EUROPEAN-NEWS-AGENCY.COM

EUROPEAN NEWS AGENCY

International Press Service

Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Poet of dance

Vienna State Opera, 02.07.2026 [ENA]

The Ballet Gala 2026 of the Vienna State Ballet, dedicated to Sir Frederick Ashton, is an eloquent, finely balanced tribute to the “poet of dance” that also draws a luminous line from his legacy into the present. Curated by Ballet Director Alessandra Ferri and framed within the international initiative “Ashton Worldwide 2024–2028,” the evening creates a living dialogue between Ashton’s works.

The performance focuses on his inspirations and his artistic contemporaries, revealing a century of choreographic imagination through an impeccably danced and thoughtfully assembled programme. At the heart of the gala lies Rhapsody, Ashton’s 1980 work—here a Viennese premiere—performed by Cassandra Trenary and António Casalinho. Conceived originally for Mikhail Baryshnikov, the ballet marries classical virtuosity with the choreographer’s distinctive lyrical clarity: brisk, finely etched footwork, airy “Fred steps” that seem to walk on air, and an unbroken musical phrasing that makes technique feel like a natural extension of emotion.

Trenary and Casalinho rise to the challenge with dazzling, yet unforced brilliance, their lines clean and their musicality incisive. Casalinho’s jumps and turns have the necessary brio, but what lingers is his ease in Ashton’s stylistic world; Trenary, for her part, brings a poised, subtly inflected lyricism that lets each phrase breathe. Christopher Wheeldon’s Within the Golden Hour stands as the evening’s bridge to contemporary neo-classicism. Performed by Sinthia Liz with Victor Caixeta, and by Madison Young with Alessandro Frola, the work makes visible how Ashton’s “lines extend into the present,” as the programme notes put it.

Wheeldon’s choreographic language spins off the classical axis into off-centre tilts, layered partnering and rich ensemble textures, yet remains deeply musical—an echo of Ashton’s own intuitive relationship to score and structure. Young and Frola give their pas de deux an unhurried, glowing quality, while Liz and Caixeta sharpen theirs with a slightly more incisive, driving energy; together they reveal the piece as a meditation on time, luminosity and touch. The gala’s focus on Ashton’s web of inspirations and friendships comes to the fore in the sequence of shorter works. Michel Fokine’s Der Sterbende Schwan—that timeless, “spectacularly unvirtuosic” solo shaped for Anna Pavlova—appears as a distilled reflection on mortality and modernity.

It is a reminder of the thread that connects Pavlova’s lyricism to Ashton’s own aesthetics. In the

Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
Email: contact@european-news-agency.com
Internet: european-news-agency.com

Haftungsausschluss:

Der Herausgeber übernimmt keine Haftung für die Richtigkeit oder Vollständigkeit der veröffentlichten Meldung, sondern stellt lediglich den Speicherplatz für die Bereitstellung und den Zugriff auf Inhalte Dritter zur Verfügung. Für den Inhalt der Meldung ist der allein jeweilige Autor verantwortlich.

Schwanensee Pas de quatre from Ashton's contribution to the Royal Ballet's 1963 Swan Lake, Natalya Butchko, Ioanna Avraam, Masayu Kimoto and Duccio Tariello navigate its geometric precision and Charleston-inflected footwork with verve, proving why Jane Pritchard could call its twelve minutes "pure bliss." Here, four dancers form a non-hierarchical community, their mirrored formations and shared coda embodying Ashton's belief in ensemble as sculpted musical architecture.

Voices of Spring, the sparkling pas de deux to Johann Strauss's "Frühlingsstimmen", shows Ashton's champagne-light humour and effervescent musical phrasing. The dancers' buoyant ballon and airy batterie turn virtuosity into sheer joy, aligning with the gala's celebratory tone. In striking contrast, Dance of the Blessed Spirits—originally created for Anthony Dowell and performed here by Alessandro Frola—offers concentrated introspection. Set to Gluck's "Danse des esprits bienheureux", the solo fuses Orpheus' longing with Elysian calm; Frola's phrasing lets one movement grow organically from the previous, his restraint and clarity revealing Ashton's capacity to translate metaphysical questions into pure dance.

The inclusion of the Le Corsaire pas de deux (after Alexander Tschekrygin and Vakhtang Tschabukiani) honours not only a cornerstone of gala virtuosity, but also Ashton's role in bringing together Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev—whose legendary performance of this duet helped ignite the "dance boom" of the 1960s. In this context, the piece reads less as mere bravura and more as a reminder of how choreographic choices can reshape public perception of ballet itself.

George Balanchine's Diamonds (from Jewels) closes the evening with a majestic salute to Ashton's American counterpart and friend. Olga Esina and Victor Caixeta lead the ensemble with elegance and authority, the great polonaise and pas de deux conjuring the grandeur of Tschaikovsky's Third Symphony and the Russian classical tradition. As Alastair Macaulay notes, Balanchine and Ashton extend Petipa's classicism in different but complementary ways: Balanchine opens us to transcendence, while Ashton becomes "our skin," the poet of our nervous system. The juxtaposition of Rhapsody and Diamonds allows this insight to be felt rather than merely read.

Throughout, David Coleman, returning to the Vienna State Ballet after earlier galas, leads the Orchestra of the Vienna State Opera with a firm yet flexible hand, ensuring that the score's structural clarity supports, rather than constrains, the dancers' phrasing. His experience across opera and ballet gives the evening a musical spine equal to its choreographic ambitions.

As an act of programming, Alessandra Ferri's gala does exactly what the "Ashton Worldwide" initiative sets out to do: it celebrates Ashton's choreographic legacy not as museum piece, but as living practice, in conversation with Fokine, Pavlova, Balanchine and Wheeldon, and embodied by today's Vienna State Ballet. In doing so, it reveals Ashton not only as the poet of English ballet, but as a central figure in a

Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
Email: contact@european-news-agency.com
Internet: european-news-agency.com

Haftungsausschluss:

Der Herausgeber übernimmt keine Haftung für die Richtigkeit oder Vollständigkeit der veröffentlichten Meldung, sondern stellt lediglich den Speicherplatz für die Bereitstellung und den Zugriff auf Inhalte Dritter zur Verfügung. Für den Inhalt der Meldung ist der allein jeweilige Autor verantwortlich.

broader, international dance history that continues to inspire—and to demand—the kind of elegance, musicality and humanity that this 2026 gala so beautifully displays.

Bericht online lesen: https://berlin.en-a.eu/kunst_kultur_und_musik/poet_of_dance-94017/

Redaktion und Verantwortlichkeit:
V.i.S.d.P. und gem. § 6 MDStV: Dr. Nadejda Komendantova

Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
Email: contact@european-news-agency.com
Internet: european-news-agency.com

Haftungsausschluss:

Der Herausgeber übernimmt keine Haftung für die Richtigkeit oder Vollständigkeit der veröffentlichten Meldung, sondern stellt lediglich den Speicherplatz für die Bereitstellung und den Zugriff auf Inhalte Dritter zur Verfügung. Für den Inhalt der Meldung ist der allein jeweilige Autor verantwortlich.