**For immediate release: Monday 24 July 2023**



**Cast of 20 announced for Mahabharata, a spectacular retelling of the ancient Sanskrit epic, by Canada’s Why Not Theatre**

**First major international adaptation led by a company from the South Asian diaspora**

**UK premiere at the Barbican from 1-7 October 2023**

[**Why Not Theatre - *Mahabharata***](https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2023/event/why-not-theatre-mahabharata)

**Barbican Theatre, 1 – 7 October 2023**

Press day:
Mahabharata: Karma (Part 1) on Sun 1 Oct (3.30pm – 6.10pm)
Mahabharata: Dharma (Part 2) on Sun 1 Oct (8.15pm – 10.30pm)

Tickets from £16 (for each part)
UK premiere, Barbican co-commission

[**Link to images**](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/q6sqftqp8ddmdnt/AACkKnvS0QLa8WF-7NBt8zmDa?dl=0) | [**Link to video**](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/mhofmyq53047g00/AABK9DouEI5igRpMn1reHjQea?dl=0)

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Why Not Theatre’s *Mahabharata* at The Shaw Festival Theatre 2023. Photographer David Cooper

***Mahabharata*** ([Mah-hah-BAH-ruh-tah](https://www.dropbox.com/s/9k0x6389boytkoh/Mahabharata%20-%20Pronunciation%20by%20Creative%20Associate%20Sharada%20K%20Eswar.m4a?dl=0)) is a contemporary adaptation of the Sanskrit epic poem, that follows a devastating familyfeud and exploresprofound philosophical and spiritual ideas. Its stories are more than four thousand years old and foundational to South Asian culture. The new, large-scale retelling by Toronto-based company **Why Not Theatre** is the first major international adaptation to be led by a company from the South Asian diaspora and makes its UK premiere at the Barbican Theatre this autumn (1 – 7 October). The world premiere was hailed by critics as “triumphant” (Toronto Star), “stunning” (Globe and Mail) and “Epic in every sense of the word.” (Intermission magazine) at The Shaw Festival Theatre in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada in March 2023.

The stories collected in ‘The Mahabharata’ span thousands of years and over 100,000 verses – almost four times as long as Homer’s ‘The Odyssey’ & ‘The Iliad’ combined, and eight times as long as the Bible. To this day, favourite moments, characters and lessons are remembered and retold in the kitchens and temples of more than 1 billion people of India and its diaspora. These ancient stories continue to resonate powerfully today against a backdrop of territorial war, human rights violations, and climate change.

Almost 40 years since Peter Brook’s legendary production*,* Why Not Theatre’s adaptation takes audiences on a journey through the past in order to write a thrilling new future. Exploring the act of storytelling itself, the staging evolves from ancient and intimate – a storyteller around a fire and classical Kathakali dance – to a modern spectacle with projection, dynamic soundscapes, poetic stage design and a new opera for the most revered portion of ‘The Mahabharata’, the *Bhagavad Gita*. A live onstage band creates the atmospheric music score, featuring traditional instruments from the Bansuri (bamboo flute, often depicted as a favourite of the Hindu god Krishna) to the Tabla (percussion, an essential element in music and dance performance across the Indian subcontinent).

The production is presented in two parts and narrated by a storyteller (**Miriam Fernandes**), a charismatic guide who weaves a path through the forest of stories. ***Karma (Part 1)***, is the origin story of the rival Pandava and Kaurava clans, illuminating the choices we inherit and how those choices impact generations to come. In ***Dharma (Part 2)***, a great battle destroys the planet and the survivors are left behind to rebuild.

*Mahabharata* is performed by a company from across four continents, all from the South Asian diaspora. Balancing East and West, traditional and contemporary, the production and ensemble highlight the complex hybrid nature of cultures in today’s globalised world and interconnected lives. The cast includes UK based performers **Ajay Chhabra** (*Rough Diamonds,* Netflix), **Neil D’Souza** (*How To Hold Your Breath,* Royal Court)**, Darren Kuppan** (*Let The Right One In,* Manchester Royal Exchange), **Goldy Notay** (*Life of Pi,* UK Tour) and **Sakuntala Ramanee** (*Life of Pi,* West End), who are joined by Canadian and other international performers **Shawn Ahmed, Jay Emmanuel, Miriam Fernandes, Navtej Sandhu, Anaka Maharaj-Sandhu, Ellora Patnaik, Meher Pavri, Munish Sharma** and **Sukania** **Venugopal,** andunderstudies **Varun Guru,** **Karthik Kadam, Suma Nair, Ronica Sajnani** and **Ishan Sandhu.** Performing in the live band are **John Gzowski** (Conductor/Co-Composer/Co-Sound Designer/Guitar), **Suba Sankaran** (Band Leader/Co-Composer/Co-Sounder Designer/Vocals), **Dylan Bell** (Bass/Keyboard), **Gurtej Singh Hunjan** (Percussion), **Hasheel** **Lodhia** (Bansuri/Vocals) and **Zaheer-Abbas Janmohamed** (Tabla).

**Associate Director, Co-Writer, Storyteller and Why Not Theatre Co-Artistic Director**, **Miriam Fernandes, said:**
“We are a small strand among a great lineage of storytellers who have weaved this epic of 'The Mahabharata’ over the ages. These stories have been passed from storyteller to audience for thousands of years and span the earth, traveling in the memories and imaginations of the South Asian diaspora. Though first composed in an ancient time, the themes of greed, revenge, ecocide and privilege feel acutely relevant in our globalized world.”

**Director, Co-Writer and Why Not Theatre Founder and Co-Artistic Director, Ravi Jain, said:**

“As a student in London, I watched the world masters dazzle audiences on the Barbican stage. 20 years later it’s a dream come true to share this complex work we’re so proud of at this truly special venue.”

**Toni Racklin, Head of Theatre & Dance at the Barbican, said:**

“We are thrilled to present this groundbreaking new production to our audiences, a masterclass in exhilarating stagecraft inspired by ancient oral traditions and poetry. We are honoured to welcome Why Not Theatre to our main stage for the first time, following their studio residency in 2019, and we hope that, for many of our audience members, *Mahabharata* will resonate with the stories that have been passed down for generations. Exploring the power of storytelling to understand where we’ve come from and to help us navigate our future, *Mahabharata* invites us to connect with perspectives from across the world and inspire us to reimagine what we can achieve together.”

The first sparks for the project started in 2015. **Ravi Jain** (Founding Artistic Director of Why Not Theatre) chose to adapt just one story (the *Bhagavad Gita*) within the sprawling ‘Mahabharata’ for a commission by the intercontinental Pan Am Games. Backed by funding from Canada Council of the Arts, Ontario’s prestigious Shaw Festival Theatre then invited Ravi to “Dream Big” and stage the entire epic poem. Having grown up with the Indian stories transplanted to a Canadian context, Ravi was inspired to dive deep into his past, taking inspiration from many South Asian sources as well as Peter Brook’s 1985 production. Ravi wanted to find a way to share this story with a modern audience by highlighting the myriad ways we tell stories. As part of Why Not Theatre’s deeply ingrained collaborative approach, Ravi teamed up with **Miriam Fernandes** (now Co-Artistic Director of Why Not Theatre). Together they built the script, drawing primarily from Carole Satyamurti’s ‘Mahabharata, A Modern Retelling’, Devdutt Patnaik’s ‘JAYA’, and the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore, but also pulling from wildly diverse perspectives and combining influences, including folk tales, street theatre, western European physical theatre (from their training at LAMDA and the Lecoq School and contemporary companies such as Simon McBurney’s Complicité and Ariane Mnouchkine’s Théâtre du Soleil), oral storytelling traditions, and the popular Indian staples they grew up with, such as Amar Chitra Katha’s *Mahabharata* comics and B. R. Chopra’s *Mahabharata* TV series.

*Mahabharata* is adapted by Why Not Theatre’s Founding Artistic Director **Ravi Jain** and Co-Artistic Director **Miriam Fernandes**, using poetry from **Carole Satyamurti's** ‘Mahabharata: A Modern Retelling’. The original concept was developed with **Jenny Koons**. Set design is by **Lorenzo Savoini**, costume design is by **Gillian Gallow**, lighting design is by **Kevin Lamotte** with associate lighting designer **Mikael Kangas,**, projections are by **Hana S. Kim** with associate projection designer **Ann Slote**, sound design is by **John Gzowski** and **Suba Sankaran**, original music is by **John Gzowski** and **Suba Sankaran**, with contributions from **Dylan Bell**, **Gurtej Singh Hunjan**, **Zaheer-Abbas Janmohamed** and **Hasheel Lodhia** (who also serves as traditional music consultant), and choreography is by **Brandy Leary** with contributions by **Jay Emmanuel** and **Ellora Patnaik.**  Lead Producers are **Michelle Yagi** and **Kevin** **Matthew Wong,** with Production Manager **Crystal Lee**. The production is directed by **Ravi Jain** and made its world premiere at the Shaw Festival, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada.

**Why Not Theatre** is an international theatre company based in Toronto, Canada, operating at the intersection of art, innovation and social change. Rooted in values of community and collaboration, Why Not challenges the status quo, rethinking how stories are told and who gets to tell them. Since its inception, the company has developed and produced 50+ new plays to critical and public acclaim. These works have toured to over 50 cities and garnered over 40 awards and nominations. Why Not is led by Founder and Co-Artistic Director, **Ravi Jain**, Executive Director, **Karen Tisch**, and Co-Artistic Director, **Miriam Fernandes**.

**The Story**

**Mahabharata: Karma (Part 1)**King Janamejaya is holding a ritual sacrifice in which he will kill all the snakes in the world to avenge his father’s death. In hopes of ending this cycle of revenge, a storyteller is summoned to tell King Janamejaya the tale of The Mahabharata. The storyteller tells of the rival Pandava and Kaurava clans, and the choices that lead to their infamous Game of Dice. Through playful narration, classical Indian dance and a live band, the ensemble tells the stories of humans struggling to build a just world in the face of competition, jealousy, and rage.

Exploring the themes of storytelling, ecocide, and dharma (empathy), *Karma (Part 1)* begins *Mahabharata*’s epic journey that asks, “When everyone believes they are right and their opponents wrong, how can one end a spiral of revenge?”

**Mahabharata: Dharma (Part 2)**King Janamejaya is told of the war fought by his ancestors — its devastating destruction of the planet, the mass extinction that follows, and of the survivors left behind to rebuild. Using captivating projections, dynamic soundscapes, and poetic stage design, *Dharma (Part 2)* includes a 15-minute Sanskrit opera adaptation of the *Bhagavad Gita*. King Janamejaya is confronted with the battle of Kurukshetra, and the battle inside his own heart. Are we destined to repeat the mistakes of our ancestors?

**Community Meal & Storytelling Session: Khana & Kahani**(Optional, limited capacity)*Mahabharata* is a story that one learns over a lifetime; it needs to be absorbed and digested. On select days there will also be the option to book for *Khana & Kahani*, a community meal and storytelling session to delve deeper into the philosophical riddles of the Pandava family’s thirteen years of exile. Hosted by two charming storytellers, played by **Miriam Fernandes** and **Sharada K Eswar,** audience members gather for an Indian (vegan) meal to hear further stories from ‘The Mahabharata’*,* as people have experienced for millennia, around the dinner table.

**ENDS**

**Press Information**
For further information, images or to arrange interviews please contact:

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 **Images & Video**

Production images from the world premiere of *Mahabharata* at The Shaw Festival Theatre:
<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/q6sqftqp8ddmdnt/AACkKnvS0QLa8WF-7NBt8zmDa?dl=0>

Trailer, plus ‘behind the scenes’ footage from rehearsals exploring music and movement in the production:
<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/mhofmyq53047g00/AABK9DouEI5igRpMn1reHjQea?dl=0>

 **Listings**Mahabharata: Karma (Part 1)

Sun 1 - Sat 7 Oct 2023 (4 performances)

Barbican Theatre

3:30pm on Sun 1, Fri 6 & Sat 7 Oct, 7:45pm on Wed 4 Oct 2023

2 hours 40 mins including 20 minute interval

Age Guidance: 12+ (Concentration. Discussions and non-graphic depictions of violence, war, and sexual activity)

From £16 plus booking fee; £15 Young Barbican tickets available

Mahabharata: Dharma (Part 2)

Sun 1 - Sat 7 Oct 2023 (4 performances)

Barbican Theatre

7:45pm on Thu 5 Oct, 8:15pm on Sun 1, Fri 6 & Sat 7 Oct 2023

2 hours 15 minutes including 20 minute interval

Age Guidance: 12+ (Concentration. Discussions and non-graphic depictions of violence, war and sexual activity)

From £16 plus booking fee; £15 Young Barbican tickets available

Mahabharata: Khana & Kahani: Community meal and storytelling session

Sun 1 - Sat 7 Oct 2023 (3 performances)

The Pit

6:30pm on Sun 1, Fri 6 & Sat 7 Oct 2023

75 minutes / no interval

Age Guidance: 12+ (Concentration, and for consistency with the other two parts)

£20

 **Supporters credits**
A Why Not Theatre Production. Originally presented and commissioned by the Shaw Festival in association with the Barbican.

The Barbican presentation is generously supported by the Bagri Foundation.

Why Not Theatre acknowledges the support of its Major Production Supporters: Shaw Festival, Canada Council for the Arts, Canada’s National Arts Centre and its National Creation Fund, The Slaight Family Foundation, Kingfisher Foundation, Deb Barrett & Jim Leech, Lindy Green Family Foundation and Wuchien Michael Than Foundation.

**Notes to Editors**

**Creative Team**Originally presented and commissioned by the Shaw Festival

Written and Adapted by Ravi Jain and Miriam Fernandes,

using poetry from Carole Satyamurti’s ‘Mahabharata: A Modern Retelling’

Original concept developed with Jenny Koons

Directed by Ravi Jain
with Associate Director Miriam Fernandes

Set design by Lorenzo Savoini

Costume design by Gillian Gallow

Lighting design by Kevin Lamotte with Associate Lighting Designer Mikael Kangas

Projection design by Hana S. Kim with Associate Projection Designer Ann Slote

Sound design by John Gzowski and Suba Sankaran

Original music by John Gzowski and Suba Sankaran with contributions from Dylan Bell, Gurtej Singh Hunjan, Zaheer-Abbas Janmohamed, Hasheel Lodhia.

Traditional music consultant Hasheel Lodhia

Choreography by Brandy Leary with contributions from Jay Emmanuel and Ellora Patnaik

Khana & Kahani Storyteller and Creative Associate Sharada K Eswar

Lead Producers Michelle Yagi and Kevin Matthew Wong

**Bhagavad Gita Opera**

Written and adapted by Miriam Fernandes and Ravi Jain

Original music and score by John Gzowski and Suba Sankaran

Translation and text adaptation by Sharada K Eswar

Performed by Meher Pavri

Guest recording artist: Trichy Sankaran (mrdangam)

**Cast**Shawn Ahmed

Ajay Chhabra

Karthik Kadam

Neil D'Souza

Jay Emmanuel

Miriam Fernandes

Varun Guru

Navtej Sandhu

Darren Kuppan

Anaka Maharaj-Sandhu

Suma Nair

Goldy Notay

Ellora Patnaik

Meher Pavri

Sakuntala Ramanee

Ronica Sajnani

Ishan Sandhu

Munish Sharma

Sukania Venugopal

**Musicians**John Gzowski - Conductor/Co-Composer/Co-Sound Designer/Guitar

Suba Sankaran - Band Leader/ Co-Composer/Co-Sound Designer/Voice

Dylan Bell - Bass/Keyboard/Music Contributions

Gurtej Singh Hunjan - Percussion/Music Contributions

Hasheel Lodhia – Traditional Music Consultant/Bansuri/Voice/Music Contributions

Zaheer-Abbas Janmohamed - Tabla/Music Contributions

**Production**

Crystal Lee, Production Manager
Neha Ross, Stage Manager

Victoria Wang, Stage Manager

Jenny Kim, Assistant Stage Manager

Daniel Bennett, Technical Director

Anthony Allan, Assistant Technical Director

Danny Carr, Head of Video and Video Op

Matthew Mellinger, Video Engineer

Brandon Wells, Head of Sound

Olivia Wheeler, Assistant Sound Designer & Playback Operator

Rachel Forbes, Head of Wardrobe

Michelle Mohammed, Toronto Company Manager

Maya Royer, Assistant Producer (Mahabharata: Karma and Mahabharata: Dharma) & Production Manager/Stage Manager (Khana & Kahani)

Mary Anderson, Communications and Outreach

Yve Lu Trinh, Digital Marketing

Lucky Chance Productions - UK General Management

Perspective Marketing - UK PR and Marketing

Karen Tisch, Executive Director of Why Not Theatre

 **Biographies**

**Creative Team**

**Ravi Jain** (Co-Writer/Director) is a multi-award-winning artist known for making politically bold and accessible theatrical experiences in both small indie productions and large theatres. As the Founding Artistic Director of Why Not Theatre, Ravi has established himself as an artistic leader for his inventive productions, international producing/collaborations, and innovative producing models, which are aimed to better support emerging artists to make money from their art. Ravi was awarded the Pauline McGibbon Award and the 2016 Canada Council John Hirsch Prize for Direction. In 2022, he was awarded the Johanna Metcalf Foundations Performing Arts Prize. He is a graduate of the two-year program at École Jacques Lecoq.

**Miriam Fernandes** (Co-Writer/Associate Director/Storyteller/Astika) is the Co-Artistic Director of Why Not Theatre. Creation credits include: *Mahabharata, What You Won’t Do For Love* (Why Not Theatre), and *Nesen, The First Time I Saw the Sea* (Yva Theatre, Norway). Directing credits include: *Metamorphoses* (CDTPS) and *Hayavadana* (Soulpepper). Acting credits include: *Prince Hamlet* (Why Not Theatre), *Animal Farm* (Soulpepper), and *Jungle Book* (WYRD/Kidoons). Miriam's work as a playwright (*Mahabharata, What You Won't Do for Love*) has been published by Coach House Books, and *What You Won't Do for Love* was also adapted into a film. Miriam is a graduate of École Jacques Lecoq, in Paris.

**Cast**

**Shawn Ahmed** (Yudhishthira/Shantanu) is an award-winning actor, writer and producer based in Toronto. Theatre credits include: *The Orchard* (After Chekhov), *Of Marriage and Men* (Shaw Festival), *Comedy of Errors, Revolutionary Moments, More Words! More Play* (Shakespeare & Company) and *Twelfth Night* (Shakespeare BASH’D). Film credits include: *Fallen Angels Murder Club* (Vol 1 & 2), *Under the Christmas Tree, ‘Twas the Night Before Christmas, Love on Harbour Island* and *Flight 93.* Television credits include: *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* (Paramount+), *So Help Me Todd, Twilight Zone* (CBS), *DC’s Legends of Tomorrow* (The CW), *The Expanse* (SyFy), *Coroner* (CBC), *Slasher* (Netflix) and *Orphan Black* (BBC America).

**Ajay Chhabra** (Dhritarashtra) is a British actor, director and producer of Indo-Fijian heritage. His theatre performance credits include: *Kafka's Dick* (Derby Playhouse), *The Trouble with Asian Men* (Tamasha), *Mahabharata* (Year of Opera), and *Indian Ink* (Michaell Codron/Yvonne Arnaud). Film and television performance work includes: *Tom & Jerry* (Warner Bros), *The Bull* (Tea Shop Productions), *Bell Bottom* (Pooja Entertainment), *‘83* (KK Productions), *Anita & Me* (BBC Films), *Rough Diamonds* (Netflix), *The Gold, Phoenix Rise, The Duchess* (BBC), *This England, Marcella* (ITV), VERA (ITV Studios), *Hetty Feather, The Basil Brush Show* (CBBC) and *Days that Shook the World* (BBC4).

**Neil D’Souza** (Krishna) is a British actor, writer and teacher of South Asian heritage. Theatre credits include: *How To Hold Your Breath, Khandan* (Royal Court Theatre), *Drawing The Line* (Hampstead), *Much Ado About Nothing, Midnight’s Children* (Royal Shakespeare Company), and *Tintin* (West End). Film and television credits include: *Filth, Still Life, Closed Circuit, Wild Target, Another Me, My Sweet Home, Gate To Heaven, Italian Movies, Diamonds* (Netflix), *The Ballad of Renegade Nell* (Disney), *In the Long Run* (Sky) and *Alma’s Not Normal* (BBC). Neil teaches at RADA, East 15, and the University of Bath, and his upcoming play, *Out of Season*, will be produced by Hampstead Theatre in 2024.

Born in India and based in Australia, **Jay Emmanuel** (Shiva/Amba/Drupada/Pandu) is a performer, writer, and director, and currently Artistic Director of Encounter. Jay migrated to Australia in 2009 and is a graduate of the Jacques Lecoq School in Paris. His recent works include *Mahabharata* (Why Not Theatre), *Counting and Cracking* (Bevoir St. Theatre/Co-Curious), *Beneath the Music* (Encounter/Performing Lines), *The Tides of Longing* (Western Australian Symphony Orchestra), and *Children of the Sea* (Perth Festival). In 2019, Jay was selected for the Australia Council for the Arts Future Leader Program, and in 2020 was awarded an Australia Council Career Development Grant.

**Darren Kuppan** (Duryodhana) is from the UK and lives just outside of Manchester. He got into the arts at an early age, starting with Ballroom/Latin American dancing, eventually becoming a British champion. Selected theatre credits include: *Let the Right One In* (Royal Exchange Theatre), *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Grosvenor Park Open Air Theatre), *Under Three Moons* (Box of Tricks Theatre), *Around the World in 80 Days, Hamlet, A Christmas Carol, Road, Europe* (Leeds Playhouse Ensemble), *Partition* (West Yorkshire Playhouse/BBC Radio Leeds), *Guards at the Taj* (Bush Theatre), *Cymbeline, The Tempest* (Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre), *East Is East* (West End, UK tour), *England Street* (Oxford Playhouse), and *Much Ado About Nothing* (RSC).

**Anaka Maharaj-Sandhu** (Arjuna) is a South Asian and gender non-conforming artist born and raised on Treaty One Territory (also known as Winnipeg, Manitoba). Anaka is a recent graduate from the acting program at the National Theatre School of Canada. Before their time at the National Theatre School, Anaka studied political science and film at the University of Manitoba. As a genderfluid artist and part of the Indigenous, Black and People of Colour community, Anaka seeks to create space for stories that have historically been erased. They’re especially interested in challenging the notion of Western ‘classics’; examining stories that were not written with people like them in mind.

**Goldy Notay** (Gandhari/Draupadi) is of British Canadian heritage. Theatre credits include: *Mahabharata* (Why Not Theatre), *All of Us* (National Theatre), *Abigail’s Party* (Watford Palace Theatre), *Pink Sari Revolution* (Curve/English Touring Theatre), *Speed, My Daughter’s Trial* (Kali Theatre), *Zameen* (Arts Theatre), *The Dishonoured* (Arcola Theatre), and *Happy Birthday Sunita* (Rifco/Experimental Theatre, India). Film/Television credits include: *Little English, It’s a Wonderful Afterlife* (directed by Gurinder Chadha), *Sex and the City 2* (Warner Bros), *Ackley Bridge* and *Beecham House*. Goldy is currently in the Olivier award-winning production *Life of Pi*, directed by Max Webster. Awards include: Best Actress Nomination-ACTA Awards (*The Dishonoured*) and Best Actress-London Movie Awards (*Chapter Two*).

**Ellora Patnaik** (Kunti/Drona)’s theatre credits include: *Mahabharata* (Why Not Theatre), *A Christmas Carol, Sisters* (Soulpepper), *Romeo & Juliet* (Shakespeare in the Ruff), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Tarragon Theatre), *Free Outgoing, Her2* (Nightwood Theatre), and *Acha Bacha* (Theatre Passe Muraille). Film/Television credits include: *Sort Of, Ginny & Georgia, One Small Visit, Holly Hobby, Kitty Mamas, The Wedding Planners, Nurses, Kim’s Convenience, Schitt’s Creek, Spinning Out, Hudson & Rex, Talent Drivers, Titans, Too Close For Christmas, Coroner, Pride Prejudice* and *Mistletoe*. Upcoming: *Calorie* (Compass Productions).

Parsi-Canadian soprano, **Meher Pavri** (Voice of Krishna), hails from London, Ontario. Her career highlights include: Maria in *West Side Story* (LOT, Windsor Symphony Orchestra, Niagara Symphony Orchestra), *88 Keys* (Soulpepper), *The Overcoat, A Musical Tailoring* (Canadian Stage, Tapestry Opera, Vancouver Opera) and Mozart’s *Idomeneo* (Opera Atelier). Meher has sung the national anthem at NBA Raptors games and was featured in the Canadian premiere of *Bend It Like Beckham* (Starvox), and most recently the world premiere of *Mahabharata* (Why Not Theatre). Meher was also a part of the ensemble in Handel’s *Messiah* with Against the Grain Theatre, which won a Dora Award.

**Sakuntala Ramanee** (Shakuni/Sanjaya)’s Theatre credits include: *Mahabharata* (Why Not Theatre), *Life Of Pi* (West End), *Romeo and Juliet* (RSC, Barbican, UK tour), *The Forest* (Hampstead Theatre), *Father and the Assassin* (National Theatre), *East Is East* (West End, UK tour), *Meat Pie Sausage Roll* (Oldham Coliseum), *Bring on the Bollywood* (Phizzical), *Coventry Mystery Plays* (Belgrade, Coventry) and *India Song* (Theatre Clwyd). Television credits include: *DI Ray, The Bay, Line Of Duty, Coronation Street, Eastenders, Whitechapel* and *Emmerdale*. Film credits include: *Second Spring* and *The Boat Woman*. Radio credits include: *Memories* and *Midnight’s Children.*

**Navtej Sandhu** (Karna/Satyavati) is a Toronto-based actor, born in the United States; she is also an emerging screenwriter and singer. Theatre credits include: *Mahabharata* (Why Not Theatre), *The Green Line* (Edmonton Fringe Festival), and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Canadian Stage). Navtej was introduced to fight training at York University’s acting conservatory where she graduated with a BFA, and is now in the process of getting her advanced actor combatant at Rapier Wit.

**Munish Sharma** (Bhima) is originally from Regina, Saskatchewan, but now calls Vancouver home. He was inspired to become an actor by the Bollywood legend, Amitabh Bachchan, but it was his breakout role as Captain Hook in grade three that really solidified his desire to act. Theatre credits include: *#34* (Globe Theatre), *A Midsummer Night’s Dream, All’s Well That Ends Well* (Bard on the Beach), *Himmat* (Theatre Conspiracy), *Men Express Their Feelings* (Zee Zee Theatre), *A Thousand Splendid Suns, The Cherry Orchard: After Chekov* (Arts Club), and *The Invisible Hand* (Pi Theatre).

**Sukania Venugopal** (Bhishma) is a performer, actor, singer, and dancer. Selected theatre credits include: *Counting and Cracking* (Belvoir Theatre Company, Sydney Festival), *Past Caring, Good People* (Necessary Stage), *Sybil, Box of Delights, Killing of Sister George, Tribute to Mustaffa Noor* (Actor’s Studio), *Terra Arata* (Jumping Jellybeans), *Second Link, Five Acts Centre* (Wild Rice Theatre), *Svaradhara, Butterfly Lovers, Dance India – Taste India, Taj Mahal,* (Temple of Fine Arts), *Love Child, A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Instant Café Theatre Company), *One by One, Dramalab; A Tribute to Leslie Dawson, The White Liars* (K.L. Music Chamber Players/British Council), *Romeo and Juliet* (Liberal Arts Society) and *1984 Here & Now* (Five Acts Centre)*.*

**Varun Guru** (Understudy) is an actor, composer, voice actor, writer born and raised in India and based in Toronto. Theatre credits include: *Mahabharata* (Why Not Theatre), *Peggy Pickit Sees The Face of God, Axe AKA Akshay,* and *King Lear* (Soulpepper Theatre). Film credits include: *Keeper of the Cup, Look at Me, There’s Nothing Else, Oh Deer* and *Family Values*. Television credits include: *King and Pawn* (Bell). Voice-over credits include: *Hyper Scape* (Ubisoft), Hyundai, Woodland and Adidas.

**Karthik Kadam** (Understudy) was born in Bangalore, India, and has had the honour of creating with some of the most inspiring people in what’s presently known as Canada. Theatre credits include: *HENRY V, A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Bard on the Beach), *The Legend of Georgia McBride* (The Arts Club), *Mahabharata* (Why Not Theatre), *Juggle Me Not* (Axis Theatre Company), *Silent Sky* (United Players of Vancouver), *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again,* Timothy Findley’s *The Wars*, and *Goldrausch* (University of British Columbia).

**Suma Nair** (Understudy) is the Artistic Director of Sampradaya Dance Creations in Mississauga, Canada. Trained in the Indian classical dance form of Bharatanatyam, Suma is a choreographer and producer. She is also a voice artist and a theatre actor. Suma is the co-founder of ĀṬAM Arts Collective, a Malayalam theatre group based in Toronto. Winner of the MARTY award for Dance by the Mississauga Arts Council in 2018, Suma holds an MFA in Dance from York University, where she was awarded the Susan Crocker and John Hunkin Scholarship in Fine Arts in 2014-2015.

**Ronica Sajnani** (Understudy)’s theatre credits include: *A Brimful of Asha* (Theatre Antigonish), *My Granny the Goldfish* (Factory Theatre), *The Washing Machine* (Next Stage Festival, Factory Theatre), *Unburdened* (Modest Productions), and *Rice Boy* (Canadian Stage). Film/Television credits include: *Water* (directed by Deepa Mehta, nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the 2007 Academy Awards), *Run the Burbs, Sort Of, TallBoyz* (CBC), *Good Sam* (CBS), *Sneakerella* (Disney), *Wedding Season, Black Mirror* (Netflix), *Kids in the Hall* (2022, Amazon), *Workin’ Moms* (CBC/Netflix). Awards: Theatre Nova Scotia Robert Merritt Award nominee, Best Lead and Production (*A Brimful of Asha*), nine Genie Award nominations.

Chandigarh, a small town in the north of India, designed by a French architect, is where **Ishan Sandhu** (Understudy) calls home, and it was there where he dreamt of a life in the performing arts. Ishan pursued a BFA in Theatre at the University of British Columbia. Theatre credits include: *Mahabharata* (Why Not Theatre), *Romeo and Juliet* (Bard on the Beach), *The Triumph of Love* (Western Gold Theatre), *Men Express Their Feelings* (Zee Zee Theater), *The Here and This and Now* (Jericho Arts Centre) and *Gramophone* (The Cultch).

 **Musician Biographies**

**John Gzowski** (Conductor/Co-Composer/Co-Sound Designer/Guitar) is a composer, sound designer, musician, and instrument maker and has worked on over 250 theatre, dance, and film productions. John’s theatre contributions have won 6 Dora Awards, with 18 nominations from companies such as Ex Machina, Stratford Festival, Shaw Festival, Luminato Festival, National Arts Centre, the Mirvishes, MTC, The Arts Club, Canadian Stage, Soulpepper, Dancemakers, Red Sky, Tarragon Theatre, Factory Theatre, and YPT. He has played on compilations alongside Patricia O'Callghan, Tasa, Autorickshaw, and Maza Meze. He ran Canada’s first microtonal group, playing the works of Harry Partch, and has also worked as Co-Artistic Director of the Music Gallery.

**Suba Sankaran** (Band Leader/Co-Composer/Co-Sound Designer/Voice) is a Dora award-winning, thrice Juno-nominated world/fusion vocalist who has effortlessly combined musical worlds. She has performed with Autorickshaw, master drummer Trichy Sankaran, a cappella live-looping duo FreePlay and Retrocity. Performance highlights include performing for Peter Gabriel, Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and performing with Jane Siberry, Lorraine Segato, Bobby McFerrin and the Swingles. Highlights include collaborations with Deepa Mehta, the CBC, and Stratford and Shaw Festivals. Theatre credits include *Jungle Book* (Kidoons), *For Coloured Girls* (Tiger Bamboo Festival, Soulpepper), *The Enchanted Loom* (Cahoots Theatre), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Tarragon Theatre) and *Same Same, But Different* (Nightswimming).

**Dylan Bell** (Bass/Keyboard/Music Contributions) is a Juno-nominated vocalist, instrumentalist (piano, bass, Stick, guitar, percussion), composer/arranger, music director, and producer/engineer. Dylan has worked with groups ranging from vocal jazz, vocal pop, eclectic jazz and world music, to classical and flat-out rock ‘n’ roll, and has played stages in over 25 countries. When it comes to a cappella vocal arranging, Dylan literally wrote the book: ‘A Cappella Arranging’, co-written with Deke Sharon, and published by Hal Leonard. Theatre music credits include: *Mahabharata* (Why Not Theatre), *Parliament of Birds* (Soulpepper), *Same Same But Different, Nightswimming, Arrabal* (Mirvish), and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Driftwood).

**Gurtej Singh Hunjan** (Percussion/Music Contributions) is a Juno-award nominated percussionist, composer and DJ, based in Toronto. His classical training in North Indian rhythm informs his eclectic, rhythmic-driven sound. Gurtej has recorded and performed internationally with headlining artists and composes music for film, television, digital media, and theater.

**Hasheel Lodhia** (Traditional Music Consultant/Bansuri/Voice/Music Contributions) began training in North Indian Classical music at age three, under his father. Later he studied vocals under Shri Narendra Datar and bansuri under Shri Jeetu Sharma. Hasheel is currently a senior disciple of Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia and vocal student of Pandit Ajay Pohankar. He has performed with Kailash Kher, Hariharan, Karthik, Shafqat Amanat Ali Khan, Karsh Kale, Javed Ali, and A.R. Rahman. Festivals include: Iceland Airwaves and Pride Toronto. Discography includes: ‘Circle’ (Alysha Brilla) and ‘The India Beat Tape’ (Yanchan). Music direction includes: *In Multiplicity* (Nuit Blanche) and *The Tagore Project* (Tanveer Alam and Atri Nundy).

**Zaheer-Abbas Janmohamed** (Tabla/Music Contributions) is a Canadian tabla player and a student of Ustad Allarakha’s senior disciple, Shri Prafulla Athalye. Aiming to preserve the integrity of the repertoire he studies, Zaheer-Abbas brings the tradition of tabla to new contexts and audiences through his musical collaborations. He uses the instrument’s sound and theory to explore forms of electronic music production, and he plays in Toronto band, Running Rivers. Zaheer-Abbas has performed across Canada in a variety of classical, semi-classical and contemporary musical settings. Selected appearances include Sonic Landscapes with Surbahar, Sufi Folk Music of Mukhtiyar Ali, and Concerts Café Classico Series.

**About the Bagri Foundation**

The Bagri Foundation is a UK registered charity whose main mission is to realise unique, unexpected ideas from and on Asia, weaving traditional culture with contemporary thinking. The Foundation provides support towards artistic and educational projects and establishes collaborative partnerships with institutions that range in scale—from small cultural organisations that share our ethos and mission to large national and international partners like the British Museum and Hayward Gallery in London, Artes Mundi Prize in Cardiff, The Metropolitan

Museum of Art of New York, and La Biennale di Venezia. The Foundation’s supported projects include film, visual arts, music, literature, courses and lectures, and each of them aims at giving artists and experts from across Asia and the diaspora, or those inspired by the continent, wider visibility on the global stage. [www.bagrifoundation.org](http://www.bagrifoundation.org)

**About the Barbican**

The Barbican is a catalyst for creativity, sparking possibilities for artists, audiences, and communities. We showcase the most exciting art from around the world, pushing traditional artistic boundaries to entertain and inspire millions of people, create connections, provoke debate, and reflect the world we live in.

We are an international arts and events centre rooted firmly in our own neighbourhood, collaborating with local communities and putting the City of London on the map as a destination for everybody. Central to our purpose is supporting emerging talent and shaping opportunities that will accelerate the next generation of creatives.

As a not-for-profit, we rely on the generosity of individuals and organisations, including our principal funder the City of London Corporation. Every ticket purchased, donation made, and pound earned supports our arts and learning programme and enables the widest possible range of people to experience the joy of the arts.

Opened in 1982, the Barbican is a unique and audacious building, recognised globally as an architectural icon. As well as our theatres, galleries, concert halls and cinemas, we have a large conservatory with over 1,500 species of plants and trees, a library, conference facilities, public and community spaces, restaurants, bars, and a picturesque lakeside oasis.

We are the home of the London Symphony Orchestra, and a London base of the Royal Shakespeare Company. We regularly co-commission, produce and showcase the work of our other partners and associates: the Academy of Ancient Music, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Boy Blue, Britten Sinfonia, Cheek by Jowl, Drum Works, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Serious and We Are Parable.

For more information, visit our [website](https://www.barbican.org.uk/) or connect with us on [Instagram](http://tracking.barbican.org.uk/tracking/click?d=C_LcOAEiFammbcN9d1wzlvoHUG8xMgN2gk7cf_jV4xIpHT95q2b6MaPezKubdtjUv9KuzanntN-XIbhgPcJBOghIullKzV_GSVpR8S8h8Zfj55rzJuxylUDBjIDazGl451iGlU5PMBrqGMVCCeYb-X81) | [Twitter](http://tracking.barbican.org.uk/tracking/click?d=YxrwqmAN_KwTHCUchykvioTVUqRlwwQD1WgP9a6Bj75xTE0UeQyN8f6wgDjeX56yGP_rafq4dqkYLjzufj7wYs10j8IVmxcmX2_sVZmjpnJklwNPtkG3ihECmGYKiNYQyA1KwzcIZO3iSwllImukBkI1) | [Facebook](http://tracking.barbican.org.uk/tracking/click?d=mmA_GD5bDhOpy5-M7Y6kk2acIYZN8ZnldsWxhHuZRLqA0GgYtCnsgxeTvdDg2z7B4ITpUiu3fAH__oev9hOtQh_B-Uid4qMhSOC8wrH0cKPtJj_yWzuLO7v1EZauV3MtYtjvb_Cf7GlnbTFuN-w3uto1) | [YouTube](http://tracking.barbican.org.uk/tracking/click?d=jFmMraam-JwFLgKGhaj32XSaxwHFpnx8Byr7moU_VQJQUEhYRLbhyDuyQ7-Alk7VqWsdIdpgSKQU4HcRDhIMbwFTGqq_ldChg4D9h1JrZoOuZsslrXnqyQBLegGH1v8FlxxQ6XBivIP0eC88d089QZA1) | [Spotify](http://tracking.barbican.org.uk/tracking/click?d=VCc8iBn6M3M5uUQekGBfYpWGwEIyVm8LiiNfYleR_xUsg0dLgVUHXZ8NCVZNUd4pVaClYi4qElv8RaRzkL-LlCLkwXqSXbYNB9vBi-JFrbYpWrYd58kpYwLlIK2xHYmw-_oge8cZbEmc94bIAGbhixOhkpihXYgBrPxMWuh-6GFq0) | [LinkedIn](https://uk.linkedin.com/company/barbican-centre)