



AKRAM  
KHAN,  
dancer &  
choreographer,  
*on The Black*

*Count* by  
TOM REISS

“The Black Count is a biography of General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, the father of the famous French author Alexandre Dumas. The elder Dumas’ father was a white, French nobleman, and his mother was of African descent, enslaved on a plantation in Haiti. So Thomas-Alexandre was mixed race but had nobility running through him. He later fought in the French Revolution, and he was so strong and well respected that he was considered a threat to Napoleon, so they locked him up, with no reason. Alexandre was in awe of his father’s story. He wrote about him in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, but he knew the world wasn’t ready for a black hero. That’s why *The Black Count* surprised me – most of our civilisation has been based on the white-male perspective. There are so many stories that have been edited out of history because they’re different, or because of power and greed. I want to tell those stories.”

It was Alexander Poots, the CEO and artistic director of New York’s soon-to-open hub for the arts The Shed, who first introduced Akram Khan to Tom Reiss’ powerful book. The London-born dancer and choreographer of Bangladeshi descent was working at the time on *Xenos*, his acclaimed solo performance that portrayed the shell-shocked dream of a colonial soldier in the first world war, and so investigating ways to tell stories from the perspective of the Other. Khan’s practice, and the spirit of his company, founded in 2000, is born of a compelling fusion of classical Indian kathak and contemporary dance. This spring, he will present a similarly subversive project with *Dragon Spring Phoenix Rise*, an artistic collaboration with Chen Shi-Zheng and screenwriters Jonathan Aibel and Glenn Berger, at The Shed – bringing his connection with Poots full circle.

WORDS MAISIE SKIDMORE

AKRAM IS WEARING A COTTON TRENCH COAT BY STELLA MCCARTNEY. CASHMERE ROLL-NECK BY JOHN SMEDLEY. AND HIS OWN HAT

HAIR: CHI WONG AT MANAGEMENT ARTISTS USING MR SMITH. MAKE-UP: GEMMA SMITH-EDHOUSE AT LGA MANAGEMENT USING VISION D’ASIE: L’ART DU DÉTAIL AND SUBLIMAGE L’ESSENCE FONDAMENTALE BY CHANEL. LIGHTING: HENRY GORSE. PHOTOGRAPHIC ASSISTANT: JAMES HOBSON. STYLING ASSISTANTS: RHIARN SCHUCK AND GABRIELE RIZZI. HAIR ASSISTANT: KEI TAKANO. MAKE-UP ASSISTANT: NAOMI NAKAMURA. PRINTING: JAMES AT TOM JOHNSON STUDIO. POST-PRODUCTION: STUDIO RM