



The Culture Project

Welcome, to the much-anticipated 4th edition of The Culture Project.

The Culture Project Edit seeks to explore topics and stories that can feel challenging, but relevant to many of us and generally important to be aware of.

The process of adoption is notoriously daunting and rarely discussed. In this issue, we share insightful interviews with Paul Groothuis (Associate artist & Sound Designer) and Tania and Chris Tonini (Relighter and Technical Stage Manager respectively), shining a light on their experiences of adoption. These are truly heart-warming stories; we are so grateful for their openness and honesty.

We also talk resilience and strength with Ashley Shaw, as she reveals her experience of injury and journey to recovery. And, finally, physiotherapist, Amy Bond, shares her guide to injury prevention and safe working. Essential reading for our Romeo and Juliet and Edward Scissorhands company dancers on tour right now, and great tips for the office team too!

As always, your feedback is invaluable to us, shaping the essence of The Culture Project, so [please get in touch](#) to give us your thoughts.

Let's collectively make 2024 a year of creativity, connection, and, most importantly joy - bringing smiles to audiences' faces across the globe. Here's to another season of magic and shared moments. Cheers to New Adventures and the boundless wonders that await us!

Glenn & The Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Access Group x

P.S. Don't forget you have access to The Culture Project Resources and Toolkit [here on the website](#) for links to information and training to support you and your understanding of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Access.

Ashley Shaw Talks Injury

Principal Dancer, Ashley Shaw shares her experiences with injury prevention, rehabilitation, and recovery.

What specific injury did you face and how did it impact your dancing career?

In rehearsals for Edward Scissorhands, about two weeks in, I tore my left calf during a jumping exercise in contemporary class. What made it more devastating, is that from the end of the Sleeping Beauty tour, I fractured my toe and had to have an operation on my toe joint. I had just rehabbed back from that injury, and then I tore my calf. So having these two back-to-back injuries was tough, because I felt like I'd climbed the mountain, and then I got knocked back down to the start of it again and had to rebuild and restrengthen. The timing of it as well sadly meant that I missed the opening of the show, press nights, gala nights, and all of those events that we love to do so that was challenging.

Could you share your experience of overcoming injury as a dancer?

It's one of the toughest things that we have to do as a dancer because it's in the name that we want to be dancing. When we're not, we kind of lose our identity, and it's challenging. Overcoming it takes a lot of mental strength as well as physical strength to rehab and get back to physical fitness, but I found the mental challenges tough.

What motivated you to persist through the challenges of rehabilitation and recovery?

My biggest immediate motivation was getting back into the show. I was still on tour with everyone watching the show every night, helping in my rehearsal assistant role, so that was tough at the same time, being involved, but not being involved in the way that I normally am. My biggest goal was just to get back on stage, back in the role, and then a bigger picture thing is just to get back to dancing in general. I hope to have a long career, and I want to give myself the best chance to have that. So that's what got me through every day and pushing and being patient at the same time.



Can you discuss the emotional and mental aspects of returning to the stage after an injury?

It's a lot of emotions because I was happy to be returning but also, you've missed a big chunk that everyone else has done. You are behind, my stamina was behind, and my strength was behind. That can be quite confronting as well; going out on stage and not feeling like your best self in front of hundreds of people. It was quite a tough thing to have to deal with. I reminded myself that I'm so grateful to be on stage. My stamina will build, my strength will build, I just have to be patient and work hard, and I will return to pre-injury fitness. And I was just so happy to be back on stage.

Do you feel like there's a responsibility as a principal dancer to lead by example?

Very much. And I've been really lucky to be a principal dancer for a long time. I've done a lot of roles, and I suppose there's an expectation. There's a certain pressure I put on myself, but also that other people put on you, and I don't ever want to let that standard drop, whether that's due to injury or anything else, so I was conscious of that as well.

How did you adapt your training routine to prevent future injuries and maintain peak performance?

I've had to add in a lot of new things. Amy Bond, our physio, has been wonderful and given me so many tools to stay healthy and injury-free. It's all of the basics, but extreme; so warm up, cool down, ice after the show. I use deep heat, I use massage guns, I have a complex machine to build my muscles up, strength training, adding weights into my normal exercises and things like that. I just have to do a bit more to keep going longer.

What support systems, whether professional or personal played a crucial role in your rehabilitation?

I think both elements needed to be quite strong for me to get through it. The company were absolutely brilliant, and I had such a good support system from all of the management team, but



particularly my physio. And then also at home, having Adam, my husband, was so supportive when it was a really tough time. So having both elements at home and work helped me to keep my head in the game and not spiral. I appreciate both of them.

What advice would you offer to other dancers facing similar challenges?

Just to keep going, the time will pass, and you will not be injured forever. And when you're in it, it's really hard to feel like that. One of the reasons I agreed to do this interview is because I found it comforting to read other dancers' stories of injury. You tend to see the highlights of people on stage, and we post videos and photos of the highlights, but I think you'd be hard-pressed to find a dancer who's never had an injury. Particularly those big principal dancers that have had amazing careers, they've all had low points and injuries. In Plymouth, when we met Darcey Bussell, I had a really lovely chat with her about her injuries as well, which you never think of when you think of a dancer like that. I found that helpful, reading other people's stories and experiences, getting that inspiration. Just keep going and working hard, you will be back on stage, you will get better.

New Adventures is looking to create a peer support group around injury –more information about this coming soon.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN, A GUIDE TO INJURY PREVENTION FOR COMPANY MEMBERS

Amy Bond, New Adventures' long-standing physiotherapist, shares her expertise on injury management and prevention tailored specifically for our talented dancers, shedding light on the crucial aspects of their well-being during performances.

Please introduce yourself and tell us about your role here at New Adventures?

My name is Amy Bond and I am the Company Physiotherapist for New Adventures. I'm responsible for the Health and Wellbeing of the dancers.

What do you find is a common factor as to why dancers get injured?

There are lots of different factors but generally, a combination of poor recovery and high workload are guaranteed to cause injury. Often when recovery is inadequate and maybe you haven't quite slept enough or you've eaten less than normal, your body isn't as prepared as it should be to meet the high demands of a performer and injury occurs. The other large factor is repetition. We're lucky at New Adventures, dancers will often learn at least 2 roles which helps to reduce this, alongside the alternating classes from ballet to contemporary but there's also a lot to gain from cross-training and moving your body in a completely different way to further reduce the risk of injury from repetition.

What advice would you give to the new dancers in the company on how to maintain their bodies through what seems like a busy schedule?

You need to remember that your body is your tool. It needs appropriate warming up and that includes for class not just the show.

Nutrition and hydration are large factors, especially eating enough protein which is vital not only pre-show but also afterwards.

Recovery! Spend time and effort on your recovery, whether that's taking the time to do a cool down, ice bathing, using compression boots, having a protein shake or all of the above, alongside getting enough sleep. Appropriate recovery can make a difference to that "heavy leg" feeling known as DOMS (delayed onset of muscle soreness) but also make sure your body is ready for the next day of heavy scheduling. As mentioned previously, cross-training is great when the schedule allows. I will often advise people to go swimming as it's great for cardio fitness but also low load.

We talk about it a lot at the beginning of a contract but highlighting any issues with wardrobe, both costumes and shoes. If something doesn't fit well or you have to adapt your movement because your shoes aren't stable enough, then you're asking for problems. Vocalising these things is very important, no matter how far into a contract we are.

The biggest thing from my point of view, is don't just put up with being in pain. Come and get assessed and let's deal with it as soon as it starts. There's nothing worse than finding out someone's had a niggle for 6 weeks which could have been solved very quickly if we'd dealt with it at the onset.



How do you think injury impacts dancers' mental health, and what can the company do to help?

Injury is probably what all dancers fear the most because suddenly they're in a position where they can no longer do what they love which can be a hard thing to process. Sadly, it's a very normal thing to happen and nearly everyone will experience a significant injury during their career. The support network at New Adventures is very good and we will often refer injured dancers to a sports Psychologist to help them through the process.

Are there any nutritional tips you have to help with?

It's notoriously hard to eat well on tour but it is achievable if you try hard enough and make good choices. Generally, you want to make sure your diet is balanced and includes a good mix of carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins and minerals, alongside water. The hardest thing I think, is eating enough to replenish what has been used during the day; you need to remember that you use far more calories as a performer than an average person does, therefore your calorie intake needs to reflect that. Healthy protein-filled snacks alongside protein shakes are good ways to supplement calorie intake when you don't feel like eating a big meal e.g. post-show. There's a lot to be said for planning, what is your day going to look like physically? You're likely to eat different things and amounts on a day where you may just have a ballet class, as opposed to a day where you have ballet, rehearsals and a performance. Also, the different shows and different tracks within them may require more or less fuel accordingly.

What advice would you give to people who work at a desk or screen?

Make sure you've had your desk space assessed. If your screen, desk or chair height is too high or too low you're asking for problems. Don't spend hours working at home from a laptop on your lap or hunched over the coffee table. Equally, monitor the position you're sat looking at your phone or tablet. Perhaps consider a sit/stand desk.

Get up regularly. You should be getting up and having a move/stretch every 30 - 60 mins, even if it's just to make a cup of tea or go to the toilet. Roll

your head and shoulders, shake out your wrists, march on the spot, and do some star jumps, there's a plethora of examples on the internet but ultimately just move!

Alternate your tasks. Don't spend hours on the computer and then hours on the phone, try to mix it up regularly. Can that email be a face-to-face chat instead?

Be active out of work. You don't have to start going to the gym but go for a walk at lunchtime, get off the bus a few stops early, and try and cycle to work one day a week. When you spend most of your day sitting you need to make an effort to counteract that by adding some activity into your day. Don't make a habit of working through lunch or eating at your desk. Go outside, have a walk and leave your office environment, not only is it good physically but also mentally.

Also, get your eyes tested regularly! All that screenwork can have an impact on your vision.

We are looking to create a peer support group around injury – more information coming soon.



Paul Groothuis on Adoption

Sound Designer Paul Groothuis talks about what he and his husband experienced when adopting their children.

Please introduce yourself, your family and your role within New Adventures.

My name is Paul Groothuis. My husband is Ian Jasper, and in 2013 we adopted two children: Lacey who is now nearly 12, and Linden who is 16 in May. In 2001, I joined New Adventures as Sound Designer for that year's re-mount of *The Nutcracker* and have designed the sound for every New Adventures production since. I have also worked with Matthew on *My Fair Lady* and various other productions not related to New Adventures.

Could you tell us about the process you went through when adopting?

Ian and I met in 1988 and have lived together since that year. In 1991 we started to discuss the possibility of adopting a child or children. Things were very different then. At that point, two men couldn't adopt. Oddly, one of us could adopt as a single person. Even finding a suitable match was very difficult, not least because there was very little support and interest to help two men adopt at all.

As was common in those days, to find a child suitable to adopt at all, one had to often look abroad. We travelled to Wuhan and quickly found that it was very possible to find a child, but often large amounts of cash were exchanged to "donate" to an official to expedite the process. Bringing the child home was not as easy though, as one still had to have adoption approval here.

To us, this all felt very underhand, not least because we would know absolutely nothing about the child. This could be seen as useful, but it is important to have some idea of their history, particularly for the child later in life.



We looked at fostering. This would have been in the late nineties. Even that was problematic for a gay couple. The only way that was possible was with an organisation specialising in "gay problem children". These kids come from terrible situations as you can imagine, having experienced enormous amounts of parental and family abuse and were generally very difficult to handle. In truth, we also didn't really want to foster. We wanted to adopt. So, we packed it all away again for a few years.

Can you share your journey and decision-making process behind adopting a child?

Then in 2005, the law changed allowing gay couples to adopt. However, I was 47 by then and the upper age limit was 45. Along came 2009 or thereabouts. The age limit was taken off as long as you were deemed fit. We went to an open day and felt confident. The problem was that the process at the time was very slow; from application to the kids being in our home was just over three years. It was a rigorous process. We both had to attend courses; in hindsight, these were only marginally useful. We were interviewed as a couple for 12 sessions and then I think another 3 or 4 hours as individuals.

Once the interviews and checks are done, you will be put in front of an approval panel. They can essentially ask you anything they want. Our approval meeting was ok, we were asked to step out and within ten minutes called back in to be given unanimous approval.

You would be invited to go to “open days” which would consist of a room in a local hotel filled with tables behind which adoption agencies would sit showing photographs of children seeking adoption. You would pick up “ones you like” and take them to the table upon which you would be given (what I used to call) the Argos Catalogue where further detailed information could be found about that child or children.

How did you navigate the adoption process, and what challenges did you face along the way?

We had been assigned an amazing social worker, who incidentally is essentially your anchor, both procedurally and emotionally. We were very lucky. For anyone considering this, I would say that if you feel the social worker assigned to you is not 100% on your side then ask to be assigned another one. It is an essential relationship to get right.

Being super excited, we chose two children within minutes. We expressed our interest and then you wait, for weeks, in that case only to be told that we were not suitable candidates as the families they originated from were notoriously violent and living too close to where we live. This was a huge disappointment. But you have to remind yourself this is for the benefit of the child.

We decided to set an ultimatum with Social Services and ourselves of six months. Within two weeks we were sent simply a picture of a boy pushing a little girl on a swing. We replied that we wanted more information and quickly realised that this was a good match for us. We were shown more pictures and detailed information.

So, at 10am on Monday the 6th of May 2013 we rang the doorbell at Linden’s foster carer’s house. Linden opened the door, looked at us and ran upstairs. Within three minutes Linden comes back down the stairs with a huge box of Lego and tips the whole lot out on the carpet and sits down amongst it. All he says is “play”. Play we did for two hours. Nothing else that first day. The visit was due to finish at 12 and after we left, we spent a good hour sitting on a Margate cliff trying to work out what just happened. We got to know him whilst slowly visiting Lacey who needed a slightly different approach as she was so

young. After two weeks of this, we were able to take him with us permanently.

What advice would you give to others considering adoption as a path to parenthood?

My best advice, if you wish to consider adopting, is to talk to others who have done it and be as open and honest as you can be with yourself, your partner and those you talk to right from the start of the process. We all have a few skeletons in the cupboard, so deal with as many of them as possible before the process starts. Consider your referees and brief them, at the time we both needed 7 or 8 each, both professional and personal.

Be honest, heartfelt and truthful with your partner. You can't drag each other into this, because believe me as parents you have to deal with the issues together, whilst tired and angry and disappointed all at the same time.

How has the adoption impacted your family dynamics and relationships?

People often say: “what is it like when you bring the child home?”

The hard bit is taking them away from their current foster placement. This is about the children, so they are the ones that are feeling fear-anxiety rather than excitement-anxiety. The pickup days were, for the adults involved, not easy. But again, we were well briefed and pretty well ready to take it on.

That was all 10 years ago. They are growing up quickly. It has been a journey I wouldn't have wanted to miss for all the money in the world, but it has also been very difficult at times and still is for many reasons. These are complex children with complex emotional needs. We were two carefree gay men suddenly handed two kids. We had been together for 24 years and suddenly had to share our lives with two new souls. Lots happened in the first few years of the children's lives before they came to us, and even if they can't remember everything, there is a lot of body-held trauma.

It does put huge pressure on your relationship. If, as a couple before children, you think you have ups and downs in your relationship, believe me, you ain't seen anything yet. It is by far the hardest and most demanding show you will ever do. But it is often the most memorable too.

Tania and Chris Tonini on Adoption



Tania and Chris Tonini of the New Adventures production team discuss their experience with adoption.

Please introduce yourself, your family and your role within New Adventures.

We are Chris and Tania Tonini, we have our daughter Neave and our little dog, Lady Boo. Chris and I are part of the Production team for New Adventures as well as the Management team for the New Adventures store.

Could you tell us about the process you went through when adopting?

We first contacted our local adoption agency. This then led to us beginning our application to become approved adopters. This involved a lot of quite intense and emotional training and assessments of ourselves, Lady Boo, and our home. We were approved 18 months later and matched with our daughter 5 months later. She came to live with us in August following 3 months of transitions.

Can you share your journey and decision-making process behind adopting a child?

We always spoke about the possibility of adopting, and after eventually doing research, we decided that it was the path we should take. We realised that we were perfectly suited for adopting and we had a lot to offer a child who needed a loving and secure home. We feel that the training courses were designed to test your resolve, and the amount of self-reflection needed to be able to pass the assessments was at times quite difficult. Although we would say the experience, even before being matched with Neave, was a positive one.

How did you navigate the adoption process, and what challenges did you face along the way?

We had a very good social worker who kept us grounded and helped us navigate the system. This was essential, as you can imagine this process is extremely complex. We were very lucky as all the professionals involved were fantastic. It was very daunting the amount of paperwork, training and reports that had to be done on schedule! Even the house had to have an assessment. A lot of work had to be done as our age range started at toddler.

What advice would you give to others considering adoption as a path to parenthood?

The best thing we did was talk to everyone we knew about their experiences with adoption. Lots of reading and finding your support network. You will be amazed at how readily people will want to help. Remember to ask them. Having confidence in your decision-making is important. Know your limits, and think about what you can offer a child, not what you think you should.

How has the adoption impacted your family dynamics and relationships?

Neave is wonderful, we are so lucky; she was meant to be a Tonini. Our family dynamic has strengthened: becoming funnier, sillier, louder (if you can believe it!) sleepier and cosier. It's like we should have always been a 3, plus Boo. All our "support networks" have been amazing. It's difficult to believe she has only been with us for 6 months. Everyone has welcomed her into our family as a Tonini.

LEARNING SESSION TAKEAWAYS

1. Disability Equality with Michele Taylor

Disabled is a verb – people are only disabled when they step out into a world that has not been built for them.

We are taking responsibility for the barriers in our environment, rather than ‘helping’ someone with their access needs.

The language we use should be accurate, descriptive, free of assumptions, free of value judgements and based on the social model of disability.

[Disability Equality](#)

2. Unconscious Bias, Allyship and Anti-Racism – Creative Access

Consider your personal impact and the role you play day to day to manage and support an inclusive culture and build a sustainable future for the organisation.

Be aware of your privileges – reflect on your assumptions and leverage your privilege to lift up others.

Hold yourself, colleagues and the organisation to account to ensure anti-racist values are reflected in behaviour and operations.

[Creative Access](#)

3. Trans Awareness – Global Butterflies

Get to know people as people before anything else.

If in doubt, you can always ask what name or pronouns someone would like to be addressed by – it will never cause offence.

Be a proactive ally in and out of the workplace, educate yourself and listen to trans and non-binary people.

[Global butterflies](#)

4. Neurodiversity

Try to be aware of how language is always changing, but whatever you say make sure your language is relevant, useful and empowering.

When communicating with a neurodivergent or learning-disabled person, say what you mean, keep language and instructions simple, and give people time to respond.

Take the time to explain artistic or creative choices rather than assume someone will understand.

[Access All Areas](#)