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Dublin Dance Festival 2016 'Chotto Desh' labours its love

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Chotto Desh by Akram Khan Company
Richard Haughton

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Rating: ★★★★★

Akram Khan's "Desh" was a major hit when first presented back in 2011. "Chotto Desh," adapted by director Sue Buckmaster from Khan's original masterpiece, offers a fresh reworking specifically aimed at seven and eight year olds and their families. "Chotto Desh" certainly has its moments of spectacle, and when it's good it's very, very good indeed. But it also lags and sags in too many places and doesn't always engage its target audience. A labour of love perhaps, "Chotto Desh" offers a tale within a tale within a tale, one that labours at times in the telling.

Our first tale follows a young man on a phone call to a call centre in Bangladesh. This opens up onto "Chotto Desh's" central tale of the tension between a father from Bangladesh and his London born son. We follow the restless son, who loves dancing and hates being told what to do, through

the defiant and disobedient years, his sense of the modern and new clashing with his father's cultural heritage and fear for his son's place in the world. But Grandmother also has a story to tell, of honey bees and jungles, and of the goddess of the jungle. Individually none of the stories are particularly fleshed out enough to be truly engaging, nor is the interplay between all three sufficiently intriguing, though Grandmother's tale is certainly the most effective, and the others do still have their moments.

"Chotto Desh" can be charming, clever and utterly brilliant, but just not consistently so. The opening sequence is engaging enough, as is the overly long tour through Bangladesh which displays some visually interesting moments. The first appearance of the father is one of such simplicity and brilliance it's unquestionably one of the best theatrical sequences to be found in this, or any production, casting everything that went before it in an even poorer light. Throughout, "Chotto Desh" is at its strongest when engaging with objects such as chairs and its black and white projection, which itself is worth the price of admission. In between, interchangeable dancers Dennis Alamanos or Nicolas Ricchini, depending on which performance you attend, efficiently execute their routines, resembling at times a mime artist, at others times a shaolin monk.

The more cynically minded might see in "Chotto Desh" something of the Disneyworld conveyer belt approach to making [dance](#) for children, creating a show with sufficient spectacle to take its audience on a ride built more from the demands of style than substance. What substance there is, family and the search for identity, the importance of our stories, teenage rebellion, social protest, multi-culturalism and an environmental subtext, seems under developed in too many places and positioned in such a way as to most likely elude most seven or eight year olds. Do they even know what a call centre is? Funny when it needs to be, touching when it needs to be, "Chotto Desh" has the highest production standards and some wonderful moments of mind blowingly good spectacle, but not enough, nor story enough, to be truly engaging.

"Chotto Desh" by Akram Khan Company ran as part of the [Dublin Dance Festival 2016](#) at The O'Reilly Theatre

For more information, visit [Dublin Dance Festival](#)



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