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# Late run to preserve genius's works

Launch of Frederick Ashton Foundation by the Royal Ballet

by [Ismene Brown](#) | Monday, 10 October 2011

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Cecil Beaton's 1950 portrait of Ashton, Margot Fonteyn and Robert Helpmann on the set of 'Apparitions'

Death concentrates the mind wonderfully, as they say. In the wake of the demise last week of Alexander Grant, who owned the choreographer Frederick Ashton's world-wide hit ballet *La fille mal gardée*, the Royal Ballet has announced that it is launching a foundation to "perpetuate the legacy and work" of the distinguished choreographer 23 years after his

*“Disputes frequently arise between ballet companies and*

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rightly, and none of the remaining choreographers have survived his death.

The situation of ownership is complicated. The bulk of Ashton's ballets, whether performable or not, are owned by his nephew, Anthony Russell-Roberts, formerly administrative director of the Royal Ballet. The choreographer left some of his (then) more popular ballets as financial gifts to close friends and artists including Margot Fonteyn and his principal male inspirations, Grant, Michael Somes and Anthony Dowell.

However, once the ballets become others' property their performing rights and financial benefit can be bequeathed to further heirs with no close connection to Ashton's work. It is not yet known to whom Grant bequeathed *La fille mal gardée*, which has become a globally performed and remunerative hit, requested around the world, nor *Façade*, his other bequest. *Cinderella*, another popular full-length ballet, is now owned by the widow of Michael Somes, Wendy Ellis Somes, along with *Symphonic Variations*. Fonteyn's ballets, *Ondine* and *Daphnis and Chloé*, passed to her sister-in-law via her brother.

Disputes frequently arise between ballet companies and the owners of ballets, who have the power to dictate production values and castings. In the past the Royal Ballet has had to yield artistic decisions to the Balanchine Trust and John Cranko's heirs over *Apollo* and *Onegin*. The late Ross Stretton, a former Royal Ballet director, faced a challenge from the widow of Kenneth MacMillan over his intentions for the performance of MacMillan ballets. The recent death of Roland Petit caused last-minute difficulties for English National Ballet with their Petit programme last summer at the London Coliseum.

An informal Ashton Trust already exists, yoking the rights holders together in intention. The Foundation is intended to add activity to the goodwill. Chaired by one of Ashton's heirs, Tony Dyson (*Monotones*, *Enigma Variations*), it will establish an online Ashton archive, through filming rehearsals, work in the studio, interviews and masterclasses with dancers associated with him, and collecting and cataloguing written and photographic testimony that will help in the future staging of ballets. The trustees include the Royal Ballet's current and future directors, Dame Monica Mason and Kevin O'Hare, and the director of Birmingham Royal Ballet, David Bintley.

While the body has some similarities in intention to the Balanchine Foundation in the US, it will not attempt to obtain the rights to the Ashton ballets from their inheritors - something that was achieved by agreement between Balanchine's heirs to preserve and pool his ballets for common benefit under strict licensing terms.

The Ashton Foundation's activities will be backed by the financier and chairman of the National Association of Pension Funds, Lindsay Tomlinson. Early planned events include a reconstruction of Ashton's 1932 *Foyer de danse*, to be shown at the Opera House in an "Insight Evening" on 2 November, the filming of a BRB rehearsal of *The Two Pigeons* in Birmingham (March 2012), and the filming of the Royal Ballet working on *La fille mal gardée* (April 2012). A DVD of Ashton's *Scènes de ballet*, divertissements and *Les patineurs* is to be released by Opus Arte next month.

- [Contact the Foundation's executive director Christopher Nourse](#)

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