

Sadler's Wells

MARKETING AND PRESS PACK FOR *SUTRA*

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Sutra © Hugo Glendinning

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For further information contact:

Dawn Prentice, Sutra Touring

Sadler's Wells, Rosebery Avenue

London EC1R 4TN

T: +44 (0)20 7863 8107

E: dawn.prentice@sadlerswells.com

Important note

All copy must be used as provided. No changes or translations are permitted without the agreement of Sadler's Wells. All information contained in this document, along with high resolution images, can be downloaded from www.sadlerswells.com/sutra_tour_marketing

All marketing materials, audience programmes and press releases must be proofed by Sadler's Wells before going to print. Please send all proofs, allowing adequate time for approval, to dawn.prentice@sadlerswells.com

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR USE IN AUDIENCE PROGRAMMES CAN BE FOUND AT http://www.sadlerswells.com/sutra_tour_marketing/sutra_programme.asp

1. Crediting (Advance publicity & press release only)

The following credits must appear on all advance publicity including posters, venue/festival brochures and press releases:

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui / Sadler's Wells London

Sutra

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui / Antony Gormley
Szymon Brzóska
with monks from the Shaolin Temple

Direction & Choreography: Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui
Visual creation and Design*: Antony Gormley
Music: Szymon Brzóska

A Sadler's Wells Production

Co-produced with Athens Festival, Festival de Barcelona Grec, Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg, La Monnaie Brussels, Festival d'Avignon, Fondazione Musica per Roma and Shaolin Cultural Communications Company.

[Further credits will be required for the audience programme and are found in the 'Audience Programme' document along with further programme material.]

If you wish to use a descriptive tag line, we recommend the following:

'a new dance collaboration inspired by the skill, strength and spirituality of Buddhist Shaolin monks'

** in French, Antony Gormley's title should read 'création plastique'*

2. Brochure Copy

Celebrated Flemish/Moroccan choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui presents a brand new dance work inspired by the skill, strength and spirituality of Buddhist Shaolin monks. He has collaborated closely with Turner Prize-winning artist Antony Gormley, who has created a design consisting of 21 wooden boxes which are repositioned to create a striking, ever changing on-stage environment. Polish composer Szymon Brzóska has created a beautiful brand new score for piano, percussion and strings which is played live.

The 17 Monks performing in Sutra are directly from the original Shaolin Temple, situated near Dengfeng City in the Henan Province of China and established in 495AD by monks originating from India. In 1983 the State Council defined the Shaolin Temple as the key national Buddhist Temple. The monks follow a strict Buddhist doctrine, of which Kung fu & Tai Chi martial arts are an integral part of their daily regime. By visiting the Shaolin Temple in China, and working with the Shaolin Monks over several months, Sidi Larbi follows a life-long interest of exploring the philosophy and faith behind the Shaolin tradition, its relationship with Kung-Fu, and its position within a contemporary context.

"Exceeds even our highest expectations" *****

THE TIMES (UK)

"Takes the concept of cultural exchange to a whole new level" *****

THE GUARDIAN (UK)

2.5 Brochure Copy (shorter version)

Celebrated Flemish/Moroccan choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui presents a brand new dance work inspired by the skill, strength and spirituality of Buddhist Shaolin monks. He has collaborated closely with Turner Prize-winning artist Antony Gormley, who has created a design consisting of 21 wooden boxes which are repositioned to create a striking, ever changing on-stage environment.

Featuring 17 Monks directly from the original Shaolin Temple in China, the piece also includes a beautiful brand new score for piano, percussion and strings by Polish composer Szymon Brzóska which is played live.

“Exceeds even our highest expectations” *****

THE TIMES (UK)

3. Sample Press release

Please note this is a guide for your reference. Dates and performance talks / other events will change for each venue.

Please arrange all interviews through Abigail Desch, Press Manager, Sadler's Wells:
Tel: 0044 (0) 20 7863 8119 / abigail.desch@sadlerswells.com

For release: [insert Day Month Year]

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui / Sadler's Wells London

Sutra

**Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui / Antony Gormley
Szymon Brzóska
with Monks from the Shaolin Temple**

**Direction & Choreography: Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui
Visual creation and Design: Antony Gormley
Music: Szymon Brzóska**

A Sadler's Wells Production

[Insert performance dates in bold]

[Insert performance times in bold]

[Insert ticket prices in bold]

[insert booking details in bold]

"This unique, profoundly imagined show takes the concept of cultural exchange to a whole new level"

*** * * * * The Guardian**

The UK's leading dance theatre **Sadler's Wells** presents ***Sutra*** at [insert town/venue name] on [insert performance dates]. ***Sutra*** sees one of Europe's most exciting dancer-choreographers **Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui** unite with Turner Prize-winner **Antony Gormley**, alongside 17 Buddhist monks from the original Shaolin Temple in China, in the first true collaboration between Western artists and the Shaolin Temple.

Since its first sell-out performances at Sadler's Wells in London in May 2008, ***Sutra*** has been seen by over 23,000 people in eight European countries. Celebrated by audiences and critics alike, the production is a fascinating perspective on the philosophy and faith behind the Shaolin tradition. Recently appointed a Sadler's Wells Associate Artist, **Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui** spent several months at the Shaolin Temple in China working with the Monks and exploring his life-long interest in the Shaolin philosophy and its relationship with kung fu. ***Sutra***, performed by 17 monks from the Temple alongside Sidi Larbi himself, sees breathtaking sequences of enthralling, hypnotic movement set around Antony Gormley's striking design of 21 wooden boxes which provide a compelling, ever-changing environment for the performers. Polish composer Szymon Brzóska crafts a serene score for five musicians, including piano, percussion and strings which is played live.

Born in Antwerp in 1976, dancer and choreographer **Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui** is the son of a Flemish mother and a Moroccan father. Alongside ***Sutra*** he is best known in the UK for his collaboration with Akram Khan, Antony Gormley and Nitin Sawhney for the renowned 2005 production *zero degrees*. He has previously worked with Alain Platel and Les Ballets C. de le B., Les Ballets de Monte Carlo and the Royal Danish Ballet to name a few. He became an artist in residence at Toneelhuis in Belgium in 2006 and a Sadler's Wells Associate Artist in November 2008. He has recently been awarded the 2009 Kairos Laureate; Europe's most prestigious cultural award.

Aged between 12 and 26 years old, **The Monks** performing in *Sutra* are from the original Shaolin Temple, situated near Dengfeng City in the Henan Province of China and established in 495AD by monks originating from India. In 1983, the State Council defined the Shaolin Temple as the key national Buddhist Temple. The monks follow a strict Buddhist doctrine, with kung fu and tai chi martial arts forming an integral part of their daily practice. There are many martial arts schools that have also been set up in the region under the name of Shaolin, from which performers for many of the more commercial Shaolin Monk shows are drawn. The performers in *Sutra* however are all Buddhist Monks from the original temple itself.

For further information, images and interview requests please contact:

[insert contact details for press contact at your venue]

Notes to Editors:

Sutra is a Sadler's Wells Production

Co-produced with Athens Festival, Festival de Barcelona Grec, Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg, La Monnaie Brussels, Festival d'Avignon, Fondazione Musica per Roma and Shaolin Cultural Communications Company.

The title *Sutra* is derived from the Pali word *sutta*, whose primary meaning is a collective term for the sermons of Buddha. It is also a generic term for rules and aphorisms, in Hinduism *sutras* laid down the guidelines for proper conduct in life. The word in Sanskrit also meant *string, thread, measure of straightness*.

Sadler's Wells is the UK's leading dance house bringing the widest forms of world-class international and UK dance to London audiences. As a well-established producing house under the Artistic Directorship of Alistair Spalding, Sadler's Wells is committed to producing, commissioning and presenting award-winning works and ground-breaking collaborations on an international scale, including *zero degrees*, *PUSH* and *Sutra*. Sadler's Wells is dedicated to working with celebrated artists, performers and companies at the forefront of dance, many of whom are Associate Artists and resident companies of the theatre, including Sylvie Guillem, Akram Khan, Matthew Bourne and his company New Adventures, Wayne McGregor and his company Wayne McGregor Random Dance, Russell Maliphant, Jasmin Vardimon, Jonzi D, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Christopher Wheeldon and his company Morphoses/The Wheeldon Company.

/ends

Images

Images can be downloaded from www.sadlerswells.com/sutra_tour_marketing

4. Basic Information

Performers: The Performance features 17 Buddhist monks, 1 Contemporary dancer and 5 musicians.

NOTE - FOR A FULL LIST OF PERFORMERS, PLEASE SEE THE FULL PROGRAMME COPY AT http://www.sadlerswells.com/sutra_tour_marketing/sutra_programme.asp

Running time: 1 hour 10 mins (no interval)

5. Biographies

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui

Director, Choreographer and Dancer

My first dalliance with art was not dance, but drawing. As a child I wanted to draw reality and all the images I associated with it. For example, the clouds and what I could see in them, and people and the shadows they cast. They were 'surrealist-type' drawings: realistic but never just the bare facts. It was my way of interpreting the reality around me. But eventually I started to get impatient. The two dimensions were no longer enough. Then I started dancing, and the nice thing about dancing is that you have to dance constantly to see the drawing. Moreover, you are both the pencil and the draughtsman. Dance is always a temporary drawing, it disappears when the movement ends. So the drawing can be written over, or rewritten at any time. Each performance has to be drawn again the next evening.

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's first experience as a choreographer was with the 'contemporary musical' *Anonymous Society*, director Andrew Wale's salute to the music of Jacques Brel. Cherkaoui also danced in this production for which he won several awards including the Fringe First Award and the Total Theatre Award in Edinburgh, and the Barclay Theatre award in London.

Rien de Rien, Cherkaoui's first choreography as a member of Les Ballets C. de la B. artistic team, toured Europe in 2000 and won the Special Prize at the BITEF Festival in Belgrade. He worked on this production with singer and dancer Damien Jalet, who introduced him to Italian folk songs and went on to have a great influence on his later creations. The six dancers in *Rien de Rien*, whose ages ranged from sixteen to sixty, have a thorough command of as many different dance styles and techniques: from classical ballet through salon dance to the hand gestures we all make when we speak. Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui regards them all as equally valuable sources for a contemporary dance language. This eclecticism fits in very neatly with a theme that is close to his heart: equality between individuals, cultures, languages and means of expression. *Rien de Rien* went on a marathon tour and also won him the Promising Choreographer prize at the Nijinski Awards in Monte Carlo in 2002.

That year Larbi and Nienke Reehorst also led a workshop for mentally handicapped actors at Theater Stap in Turnhout, which led to the production *Ook*. This collaboration was a revelation. The individuality, directness, empathy and stamina of the Stap actors taught Larbi more about what it takes to be a 'performer' than all his previous professional experience together. At that point Stap actor Marc Wagemans joined the group of kindred spirits who have accompanied Cherkaoui through his career.

In July 2002 he took part in *Le Vif du Sujet* in Avignon, dancing in *It*, a Wim Vandekeybus production. Inspired by a short story by Paul Bowles, *It* is a dance solo in which the very specific languages of movement of both choreographers merge. "Cherkaoui pulls out all the stops. His body seems to have been uprooted and is inaccessible. When his foot touches the back of his head, it is as if the upper part of his body doesn't know there is also a lower part. The body fights with itself, juggles with the air between his hands, twists itself into a thousand curves." (from 'De Standaard', EVC, 19/07/02).

In the autumn of 2002 he and Damien Jalet and a number of dancers from the Sasha Waltz company created *D'avant* for the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz in Berlin, which combines medieval songs from the thirteenth century and contemporary dance. *D'Avant* is a highly physical production, which succeeds in coupling lightness and relativization with important social phenomena such as fanaticism, physical violence and moral apathy in a mosaic of styles. This production is so close to the performers' heart that it is a permanent part of the repertoire.

At the request of the Festival d'Avignon, in July 2004 Larbi presented a new project with Les Ballets C. de la B. Entitled *Tempus Fugit*, the piece calls into question the apparent absoluteness of time. People the world over seem to use the same concepts of time, but time is experienced and interpreted in different ways in different cultures. In *Tempus Fugit* an ensemble of fifteen performers from just about every corner of the world explored their own cultural past. Each of them tried to take control of time, which took the form of diverse dance rhythms and speeds. *Tempus Fugit* focused on the Mediterranean, the Arab and Central African worlds and on their mutual relationships.

In December 2004 Cherkaoui made *In Memoriam* at Les Ballets de Monte Carlo, and for the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève he choreographed *Loïn*, which was premièred in April 2005.

In 2005 Larbi worked with Akram Khan for the first time. Akram Khan is also a dancer and choreographer with dual 'roots': the son of Bangladeshi parents, he grew up in England. Together Cherkaoui and Khan created and danced the production *zero degrees* about the effect of their mixed cultural backgrounds. *zero degrees* was nominated for the Laurence Olivier Award in 2006, and went on to win the Helpman Award in Australia in 2007. For België danst, a special nationwide edition of Bal Moderne staged out in the open air in twelve Belgian cities simultaneously on July 16th 2005, Sidi Larbi worked with Damien Jalet to create a new choreography, *Ik hou van jou/je t'aime tu sais*, to music by Noordkaap and Marie Daulne. *Corpus Bach* followed in the spring of 2006 in which Larbi and Nicolas Vladyslav explored the theatrical effect of Bach's cello suites. The spring of 2006 took Larbi back to Monte Carlo, where he made a new creation for Les Ballets de Monte Carlo, *Mea Culpa* (premièred in April 2006). In August 2006 his new creation *End*, made for the Cullberg Ballet, had its première at the Gothenburg Dance and Theatre Festival. The piece, made during the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, clearly bears marks of the geopolitical realities that paralleled its gestation.

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui combines a busy touring schedule of his repertoire pieces with creating new productions. The audience at the impressive new opera house in Copenhagen were in raptures about *L'homme de bois*, Larbi's new creation for eighteen dancers from the Royal Danish Ballet to music by Stravinsky (May 2007).

Larbi accepted Guy Cassiers' invitation to join all the other Toneelhuis artists in making a site-specific project in Antwerp's Bourla theatre, based on *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* in April 2007. Furthermore, at the request of the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration, the new national museum in Paris, Larbi and photographer/film-maker Gilles Delmas worked together on a new video installation, *Zon Mai*, an extraordinary construction in the shape of a house filled with footage of dancers who reveal themselves through dance in the privacy of their sitting-rooms. September 2007 brought the première of *Apocrifu* (Apocrypha) commissioned by La Monnaie in Brussels. *Apocrifu* is a musical encounter with the Corsican a capella polyphonic singing of A Filetta. The group's music provides the backdrop for Larbi's new creation in which he also dances. The title is telling: a concise but key scene from *Apocrifu* (in which the three dancers take it in turns as three-headed monsters to read aloud from the Talmud, the Koran and the Bible) makes it clear that the difference between apocryphal and canonical is more a question of perspective or authority than of content or value. In this way Larbi treats in a light-hearted manner a broader theme that has been with him for a long time: the intrinsic equality of different cultures and religious viewpoints.

That theme returns in *Origine*, his most recent piece in which he brings two male and two female dancers - all from different parts of the world - together with the Sarband Ensemble (première February 2008). "The Sarband Ensemble's playing and singing is simply out of this world", wrote journalist Daniëlle De Regt. "Religious songs, passed down through the ages by female composers and choirs are interwoven into a sublime concert of sirens" (De Standaard, February 11th 2008). Again Larbi chooses an unusual approach to the musical tradition and with that music he provides the leitmotif for a choreography that subtly examines topical political issues. Light-heartedly but unmistakably he touches on themes like immigration, alienation, and our excessive consumerism before abandoning them to an increasingly abstract dance vocabulary.

After *Sutra* Larbi will return to his study of the notion and confusion of God in humanity's mindscape, of man's quest for the divine with work on *Babel*, the third chapter of the trilogy that began with *Foi* and continued with *Myth*.

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui

Director, Choreographer and Dancer [SHORTER VERSION]

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's debut as a choreographer was in 1999 with Andrew Wale's 'contemporary musical' *Anonymous Society*. Since then, he has made more than fifteen full-fledged choreographic pieces and picked up a slew of awards including the Fringe First Award, the Total Theatre Award in Edinburgh and the Barclays Theatre Award in London, the Special Prize at the BITEF Festival in Belgrade and the Most Promising Choreographer Prize at the Nijinski Awards in Monte Carlo, the Movimentos Award in Germany, and the Helpmann Award from Australia in 2007. In August 2008, Ballet Tanz awarded him the title of Choreographer of the Year for his work across the 2007-2008 season: *Myth*, *Apocrifu*, *Origine* and *Sutra*. The Alfred Toëpfer Stiftung has awarded its 2009 Kairos Prize to him in recognition of his artistic philosophy and his quest for cultural dialogue.

While Cherkaoui's initial pieces were made as a core member of the Belgian collective Les Ballets C. de la B. – *Rien de rien* (2000), *Foi* (2003), *Tempus Fugit* (2004) – he also undertook parallel projects that both expanded and consolidated his artistic vision. *Ook* (2000) was born from a workshop for

mentally disabled actors held by Theater Stap in Turnhout with choreographer Nienke Reehorst; *D'avant* (2002) from an encounter with long-standing artistic partner Damien Jalet and dancer-singers of the Sasha Waltz & Guests company, and *Zero Degrees* (2005) with friend and fellow-choreographer Akram Khan.

He has worked with a variety of theatres, opera houses and ballet companies, ranging from Sadler's Wells in London (*Sutra*, 2008), Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels (*Apocryfu*, 2007), the Royal Danish Ballet (*L'homme du bois*, 2007), Ballets Cullberg in Stockholm (*End*, 2006), Monte Carlo Ballets (*Mea culpa*, 2006, and *In memoriam*, 2004) and the Grand Théâtre in Geneva (*Loin*, 2005). But Cherkaoui's base since 2006 has been in Antwerp, where he is associate artist at Het Toneelhuis, the theatre that produced *Myth* (2007) and *Origine* (2008). Eastman, his future company, will throw anchor in the same port city, with the making of its first piece *Babel* in 2010.

Antony Gormley ***Visual creation and Design***

Antony Gormley was born in London in 1950. Upon completing a degree in archaeology, anthropology and the history of art at Trinity College, Cambridge, he travelled to India, returning to London three years later to study at the Central School of Art, Goldsmiths College and the Slade School of Art.

Over the last 25 years Antony Gormley has revitalised the human image in sculpture through a radical investigation of the body as a place of memory and transformation, using his own body as subject, tool and material. Since 1990 he has expanded his concern with the human condition to explore the collective body and the relationship between self and other in large-scale installations like *Allotment*, *Critical Mass*, *Another Place*, *Domain Field*, and *Inside Australia*. His recent work increasingly engages with energy systems, fields and vectors, rather than mass and defined volume, evident in works like *Clearing*, *Blind Light*, *Firmament* and *Another Singularity*.

Antony Gormley's work has been exhibited extensively, with solo shows throughout the UK in venues such as the Whitechapel, Tate and the Hayward Galleries, the British Museum and White Cube, and internationally at museums including the Louisiana Museum in Humlebaek, the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington DC, the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin, and the Kölnischer Kunstverein in Germany. *Blind Light*, a major solo exhibition of his work, was held at the Hayward Gallery in 2007.

He has participated in major group shows such as the Venice Biennale and the Kassel Documenta 8. His *Field* has toured America, Europe and Asia. *Angel of the North* and, more recently, *Quantum Cloud* on the Thames in Greenwich are amongst the most celebrated examples of contemporary British sculpture. One of his key installations, *Another Place*, is to remain permanently on display at Crosby Beach, Merseyside.

He was awarded the Turner Prize in 1994 and the South Bank Prize for Visual Art in 1999 and was made an Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1997. In 2007 he was awarded the Bernhard Heiliger Award for Sculpture. He is an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, Trinity College, Cambridge and Jesus College, Cambridge, and has been a Royal Academician since 2003.

Szymon Brzóska ***Composer & Pianist***

Recently awarded a postgraduate diploma in composition from the Royal Flemish Conservatory in Antwerp, Szymon Brzóska trained under the baton of Luc Van Hove. He attended workshops directed by Marek Stachowski, Tapio Tuomela, Remigijus Merkelys, Toivo Tulev and Peteris Plakidis between 2000 and 2004.

This young Polish composer, who also holds a Master in Arts diploma from the Ignacy Jan Paderewski Music Academy in Poznan (where Mirosław Bukowski was his professor), has already attracted considerable attention among professionals of classical and contemporary music: his works have been performed in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Norway and Poland; in 2003, his *Antiphona Beatae Mariae Virginis* was chosen by the Polish chamber choir Schola Cantorum Gedanensis for their concert at the Festival of Sacred Music *Maria Auxilium Christianorum* in Rumia; and in 2004, he won both the 3rd prize at the Adam Didur Composition Competition in Sanok (Poland) for *Czarna róża (The Black Rose)*, song for tenor and piano with words by Zbigniew

Herbert and the 2nd prize in the Composition Competition for Choral Passion Song in Bydgoszcz (Poland) for *Vexilla Regis Prodeunt*.

In 2006, his *6 miniatures* for cello and piano was chosen for the workshop with the prestigious Belgian Prometheus Ensemble and he was also among the selected few at the Composition Competition of the *music@venture 2007* festival in Antwerp, which commissioned him to create a piece for the Belgian ensemble I solisti del vento, which they performed in October during the 2007 edition of the festival.

Brzóska is particularly interested in the synergy between music and other arts, such as contemporary dance, theatre and cinema. He has participated in soundtracks for several film and theatre projects in Poland, and his composition for the Original Motion Picture soundtrack for the French film *Le bruit des gens autour*, directed by Diastème and produced by Cipango Productions will be heard at a special pre-screening at Festival d'Avignon before the commercial release in Europe in September.

Shaolin Temple

The warrior monks performing in *Sutra* are from the Shaolin Temple, situated near Songshan mountain in the Henan Province of China and established in 495AD by monks originating from India. In 1983, the State Council defined the Shaolin Temple as the key national Buddhist Temple. They follow a strict Buddhist doctrine, of which Kung-Fu & Tai Chi martial arts are an integral part of their daily regime.

A patriarchal clan system presides within the Temple and in nearly 800 years, there have been over 30 generations of monks. The representatives of the current generations have, in their surnames, the characters of 'Su', 'De', 'Xing', 'Yong', 'Yan' and 'Heng'. Master Shi Yongxin is the present Abbot of the Shaolin Temple. Shaolin Kung-Fu is one of the oldest Chinese martial arts traditions.

Based on a belief in the supernatural power of Chan Buddhism, the moves practiced by the Shaolin Kung-Fu monks are its major form of expression. According to the guidebooks handed down in the Shaolin Temple Kung-Fu has 708 movement sequences, plus another 552 boxing sequences and 72 unique skills for capturing, wrestling, disjuncting and touching vital points in order to cause injury.

The monks of the Shaolin Temple regard the perfection of their Kung-Fu warrior skills as their lifelong goal. Fully understanding life with no fear in their hearts, their physical and mental practice embodies the ancient Chinese belief in 'the unity between heaven and man'.

Note:

There are many martial arts schools that have also been set up in the region under the name of Shaolin, from which performers for many of the more commercial Shaolin Monk shows are drawn, however please note the performers in *Sutra* are all Buddhist Monks from the original temple itself. More information about the temple can be sourced at www.chinavoc.com/kungfu/shaolin/intro.asp

6. Tour Schedule

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| World Premiere 27 May 2008 | Sadler's Wells, London |
| 27 – 31 May 2008 | Sadler's Wells, London |
| 3 – 5 July 2008 | Festival Internazionale di Villa Adriana, Tivoli, Roma, Italy |
| 6 – 8 July 2008 | Festival D'Avignon, France |
| 16 – 18 July 2008 | El Grec Festival, Barcelona, Spain |
| 26 July 2008 | Athens Festival, Greece |
| 29 – 30 August 2008 | Groningen, Holland |

| | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 28 - 31 Octobre 2008 | La Monnaie, Brussels, Belgium |
| 7 - 9 November 2008 | Festival de Otoño, Madrid, Spain |
| 3 -6 December 2008 | Berliner Festpiele, Germany |

7. Press quotes

"This new Sadler's Wells production exceeds even our highest expectations"

The Times (UK)

"This unique, profoundly imagined show takes the concept of cultural exchange to a whole new level" *****

The Guardian (UK)

"Phenomenal acrobatic feats" *****

Metro (UK)

"A tremendously captivating evening that inspires a childlike wonder" *****

Daily Express (UK)

"Mesmerising and Magical" *****

Evening Standard (UK)

"Impossible to resist... astounding"

LE MONDE, France

"Beautiful movements and amazing acrobatics"

EL PAIS, Spain

"A sophisticated work of art... beyond entertainment, it offers the audience a sense of harmony and tranquility"

ETHNOS, Greece

8. Reviews

Sutra

★★★★★ Judith Mackrell, Friday May 30, 2008, The Guardian

The Shaolin monks put on a five-star performance just by being themselves. It's not just the collective virtuosity of their kung fu heritage - their flying kicks, their backflips, their shadow-boxing. Practised as part of the monks' spiritual discipline, these maniacally dangerous and beautiful moves also carry the aura of compelling ritual.

For choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and his collaborators, the artist Antony Gormley and the composer Szymon Brzóska, the challenge of working with 17 monks from the Shaolin temple is to make convincing dance theatre out of an already incredible show. They have succeeded in spades. Sutra combines dance, music and design in ways that intensify the mystery of the monks' prowess, even as it opens up new views of their agility.

For those expecting straight physical fireworks, the opening minutes may seem muted. On a stage lined with coffin-sized wooden boxes, Cherkaoui and 11-year-old Shi Yandong sit and face each other. Cherkaoui gestures delicately to the boy, as if trying to communicate in sign language. Then the adult monks rise out of the boxes; as each performs a tiny vignette of martial-arts brilliance, they seem to come from a very alien world.

These are the two threads that run through Sutra: Cherkaoui, a fascinated, interrogative westerner trying to find a way into the monks' culture, and the enchantingly alert, fearless little Yandong, who leads him on his quest. Their journey is a maze of episodic dance stories, each revealing the monks in a different aspect. The stacked boxes, conceived and designed by Gormley, are both functional and miraculous. They can be arranged to resemble the petals of a lotus flower, upon which Yandong sits like a little Buddha, or they can be upended to become a forest of skyscrapers, upon which the monks stand gazing as if on their first trip to the city.

Brzóska's music gives each episode extra emotional colour and gathers the work to its powerful conclusion. Cherkaoui, having choreographed the monks into a climactic ensemble, also reaches the end of his quest, his pale, supple, questioning body finally dancing confidently among them.

It is not just Cherkaoui who has made the journey: the audience, too, gain some kind of privileged intimacy with the monks. This unique, profoundly imagined work takes the concept of cultural exchange to a new level.

<http://arts.guardian.co.uk/theatre/dance/reviews/story/0,,2283031,00.html>

Sutra at Sadler's Wells



Debra Craine , May 30, 2008, The Times

Collaborations can bring out the best in artists working together from different disciplines. But *Sutra*, which reunites the Belgian choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and the British sculptor Antony Gormley in this new Sadler's Wells production, exceeds even our highest expectations. It forms a dazzling alliance of space and content that grants kinetic life to Gormley's art and conceptual discipline to Cherkaoui's philosophical choreography.



And yet there's even more going on here than two European artists making something amazing, for *Sutra* is performed by Buddhist warrior monks from the Shaolin Temple in China. An extraordinary group of 17 kung fu masters (including the 11-year-old Shi Yandong), they possess such a commitment to their faith and fighting skills that mind and body are joined in transcendent vibrancy. Cherkaoui, long fascinated by the flamboyant virtuosity of Bruce Lee, spent months working with the monks in China and is clearly in thrall to their stunning certainty and control.

Gormley's genius is the simplicity and versatility of his contribution. He provides 21 wooden boxes – big enough to house a grown man – which most strikingly resemble open-topped coffins. Cherkaoui's genius is knowing how to use them. The mutating set is constantly shaped by the monks acting as Gormley's proxy in his living installation. Meanwhile, on the side of the stage, a tiny toy version of the set mimics and presages what happens to the big one.

The boxes are rearranged to suggest secrets and traps, soaring man-made structures and beauties of the natural world. The monks lie in them as if they were beds, pop out of them like moles, disappear into them, build walls and castles, topple the boxes like dominoes (with the monks still inside). They die inside their coffins, are reborn, struggle to escape and seek solace within; they wield swords like soldiers on the ramparts. In one of the most resonant images, the boxes are upended to look like an urban landscape of office blocks and the monks, now garbed in cool black suits, scurry around them like hassled City workers. Perhaps the boxes themselves are the physical manifestation of minds in constant search for balance.

Cherkaoui weaves himself into his elaborate game like a wry Western observer, in awe of his exotic Eastern monks. And no wonder. Their grace, strength and bravery are awesome, the speed and ferocity of their punches, kicks, back flips and flying jumps astounding. Szymon Brzoska's score for percussion and strings wisely doesn't try to compete with the monks' inner rhythms; rather it seeks to surround them with soothing, even meditative sounds.

The atmosphere of *Sutra* is playful yet serious. For these monks, kung fu is as much about the mind as it is about the body, and the juxtaposition of inner calm and outward energy, the unity of thought and action in a community that embraces all living things, is the point of this striking show.

http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/stage/dance/article4028097.ece

MESMERISING AND MAGICAL SHOW

★★★★★ Sarah Frater, Evening Standard, 29th May 2008

There's not much to prepare you for what you see in Sutra. It's not dance, and it's not theatre, and although it includes 16 tumbling and jumping Buddhist monks from the Shaolin Temple in China's Henan Province, it's not kung fu either. It's certainly nothing like the gaudy kung-fu action shows that have visited London in recent years.

Sutra has no story, and no dialogue, and Antony Gormley's set is just 16 coffin-shaped boxes that the monks drag, push and throw about. They also climb into them like the trenches, turn them into the Labyrinth, and then stack them up like Japanese cubicle hotels. They morph into boats and catacombs, and in one magical scene, form concentric circles that open like the petals of a flower with the youngest monk as the stamen. In another scene, they become a barrier that reminds you of the Berlin Wall or the one that separates Israel from its neighbours.

You could call Sutra conceptual, or 101 ways with a wooden box, but the first is too clinical and the second too cynical, and neither conveys the work's gentle humanity nor its mesmerising effect. Admittedly, when the 75-minute piece starts, you wonder what Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui is on about.

The Belgian-Moroccan director-choreographer, best known for his work with Britain's Akram Khan, sits on one side of the stage and plays with a miniature set of boxes while the monks shunt the coffin-sized ones around. Then gently, quietly, and without anyone saying a word, you realise Sutra is an elegy and fanfare combined. It's a prayer for the meek and a cheer for the brave, be they mere taxpayers, battling bureaucrats or the dispossessed fighting for their lives.

The wonder is that Cherkaoui achieves such potent effect with just 16 Shaolin monks and his own Chaplin-esque stage presence. The monks tumble and leap, but Cherkaoui corrals their moves to trigger pictures that comment on our times. The Berlin Wall evocation is especially moving, as are the scenes that remind you of refugee camps and boat people.

Cherkaoui is called a choreographer, but he's really our conscience. True, Sutra is slow, and more than a little po-faced, yet this silent drama never browbeats and both its subject and means are truly innovative. Special mention for Flemish composer Szymon Brzoska, his five able musicians, and Adam Carree's lighting designs which add nagging shadows and bright linings.

<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/theatre/show-23389980-details/China+Now:+Sidi+Larbi+Cherkaoui/Anthony+Gormley,+With+Monks+From+The+Shaolin+Temple:+Sutra/showReview.do>

Dance Review

Sutra

★★★★★

Keith Watson, Metro, Friday 30 May 2008

It's very versatile, the humble box. In Sutra, human-sized boxes morph from coffins to boats and skyscrapers to national frontiers. Antony Gormley's creations are not so much a set, more an adventure playground into which choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui can pour his inventive imagination.

And Cherkaoui has found some fabulous playmates in the gymnastic monks of China's Shaolin Temple to explore the meeting point between martial arts and contemporary dance while remembering to make room for some kick-ass kung fu.

Though it takes a little while to take off, once Sutra hits its stride, it paints a portrait of how we all construct barriers around our lives.

Striking images abound, not least when the monks swap their simple tunics for sharp suits and the boxes transform into a towering temple of commerce. The monks fizz out phenomenal acrobatic feats in an adrenalin-rush reflection of high velocity life.

But Sutra is about still moments too, with Szymon Brzóska's string score perfectly counterpointing Cherkaoui's box-bound duet with a boy monk, a touching scene which plays like a troubled soul communing with his guided spirit. It captures Sutra's quiet magic a marriage of the athletic and the artistic which offers succour for the soul.

Sutra, Sadler's Wells, London: One way of thinking outside the box

Jenny Gilbert, The Independent, Sunday 1 June 2008

There must be countless men in their thirties who claimed Bruce Lee as their boyhood hero. Unlike most, though, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui has achieved the ultimate kung-fu dream. He has spent two months living and training alongside the warrior monks of China's Shaolin temple, fusing his experience as a choreographer and performer

with their religious discipline and fight-skills. Into the mix, too, he brought the sculptor Antony Gormley, whose streamlined thinking about the human form has always had a spiritual tilt. The result, *Sutra* – a word with far-reaching connotations in Eastern philosophy – is remarkable: part martial-arts spectacular, part-conceptual art, which thrills and also gives pause.

Gormley's central idea couldn't be simpler: a man-sized plywood sentry box. Multiplied, though, the boxes assume a Lego-like versatility, as 17 grey-robed monks slide, pile and heave them into forms that suggest a fantastic range of things, most obviously beds, coffins, pillars and portals, but also the ramparts of a castle complete with armed guards and drawbridge, and even a lotus bud whose petals unfold to reveal a beaming infant Buddha.

The involvement of 11-year-old Shi Yandong skates dangerously close to cuteness, but Cherkaoui's own delicately sober stage presence reins in the aah factor.

In the opening moments, an adult monk performs a fast, maniacally dangerous sword-whirling routine, while Cherkaoui and the boy sit cross-legged to one side, the man mesmerising the child-monk with hand movements that exactly mirror the swordsman's choreography. At intervals, the pair play together with what look like wooden bricks: you quickly realise that these are the boxes in miniature, their evolution a scale version of the stage picture.

For much of the show's 80 minutes, the Moroccan-Belgian assumes the role of puppeteer, controlling the man-sized boxes as-it-were remotely. At other times, he's the spiritually curious Westerner (like the rest of us at Sadler's Wells), observing the monks' dazzling physical powers. He has his own man-sized box (his own consciousness, his own limitations?), but his box is silver-coloured, which sets him apart as different.

Within the box he does his own Sidi Larbi thing, with the pale, insinuating suppleness that made him so powerful an element in *Zero Degrees*, the hit show in which he first collaborated with Gormley. Bearded and balding, his slightness exaggerated by an odd combo of tailored jacket and combat pants, he looks like a smaller version of Derren Brown. But his is a different kind of magic as he stands no-handed on his head and rotates spookily in his broom cupboard, or wedges his limbs into its corners at anatomically unlikely angles.

When the little boy joins him in there it's hard to believe there'd be room for them both. And it's touching, as well as astounding, as man and boy find ways to accommodate one another, balancing with one leg brushing an ear, say, or curled up like matching woodlice.

But the Western choreographer isn't the only one on a learning curve. The monks have had to learn to interact with music. And even though Szymon Brzoska's emotive, verging on soupy score for strings, piano and percussion floats clear of kung-fu's irregular rhythms, the monks have had to rechannel their energy from short, animalistic bursts into longer, sustained sequences.

I've seen the Shaolin monks before and been saddened by the tawdriness of the presentation. The achievement of Cherkaoui and Gormley is in forging a real cultural exchange. However, when Cherkaoui finally joins the monks in a fast-kicking shadow-boxing finale, it's striking how the moves are all there, but an inner-something is missing. That something isn't learnt in two months or even two years. But the attempt is nonetheless revealing.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre/reviews/sutra-sadlers-wells-london-837607.html>

The martial artist

Luke Jennings, Sunday June 1, 2008, The Observer

Sutra, conceived with sculptor Antony Gormley, and performed by Cherkaoui himself and 18 martially trained monks from China's Shaolin temple, is both shorter and purer. Gormley has conceived a set consisting of human-sized boxes from which the fighting monks emerge to perform amazing feats of kung-fu virtuosity. At intervals, they retreat into the boxes only to reappear, remade and respiritualised, for yet more dynamic manifestations of the warrior spirit. Sometimes the boxes become cells in a hive, sometimes sentry boxes and, on one occasion, perfectly co-ordinated collapsing dominos.

As a quintet of musicians plays Szymon Brzoska's plaintive score, Cherkaoui wanders through the warehouse-like set, watches the action and is finally integrated into a fast-moving martial routine. The result is utterly satisfying and a dignified frame for its phenomenal cast.

<http://arts.guardian.co.uk/theatre/dance/reviews/story/0,,2283258,00.html>

9. Features

Sutra: Prayer. Porridge. Dance!

Mark Monahan, Daily Telegraph, 3rd May 2008

Mark Monahan reports from the Shaolin temple in China on a remarkable new kung-fu collaboration coming to the UK

It's a chilly 4.30am in April at the Shaolin Temple, birthplace of Zen Buddhism, on the western edge of the Songshan mountains in eastern China.

A glance out of the doorway to my right, up through the cedar and cherry-blossom trees, reveals the sky just beginning to melt from ink-black to deep turquoise, while in the chapel around me, an even more hypnotising sight is playing out. For the day is beginning, as always, with prayer.

The hall is lit with barely half-a-dozen candles. As their light flickers over the giant gilded effigies at the front, the space resonates with the complex eddies of the 40-odd Buddhist monks' chants and the occasional clank of primitive percussion.



It's quite transporting and very beautiful, made more so by the knowledge that had one visited this site five centuries before the Battle of Hastings (the temple was established in 495AD), the spectacle would have been identical.

The ritual continues in the dining hall, with breakfast. Sitting on long benches, we all eat a formidable quantity of boiled vegetables and watery porridge, drunk straight from the bowl. (You don't have to accept all the food offered, but what you take, you eat.)

Talking is forbidden, which contributes to the calm - but what I don't yet know is that one of these tranquil monks will soon come close to knocking me flat on my back.

This happens later, when the engaging 29-year-old Master Shi Yanda decides to show me a sliver of the Shaolin technique that was originally developed as a defence against feudal aggressors, and that now provides the backbone of a new East-meets-West collaboration at Sadler's Wells later this month.

First, he's several feet in front of me. A nanosecond later, somehow, he's to my right. Then, before I've even had time to turn my head, his forearm slams into my chest like a wrecking-ball. It's perfectly judged - strong enough to give an idea of what he's capable of (and I'm guessing that this is about a fifth of his potential power), restrained enough to avoid turning my ribcage inside-out (at least, just about).

Certainly, you get the feeling that if 10 "mortals" were foolish enough to take on either this 5ft 6in man or any of his colleagues, they wouldn't stand, well, a prayer.

It's this unique combination of physical thunder ("fire") and ascetic spirituality ("water") that has drawn Belgian-Moroccan dancer-choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui to collaborate with 17 of the monks in his eagerly awaited new piece, Sutra. (An older work of his, Myth, is also being performed at Sadler's Wells, earlier this month.)

An alumnus of Les Ballets C de la B, the 32-year-old is best known in the UK for Zero Degrees, his tremendous 2005 collaboration with British dancer Akram Khan and sculptor Antony Gormley.

Tirelessly questing, and blessed with a suppleness that can suggest every bone has been removed from his body, Cherkaoui has long been an admirer of both Buddhism and Bruce Lee. And when his friend, Japanese impresario Hisashi Itoh, suggested he join forces somehow with the temple, he acted swiftly.

"I went and met Master Shi Yanda," he says, "and I felt I'd finally met someone who I could ask the questions that mattered. Like, why are they preaching such peacefulness and yet fighting like madmen?"

"He told me how meditation is to quieten the mind and how kung-fu is to quieten the body, and that it's all about interconnectedness with animals, and the way they admire various animals for how they move. I related to that, because when I choreograph, I feel increasingly inclined to want to think more like an animal and less like a human being."

A further lure for Cherkaoui was that, like so much Chinese dance, his own work "is always about the struggle between yin and yang, duality", and life and death.

Later in the day, a partial rehearsal reveals Sutra to be very much a work in progress, but a fascinating one. Essentially, Cherkaoui seems to be trying both to recast the patterns and structures of the monks' astonishing athletic movements, and to put them to fresh, more enquiring use.

"I'm taking away certain letters of the words in their 'vocabulary'," he says, "and making new words with them." (When I ask one of the younger monks what they make of all this, he cryptically replies: "We follow the orders of Larbi.")

Set to plangent new music by Polish composer Szymon Brzóska, the result is a sort of contemporary Buddhism-inflected ballet for 17 Chinese monks, one or two Western dancers (Cherkaoui is still deciding) – and 21 wooden boxes. Each measuring 60x60x180cm and with only five sides, these are the chief, vital contribution to the piece of Gormley, collaborating once again with Cherkaoui.

As the monks perform in them, under them, on them - one moment furiously energetic, the next blissfully calm - they become by turns coffins, plinths, altars, people, even huge dominoes, and subtler things besides.

"For me, in life," says Cherkaoui, "sometimes it's the body that stops the mind from being free, but sometimes it's the mind stops the body from developing. So, sometimes the box and the monk are like the body and the mind, but sometimes it's the other way around."

So, where did the "box" idea come from?

"Because of the monks' being like a collective," says Cherkaoui, "it felt like a sort of cloning, even if they are individuals. The 'replica' nature of Antony's work is very like that, and I knew that Antony had studied Buddhism for three years too. We brainstormed, and then he came up with the idea."

Talking to Gormley, one's interest is pricked not just by his enthusiasm for Sutra, but by his frustrations with it.

"I have enormous love and respect for Larbi," he says, a warm, avuncular figure at 57, "and how he works, and how he stretches himself and everybody who comes into his sphere, and I would never want to impinge on that."

"And at the same time, my view at the moment is that there's too much kung-fu, too much boxes, and we need more space, silence, and stillness. The kung-fu is so precious, those explosions of finely-tuned human energy - you just don't want too much of it. It's the most extraordinarily sophisticated but also exotic thing. It's like you can't eat 24 mangos in a day."

He appears to wonder fleetingly if he's being disloyal - but of course he's merely being as exacting a collaborator as possible.

"All I'm saying," he adds, "is that there's a lot to be done, still. And I'm sure it will be. And," he concludes, "it probably won't be anything to do with me!"

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml?xml=/arts/2008/05/03/btshaolin103.xml>

'I want to stay here for ever'

Judith Mackrell, *The Guardian* Wednesday April 23, 2008

When choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui visited China's Shaolin monks, it became more than a collaboration - it was a spiritual journey. Judith Mackrell introduces excerpts from his diary



Monks practice their moves for Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's *Sutra*. Photograph: Anthony Jiang Nan

The legendary skills of the Shaolin monks have for years thrilled and fascinated the innovative Belgian choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. He has been a fan of Bruce Lee from childhood. Yet, when he thought about creating a work with the monks, it was less their kung fu prowess he wanted to explore than its underlying philosophy: the inspiration the monks draw from the world around them, their capacity to identify with other living creatures and their perception of themselves as a conduit for universal energy and transformation.

There was a personal motive for his project, too. Cherkaoui's career has recently gathered an extraordinary momentum: having separated from his mentor Alain Platel, of the Ghent dance company Les Ballets C de la B, he had begun running his own troupe, as well as touring with Akram Khan in their acclaimed duet, *Zero Degrees*. But success had also brought creative fatigue, and Cherkaoui needed to pause and take stock. When he started this project, he was, he says, looking for "a new way of expressing myself, a new place to be". As these extracts from his diary show, he found it in China - in the remote mountain temple of the Shaolin monks.

Late January 2008

The basic elements of the collaboration, entitled *Sutra*, are in place. Sculptor Antony Gormley and Polish composer Szymon Brzóska have signed up and Cherkaoui is about to leave for rehearsals at the temple.

I made two visits to the temple last summer and it had been a big surprise. It was very beautiful, set on a mountainside, but it wasn't exactly as I had imagined. The monks were talking on mobile phones, they were allowed pop music and an internet connection was close by. They told me this was natural, as the Shaolins have always been on top of new technology. Back when paper was first invented, they adopted it very quickly. This openness was good for me because it meant the monks were receptive to my ideas.

At our first meetings, we spoke about their culture, how their kung fu discipline connects with the outside world, and the way they relate spiritually to animals and the environment. I am thinking about how to develop these ideas into stories. Antony has designed a set of boxes that can be used to suggest different locations - a house, a village, a graveyard, an island, a lotus flower, even the bodies of the monks themselves.

February/early March

It's very cold here. Some days there is snow. Because the monks are so tough, they don't need any heating. I am afraid my body and my brain won't function if I'm cold all the time, so I'm staying at a hotel down the mountain, 20 minutes' drive away. When I'm at the temple, I rehearse in gloves and a hat.

The first two days were a nightmare. The dancefloor hadn't been installed, and Antony's boxes had been made too small. Communicating the arrangements long-distance and in a different language has led to misunderstandings. The delay was hard for me. When I'm not choreographing, I'm horrible. I panic. Even when we got started, our first sessions felt very slow. It took time to get used to doing everything through a translator.

Most of the monks are young, around 21 or 22. When I showed them Antony's boxes and explained how I wanted to use them as building blocks to create different sets, they were very eager. They organised themselves immediately to build up the sets. It was like when my brother and I used to play with Lego.

The routine here suits me very well. The monks get up at six for a warm-up jog, and I do a yoga session in my hotel room from about 7.30. I take all my meals with them in the temple. It's heaven for me as I've been a vegetarian for 17 years. Because I don't drink or smoke, I don't miss too much from the west. It's such a blast. I want to stay here for ever.

March

After a few weeks of watching and directing the monks, I've started trying to do some of their moves myself. Everything they do is very beautiful, although some of it could actually break your arm. One spiralling move was lovely in thin air, but when I did it with one of the monks, it pulled me almost on to the floor. I'm surprised by how familiar certain moves are, as if dance elements cross cultures. There's a flipping of the shoulders the monks do, like a dolphin, that I use in my own choreography. Some jumps look more like jazz to me than kung fu.

We are building up the stories that will go into the final narrative of Sutra. I've started working with a very young monk, only 10 years old, who we call Dong Dong. He is becoming like a red thread running through the piece. There is one scene where the boxes form a maze and he is like a little rabbit running through it, until he gets trapped in one of the boxes. In another, the boxes form a lotus flower and he is like a young Buddha in the middle, going into this incredible stillness. In a way, Dong Dong understands me best. Because he has the imagination of a child, he doesn't need to ask why we do something, he just does it. He has an innocence, but he is very smart, very intriguing.

April

I hated having to go to Moscow [to perform with my company]. I lost my plane ticket so spent most of my time having these Kafkaesque conversations about how to get a replacement. And the little I saw of Moscow was horrible: it's become so westernised, covered with advertising hoardings. People there have a sadness.

Soon after I got back to the temple, Antony arrived, as well as some of my own dancers, which I found very confusing. For a long time, I had been in this safe zone with the monks, and suddenly I had all these people looking at our work, offering different perspectives and suggestions. It's very hard to assimilate all their differences, but the main point seems to be that the monks enjoy the piece when it moves very fast and the Europeans, especially Antony, think the images need much more time and space to be seen.

The monks have been interested in having my dancers here, though: they've been learning some European movement. Anything that looks like hip-hop, they learn very quickly. They recognise the moves from music videos. But dancing that is less undefined, they find difficult.

I've been talking with the visitors from Europe about the troubles in Tibet. It's been difficult to get news here and I haven't thought it appropriate for me, as a guest of the temple, to ask the monks about it. Now I can feel the clock ticking, as my time at the temple comes to an end. I know I'm really going to miss it. I have also been talking with the monks about what it will be like when they come to Britain to perform Sutra. They aren't exactly excited; they live too much day to day. But some of them haven't been to the west before, and they want to see Big Ben and all the tourist sites. They want to see how other people live.

What they don't care about are the touring conditions. They say they only need humble rooms. When I discuss what kind of space they need for warming up and rehearsing, they laugh and say they can go for a run in one of the parks. I think this is going to be such a sight for London: all the Shaolin monks jogging in the park.

A box of delights: Antony Gormley's 'Sutra'

Hannah Duguid, The Independent, Wednesday 21 May 2008

When he designed a set for the Shaolin monks' dance extravaganza, Antony Gormley made one of his strangest creations yet, *he tells Hannah Duguid*, Wednesday, 21 May 2008, The Independent

As an artist whose work is so much about the body, it seems natural that Antony Gormley should be interested in dance. For years, he has cast his own body, placing it on top of buildings, in trees and on gallery ceilings, willing us to look at our own bodies, and our selves, in a new light.

An invitation last year to design the set for a dance performance, working with the choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and warrior monks from the Shaolin temple in China, seemed singularly apt.

"I've always been interested in dance because it is one of the bravest and most direct art forms there is," Gormley says. "Dancers' bodies have become the instrument through which they communicate their vulnerability, allowing the body to become a direct evocation of thought and feeling, without anything coming in between. It's an extraordinary thing."

Underpinning all this is a long-standing interest in Buddhism and spirituality. During his twenties, Gormley spent two years in India living in monasteries and practising meditation. The central strand of ideas in his work stems from this time: ideas about the conscious body, of stillness in the present moment, and of perception.

The Shaolin monks are a Buddhist order legendary for their training in kung fu. They lead a disciplined life in a mountain monastery in central China, where they train for at least five hours a day until they can move with great agility and speed, within which there is a spiritual dimension.

"I'm very aware that the premise of, I think, all spiritual traditions is that somehow through the disciplining of the body, you free the mind. When you visit the meditation cell of St Francis of Assisi, you will see that it is a stone-cut chamber about 4ft square. Gandhi and Nelson Mandela both spent time in prison, and through that achieved extraordinary powers of communicating a message," Gormley says.



To come up with a set design that would work within the discipline of kung fu, Gormley went to watch the monks train at their monastery in Henan province. "The monks have a wonderful freedom of spirit. They're as interested in hip-hop and contemporary culture as they are in the Buddhist sutras. One of the warrior monks told me that he was there solely to learn kung fu. 'I'm not interested in Buddhist philosophy,' he said. But through the physical discipline he is getting it anyway – no theory, all practice.

"The warrior monks are very hardy and the arrangement at their monastery is very basic, although they don't follow the strict meditation rituals of other monks. You're denied a lot of the basic comforts we would think of as essential," Gormley says.

"The thing that struck me the first time I went to China, in 1995, was how many people there are. In a factory we went to look at, I was astonished at the domestic arrangements for these very young girls. Bunk beds were stacked up five or six high. And when I saw the monastery next door to the Shaolin temple, the dormitory arrangements for the monks were very similar, very tight. These were human lives in storage, filing shelves for bodies."

The set idea Gormley came up with is very simple, relating in a quite obvious way to the living arrangements he saw in China. He designed 21 wooden boxes, like open coffins. Made of spruce, they are three times as high as they are wide and conform roughly to human dimensions. They could be a tomb, a bed, a table, a shelf, a boat or just a box. In Gormley's mind, this simple object becomes something existential.

"They are rather lovely because they are so ordinary, but the colour and texture of them works very well. The box, on one level, is about accepting or recognising our limitations and how we can escape or transcend them. For me, that's the basic premise. Whether people will see that, I don't know. They are very simple things but can be very rich in their potential for being extended and occupied in different ways.

"You can be on them, in them, by them. But you occupy them mentally by how you think of them. Is this a pillar? A sentry box? Is this a table? A bath? And the way the mind runs through 10 or 12 different ways of inhabiting the box and what it is," he says.

There is one extra box, an anomaly. Made of aluminium, it is a dull, dark grey. It was designed for Cherkaoui, the lead performer. It is the star's box, a bit special, though Gormley is not entirely convinced that it works. "Larbi wanted his aluminium box, and it was sweet how much he wanted it. So we made one. Maybe it's not a bad thing to have an exception that proves the rule but I wasn't sure whether it deserved to be there; it rather undermines the others.

"It reads like the box a magician might have, or a cryogenics experiment. If you were going to be deep frozen for the next 5,000 years, you might have a box like this. It's a bit futuristic, a bit space age, a bit techno. He was dead keen for it – and why not?" Gormley says.

Originally, the sculptor thought the boxes would be static structures. He now accepts that he underestimated Cherkaoui's creativity, for his boxes are used in almost every scene, as a kind of extension of the body of the dancer. In one scene the boxes will become a lotus flower, wooden petals blossoming in a way that defies their

rigid architecture. They become dominoes, as the boxes, each containing a monk, clatter down across the stage. They will become an instrument of sound as they are dragged around the stage on one corner, like a gramophone needle. And in one dormitory scene, the monks test the context of their lives by hitting the inside of their box, hammering against their limitations.

"One of my favourite scenes is in the dormitory where the monks are all lying horizontal and the boxes are all open towards us. It is like a mass grave. We recognise that the bodies are alive and asleep and they have their own patterns of tossing and turning in their sleep, but then that tossing and turning becomes a curiously co-ordinated and collective act. Where they all turn and begin to walk in their sleep, still lying horizontal, their legs lifting, moving in unison, all 16 of them in their boxes – I think it works extremely well."

In 2005, Gormley worked with the choreographer Akram Khan and Cherkaoui on *Zero Degrees*, a performance that was well received. It has recently been on stage in New York. Gormley's contribution was a pair of life-size silicone dummies.

Modelled from the bodies of the dancers, one was rigid and standing, the other floppy. They were mostly silent observers on stage, although they were brought into the performance at times. In one scene, Cherkaoui pleads with the dummy, on his knees, begging it to love him; of course, the dummy does not respond, appearing to reject him.

"It has everything to do with how we project volition and motivation on to each other," Gormley says. "When you see that process going on with a dummy, it reveals something about that very process and the whole thing about worship or subjugation."

Gormley thinks deeply about his work and the meaning he hopes to achieve. There is a kind of earnestness in the hope that his work can induce a level of psychological reflexivity that could change lives. But, who knows, he may be right – and if he is not, his intentions are genuine and well meant.

That his work is so accessible and popular with the general public has prompted a sneer from some art critics who think it is not difficult or challenging enough. Or maybe they are merely irritated by his success: his work is everywhere, from the Angel of the North on the A1 to his latest proposal for Trafalgar Square's fourth plinth, where he would like members of the public to stand on the plinth for one hour at a time; another meditative endeavour.

What cannot be denied is that Gormley is intelligent and articulate; not qualities every successful artist is blessed with. He is not cynical, neither is he naive. What I think he wants is for us to see in a different way, to see the world and our place in it in a way that is perhaps less Western and rational. Last year, as part of the Hayward Gallery exhibition *Blind Light*, he placed human figures on top of buildings near to the gallery and on Waterloo Bridge. Isolated and exposed, they were haunting, fragile and vulnerable. They caused a few problems; the police received phone calls from members of the public concerned about the suicidal man on top of a building.

"It's the alien invasion thing, a disturbance of the normal order," Gormley says. "It invites you to look again, although if that is all it does, then it's not really succeeding as it doesn't achieve a level of reflexivity. The question you then ask is, 'What is this thing doing here?' If that doesn't end up with you asking the same question of yourself, it hasn't really done anything more than be an irritating bit of decoration."

And this is what Gormley wants from his work on stage. His boxes are more than just props; they work within the performance, adding a layer of meaning. And even if they don't work for everyone, they are a testament to the fertility of his mind.

Antony Gormley to team up tiger-style with Shaolin monks for dance piece

Francesca Martin, *The Guardian*, Wednesday November 7, 2007

He has given the north of England an angel, dotted giant statues across the London skyline and made life-size dolls dance onstage. Now artist Antony Gormley is looking to Buddhism: he is working with dancer and choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui on a new dance piece inspired by the Shaolin monks, which is to be performed at London's Sadler's Wells next May.

They may be best known internationally for their high-octane, martial-arts routines, but the monks - based in the Shaolin Chan Buddhist monastery in China - will be in more reflective mood in the piece, entitled *Sutra*, for which Gormley is designing the set and the lighting. Performed by 16 dancers, the piece - which the monks themselves asked Cherkaoui to create - considers the monks' relationship with living creatures, and the ways in which the human body can re-interpret the spirit and energy of animals such as tigers and snakes. "The monks wished for Sidi Larbi to create something different to their usual martial arts and bright lights routine, which has

become a sort of circus," Gormley says. "We wanted to go back to the internal conceits of Chan Buddhism, about the philosophy of emptiness, and how energy goes through but is never contained by the body."

The last time Gormley worked with Cherkaoui, he designed the life-size dolls with which Cherkaoui and fellow dancer/ choreographer Akram Khan performed in their critically acclaimed 2006 dance piece, *Zero Degrees*. For *Sutra*, Gormley has created three walls made of plywood boxes, with which the dancers will interact - a concept from his piece *Allotment 11*. Gormley - who is also preparing for a new solo show at London's White Cube Mason's Yard Gallery next year - says that working with Cherkaoui for a second time is "enormously exciting and inspiring. He thinks with his knees and his body in a way that is quite remarkable. It is like having the most conscious clay you could ever have."

Twenty top talents

Daily Telegraph, 29th December 2007

Dance

Alistair Spalding on Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui

I've watched this extraordinary choreographer - part contortionist, part visionary, part poet - develop from the very start of his career as a performer with Alain Platel's Ballets C de la B. This year Larbi has two projects at Sadler's Wells which we are producing: the first is *Myth*, which is performed with his own company, and the second is *Sutra*, a collaboration with monks from China's Shaolin temple and the artist Antony Gormley.

Larbi has worked with Gormley before, on *Zero Degrees*, alongside dancer Akram Khan. That was a huge international hit for him and showed just how much he was developing as a choreographer in his own right.

The other day I was in the studio when Antony brought in the boxes which he has created as a set for *Sutra* and I observed an extraordinary moment of improvisation by Larbi, getting inside the boxes and pushing them around. It was comical and moving and I realised what a remarkable creator he is. He has a physical language which mixes elements of yoga, martial arts, contortionism and dance to become something unlike anything I have ever seen before.

It's not a question of whether it springs from classical or contemporary roots; he is making his own language. I see so many people's work, but there are only a few with whom you have that sudden sense of what an incredible artist they are. That of course is also the unique thing about choreographers and about dance - it is the thrill of seeing the unexpected being created right in front you.

Alistair Spalding is artistic director of Sadler's Wells

10. Merchandise

Sutra is available on DVD, featuring a film of the performance during its world premiere season at Sadler's Wells and in-depth interviews with key collaborators, including choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, composer Szymon Brzóska and artist Antony Gormley. The DVD also features a stills gallery and limited edition collector's booklet.

For more information on merchandise sales at your venue, please contact [Douglas Cummins at Axiom Films: douglas@axiomfilms.co.uk](mailto:douglas@axiomfilms.co.uk)

Also available to buy from www.sadlerswells.com/page/shop