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Dance Kaash Sadler's Wells

★★★★☆

There are so many ideas going on in Akram Khan's first full-length production for his eponymous company that they almost work against each other. Inspired by ancient Hindu gods and modern theoretical physics, *Kaash*, first seen in 2002 and here revived for Sadler's Wells, tries to strike parallels between mythology and science as it grapples with the inexorable cycle of birth and death, of creation and destruction, and the possibilities of multiple universes.

How much of that you will glean from Khan's choreography is anyone's guess, because the focus is ever shifting and transitory. In the end, though, it doesn't matter, for *Kaash* stands alone as a striking work of pure dance that takes the spectator on a journey from the vast echo of outer space down into the red-hot centre of the Earth. At least that's how it feels.

Khan's barefoot choreography, now reworked for the current cast of five (three women and two men, all fantastic), is defined by opposites: power and grace, human and animal, circular flow and angular thrust, speed and stillness, kathak and contemporary dance. The back and forth of the movement is pointed with aggression, as if the dancers are battling with the space that contains them, yet it's fluidly processed and etched with incredible precision. Sometimes the choreography is compressed into an eerie meditation or fashioned as a dialogue of forceful gesture; at others it lets rip in images of impending disaster.

The feeling of epic unease — and cosmic rebirth — is accentuated by Nitin Sawhney's exciting score, part psychedelic prog rock, part febrile tabla rhythms and thundering soundscape, and Anish Kapoor's fascinating backdrop, a dark rectangle that hints at black holes, the expanse of the Universe, a window on to the soul and the void of annihilation.

Debra Craine