

Dance In Context

Lectures: 4th and 5th March 2019

Lecture Content: Contemporary Dance in the UK

You will gain an insight and understanding of the beginnings of contemporary dance in the UK, considering the different approaches of London Contemporary Dance Theatre and School and Rambert.





Marie Rambert

In 1914 former Ballet Russes dancer Marie Rambert fled First World War, to London.

Marie Rambert gave tuition in dance and eurhythmics.

At the same time she continued with her own ballet studies, as well as performing as a soloist.

Two years later she opened a school of dancing in Bedford Gardens, Kensington.

The birth of British Ballet

In 1926, Marie Rambert and her students presented the ballet *A Tragedy of Fashion* by Frederick Ashton.

This is considered the birth of British ballet. Rambert is Britain's oldest dance company.

It signified the formation of Rambert Dance Company.

From 1926 Marie Rambert and her dancers staged more occasional performances.

Rambert formed the Ballet Club in 1930, giving regular Sunday performances at the Mercury Theatre in Notting Hill Gate.

They also performed in short seasons in the West End and regional theatres

The Mercury Theatre that was owned by Rambert's husband, Ashley Dukes, acted as a base for the company for many years

Ballet Rambert

In 1935 the company began using the name “Ballet Rambert”.

The company restaged works from the Ballet Russes by Fokine, Nijinsky and Massine.

New works were created by choreographers including Ashton, Andrée Howard, Susan Salaman and Antony Tudor.

Mid Century Ballet Rambert

During the Second World War Ballet Rambert became a full time touring company

Outgrowing the Mercury Theatre from 1946 the company performed at Sadler's Wells.

During the war the Company appeared in a range of venues including factory canteens as well as theatres

The change in its performance activities, during and immediately after the war, resulted in a new audience.

The company began to perform longer ballets alongside traditional mixed bills of new works.

Ballet Rambert performed several classics, including the well-known *Giselle* and *Coppelia* and the first major British productions of *La Sylphide* and *Don Quixote*.

Two Brothers - a turning point

In 1958 Norman Morrice, one of Rambert's novice choreographers, created *Two Brothers*.

A return to the innovative policies which had previously been the hallmark of Ballet Rambert.

Two Brothers was performed in modern dress and dealt with a contemporary theme while still using a traditional ballet vocabulary.

Morrice travelled to America in 1962 on a Ford Foundation Grant

He studied with some of the major choreographers of the time, including Martha Graham.

Returning to Rambert Morrice encouraged Marie Rambert to return to a smaller ensemble, aiming to create new works and preserve the best of their previous works.

Becoming a Contemporary dance company

In 1966 Morrice was appointed Associate Artistic Director of the new Company

He brought several American choreographers to work with the Company

Glen Tetley: *Pierrot Lunaire* (created for his own company in 1961)
Ricercare (originally created for American Ballet Theatre in 1966)

Regular choreographic workshops were also held for the dancers, and Christopher Bruce began to emerge from the Company as a talented choreographer.

The company continued to perform several pieces from its earlier repertoire:

Antony Tudor: *Dark Elegies* (1937)

Nijinsky: *L'Après-midi d'une faune* (revived for Ballet Rambert in 1931)

A new director - John Chesworth

In 1974 Morrice was succeeded as Artistic Director by John Chesworth

Chesworth had performed with the company since 1951

Served as Assistant to the Directors from 1966 to 1974

Chesworth was assisted by Christopher Bruce in the role of Associate Director

The company produced several major works, including two full evening pieces:

Cruel Garden (1977, Bruce in collaboration with Lindsay Kemp)
Tetley's *The Tempest* (1979).

Continued to invite overseas choreographers

In 1979 Bruce left the Company to embark on a career as a freelance choreographer, although he still maintained a position with Ballet Rambert as Associate Choreographer

Robert North - Director

In 1981 Robert North was appointed as new Artistic Director

He held the post until 1986

Trained at London Contemporary Dance School and was a dancer for London Contemporary Dance Theatre

North himself choreographed work with Bruce and Richard Alston also choreographing

Also Paul Taylor made *Airs* (1982), Merce Cunningham - *Fielding Sixes* (1983) and Dan Wagoner, *An Occasion for Some Revolutionary Gestures* (1985).

The repertoire was very popular in the UK and overseas.

Richard Alston

North was replaced by Richard Alston in 1986

Company became known for its use of Cunningham technique and a repertoire of abstract works

Alston believed that dance should be created for its own sake and not to support narrative or spectacle.

He invited choreographers from abroad to make works for the Company, including a number of influential American 'postmodern' choreographers such as Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs.

Merce Cunningham himself created *Touchbase* (1992) specifically for Rambert

In 1987, the company was renamed "Rambert Dance Company" to more accurately reflect the style and nature of its current form.

Christopher Bruce

Alston left Rambert at the end of 1992

His successor was named as Christopher Bruce in April 1994

Bruce invited internationally recognised choreographers such as:

Merce Cunningham

Twyla Tharp

Siobhan Davies

Created opportunities for young choreographers to create new works for Rambert

Jeremy James

Wayne McGregor.

Bruce's own creations *Ghost Dances*, *Swansong* and *Rooster* are still performed widely today

Mark Baldwin

Christopher Bruce was succeeded in 2002 by Mark Baldwin

Baldwin was a former dancer with the company

Developed a career as a choreographer

In 2015 received an OBE in the 2015 Queen's Birthday Honours

Commissioned works based on collaboration with other artforms and works by:

Karole Armitage

Rafael Bonachela

Aletta Collins

Javier De Frutos

André Gingras

Shobana Jeyasingh

AWARDS and a NEW HOME

Rambert won two Olivier Awards and the TMA Theatre Award for Achievement in Dance

The company also successfully raised £19.6million to create a purpose-built home on London's South Bank, which opened in 2013

This was shortened to simply "Rambert" in 2013

RAMBERT TODAY

Rambert today has the most far-reaching touring programme of any British contemporary dance company

Presents new, large scale works of the highest standards to audiences throughout the UK

Extensive education, outreach and participation work

Rambert School

Independent Research

Key dates

Key people

Relationship with the company

Consider where you will research... What are your research methods... How will you approach it... What do you need to remember to do with the research... how do you record it...

What is Rambert 2?

LINKS

<http://www.rambert.org.uk>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/rambertdancecompany>

London Contemporary Dance Theatre

It made its debut as the Contemporary Dance Group in 1967, with students from London Contemporary Dance School,

Gave its first full season as LCDT in 1969 at the Place Theatre.

Early repertory featured works by Graham, Ailey, Taylor, Sokolow, and Cohan himself.

American works were replaced by company choreography by Alston, North, and Davies (the last two becoming associate choreographers in 1974).

As the company expanded (to about twenty dancers) it played a key role in developing a British audience for modern dance.

Touring extensively round the UK as well as abroad (its US debut was at the American Dance Festival, 1974).

London Contemporary Dance Theatre

By the mid-1980s it began to lose its artistic edge

1989 Dan Wagoner took over as director

He introduced new European and American works (including his own)

Choreography also by company members, including Jonathan Lunn and Darshan Singh Bhuller

After a succession of short-term directorships it was disbanded in 1996

Richard Alston Dance Company took over as resident dance company of The Place

Robin Howard - Founder 17/5/1924 - 12/6/1989

Robin Howard was the grandson of Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin and the eldest child of Sir Arthur Howard and Lady Lorna Howard.

He studied at Eton College and served in World War II as a lieutenant in the Scots Guards (1942–45), until he sustained injuries that resulted in the loss of both his legs.

In 1945 he resumed his education at Trinity College, Cambridge, and passed the bar examination to become a lawyer, but he never practiced; instead he entered the hotel and restaurant business.

In 1956 he formed the Hungarian Department of the United Nations Association in England to assist refugees, and he served as its director of international service (1956–63).

Robin Howard - Founder

In 1954 that Robin Howard first saw Martha Graham Company performing in London.

Financed the company's return to the UK, he persuaded Lord Harewood, Sir John Gielgud, Henry Moore, Ninette de Valois, Marie Rambert and Martha Graham to become the inaugural patrons of "Contemporary Ballet Trust Ltd", which would be The Place's parent company.

His offer to Graham Company dancer Robert (Bob) Cohan to join The Place as its first Artistic Director.

His objectives for The Place, were

- to use the universal language of dance to break down social, political, linguistic and other barriers

Robin Howard - Founder

In 1976, Howard declared that he no longer wished to be seen as a “rich man who pottered with the arts and gave of his surplus.”

He sold his land, his book collection and his shares to raise the funds for The Place to purchase the freehold of its buildings.

For the rest of his life he continued to work for The Place, sticking steadfastly to his principles.

He died in in 1989.

Robert Cohan - Artistic Director

Born in New York in 1925

Robert Cohan trained at the Martha Graham School.

Joined the Martha Graham Dance Company in 1946. Was soon a soloist and partnered Graham herself.

He left in 1957 to start his own small group of dancers and started his long career as a choreographer.

Returning to the Graham Company in 1962 for its European tour he soon became a Co-Director of the Company with Bertram Ross.

In 1967, invited by Robin Howard to become the first Artistic Director of the Contemporary Dance Trust in London

Was the founder Artistic Director of The Place, London Contemporary Dance School and London Contemporary Dance Theatre

He directed the company for the next 20 years.

Robert Cohan - Artistic Director

As director of LCDT he created many works for the Company.

Worked in collaboration with leading composers and designers.

Works such as:

- *Stages*
- *No Man's Land*
- *Stabat Mater*
- *Forest*
- *Testament*
- *Dances of Love and Death* (Full length work commissioned for the Edinburgh Festival)

TV broadcasted work: *A Mass for Man*, *Waterless Method of Swimming Instruction*. *Cell*, *Forest*, *Etc*

Robert Cohan - Artistic Director

Since 1989 he has worked freelance and has choreographed several ballets for Scottish Ballet as well as companies in Germany and Italy.

He was the Artistic Advisor to the Batsheva Dance Company from 1980 to 1990.

Choreographed several works for Batsheva and the Bat Dor Company.

Director of choreographic courses, notably the International Course for Professional Choreographers and Composers and professional choreographic courses in New Zealand and Canada.

As a teacher of contemporary dance he has taught extensively. Besides being a senior teacher at the Martha Graham School he worked at The Julliard School, Harvard, Radcliffe, and the University of Rochester in the US, York University in Toronto, London Contemporary Dance School and Middlesex University.

Robert Cohan - Artistic Director

With LCDT he won the 1975 Evening Standard Award for The Most Outstanding Achievement In Ballet

In 1978 won an award from the Society of West End Theatre (now the Laurence Olivier Award).

Has received several honorary doctorates including from the Universities of Kent, Exeter, Middlesex and Winchester.

1988 Cohan was awarded an honorary CBE in recognition of his outstanding contribution to dance in the United Kingdom.

2013, he was awarded the De Valois Award for Outstanding Achievement at the 2012 Critics' Circle National Dance Award

He is still making work today at over 90 years of age. He is currently working with Yorke Dance Project.

LINKS

<https://www.theplace.org.uk/history-place>

Further Reading

<https://www.theplace.org.uk/history-place>