

## Dance Performance

### *Until the Lions*

14 January 2016

Akram Khan Company

The Roundhouse, London

Reviewed by Pranav Yajnik

**U**ntil the Lions reminded me of the vagaries of attending performances. For no planned reason, neither I nor my three companions on the evening

from her body and left behind hardened, embittered movement that matched Khan's resolute obstinacy, unwomanned – "Come, you spirits/That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here/ And fill me from the crown to the toe-top full/Of direst cruelty!" – into Christine Joy Ritter's Fury, inexorably bearing down on Khan until the inevitable.

Chien's capacity to control her almost inhuman flexibility was extraordinary, every limb powering into an improbable

But it is a testament to Khan's conceptualisation that although we four spectators emerged afterwards with four different interpretations of the evening, all of them were variations on a consistent theme of a loss of innocence in the face of the warping power of blind preoccupation; his choreography is effective and legible. Somehow even our later discovery of the impetus for the choreography (the episode of Amba and Bhishma from the *Mahabharata*)

fluid grace. Her strengths were the energy she exuded and the sparkle in her eye. Even when reciting the bols, her eyes danced and skipped as if the words were not necessary to maintain the rhythm. Her rapport with the sitar player was exquisite, although at times it appeared that she wasn't entirely happy with the pace of the percussion. She would also benefit from interspersing her high-energy routine with some breathers to ground the performance. Her *abhinaya* performance to the accompaniment of only the voice of the singer was innovative, although the use of rhythm-based moves in a pure *abhinaya* number wasn't entirely effective.

The Mogul court was quickly transformed into a Shiva temple. Santosh Nair, a bharatanatyam dancer of the Vazluvur school, presented a philosophical devotional piece. Santosh had a captivating stage presence with the assuredness of a seasoned performer. Brisk, precise footwork and a command over the emotions conveyed throughout the piece were commendable. It was very well choreographed with highlights that lingered. The depiction of Shiva emphasising the *damaru* (drum) in the wide-stanced *ardha mandala*, the subtle yet constant ramping-up of the pace throughout the piece to convey the idea of cycles of creation and destruction with continuous repetition of the main phrase all heightened the experience. At times Santosh was carried away by the energy of the piece resulting in sharp movements, bordering on jerky staccato moves that were unwarranted. She must also watch out for the wandering foot in the *araimandi* stance that was more than once somewhere in-between a technically correct *araimandi* and a wide-stanced *ardha mandala*. Her second piece was a *kavadi* describing Krishna and all living creatures dancing to his tune. A lovely piece set to cycles of five, Santosh's execution was flawless and as intended by the choreographer.

Hiten Mistry, the final emerging dancer of the evening, is from the Kalakshetra style of dance. He had undertaken the challenging task of choreographing his own pieces. In contrast to the other dancers who had a more turbo-charged approach, Hiten had a serene and calming presence. Clear



Until the Lions | Photo: Jean Louis Fernandez

had read any material about the performance beforehand. All I had was the ellipsis of *Until the Lions* – come? Are *the Lions* an event? – and a superficial knowledge of Khan's previous work. So we sat wondering, as the lights dimmed and a lone dancer slunk about the stage, what it was that we were going to watch.

A circular stage in the form of a section of a tree-trunk faced us, mysteriously cracked like the earth in a drought-stricken land. Ching-Ying Chien effortlessly sketched a young girl around its rim, with a few brushstrokes evoking a life before care and fear, and Khan entered into it. Above the stage was raised a human head on a pole, scowling sullenly down on the performers. Needless to say, Chien's carefree times were not to last as she repeatedly encountered Khan, whipping his kathak spins and snaking arms around the stage like a flag in a hurricane until, with a hand over his face literally but effectively blinding himself to Chien's hopeful advances, his stubbornness frustrated her every hope and she herself began to change. Youth visibly slipped

twist at her command. Michael Hulls' lighting, initially subdued, grew in prominence as the performance wore on, until by the redemptive finale it had literally taken centre stage. The troubadour musicians circled the set, balladeering the action on the stage: distant, unnamed lands evoked by the poignant melodies of Sohini Alam and unseen, unknown powers by the unearthly singing of David Azurza.

Khan's choreography frequently seems to be characterised by the concept of struggle, both physical and mental, and *Until the Lions* was no exception: movements were brought up short, repeated, attempted to take a different path, met with an obstacle, iterated, groped for a way through. In the end, the violence had proven so profound that the very earth was changed, steaming with Stygian vapours and eerie light. In the silence after the lights fell before the curtain call, the audience's thoughtfulness about taking delivery of such a multi-textured package of emotions as this was palpable.

did nothing to dislodge the imagery that the performance had constructed in our minds. Weeks later, the residue of a message against the dangers of uncomprehending, blind belief abide, as did the image of Khan, a hand over his face, slowly and determinedly laying to ruin the innocence of youth.

### *Navodit*

19 February 2016

Sonia Chandaria, Hiten Mistry and Santosh Nair

Rich Mix, London

Reviewed by

Annapoorna Kuppuswamy

**I**t was a typical February evening in London: grey skies with a light drizzle, one that doesn't invoke much joy. But when the house lights dimmed and the first twang of sitar filled the space, we may well have been in a Mogul court preparing to be dazzled. We were not disappointed. Sonia Chandaria, the emerging kathak talent of the Lucknow school, was first in order of appearance. Her presentation of teental was filled with crisp bols, impeccable footwork and