

Germans did so, they would be lined up behind a building and shot.⁶ Cohan certainly knew what Howard meant when he called dance a contrast to warfare.

As director of LCDTF, as the troupe was often known for short, Cohan brought approximately 200 works to the stage, making that company the most choreographically productive group in the history of British dance.⁷ Despite his affinities to Graham, only two of these works were by her: *El Penitente* and *Diversion of Angels*. The repertoire was eclectic from the outset.

Of Cohan's own compositions, *Cell* (1969) received praise as a tense study of people trapped in either a real prison or a prison of the mind. *Stages* (1971) depicted a journey of self-confrontation and discovery. *Class* (1975) celebrated a dancer's daily training. *Stabat Mater* (1975) choreographically reflected the emotions of the Virgin Mary.

In some ways, the growth of the London Contemporary school and company contradicted the way modern dance had developed elsewhere in the world. Whereas most modern troupes devoted themselves to a single choreographer, London Contemporary Dance Theatre was always choreographically eclectic—as was Ballet Rambert both before and after its transformation. And whereas many modern dance choreographers have begun with a vision and then have devised a technique to express it, Robin Howard attempted to stimulate British dancers by importing techniques—notably, Graham technique, but others as well—in the hope that exposure to unfamiliar ways of moving would inspire choreographers with new ideas.

Modern dance purists might have charged that Howard was reversing the proper order of things: ideas, they would argue, should precede steps, otherwise modern dance could become as codified as classical ballet. Indeed, as early as the mid-1970s, some young dancers felt that London Contemporary had already become “establishment.” But the school was trying to cope with the problem—a chronic one in modern dance—of trying to give students a sound technical foundation while at the same time allowing them to remain open to unconventional ways of performing and choreographing.

London Contemporary certainly succeeded in producing capable dancers and developing a well-organized curriculum. In the 1980s, it helped make modern dance accepted on the college level in Britain, establishing a B.A. Degree Course in cooperation with the University of Kent, which produced its first dance graduates in 1985.

London Contemporary and Ballet Rambert also developed choreographers. This surely must have pleased Robin Howard, Norman Morrice, and Marie Rambert, for opponents of their efforts could easily have accused them of foisting a foreign art upon the British public. British modern dance may have had its roots in a Graham-based technique, but it flowered in its own way.

Christopher Bruce, who has choreographed for other companies as well as Ballet Rambert, was one of the first—and remains one of the most successful—British choreographers to blur conventional distinctions between ballet and modern dance. Bruce, who was born in 1945, has remarked, “I suppose I’m a mongrel; but mongrels often make the most interesting dogs.”⁸

As a dancer, Bruce was praised for his dramatic presence, and his choreographic works are also often strongly dramatic, even when they do not tell an actual story. He is also drawn to social and political themes. *There Was a Time* (1973) used the Trojan War to criticize all power struggles. *Cruel Garden* (1977), created in collaboration with the mime Lindsay Kemp, combined dance, mime, and song in an exploration of the life and writings of Federico García Lorca, the great Spanish poet who was executed by Fascist forces during the Spanish Civil War. The hallucinatory *Ghost Dances* (1981) condemned political repression in South America. And by combining Anglo-Irish and American folksongs in *Sergeant Early's Dream* (1984), Bruce suggested both nostalgia for an old world and hope for a new.

Richard Alston (b. 1948) was the first choreographer to emerge from the London Contemporary organization, and he rapidly established himself as a major figure in British dance. His rise to prominence was welcomed by Robin Howard, even though Alston favored ways of moving unlike those emphasized at London Contemporary. Howard has said that it was not until Alston came upon the scene that he felt confirmed in his belief that Great Britain could produce its own important modern dance choreographers.⁹

Like many of his contemporaries in British modern dance, Alston came from a background in the visual arts, having studied theatre design at the Croydon Art College. A growing interest in dance led him to the Rambert Ballet School; in 1967, he became one of the first students to enroll at the London School of Contemporary Dance. He