he felt at meeting those dancers in the flesh, like confronting his dream.

"The very word bayadère evoked notions of sunshine, perfume and beauty. Imaginations are stirred and dreams take shape of latticed pagodas and monstrous idols."

— Théophile Gautier



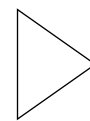
## Objectification of Women

Key to Orientalism, was the mystification and the attraction of exotic women. Until recently, and certainly in the 19th century, European artists were overwhelmingly male and the depiction of women in visual arts and in dance was therefore the domain of men.

Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque* for example portrays a nude European white woman in the middle of an 'exotic' décor. Odalisques (harem slaves) captured the (male) artists' imagination and allowed them to represent the dark reality of the domination of men and the objectification of women. Behind the beauty of this young body and the lavish décor, we are actually faced with a woman who has been sexually enslaved and made into an object of male desire. Similar depictions thrive in 19th century European ballets where the main exotic female characters display incredible seductive powers yet are unable to control their own fate or their ultimate deaths. In *The Pharaoh's Daughter* and in *La Bayadère*, both heroines descend to the kingdom of death, and the impossibility for the male hero to love them heightened the exotic woman's mystique.

In the exotic ballets of the time, ballerinas wore revealing and enticing costumes which would have been only acceptable on stage. In a similar fashion, the ideal of the 'exotic' woman, who is often a mixture of Middle-Eastern and South Asian traditions, is nowadays used by some 21st century Hip-Hop artists. Akon, for example, has his dancers in Bananza dressed in belly dancing skirts, snakes and Middle-Eastern jewellery. Musicians, dancers and many other artists still use the mysterious Oriental feminine clichés to heighten the erotic in their work, often to portray a woman who is bound by her male counterpart. (To explore this theme further, read through Abigail Keyes' [dance blog](#)).

This broad characterisation of women in artistic fiction is relayed in Gautier's impressions of the Indian dancers he met in Paris. His fascination with one of the dancers, Amany, reveals both his attraction and his revulsion of her: "There can be no more charming sight than that pale golden skin so smooth and tender like a satin corset" and his revulsion of her, "her big toe is separated from the others like a foot of the lark. Her blue dyed gums and teeth are alien, Asiatic." His use of a mixed language, both Eurocentric and condescending yet also seductive and admiring, create a striking uneasy tone. In *Bayadère – The Ninth Life*, the bayadère (who is a male dancer) replicates the sense of objectification, commodification and anthropological analysis that Gautier subjected the Indian dancers to. The choreography investigates his body, his movements, his allure in the same way that Gautier analysed Amany.



[Watch Extract from  
Bayadère – The Ninth Life](#)



# Bringing Shobana's *Bayadère* to life

## Set and Costume Design – Tom Piper

The set is built around simple sculptural 'Oriental' frames which divide the stage and project key moments of the narrative; this helps conjure up the idea of Orientalism while also critiquing it. In this respect, Tom Piper creates a set that is, in theme, similar to the one designed by Ezio Frigerio for Rudolf Nureyev at the Opera National de Paris in 1992.

Frigerio wrote: The set design for *La Bayadère* is a dream of the Orient. It does not reproduce a particular style of architecture, but is a synthesis of diverse elements, taken from different monuments in India and the Ottoman Empire. It is a mixture of different influences. [...] For *La Bayadère* is nothing other than the expression of a taste for exoticism – India seen through European eyes – a springboard for the imagination.

Dancers interact with the frames to showcase particular elements of the choreography, trapping the audience's gaze and making us all become 'voyeurs'. During the second act, visual representations of the exotic adorn the stage with colourful parrots and gold lighting hanging from the ceiling. In the third act, the set is deconstructed to mimic the chaos of the Kingdom of the Shades and give way to Shobana's contemporary dance style.

## Composer – Gabriel Prokofiev

Gabriel Prokofiev's electronic music both embraces and challenges western classical traditions. Choosing which composer to work with is the most important decision Shobana makes when working on a new piece after her own choreography.

As Stephanie Jordan writes: "Prokofiev exemplifies today's breed of composers: moving freely between popular and classical genres, first, university composition studies, then Dance, Electro and Hip-Hop experience, then a return to the classical scene alongside an eagerness to present his music in non-classical formats (he founded the label NonClassical). [...] Highly flexible and fundamentally practical, he is happy to re-mix as much as to turn his dance scores into concert works, and he will often edit by return, ready for the next day's rehearsal." <sup>1</sup>

For *Bayadère – The Ninth Life*, his score questions the attraction of the orient, with phrases from Théophile Gautier's essays added to the music. Gabriel Prokofiev started to work on sounds that were an elaboration of the original *La Bayadère* score, which he used as a source to distort. Phrases from his music are excerpts from the original ballet music which are manipulated, inverted or mixed backwards. He has described the collaborative process with Shobana as 'involving a lot of 'searching', with Shobana being the 'ultimate composer'. Despite many unanimous decisions, Prokofiev sometimes found his views about his own music challenged, a climax ignored, for instance, which was initially jarring, but which, in the end, provoked a revelatory shift in his perceptions. He learnt too that it was good to let 'a piece lead you rather than you lead it', another way of suggesting that collaboration leads to fresh discoveries.' <sup>2</sup>

1, 2 Stephanie Jordan, *Choreographers and Musicians in Collaboration*, submitted in *The Oxford Handbook of Creative Process in Music*, ed. Nicolas Donin of IRCAM, Oxford University Press, 2018





Photography: Benedict Johnson



Tom Piper's design model for Bayadère – The Ninth Life





# **Making the Dance**



# Shobana's choreographic approach

## Technique

Shobana trained in her youth as a Bharatha Natyam dancer, a traditional Indian classical dance. In her work you can see the influences of Bharatha Natyam in her use of detail, such as shaping the fingers, and weight. As one of her dancers explains: "Instead of just transposing the shapes of Bharatha Natyam, she transposes the physical sensation of it somehow with the tension of the back, the extension of the fingers or the weight of the feet."

There is no dominant signature style of movement because each work is created with its own motifs and language. Her dance works explore a wide variety of subject matter and are created for stage, outdoor sites as well as for camera. Her approach is broadly contemporary in that movement is created in the studio drawing from a wide palette of movement vocabulary both classical and contemporary. Her unrestricted choice and use of vocabulary interpreted by a wide range of dancers makes her technique difficult to categorise. 'Highly personal' is probably the most useful category.

Shobana's signature is more clearly seen in her compositional methods rather than in technique or movement vocabulary.

## Movement style

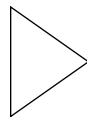
Contrary to popular views Shobana's work is not a 'fusion' between India and Europe. She doesn't just simply insert classical Indian dance movements into her choreography. For example Indian hand gestures (mudras) that appear in her work are used to create tension at the end of the arm and to create a resistant relationship between the body and the space around.

The use of the back to constantly animate the body is another hallmark of Shobana's visual language. The curves and shifts of the spine cannot be easily codified to any specific dance genre. She also plays with speed, accelerating or slowing down movement, demanding unusual combinations on the body. One of her dancers commented: "You push your technique to dance fast yet also sometimes slow down: that's when you feel that your technique comes into play. To slow things down you have to use all you have ever learnt to control your speed."

## Choreographic style

One of the features of Shobana's choreography is to create a body that moves with restless tension against the space around it. The body carves out the space incisively keeping the energy within rather than releasing it into the space around. In duets or group work, the space between bodies is similarly deployed and choreographed on. Her dancers work in bare feet and use the floor to push against and dance from it. The weight of the body is acknowledged and is used to give volume to shape and movement. Typically the dancing body is full of small details specially in the use of hands and fingers.

See below short video clips of Shobana's contemporary dance movements:



[Dance phrase from Bayadère –The Ninth Life](#)

[Dance phrase from Faultline](#)

[Dance phrase from Strange Blooms](#)

[Elements of Choreography, dance phrases from Bayadère – The Ninth Life 2015](#)

**“Instead of just transposing the shapes of Bharatha Natyam, she transposes the physical sensation of it somehow with the tension of the back, the extension of the fingers or the weight of the feet.”**

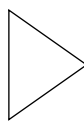




## Creative tasks

Shobana generates movement in collaboration with her dancers. When creating a new work, she asks her dancers to respond to carefully thought out creative tasks in the rehearsal studio. Material thus generated becomes the starting point for her choreography and composition. The tasks she sets are varied and can be based on images, objects or words. Dancers create a large amount of movement material with her, which then, through a process of selection, editing, amending and manipulation become dance phrases and sequences. This means that coming into the studio, she doesn't have a preconceived idea of where her choreography will take her, or precisely which movements she will ask the dancers to perform.

Dancers therefore play an active part in shaping her works. They often come from a wide variety of dance backgrounds; some might have had strong ballet, or contemporary training, while others might be specialised in traditional Indian dance or Hip-Hop (as was the case in *Material Men redux*). This means the material they produce is often incredibly varied and is often difficult to re cast. One dancer recently commented: "when you work with tasks vocabulary, most dancers are bound to feel vulnerable. When there's a task given to you, all dancers produce different results and eventually the choreographer picks out the ones that are relevant to their work. Because we're programmed to see things as right or wrong, selected or not selected, there is a sense of loss when your material is not used and where you feel "oh, am I not doing it properly?". Overtime, you see the dancer's role as just throwing up ideas. The key is not to be over-attached to what you produce because things will change and be weeded out. It really is about being open about throwing away a lot of the material you produce in the studio. You have to also believe in the fact that you can give away all the material that you have because you will eventually get something that fits very well, that was designed for you."



Watch this short video to understand  
how Shobana uses creative tasks.

**Shobana doesn't have a preconceived idea of where her choreography will take her, or precisely which movements she will ask to the dancers to perform. Dancers therefore play an active part in shaping her works.**



Photography: Bill Cooper

### **In the studio**

Below is a list of creative tasks to use with your students in the studio:

Make sure your students are warmed up thoroughly before setting them tasks.

Each task should take around 10–15 minutes to produce.

They should be done quite quickly, so students don't overthink and therefore produce material that is instinctive.

Students can work individually, in duets or in small groups.

Encourage your students to then work together to weave and edit material together and produce a final short phrase, or series of movement as explained in the video above.

Make sure your students understand that there is no right or wrong response to the tasks, but rather that the more they engage and include all parts of the body (including hands, fingers, feet, toes, the spine, the neck, the knees etc), the more creative their responses will be.

When collating the material into a short choreography, encourage your students to think in detail about transitions between movements and not be afraid of discarding some of the material they have produced.



Photography: Benedict Johnson

Here are five creative tasks used during the creation of *Bayadère – The Ninth Life* in 2015 as recorded by Elisabetta d'Aloia, Rehearsal Director. Tasks were usually either physical (requiring a particular attention to different body parts) or conceptual (requiring to respond creatively to words or a concept).

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### **Physical tasks**

#### **Reinventing the traditional ballet**

We watched a short clip from the ballet *La Bayadère*, analysing an ensemble or a corps de ballet scene. We then focused only on what the torso was doing in this particular clip and we looked specifically at how the body was moving without legs or arms. For example, in an arabesque, we would only look at what the torso was doing and replicate that very clearly. From that, each dancer had to go away and make a sequence of dance keeping the torso movements from the original ballet clip but add the rest of the body as they wanted. They could do whatever they wanted with legs, arms and head as long as the information on the torso stayed the same. A lot of section three of *Bayadère – The Ninth Life* actually came out of this task.

#### **Work on contact**

Shobana extracted words from Gautier's text and asked dancers to work very specifically with different kinds of interaction. For example, she would ask them to work with something like 'pulling apart', 'falling into a vortex', 'falling with support' and 'contorting'. Although they are quite broad terms, couples had to produce 30 seconds of contact material around this.



Photography: Bill Cooper

## Conceptual tasks

### Gautier's depiction of the bayadère

In his writing, Gautier describes the Indian dancer he met in Paris, referring to 'her blue dyed gums and teeth are alien' or her 'ears [...] pierced with enormous holes, upper ear riddled with openings' for instance. Using those words, dancers worked in pairs and created a duet where one dancer is being manipulated by the other while highlighting Gautier's meticulous and often prejudiced physical descriptions. For example, dancers would create gesture to draw attention to specific parts of their heads (mouth or ears) and ask their partner to replicate it. This creates a chilling satirising effect, which you can see in section two of the work, where dancers, in pairs, coarsely mimic Gautier's words while dancing around the bayadère.

### Replicating dancers' idea of heaven

Dancers were told to physically explore their own idea of heaven. Even though this was their only guidance the dancers were incredibly enthusiastic and went crazy. Although Shobana had a clear idea of what she wanted, she was very open to people offering unusual ideas and was extremely interested in how people responded to the task.

### The bayadère and Gautier as people

This task explored the relationship of Gautier and the bayadère dancer Amany who he met in 1838 in Paris. Dancers, in pairs, had to think about this encounter and respond to how the gaze of this 19th century European man would have been perceived by a young Indian dancer at the time. It's a very difficult task, but by using Gautier's text, it allowed the dancers to go beyond a stereotypical 'man and woman' interpretation and devise movements that go deeper into the ideas of seduction and repulsion, which are at the core of his text. Shobana was again interested in seeing what people would come up with in response to this dynamic. Some of the material created during this task was used in section two of *Bayadère – The Ninth Life*.





# Learning project

Between January and March 2017, one of our company dancers Wayne Parsons worked with Year 1 dance students from Lewisham Southwark College on producing work inspired by *Bayadère – The Ninth Life*.

After a two-day masterclass, students developed and choreographed their own short pieces over the course of the term. In March, they got back into the studio with Wayne to finalise their work, which was assessed and included as part of their final year assessment. Some also chose to write essays about Shobana in the written component of their coursework.

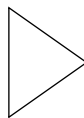
We were really pleased to see how varied their use and inspiration from Shobana's production was. Some expanded on specific dance movements from her work to build their own choreography, while others were inspired to write and record their own spoken word to create their own music track (following Gabriel Prokofiev's own musical inspirations) to perform with.

## Credits

Lewisham Southwark College  
teachers: Orley Quick and Emily Phelps

## Students

Analeise Auguste  
Andre Valentine  
Anna Micunekova  
Eden Nansera-Kay  
Emily Cabrera  
Gabriel Corrêa de Rezende  
Goran Gbo  
Isobel Eade  
Kaiden De'Souza-Spencer  
Stephanie White  
Maria Gauronskaite  
Olivia Walton  
Roushonara Campbell



[Watch video from  
Lewisham Southwark College](#)

# Interview: Elisabetta d'Aloia

**Elisabetta d'Aloia was *Bayadère – The Ninth Life* 2015 Rehearsal Director.**

**Hi Elisabetta, can you let us know a bit more about yourself and your dance career?**

I started dancing when I was eight years old and trained in ballet, in Italy, until I was nineteen. I then also trained at The Place and Laban in London. I have worked with many choreographers and companies such as Hofesh Shechter, Akram Khan, Javier De Frutos and I have been an assistant choreographer for Kim Brandstrup, Russell Maliphant, Luca Silvestrini, Cameron McMillan and Alexander Whitley. I was part of the 2008 Handover Ceremony at the Beijing Olympics. I currently also teach dance at DanceXchange and I am a guest lecturer at the Royal Ballet School.

**What is the role of a Rehearsal Director?**

A Rehearsal Director is a figure in the studio that creates a link between the dancers and the choreographer. I'd never worked with Shobana before I came in as Rehearsal Director for *Bayadère*, so there was the process of getting to know her and her way of working. The form, Bharatha Natyam was also really new to me and this was something I found really interesting. The way Shobana works is very intellectual so the work that happens in the studio is the product of extensive research and it was brilliant to be part of this. I needed many conversations with Shobana to understand her research and where her choreographic choices came from.

**Can you tell us what a typical day in the studio is like when creating the work?**

We start with a class, usually ballet or contemporary for an hour or so. After a short break, we have rehearsals until lunchtime. After lunch, we have rehearsals all throughout the afternoon. It's a very intense day, usually from 10am to 6pm.

**Can you describe *Bayadère – The Ninth Life*? What kind of work is it?**

The piece is a commission from the Royal Ballet Studio Programme and it is a response to the classical ballet *La Bayadère*. *Bayadère – The Ninth Life* is a reconsideration of the traditional ballet and what significance it has today. Shobana investigates how the original message in the ballet sits with today's world through dance, which I thought from the start was a huge task. I really wondered at first how it would be realised in dance. What I found interesting is how she used such an iconic ballet as *La Bayadère* and by digging into its roots and its history made a completely original work, commenting on stereotypes of cultural heritage.

**What do you prefer about the work?**

The thing I find most fascinating is the structure of the work. If I had to pick a specific thing I really like, I would go for the figure of the bayadère (danced by Sooraj Subramaniam) as a concept. I like the fact that, contrary to the ballet, our bayadère is a man, and Shobana has made an intelligent choice of gender transposition to portray the objectification of the exotic dancer. I like the Odalisque segment in the second section when the bayadère is being lifted by the other dancers. He is first paraded around as royalty before being lowered down on the stage. The dancers then curiously approach him and stare at him before trying to mimic his every move.

**Can you talk us through Shobana's creative tasks?**

As a dancer, you do more than just lend your body to instructions, you work as a collaborator. The choreographer has worked out these choreographic tasks that derive from the concept of the work, and they assign these tasks to you or to a group of dancers. There is a set amount of time for the tasks to be developed. Then the person or the group shows what they have produced. We video those or sometimes Shobana gives us further instructions and we video more. At the end of the day, there is usually around 15 mins of material produced to take home. In the evenings, and on her own, Shobana reviews and selects the material she likes, ready for the next day.

**How much do you talk about the piece with Shobana when creating? Do you have some input on the material she chooses from the tasks for the choreography?**

I have some input in the sense that I am part of the conversation. As Rehearsal Director, you go around in the studio and help the dancers do the tasks. At the beginning of the day, I would talk to Shobana about the tasks before she gives them to the dancer, so I have some background and I can help dancers contextualise the tasks. But the final editing is done by Shobana.

**“As a dancer, you do more than just lend your body to instructions, you work as a collaborator.”**

**How do you ‘rehearse’ the dancers? Do you video the choreography and then base yourself on this?**

Because I was part of the creation, some of the rehearsal process is about cleaning up, sharpening the material. The most interesting part of the job is that I was able to delve into her initial choreographic ideas and concepts to help realise Shobana’s vision; to make sure the work grew in the right direction so in its final iteration the piece is not only technically strong but is true to the original concepts.

Overtime you find that shortcuts are used or things get muddled up, so you have to make sure to keep things clear. Shobana has a good idea of what she wants things to look like so I made sure the material was sharpened, that there was a clear idea of what things should look like physically. The material uses a lot of line and tension. Once the material feels comfortable in the body, I would push the dancers further to go beyond what they thought was possible, almost pushing the body into something they thought it couldn’t do.



Photography: Bill Cooper





# **Further information**



Photography: Benedict Johnson



# Shobana Jeyasingh

## **Concept, Choreography & Direction**

Shobana Jeyasingh has been creating dynamic, fearless and enigmatic dance works for almost 30 years. Born in Chennai, India, she currently lives and works in London. Her acclaimed, highly individual work has been witnessed in all kinds of venues, including theatres, outdoor and indoor sites and on film. Her work taps into both the intellectual and physical power of dance, and is rooted in her particular vision of culture and society.

Shobana's work is often enriched by specially commissioned music composed by an array of contemporary composers from Michael Nyman to beat-boxer Shlomo. Her eclectic band of creative collaborators have included filmmakers, mathematicians, digital designers, writers, animators, as well as lighting and set designers.

Lavishly honoured and awarded, Shobana has also made a significant contribution to dance in the UK and internationally through her published writings, papers, panel presentations and broadcast interviews.



# Creative Team

## Tom Piper, Set & Costume Design

Recent designs include: *Pelléas Et Mélisande*, Garsington Opera; *Hay Fever*, Royal Lyceum; *Frankenstein* and *Hedda Gabler*, Northern Stage; *iHo*, Hampstead Theatre; Harrogate, HighTide & Royal Court; *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, RSC & UK Tour; *Carmen La Cubana*, Le Chatelet, Paris; *Endgame*, *Lear*, *Hamlet*, Citizens Theatre; *Red Velvet*, West End, Tricycle Theatre & New York; *A Wolf In Snakeskin Shoes*, Tricycle Theatre; *The King's Speech*, Birmingham Rep, Chichester Festival Theatre & UK Tour; Orfeo, ROH.

As Associate Designer of the RSC, Tom designed over 30 of their show including *The Histories* for which he won an Olivier for best costume design.

Tom designed *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* at the Tower of London and received an MBE for services to Theatre and First World War commemorations. Other recent exhibitions include: *Dr Blighty*, Nutkhut, 14-18 NOW; and *Curtain Up*, V&A, Lincoln Centre New York.

## Gabriel Prokofiev, Composer

Gabriel is a London-based composer, producer, DJ and founder of the NONCLASSICAL record label & club-night ([www.nonclassical.co.uk](http://www.nonclassical.co.uk)). Composing music that both embraces and challenges western classical traditions, Gabriel has emerged at the forefront of a new approach to classical music in the UK at the beginning of the 21st century. His compositions have been performed at a diverse range of venues, from the Royal Albert Hall and Tchaikovsky Hall, through to East London night-clubs & warehouses. With performers including Daniel Hope, Vladimir Jurowski, Sascha Goetzel, Seattle Symphony, Luxembourg Philharmonie, Russian State Symphony, Copenhagen Philharmonic, and Princeton Symphony. Gabriel is published by Mute Song.

## Sander Loonen, Video Design & Production Manager

After a four-year apprenticeship at the Rotterdamse Schouwburg in the 1990's, Sander has developed as a true all-round technician and designer. Equally versed in lighting, sound, video and staging he fills the gap between artistic ambitions and technical feasibility. Working with international creative teams, in all aspects of live performance and installations, he has developed the ability to steer a production towards a fulfilling project. He has designed and managed lighting, video, sound and staging for a great variety of artists: Aakash Odedra, Akram Khan, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, English National Ballet, LA Dance Project, Boy Blue, Sarah Moeremans, Anish Kapoor, Emilio Greco|PC, Aditi Mangaldas, Gregory Maqoma, Duckie, Meg Stuart/Damaged Goods, Serpentine Gallery, Productiehuis Rotterdam, Theatre de la Ville Paris, National Architectural Institute Netherlands, National Ballet of Flanders and many, many others.

## Fabiana Piccioli, Lighting Design

Fabiana Piccioli studied philosophy in Rome, graduating in 1999, while also training in ballet and contemporary dance. Between 2000 and 2001 she performed with a number of dance companies in Belgium, and in 2002 she returned to Rome for the RomaEuropa Festival where she worked as Production Manager for three years.

In 2005 she moved to London to join the Akram Khan Company as Technical Director and Lighting Designer touring with the company worldwide. Since going freelance in 2013 she has collaborated with many international artists and choreographers. In 2013 Fabiana won the Knight of Illumination Award (Best Lighting for Dance) for her work on Akram Khan's iTMOi.

**Karthika Naïr, Dramaturg**

French-Indian, poet-dance producer/curator, Karthika Naïr is the author of several books, including *The Honey Hunter*, illustrated by Joëlle Jolivet and published in English, French, German and Bangla. *Until the Lions: Echoes from the Mahabharata*, her reimagining of the Mahabharata in multiple voices, won the 2015 Tata Literature Live! Award for fiction and was shortlisted for the 2016 Atta Galatta Prize for Fiction. She was also the principal scriptwriter of the multiple-award-winning *DESH* (2011), choreographer Akram Khan's dance solo, and its adaptation for young adult audiences, *Chotto Desh* (2015).

In Naïr's résumé as a dance enabler, one finds mention of Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Damien Jalet, Käfig/Mourad Merzouki, two Olivier award-winning productions (*Babel(Words)* and *Puz/zle*), Auditorium Musica per Roma, the Louvre, the Villette, the Shaolin Temple in Henan, misadventures with ninja swords and pachyderms, among others, many of which materialise in her poetry (though, hopefully, not in the retelling of the Mahabharata).

**Hian Ruth Voon, Rehearsal Director**

Ruth has danced for Shobana Jeyasingh Dance, Will Tuckett, Fin Walker, Art of Spectra (Sweden), Union Dance, Freddie Opoku-Addaie/Jagged Antics, Aletta Collins, Stephanie Schober, Mayuri Boonham/ATMA Dance, Royal Opera House, English National Opera and Palau de les Arts (Valencia) amongst others. She has worked with choreographers including Rafael Bonachela, Henri Oguike, Alex Reynolds, Stephan Koplowitz (New York), Mavin Khoo and Michael Joseph, and performed in aerial work (bungee and harness) for The Generating Company and Robyn Simpson. Ruth was a dancer in the ROH DanceLines project under the direction of Wayne McGregor, and she also participated in ArtsCross 2013. Commercial credits include *World War Z*, and music videos for James Blunt and Gabby Young & Other Animals. As a teacher Ruth has taught at Greenwich Dance Agency, The Place, Shobana Jeyasingh Dance, Walker Dance and Union Dance. She was rehearsal director for Shobana Jeyasingh's *TooMortal* and is also a qualified Yoga teacher.

**Claire Cunningham, Rehearsal Director**

Claire is a rehearsal director, producer and teacher. She has restaged and assisted with creations for Clod Ensemble, Agudo Dance Company, Akram Khan Company, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Theatre-Rites, Akademi, Wayne McGregor: Random Dance, La Scala Opera House, Hélène Blackburn and Enrique Cabrera. In the last two years, Claire has produced *Silk Road* for Jose Agudo and *Chotto Desh* for Akram Khan Company. She was previously a dancer for sixteen years and continues to teach Yoga for London Contemporary Dance School and several studios and dance companies in London.

**Fred De Faye, Sound Engineer**

A sonic artist and composer, and member of the People Show theatre, Fred learnt his trade in Paris as a recording engineer, moving to England to become the personal recording engineer of the Eurhythmics.

Through his career he has mixed and recorded albums for the likes of Bob Dylan, The Prodigy, Depeche mode, Tom Petty, David Gray and many more. He has sound designed for theatrical experience created by Punchdrunk, Burberry, Tods, Philipp Plein fashion shows in Paris, London and Milan. Fred has also composed music for choreographer Garance Marneur on behalf of Levy Dance in San Francisco for *Alone Together* and *Pull Me Closer* part of the SF International Art Festival 2017.

Touring as a live sound engineer, his broad client base includes choreographer Lee Anderson, Patti Smith, and the KLF *Welcome to the Dark Ages*. Fred has worked with Shobana Jeyasingh Dance for the past eight years.

# Dancers

## Avatâra Ayuso

Avatâra trained in ballet (Conservatorio Profesional de Mallorca) and Linguistics (BA and MA, Universidad Complutense de Madrid) before moving to London to trained at London Contemporary Dance School. In 2005 she became part of the D.A.N.C.E. programme where she worked and performed internationally under the artistic direction of William Forsythe, Wayne McGregor, Frédéric Flamand and Angelin Preljocaj. In 2008, she obtained a Masters in Professional Dance from Palucca Schule Dresden. Over the years, Avatâra has received several awards and grants to develop her skills as a dance researcher and cultural leader (completing studies with the Open University UK and the prestigious Clore Leadership Programme Emerging Leaders). She is Associate Artist of the European Centre for the Arts Hellerau Dresden and her AVA Dance Company Associate of The Creative Academy Slough. She was nominated for the 2015 UK National Dance Awards. Since 2007, Avatâra has collaborated regularly with Shobana Jeyasingh Dance.

## Carmine De Amicis

Carmine De Amicis is a London based performer and choreographer as well as an associate lecturer at the University of Chichester. He joined Shobana Jeyasingh Dance in 2017 for the production *Bayadère – The Ninth Life* and has previously worked with Tavaziva Dance Company, José Agudo-Akademi, Watkins Dance Company, Lynne Hockney & Lucy Burge (Grange Park Opera), Chantry Dance Company, Salvatore Spagnolo. He has also performed pieces by Kerry Nicholls, Gary Clarke, Yael Flexer, Hagit Bar and Liz Aggiss. In 2015, alongside Co-Director Harriet Waghorn, Carmine founded EDIFICE Dance Theatre whose choreography combines Ballroom and Latin American technique with Contact and Contemporary Dance.

He trained at the Italian National Academy of Dance in Rome and then joined the postgraduate dance company MAPDANCE at the University of Chichester where he gained a distinction in his Masters Degree. He is also a professional Ballroom and Latin American Dancer.

## Fabio Dolce

Fabio Dolce was born in Palermo on 1985. He started dancing at 11 years old with ballroom dances. At 16 years old he started ballet and contemporary dance at the 'Teatro Massimo di Palermo' where he joins the company at 18 years old. One year later he decided to go to Rome to go deeper in dance studies at the National academy of dance and he joins at the same time the Astra Roma Ballet company. A year later he is hired at the Cannes Jeune Ballet in France where he works for Monique Loudières for two years. At 21 years old he joins the national company CCN ballet de Lorraine based in Nancy where he worked for nine years works by Forsythe, Tharp, Cunningham, Manuel Gat, Itamar Serussi, Mathilde Monnier... and many others. At 30 years old he decides to leave the company to start again a freelancer life and he moves to London where he danced for De Nada Dance Theatre and started to offer his own choreographic work in England and in France.

## Sunbee Han

Sunbee was born in Seoul, South Korea, where she obtained a BA and MA in Dance & Dance Film from Han Yang University's Arts Faculty. In 2009, she also won the gold medal at the Dong-A National Dance Competition – the most prestigious dance prize in South Korea. From 2007 to 2010, Sunbee danced with Garimda Dance Company in Seoul and in 2011 she joined the London-based Henri Oguike Dance Company, receiving critical acclaim for her first performances in the UK in Oguike's V4.

In February 2014, Sunbee was featured as *Dancer of the Month in Dancing Times*, which was the first major interview of a Korean dancer in this magazine.

Sunbee joined Shobana Jeyasingh Dance for *Strange Blooms* in 2013.

### **Bryony Harrison**

Bryony was born in Hull and started dancing at The LWHS School of Dance. At 16, she decided to further her training at The Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance. She had the privilege of working with choreographers such as Ross McKim, Mark Baldwin, Kerry Nicholls, Antonia Franceschi, Lynne page and Charlotte Edmonds and to have performed on stages such as The Royal Opera House, Sadler's Wells, Theatre Royal Drury Lane and the Barbican. In her final year, she performed alongside Rambert company on three different occasions in works choreographed by Mark Baldwin for Dance Power and Garsington Opera and in Itzik Galili's A Linha Curva.

After Graduating in July 2016 with a 1st Class BA (Hons), Bryony joined The Ballet National de Marseille's BNMNEXT under the direction of Emio Greco & Pieter C. Sholten, rehearsing and performing alongside the company for the 2016/2017 season.

### **Ingvild Krogstad**

Ingvild is a Norwegian dance artist currently based in Oslo. She graduated from London Studio Centre in 2015 with a First Class Honours degree in contemporary dance. She was part of Intoto Dance Company in her final year, and during this time, she performed in works by Henri Oguike, John Ross and José Agudo.

In January and February 2017, Ingvild danced the leading role 'Leila' in Les Pêcheurs de Perles at the Opera House in Kristiansund. She has worked as a rehearsal assistant at the Norwegian Opera and Ballet's project *På Tå Hev*, and choreographed for Dancarte 2017 | Faro, Portugal. She teaches and choreographs regularly at the Norwegian Ballet Academy. During the last year, Ingvild has worked with choreographers such as Toni Herlofson, Ann-Terese Aasen and Luke Brown. Ingvild greatly values diversity in her work, and has worked with many Norwegian artists, worked as a dance model and featured in several dance short films.

### **Andre Kamienski**

Andre came to London in 2010, after 12 years of Ballroom and Latin-American dance training in Poland. He began his adventure with contemporary dance at CAT Scheme at The Place and various youth dance companies. He graduated from London Studio Centre in 2015, where he performed works by José Agudo and Henri Oguike. Andre took part in AKX programme for Akram Khan Company in 2015, and is currently working as a freelance dance artist.

### **Noora Kela**

Noora was born in Finland, Helsinki. She started dancing at the age of 13. She went into full time dance training after she was granted a place at the Sibelius High School for music and dance in Helsinki (1997-2000). During this time she also worked for the Finnish National Theatre assisting on various plays and musicals. She graduated in 2003 from The London Contemporary Dance School with First Class Honours. Since then Noora has worked with Jan De Schynkel, David Bolger, Nigel Steward, Hubert Essakow, Fernando Magadan of NDT, and Tanja Raman. She also worked with the Henri Oguike Dance Company for 4 years, touring nationally and internationally. She joined Shobana Jeyasingh Dance in 2009. She has also worked with the ENO on two of their productions and been part of a few commercial videos.

### **Sooraj Subramaniam**

Sooraj Subramaniam began training at the Sutra Dance Theatre, Malaysia, in Bharatanatyam, Odissi, classical ballet and contemporary dance forms. He graduated with an Advanced Diploma in Performing Arts (Dance) from the Western Australian Academy for Performing Arts. Since 2007 Sooraj has been working in the United Kingdom, principally with Srishti - Nina Rajarani Dance Creations, and also with Akademi, Balbir Singh Dance Company and Shobana Jeyasingh Dance, performing across the UK and Europe. Currently he lives in Belgium and works as a freelancer.



### **Jack Thomson**

Jack is a London based dancer, photographer, choreographer and film maker. After training at Rambert School, Jack went onto to dance for Phoenix Dance Theatre performing choreography by Itzik Galli, Caroline Finn and Sharon Watson among others.

In addition to this he was a feature dancer in ENO's award winning opera *The Indian Queen* (2015) choreographed by New York based Christopher Williams. Jack was also an original dancer in Mark Baldwins' *Inala* (2014 – 2015), featuring Lady Smith Black Mambazo which he performed national, internationally and for the Royal family at the 2014 Royal Variety Performance. Most recently he danced in the 16th revival of the Royal Opera House's *Turandot* (2017) choreographed by Kate Flatt.

Jack joined Shobana Jeyasingh Dance for the revival of *Strange Blooms* in 2015 and is excited to perform in *Bayadère – The Ninth Life*.

[www.jack-thomson.com](http://www.jack-thomson.com)

### **Adi Chugh, Actor**

Adi Chugh trained at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School (BOVTS), LAMDA, NYC Acting School and Pennsylvania State University.

Screen roles include: Ronnie – *Three Dots and A Dash* (feature film, UK), Mohammed – *Oksijan* (short film, UK), and Boss – *Pool Sharks* (short film, USA).

Theatre roles include: Amar – *Dubailand*, Finborough Theatre, London; PJ – *5 Guys Chillin'*, NYC Off-Broadway, London, Edinburgh Fringe; John Thorpe – *Northanger Abbey*, Wickham Theatre, Bristol; *The Creature – Frankenstein*, John Wesley Chapel, Bristol; Silva Vicarro – *27 Wagons Full of Cotton*, WITS, South Africa; Vilom – *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*, Hindi, New Delhi; and Pran Padpaan – *Apne Fan Ka Ustad*, Hindi, New Delhi.



Photography: Benedict Johnson

## Credits

Co-produced by Sadler's Wells

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## The Company

Shobana Jeyasingh Dance pushes the possibilities of dance beyond storytelling, to stimulate thought, reaction and sensation through the movement of the human body. Restless, inquisitive and intrepid, we never tread the same path twice. We challenge expectation, going against the grain to create dance pieces that are at once beguiling and unsettling.

We're inspired by the complexities and contradictions of the world around us, taking cues and ideas from unlikely corners. Past works have explored science and classical painting, culinary trends and urban architecture. We use original design, music, media and site-specific staging to complement and counterpoint our dance, embracing the harmony and the tension they build.

Our many and varied artistic collaborators are cut from the same cloth — brave, bold and uncompromising. Together, we take our audiences on an adventure of the senses.

[www.shobanajeyasingh.co.uk](http://www.shobanajeyasingh.co.uk)

## Bibliography

More on Shobana Jeyasingh

For more on Shobana Jeyasingh and Shobana Jeyasingh Dance, go to the [Explore section](#) of our website

To see other works by Shobana Jeyasingh, go to the [Works section](#) of our website

## Articles

Joan Acocella, "The Sheiks of Araby", *The New Yorker*, 17 – 24 Feb 2014  
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