

For Immediate Release

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Mark Skipper to retire from Northern Ballet

Northern Ballet announces retirement of Chief Executive Mark Skipper DL after 35 highly successful years with the Company



Northern Ballet today announces the retirement on 30 September of Mark Skipper DL, its Chief Executive. Mark will go with our utmost gratitude for a job very well done and with our huge appreciation of everything he has achieved for Northern Ballet.

Mark Skipper joined Northern Ballet (then Northern Ballet Theatre) in November 1987 as Deputy Stage Manager; he became Company Manager in May 1988 and Head of Planning in January 1995. He was appointed Chief Executive in May 1996 and achieved 25 years in that role in May last year. In 2006 Mark was awarded the Manager of the Year Award by the Theatrical Management Association (now UK Theatre). In 2010 he was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant of West Yorkshire for his contribution to the county in a voluntary capacity.

During his tenure Mark has worked closely and successfully with three Artistic Directors – [Christopher Gable](#) (1987-1999), [Stefano Giannetti](#) (1999-2000) and [David Nixon OBE](#) (2001-2022). These partnerships have taken Northern Ballet to its current position as one of the small number of internationally-renowned ballet companies based in the United Kingdom. He is now collaborating with our newly-appointed Artistic Director [Federico Bonelli](#) on plans for the future success of the Company.

Mark masterminded, and was responsible for raising the financial resources for, two changes of location of the Company, from Halifax to Leeds in 1996 and in 2010 to its present home, a purpose-built headquarters containing the largest dance rehearsal space outside London, a 230-seat studio theatre and seven dance studios. He has led the Company's relationships with Arts Council England and Leeds City Council, and dealt very adroitly with the significant cuts in Arts Council funding in the 2012-2015 round, being commended for that reaction by the allocation of a significant increase in Arts Council funding for 2015-2018. During these periods, as a result in part of Mark's fundraising efforts from supporters and other non-public sources, the Company was able to maintain a full complement of dancers and a full range of performances.

Mark was instrumental in obtaining Arts Council Strategic Touring (National Lottery) funding for ballets specifically for younger children, all of which have been successfully adapted for BBC television by CBeebies, and some for cinema distribution. Mark has also taken the Company into digital production of our work.

More recently, Mark has, with Artistic Director David Nixon OBE, faced and surmounted the challenges of Covid, a very wearing time with particular issues proving very challenging for ballet companies. Thanks to the huge efforts of Mark and David the Company has come through this difficult period in good shape financially and artistically and looks forward to a bright future.

A process for the appointment of a new Chief Executive will begin in earnest.

Sir David Wootton, Chair of Northern Ballet, said:

“Mark Skipper has devoted his working life to Northern Ballet. He has been with the Company for two-thirds, and Chief Executive for almost half, of its existence; he is the longest serving Chief Executive of any UK professional ballet company. Mark's tireless efforts to ensure a lean and efficient organisation which always delivers at the

highest level have seen Northern Ballet recognised as one of the best managed arts companies, with a strong executive team well equipped to meet the challenges that lie ahead. During his 20-year partnership with Artistic Director David Nixon OBE Northern Ballet has become an internationally renowned dance company which has remained committed to extensive touring throughout the UK and has developed and nurtured a love of dance for a generation of ballet lovers. We are very grateful to Mark for all his achievements and we wish him well.”

Mark Skipper DL said:

“I have been in conversation with the Board of Northern Ballet since November last year about my desire to step down as CEO of Northern Ballet at a time that we would decide was mutually convenient for me and the Company. With a new Arts Council funding round on the horizon and a much younger senior team now leading the organisation, it is time for a younger person, with new ideas to take on the role of CEO.

Northern Ballet has been a huge part of my life and it will be sad to step down but I am happy that the Company is left in good shape and with Federico Bonelli as new Artistic Director, the Company will continue with the great legacy that David Nixon leaves behind artistically. I am confident that the Board will find a new CEO to take on the challenges that face all of us in the arts.”

-ENDS-

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Notes to Editors

Mark Skipper DL

Mark Skipper has been Chief Executive of Northern Ballet since 1996. Mark started his career in banking before joining Northern Ballet as Deputy Stage Manager in 1987. He was promoted to the role of Company Manager and then Head of Planning before being appointed Chief Executive. Since then he has supported the creation of more than 50 new productions and increased the Company's overseas touring, most recently securing partnership funding to take Northern Ballet to China.

Mark spearheaded the campaign for a new purpose-built dance centre for Northern Ballet and Phoenix Dance Theatre, leading the team who secured the £12.2million required to complete the project. In 2010 both companies moved in to the fully-funded six-storey powerhouse for dance in Leeds City Centre which boasts world-class facilities. The building has gone on to win several awards including the National Lottery Award for Best Arts Project. Hundreds of people of all ages use the building on a weekly basis for dance classes and to watch performances and it is a place of inspiration and aspiration for the young people in the Academy of Northern Ballet.

Mark's tireless commitment to the Company, as well as his inspirational leadership of the technical and administrative teams, was recognised in 2006 when he was awarded Manager of the Year at the TMA Management Awards. He is a prominent member of the national dance community and during his time with Northern Ballet the Company has been catapulted to the top ranks of dance in the UK, winning many awards and accolades for its productions and partnerships.

No other national ballet company gives more performances or tours to as many towns and cities across the UK as Northern Ballet. Mark has an unwavering commitment to ensure that audiences in all parts of the country get to experience the very best classical dance performance. In 2012 he took this a stage further when Northern Ballet began a tour of new children's ballets throughout the UK. From 2015 - 2017 he extended the Company's touring further with performances in medium scale theatres, reaching even more towns and audiences.

In 2010 he was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant for West Yorkshire, a role which sees him assist the Lord-Lieutenant in carrying out her role as The Queen's representative. Mark regularly carries out duties in this capacity including laying a wreath at the annual West Yorkshire Remembrance Sunday service.

Always looking for other ways of bringing a diversity of income streams to Northern Ballet, in 2011 he oversaw the purchase of Info Display, a leaflet distribution company for arts and tourism. This business now makes a significant annual contribution to revenues for Northern Ballet. Mark is also Chair of Northern Opera Group and Chair of Info Display.

Through his work he has helped inspire generations of dance fans and he has undoubtedly contributed to the growth of dance audiences in the UK as well as its profile on the world stage.

Northern Ballet

Northern Ballet is one of the UK's leading ballet companies and the widest touring ballet company in the UK. Bold and innovative in its approach, Northern Ballet is prolific at creating new full-length work with a unique blend of strong classical technique and impressive storytelling. Northern Ballet's repertoire embraces popular culture and takes inspiration from literature, legend, opera and the classics, pushing the boundaries of what stories can be told through dance.

A champion for the cultural exports of the North, Leeds-based Northern Ballet is dedicated to bringing ballet to as many people and places as possible. Northern Ballet's Company of dancers performs a combination of its full-length ballets and specially created ballets for children at more than 40 venues annually.

Launched in 2019, Northern Ballet's digital dance platform ensures more people can access their work, from full-length films of popular ballets through to exciting short dance films by up-and-coming choreographers and filmmakers. Visit digitaldance.org to discover more.

For more details of Northern Ballet's tour, on sale dates and booking information, please visit northernballet.com/whatson