



**SCHOOL OF AMERICAN BALLET  
ANNOUNCES NEXT FACULTY CHAIR**

**DARLA HOOVER WILL SUCCEED KAY MAZZO  
IN FACULTY LEADERSHIP ROLE IN JUNE 2022**

**AESHA ASH APPOINTED TO NEW  
ASSOCIATE CHAIR OF FACULTY POSITION  
AS OF JUNE 2022**

---

**NEW YORK – December 16, 2021** – The School of American Ballet (SAB) today announced that Darla Hoover, an SAB alumna who currently serves as artistic director for both Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet (CPYB) in Carlisle, PA, and Ballet Academy East (BAE) in New York City, will follow Kay Mazzo as the next Chair of Faculty upon Ms. Mazzo’s retirement from the position at the end of the current Winter Term in June 2022. SAB Artistic Director Jonathan Stafford also announced today that current SAB faculty member Aesha Ash will be appointed to the newly created position of Associate Chair of Faculty in June 2022 when Ms. Hoover begins as Faculty Chair. Ms. Mazzo plans to continue as a member of the School’s faculty after concluding her long tenure as an artistic leader.

As Chair of Faculty, Ms. Hoover will work collaboratively with Mr. Stafford and SAB Executive Director Carrie Hinrichs to fulfill SAB’s mission to train young people in the Balanchine tradition for professional careers in classical ballet – for New York City Ballet as well as numerous companies across the country and abroad. Reporting to Mr. Stafford, Ms. Hoover will be responsible for the day-to-day artistic functions of the School, overseeing the faculty, pianists, and artistic administrative staff to ensure the highest quality training program for SAB’s students.

In the new position of Associate Chair of Faculty, Ms. Ash will aid the work of the Chair of Faculty with a primary focus on providing artistic partnership for SAB’s ongoing student wellness programs and will join with administrative leaders to support the School’s expanding focus on the development of programs and policies that enhance the quality of the student experience within and outside of the ballet studio. Both Ms. Hoover and Ms. Ash will be active members of the School’s faculty, teaching a regular schedule of daily classes.

In sharing today’s news, Mr. Stafford said, “This announcement is a bittersweet moment for me. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Kay Mazzo for her leadership over these many years. Her influence has been monumental in shaping the School that we all know today, and without question our teachers and students regard Kay as the standard-bearer for George Balanchine and Lincoln Kirstein’s vision for

-more-

## SAB – Page 2

SAB. She is irreplaceable. In looking to the future, I am confident that I have found someone in Darla Hoover who represents the best possible continuation of Kay's impeccable standards and skill in the classroom, her passion and care for her students, and her knowledge and understanding of Mr. Balanchine's teaching and choreography. And I believe the breadth of Darla's experience and accomplishments over her thirty years as a dance educator and administrator will provide an ideal foundation for the continuance of outstanding leadership at SAB when we make this transition in 2022.

"I am also excited to expand the scope of our artistic management team by appointing Aesha Ash to the new position of Associate Chair, effective next June. The addition of this role speaks to our students' ever-evolving needs and our growing understanding of the support our students require to flourish in every facet of their experience at SAB. We have already benefited tremendously from Aesha's wisdom and insights since she joined SAB last year as a full-time teacher and I know that her expanded commitment to the School when she takes on this new role will be of tremendous benefit to our students."

Darla Hoover commented, "I am awed by the opportunity that has been presented to me to follow Kay Mazzo at SAB. The thought of taking this position at the school that was so pivotal to shaping who I became as a dancer and that opened the world of Balanchine to me is humbling. I look forward with great anticipation to working hand in hand with SAB's incredible faculty and administrative teams in support of SAB's mission."

Aesha Ash stated, "I feel honored to have been asked to take on this new position as the School strives to ensure that our students have every possible resource at their disposal to meet the challenges of their training. This art form demands so much of our students—intellectually, emotionally, and physically—and I am gratified and so pleased to have this new opportunity to partner with SAB's Student Life team and administrative staff on behalf of the faculty to ensure our wonderful students have everything they need to thrive."

Today's announcement comes at the end of a six-month search process that began last spring after Kay Mazzo announced that she would retire from the Chairman of Faculty position in June 2022. Appointed to SAB's faculty in 1981 by George Balanchine, Ms. Mazzo was named Coordinator of Curriculum in 1993 and rose to Co-Chairman of Faculty in October 1997 after the death of renowned SAB faculty member Stanley Williams. She was named Chairman of Faculty in 2018 upon the retirement of Peter Martins. In her roles as Co-Chairman and Chairman of Faculty, Ms. Mazzo has overseen all aspects of daily training for the entire School, including the management of faculty and pianists. Student development and professional placement along with the School's national and local audition initiatives have been among her key areas of focus. Throughout, Ms. Mazzo has taught a full schedule of classes for intermediate and advanced girls, passing on the knowledge and expertise gleaned from her twenty-year performing career at New York City Ballet under Balanchine's direction. Upon stepping down from her artistic leadership role in 2022, Ms. Mazzo plans to remain on the permanent faculty as a regular teacher in SAB's summer and winter training programs.

Incoming Chair of Faculty Darla Hoover received her early training at Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet and the School of American Ballet before receiving an invitation from George Balanchine to join New York City Ballet in 1980, where she performed as a member of the corps de ballet for eleven years.

## SAB – Page 3

An experienced dance educator who has worked for more than twenty years as a répétiteur for The George Balanchine Trust—staging the works of George Balanchine for schools and companies around the world— Ms. Hoover will also bring a wealth of artistic management experience to SAB after leading highly respected pre-professional training programs at CPYB and BAE.

Aesha Ash made history in the fall of 2020 when she became the first black female to join the School's permanent faculty after serving as a member of SAB's guest faculty over the previous four years. An alumna of SAB whose accomplished performing career spanned New York City Ballet, Béjart Ballet de Lausanne, Alonzo King's LINES Ballet, and Christopher Wheeldon's Morphoses, Ms. Ash has been a deeply engaged founding member of SAB's Alumni Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion since 2015. Since joining the faculty in 2020, she has been an influential member of SAB's internal "Transformation Team", a cross-departmental group of staff, faculty, and pianists who serve as SAB's fulcrum of learning for ongoing efforts to deepen institutional capacity for racial equity and systemic change.

SAB's artistic leaders spearhead a comprehensive education in classical ballet for students aged 6 to 18 as refined by George Balanchine and legendary faculty members who have handed down elements of the Russian, English and Danish classical ballet traditions to today's teachers. The Chair of Faculty works alongside the Artistic Director and Executive Director to maintain the continuity of the School's longstanding tradition of training excellence while regularly augmenting and expanding its programs to respond to the demands of a changing world. Surrounding the core training in classical ballet are a vast array of services designed to facilitate, bolster, and enhance the development of fledgling ballet dancers, including a residence hall, mental and physical wellness resources, cultural, developmental and educational programming, professional placement support, and extensive scholarship and financial aid programs. The Chair of Faculty leads an essential collaboration between the artistic staff and the administrative teams who provide the infrastructure for those programs and services, with the unified goal of training talented dancers who leave the School with the skills necessary to succeed in any pursuit, whether on the stage or beyond.

###

### **DARLA HOOVER—Biography**

A native of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Darla Hoover started her ballet training at age 6 at Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet under the direction of Marcia Dale Weary. After attending the School of American Ballet's five-week Summer Courses from 1974 to 1976, she was invited to enroll as a full-time student in the fall of 1976. Over the next three years, Ms. Hoover trained with renowned teachers Alexandra Danilova, Antonina Tumkovsky, Stanley Williams, and Suki Schorer, among others, as a student in SAB's advanced division. In April 1979, George Balanchine created a featured role for Ms. Hoover in a new production of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* for New York City Opera in which she danced alongside Rudolf Nureyev, and NYCB Principals Patricia McBride and Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux. In October 1979, George Balanchine invited Ms. Hoover to become an apprentice with New York City Ballet, and in April 1980 she was named a member of the Company's corps de ballet. During her eleven years as a member of NYCB, Ms. Hoover performed featured roles in Balanchine's *La Valse*, *Chaconne*, *Harlequinade*, *Ballo della Regina*; Peter Martins' *Eight Easy Pieces*, *Rossini Quartets*, *Sonata di Scarlatti*; and Jerome Robbins's *Fanfare*.

-more-

## **SAB – Page 4**

Ms. Hoover began to develop her teaching skills as a pre-teen while training at Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet. Recognizing her unusual aptitude for giving steps and corrections, Marcia Dale Weary charged her with teaching her fellow students on a regular basis, and she continued guest teaching at CPYB throughout her performing career and in the initial years following her retirement from NYCB in 1990. In 1995 she was named CPYB's Associate Artistic Director, and in 2019 she rose to Artistic Director upon the death of Ms. Weary. Concurrently with her work at CPYB, Ms. Hoover joined the faculty of Ballet Academy East on Manhattan's upper east side in 1996, rising to Associate Artistic Director in 2006. She was named the Artistic Director of BAE's Pre-Professional Division in 2014, giving her full oversight of a focused ballet training program spanning beginning children through advanced teens. Ms. Hoover has regularly traveled between homes in New York City and Carlisle, PA, over the past 25 years to simultaneously fulfill her roles at CPYB and BAE. In addition, Ms. Hoover has guest taught at ballet companies and schools around the world, including New York City Ballet, Boston Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Miami City Ballet, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Royal Danish Ballet and the Vaganova Ballet Academy, among many others.

Ms. Hoover has been a répétiteur for The George Balanchine Trust since 1996, staging the works of George Balanchine for leading U.S. and international dance companies, including American Ballet Theater, Royal Danish Ballet, The Joffrey Ballet and The Washington Ballet. Among the works in her staging repertoire are Balanchine's *Allegro Brillante*, *Concerto Barocco*, *Serenade*, "Rubies" from *Jewels*, and *George Balanchine's The Nutcracker*.

Since 2003, Ms. Hoover has directed the Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet's Teachers Workshop for dance instructors from around the world, and in 2013 she directed a teachers workshop for the Miami City Ballet School. She is a recipient of the Marcia Dale Weary Legacy Award in recognition of her lifelong commitment to education in the arts. In 2021 she received a Congressional Commendation for outstanding public achievement in New York's 12<sup>th</sup> Congressional District.

Ms. Hoover will begin her new role as the School of America Ballet's Chair of Faculty in June 2022.

### **AESHA ASH—Biography**

Aesha Ash was born in Rochester, New York, and started dance lessons at the Joyce Winters School of Dance at age 5. Upon enrolling at Rochester's Draper Dance Theatre at age 10 she began her pursuit of classical ballet while continuing to train in tap, jazz, and lyrical dance. Beginning at age 14, Ms. Ash attended SAB's five-week Summer Course for three consecutive summers before accepting an invitation to live in the School's on-site residence and train as a year-round student in SAB's Advanced Division. She performed the principal female role in George Balanchine's "Rubies" from *Jewels* at SAB's 1996 spring Workshop Performances and received the School's Mae L. Wien Award for Outstanding Promise.

Ms. Ash was tapped to become an apprentice with New York City Ballet in June 1996 and was hired into the corps de ballet upon making her debut during NYCB's 1996 summer residency in Saratoga Springs, New York. She performed with New York City Ballet for seven years, originating corps roles in new works by Peter Martins, Christopher Wheeldon, and Miriam Mahdavian, among others, and performing in numerous masterworks of George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins. She originated a principal role in *Haiku*, with choreography by Albert Evans and music by John Cage, for NYCB's May 2002 Diamond Project.

## SAB – Page 5

In 2003, Ms. Ash joined Béjart Ballet Lausanne as a soloist and for two years toured Europe and the Far East performing new and classic works by Maurice Béjart, including a principal role in his landmark *Le Presbytère*. She returned to the U.S. in 2005 to join the California-based Alonzo King LINES Ballet, originating roles in new works by Mr. King including *Handel* and *Migration* and touring with the company in the U.S. and abroad. From 2007 to 2009 she reunited with Christopher Wheeldon as a member of his Morpheses touring company, performing around the world in works by Mr. Wheeldon and William Forsythe. Ms. Ash retired from performing in 2009 prior to the birth of her first child.

Upon her retirement from performing, Ms. Ash founded The Swan Dreams Project, a not-for-profit endeavor which was initially conceived as a photography project but has expanded to include programs, lectures and camps with Ms. Ash's career and imagery as the foundation of the Project's mission to dismantle stereotypes surrounding race, beauty and talent. Ms. Ash returned to her hometown of Rochester in 2018, 2019, and 2021 to partner with the city of Rochester for Swan Dreams Project summer programs for underserved youth, and she continues to seek new avenues for the Project to inspire youngsters through her example.

Ms. Ash is a founding member of the School of American Ballet's Alumni Committee on Diversity & Inclusion, which was formed in 2015. She served as a guest teacher at the School's 2016 and 2017 California Workshop for Young Dancers and during the 2017-2018 Winter Term; and held the position of SAB Visiting Faculty Chair from September 2018 to July 2020. She participated in SAB's National Audition Tour as a guest adjudicator to recruit students for the School's summer training programs from 2018 to 2020. Ms. Ash was appointed to the School of American Ballet's permanent faculty in September 2020.

Ms. Ash resides in New York City with her husband and their two young children. She will assume the title of Associate Chair of Faculty at SAB in June 2022.

### **About the School of American Ballet**

The School of American Ballet is widely regarded as America's leading ballet school. It is the official academy of New York City Ballet, trains almost all of New York City Ballet's dancers, as well as dancers for companies around the globe, and is world renowned for the excellence of its classical training as established by the School's founders – the legendary teacher and choreographer George Balanchine and the visionary arts patron and writer Lincoln Kirstein. Located at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, SAB annually trains over 1,000 youth aged 6 to 19 and provides \$2 million in financial aid to almost half the student body so that talented children are able to attend regardless of their families' ability to pay. Students enrolled in the current Winter Term hail from throughout New York City, 26 states and 2 foreign countries; and 52 percent identify as students of color. Approximately 20 advanced students embark on professional dance careers annually. Beyond the footlights, the School's alumni have made their mark over the past 88 years as founders, artistic directors, choreographers and teachers for dance companies and schools around the world. While SAB is the official academy of New York City Ballet, it is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with its own Board, administration, budget and fundraising. SAB and New York City Ballet have historically shared a common artistic leader: founder George Balanchine until his death in 1983, Peter Martins from 1983 through 2017; and Jonathan Stafford since 2018. A critically acclaimed six-part docuseries about SAB from Imagine Entertainment and DCTV, *On Pointe*, premiered on Disney+ in December 2019.