



Press release – 11 December 2024

CHRISTOPHER NOURSE TO RETIRE FROM THE FREDERICK ASHTON FOUNDATION

SARAH ELIOT-COHEN, FORMER ROYAL BALLET SCHOOL HEAD OF DEVELOPMENT, APPOINTED NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Frederick Ashton Foundation today announces that Christopher Nourse, a co-founder with Tony Dyson and Jeanetta Laurence of the Foundation and its first Executive Director, is to retire at the end of the year, bringing to a conclusion a 50-year career in dance administration. He will then join the Board of Trustees. Christopher set up the Foundation in 2011, having been asked by the Royal Ballet to explore how the Ashton Trust might more effectively deliver its mission to safeguard the legacy of Frederick Ashton. Under his leadership, the Foundation has become the 'go to' organisation for all matters relating to Frederick Ashton and his ballets, and it now manages all but seven ballets in the Ashton catalogue.

Sarah Eliot-Cohen's appointment as Executive Director of the Frederick Ashton Foundation takes effect from 1 January 2025. Sarah is currently a Trustee of the Foundation and will transfer from the Board of Trustees to work alongside Christopher until the end of the year.

Jeanetta Laurence, Chair of the Frederick Ashton Foundation, comments: *Christopher's contribution to the formation of the Foundation has been immense. I cannot imagine anyone more perfectly qualified to have been the Foundation's first Executive Director and I give my heartfelt thanks to him for all that he has done to make my vision of an organisation devoted to the choreographic legacy of Frederick Ashton become a reality. It has been*

wonderful to have the opportunity to work so closely with Christopher over the last fourteen years and I am delighted that his willingness to become a Trustee means his wisdom, invaluable experience and wonderfully even temperament will remain at the centre of what we do.

I am equally delighted that Sarah has agreed to be the Foundation's new Executive Director. Her past experience at the Royal Ballet School, with responsibility for fundraising, marketing and communications, and as a Trustee of the Foundation, together with her passion for the work of Frederick Ashton, make her the perfect successor to Christopher. My fellow Board members join me in wishing her well in her new role, knowing that under her leadership, the Foundation's management and delivery of its objectives will continue to be of the highest standards.

Christopher comments: "Leaving the Frederick Ashton Foundation is a bitter-sweet moment for me. Although never a dancer, I knew Frederick Ashton away from the studio, enjoyed his company and have always loved his work. It has been a privilege to mould and develop the Foundation into its present position, under the guidance of a truly supportive Board of Trustees, chaired exceptionally well, first by Tony Dyson and now by Jeanetta Laurence. After a most happy and fulfilling career working for fifty years in the dance sector, the Foundation has provided the perfect coda to my professional life. As the Foundation moves into a new phase in its development, I could not be more delighted that Sarah Eliot-Cohen is to be its new Executive Director. I wish her, the Board and all involved with the Foundation the greatest success."

Sarah comments: "I consider it the greatest honour to have been invited to take on the role of Executive Director of the Frederick Ashton Foundation, and thank Jeanetta, Christopher and the Trustees for putting their faith in me. I have huge shoes to fill and am deeply mindful of the extraordinary work which has been undertaken to create such an important and inspiring Foundation in honour of our great British choreographer. Looking ahead, I hope that with my administrative and fundraising experience at the Royal Ballet School, the Foundation can build on its current success. Christopher's knowledge of Ashton and his immense portfolio of work is unsurpassed and his dedication to sharing this as widely as possible and perpetuating Ashton's legacy has been tireless. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to continue his work."

For further information, contact the Frederick Ashton Foundation:
020 7370 2520 (voicemail service) or ashtonfoundation@roh.org.uk

Note for Editors

Christopher Nourse. Prior to his appointment to the Frederick Ashton Foundation, Christopher held senior positions with Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet (administrative director), Rambert Dance Company (executive director) and English National Ballet (managing director) and at the Royal Opera House (Assistant to the General Director; Administrative Director of the Royal Opera House Trust). Voluntary roles have included: chairman of the Dame Margot Fonteyn Scholarship Fund, chairman of the Dancers' Pension Scheme, a Governor of the Royal Ballet Companies and School, and a Trustee of Candoco Dance Company, Youth Dance England and the Cecchetti Society Trust.

Sarah Eliot-Cohen. Sarah was Head of Development and Communications at The Royal Ballet School between 2008 – 2022, directing the School's fundraising, marketing and communications. Prior to that, she was part of the founding team of Breast Cancer Haven and their Development Director for ten years. Earlier in her career, Sarah worked in the Events Team of Macmillan Cancer Support. Sarah is a Trustee of Dancers' Career Development (chair of its Grants Committee) and of Action Through Enterprise.

The Frederick Ashton Foundation. The Foundation was established in 2011 as a charitable limited company working in close association with, but independent of, The Royal Ballet and Birmingham Royal Ballet. The overall aim of the Foundation is to enrich the legacy of Frederick Ashton and his ballets, primarily through the ownership or management of most of the ballets and divertissement which comprise the Ashton catalogue, and through a number of initiatives, including:

- A shadowing scheme to enable potential Ashton répétiteurs to watch and learn from original cast members as they work on an Ashton ballet and learn to read Benesh Notation, thus equipping them with the skills to teach, rehearse and stage Ashton ballets for today's audience
- A programme of *Ashton Rediscovered* masterclasses focusing on rarely-performed Ashton works, whereby original cast members coach today's dancers and the notation score is checked, and if necessary amended, the whole masterclass being filmed for education and research purposes, thus providing an invaluable resource for the future
- A pioneering partnership with the Royal Ballet School's Affiliate Training and Assessment Programme, whereby Ashton ballets are being brought to life for the next generation of young, recreational dancers learning simplified versions of the Ashton repertoire
- *Ashton Worldwide 2024 – 2028*, the Foundation's international festival celebrating the work and legacy of Frederick Ashton. To date, twenty-four companies and schools have agreed to participate
- The annual Frederick Ashton Lecture, given to both honour the memory of Frederick Ashton and to advance public understanding and debate about the arts, delivered by a distinguished speaker from the arts sector (speakers to date have included theatre

director Sir Nicholas Hytner, broadcaster and composer Michael Berkeley and writer and mythographer Dame Marina Warner)

- The commissioning of Lynne Wake's documentary *Frederick Ashton: Links in the Chain* to mark the Foundation's tenth anniversary in 2021, which throws light on how the choreographic steps and intentions of one of the country's greatest choreographers are handed down from one generation to the next
- The commissioning in 2021 of a new production of Ashton's *Hamlet and Ophelia* (formerly known as *Hamlet Prelude*), originally created in 1977 on Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev
- Other one-off events such as a symposium on the relevance of Ashton in today's world (2013) and the presentation of Ashton works in Guayaquil, Ecuador, the birthplace of Frederick Ashton (2018)
- Co-producer with The Royal Ballet in 2024 of a new production of *Les Rendezvous*, designed by Jasper Conran and staged by Vanessa Palmer, who was trained as an Ashton répétiteur through the Foundation's shadowing scheme

Ends