

ELIOT SMITH DANCE

15TH ANNIVERSARY

2011–2026

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

“Being diagnosed with dyslexia when I was younger made me realise that dance was my language. I connected with movement in a way I didn’t always connect with words, and it remains a powerful part of how I communicate and express myself today.”

Eliot Smith

OUR STORY: 15 YEARS OF IMPACT

Fifteen years of Eliot Smith Dance is a story of ambition, determination, creativity and, above all, people and place.

Although ESD was officially established in January 2012, its story began a little earlier, with the premiere of my first major choreographic work, *MISSA*, at Westminster Cathedral on 16 February 2011.

Those early years were driven by determination, self-generated income and a passion for sharing contemporary dance. For our first five years, we toured village halls, community centres, memorial halls and church halls across Northumberland and Newcastle, reaching communities where access to the arts could be limited.

One audience member once said to me, “Are you aware of what you are doing? You need help. Let’s chat.”

That moment made me realise there was something much bigger to build.

By 2016, reaching people and places had become central to our mission. Over 15 years, we have worked with extraordinary dancers, choreographers, musicians, filmmakers, visual artists, writers, photographers, participants, communities, partners and educational settings; creating work inspired by history, place, people and contemporary life.

From community spaces to theatres, galleries, heritage sites and international stages, we have continued to explore what contemporary dance can be and where it can belong — often with limited resources, but always with belief in the work.

This anniversary celebrates the journey and everyone who has been part of it.

Fifteen years is a milestone, but it also feels like the beginning. There is still so much more to do.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. For believing in the work, sharing the journey and helping Eliot Smith Dance become what it is today.

The next chapter is already being choreographed.

Eliot Smith

Founding Creative Director & CEO

ABOUT ELIOT SMITH DANCE

Founded in 2011 by choreographer Eliot Smith, Eliot Smith Dance (ESD) is a contemporary dance company rooted in the North East of England and connected to audiences, artists and communities nationally and internationally. ESD is committed to becoming a nationally touring and sustainable contemporary dance company.

What began with the premiere of *MISSA* at Westminster Cathedral has grown into a company with a distinctive artistic voice and a commitment to making contemporary dance exciting, accessible and meaningful for everyone.

Over the past 15 years, ESD has created more than 30 original works, delivered over 200 performances and led more than 500 workshops and community engagements for children, young people and adults. From schools and community spaces across Northumberland to theatres and international stages, our work has reached audiences across the North East, London, New York, Rome, Paris and the region of North Denmark.

At the heart of ESD is a belief that dance can genuinely change lives, connect people, tell powerful stories and create opportunities for everyone to participate. Alongside our professional performances, we deliver workshops, education programmes, youth opportunities and community projects for people of all ages and levels of experience.

ESD's artistic work draws on Eliot's fascination with history, place, people and contemporary life, bringing together dance with music, film, visual art and storytelling.

Working often with limited budgets, ESD are committed to creating ambitious, high-quality work through collaboration, creativity and resourcefulness. ESD are committed to sustainable and responsible ways of working, including environmental practice and international partnerships. ESD received the inaugural Green Dance Award at the annual One Dance UK Awards in 2022 and has subsequently staged works by world-leading contemporary choreographers including Paul Taylor and Sir Robert Cohan; alongside developing and commissioning new work by emerging and established artists.

Our 15th anniversary is not only a celebration of the past, but a moment to look forward. ESD will continue working towards becoming a nationally touring and sustainable contemporary dance company, creating ambitious new work, nurturing the

next generation of artists and strengthening our relationships with communities across the North East.

Alongside this, ESD's 10-Year Vision aims to contribute to establishing Northumberland as a global destination for dance with regional partners, creating new opportunities for artists, communities and audiences.

The future is already in motion.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Dance has been part of my life for as long as I can remember, so being involved with Eliot Smith Dance has always felt like much more than simply taking on a governance role.

What struck me about ESD was its combination of artistic ambition and a genuine belief that dance should be for everyone. This is a company that can bring exceptional contemporary dance to a theatre or major cultural venue, but is equally committed to taking it into communities and creating opportunities for people who might never otherwise see themselves as part of the world of dance.

As Chair, I have been privileged to see behind the performances: the determination, creativity and sheer hard work that goes into sustaining an independent dance company. I have also seen Eliot's extraordinary commitment to the company, the artists he works with and the communities ESD serves.

There is so much to be proud of after fifteen years. More than 30 original works, hundreds of performances and workshops, international connections and collaborations with some of the most respected names in contemporary dance are significant achievements.

But, for me, ESD's impact cannot only be measured in numbers. It can also be seen in the people who have been given an opportunity, discovered something in themselves, felt welcomed into dance or had their stories and communities reflected through movement.

And that is why I am excited about what comes next.

My hope is that ESD continues to grow in ambition, reach and recognition without losing the thing that makes it special: its roots in the North East and its belief in the power of dance to connect people.

Fifteen years deserves to be celebrated. But I have a feeling that some of Eliot Smith Dance's most exciting chapters are still to come.

Steph Edusei

Chair of Eliot Smith Dance

A MESSAGE FROM THE FRIENDS REPRESENTATIVE

It was on a bleak autumn evening at the Settlement Theatre in Spennymoor that I first encountered the gifted performers of Eliot Smith Dance. Their storytelling through choreography made an immediate and lasting impression on me. Having spent forty years living near London and enjoying easy access to the performing arts, I never expected to discover work of such exceptional quality so close to my original hometown.

The evening was also remarkably accessible for contemporary dance, and a post-show discussion gave me the opportunity to speak with Eliot and the dancers. That conversation was a revelation, and I knew then that I wanted to become involved as a Friend, later following in the footsteps of Helen Redfern as Friends Representative.

I have been proud to support the company and contribute where I can, including creating the ESD Archive at ESD's invitation. Now updated monthly in both physical and digital formats, it has become a living record of the company's performances, achievements and growing legacy. It has been a privilege to document the extraordinary talent, dedication and generosity that have shaped ESD over the past fifteen years.

The archive also reflects a company committed not only to creating outstanding work, but to nurturing the next generation through children's and youth workshops, work experience, apprenticeships, professional training and collaborations with world-class choreographers. From village halls and libraries to major theatres, ESD continues to enrich the cultural life of the North East and beyond.

My hope is that others will get to know and support the future of Eliot Smith Dance. I look forward to seeing the company's vision unfold and watching ESD continue to educate, inspire and entertain audiences for many years to come.

The world deserves to experience the skill, imagination and storytelling that make Eliot Smith Dance such a unique force in contemporary dance.

Tony Loughlin

Friends Representative

Friends of ESD

A COMMUNITY DANCER'S PERSPECTIVE

I first heard about ESD in 2024 when Eliot was looking to create a new piece of work entitled *Haway The Lasses* to be performed at Woodhorn Museum by a community cast to celebrate the important role of women during the Miner's Strike of 1984–1985.

This resonated with me so much personally that I was compelled to apply for a place in the community cast.

The performance took place within the museum directly under the original *Haway The Lasses* banner, and the emotions, memories and poignancy of that day continues to remain with me.

Since then I have had the privilege to perform with ESD in *Forest* celebrating the late Robert Cohan, and *Sea of Red Dancers* as part of *Poppy*, and I am about to join Eliot and my fellow community cast dancers on his new piece of work which will be based on the Pitmen paintings.

Being involved in the community cast has given me an amazing opportunity to work with ESD, meet other lovely dancers, share the whole process of creating new and inspiring work together, and performing some incredible pieces of dance. I feel very lucky to have been a small part of this.

As a community cast dancer I can honestly say that Eliot offers the warmest of welcomes to being part of ESD, he is so respectful, encouraging, thoughtful and appreciative to each and every one of us.

Joan Watson

Community Dancer / Participant

THE WORKS

Presented at The Common Room, Newcastle upon Tyne
for *Vision in Motion: 15 Years of Eliot Smith Dance*

Thursday 24 September 2026

PITMAN (The Miner)

Choreographer: Eliot Smith

Dancer: Harry Wilson

Music: *They Being Dead Yet Speaketh* — Jóhann Jóhannsson

First Performed: 10 November 2016, Newbiggin Maritime Centre, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea

Notes: Inspired by Harry Wilson's painting *The Miner*, created by one of the founding members of the Ashington Group.

ON RED KITES — Excerpt

Choreographer: Eliot Smith

Dancers: Amy Becke and Yamit Salazar

Music: *II. Adagio (Violin Concerto in D / Violin Sonata No. 3 in D minor)* — Johannes Brahms

First Performed: 26 November 2019, The Glasshouse, Gateshead

Notes: A work for four dancers, *ON RED KITES* embodies the spirit and movement of one of the UK's most magnificent birds — the Red Kite.

BLOOM — Excerpt

Choreographer: Yamit Salazar

Dancers: Amy Becke, Olivia Kirk, Yamit Salazar and Harry Wilson

Music: *El Sanjuanero (Cuerdas Colombianas)* and *Mapale (Toto La Momposina)*

First Performed: 4 July 2021, Gosforth Civic Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne

Notes: A work for four dancers, *BLOOM* explores the meaning and cultural significance of Colombia's annual Festival of Flowers.

WITH THANKS

Eliot Smith Dance gratefully acknowledges the individuals, organisations, funders, partners and supporters who have helped shape our journey over the past fifteen years. Too many to name individually, but every contribution has been valued and appreciated.

PUBLIC FUNDING

Arts Council England

LOCAL AUTHORITY

Ashington Town Council
Newbiggin-by-the-Sea Town Council
Newcastle City Council
Northumberland County Council

TRUSTS AND FOUNDATIONS

The Archbishop Romero Trust
Catherine Cookson Charitable Trust
Community Foundation
Jesuits Fund in Britain
Emma Newton Fund
Porticus UK

CORPORATE

Akzo Nobel
Sinton Law Solicitors
Northern Jewellers of Ashington

PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

Alnwick Playhouse
Ashington Group Trustees
Yasmin Basra
The Barre Studios
Billingham International Dance Festival
The Bowes Museum
Sir Robert Cohan Dance Legacy
Dance City
Dominican Friars
Gateway Studios
Adam Johnson
Elijah McDonnell
Martha Graham Center of Contemporary Dance
Newcastle College
Paul Taylor Dance Foundation
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
Sound Ideas Media
Westminster Cathedral
Warkworth Memorial Hall
Woodhorn Museum | North East Museums

And the many theatres, community centres, libraries and other spaces across the North East and beyond that have welcomed our work.

INDIVIDUALS

June Atkinson
Lynda Clough
Richard Chen See
Darren Irwin
Gildas Parry
Pat Pierpoint
Florence Smith
Jason Thompson
Kenneth Olumuyiwa Tharp CBE

Dominic White OP
David E. Young

And all those who pledged their support through ESD's Crowdfunder and Kickstarter campaigns, as well as donors who wish to remain anonymous.

FRIENDS OF ESD

Our sincere thanks to the Friends of Eliot Smith Dance, past and present, whose generosity, encouragement and belief in the company have supported our journey:

Carol Ainslie
June Atkinson
Mary Barber
Pam Clarke
Gareth Davies
Judith Davies
LL Dawson
David Goodacre
John Horsfield
Sue Jenkins
Karen Lanceley
Tony Loughlin
Gillian Mayne
Sabena Monk
Kevin Moore
David Newton
Rachel Osborne-Jones
Dawn Potkins
Angela Reay
Helen Redfern
Joyce Richardson
Christine Svenson
Carol Wilson

HONOURING THE MEMORY OF AND WITH GRATITUDE TO

Robert Crane and June Svenson.

WITH SPECIAL THANKS

Eliot Smith Dance extends its special thanks to Judi & Gareth Davies and Tony Loughlin for their generosity, support and belief in *Vision in Motion*, helping us to celebrate fifteen years of the company.

Our deepest thanks to the many dancers, choreographers, artists and creatives who have contributed to the life and work of Eliot Smith Dance over the past fifteen years.

From performers and choreographers to musicians, composers, filmmakers, rehearsal director, photographers, videographers, designers and collaborators, each has brought their own talent, perspective and imagination to the company.

We also extend our sincere thanks to our current and former Board members, whose guidance, commitment and support have helped shape the organisation, and to our Patrons and Principal Patron, The Duchess of Northumberland.

A COMMUNITY PARTNER'S PERSPECTIVE

Working with ESD is a wonderful opportunity for our community at Converge Northumbria.

Through dance and performance, we've seen students step out of their comfort zones and discover creative possibilities they hadn't imagined for themselves.

For some, it's been a chance to build confidence and find a genuine creative outlet; for others, a form of expression that has quietly supported their mental health and wellbeing.

What we value most is the openness of the relationship, the willingness to enable and support students to engage with

something new, sometimes unfamiliar, and see where it takes them.

ESD brings real warmth and possibility to the community we work with, and we are privileged to work with ESD — long may it continue.

Ally Hunter-Byron

Director

Converge, Northumbria University

A DANCER'S REFLECTION

"I've always felt seen at ESD and valued as a company member and as an artist. I'm grateful for all the opportunities I've had here and to where they have led me."

Adam Davies

Dancer

PUBLICATION INFORMATION

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