

read *Peanuts* using an Italian translation. That was one way she learnt to speak Italian.

Sally is a happy little girl but in one story "she is skipping and suddenly she stops and she cries because she thinks everything around her is very futile. That was what I was feeling sometimes when I was dancing, when you feel alone. I'm thinking, 'Here I am with my tutu, that is very nice, it's beautiful, you are supposed to give pleasure, it's a divertissement, it's light and everything.' Then sometimes I think, 'What am I doing? Am I doing something useful?' And I thought that sometimes I could feel similar to this little girl."

In *Sacred Monsters*, lying downstage, she tells this story. Guillem had never before delivered a monologue on stage and "I was afraid to do it ... I didn't know how it would sound."

In the end, "I had also a lot of pleasure doing it. It felt like what I needed" and a big change from the way she communicated with the audience in classical ballet, telling a story with her body and eyes.

Khan said he "talked it [the Sally Brown tale] out of her. I'm fascinated by people's stories. Eventually I used all the text, all childhood

'It's the monster in me. I think she monsters me back but in a much more subtle way.'

Akram Khan

stories about Sally were very beautiful and touching and real."

Khan choreographed most of the work, which opens with the two dancers referring to their childhoods. Guillem holds a skipping rope while Khan works on his dance steps. Each dancer performs a solo that shows their dance traditions, with Khan's choreographed by Gauri Sharma Tripathi and Guillem's by Lin Hwai-min, artistic director of Taiwan's Cloud Gate Dance Theatre.

At the end, the two stories become one in a duet in which Guillem and Khan ripple their bodies and circle one another. The dance becomes aggressive as he moves towards her, as if to attack her body, his mouth opening as if he might bite her. "I'm using my head to go close to her, making her go back," Khan said. "It's the monster in me. I think she monsters me back but in a much more subtle way. She is a master in disguising it."

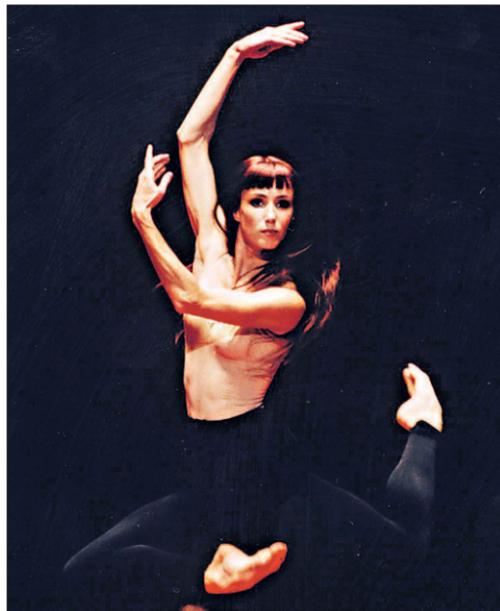
While Guillem lets down her guard in *Sacred Monsters*, Khan also reveals a personal fear when he talks to the audience about losing his hair. He shaved off all his hair after losing part of it at the back when he 26.

"Kathak," he said, "is based on the concept of Krishna, who has a lot of hair. When I was losing my hair I thought I had never seen a kathak dancer who had bald, shaved hair. I was terrified of the consequences ... I didn't know how the classical world would respond, like, 'Are you taking the piss?' But ... you can never look like Krishna anyway. Krishna is within you."

Guillem's next venture, as an artistic associate of Sadler's Wells in London, is a theatre piece with the Canadian director Robert Lepage, whom she met at the Sydney Festival two years ago.



On the way ... Cuban dancer Carlos Acosta.



French toast ... Sylvie Guillem in *Bolero* in 2000.

Khan is working on a duet with the French actress Juliette Binoche, completing a series of three duets that began with *Zero Degrees*. Premiering in London in September, the Khan-Binoche duet is likely to tour to the Sydney Festival next year.

Sacred Monsters will be at the Adelaide Festival on March 13 and at the Sydney Opera House from March 17 to 19.

Leap year

Highlights of the 2008 dance calendar

Edward Scissorhands

Adapted for the stage by London-based Matthew Bourne, whose *Swan Lake* (based on the story of a frustrated prince in love with a male swan) was an Australian hit last year. At the Sydney Opera House in May.

Sydney Dance Company (right)

Works by Meryl Tankard (Theatre Royal, March/April), Rafael Bonachela (CarriageWorks, July/August) and Azure Barton (CarriageWorks, October).

The Australian Ballet

Highlights include works by Jerome Robbins and a revival of Kenneth MacMillan's *Manon*. Cuban star Carlos Acosta will dance in some performances of the Robbins program at the State Theatre, Melbourne, in June. Three other international guests, Ethan Stiefel, Leanne Benjamin and Robert Tewsley, will dance in some performances of *Manon* at the Sydney Opera House in December.

DVS Physical Theatre

In To Be Straight With You artistic



Photo: Jez Smith

director Lloyd Newson directs an international multi-ethnic cast in a work about "tolerance, intolerance, religion and sexuality". At the Adelaide Festival Theatre, March.

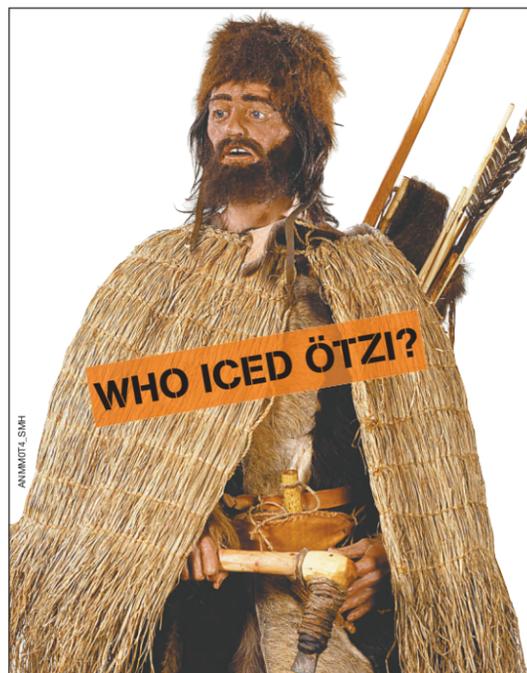
Kiev Ballet

Swan Lake and *The Sleeping Beauty* will be presented as part of a regional tour. Civic Theatre, Newcastle, May.

Mathinna

A new work by Bangarra Dance Theatre's artistic director Stephen Page is inspired by a young Aboriginal girl's journey between two cultures. National tour in winter.

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