

HISTORICAL DANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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A significant element of Belinda Quirey's work in the field of historical dance was undertaken within Institutions of Higher Education. This has led me to present this paper linking some aspects of her activity to the current scene. Limitations of space do not allow for a thorough survey of the provision of historical dance within Higher Education today, but in preparing this short paper, I realize that the subject is capable of a more extensive treatment. I am aware that it is not possible even to allude to many valuable courses and initiatives, and trust that this will not be seen as denigratory to such programmes.

I will also be referring to two aspects of Belinda's work with which I am acquainted, and others who knew her will probably be able to augment the information on further teaching roles of this nature that she undertook.

Reviewing the past twenty-five years or so, we can observe a variable profile for historical dance within the Higher Education sector. Initiatives, funding and individual expertise have come and gone during the period: historical dance has probably served as a litmus test for the health of the performing arts within universities. Music courses and drama departments have been the most constant protagonists here, and a value has been placed on the understanding of dance within these disciplines. Drama students are still encouraged to develop an understanding of period movement and basic dance. The success of the Early Music movement has supported the use of dance to understand the music of the past. Dance courses have not been so ready to extend study beyond the disciplines of contemporary techniques or classical ballet. Historical studies are often restricted to the twentieth century on ideological grounds.

A notable exception to this pattern was the London Contemporary Dance School, which included Baroque Dance in its syllabus and organized regular classes taught by Belinda Quirey. No doubt, the special interest of Robin Howard and Richard Ralph enabled the initiative to survive financial and curricular difficulties. Several generations of dance students were given a thorough grounding in the work, and went on to make their own contribution in later careers. The historical dance field benefitted by having access to able dancers with a technique that developed strength and pliancy without excessive elongation and tension, who were able to move in the organic and flowing mode of Baroque dance.

The London College of Dance and Drama, with its commitment to a full and rich education for dance teachers, placed a high value on dance history. With a lead set by Phroso Pfister, the contribution of Belinda Quirey to historical studies within the Diploma programme was significant. In addition to the educative value of the course, students were also success-

ful in taking Parts 1 & 2 of the History requirement for Licentiate status within the ISTD. When the Degree programme was added to the courses taught at London College of Dance, it was inevitable that a strong historical strand should emerge in it.

Currently, these two aspects of Belinda's work meet within the course. The connexion with London Contemporary Dance is now a powerful one, as the Head of School, Professor Christopher Bannerman, is a graduate and ex-dancer, and two members of staff studied with the School and Company. This includes Kate Flatt, who worked alongside Belinda and took part in the dance sequences filmed for 'May I have the Pleasure?'. This repertoire of historical dance has been used during her career as a choreographer for opera and musical theatre. Meanwhile, staff at London College remember Belinda's presence as a part-time lecturer and the dances she arranged for student performances. I was appointed as Lecturer in Dance Education shortly after Belinda had ceased to make the journey up to Bedford, but her pigeon-hole was still there! I picked up the practical work with the Diploma students, which had already been affected by funding cuts and was reduced from a term's programme to a one-week summer intensive course.

The London Contemporary Dance degree, validated by the University of Kent, was one of the earliest degree programmes to be established, and the first with a powerful emphasis on dance performance skills and an intimate link to a professional company. The BA (Hons) in Dance at London College of Dance was also designed to have a significant emphasis on practical dance and was the first degree programme with classical ballet as the core technique. An expansion in the provision of dance degrees has since taken place, and this has led to a further interest in dance history as a theoretical underpinning to practical and creative studies. A smaller, but potentially more significant, growth in postgraduate courses encourages serious research in all fields of dance, including historical topics. A range of undergraduate and postgraduate studies in dance history is a useful ecosystem for the production of knowledge and publications to fuel further study and extend understanding and practical expertise. As dance fights for an appropriate place within the research system of universities, it asserts the value of practical processes. This gives strength to reconstruction in historical studies, whilst traditional scholarship in history demonstrates that dance is valid subject for mainstream research. It is worth noting here that the major conference at Roehampton in November 1997 has adopted Reconstruction as its organizing theme.

The degree programme at London College of Dance, validated by Buckingham University, was drawn up by Pat and Trevor Whittock with the full-time lecturing staff and a panel of external examiners. By making classical ballet the core technique, a dimension on the inheritance of the past became inevitable. With competence at Elementary level in ballet an entrance requirement, an intake of students with a good level of dance skills was ensured. This allowed for the possibility of integrating theory and practice in dance studies. Thus, a first-year foundation course was created to include Dance History, Dance Appreciation, Music and Drama. This prepared students for the Integrated Studies courses in the second and third

years. The rationale of these courses was to study a chronological period of dance in the context of the related arts, involving study and assessment in both theoretical and practical aspects.

The four courses, each taught within one term of the academic year, were:

- 1 Renaissance/Baroque
- 2 Romanticism
- 3 Early Twentieth Century
- 4 Post-1940.

A course of lectures and practical sessions for each project was planned by a course leader, and in its turn supported the creation of dance works (mainly by staff) based on repertoire or inspired by the period. These works were performed by students at the end of the course, during which an assessment of their performance skills was made. Theoretical studies were developed in essays and assessment made by means of four three-hour examination papers at the end of the third year. The inclusion of the Renaissance/Baroque project owed much to the earlier contribution of Belinda Quirey and the resulting knowledge of suitable practical work to be included in the course.

This degree programme was in its second year when I joined the staff and began to contribute to the courses. My first proposal was to alternate Renaissance projects with Baroque projects, to allow for a clearer focus on each technique. Thus, we were able to do a fully-fledged integrated project in 1992, by devising a production of The Lords' Masque, using the full text and surviving music. With strong support from the music and drama staff, students worked on the Renaissance dance repertoire, learned spoken parts, formed the chorus, sang solos, and mediated the requirement for noble and grotesque performers, with an audience of partners for the revels. This was a deep educational occasion. The power of court dance was effectively summoned up in the performance.

The next development in the Integrated Studies concept came with the merger of London College of Dance with Middlesex University. Nomenclature now became crucial: the entity that was London College of Dance is now the BA(Hons) in Dance programme (also identified as the DLC Set of modules) within the School of Dance incorporating London College of Dance, and this is currently taught at the Bedford Campus. The prima facie case for the merger on the University's part was acceptance of the degree as it stood, resulting in a simple transfer of validation from Buckingham to Middlesex. Sadly, the Diploma course could not be subsumed into the University's programme, so it ceased in 1995 as the last cohort completed the course.

Middlesex University had recently established a Common Academic Framework to facilitate multi-disciplinary programmes within a modular structure and a two-semester academic year. Thus, the degree programme had to be converted to fit this framework. Of course, the Integrated Studies programme was already tailored in a quasi-modular format, so the transition

was easy at first. However, the Common Academic Framework also required a parity in student experience across all modules in the amount of directed learning (lectures, workshops, seminars, etc) and private study required, plus a parity in the assessment load at the end of the module. This is in order to ensure that the work involved in one 20-credit module is broadly comparable to the work-load in another 20-credit module, where students are able to make a lot of choice in the programme they follow. During 1995 the University also decided to reduce the length of the semester as a way of coping with reduced funding from Government. This has resulted in the introduction of a twelve-week semester, with one revision week, and two weeks for assessment. Thus, while the Integrated Studies concept has remained intact through the merger, the amount of staff and student time that can be allocated to it has been significantly reduced. This has included a switch from final exams to coursework essays. While this may sound like a problem, and certainly we are unlikely to be able to do a masque again, the situation has led to a sharper focus to each module and a greater emphasis on autonomous learning by the students. The aim has been to preserve the integration of theoretical and practical learning, rather than change the balance.

To achieve this, a focus has been placed on the study of key works, both from the relevant dance repertoire and for the related arts. The presence of Graham Fletcher, ex-Royal Ballet dancer, on the staff has allowed for the exploration of early-20th-century repertoire, and Anne Went, ex-London Contemporary, brings recent repertoire, allowing the study of Cohan's Stabat Mater within the Post-1940 project this semester. The selection of literature and music is tightly geared to the dance of each period, so that the relevance and spirit of each work can be quickly presented to students. One such sequence is to follow Mallarmé's poem L'Après Midi d'un Faune, through Debussy's response to it in music, to Nijinsky's interpretation in dance.

For each module, students are now timetabled for up to four and a half hours' teaching each week, with time set aside for viewing set works. Each module has its own schedule within the main timetable to allow for flexibility in providing a coherent programme and involving specialist visitors. Where possible, outside visits are planned, too. To meet the standards of a university programme, and to satisfy the moderation of both internal academic quality control and external examiners (not to mention the forthcoming review by HEFCE), the courses require:

- 1 a range of up-to-date and accessible sources, both primary and secondary, for student study covering
 - dance repertoire
 - historical and critical studies
 - visual sources
- 2 expert teaching in both theoretical and practical studies
- 3 appropriate performing spaces, with associated elements, such as music, costume and lighting.

On this basis the Baroque project for Semester 1, 1996-67, was focussed on dance at the courts of Louis XIV and Charles II, leading to an understanding of the common features of Baroque dance in the two countries, as well as the significant differences, particularly regarding dance in the theatre. The project was given the title Les Divertissements Royaux. To make best use of the semester programme, students were asked to research the key features of the lives and political strategies of the two monarchs during the summer vacation (resources being readily available in local public libraries). This ensured a contextual understanding of the period that allowed for more specific lectures on court life, the roles of men and women and the place of dance in society.

Theatre dance was also explored and contextualized by the study of three works: Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, The Way of the World and Dido and Aeneas. An obvious choice for poetry was Soame Jenyns, The Art of Dancing, and the anonymous Satyrs, whilst a higher achievement in Augustan poetry was demonstrated by reading Pope's The Rape of the Lock. To balance this with a French text, the Fables of La Fontaine were included, showing the 18th-century emphasis on a moral within art, and to make plain the influence of French writers on English culture. Music lectures covered composers, instrumentation and dance rhythm.

Classes in Baroque dance were an important part of the course, with two one-and-a-half-hour sessions per week to instil technique, step vocabulary, spatial awareness and social interaction. From the rich repertoire of ballroom dances known to us, a selection was made featuring the minuet, which was such an important rhythm in the ballroom and the key dance in the education of Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme: these were the ballroom minuet, Tomlinson's Address rigadon and minuet and Mr Preist's minuet for twelve ladies. A lecture-demonstration by Moira Goff and Jennifer Thorp was a key element in the treatment of theatre dance, and Jenny also led further dance workshops in theatre repertoire, taking students through an Entrée Espagnole and an Entrée d'Arlequin. We were also fortunate in autumn 1996 to visit the British Library exhibition on London's 18th-century theatre and attend Alistair Macauley's lecture 'Breaking the Rules of the London Stage'. An introduction to Feuillet/Beauchamp dance notation was an important aspect of the course. The aim here was to encourage students to use the notation to access the sources and help them appreciate the ingenuity and effectiveness of the system in recording dances. Whilst not expecting many to be able to decipher steps with ease, all were encouraged to trace pathways, and to examine short passages of dance already learnt, and to decipher simple sections not yet learnt, such as the minuet in The Address, or country dances.

Assessment tasks were designed to encourage further research, consolidation of knowledge and autonomous learning. The University places value on assessment being part of the learning process, rather than detached from it. Each Integrated Studies module now requires the student to complete two written assignments and two practical tasks. On the one hand, competency in undergraduate writing and argument is nurtured and, on the other, performance skills are promoted. For this module, the students were asked

to devise a two-minute dance for inclusion in one of the three drama/music texts studied. The dance could be for any number of dancers and would not be assessed itself. Supported by a range of musical, visual and dance sources provided by staff, the students readily organized themselves and selected their topics. As the work progressed, tuition was offered to help negotiate issues of authenticity, as well as advice on suitable patterns, relationships and enchainements. The resulting dances were very successful. For Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme three shepherdesses danced a minuet for the ballet presented by the dance and music masters; Mr Jourdain was dressed in rhythm by four tailors; three proud Spanish ladies made an entrée for the Ballet des Nations. Two other groups devised Harlequin numbers to accompany The Way of the World in the eclectic style of English theatre. A knack for grotesque and comic movement emerged in these items.

This study led to one written assignment requiring a report on the selection and composition of the study, comments on dance in relation to the text, and discussion of the choice of steps and pattern in relation to sources. Issues of authenticity and adaptation to available conditions were to be addressed as well. The other written assignment was an academic essay on one of the topics of dance history or the texts. The second practical assessment was in the ballroom repertoire, presented simply in the studio.

The level of achievement in Baroque dance was high, considering the brevity of the project. In technique, this cohort developed the elasticity of style much more successfully than previous groups. They paid attention to the nuances of the technique and were more alert to the need to moderate the turn-out, soften the extended foot and reduce the length of stride that assisted the development of style. Another dimension has also been the introduction of Release technique as one of the Contemporary techniques studied. This tunes the dancers into their physique more organically and gives them a fuller experience of pliancy and the reduction of tension in the limbs, whilst maintaining strength and control. Thus, the strong demands made by ballet can be counteracted, allowing other modes of movement to gain validity.

The students rated the module highly in their evaluation at the end of the course. It was already apparent earlier in the course that they had identified with Baroque dance. They were very aware of the challenge of the technique: the demands of working with heels only slightly raised off the floor, the co-ordination of the arms, the shaping of spatial patterns. The complexities of theatre dances astounded them. The course also presented them with a society in which dance was highly valued, when it was part of the display of power by princes, and an inseparable part of the social diversion. They also discovered the foundation of French ballet, and a period of significant growth in the professionalization of dance. But, most of all, they discovered a beautiful valid style worthy of attention. A few have developed a profound interest in the period and may pursue further studies of their own. All at least have a good basis on which to draw in the future in careers as teachers, choreographers, performers or administrators. I trust this will include an understanding of the limits of their own knowledge, too.

The level of autonomous study was possible because of the availability of original sources, texts on Baroque dance and journal articles. Baroque dance as a field of study is currently expanding a little more quickly than that of Renaissance dance. We expect further publications in the near future, such as a selection of the papers from the Baroque conference of August 1996 [Dance to Honour Kings]. It may be that Baroque dance will continue to be the focus of this Integrated Study, rather than Renaissance dance, for the time being. I am also sure the student commitment to the course was due to the autonomous dimension.

The success of the course was also strongly related to the integration of theoretical and practical study. It is essential to understand the rationale behind the dance to execute the steps with clarity and conviction. It is essential to experience the dances themselves to understand the history fully and to appreciate the art. This is, of course, what we all do when teaching our own workshops, and what Belinda Quirey did in all her teaching – unfold the context and philosophy of the dance. And yet such integration is (I believe) quite rare in an extended course within Higher Education. I have been told that Belinda refused to be called a teacher of historical dance, rather claiming that 'I teach history and then we dance' ... a view with which I concur.