

Christopher Hampson joined Scottish Ballet as Artistic Director in August 2012 and was appointed Artistic Director / Chief Executive of Scottish Ballet in June 2015.

Christopher trained at the Royal Ballet Schools. His choreographic work began there and continued at English National Ballet (ENB), where he danced until 1999 and for whom he subsequently created numerous award-winning works, including Double Concerto, Perpetuum Mobile, Country Garden, Concerto Grosso and The Nutcracker.

Christopher's Romeo and Juliet, created for the Royal New Zealand Ballet (RNZB), was nominated for a Laurence Olivier Award (Best New Production 2005) and his production of Giselle for the National Theatre in Prague has been performed every year since its premiere in 2004. Christopher created Sinfonietta Giocosa for the Atlanta Ballet (USA) in 2006 and after a New York tour it received its UK premiere with ENB in 2007.

He created Cinderella for RNZB in 2007, which was subsequently hailed as Best New Production by the New Zealand Herald and televised by TVNZ in 2009. His work has toured Australia, China, the USA and throughout Europe. Other commissions include, Dear Norman (Royal Ballet, 2009); Sextet (Ballet Black/ROH2, 2010); Silhouette (RNZB, 2010), Rite of Spring (Atlanta Ballet, 2011), Storyville (Ballet Black/ROH2, 2012) nominated for a National Dance Award 2012, and Hansel and Gretel (Scottish Ballet 2013).

Christopher is co-founder of the International Ballet Masterclasses in Prague and has been a guest teacher for English National Ballet, Royal Swedish Ballet, Royal New Zealand Ballet, Hong Kong Ballet, Atlanta Ballet, Matthew Bourne's New Adventures and the Genée International Ballet Competition. Christopher's work now forms part of the Solo Seal Award for the Royal Academy of Dance.

GD: We are going to trot through your life Chris and focus on various areas. We felt strongly that bringing things up to date and talking about the future was absolutely essential as opposed to just going on about what you did at school aged 5, although we are going to kick off with your schooling, what is it from your time at the Royal Ballet School that has stuck in your mind and influenced you as an artist in your adult life?

CH: If I may just go a little bit before the Royal Ballet School. My first interaction with ballet was with Northern Ballet which of course was the offshoot to Western Theatre Ballet and it was to be a walk on role in a new ballet by Jonathan Thorpe called Madame Butterfly and I was six years old. My interactions after that with Northern Ballet were always in new work and the next one was by Geoffrey Cauley, a wonderful choreographer and a lovely man and he created a whole full length ballet with myself as the child and Nicky Treherne as the dancer. By the time I got to the Royal Ballet School I thought that was normal to have work created on you. (laughter) When I got to the RBS it took me time to adjust to going back to basics which was what was done at that time at White Lodge.

But through the rigour of that training, I learnt to harness creativity in all its forms. At White Lodge I didn't choreograph, there was another Christopher that choreographed at White Lodge, Christopher Wheeldon who was in my year but I did compose, I composed a score for him and in my final year a choreographic award was given to me because I composed a score for Chris which is quite a curious way to gain a choreographic award.

So I guess harnessing creativity and then I think the other part that was quite strong was that I had a Russian teacher, Anatoli Grigoriev and we as a group of boys were his very first year and he spoke really no English and we spoke no Russian but at the end of his first year with us we spoke Russian. So I can count in Russian and name the parts of the body and the parts of the studio I don't know whether it was just laziness on his part.

What's lovely is it opened the world up for me. I learnt from that experience that and my time later with the English National Ballet, a multinational company was the ability for dance to be able to inhabit so many different cultures and that I love about this world so harnessing creativity and that drive to assimilate different cultures were the main things I got from my time at the Royal ballet School.

GD: That experience of having something created on you and what it felt like, is it something at the back of your mind when you are creating either as a Choreographer or a director?

CH: It is quite simply one of the greatest gifts you can give as a creator, is to work with an artist and to develop a role or even with a group of people to develop a dance, and a storyline I always remember with my own productions who was in that first cast and the memory is an interesting thing. The brain is fascinating even in works that I've had done many times, when they get set I always say, isn't that head that way and it is always the first thing I ever thought of, or the first thing I ever saw that dancer do, the fact that I've changed it every year since then whoever's assisting me always has to remind me, "Chris you changed at 10 years ago, so shut up and stop changing it." It's part of the process. And I know how important it is for an artist to be part of the creative process.

GD: It is fascinating that you started think about choreography at a very young age, at an age when a lot of students are just concentrating on producing what they're told to produce in terms of their own physicality and yet the few, including yourself start thinking about what you can do with other bodies. When did you first have that desire to create dance?

CH: Well as far as creating dance it was probably at the Royal Ballet School, but I have always been very creative, I was that kid that always made a theatre out of something whether it was a cornflake box or something! I would build the spaceship from LEGO then break it up and build a theatre so I always looking for an outlet, to have a frame on the world.

I think the Royal Ballet School the training was really conducive to creativity and we were expected to come up with enchainment and we were expected to input into the creative process.

We were lucky in that in 1984 it was the first year Sir Peter Wright did his new production of the Nutcracker, and we were involved in the process, so Sir Peter would come to the school and we would see him creating and the same with David Bintley and with Kenneth MacMillan, we had creativity around us at a very high level. The one thing that I remember from all of those people and others since, is the doubt, it was so wonderful to see someone at the front have doubt, to doubt themselves and to doubt what they were doing and be open about it didn't diminish their standing in our eyes but it in a way gives permission to young people to question and to be curious, that was important to me.

GD: So would you characterise yourself as a doubtful choreographer?

CH The older I get the more open I get in the studio, I used to feel like I needed to know everything and of course you don't know the half of it when you walk into the room and you have that fear I know every choreographer has. In my current guise as a director I listen to a choreographer's nerves and doubts, but you do feel like you should know what the work is when you walk into the room on the first day but you really don't. You know what the aspirations are, you know the themes you wish to explore with that group and you might know an endpoint but not how to get there, it's a nerve wracking position to be in.

GD: So going back to those early days of young master Hampson as a dancer and choreographer, at what point did you feel that you had to make a choice or begin to make a choice?

CH: That would have been when I was with the English National Ballet, a company that at that time was prolific in its performance output with close to 200 performances in a year, 12 performances a week of Nutcracker at the Festival Hall or the "festering hole" as we used to call it because in those days the Southbank really wasn't what it is now. I really cut my teeth as a performer with the English National Ballet, if I'm honest I was an undisciplined dancer, I had a lot of natural talent and a lot of very natural technique in terms of physicality but I really needed to learn how to perform and how to be a character and the English National Ballet was good for me but that amount of performing burnt me out as a performer and fortunately as my choreographic output increased my interest in performing was waning.

I remember at the Royal Albert Hall we were doing Derek Deane's Swan Lake and I had just put my make-up on and I didn't feel excited and it really upset me, I really found that very upsetting however when I thought about my next rehearsal for my ballet that really got my juices flowing, so I could see that sea change and I felt that creatively if I wanted to forge a path, I needed to direct that same intensity and methodology I was lucky enough to have picked up at the Royal Ballet School and turn it into some sort of creative pathway, so I decided to stop dancing completely at 27, not very old and upset a lot of people as I remember and my director was Derek Deane and he wasn't happy though very gracious and he said you know you don't need to do this but he understood I sort of did and he really left the door open so I had that safety net.

GD: But easier said than done, when you're the member of a company you turned up in the morning, the day is set out for you, as a freelance choreographer it's a completely different life in a different way of working. How was that transition?

CH There's no preparation for that. I remember I was in Southampton and I bought an A4 diary from the WHSmith, just blank pages in it and I wrote down people to phone and to start to use my network to gain commissions or experiences and it was, and it still is, important. It was the ballet schools that came up first so English National Ballet School, RBS, Elmhurst and the Central School of Ballet, they came up first and I say now to any budding choreographer use those opportunities and I actually say to any choreographer that isn't budding, that's perhaps flowered still use those opportunities because they are the dancers you're going to be working with, that group of 16 to 18 or 19 years old, 2 to 3 years down the road, they're the dancers you're going to be working with and they accelerate through companies very quickly now, so I actually think it was a wonderful link to make early on and that those commissions with those schools were vital and they are still are today to me. The

Royal Conservatoire Scotland will be performing a work of mine at the end of this week Central Ballet they still do you work of mine same with ENBS and the Royal Ballet School. I like that connection it keeps my finger on the pulse.

GD: You said to me you saw Kenneth Macmillan come in at work with the Royal Ballet School and he didn't feel that was beneath him in any way.

CH Yes now I am experienced as a choreographer but also in directorship it's incredibly liberating to go into a room of people that listen to you. (laughter) not that my dancers don't but we know each other now so it's a different relationship.

GD: Ok so you made that decision, you had your A4 pad sitting there, you make the phone calls with schools and came up trumps. How did you get from working with the schools to company commissions first of all in the UK but also abroad? How did that start to come about?

CH Well Derek Deane was as good as his word and he commissioned a major work from me in my first year which turned out to be a full company work. I think he was quite sick of doing Etude which the company do brilliantly it is a marvellous work and I used to love dancing it but he wanted a new full tutu ballet and so I created Double Concerto which was to Poulenc's Double Piano Concerto and that really gave me a really good grounding. It was hugely successful work, it used the full forces of that company, a company I knew very very well so they were 40 people on stage which is fantastic and 28 tutu's which cost a fortune but I think really spring boarding from Double Concerto there were a lot of commissions that came out of that most notably my relationship with the Royal New Zealand Ballet which actually started with Matz Skoog who was a Festival Ballet dancer and I created my first major full works in New Zealand, which is really important and to be able to do that quietly on the other side of the world and learn what it is to craft a full evening.

Speaking about it reminds me of how important the Festival Ballet and then the English National Ballet was for me. When I won a prize from Kenneth MacMillan for composing some music, which I would dread to hear now, I was very proud to win as it was the inaugural year of the award and the prize was to be taken to see different forms of Theatre and concerts with Sir Kenneth and Lady MacMillan and myself, Chris Wheeldon, David Fielding and a few people went to see lots of different things and the ballet, typical of Kenneth Macmillan he didn't want to see the Royal Ballet. I think he knew we saw the Royal Ballet a lot and we had to access to it so he wanted us to see another company and it was the Festival Ballet and they did Etudes [and the third act of Anastasia with Lynn Seymour dancing, she hadn't done that role for a number of years, a really amazing moment. My first professional job was with English National Ballet I wouldn't know that until four years later and also my first major commission was from the English National Ballet it's really been a place that fostered my I thinking. It has been a wonderful springboard and going out to New Zealand and re engaging with Matz Skoog and later with Gary Harris another Festival Ballet dancer cemented that connection.

GD: I want to go back to Double Concerto because you said you had 40 dancers on stage and presumably you hadn't made anything of that scale before. How do you approach something that you have never done before in that way?

CH Yeah it wasn't as daunting as it might sound because the concept of Double Concerto was to show the classical pyramid and I divided the cast into the corps de ballet and principles and it was a pyramid and I wanted to show what a classical ballet company looks like in the modern era. The Corps de ballet actually dance as much as the principles that's what I really wanted to do, so dividing the score up as it's short it's only 24 minutes it wasn't too daunting and I had a wonderful cast including Daria Klimentova and I think the shortcut for me was that there was a group of people I knew incredibly well and they were with me so when I was creating the corps de ballet sections I knew how to work with them and how to make them look sensational.

I worked to their strengths so it wasn't too much of a tall order but I was surprised by its success, I really was. It's a score I love and I often use scores that are in my heart and soul but funnily enough it's quite sad actually, once I create work I can't ever listen to it again, if it comes on the radio I just switch it off I don't want to hear it. I think it's because I inhabited it so much and heard it hundreds and hundreds of times and the movement has sprung from the composition and once it's been created it's almost as if it has been exorcised from me and I don't really need to engage with it again.

GD: Do you regret that?

CH No only that my listening list gets shorter and shorter! (laughter)

GD: Are you actively looking out for pieces of music by composers you don't know on the off the chance of something might be out there?

CH That is my life now, that's the way I rock and roll. I always have music on in the background I am always listening, always wanting to hear new composers of different music or even new recordings of old works because that can often shine a light on music in a different way, so in a way that's my default setting and occupational hazard.

GD: Are there types of music, structures of music or instruments which you won't touch?

CH Music Concrete¹. I have yet to get into and it's had its time and when I was a student and I was studying choreography with Norman Morris and David Drew I was into Stockhausen and John Cage and I would bore Norman stupid, I dread to think what he thought. He must have thought "Get out of my office." I think Music Concrete needed to happen but it's a dead end. It fascinates me that music and actually dance in some respects, that we are creatures of habit and search for form and structure and as we are creators our duty is to expand and to push the boundaries into a muddle and confuse and to show a different light but always ultimately to have some some truth in the middle of it that someone could find a way to, and so Music Concrete doesn't do that for me.

¹ **Musique concrète** (French pronunciation: [\[myzik kɔ̃.kʁɛt\]](#), meaning "concrete music")^[nb.1] is a form of *musique expérimentale* ([experimental music](#) ([Palombini 1998](#), 542)^[not in citation given]) that exploits [acousmatic listening](#), meaning sound identities can often be intentionally obscured or appear unconnected to their source cause. It can feature [sounds](#) derived from recordings of [musical instruments](#), the [human voice](#), and the natural environment as well as those created using [synthesizers](#) and computer-based [digital signal processing](#). Compositions in this idiom are not restricted to the normal musical rules of [melody](#), [harmony](#), [rhythm](#), [metre](#), and so on.

GD: What about existing scores, where perhaps you seen other choreographers, is that difficult then to put those out of your mind and just listen to it ?

CH It's really difficult I've done three major works that other choreographers have done. Romeo and Juliet, the Nutcracker and Cinderella. Romeo and Juliet was one of the hardest because the Macmillan version is so ingrained in my consciousness. I mean it was so hard to step out from underneath that history and that shadow, I did it in the end, at the third time and I took out anything that had an accent. I think I was getting better at saying what I meant and you know we all speak with an accent, we all draw with something learned, we have learned behaviour and I don't discredit anyone that has the Macmillanesque or Forsythian look to their work, you know we all have to come from somewhere.

Nutcracker was difficult in a different way, actually it was the critics that couldn't get out from under the Nutcracker shadow, it was quite evident we were trying to do something very different and I think it didn't work the first time round I think we got there after a while and some critics did as well.

Interestingly the audience always did. And that fascinated with me as a journey because it was an incredibly painful experiences as the creator and why I'm so glad I've been through it because I've understood what it feels like when you're not valued or liked.

It helped me to understand criticism and its place and value but it's very hard as a creator to find your way through it, it was probably the most extreme time I've been through and not just for myself. It was often going in the next day to face the company who have worked so hard and enjoyed the production very much and helping them to understand that I understood, that would be the most difficult situation.

Cinderella was the third one and it went like that chronologically and was probably the most joyous. I loved it. I was always better at telling a story and I trusted myself, I love doing humour and I like to laugh a lot in the studio. I mean it's not like a comedy store but I find there's something about a sense of humour in work that's vital and when its missing I'm disturbed, it upsets me as a human being. I can feel myself feeling very disturbed it's not natural to not have some sense of fun or lightness or sense of humour and it doesn't need to be there all the time by any stretch, but I've been in those rooms in studios where there isn't a sense of humour and I'm suspicious, it doesn't feel like there's an honesty in the room. It helps artists face difficult challenges it helps the creator unblock sometimes and it shows immense trust to everyone in the room and that's not just the dancers but the technical support, the stage managers, your artistic staff and allows everyone and it allows everyone in for a moment and with Cinderella I really had that and we flew with it. Some of the sisters solos and their backstories which I so enjoyed creating I was worried that when it premiered I should have called it The Two Ugly Sisters and Cinderella in brackets.

GD: And the last thing about music, what about commissioned scores?

CH I went through a stage of feeling quite guilty of not using commissioned scores there are great writers out there but to be true to myself the way I create I just need to live in the music so much before I even have an idea, it is an unusual amount of time I listen to the music before starting to work. Poulenc, now if he were alive were alive I would happily commission work from him.

I do like to challenge myself I'm 44 I could do some more work hopefully that's something I can embrace.

AM Who would you choose if you could commission a score?

CH Poulenc, now if he were alive were alive I would happily commission work from him.

Nico Muhly, I discovered his work about 5 years ago I like who he is I like what he does I follow him on Twitter and he is a guy with a great sense of humour, I can't hear humour in his music but I hear movement in his music and I hear a sense of space and that leaves room for the listener which I think is really important.

Audience Member: Two of my favourite works of yours are Hansel and Gretel and Le Corsaire, are there any plans to bring these works down south?

CH: Thanks. I am glad you enjoyed them. I'm very conscious when we get the opportunity to present Scottish Ballet, at Sadler's Wells and the other theatres here that we need to be showcasing what differentiates us from other companies.

I would love the one I would love is Hansel and Gretel that particular work came about it was my first full-length work for Scottish Ballet and it was borne out of wanting to bring our education department right into the heart of what we do. Artistically it was a massive research project and I used the education department as a research tool to inform the production, and it was a year-long research with all ages and cradle to grave. I split the story up and worked with lots of different groups, so I very proud of that work because it came about by different means. This visit to Sadler's Wells is a double bill. We're doing Emergence by Crystal Pite and MC 14/22 (Ceci est mon corps) by Angelin Preljocaj, this double bill is really Scottish Ballet, it is our differentiator.

I commissioned David Dawson to do Swan Lake. David's work is visceral, challenging to dancers and they always end up better dancers having danced his work. I knew we wouldn't get cut-out trees and a prince with gold brocade; we were going to get a conceptual Swan Lake and our audiences are really ready for that, they embrace that, they trust us.

When we came down to London with Romeo and Juliet, which was a decision that predated my directorship, and if I'm honest I wasn't that keen on the decision, although it was a lovely Romeo and Juliet because this city has Romeo and Juliet's for days and I just wanted this current visit to be much more representative of who we are as a company.

But if I was pushed, Swan Lake and Hansel and Gretel would be the ones I would bring down

AM: I'm pleased you mentioned Double Concerto I really loved it, is that the property of the English National Ballet?

CH: It's a bit of both is the answer. Most companies that commission a work have the rights in perpetuity so English National Ballet have the rights, but the rights revert back to me after a few years. I also have the right to perform my own ballets

AM Have you considered doing this work again?

CH Yes I have considered it. The Royal Swedish Ballet did it and another company in the antipodes is looking to do it. I thought about it, we are currently just a little bit too small we are currently 36 dancers Crystals work needs 36 dancers in it and my work has 40 dancers. I am increasing the size of the company to 40 dancers in the next couple of years.

GD: Now looking at your decision to move into directorship and running your own company when was the first germ of the idea how long did it take before came to fruition?

CH That is an easy answer, it was around 2010 and I had created a lovely network of companies to be creating for and I was being asked back, which is always a good thing. I was starting to get to know the directors and the Dancers and more importantly the guts of the company and I was often asked my opinion and was happy to be asked for input and I was learning a great deal about different styles of leadership and different ways of directing companies.

GD: Your opinion on what?

CH Strategizing mostly, what do you think of this person? Do you think we should bring this back? General stuff and you would shoot the breeze, when you are 3 months with the director creating a new work you just sort of chew the fat because my work stretched from New Zealand to Europe to London to Atlanta it was a great learning curve like being at the University of Artistic Hard Knocks.

I was really getting to see how different companies were facing the same challenges and I started to see that there was a lot of isolationism in people's thinking and as a keen traveller and going back to my time with Anatoli Grigoriev and my time of the ENB just knowing how much you can learn from other cultures and from other people, I started to see the leadership role could be of interest because it would allow me to lead creatively, so transferring my creativity as a choreographer into something more meaningful and impactful for the profession.

I'm also quite aware as a choreographer I've got a very particular voice and very particular skill but I know where others do better than me and I know where others strengths are as well and I was starting to see that I needed to not keep creating work eternally which is what I started to feel like I was doing and I just wanted some space and some time to reflect but still to work with dancers. So it felt like a natural pull if you like you just felt like I was being pulled somewhere and a couple of opportunities came up and one unsuccessful and one successful and unsuccessful one was really great experience for me and there was the successful one and so here I am.

GD: I mean it sounds awfully easy but what was your approach then as a potential director what was it you were looking to do and to bring to the table?

CH Well the first and most important thing was to not just become an artistic director at any cost. It needed to be a company that I felt would be the right fit with my strengths and with their strengths. So I wasn't interested in going for lots and lots of different directorships although they don't come up often to be fair.

With the two companies I was engaging with one was Royal New Zealand ballet and I have some real connection with them but interestingly Scottish ballet came up, very similar size,

very similar demographic in terms of the population, it's about 4 million and so is New Zealand there were some amazing parallels and so some of the desires I had to impact on the Royal New Zealand ballet were very transferable to the Scottish ballet and I could see that there was more opportunity to lead creatively with Scottish Ballet as I learnt more about them.

The other factor was that I was doing a lot of guest teaching and I'm from that generation where if you're good at something that's what you're good at, and it's a very British mentality if you're good at something you excel if you're good at two or three things you must be bad at one of them and that's how it felt and I used to describe teaching as my guilty secret until I went to America. I taught class to get to know the Dancers and word got round and people just engaged me to teach as well as choreograph and I thought that's a really valuable commodity and something that inspires me and why should it be secret? I love that, I really enjoy seeing people succeed and I love that connection with the Dancers and it keeps you connected with what's coming up and it keeps you connected with and enabling those that are transitioning in their careers. So I harnessed that in 2010 I have a few strings to my bow not just one and that's where a leadership role resonated.

GD: Were you looking for somewhere in the UK?

CH: I know what companies of that size can do, so between 36 and 40 dancers the companies are quite different beasts to companies with 15 or 20 dancers and they certainly are different to those with over 60 dancers. I'm at that point in my career I felt I could probably handle that size that's what felt right as a fit.

GD: So really you did your homework about Scottish Ballet. What was the attraction of that company that it looks as if you'll be a good fit? Why was it good for you?

CH: It needed direction. It was Ashley Page who had really put it back on the map. It was not a particularly happy ending for Ashley and Scottish ballet, but there was still a company there that needed some direction and that needed that creativity to be built upon with everything achieved during Ashley Page's directorship and that's what excited me. I knew that as a choreographer and as a director I'm very different to Ashley and I felt that that was probably what that company needed at that time.

GD: So in terms of what you said that as a choreographer and as a director, the path that you haven't chosen is for Scottish ballet to be the Christopher Hampson show. You haven't gone down that path, were you tempted or is that just not something you would do?

CH: It was actually part of my proposition to the board to massively increase the creative exposure of the company, and that was a great interest to them and to me because you can learn so much from other creators. When you're freelance it's a terribly lonely profession, we don't really hang out and watch each other's rehearsals although you might do if you're in an opera house but we are quite solitary creatures so although we all see each other and all know each other it is an isolated place.

I was excited to be able to invite creators in and see how they impact on the company and to let them form the company with me and I know creatively where I can fit into the Repertory and where others can fit in better.

GD: What was your shopping list as a new director?

CH: Even in my interview I arrived with Crystal Pite and Highland Fling by Matthew Bourne, when I put in my list together of who I would like to engage with creatively for Scottish Ballet, Matthew Bourne was top of my list. He has changed the face of dance in this country it is inarguable that he has and yet wasn't placed in any major repertory at all.

Now I don't think that's the fault of directors, I think Matthews actually quite proud and rightly so of his achievements and his company achievements but I really wanted to cement his place within a balletic narrative. and what better place than Highland Fling for Scottish Ballet so I met with Matthew and very nervously said "You know, would you consider letting us do Highland Fling?" and he listened to me rattle on for 20 minutes and he said "Yes ok."

He qualified it with some stipulations but he knew Scottish ballet and we could offer 6 to 8 weeks of only doing Highland fling so no other ballets being rehearsed and really going into the characterization, writing the script and storyboarding with each of the different casts. We have three casts not 1, 2 or 3 we had haggis, neaps and tatties and it is also the trust in the not allowing one cast to come up against another in the creative process Scottish Ballet lends itself to that sort of working just by the nature and size that we are, it's not as applicable in some other companies but it was the trust he had in me as we've known each other for many years but also the trust in the process. He knew I was very respectful of his process so coming with those two choreographers was really vital but also reaching out to the independent sector which I do quite often as well.

GD: So exploring the Independent sector, how would you define the Independent sector?

CH within Scotland there is a fantastic independent sector of choreographers who rely on arts council funding which is run by Creative Scotland.

I think any funded organisation is funded in order to take risk and I take that duty very seriously. Though as an Independent choreographer you get funding from creative Scotland it's a small pot and they're all after the same money.

What we're able to do able is open our doors as a company to allow them into work with our dancers and to do research and development. We now work with lovely Mark Brew and he did a fabulous integrated work where we teamed up with Indepen-dance.

It is an integrated dance company and they came to work with us for a couple of months and we created a work which was premiered at the Dance International Glasgow festival

We work with Jack Webb wonderful choreography and Sophie Laplane our newly appointed in-house choreographer.

In Scotland there is a very strong weighting towards inclusive dance, so those with physical challenges or learning challenges work with choreographers and dancers. It's a really huge area and I love seeing our dancers engaging with that group within a creative process.

When we worked with Indepen-dance we were working with two guys and they did my class which was their first class. I didn't drive them away and we were together for a couple of months. I could see my dancers learning and vice versa. I love that idea of shared learning and learning together at the same speed and what that creates, so I am passionate about that and what I tend to do in Scotland is we will do double bills because I believe the triple bill I feel very nearly dead outside of London.

I always introduce them from the stage I just talk about the theme is or what the audience might look for between the two works and in the last few years I've just given a little surprise and it's normally an independent choreographers' work but maybe just 5 or 10 minutes just to showcase their work and they will come on tour with us and it's been fascinating to see audiences watching work they probably wouldn't buy ticket for.

The last one we did was by Jack Webb called "Drawn to Drone". It's the most beautiful work, it was for a male and he sits in a chair and puts another chair behind his chair and he just rocks back like to fall out of the chair and the chair lands on the other chair and he's left in limbo and just does the most beautiful solo, never getting out of a chair, it's seven minutes long and it is mesmeric and it brings the house down every time but if I put that on a poster "man in chair dancing solo" I'm not so sure they would buy a ticket.

GD: I want to ask about the past in terms of the present. You're part of the national celebration of Kenneth Macmillan in the autumn I'd like to explore that a little bit but also what your thoughts are about the heritage of Scottish Ballet, and Peter Darrell in particular.

CH This is a wonderful opportunity that we have at the Royal Opera House to be performing at Covent Garden which we are really thrilled about but more so to be recreating the *Le Baiser de la Fée*. This is a work that has had only one other revival.

Lady Macmillan allowed me to watch old recordings of those original dancers in the 1960s in black and white films and it's fascinating for me to watch this work as a choreographer and I sit there going "There's Manon, there's Mayerling." Just tiny tiny glimpse of the moves, it is the way the Donald MacLeay will just grab the other leg not the obvious leg and she flips and you go he uses that so much later on.

It's a wonderful work because it allows us to see the genesis of some of his work. It's been redesigned by Gary Harris. The original staging and I dare say even though the 1980s reproduction looks dated, we do things differently now it was very front cloth heavy it was like *Romeo and Juliet*, very transitional with breaks. We have opened it out so it's a bit more seamless and less stop start it is the only slight adaptation. We are very privileged to have Donald McLeay coming out to coach the principle dancers and it's been danced from the original Benesh notation by Diana Curry from the 1960s notation and that's really exciting.

GD: And was that choice of ballet it was that yours?

CH: I had spoken with Deborah about it. We'd just done *Elite Syncopations* which was great fun and we did enjoy doing it and we got great notices for it, but again what is our differentiator. I'm acutely aware that on this very small island that we live on, there's a lot of Macmillan's work around and why should we produce another *Concerto*. You know there's an opportunity for company of our size to explore smaller works and the earlier works.

GD: And the Peter Darrell heritage?

CH: So one of the things I did do was bring back his Nutcracker, it's a gem. It's a chamber Nutcracker, absolutely beautiful and I went to see Philip Prowse and I met him in Canary Wharf and I said we are looking to do it. His designs are iconic and sumptuous, it reminds me of all my ballet annuals I had when I was a kid. I said to Philip that I'd like to bring it back and we're just going to tighten it up a bit, which we've spoken to the Peter Darrell Trust about, but it does need redesigning, the materials we can use now are so much better, "Are you interested in redesigning it?" though I actually thought he wouldn't be and I had someone in mind and I was so grateful when he said "Oh my dear boy I haven't got another ballet in me." So I commissioned Lez Brotherston who was actually a pupil of his, Lez did a fantastic job and I said to Lez, we need to give Scotland what they remember, it's not about being precise and honestly if I gave Scotland what was created in 1973 it would not have flown, it needed a fresh look at it and Lez was so tender and respectful to Philip's original design so that it is what people will remember.

So I'm really proud of that, I work closely with the Darrell Trust and am trying to identify lots of opportunities to bring his work back and we have recreated some of his key small works.

One major work is Tales of Hoffmann, I have an aspiration to bring it back and it's a wonderful work. Noriko Hara, who's a former principal dancer with Scottish ballet recreated it in Tokyo and I went across to Tokyo to see it and do you know it's beautiful, it is stunning, it has got some wonderful dancing in it, really hard dancing for the men when you think when it was created, it has really strong dancing for the male dancers and some stunning storytelling is very funny, it's very sad all at the same time and if it comes back to us it needs to be in a way that we should see it today. So I'm still working on how that might manifest itself and but I love that Peter Darrell was all about new works and I feel with carrying on that legacy we've worked with well over 30 choreographers in the last 5 years, we did a very cheeky one which is the Edinburgh festival where we produced 10 world premieres in 4 days so I did do a bit of a fast track marathon, but we have created a huge amount of world premieres and we have just engaged with our first digital season. It's the first time of ballet companies ever launched a purely digital season, I think Peter Darrell would like that. He was the one of the first to really engage with television, you just look at those fabulous works he did like the one on Les Biches you know Matthew Bourne bows down to it as it really was the precursor to Play without Words.

GD: Are there any questions yes

AM: Two works stand out, Beauty and the Beast and a much earlier work Darrells "Mods and Rockers which could live again.

CH: Mods and Rockers had The Beatles track but we couldn't use their music today. Peter Darrell was again was right there on it. Elaine McDonald told her mother "I thought it would

all be ballet but it's not, it's really not” and it was Peter Darrell trying to get the company to move in a much more realistic way.

Audience Member: Could you say a little bit about Streetcar Named Desire as it was one of the best ballets I've ever seen?

CH: Street Car is one of our most enduring works it's been very successful, a fantastic commission with theatre director Nancy Meckler and choreographer Annabelle Lopez Ochoa and it has done brilliantly. We have just done it in Los Angeles to rave reviews but we are street car'd out we've done it every year since 2012 but it is another great example of the company doing something different working with a theatre director and a choreographer.

That is a female choreographer doing a full length work with a female Theatre director, we have done work by Twyla Tharp, Kristen McNally, Sophie Laplane and Crystal Pite and this is all in the last 4 years. There is a very great need to hear different voices choreographically. I feel in Scotland we are doing it and ballet gets tarred with a London problem, it's not that people are not trying to do it but most companies are planning two to three years ahead when there's not visibility in one year its often a logistic problem.

I'm extremely proud that Scottish ballet has resolutely kept a very strong balance of you know not just male/female choreographers but choreographers from very different backgrounds with different abilities it's an exciting time when you embrace that kind of diversity because it brings even more creativity to the company

GD: It sounds as if, in addition to your own choreography being Artistic Director is a creative act?

CH: It was a surprising moment when I became Director of Scottish Ballet and I commissioned my first ballet. It nearly moved me to tears giving the commission because I know what that feels like, and it still moves me to this day when I say to a choreographer, I would like to commission something because I know what fireworks that sets off in the mind of a creator and it's so exciting as a journey and regardless of whether it works or doesn't work, it's the journey you're not just about to go on with the choreographer but the entire company, so new commissions are vital.

GD: And that is where we have to stop.