

## Areas of Study and Set Works

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This resource is a set of notes that supports your teaching of areas of study and set works for the A-level Dance specification (7237). Critical engagement with set works and areas of study requires students to develop knowledge and understanding of the constituent features of dance studied. Students study one compulsory area of study plus one optional area of study (a choice from four) at both AS and A-level.

### Areas of Study

#### Rambert Dance Company (formerly Ballet Rambert) 1966 to 2002 – Prior to 1966

The development of the art of ballet in Western Europe in the early part of the twentieth century was supported by the work of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Through this company, dancers and choreographers were trained who were to continue the expansion of ballet after Diaghilev's death in 1929. Marie Rambert was a member of Diaghilev's company and was already beginning to develop her involvement with dancers in Britain before Diaghilev's death. Before the 1920s there was no British tradition of ballet. This situation began to change when Marie Rambert formed her own school in 1920, which became known as Ballet Rambert from 1935. Her early involvement with Diaghilev, Stravinsky and the Ballets Russes developed her appreciation of collaboration and the importance of composers and artists being commissioned to work with new choreographers.

By the 1950s public support for the art of ballet was established but the arrival of the Martha Graham Dance Company for a two-week season in 1954 met with a negative response from the audience. However, the enthusiasm of Robin Howard and the appreciation of dance critic Richard Buckle heralded the start of a process to introduce modern dance to Britain. Ballet Rambert played a key part in this development and the 1960s saw a period of change in the company. In 1966 Marie Rambert was encouraged by Norman Morrice, associate director, to make changes to the company. These included:

- a reduction in the size of the company
- the preservation of the best of the company's original works
- the creation of new works
- in addition to ballet, the inclusion of modern dance ie Graham technique in the training of the dancers

- the contribution through teaching and choreography of a range of practitioners from within the company and from America, eg Glen Tetley
- regular seasons in London and a tour schedule in the provinces and abroad.

John Chesworth, a company member and former Rambert student, assisted the directors in the reorganisation of Ballet Rambert. He was made associate director in 1970 and became artistic director in 1974 when Norman Morrice left. Chesworth continued Morrice's policies with the promotion of new work from company members and the expansion of the repertoire through guest choreographers. He was also instrumental in developing Rambert's educational activities in order to give young people an understanding of choreography and the staging of works.

During the 1970s the repertoire of the company was dominated by the works of Glen Tetley and Christopher Bruce, leading to two large-scale productions: *Cruel Garden* (Bruce and Kemp, 1977) and *The Tempest* (Tetley, 1979). Bruce became associate director in 1975 and then associate choreographer in 1979.

From 1975 to 1985 the two main dance companies in Britain were London Contemporary Dance Theatre and Ballet Rambert. London Contemporary Dance Theatre began to focus on the development of work by company members whereas Ballet Rambert began to include works from a range of choreographers in its repertoire. There were also links between the companies through the use of choreographers, eg the input of Robert North and Richard Alston to Ballet Rambert.

In the 1980s the repertoire of Ballet Rambert focused on the work of three British choreographers: Robert North, Christopher Bruce and Richard Alston. After John Chesworth's departure in 1980, Robert North directed the company from 1981 to 1986. He was keen to develop the physicality, musicality and dramatic quality of the dancers. He encouraged the creation of new choreography and continued to include works by visiting choreographers in the repertoire.

Alston became resident choreographer in 1980 and artistic director in 1986, consolidating the Cunningham influence. The name of the company changed to Rambert Dance Company in 1987 and Marie Rambert's original policy to encourage new approaches to choreography, design and music was continued. Bruce returned to the company in 1994 as artistic director and continued its development with:

- the inclusion of a wide range of techniques
- the continued development of new choreographers
- the creation of his own new works
- the contribution of guest choreographers
- a repertoire of neo-classical and modern works.

In 2002 Bruce was succeeded as artistic director by Mark Baldwin.

## Set works

### Rooster (Bruce, 1991)

Choreography: Christopher Bruce

Music: songs recorded by the Rolling Stones

Costume designs: Marian Bruce

Lighting designs: Tina MacHugh

First performance: 10 October, 1991 by the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève

British première: 28 October, 1992 by London Contemporary Dance Theatre

First performance by Rambert Dance Company: 8 December 1994

The themes of the work reflect the lyrics and ideas in the music and the social attitudes of the 1960s. The work is also a celebration of the music by the Rolling Stones.

Characterisation is shown, linked to the songs and images of that period. The style of the movement vocabulary mainly reflects jazz, disco and contemporary dance techniques. However, use of pedestrian movement, gesture, social and folk dance can also be seen.

The work is made up of eight distinct dances, each performed to a different song. This allows for variety in the mood and style. There is often a transition from one dance to the next, establishing a connection. The use of movement motifs, often linked to the lyrics, is evident in the choreography.

Bruce rarely uses an elaborate setting for his works but the lighting and costumes enhance the choreographic presentation and intention. Generally the costumes reflect the way young people dressed in the 1960s rather than a literal representation.

In the 1980s a feature of Bruce's works involved choreography linked to cycles of songs. The creation of Rooster in 1991 was a further example of this feature of his style.

### The choreographer: Christopher Bruce (born 1945)

Bruce was born in Leicester and has worked as a dancer, choreographer and artistic director. His early training provided him with a background in classical, contemporary and popular dance. He studied at the Rambert School and joined Ballet Rambert in 1963. During his career he has performed with many companies in a variety of roles.

His choreographic career began in 1969, creating works for different companies, particularly Rambert.

From 1975 to 1979 he was associate director of Ballet Rambert.

From 1979 to 1997 he was associate choreographer of Ballet Rambert. In 1994 he returned to the Rambert Dance Company as artistic director. Bruce's choreography reflects a range of styles: ballet, contemporary, folk and popular dance. He deals with themes linked to the human condition, political or social issues and tends to portray them through dramatic, emotive and theatrical elements.

He uses a variety of accompaniment for his works, including popular music, eg the songs of John Lennon, Bob Dylan and the Rolling Stones.

As well as *Rooster* (1991), his works include *Cruel Garden* (1977), *Ghost Dances* (1981), *Sergeant Early's Dream* (1984), *Four Scenes* (1998) and *God's Plenty* (1999).