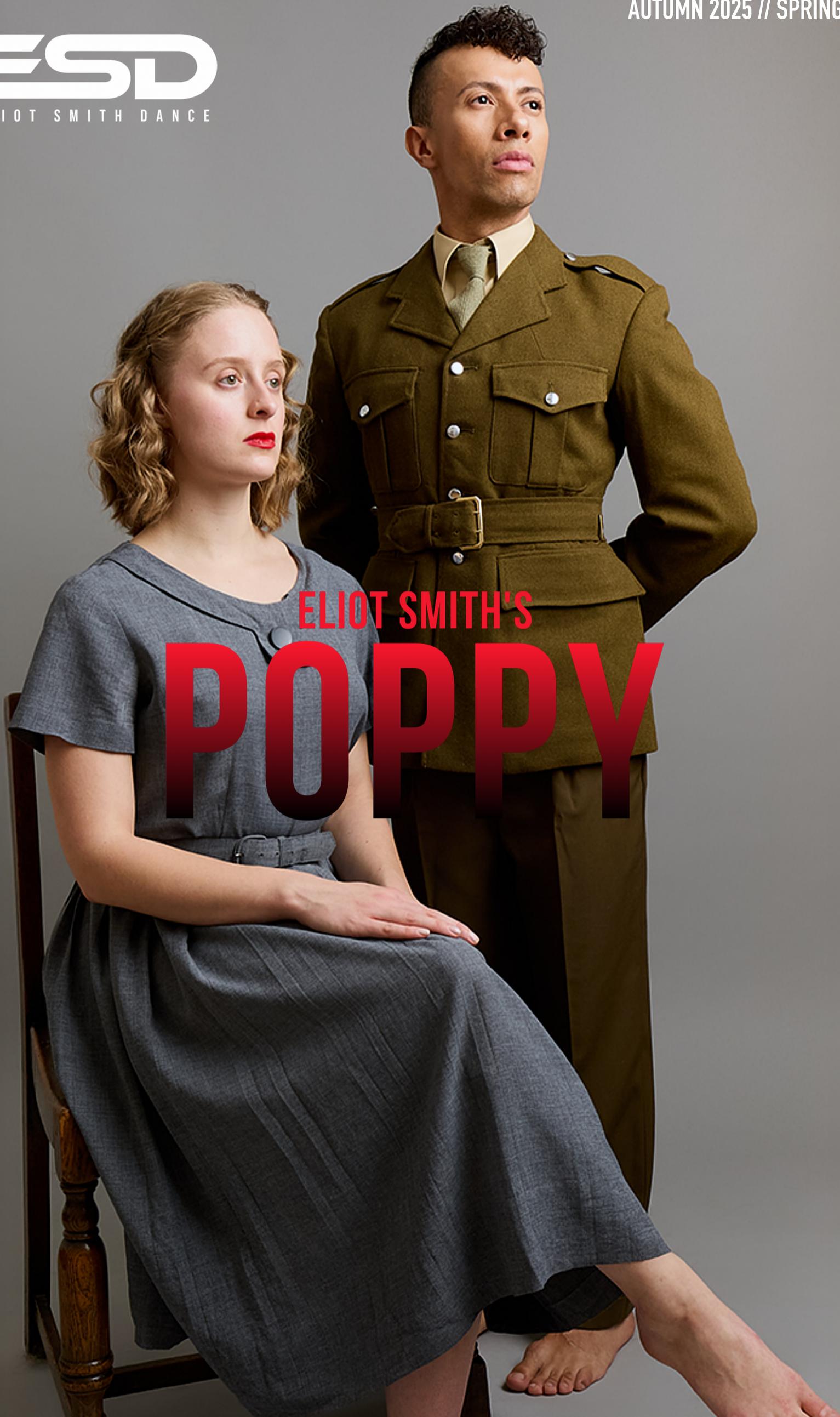


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ESD
ELIOT SMITH DANCE

AUTUMN 2025 // SPRING 2026



ELIOT SMITH'S
POPPY



WELCOME



© Photographer Steve Brock

Welcome to Eliot Smith Dance Autumn 2025 – Spring 2026 Season

I'm delighted to welcome the return of my work, *POPPY*, as part of this season's programme.

Originally choreographed and premiered at The Glasshouse (formerly Sage Gateshead) in 2018, *POPPY* has been newly reimagined for 2025. Featuring an original score by multi-award-winning composer Adam Johnson, the work draws on the enduring symbolism of the poppy flower.

This new interpretation is also inspired by illustrations from *The Art of World War II* by John Noott. As global conflicts continue to shape our world and the UK recently marked 80 years since Victory in Europe (VE) Day, I hope *POPPY* serves as a poignant tribute to remembrance, resilience, and the human cost of war.

We're proud to present this work with a phenomenal cast of five exceptional dancers, whose passion and technical brilliance are sure to leave a lasting impression.

As we look ahead to 2026, Eliot Smith Dance will be celebrating its 15th anniversary. I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported the Company over the years — your encouragement has been vital to our journey. If you're able to continue supporting our work, we would be incredibly grateful for any donations. To learn how you can help support the continued development of this unique company, please visit: www.eliotsmithdance.com/support

My heartfelt thanks to Arts Council England and Alnwick Playhouse for their generous support, as well as to Woodhorn Museum, North East Museums, Friends of ESD, our donors, and our touring venues.

Thank you for joining us. I hope you enjoy the performance.

Warm wishes,
Eliot Smith
CEO & Founding Creative Director



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CREATIVES AND CREDITS

ELIOT SMITH DANCE

in association with
ALNWICK PLAYHOUSE

present

ELIOT SMITH'S **POPPY**

Creator and Choreographer
ELIOT SMITH

Dancers

AMY BECKE STEFANOS DIMOULAS DANIEL JAMES
YAMIT SALAZAR KARISHMA YOUNG

Rehearsal Director
YAMIT SALAZAR

Composer
ADAM JOHNSON

Musicians

SARA DOWLING (Vocals) **JOHN GARNER** (Violin)
ADAM JOHNSON (Piano & Vocals) **LUIZA LALE** (Saxophone)
JESSICA LEE (Clarinet) **GABRIEL WAITE** (Cello)

Costume and Set Design
ELIOT SMITH

Lighting Designer
ANDY HUNT

SCENES

Scene 1

Farewell, My Love

Duration 8 minutes

Scene 2

Becoming Men of War

Duration 8 minutes

Scene 3

Haunted Ground

Duration 6 minutes

Scene 4

Poppies Grow

Duration 4 minutes

Scene 5

When the War Was Over

Duration 6 minutes

Scene 6

In Her Arms Again

Duration 3 minutes

LYRCIS

Scene 1

Poppy (Words & Music by Adam Johnson)

When Gertrude's eyes are flashin' by my side
She's dancin' wild and wild, she's swirlin' girl and child,
And when the lights are blazin', she's a-serenadin',
She's a smilin' siren, she's a flamin' whirl!

Through the moonlight there's a distant bell,
And with its casting spell, we're hoping all is well.
In these moments fear is far away,
But "every passing day alludes us" — some others say.

Then we cuddle up beside the fire,
And what we might desire could take us nice and high.
Bring me closer to your warm embrace —
That's where I belong.

Keep on dancin', every man and boy,
And keep us smilin' through the bad times.
Dance with joy! You'll find that when you do —
(And while it's up to you)
We'll be right next to you,
And lovin' all the day through!

Scene 2

"Oh, you who are climbing the mountain..." (Ya talein Ein el Jabal)

To those of you who are climbing the mountain —
To those of you who are lighting the fire —
[The Resistance. The Revolution.]

Amid my melody of Yaman Yaman (an Ottoman singing style),
I tell you:
You are the most important thing for my soul.

I only want this gazelle to know:
This prison will not last.
Amid my melody of Yaman Yaman,
I tell you again:
You are the most important thing for my soul.

Scene 3

The Fibonacci Series (in German)
1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89

"Written in pencil in a sealed railway car"

By Dan Pagis — used with kind permission from The Jewish Publication Society

Here, in this carload
I am Eve, with my son Abel.
If you see my older boy Cain,
(Son of Adam)
Tell him that I...

REFLECTION



Eliot Smith in rehearsal © Photographer ESD

Before rehearsals for this new version of *POPPY*, I visited Auschwitz—a profoundly moving experience that deepened my understanding of remembrance and the human cost of war. It became a source of reflection that shaped the emotional direction of the work.

In my research, I interviewed service personnel whose stories of loss, resilience, and survival grounded *POPPY* in real human experience. I also explored *The Art of World War II* by John Noot and spent time at the Imperial War Museum, immersing myself in the histories and personal accounts of those who lived through conflict.

This reimagined *POPPY* follows one couple through World War II—an intimate journey through love, separation, fear, hope, and remembrance. At its heart is a powerful new score by multi-award-winning composer Adam Johnson, whose music has shaped the tone and emotional arc of the piece.

As war and conflict continue to affect lives today, *POPPY* stands as both reflection and reminder—a call for compassion, connection, and shared humanity. My hope is that audiences not only witness this story, but feel part of it.

— **Eliot Smith**

In this piece I have tried to interweave universal musical themes (and references we already carry) into this hugely varied score.

Beginning the journey with a 1940's swing, delving into a rifle stuttered Act 2 with a concluding Palestinian folk song, to next envisaging a “death metal” Rammstein-inspired Act 3, we are then transported out of war back to where we began.

The piece intentionally finishes with something of a question mark.

I am grateful to all our wonderful international musicians for their extraordinary performances.

— **Adam Johnson**

CREATOR AND CHOREOGRAPHER



© Photographer Steve Brock

Eliot Smith (He/Him), born in 1990 in Newcastle upon Tyne, is a British dancer, choreographer, and the founder, chief executive, and creative director of Eliot Smith Dance (ESD). Known for his innovative approach to dance, Smith blends traditional techniques, particularly those inspired by Martha Graham, with bold and contemporary movement. His work is characterised by its emotional depth and physical intensity, often reflecting his interest in human experience and expression. Collaborating frequently with composer Adam Johnson and other artists, Smith creates powerful performances that resonate deeply with audiences.

Smith's choreographic work has been showcased across the UK and internationally, earning critical acclaim. His choreography has been featured in various national and international tours, with notable recognitions, including a shortlist for the One Dance UK People's Choice Award in 2018 and The Green Dance Award in 2022. His ability to blend Graham's classical techniques with modern sensibilities has made him a key figure in the contemporary dance scene.

In addition to his choreography, Eliot Smith is deeply committed to making dance accessible to a wide range of people. He leads award-winning wellness dance workshops aimed at children, young people, and adults with limited access to the arts, helping foster a love for dance and creativity in underserved communities. This commitment to accessibility has been a central tenet of his career, ensuring that the benefits of dance reach beyond traditional performance spaces.

Smith's dance training took him to New York, where he studied at The Martha Graham School, an experience that profoundly influenced his work and understanding of dance as an art form. In 2018, he founded *Graham in the UK*, a platform dedicated to promoting the legacy of Martha Graham and ensuring her techniques continue to influence future generations of dancers.

Since retiring from performance in 2021, Eliot Smith has focused on choreographic leadership and expanding the reach of Eliot Smith Dance. He holds several significant roles in the dance community, including Associate Artist at Dance City (2017), Artist in Residence at The Bowes Museum (2018), and a position on the Bowes Board of Trustees, which he joined in 2021. His leadership continues to drive the development of new works and outreach initiatives, including through his involvement in Creative UK's Create Growth Programme, which he joined in 2025.

Through his diverse roles and contributions to the arts, Eliot Smith continues to shape the future of contemporary dance, blending artistic innovation with a commitment to accessibility and education. His work remains at the forefront of contemporary dance, pushing boundaries while honouring the traditions that have shaped his career.

COMPOSER



© Photographer Felix Grunschloss

Adam Johnson (He/Him) is an internationally acclaimed pianist celebrated for his exceptional technical mastery and emotionally rich performances. Known for blending classical crossover and modern instrumental works, he has earned critical praise, with *The Telegraph* hailing him as “A Revelation.” His concerts regularly sell out major venues across London and Europe. Beyond his solo career, Johnson is also the Founder, Artistic Director, and Principal Conductor of The Northern Lights Symphony Orchestra. His contributions to the music world have earned him numerous accolades, including his election as a Freeman of the Worshipful Company of Musicians and a member of the Royal Society of Musicians. In 2019, he was awarded the Freedom of the City of London.

As a composer, Johnson’s work has been widely praised. His album *Savage Piano*, recorded at Abbey Road Studios, was described by BBC Radio as “Cinematic and Emotional.” He followed this with the 2020 EP *Keys to the Garden* and the single “Frith (After Janáček),” released under Collaborative Records. Johnson has also composed extensively for stage, collaborating with ESD on productions such as *Seacole + Nightingale* (2020), *TroY* (2020), *LIFE* (2022), *HUMAN* (2023), and *POPPY* (2025). His creative involvement extends to ESD’s educational outreach programs, where his compositions help broaden access to music for diverse communities.

REHEARSAL DIRECTOR AND DANCER



© Photographer Portfolio London

Yamit Salazar (He/Him), originally from Colombia and raised in Central London, trained at the BRIT School and Bird College of Dance. He began his career in 2013 with Eliot Smith Dance (ESD), quickly gaining recognition in lead roles by choreographers like Eliot Smith, Maggie Boogaart, Maurice Causey, Paul Taylor, and Mark Baldwin. In 2017, he became Rehearsal Director, and in 2021, he debuted his first major choreographic work, *Bloom*.

Yamit’s career spans diverse performance experiences, including dancing for Celebrity X Cruises and five pantomime seasons at The Capitol Theatre, where he was also dance captain and choreographer. He’s performed in Madonna’s “Vogue” for her London Palladium dates and appeared in *La Forza Del Destino* at the Royal Opera House. Recently, he choreographed pantomimes for Trinity Theatre (2023-2024) and teaches Heels at 'Heels and Feels' in London.

DANCERS



© Photographer Alan Mason

Amy Becke (She/Her) is a dance artist from South Shields, North East England. She trained at Ballet West Scotland, graduating with First-Class Honours, and toured Malaysia performing *Swan Lake* with Ballet West International. After joining Ballet Cymru 2, she danced in *Romeo & Juliet* and worked with choreographers Marcus Jarrell Willis and Jack Philp. In 2021, she gained an MA in Advanced Dance Performance with Distinction at Dance City, leading to national tours with Southpaw Dance Company, Alleyne Dance, and Mischief Company. A BBC Young Dancer 2022 finalist, Amy has also worked with various North East artists, taught at Dance City (including its CAT programme), and in 2024 performed with Fertile Ground and Company of Others. She is the founder and director of the North East Dance Project and joined Eliot Smith Dance in April 2025, performing in *Eclipse* by Robert Cohan and *Moonlight* by Eliot Smith.



© Photographer Andy Brown

Stefanos Dimoulas (He/Him) is a Greek-born multidisciplinary dance creative, specialising in performance, choreography, movement direction, and mentoring. Born in Volos, Greece, he began dancing at age 4 and later earned a full-scholarship BA in Modern Ballet from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. He merges classical structure with contemporary fluidity, creating emotionally driven works that explore memory, identity, myth, and narrative, often incorporating cinematic and hybrid elements. His performance credits include engagements at the Royal Opera House, Sadler's Wells, Pushkin Theatre (Russia), Wales Millennium Centre, Birmingham Hippodrome, and theatres in Macao, Singapore, and beyond. He has delivered keynote talks (including a TEDx appearance), and is the Founder & Executive Director of Culture Select, an arts non-profit supporting emerging and mid-career performance professionals. Stefanos joined Eliot Smith Dance in autumn 2025, debuting in *POPPY*.



© Photographer Eily Welford

Daniel James (He/Him) is a Hampshire-based dancer with family roots in the North East of England. He recently graduated with a BA (Hons) in Ballet and Contemporary Dance from Rambert School, following early training at Queen Mary's College, Tring Park School as a Ballet Associate, and the Jeanine Greville Dance Academy, where he studied RAD Ballet, ISTD Modern, and Tap. His professional credits include performing *Neither Drums Nor Trumpets* by Pam Tanowitz at the Royal Opera House for the Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels Festival (2025), and working with Akram Khan Company on *Jungle Book Reimagined* (2024) under Mavin Khoo for the Next Generation Festival. He has also contributed to research and development projects with choreographers Julian Nichols and Rose Alice, and participated in improvisational work with Dresden Frankfurt Company. Daniel joined Eliot Smith Dance in autumn 2025, debuting in *POPPY*.



© Photographer Akta Photography

Karishma Young (She/Her) originally from a small town in Northamptonshire, she began her dance journey at age three with Kilburn School of Dance, where she completed her ISTD and RAD grades in ballet, modern, tap, and Greek dance up to the Advanced level. During her training at the Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance, she performed as part of the Young Cast in Matthew Bourne's *Romeo and Juliet*, gaining valuable experience rehearsing and performing with the company under the direction of Matthew Bourne and Arielle Smith.

Karishma furthered her studies with an MA in Dance Performance and Professional Practices through Emergence, the postgraduate performance company of Joss Arnott Dance and the University of Salford. She joined ESD in autumn 2024, with PITMAN and POPPY among her credits.

MUSICIANS

Sara Dowling (Vocals) is a Palestinian-Irish jazz vocalist known for her soulful tone, fearless improvisation, and captivating stage presence. A classically trained cellist turned jazz artist, she was named Best Vocalist at the 2019 British Jazz Awards. Now based in Spain, she performs internationally and has collaborated with leading jazz musicians at major festivals across Europe.

John Garner (Violin) is a musician, educator, and PhD candidate based in North Shields. Known for his innovative violin technique and freewheeling improvisation, he draws on multiple traditions to create a unique musical voice. He is a senior lecturer at Leeds Conservatoire, a tutor at The Glasshouse International Centre for Music, and co-director of Mudita Arts.

Adam Johnson (Piano and Vocals) – see full bio on page 7.

Luiza Lale (Saxophone) enjoys an eclectic career performing classical, jazz and pop. She has appeared as soloist with several London orchestras and has recorded in the XFM live studios, Pizza Express Live jazz in Soho, as well as Ronnie Scott's London. Since 2020 Luiza also writes and records pop and cinematic music for tv, film, and commercial release. She has recently launched a series of 14 music books for instrumentalists, full of jazz, pop, rock and funk pieces, available on Amazon, called Make Some Noise!

Jessica Lee (Clarinet) was born in Chichester, West Sussex. She began to learn the clarinet aged nine whilst one of the first girl choristers at Salisbury Cathedral. Jessica graduated from the Royal College of Music in 2005 after which she had a busy freelance career in London working with the orchestra of the Royal Opera House, the London Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, English National Opera, BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Nash Ensemble. Jessica joined Royal Northern Sinfonia as Principal Clarinet in 2009.

Gabriel Waite (Cello) studied cello with Eduardo Vassallo at the Royal Northern College of Music, where he won the Granada Prize for chamber music. A member of Royal Northern Sinfonia since 2005, he lives in Gateshead and performs widely as a chamber musician, including with Ensemble Lumiere. He plays a cello by Marc Soubeyran, commissioned in memory of his parents.



DANCING IN THE COMMUNITY



Dance Participant © Photographer ESD

As part of *POPPY*, Eliot Smith Dance brought together nine local adults from South East Northumberland and the wider North East to create *Sea of Red Dancers* — a powerful 15-minute community performance reflecting on themes of war, remembrance, and hope. Developed through workshops at Woodhorn Museum and performed on 1 November 2025, the work united veterans, military families, and the general public in a moving tribute inspired by the symbolism of the poppy and the poetry of John McCrae.

Eliot Smith Dance gratefully acknowledges the support of **Arts Council England**, **Woodhorn Museum** and **North East Museums** in making this project possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Eliot Smith Dance (ESD) is forever grateful to many previous individuals, companies, trusts and grant-makers for their generosity in support of ESD's work. Without them it simply would not be possible.

ESD acknowledges the generous support for *POPPY* in autumn 2025 and spring 2026 from **Arts Council England**, **Alnwick Playhouse**, **Royal British Legion**, and **Anonymous Donors**.

Special thanks to **Alnwick Academy of Dance** for their participation in the autumn 2025 performance of *POPPY*.

ESD acknowledge further support from the **Friends of ESD**: Helen Redfern, Gillian Mayne, June Svenson, June Atkinson, David Goodacre, Mary Barber, LL Dawson, Sue Jenkins, Eileen Raby, Dawn Potkins, Judith Davies, Sabena Monk, David Newton, Eliot Smith, Carole Wilson, Tony Loughlin, Carol Ainslie, Angela Reay, Joyce Richardson, John Horsfield, Gareth Davies



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THE COMPANY

Eliot Smith Dance (ESD) is a prominent contemporary dance company based in North East England, recognised for its inclusive approach and high quality performances, particularly in underserved areas. Led by founder and creative director Eliot Smith, the company operates out of Newcastle's Dance City and has achieved acclaim for its innovative works, including performances in New York, Rome, and Paris.

ESD has a strong commitment to making contemporary dance accessible to diverse audiences, especially those with limited access to the arts. The company's mission extends beyond performances to include award winning wellness dance workshops for children, young people, and adults.

ESD's dancers come from around the world, and the company has embraced digital formats for its works, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. One notable piece, Seacole + Nightingale, received praise for its timely exploration of Mary Seacole's legacy during the Black Lives Matter movement and in the context of the pandemic's impact on minoritised NHS workers.

In recent years, ESD has turned its focus to raising awareness about climate change, with outreach programs in schools and communities. This shift led to the company's receipt of the inaugural "Green Dance Award" at the One Dance UK Awards in 2022. Additionally, ESD produces ESD Presents, a biennial event celebrating influential dance makers.

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Eliot Smith Dance is committed to exploring ways to reduce the impact of its activities on the environment through its environmental policy. Whilst acknowledging that touring creates an unavoidable carbon footprint, we are actively seeking ways to improve and mitigate against this. We endeavour to promote best practice across our creative team and to raise awareness of the effects of climate change amongst our collaborators, partners, suppliers, friends, audience members, and the young people engaging in performances, events and our Education and Beyond programme. To find out more, please visit: www.eliotsmithdance.com/commitments

W. www.eliotsmithdance.com E. info@eliotsmithdance.com P. 0191 269 5579 Social Media. [@eliotsmithdance](https://www.instagram.com/eliotsmithdance)

Company Office Address c/o Dance City, Temple Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4BR

Registered Office Address c/o Clarke's Chartered Accountants, 176 Portland Road, Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 1DJ

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