

DANCER OF THE WEEK – Ashley Shaw Fri 26 August

Matthew Bourne's *Sleeping Beauty* is in Shanghai, China at the Culture Square until 28 August and then will be heading straight to the Tianqiao Performing Arts Centre in Beijing, for 6 shows from 1 – 4 September. In our final Dancer of the Week interview for *Sleeping Beauty* we spoke to Ashley, while she was in Bali a few weeks ago!

Ashley has been with the Company since 2009 and has since performed many principal roles in New Adventures productions. Currently performing as Aurora in *Sleeping Beauty* she is already looking forward to creating the role of Victoria Page, the girl who dreams of being a great dancer in *The Red Shoes*.



When did you start taking dance classes?

I first started taking ballet class when I was just 3 years old. No one in my family had ever done any dancing. My mum saw an ad in the local newspaper for 'baby ballerinas' and thought I'd look cute in a tutu!

Where did your formal training take place?

I trained full-time at the Marie Walton Mahon Dance Academy in Newcastle, Australia for 2 years before moving to England to attend the Elmhurst School for Dance in association with Birmingham Royal Ballet, where I completed a diploma in dance.

What drew you to the Company?

I first laid eyes on the Company back in 2007 when my school (Elmhurst) took us to the Birmingham Hippodrome to see Matthew Bourne's *The Car Man*. Being trained pretty strictly in classical ballet up until that point, it was unlike anything I'd ever seen before. It honestly blew me away! Sitting in the audience that night I vividly remember thinking 'this is the company I want to be a part of', I ran home after the show and researched everything I could about the Company, finding out when their auditions were etc. I was lucky enough to be offered a place after I graduated in 2009 to dance in *Swan Lake*. I still feel so blessed to be dancing with some of the dancers that inspired me so much that night. And even luckier still to have played Lana in *The Car Man* last year. A total dream come true!

Do you have any hobbies/interests outside of dance?

Admittedly, I spend most of my days dancing. But when I'm not, I just enjoy relaxing, hanging out with friends, going to the theatre, cinema, TV, shopping and reading (at the moment I'm particularly into crime novels and documentaries). I also love to travel and luckily that's one of the perks of the job. I'm a total Aussie beach bum at heart and would spend every day at the beach if I could!

What's it like being on tour and in a different place every week?

Well, as I'm currently answering these questions poolside in Bali - I'd say it's pretty awesome! Living out of a suitcase and travelling a lot can be quite exhausting at times, but getting to do what we love each week makes it all worth it. International touring is definitely my favourite part. We are currently in the middle of an Asian tour of *Sleeping Beauty* and it's just incredible! We get to experience so many new, exciting places, plus we get to share the magic of the show with fresh audiences around the world. It's so special.

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Do you have a favourite venue to perform at?

I have a few favourite venues including, Birmingham Hippodrome - as I have lots of friends and teachers from Elmhurst to catch up with and who come to watch me perform. I usually get to go back and teach too, which I love. Bord Gáis Energy Theatre, Dublin, which have the best dressing rooms ever! Theatre Royal, Newcastle is also such a fun, vibrant city and the audiences are always full of life.

Not to forget, Sadler's Wells, London, which is like home for New Adventures. We always do quite a long run there and it's just so amazing to perform in London, in such a prestigious dance house. I always get a rush of nerves before stepping on to that stage - but I love it!

I've never performed in Australia professionally, and I'd love to dance there someday with New Adventures. Fingers crossed for Sydney Opera House at some point in my career – it would be incredible to perform on home turf!

Do you have a favourite costume you've worn during your time with New Adventures so far?

I've had some pretty fantastic costumes! One that springs instantly to mind is the white/silver full length sequined gown I wore for act 2 in *Cinderella*. It's when Cinderella gets transformed from her dowdy, grey ensemble to go to the ball and it's beautiful. She enters the Café de Paris down a cascading staircase in slow motion, being led by the Angel through the mist. The whole thing is breathtaking. Complete with a blonde up do, gloves, necklace, earrings and of course sparkly shoes!



photo by Natalia Gerasimova

Ashley's proudest moment as Cinderella

What's your favourite role that you have performed as so far, in the Company, and is there another New Adventures production that you would love to take part in?

I've been so blessed to have had the opportunity to perform so many wonderful roles with the company and they are all so different! It's really hard to choose. One that's particularly close to my heart though is Kim Boggs from *Edward Scissorhands*. I absolutely loved performing in that show! Kim and Edward's relationship is so touching and the music is beyond moving - it still breaks my heart when I hear it now!

Aurora from *Sleeping Beauty* is also very special to me as I was a part of her original creation. I love her wild spirit! Plus, the movement in that show is so beautiful.

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Ashley as Sugar in *Nutcracker!*
(Photo: Roy Tan)



Sugar from *Nutcracker!* was possibly one of the most fun roles I've ever played. I think playing a naughty, devious character is always more fun. Sitting at the front of the stage eating marshmallows and Nutella whilst getting to hit Dominic North was definitely a highlight!

I adore the work the company does and would love to dance in all of Matt's shows. I haven't done *Dorian Gray*, *Highland Fling* or *Play Without Words*, which are all fabulous shows I'd love to do. I'd also love to revisit and perform in shows I've done before, in particular, *Cinderella*.

Cinderella was my second job with the company and the first principal role I ever performed. It was such a huge moment in my career and it would be amazing to perform that role again.

What's next for you?

I'm so excited and honoured to be playing Victoria Page in Matthew Bourne's brand new production of *The Red Shoes* later this year, inspired by the legendary Powell and Pressburger film. It's such a huge, iconic role made famous by the incredible Moira Shearer, and I've got big (red) shoes to fill! It's so exciting being part of the creation of a new show. You can put so much of yourself into the character you are moulding. It's a challenging yet rewarding process and I can't wait to start!

You are able to follow Ashley on Twitter (@ashleyshaw_1) and Instagram (@asharella14) for a further insight into her world!