

Dance In Context

Lecture (26.11.18): British Modern Dance Pioneers

Lecture Content: During this session, you will gain an understanding of the early British Modern Dance pioneers and in relation to Greek revivalism in art, society and dance.

You will also discuss your research findings about modern art, theory and people.





From last week

RESEARCH/RESEARCH

What historical events took place during the modernist period?

How did they impact the development of art, theory and society?

Which artists are considered modern artists?

MARGARET MORRIS (1891 – 1980)

Born in London to Welsh/Irish parents. Moved to Boulogne when she was a few weeks old and grew up bilingual.

Precocious child, no formal education except for dance classes, including ballet.

At 6 she had her first stage engagement in panto (First Fairy, “Twinkle Star” in Little Red Riding Hood, Theatre Royal, Plymouth, 1899).

Dance and performance were to be the focus of her energies and talents for the rest of her life.

1910, aged 19 she established her own system for dance training, called Margaret Morris Movement, and opened her first school in London. It is still taught worldwide today. The curriculum came to include a progressive combination of dance and the visual arts.

MM also choreographed and danced in Gluck’s *Orpheus and Eurydice* staged by Marie Brema at the Savoy Theatre in London and played Water in *The Blue Bird* by Maeterlinck at the Haymarket Theatre.

In 1917 she ran the first of her annual Summer Schools. 1919 & 21 in Harlech.



MARGARET MORRIS (1891 – 1980)

MM's major achievement was the system of movement she devised based on the six Classical Greek dance positions, and which she enshrined in the Margaret Morris Movement which continues to this day.

Attempted to emphasise natural bodily formations emulating poses on Classical Greek pottery.

"I do not clime to be reviving Greek dancing, but to be introducing a method that I think allows of unlimited development in the future. It is really immaterial to me if it was used by the Greeks or Egyptians or any other ancient nation" (Morris, *Dancing Times*. 1917)

In the 1920s her interests extended in the remedial aspects of movement and sports training.

In 1928 she published *The Notation of Movement*, detailing her system.

The training was a formalised system and grading by colours.

MM attempted to get her method into main-stream education alongside or even to replace the Swedish gymnastic approach.



MARGARET MORRIS - LEGACY

She founded; the Celtic Ballet Club in 1940;
the touring company, Celtic Ballet of Scotland in 1947;
and the short-lived Scottish National Ballet in 1960.

MM choreographed a production of *Hair* in Glasgow in 1970.

MMM still survives today with summer schools held every year and students attending from around the globe.

Light, Ladd & Emberton created Croesi Traeth in Harlech in 2017 which began as a response to MM in Harlech one hundred years prior.

Margaret Morris designed the poster below for Votes for Women – the campaign which led to the vote for suffrage in 1918.



MARGARET MORRIS - LINKS

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ypFNWUfRHk>

Film of Margaret Morris dancing in Harlech 1910s (Merry Mermaids on the Beach)

<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/margaret-morris-movement>

Footage from British Pathe

www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person.php?LinkID=mp05596

Photographic portraits by Fred Daniels and Walter Benington from 1918 to c.1924

<https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/12367389.hair-today-anti-war-show-is-back-in-style/>

Revival of *Hair the Musical*

<https://www.margaretmorrismovement.com>

MMM

<https://www.lightladdemberton.com/work#/new-page-3/>

Light, Ladd & Emberton

MADGE ATKINSON (1885 – 1970)

English dancer and creator of Natural Movement system.

Atkinson was born and worked in Manchester.

Studied at Anna Spong School of Dancing (Natural Movement)

Wanted a career as a professional actress but was prevented by ill health.

She became interested in the work of Isadora Duncan, Spong and Dalcroze.

Productions at the Gaiety Theatre, public performances of her own work.

Regional activity - Manchester – much industry and money allowed arts to develop but lack of archive.

Influenced by Duncan and revival of Greek dance.

'we who live in the 20th century must gain what we can from these past glories, yet make our dance for today the natural outcome of our feelings. So it is that I would call it "natural" rather than "Greek"' (Atkinson, The Ball Room Dec. 1926).



ATKINSON'S NATURAL MOVEMENT

Believed Duncan's method lacked method and a system.

Combined inspirations into her own training system.

Systemic approach.

Movements for each limb, head down.

Its core vocabulary extends natural ways of travelling and gesture.

Lyrical style.

Emphasis on expressiveness and musicality.

NATURAL MOVEMENT CONTINUES

Opened the School of Natural Movement in 1918 – joined by Mollie Suffield.

1922 invited by ISTD to form Natural Movement branch with systemic approach to training.

System was recognised for its educational benefits and filtered through Manchester schools in the 1930s.

With her partner Anita Heyworth set up London College of Educational Dance (later London College of Dance and Drama) in 1944 – first specialist teacher training college in UK.

Life dedicated to technical development, choreography and teaching of Natural Movement.

Atkinson died in 1970 but Natural Movement continues as part of the ISTD syllabus.

Prolific but less well-known – no books

Further reading

Dancing Naturally - Nature, Neo-Classicism and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Dance by Alexandra Carter & Rachel Fensham <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230354487>

RUBY GINNER (1886 – 1978)

**Revival of Greek Dance in England: initially based on research into the Hellenic Greek chorus.
This dance form embraces different movement vocabularies, voice and emotion. Focus on free movement.**

Studied as an actress, chorus of Greek theatre.

Interest in Greek art and philosophy.

Danced with Margaret Morris, was inspired by Isadora Duncan's principals in using Greek dance.

1913 founded the Grecian Dancers, toured to inner city music halls. Ruby Ginner School of Dance.

1915 with Mime artist Irene Mawer – Ginner-Mawer School of Dance and Drama - presented European dances.

Natural dances were popular to audiences as well as to press.

Three books 1933, 1960/1963 journals.

RUBY GINNER - EDUCATION

1920s - Theatre work decreases, with increase in education work.

1923 - founded the Association of Teaching of Revived Greek Dance

Greek Revival absorbed into schools' curriculums by teachers in the 1920's.

ISTD and RAD Free Movement syllabus – still taught today at Royal Ballet School.

Practices in education continued but choreographic work disappeared.

Find further reading on Ginner

CULTURAL CONTEXT TO GREEK REVIVALISM

During the first three decades or so of the twentieth century there were discernible trends in artistic, educational and broad cultural beliefs and practices.

These cohered around the themes of nature and the natural.

Revised views of the perceptions of the body human, as natural and holistic.

Education itself was revised – movement in physical education.

Reaction to Victorian era values and beliefs.

GREEK REVIVAL / MODERN DANCE

Hellenic model of society was revered and considered ideal.

Idealised concepts of the changing role of women during this time.

In Greek Dance Revival – mostly women.

New dance forms that facilitated choreographic creativity by women that had been precluded.

New emancipations for women:

- dress reform

- relationship between women and their bodies in performance and participation in public

HELLENISM

Interest of the late 19th Century in 'Hellenism' arises from the pre-occupation with the perfect body – (revival of the Olympics in 1896)

Hellenism

Cultural characteristics of Greece between 332 BC (Death of Alexander the Great)
to 31 BC rise of the Roman Empire.

Spread of Greek culture following Alexander the Great's invasion of the Persian Empire.

Greek revival/reconstruction/reinterpretation coincides with interest with Greek drama in other art forms

i.e. Max Reinhardt's Oedipus Rex in 1912 and Terrance Gray's productions in the 20's and 30's

HELLENISTIC INFLUENCE ON THE BIRTH OF MODERN DANCE

'I drew my inspiration from Greek sources. Strictly speaking, I do not try to reconstruct Greek dances. This is practically impossible.'

Study of the figures of athletes, dancers and warriors in vases, pottery.

Interest in Greek Chorus of 1920s.

Duncan was accused of imitating the Greek style during her early years.

She claims to want to emulate the Greek style.

Reconstruction v's interpretation.

'frequently one finds . . . that a new idea in art has simultaneous birth in more than one mind. Unknown to each other, widely varying personalities at great distances will conceive the same idea and set work to reproduce it. When Isadora Duncan was beginning her work in the United States the same seed of inspiration was growing in England, where, under my guidance, it took shape as the revived Greek dance [sic]. (Ginner, 1960)

GREEK DANCE - DUNCAN v's GINNER

Duncan – influential in the interest leading to academicization of Greek dance by Ginner

Ginner collected pictures and images of Greek poses and movement of gymnasium activities, rituals and ceremonies, war, choral and social dances.

She guessed as to 'what receded and what followed the action, and what degree of forced speed were necessary to the rhythmic flow and continuity of the whole movement.'

Interest in the intentionality of the gesture and the translation of those into words.

She discovered a commonality between poets, playwrights and philosophers from ancient Greece.

GREEK DANCE - DUNCAN v's GINNER

Ginner interest in Greek arts from two angles: a. ideal of the body beautiful/perfect somatic form and its presentation b. tempestuous, passionate, emotionally exciting/what lies behind the impetus to move, to dance, to sing, to perform.

In a retrospective in 1960 Ginner describes her own interest in choruses of Greek dramas - creates 'a new kind of intensity' in dance not seen at the time – breaking away from stuffy traditions.

Ginner challenges the notions or ideals of Duncan's.

Ginner – research and method leads to the 'idea' of Greek myth in modern dance (Graham and Balanchine)

Mimicking Greek movements was part of the culture but this contradicts philosophies of abstractionism in modernism – i.e. Balanchine.

RESEARCH TASKS