



**INVENTORY** AKRAM KHAN  
CHOREOGRAPHER AND DANCER

**‘I had Michael Jackson’s jacket from the Thriller video. I wore it everywhere’**

**Akram Khan, 43, has won more Critics’ Circle National Dance Awards than any other choreographer. His many other accolades include the prestigious International Society for the Performing Arts Distinguished Artist Award. He was appointed MBE for services to dance in 2005.**

**What was your childhood or earliest ambition?**

To be a superhero - Spider-Man or Batman or Superman. They were replaced pretty soon with three others: Michael Jackson, Charlie Chaplin and Fred Astaire.

**Private school or state school?**

**University or straight into work?**

State school at Wimbledon Chase Middle School and, for a brief moment, I went to a private school - I don’t know how I got in. Then Rutlish School. I wasn’t unhappy at school but I had found my home very early on and it was stage or studio. I didn’t really want to go to university but my parents felt it would be valuable as a back-up.

I was lucky because I stumbled into contemporary dance. I went to De Montfort University for two years, then transferred to the Northern School of Contemporary Dance.

**Who was or still is your mentor?**

A collection of people. My life mentor is my mother. In my work, every collaborator is my mentor. And now my biggest mentors are my children, who are three and five.

**How physically fit are you?**

Reasonably. I’m working on performing *Xenos*, my solo, which is pretty full-on. You have to be pretty strong to survive that. As a dancer, it’s more about technique - the fitness happens because you’re working on technique.

**Ambition or talent: which matters more to success?**

Ambition and talent aren’t the things that attract me in artists. Devotion is the closest word I can think of - to give up your life to something you love doing.

**How politically committed are you?**

I’m definitely aware of the politics of the world today. And I’m definitely disturbed by it. A lot of my work these days is a response to the state of the world - to the way we treat the world, the way we treat each other.

**What would you like to own that you don’t currently possess?**

I would like the freedom of not wanting to own anything.

So many of us are so unhappy because our sense of happiness comes out of ownership.

**What’s your biggest extravagance?**

Daydreaming.

**In what place are you happiest?**

Between my mother and my children.

**What ambitions do you still have?**

To create a feature film - which we’re working on right now. I’m excited and terrified.

**What drives you on?**

So many things. I love dancing for myself. I love the ritual of training. That’s what gets me up in the morning.

**What is the greatest achievement of your life so far?**

Taking responsibility for one’s actions. That’s growing upon me. When you’re young you don’t quite understand that. Then you start to realise you are connected to the planet and the planet is connected to you. And, less philosophically, having two beautiful children - that’s the greatest reward.

**What do you find most irritating in other people?**

Lack of empathy.

**If your 20-year-old self could see you now, what would he think?**

“Where did all the hair go?”

**Which object that you’ve lost do you wish you still had?**

I had the jacket that Michael Jackson wore in the “Thriller” video. One of my parents’ friends got it for me from America and it was the most amazing thing they could have given me. I used to wear it everywhere, I was so proud of it. I don’t know where it’s gone.

**What is the greatest challenge of our time?**

To break the perception of me, myself and I. To return to the way our ancestors used to think: to embrace the other, as in “we”. We used to embrace something more spiritual and godly in relation to ourselves and other human beings.

**Do you believe in an afterlife?**

I don’t know. But that’s the mystery of life. I would like to think there is something.

**If you had to rate your satisfaction with your life so far, out of 10, what would you score?**

Ten. I’m very fortunate. **FT**

*Interview by Hester Lacey. English National Ballet/Akram Khan’s “Giselle” is shown in cinemas nationwide from April 25; ballet.org.uk/giselle-cinema*