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**History in Motion:
Dance and Australian Culture,
1920 to 1970**

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of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

History in Motion: Dance and Australian Culture 1920-1970 is a thematic investigation of the history of dance which takes the moving body and the production and reception of dance as a starting point for a cultural history of Australia. It attempts to contest the assumption that nothing of interest happened in Australian dance prior to the 1970s by challenging the notion that historical significance is only attributable to art which has a distinctively local flavour, and offering fusion and hybridity as characteristics which make Australian dance practice locally particular. More specifically, this thesis reconstructs the lives and artistic intentions of artists working within a variety of dance genres from the 1930s to the 1950s, re-assessing the relationship between Modernism, gender, a fascist aesthetic, and the exotic in Australian society in this period. It explores the influence of the 'primitive' and the popular on dance practitioners, examining how local and international companies and movement vocabularies influenced attempts to construct a specifically local dance product and challenge the standard separation of high and low brow culture through the 1950s and into the 1960s. This thesis then goes on to investigate the way in which the dancing body reflected and fuelled contemporary debates around the construction of sexuality and the creation of national identity after World War II. It also looks at how choreographers, dancers, and critics attempted to construct a direct relationship between national identity and the Australian landscape by creating narrative structures which offered a unifying vision of Home through the emulation of colonial archetypes or the imagined identification of an Australian 'way of moving'. *History in Motion* concludes with a comparison of the female centred dance practices of the 1930s and the gradual rise in status of men in the post WWII period, finally suggesting that a distinction can be made between the pre-1960s and post-1960s dancing body; the former being feminine, radical but marginal and the latter becoming increasingly masculine, and therefore central, but ultimately more conservative.

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Introduction

In 1981 D.C. Pitcher of East Brighton in Victoria wrote a letter to Dance Australia complaining about the way Brian Hoad, arts editor for The Bulletin, had described Australian dance.¹ Hoad's summary appeared in the official programme accompanying the Sydney Dance Company's first season in New York. Under the heading of "Dance in Australia", Hoad told New York audiences:

To be blunt, the overall history of dance in Australia is about as barren as a typical out-back... landscape. In the beginning was the 'leg-show'. Somewhat later such inimitable bird-like creatures as [Adele] Genee (1916) and [Anna] Pavlova (1926 and 1929) swanned through, imposing cast-iron impressions upon the national conscience. The Australian Ballet, the most heavily-subsidised dance company in the country, still largely caters for tastes like that... [Since] the early 1970s that company lost its way artistically, and concentrated on satisfying elderly female nostalgia for prettier days gone by. ²

D.C. Pitcher railed against the audacity of such a claim:

I have never in many years of attending performances by ballet and dance companies seen any company in its programme notes denigrate other companies and imply that it is the only one of quality in its country.³

The New York Times critic Clive Barnes also found these partisan comments in "bad taste"⁴, even though he believed that Graham Murphy was a choreographer that "you will want to tell your grandchildren about"⁵.

Brian Hoad's remarks were obviously intended to present Sydney Dance Company in a favourable light rather than as any serious attempt to offer a potted history of Australian dance. However, the view that dance had a derivative, conservative local history was not confined to the imagination of a Bulletin journalist.

¹ D.C. Pitcher, "Sydney Dance Company's slap at Australian Ballet", Dance Australia, Vol.1, No.5, September/October/November, 1981, 2

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Daily Messenger, "Sydney Dance Company Goes to New York", Dance Australia, Vol.1, No.5, September/October/November, 1981, 4

⁵ Ibid.

Many dancers and choreographers working in Australia in the same period laboured under similar misconceptions. These artists often knew more about the 'great names' of European, British or American dance - Mary Wigman, Kurt Jooss, Anthony Tudor, Marie Rambert, George Balanchine, Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham for example - than they did about those who had practiced the art within their own country.⁶ Typical of this situation was the negative response of a group of artists working with Dance Exchange in 1977, who, when asked by a reporter for The Age if there was any evidence of a modern dance tradition in Australia prior to the 1970s, confirmed that there was none.⁷ As Elizabeth Dempster has pointed out, these dancers were not "deliberately or mischievously casting aspersions upon the work of their predecessors"⁸, they simply had no idea that there had been any modern dance artists working in Australia prior to the return of their director Russell Dumas in 1976, and others like him.

By the late 1980s little had occurred to disrupt the view that Australian dance had an unimpressive history. In 1988, while many celebrated the bicentenary of colonisation, Russell Dumas offered this pessimistic assessment of the local dance scene in the journal Writings on Dance:

The philosophic concerns of the last 50 years of modern dance have scarcely impinged [on the Australian scene] and yet it is these concerns, contrasting strongly with the tenets and values of the ballet, that have defined modern dance. Australia's 19th century vision of ballet is intact and it is this vision that stymies the development of all contemporary dance here. It is as if the last 50 years of development and change did not happen - and indeed in Australia it did not!⁹

⁶ For agreement on this point see Kai Tai Chan "The Path of the Australian-made dancer", Dance-Australian Made, Papers and Proceedings, AADE National Biennial Conference, Perth, 1991, 19

⁷ Owens, "Style without Definition", The Age, 18th June, 1977, cited in Elizabeth Dempster, "Talking History", Writings on Dance, 4, Spring, 1989, 38

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Russell Dumas, "Dislocated, Isolated, Seduced and Abandoned", Writings on Dance, 3, Winter, 1988, 30

For Dumas Australian dance was a transplanted art, not only in its modern but also its classical form. The Australian dancer lacked “direct access to and connection with the culture and heritage” of dance.¹⁰ In classical ballet it was inevitable that Australians were unable to “embody” a European heritage with any “authority” because they did not possess the “cultural understanding embedded” in the form. Their bodies bore “no understanding of the present having been shaped by the past”.¹¹ In the case of modern dance, Dumas was equally dismissive, insisting that:

...the events that shaped the course of dance in the 1960s and '70s in the USA, and to a lesser extent Europe, simply were not felt here, or if they were made little impression. It was as if we were in a time warp.¹²

What Australians lacked was a heritage of their own. Americans had a revolutionary legacy which justified their contemporary claim to an authentic, locally inspired, modern dance aesthetic. Heritage also gave Europeans their mastery over the classical, neo-classical or Expressive dance forms. Australians were left with a borrowed and derivative art. What could such a history offer local dancers? In Dumas's opinion, nothing that was not tainted by replication and fraudulent, a recreation of the heritages of others, and a transplanted product dumped onto the hard, unforgiving soil of a colonised nation.¹³

Further proof of the historically deficient nature of Australian dance lay, for Dumas, in the lack of interesting scholarship on local practice. This lack moved him to ask:

Is the absence of writing that deals with our [dance] history in fact proof of something that we all know but fear to articulate for personal, political or jingoistic reasons? Namely that [Australian dance] has been so impoverished that we do not want to examine it in a critical context. Elizabeth Dempster's question comes to mind: 'Is Australian dance unremarked upon because it is unremarkable?'.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid., 28

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 30

¹³ Dumas refers here to the continuing colonisation of British culture on Australian society, not the colonisation of Aboriginal people and their continent.

¹⁴ Ibid., 31

As this thesis will illustrate, there is no particular correlation between the 'unremarked upon' and the 'unremarkable'. It is true that there is only a smattering of historical texts on dance in Australia and those which do exist are predominantly of the 'who-did-what-when' variety. These works hardly ever examine their subjects in a critical context and the life and work of many artists are completely ignored.¹⁵ However, a lack of critical comment on the contributions of this latter group, particularly between 1920 and 1970, misrepresents their position in Australian dance history. Many of the dancers and choreographers referred to in this thesis received extensive coverage from a wide variety of locations in their own time. The contemporary obscurity of their lives is not due to the "impoverished" nature of their work so much as the *foreign* nature of the forms they practiced.

This apparent lack of scholarship on Australian dance is not only the result of historical ignorance or contemporary misrepresentations. Such a deficiency is compounded by the very nature of the art form. As Michelle Potter has observed, dance is an evanescent art.¹⁶ It does not "easily take its place alongside visual art, music, film, and literature as a subject of Australian cultural debate."¹⁷ This is because its product is not captured and contained within a medium which is easily read. Unlike literature (with the book), visual art (with the painting), and drama (with the script), dance has rarely produced an artefact which could be viewed at a later date. There is the practice of dance notation which allows the recording of movement through a

¹⁵ Examples of such books are: Patricia Laughlin, Marilyn Rowe: a brilliance all her own, Quartet Books, Melbourne, 1978; Elizabeth Salter, Helpmann: The authorised biography of Sir Robert Helpmann, CBE, Angus and Robertson, Brighton, United Kingdom, 1978; Charles Lisner, My Journey through Dance, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1979; Edward Pask, Enter the Colonies Dancing: History of Dance in Australia 1835-1940, Oxford University Press, 1979; Ballet in Australia: the Second Act, 1940-1980, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1982; Frank Salter, Borovansky: the Man who Made Australian Ballet, Wildcat Press, Sydney, 1980; Christopher Sexton, Peggy Van Praagh: a Life of Dance, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1985; Shona Dunlop MacTavish, Ecstasy of Purpose: Gertrud Bodenwieser, Shona Dunlop MacTavish, Les Humphrey and Associates, Dunedin, 1987; Caryll Von Sturmer, Margaret Barr: Epic Individual, Lesma Von Sturmer, Dee Why, 1994.

¹⁶ Michelle Potter, "Archiving the Evanescent: Dance Collections and Australia", Voices, Vol. III, No.3, Spring, 1993, 95

¹⁷ Ibid.

form of short hand placed on a musical staff. This method is often considered, by those who practice Laban or Benesh notation, as one of the most accurate ways of capturing movement, but these are very particular languages, needing specific training to read them, and in any case only a small amount of work from the past has been notated. In recent years more accessible forms of recording such as video and, to a lesser extent, film have increased the possibility of viewing dance after its initial production. However, even then the most pressing problem for dance continues to be the privileging of oral and textual communication over gesture and movement in western societies. Dance may be preserved or reconstructed but, with the body as its vehicle of expression, any reading of dance becomes problematic due to a lack of general acquaintance with the signs and syntax that make the art form distinctive.

The corporeal has generally lacked authority in western culture. Historically the body has been viewed as the unreliable, brute vessel which housed the more sophisticated intellect and soul. If the body 'spoke', its utterances were either framed as natural (and therefore of little interest to a study of western cultural history) or as artistic (and therefore related to the mysterious world of creativity - a place where the artist is either graced with visitations from the gods or inspired from the mythical depths of unmediated experience). In many circumstances artists themselves have been rather partial to this latter reading of the creative process because it offered an elevated status to their practice or afforded them a space where an explanation of their work was unnecessary; being rejected as either simplifying (or complicating) a process which defied intellectualisation. As a result, the dancing body and the art of dance have rarely been 'read', especially within the academy of history, for what they reveal about the social world in which it was created.¹⁸

¹⁸ This situation has changed dramatically in American dance scholarship in particular in recent times. Some of the more recent texts which examine dance in a social, political, cultural, and/or historical context are: Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, Oxford University Press New York, 1989; Cynthia Novack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1990; Christy Adair, *Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens*, Macmillan, London, 1992; Susan Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the dances of Mary Wigman*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1993; Ann Daly, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1995;

The disappearance of its major artefact, the moving body, means that a history of dance (when it is attempted) relies heavily on the reports of critics, dance enthusiasts, audience members, the writings of dancers themselves, and the occasional videoed performance or reconstruction. Dance reviewer Eleanor Brickhill recently summarised the problems that a reliance on this type of material presents when creating a history of dance.

[W]hile we can know the theatrical conventions of earlier periods, the ways those artists were represented to the public, we can never know about their actual practices. Our assumptions might be that their work was radical, revolutionary. But the fact is we don't know what it was, because we did not see the bodies moving. It's very easy to discuss different practices from an historical viewpoint as if we know what we're talking about, because words are inexact descriptions of real experiences. And real understanding of the differences in practice only comes with actual experience of these practices...¹⁹

Here Brickhill voices a suspicion of historical research which is common among dance artists. This scepticism is born both of a genuine concern for historical accuracy and a misunderstanding of the historical process. It is true that the absence of the moving body makes the construction of a dancing past difficult, but this is only a problem if the project at hand is the aesthetic assessment of a work, rather than an understanding of that work within its historical context. For if those bodies did exist (if we could conjure them up from the theatres, church halls, and dance floors of the past) it does not follow that we would 'experience' them as they 'actually' were. Whether we could watch them from the audience or place their movements on our own bodies, the vocabulary that we saw or experienced would be mediated by our late 20th century sensibilities. Their art would be filtered through our historically specific aesthetic assumptions and situated bodies.

Mark Franko, *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1995; Ann Copper Albright, *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover, 1997; Ramsey Burt, *Alien Bodies: Representations of Modernity, 'Race' and Nation in Early Modern Dance*, Routledge, London, 1998.

¹⁹ Eleanor Brickhill, "A World of Difference", *Real Time*, 27, October/November, 1998, 9-10

Although much of the early consideration of the work of dance artists in this thesis relies on reviews, photographs, and reportage, in most cases these accounts have the advantage of being constructed in the same historical moment as the performance. When this evidence is used, any assessment of the radical nature (or otherwise) of an artists work, is framed, not in relation to contemporary notions of revolution, but within what was considered to be revolutionary at the time by those who were actually there. Were the historical bodies of these dancers available in something other than photographs and reportage this history would undoubtedly be richer, but the assumption that it would be more accurate does not take into account the way in which the passage of time marks not only the way we see, as John Berger has so persuasively argued²⁰, but also the way in which we move.

As with the way we see and the way we move, the passage of time also marks the way we remember. The dance profession has had a long and romantic attachment to memories. Personal recollections are given a similar status to that which Brickhill attributes to experience. This stems from the reliance dance has always had on the embodied transference of knowledge. Dances have traditionally been learnt and transferred, created and re-constructed through the immediacy of one moving body communicating with another. Practices have been handed down, creating a reverence for tradition even among the most radical of contemporary performers. As such, notions of heritage loom large in the creation of dance histories.

This situation was poignantly illustrated at the 1997 Green Mill Dance Project (a collection of performances and a congress which had been a yearly event from 1993 to 1997 in Melbourne).²¹ In its last year Green Mill was subtitled "Heritage and Heresy". The expressed aim of the forums for that year were the examination of dance in Australia, as produced in a Western theatrical context, from:

²⁰ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, Penguin, London, 1972

²¹ The Green Mill Dance Project took its name from a dance hall that opened in Melbourne in 1926 on the site now occupied by the Victorian Arts Centre. As of March 1998 Green Mill lost its funding from Arts Victoria. The MAP symposium, (Movement and Performance) was convened in 1998 as its replacement.

...the evolution of the early ballet companies and contemporary dance ensembles through to the most recent experiments with video and computer technologies.²²

Three local names dominated that evolution: Laurel Martin, Edouard Borovansky and Gertrud Bodenwieser. What was particularly interesting about the inclusion of these three was the way that discussion concentrated on what they had contributed to the development of Australia's contemporary dance culture. It was their relevance to the present, rather than the contribution they made to their own historical moment, that justified their 'pioneering' status. For example, the session on Bodenwieser was called "In the Wake of Madame Bodenwieser", and in "Scene Again - Laurel Martin OBE" a parade of dancers, former students, and co-workers paid tribute to Martin's influence on their lives and work over the past thirty years.

These sessions at Green Mill 1997 were well received by a dance public starved of affirmation of their own historical existence. Such glowing tributes were confirmation of a history which is denied in the general reconstruction of Australia's performing past. This was a celebration of the legacy of three pioneers. It was not a critical examination of their work in context but the production of a kind of history in which significance was conferred on those who left a heritage. Edouard Borovansky developed a ballet company which is generally accepted as paving the way for The Australian Ballet. Laurel Martin, besides creating an impressive body of original works with the Victorian Ballet Guild, also taught in Melbourne for many years where she fostered an army of grateful students who have kept her name alive. Gertrud Bodenwieser also managed to leave a trail of disciples in Australia. Reunited with her European dancers in Sydney in 1939, after fleeing from the German occupation of Austria, Bodenwieser maintained her company and school until her death in 1959. Her legacy was continued by her pupils who maintained the company and established a school under the Bodenwieser name. This school closed in 1997 after the death of its

²² Lee Christofis (Vice Chair of Green Mill board, 1997), *Green Mill 1997, Heritage and Heresy*, Programme, 14

principal Margaret Chapple. This studio, which became a Sydney landmark on City Rd in Chippendale, produced a succession of dancers, teachers, and choreographers: Coralie Hinkley, Graham Watson, Chrissie Koltai, Alain Isreal, and Jacqui Carole among them. With the establishment of this legacy, Bodenwieser's name remained relevant to contemporary developments in Australian dance. She became the starting point in the construction of an Australian modern dance heritage. She was a lonely pioneer.

Memory had played a major role in the maintenance of Bodenwieser's pioneering status. However, as an interview conducted with Joy Hart in 1994 illustrates, memory, like experience, is historically situated. Joy Hart danced with Bodenwieser in the 1940s. Her recollection of her time with 'Madame' was extremely detailed. She recalled how Bodenwieser had been asked to choreograph the 'harem' scene in Charles Chavel's epic film *Forty Thousand Horsemen*, but when the director saw what Bodenwieser had created he requested that the dance be 'spiced up' a little. Bodenwieser refused and Hart, along with the other female performers, were left to their own devices. They choreographed the scene with what they could borrow from Bodenwieser's original offering and added a little 'suggestive' movement of their own along the way.²³

Other stories Hart offered confirmed the central role which Bodenwieser played in her life. When it came to her recollections of another of her teachers, Irene Vera Young, her memory was sketchy and incomplete. However, Young had been Hart's first teacher. She had inspired her to take up dance, a practice which Hart recalled was unusual among her peers (so unusual in fact that she kept her involvement in dance a secret). Despite Young's earlier relationship with Hart, it was Bodenwieser who held sway over her memory. This situation could be explained by the simple fact that Bodenwieser had exerted a far greater impact on Hart's life, creating more profound memories, but in the passage of time between Hart's

²³ Interview with Joy Hart, May, 1994

immediate acquaintance with these two women and her interview (a period of over fifty years) her memory of Bodenwieser had been stimulated a number of times. Joy's recollections had been reinforced by the continued existence of the institutions Bodenwieser had established and the occasional media attention her works and her students received. This remained the case long after Hart left dance to marry and raise a family. In comparison, her memory of Irene Vera Young had received almost no stimulation over the years. This artist had faded completely from the public record, even though her work and life had been celebrated quite widely in the 1930s. An association with the more famous Bodenwieser offered Hart's history more validity than the time she had spent with Young. Her memories were aroused, confirmed, honoured, and maintained through Bodenwieser's posthumous creation as an Australian dance pioneer.

Joy Hart's memories are an illustration of the way in which a country's historical record is fuelled from two, inter-related directions. In the case of Bodenwieser, the maintenance of a record of her contribution relied on the continued celebration of the artist's career after her immediate influence had come to an end. The existence of people who were willing to attest to Bodenwieser's significance as an artist, choreographer, teacher, and mentor was essential. This memory was then reinforced by the dissemination and maintenance of her history within a wider cultural setting which included the re-visiting of her achievements by critics and the press from World War II to the present day. This publicity then fed the memories, and validated the experiences, of those who knew Bodenwieser, which in turn stimulated further interest in her life and work within a wider social context.

Faulty memories, problematic 'foreign' syntax, and disappearing bodies, are restrictions which have affected the research and writing on dance throughout the western world. However, a lack of scholarship on dance in Australia, and a myopic view of the art form's history, do not only arise out of these more general problems. Dance in Australia has been particularly ignored in the historical investigation of art and culture because of the way in which local excellence (or lack there of) has been

framed by successive generations of commentators and artists. Australian dance was “unremarked upon because it was unremarkable”. It was “barren”, “colonised”, and counterfeit. As these remarks by Dempster, Dumas, and Hoad illustrate, since the 1980s the past has been constructed as illegitimate in comparison to the present (a present that is often viewed from a very partisan position). This situation in Australia has been stimulated by a competition over resources, audiences and artistic legitimacy. For example, Dumas’s assessment of local history was coloured by his position within the dance community. As a post-modern choreographer who had returned to Australia after a career with major ballet, modern, and post modern companies in Britain, Europe and America²⁴, Dumas was in competition with other Australian choreographers not only for scarce government funding but also for the right to claim his work as innovative within an international and, perhaps more importantly, a national context. Sydney Dance Company’s director Graham Murphy was in a similar position, as were many other directors, choreographers and dancers who formed companies in the 1970s and the 1980s.²⁵

In Valerie Preston Dunlop’s reference book Dance Words, innovation is described as:

...work created *now* by choreographers and directors, which is not a reworking of existing work, but which does not require creators to always be totally different from how they worked before.²⁶

As this definition indicates, innovation in dance does not necessarily mean the continual reinventing of new styles on the part of a particular choreographer. An artist may have an approach which informs his or her entire body of work, but that artist

²⁴ Russell Dumas worked with companies such as the London Festival Ballet, The Royal Ballet, Ballet Rambert, the Netherlands Dance Theatre, and with artists like America’s Twyla Tharp and Trisha Brown. For a profile of Dumas see Libby [Elizabeth] Dempster, “Profile: Russell Dumas”, New Theatre Australia, September/October, No.1, 1987, 47; and Karen Martin, “The Choreography of Time”, MA Thesis, Performance Studies, University of Sydney, expected completion date 1999.

²⁵ For a list of such companies see Appendix One. Also see Clare Dyson, The Ausdance Guide to Australian Dance Companies, Australian Government Publishing Services for Australian Dance Council - Ausdance, Canberra, 1994.

²⁶ Emphasis not in original text. Valerie Preston Dunlop, ed., Dance Words, Harwood Academic Press, Chur, Switzerland, 1995, 66

must also produce work which relates to, but does not depend on, the historical product that preceded it. This insistence on innovation within dance practices has stimulated a preoccupation with notions of development, creative exclusivity, and originality. These are all central concerns of Modernism, the aesthetic which has dominated western dance since the turn of the century.

Modernism has traditionally required, if not the complete denial of the innovations of the past, then at least the abolition of their relevance to the present. As the American dance critic John Martin suggested in 1933, even the term 'modern' could only be of "temporary accuracy in so far as it is accurate at all", because "when a more advanced type of dance shall have arisen it will be impossible to refer to the dancing of to-day as modern".²⁷ For Martin, the "chief aim" in modern dance was the "expression of inner compulsion", which dictated that practitioners throw away "everything that has gone before and start all over again from the beginning."²⁸

This notion of beginning again, either with a complete or partial disregard for the past, has been a continuing feature of the modern dance project. However, since the 1950s innovation within Australian dance has also been closely linked to constructions of national identity. Post war culture demanded local particularity. Modernism demanded something new. When the two combined it became essential that each generation of modern dancers framed their precursors as antiquated and illegitimate. However, Australia's dance history is littered with practices and people who arrived from elsewhere. Therefore a post 1960s assessment of local modern dance history inevitably saw the entire past as imperfect. A lack of national sentiment or the development of a national style rendered the dance of the twenties, thirties, forties and fifties defective.

This thesis tells another story. Through experimentation with Modernism, a flirtation with fascism, encounters with the exotic, the primitive, popular culture,

²⁷ John Martin, *The Modern Dance*, Dance Horizons, Princeton, New Jersey, 1933, reprinted in 1965, 3

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 6

colonial archetypes, and sexual/social revolutions, Australian dance from 1920 to 1970 has been anything but impoverished or unremarkable. This history may not be one which reveals the development of a pristine, locally particular artistic form, but then, with its history of invasion, colonisation, and immigration, how could a dancing past located in Australia be anything but a fragmented, hybrid, erratic, disjointed, and appropriated tale? For although there have been various attempts to develop something local, ultimately Australian dance artists have been a bunch of “grabbers, spongers and appropriators”²⁹, as the contemporary choreographer Gideon Obarzanek so aptly suggested.

This being the case, it is important that any history of dance in Australia examines the migration of ideas and the process of, what the historian John Rickard has called, “cultural transplantation”.³⁰ This thesis is therefore not a definitive history of either modern, classical or popular theatrical styles but an investigation of the cross-fertilisation of ideas and vocabularies which muddies established distinctions between dance forms and challenges the usual divide between high and low brow cultural processes. After all, as Rickard also established, the separation of the high and the low in Australian performance history is an historical (and historiographic) phenomenon rather than a statement of fact.³¹ The distinction between the classic or avant-garde and the folk or popular was “born of a need to argue the case for the study of the latter”³² in the 1960s and seventies. Many histories written in this period offered the idea that Australian high culture derived from a transplanted British/European product, while popular culture was the authentic “home grown” artefact.³³ As the work of the historian Richard Waterhouse has illustrated, this is not actually the case. Both high and low brow cultural forms have had their external

²⁹ Gideon Obarzanek, from an interview with Erin Brannigan, November, 1996. Sections of this interview appear in Erin Brannigan, “Funny Bones”, *Dance Australia*, Feb/March 97, 38-39, and MAP symposium programme, 1998.

³⁰ John Rickard, “Cultural History: the ‘High’ and the ‘Popular’”, in S. L. Goldberg and F. B. Smith, eds., *Australian Cultural History*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, 187

³¹ *Ibid.*, 186

³² *Ibid.*, 180

³³ *Ibid.*

influences. Australian popular culture was infected by the migration of ideas from the working class cultures of Britain and the United States in much the same way as its high brow equivalent.³⁴ Naturally there have been adjustments to the original forms (making them peculiarly Australian) but attempts to ignore, dismiss or devalue the hybrid, appropriated nature of local, cultural practices offers a very limited and inaccurate view of Australian cultural history.

In dance the separation of the elite and the popular is a particularly inadequate distinction. Throughout the chapters of this thesis, barriers drawn between classical ballet, modern dance, or the popular/folk vocabularies of jazz, tap, indigenous or ethnic dance (and even physical culture), are shown to be artificial and continually traversed. Expressive dance artists of the 1930s may have struggled to maintain an association with high art principles established within early 20th century Modernism, the subject of chapter one, but in chapter two it becomes obvious that these artists were also greatly influenced by the practice of physical culture. Their work revealed the persuasive, popular nature of a fascist aesthetic in Australia in the interwar period. In chapter three, the exotic is investigated as another location from which dance practitioners escaped the rigidity's of Western definitions and categories. By practicing dances they considered to be of the "Orient", female artists found release from the confines of their gendered roles in Western society. The 'Other' neutralised their viewed, exposed, sexed bodies and allowed an exploration of movement vocabulary, which in more traditional circumstances, would have been a cause for concern. The subject of chapters four and five are indigenous, folk or popular culture which offer a challenge to the artificial separation of the high and low. In the case of jazz this popular, 'primitive' form inspired a whole generation of choreographers across the spectrum of dance genres. It was a movement language which crossed

³⁴ Richard Waterhouse, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville: the Australian Popular Stage 1788-1914*, New South Wales University Press, Sydney, 1990; *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure: A History of Australian Popular Culture since 1788*, Longman, Melbourne, 1995; and "Lola Montez and High Culture: the Elizabethan Theatre Trust in post-war Australia", *Journal of Australian Studies*, Number 52, 1997, 148-158.

international borders as it embodied contemporary freedoms, fears and fantasies in post WWII Australia. In contrast, Aboriginal movement, another form considered 'primitive', became a site for the celebration of the nationally particular. Through the work of Rex Reid and Beth Dean (and their 1950 and 1954 versions of the ballet *Corroboree*) the relationship between innovation and tradition found local expression.

This exploration of the choreographic intentions and contemporary reception of *Corroboree* also reveals one of the ways in which choreographers working in Australia attempted to create a nationally identifiable dance form in the post war period. Not all works were as inventive (or problematic) as the work of Reid and Dean. Some choreographers simply offered dance audiences a local identity through the narrative structure of their works, creating pieces which relied on many of the colonial archetypes which had sustained Australian culture since the late 19th century. However, in nearly all of their attempts to create 'Australian' works, artists were attracted to a romantic understanding of the relationship between geography and the dancing body. In chapter seven we see that from the late 1950s dancers, choreographers and critics had begun searching for a particularly Australian 'way of moving'. Even the sceptical Russell Dumas, who in 1988 rejected the idea that Australia had produced anything distinctive in its entire dance history, romanticised the effect of place on the practitioner and the essential (and desirable) association between geography, art and authentic practice. "Different people interacting with landscape form part of what we term culture" he stated:

[I]nhabiting the same landscape for long periods of time gives distinctive cultural understandings which are often so much taken for granted that they become invisible. These values seep into the people.³⁵

Although Dumas denied Australian dance the right to an association between authenticity and landscape, the pursuit of just such a relationship has been one of the hallmarks of post WWII dance practice in Australia. This search for a geographically

³⁵ Dumas, op. cit., 29

specific 'way of moving' has revealed not only the close relationship between landscape and national identity, but also a shift in the gendered identification of dance as an art form.

Dance has often been described as the feminine art. It is one of the few forms of artistic expression populated, if not always dominated, by women.³⁶ It has therefore also assumed the status of a secondary art - "Terpsichore curtsying behind Dionysus", as Dumas has suggested.³⁷

[D]ance in our tradition has defined itself by its relationship to the other proper arts (music, visual, dramatic), all of which are male dominated... [T]he perception of the body is related to the fate of women, i.e. the body and women are devalued. The medium of dance is the body and this is a devalued medium.³⁸

Or so the conventional argument goes. However, as chapter six illustrates, from the reception of the male dancers of Colonel de Basil's Ballet Russes at the end of the 1930s, through the career of Robert Helpmann in the 1950s and his production of *The Display* in 1964, the male dancer has been struggling to acquire a legitimate claim over this art of the body. So successful has this campaign been, that by the late 20th century, as is argued in the conclusion of this thesis, the art of 'Woman' has in fact become the art of 'Man'.

"History in Motion: Dance and Australian culture 1920-1970" examines aspects of theatrical dance which have been obscured, denigrated, misunderstood, or forgotten through the mis-application of contemporary aesthetic assumptions or the myopic quest for innovation, national representation, and international recognition. The concentrated glare of rapid development and change in Australian dance from the 1970s has contributed significantly to the masking of the lives and work of artists

³⁶ Ann Daly makes the distinction between the population and domination of dance by women in her article "Unlimited Partnership: Dance and Feminist Analysis", *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Spring, 1991, 2-5

³⁷ Dumas, op. cit., 35

³⁸ Ibid.

practicing in earlier decades. As this introduction has suggested, dance to 1970 has been invalidated by circumstances and standards which had more to do with post seventies social and aesthetic politics than historical accuracy. The work of artists from 1920 to 1970 may have been derivative. Their practice may well have contributed to the 'colonisation' which Russell Dumas railed against in the late 1980s, but, as this thesis shows, that derivation is interesting in itself. Australian dance is peppered with some very local idiosyncrasies, but its hybridity and irreverent appropriation is what makes the history of Australian dance a unique story.

Chapter One

Prominence in Obscurity: Expressive dance practices in Australia, 1928-1936.

Two of the earliest Australian exponents of what will be collectively called modern dance¹ were Joan Henry and Joan Joske. In the early 1920s both women had begun to study dance in an attempt to overcome minor physical disabilities. Joan Henry suffered from a disabled arm and Joan Joske experienced “trouble with her feet”.² The first classes they attended were with teachers who practiced, what Henry called “rhythmic movement”. This was most likely a technique related to either the teachings of the French educationalist Emile Jaques Dalcroze, or the work of the English dance/physical culturists Ruby Ginner or Margaret Morris.³ In the mid 1920s Henry and Joske were enticed away from this form of dance by the presence of the German Lola Laban in Australia. Lola Laban, cousin of Rudolf Laban (a German dance theorist, choreographer, and educator who had established schools in Basle, Stuttgart, Hamburg, Würzburg, Zurich, Prague, Budapest, Zagreb, Rome, Vienna and Paris by the 1920s⁴), had originally intended to stay in Melbourne for short holiday but she became ill and was forced to remain. Once she had recovered, Laban opened a

¹ The term ‘modern’ will be used throughout this thesis to describe a variety of dance forms which have been known at various times as Absolute Dance, Expressive dance, Art dance, Modern dance and Contemporary dance.

² The majority of the information on Joan Joske and Joan Henry emerges from two letters written to Keith Glennon by Joan Henry on the 3rd and 20th July 1967. Located in Folder 10, Box 9, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia. These letters were in reply to requests for information about the careers of inter-war dancers in Melbourne from Keith Glennon and Alan Brissenden when they were researching for “Australia Dances”. “Australia Dances” remains unpublished to date but the manuscript of this work, and the corresponding research, are collected in the Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia. These papers were viewed with the kind permission of Alan Brissenden and the assistance of staff at Special Collections at the Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide - Librarian Susan Woodburn and her assistant Iolanda Centofanti.

³ These techniques and their influence on Australian dance practice will be discussed at length in chapter three in relation to the work of Irene Vera Young and Sonia Revid.

⁴ S. Thornton, *A Movement Perspective of Rudolf Laban*, Macdonald & Evans, London, 1971, 5-6.

dance studio in Little Bourke Street which both Joan Henry and Joan Joske decided to attend.⁵

Lola Laban had trained not only with her famous cousin but also with his pupil Mary Wigman. Perhaps influenced by the early work of the latter, Lola Laban displayed what Joan Henry called a “dark soul”.⁶ She had a great “sympathy for suffering” and Henry remembered Laban’s creations as “mostly tragic” or explorations of “man and machine”⁷. As far as Henry could recall Laban gave only one recital while she was in Melbourne, which included students from her studio.

In 1927, after Lola Laban returned to Europe, Joan Henry opened her own studio in Domain Street, South Yarra, which she called *The Studio of the Absolute Dance*. One Melbourne newspaper asked the obvious question: “What is the Absolute Dance?”. Quoting Mary Wigman, Henry described it as a “living and moving art creation interpreted by the living body as its instrument.”⁸ Absolute dance:

... shapes itself out of its own essence, independently of its own interpretation, which may be understood either in the abstract or literary sense by the spectator who shares nearly all the experiences of the dancer.⁹

Absolute Dance could be “self-contained, just as any other art”, expressing thought and emotions through “the language of the dancer’s body” which, when performed with dedication, was “so clear that music or the spoken word, are superfluous.”¹⁰

⁵ Before arriving in Australia Lola Laban had taught dance to children in Switzerland. These children were mostly refugees and what Joan Henry identified as “orthopaedic cases”.

⁶ Letter from Joan Henry to Keith Glennon 20th July 1967, located in Folder 10, Box 9, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

⁷ *Ibid.* The relationship between man and machine was a popular theme within a variety of artistic forms in the 1920s. Works such as Fritz Lang’s film *Metropolis* (1926) and Gertrud Bodenwieser’s ballet *Demon Machine* (originally produced in Vienna in 1923) concentrated on the same critique of the alienating effects of industrialisation.

⁸ Article “Challenge to the ballet: Melbourne sees a New Art”, no date given. Article located in Folder 10, Box 9, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.* For more on the defining principles and history of the term Absolute Dance in relation to the work of Mary Wigman see Susan Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the dances of Mary Wigman*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1993, 15-46

Working on their own after the departure of Laban, Joan Henry recalled that, despite their apparent physical impediments:

...[i]t was not long before we found that our movements developed into dances which other people loved to watch. Granted careful costuming we could forget our physical difficulties and develop as dancers.¹¹

This “careful costuming” was a prominent and much advertised feature of their productions which were regularly created for Henry and Joske by David Bethel¹². Although these costumes were more “varied and elaborate than those of the modern European School”, the principles of their dances still adhered to the expressive ideas and abstract principles of the Absolute Dance they had learnt from Laban. Such principles allowed both Joans a space in which to explore movement which was denied them in other forms of dance practice because of their disabilities.

Assessing their own work in 1967, Joan Henry remembered that there was always “a strong element of improvisation” because both dancers felt they created their best performances by being “prepared to do something new at any moment.”¹³ This aspect of their work required a “strong and self imposed discipline”.¹⁴ They believed, as did Mary Wigman, that dance should be an independent art form, capable of maintaining interest without “subservience to music”. They also assumed that the impulse for movement could be found in what Wigman described as the “primordial sources of the body and space”.¹⁵

Around 1930 Adolf Joske purchased a “lovely little deserted church” for his daughters, Joan and Margaret. Here, at what came to be called St Chad, Margaret painted and the two Joans meet regularly to experiment and improvise together. St

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² David Bethel was born Lesley Thomas.

¹³ Letter from Joan Henry to Keith Glennon dated 20th July 1967, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Walter Sorell, *The Mary Wigman Book*, Wesleyan University Press, 1975, cited in Valerie Preston-Dunlop, *Dance Words*, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995, 19

Chad became the site of “a steady stream of studio performances” which, by 1932, included some of the students Henry considered competent dancers. At around the same time Henry’s brother Hal Percy, with Brett Randall, opened the Little Theatre in its first home - The Kiosk in Fawkner Park.¹⁶ Henry and Joske, along with a selected group of students, gave recitals there, which were later reproduced for a programme at Rumpelmayers ballroom.

At The Kiosk and Rumpelmayers Henry and Joske performed a recital of “free dancing” under the title of “Danses Rituelles”. Some of the pieces were executed in silence, one to “the beat of a native drum”, and others to classical music by Debussy (*Prelude No. 10*), Gustav Holst (*The Planet's Suite*), and Wagner (*Parsifal*). For another work Henry’s students Carrie Haase and Flora McIvor, “wearing a gorgeous robe of lobelia blue satin and draperies in cerise tonings with a turban to tone”, gave poetry readings as accompaniment.¹⁷ Joan Henry recalled Joske’s unique quality of movement in *The Bringer of Peace* to Holst’s *Venus*:

Joan had long, thin, very supple hands... [and] a rather Oriental style. She could make an audience feel whatever she wanted it to feel and could make it quiet and peaceful while still gripping its attention.¹⁸

In 1934 Joan Joske moved to England with her family. Joan Henry stayed behind in Melbourne. By 1936 Henry had begun to plan the creation of her own company but her father’s sudden illness prevented its establishment. In November 1936 she mounted an independent recital at the Melbourne Town Hall and created a ballet for the first production of the National Theatre Movement, “The Pageant of the Holy Nativity”, at the Princess Theatre. After her father’s death Henry was also free

16 Later the theatre moved to another building which was also an old church in Martin St, South Yarra. This theatre eventually became St Martins.

17 “Dance Rituelles: a unique Presentation”, undated article, located in Folder 10, Box 9, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

18 Letter, Henry to Glennon, 20th July 1967, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

to travel. She went to South Africa and later to Argentina on what she called a “dance safari”.¹⁹ Arriving in London she gave a series of recitals as the Second World War was coming to an end, but she eventually left performance to pursue a career as a teacher of music, drama, dance and puppetry for the W.E.A. and the Southern Command Formation College. After the war both Joans returned to Melbourne where Joan Joske created one last recital and Joan Henry pursued an interest in yoga.²⁰

In the 1960s Henry was asked to identify any other significant modern dancers practicing in Melbourne in the 1930s. Apart from Joan Joske, her sister Margaret and herself, Henry listed Pat Martyn - who had originally been a pupil of Henry’s and another German trained dancer Sonja Revid.²¹

Joske and Henry may have been the earliest exponents of Absolute Dance principles in Australia but, by the 1930s, it was Sonja Revid (later Anglicised to Sonia) who eclipsed their critical popularity in the same city. After seeing one of her early recitals at the end of 1932 Henry’s pupil Pat Martyn was so impressed with Revid that she left Henry to study with the newcomer. Revid’s dance history was also linked with Mary Wigman, however her association was more immediate than that of Joske’s and Henry’s. Sonia had graduated from the *Wigman Schule Dresden* in Germany in June 1928 (fig.1). Originally from Riga, she had left home at nineteen, travelling to Germany where she took up residence with an aunt. With her sights set on the Wigman school Revid took classes with several other teachers and, when she believed herself up to the task, auditioned for Wigman and was accepted into the Dresden school.

At this school Sonia would have been exposed to the aesthetic principles of inter-war German Modernism. Working independently since 1914 Mary Wigman had assimilated many of the principles of her former teachers Rudolf Von Laban and Emile Jaques Dalcroze, but she had also departed significantly from their influences.

¹⁹ Letter, Henry to Glennon, 3rd July 1967, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia. .

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

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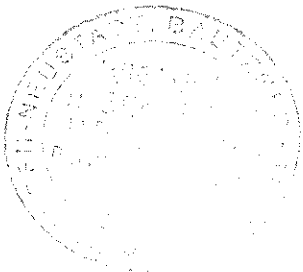
SSONGA REVID, GEBOREN DEN 11. JANUAR
1902 ZU LIBAU, HAT NACH ABSOLVIERUNG DER
AUSBILDUNGSKLASSEN DER WIGMAN-SCHULE
DRESDEN DIE ABSCHLUSSPRÜFUNG MIT
GUT (II)

BESTANDEN UND SICH DAMIT DIE LEHRBERECH-
TIGUNG UNTER BERUFUNG AUF DIE WIGMAN-
SCHULE-DRESDEN ERWORBEN

A) FÜR DIE TÄNZERISCHE BERUFS-AUSBILDUNG
BIS ZUR REIFE DER TANZKLASSE II^A LAUT LEHR-
PLAN DER WIGMAN-SCHULE-DRESDEN,
B) FÜR DAS GESAMTE GEBIET DES LAIENUNTERRICHTES.

DRESDEN, IM JUNI 1928.

DIE PRÜFUNGSKOMMISSION DER WIGMAN-SCHULE-DRESDEN:



M. W. Wigman
Elisabeth Wigman

Hanya Holm
1928

Fig. 1 Sonia Revid's Diploma from Wigman School Dresden (courtesy of the Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne)

By the time Revid became associated with the Dresden school Wigman had successfully disposed of any essential association between movement and music. She had also severed any immediate attachment to beauty and lyricism. In her *Technik* Wigman incorporated the Dalcrozian principle of “structured improvisation”²² but her’s was not a “codified movement vocabulary” but a “method of experiencing and structuring movement” through which a student could “assimilate virtuosic skills learned later”²³ in the attainment of *Ausdruck* (expression) and *tänzerischer Gestaltung* (composition) which were also part of the Wigman curriculum.²⁴

In her early career Wigman had also rejected the overtly expressive and feminine qualities of performers such as the American born Isadora Duncan and the Swiss Grete Wiesental. In contrast to these artists Wigman insisted that ‘truth’ in representation meant the exploration and exposure of inner turmoil and contradiction in the human experience. Her’s was an aesthetic steeped in the study of the ‘darker’ side of human emotions, often utilising masks in order to distance the humanity of the performer from the experience she was attempting to convey. In this Wigman had been influenced by new understandings of reality inspired by the popular dissemination of Freudian psychoanalytic theories and Nietzschean philosophies. For Wigman, as for many Modernists, the site of artistic inspiration had been relocated from the divine to the personal.²⁵ Reality was no longer singular or fixed but a multiplicity of “subjective fictions”.²⁶ In accord with these principles Wigman freed dance from any essential attachment to other art forms. Along with others, including Laban, she established dance as an independent practice, an absolute form, through which a Modernist aesthetic could be expressed.

²² Manning, op. cit., 54

²³ Ibid., 91

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Michael Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives: Vitalism in Bourgeois Social Thought, 1890-1960*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1984: 2-3

²⁶ Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, *Modernism 1890-1930*, Harvester Press, Sussex, 1978,

Like many artists at the turn of the century, Wigman was reacting to the persistent relevance of Renaissance romanticism in Western art. Her point of departure and rebellion was therefore not only the work of former moderns such as Duncan and Wiesental, but also the principles of classical ballet which had developed amidst “the baroque splendour of courtly formality” of Louis the XIVth’s France.²⁷ Ballet did not always aspire to, or achieve, such lofty associations, being more akin to what Brian Hoad described as a ‘leg show’ than the elite practice it had been or would become. However, as Deborah Jowitt suggests, by the nineteenth century the Romantic ballerina had acquired not only a literal but also a socially elevated status.²⁸ Classical ballet became the perfect representation of Victorian life and culture. In this century the art form suited a set of values which idealised temporal and spatial order. These elements were embedded in the very construction of the classical form. For example, the *enchantement*, which is traditionally the basis of all classical variations, is composed from a series of steps, each of which has a definitive beginning and end. A *glissade* is a gliding motion which begins when one foot is released to the side and the weight is transferred from one leg to another with the second leg being drawn back into the original fifth position. A *pas de chat*, the ‘step of the cat’, is a jump which also begins and ends in fifth position. Each of these individual steps would ideally be completed before the body was able to move on to another equally self contained movement. Such steps were not always executed in this static manner, but the feet should ideally have always passed through the mean position, fifth position, between each step. As such, the traditional classical vocabulary gained a reputation of being independent of the vagaries of history and culture. Each step stood entirely and definitively on its own, harbouring a definitive ‘truth’ in its execution.

The carriage of the body itself was another site where the Victorian preference for order was played out. This body rotated around an upright spine. If the weight

²⁷ Sondra Horton Fraleigh, *Dance and the Lived Body: a Descriptive Aesthetics*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1987: xxxvi

²⁸For a discussion of the technical changes that promoted the ethereal Romantic ballerina see Debroah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image*, William Morrow, New York, 1988, 29-47.

was allowed to move off centre it was always returned to a “state of equilibrium”²⁹. In this way the ballet body was successfully separated, both aesthetically and philosophically, from the ‘real’ or the ‘ordinary’ body. This was further enhanced by the gradual development of an extraordinary body which was capable of performing amazing physical feats. As Sondra Horton Fraleigh observed, ballet in the nineteenth century set its sights on the “sphere of ideal formalism...beyond everyday existence and painful realities”.³⁰ The body of the dancer, and therefore the art form itself, became separated from the ‘real’ world. Just as organisation, order and the separation of the public and private were essential components of a Victorian life³¹, the compartmentalisation of classical ballet was the perfect aesthetic expression of the Victorian world view. It was controlled and contained with a universal, reproducible ‘truth’.³²

These were the principles against which the turn of the century modern dancer rebelled.³³ Artists like Mary Wigman challenged the spatial, philosophical, scientific and emotional principles of the classical form. She promoted, what she saw as, a more ‘natural’ state of human expression through movement over the ordered, idealised classical body and technique. Although Wigman found the historical inspiration for her art in a rejection of the classical formalism of ballet and the revivalism of Isadora

²⁹ Fraleigh op. cit., xxxv

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ For more on the Victorian separation of the public and private spheres see: Rosalind Rosenberg, Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1992; Michelle Perrot, “Women, Power and History”, in Michelle Perrot, ed., Writing Women’s History, Basil Blackwell Ltd, Oxford, 1992; Carol Lee Bacchi, Same Difference: Feminism and Sexual Difference, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990

³² The popularity of classical ballet throughout the western world was also promoted by the adoption of a universally applicable language which traversed geographical boundaries. The language of ballet was French and this created, what Susan Manning has called, a “transnational legibility” to the classical form. Each step, with its French name (and its confirmation of the dominant ideological principles of the 19th century in western countries), allowed for the cross-cultural reproduction of ballet and the development of the idea that the form had a universal applicability and that it was devoid of ideological or social particularity. Manning, op. cit., 29

³³ Challenges to such concepts were not just confined to those who practiced modern dance. The work of choreographers such as Vaslav Nijinsky within Serge Diaghilev’s Ballet Russes in Paris from 1912 to 1916 also showed evidence of an affinity with a Modernist aesthetic. However, as was the with Isadora, Laban, and Wigman, to achieve a recognisably Modernist aesthetic in his work Nijinsky had to invent a new vocabulary rather than rely on the self-contained, definitive processes of the classical style in which he had been trained.

Duncan, she also found motivation for her particular innovations in the political, social and aesthetic struggles of a post World War I world.

It was in the last years of this period of experimentation that Sonia Revid became a pupil of Mary Wigman's. After two years of instruction at the Dresden school Sonia embarked on a solo career, holding her first performances in 1928. She spent the next few years travelling, performing and developing her own ideas on dance and artistic expression, but she remained a devoted follower of Wigman, returning for master-classes until she came to Australia in 1932 to visit her sister.³⁴

Sonia's older sister Rosa, and her husband Dolia, had immigrated to Australia in 1928 (the same year that Sonia had left Riga for Germany). While she learned to dance with Wigman, Rosa and Dolia Ribush opened a sweet manufacturing business in Melbourne: *Bush's Confectionery Company*. As the business flourished, Dolia was able to take up his first passion, theatre directing. With Dolia's involvement with Melbourne's amateur theatre scene, over the next fifteen years the Ribush household became a Mecca for Melbourne's actors, dancers, and artistic elite. The Australian essayist A. A. Phillips, Dolia's friend and occasional accountant, recalled that, on any one evening the writers Nettie and Vance Palmer or Betty Roland, the artist Norman Lindsay, the ballet choreographer/teacher Edouard Borovansky, or the entire caste of the visiting Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo (or any of the various foreign performers visiting Melbourne) could be found enjoying a play reading or a party, along with Rosa's hospitality and Dolia's boisterous company, throughout the 1930s.³⁵

In August 1932, the year of Dolia's first full scale production in English for the Melbourne Theatre, Sonia arrived from Germany via Dunkirk and Colombo on the ship *Ville d'Amiens*. She was 30 years old. When the ship docked in Melbourne

³⁴ *Herald* (Melbourne), 23rd August, 1932; Helen McDougall, "Sonia Revid: Russian Exile and Brilliant dancer", *Everylady's Journal*, 2nd January, 1933. Both articles available in the Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscript library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne.

³⁵ "Rosa and Dolia", *This Australia*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Spring 1986, 61-66; Douglas Stewart, *Norman Lindsay: a Personal Memoir*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1975; A. A. Phillips, *The Australian Tradition: Studies in a Colonial Culture*, Melbourne, 1958; John Andrews, *Melbourne Theatre 1929-1945: Recession and Response*, unpublished thesis, Monash University, 1979.

Revid was not allowed to disembark because she did not possess the £100 Landing Money and the obligatory return ticket which was required by “bona fide visitors” of “European Race or Descent” who had been unable to first secure a Landing Permit before arriving in Australia.³⁶ With the intervention of a Mr Patkin from Palestine & Orient Lloyd Shipping company, Sonia Revid was able to request that she be allowed to land despite her inappropriate financial situation and documentation. Patkin stated on her behalf that as “a celebrated dancer” from Europe there would be “a preliminary concert” arranged with a view to interesting the theatrical promoters J.C. Williamson in a series of engagements while Revid was in Melbourne.³⁷ J.C. Williamson, who had not only imported vaudeville acts and musical comedies to Australia from overseas but had also staged opera, were to become a major influence in the promotion of dance through the late 1930s and into the 1960s. With this recommendation, and the suggestion of prospective employment, permission was granted for Sonia Revid to enter Australia.

Soon after her arrival in Melbourne, and perhaps as a consequence of being related to two colourful and well connected Melbournians, Revid attracted the attention of the local press. In August the Melbourne Herald interviewed her, with Rosa acting as translator. Sonia indicated that she was here on a holiday to visit her sister, and that although she did not intend to give recitals, she would continue to practice her art, suggesting that Rosa’s Caulfield backyard, in the glorious Melbourne sunshine, would be the perfect place to do just that.³⁸

This reluctance to perform is difficult to explain in the light of her admission into Australia by customs officials on the grounds that she would gain employment while she was here. It is possible that Revid had come to Australia with the simple intention of seeing her sister again after a 4 year separation. In these circumstances

³⁶ Customs and Excise document 32/408 “Sonia Revid, ex s.s. ‘Ville d’Amein””, item 1932/13105, Series B13, Victorian Office, Australian Government Archives.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Herald, (Melbourne), 23rd August, 1932, located Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne.

the promise of performances may have simply been invented to allow her to leave the ship. However this does not account for the fact that she arrived in Australia unprepared for a return trip and without sufficient funds to arrange her passage at a later date. Perhaps she intended to rely on the generosity of her sister and brother-in-law when she was ready to return to Germany. Alternatively Revid may have seen Australia as a safe haven where she could escape the turmoil that was brewing in her adopted country.

Speculation of this kind is made possible when the social and political circumstances of Revid's final years in Germany are considered. Sonia's work with Wigman and her life as a solo artist had been framed by the closing years of the Weimar Republic. As the historian Eberhar Kolb has suggested, from 1929 to 1933 the dominance which the artistic avante-garde had enjoyed in former years had begun to wane.³⁹ Expressionists, Dadaists and the exponents of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (which translates as "new objectivity or matter-of-factness") had held sway over social and artistic life in Germany following WWI⁴⁰, but just as Revid began to join their ranks, internal dissension and a world wide depression saw economics, politics, and social stability of Germany falter.⁴¹ As she travelled Germany producing her solo work Revid would almost undoubtedly have been aware of the declining status of the avante-gard, the changing political climate in the country, and the rise of the National Socialists. The growing acceptance of the Nazis as a legitimate, alternative party; their victories in the elections of 14th September 1930 (when they increased its number of seats from 12 to 107 - making the Nazi's the second largest party in the Reichstag); and their virulent opposition to the artistic avante-garde and Modernism, could well have been a deciding factor in Sonia's decision to come to Australia.⁴² When she sailed from Germany in 1932, she left behind a country whose dominant party, with Hindenburg as President, was in the process of negotiating an alliance with the

³⁹ Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*, Unwin Hyman, London, 1988, 85

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 84

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 96

⁴² *Ibid.*, 107

National Socialists. By the 30th January 1933 the Third Reich was a reality, with Hitler appointed Chancellor.⁴³ In such a climate of political uncertainty, especially for an avante-garde artists of Jewish descent⁴⁴, Revid's decision to remain in Australia was most likely triggered by circumstances in Germany rather than any change of heart about the suitability of Australia as her new home.

Whatever the reason, over the remainder of 1932 and throughout 1933 Sonia applied for various extensions to her initial one month visa. She was granted an extension of three months, then another six, and finally a year. In 1934 she applied for, and received, permanent residency.⁴⁵

Despite her initial reticence, Australian audiences did not have to wait too long to see Revid dance. In early January 1933 she gave her first public recital at the Central Hall in Collins Street. Melbourne's critics were suitably impressed. To Helen McDougall of *Everylady's Journal*, Revid was a diverse and elegant performer. McDougall declared that her *Timidity* was the loveliest thing she had ever seen. With "just a movement of the hand, then a lifting of the head, a startled look...relapsing again into utter stillness" she reminded McDougall of a timid fawn moving in the "depth of the forest at the sound of a strange beast".⁴⁶ The remainder of the programme offered at this first recital further convinced McDougall of Sonia's artistry and versatility. *The Dying Flower*, was "exquisitely and tenderly done", *Presentiment* and *Expiry* were "marvellous" with "every movement" a "poetic gesture", and

⁴³ Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: the Crisis of Classical Modernity*, Allen Lane, London, 1987, 259-272

⁴⁴ As Donald L. Niewyk has noted, following the work of Heinemann Stern, the response of German Jews to the rise of Hitler and the National Socialist party ranged from extreme pessimism to overt optimism. Some expected that their citizenship would be revoked, others "anticipated little or no change" at all. Donald L. Niewyk, *The Jews in Weimar Germany*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1980, 82. It is difficult to say which side of this divide Sonia Revid and her immediate family would have been on. It could be speculated that Revid was more inclined toward the pessimistic view as she migrated from a location, where she had already begun to establish a reputation, to a place where she not only had to start all over again but also establish a new following for a little known, or appreciated, art form in Australia.

⁴⁵ Customs and Excise document 32/408 "Sonia Revid, ex s.s. 'Ville d'Amein'", item 1932/13105, Series B13, Victorian Office, Australian Government Archives.

⁴⁶ McDougall, op. cit.

Caprice and *Clair de Lune*, both invoked a lighter mood which “delighted the audience”.⁴⁷

In contrast the *Argus* reviewer admitted to being stumped as to the meaning and significance of *Timidity*, but the paper assured its readers that:

Miss Revid’s performance was of great interest, both because it revealed the art of the dance as understood by a highly cultured Russian, and because it helps an Australian audience, isolated from the movements taking place in European centres of the dance, to understand the revival of pantomimic art which is a conspicuous feature of the new dances which are coming from Germany.⁴⁸

As this review makes clear, in some circles little was known about the dance form Sonia Revid brought to Melbourne, despite the earlier work of Joan Henry and Joan Joske.⁴⁹ Acceptance of Expressive dance practices was often based on a presumption of excellence which had as much to do with artistic genealogy as expertise. However, despite the slight whiff of the ‘cultural cringe’ in this review, most Australian critics still enjoyed what they saw. Revid was foreign, exotic, and a pupil of Wigman’s which did her reputation no harm at all, but her dance also drew enthusiastic responses from Australian audiences and other dancers which appears to be based as much on her qualities as an artist as on any sense of local inferiority.

This acceptance of Revid’s art in Australia was not only the result of her ability as a performer or her association with the famous Wigman. Her work entranced local critics because it was devoid of the grotesque, harsh or “barbaric” style associated with her famous mentor.⁵⁰ There was a sense of relief in the praise

⁴⁷ Ibid. From her reviews it appears that Helen McDougall was relatively in touch with the developments in modern dance, understanding (if not particularly appreciating) the work of Mary Wigman.

⁴⁸ “Original Dances”, *Argus*, September, 1933. Copy of article located in Customs and Excise document 32/408 “Sonia Revid, ex s.s. ‘Ville d’Amein””, item 1932/13105, Series B13, Victorian Office, Australian Government Archives.

⁴⁹ Revid’s work was also less ‘Orientalist’ in style than Henry and Joske. All followed the principles of Mary Wigman but Henry and Joske produced works which were rather more exotic in their subject matter and costuming than those of Revid. Orientalism and the exotic is discussed in relation to Expressive dance practices, and the work of these practitioners, in chapter three.

⁵⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1st August, 1934, 18

Sonia received from her new audiences. Here was an artist who had reintroduced traditional notions of the 'feminine' into Expressive dance. Revid, like many of her contemporaries (such as the German, Wigman-trained Gret Palucca) had left behind much of the aesthetic shocks of earlier Modernists, re-instating a relationship between traditional concepts of beauty and the female form (see figs. 2-7).

Although the Dadaists, artists of Berlin's Cabaret Voltaire (such as Valeska Gert), and dancers like Wigman, Sophie Taeuber, and Anita Berber had enjoyed an enthusiastic following in inter-war Germany⁵¹, audiences in Britain and the United States had never really accepted their work. More often than not the attitude of the critic André Levinson prevailed. This American expatriate, living in Paris in the 1920s, described the work of Wigman and her pupils in this way:

The dancer's eyes exclaim, her fingers flare; her body writhes with terror; she squirms on the ground, stamps furiously, collapses exhausted... The classical ballerina aims at grace; Mrs. Wigman's pupils seek their efforts in a rupture of the harmony of the body, in an elegant deformation. For these romantics the ugly is (as it has always been) the beautiful... The evolutions of our ballerinas are charged with feminine charm, with a subtle sex appeal, distilled and sublimated by the dance. The sex of a German rhythmician is practically abolished. Mannish, positive, wide womb, robustly under-pinned, she functions forcefully and frankly. These neutral nymphs often affect the masculine uniform... which leaves the muscular flanks free... Their ejaculatory movements forbid grace and fragility. Far from concealing effort, they emphasize it.⁵²

Levinson associated German Expressive dance practice with a strong, grotesque, sexless, or explicitly de-feminised body. For this critic the female body was essentially linked to an erotic image of Woman as the object of desire. Wigman, Gert, Taeuber

⁵¹ For more on the work of these women and the relationship between dance, Dada, and German Cabaret see: Laurence Senelick, *Cabaret Performance, Vol II: Europe 1920-1940, Sketches, Songs, Monologues, Memoirs*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1993; Annabelle Henkin Melzer, *Dada And Surrealist Performance*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1994, 87-104; Naima Prevots, "Zurich Dada and Dance: Formative Ferment", *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1985, 3-8; Valerie Preston Dunlop and Susan Lahusen, *Scriptanz: a view of German Dance in the Weimar Republic*, Dance Books, London, 1990.

⁵² André Levinson, "The Modern Dance in Germany", *Theatre Arts Monthly*, January, 1929, 143-153. Originally cited in Joan Acacella and Lynn Garafola, eds., *André Levinson on Dance: Writings from Paris in the Twenties*, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover, 1991, 103

and their followers denied the audience the pleasures of this construction. Their work challenged the validity of dance as display, centralising the potential of movement to reveal dark emotion, confrontation, and political satire.

Britain's Ninette de Valois, the founder of the Vic-Wells ballet, also found the work of these earlier German Expressionists (or Central European dancers as they were usually referred to in Britain) decidedly disturbing. She believed their technique was based on "a primitive form of 'jungle agility'"⁵³ These "drum-tapping, leaping dervishes from Central Europe" gave de Valois "the uncomfortable feeling that in everyday life they may possibly wear a uniform and answer to numbers instead of names".⁵⁴

In contrast, the work of Sonia Revid and Gret Palucca did not harbour the same explicit feminist challenge offered by their teacher in the 1920s. These dancers had re-moulded the volatility and challenge of the work of Mary Wigman into a more recognisably feminised aesthetic (see figs. 2-7). The maintenance or revival of a more romantic, less contentious world view received a far more favourable reception, particularly in Britain.⁵⁵ Jeanette Rutherford, writing for England's *Dancing Times* in 1934, attributed the British preference for these less chaotic dance styles to a matter of national temperament. For Rutherford:

The Modern Dance in Germany was born out of the struggles and difficulties of war and post-war life... [O]ut of this chaos arose the Modern Dance. Not only was it born of an experience not shared by us [the English], but from the need of a people whose temperament was, and is utterly different. This, then is the crux of the whole matter and the fundamental reason why we in England find it difficult to accept certain aspect and forms of the Central European Dance.⁵⁶

⁵³Quote cited in Michael J. Sidwell, *Dance of Death: the Group Theatre of London in the Thirties*, Faber and Faber, London, 1984, 31

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Americans, or more specifically the balletomanes of New York, greeted Wigman with open arms in 1930 when she first performed there. However, by then even Wigman had adopted a more feminine, less confrontational approach to movement, especially in her solo work. For more on the transformation of Wigman's style see Manning, op. cit., 164-220. This change is also discussed at length in the following chapter.

⁵⁶ Jeanette Rutherford, "The Central European Dance in England", *Dancing Times*, December, 1934, 313



Fig. 2 Sonia Revid (c.1928). Photographer unknown. (Courtesy of the Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne)

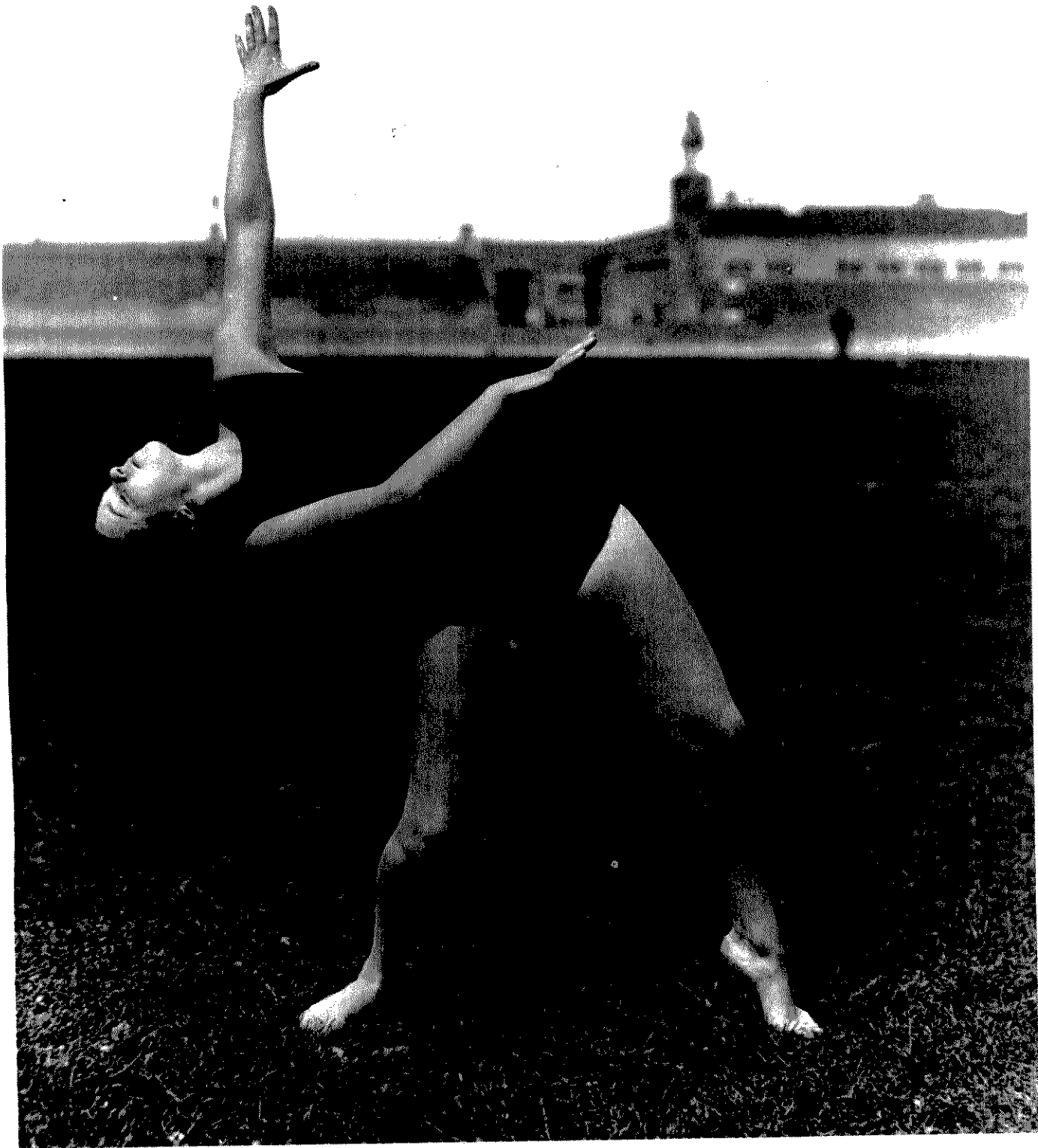


Fig. 3 Sonia Revid (c 1928). Photographer unknown. This photograph, and fig. 2, were most probably taken at the Wigman School around the time of Revid's graduation, or in the years when she returned to the school for master classes. In this photograph in particular we see Revid's more exuberant, ecstatic, free style of movement which is in sharp contrast to the images she, and her audience, favoured throughout the 1930s. (Courtesy of the Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne)

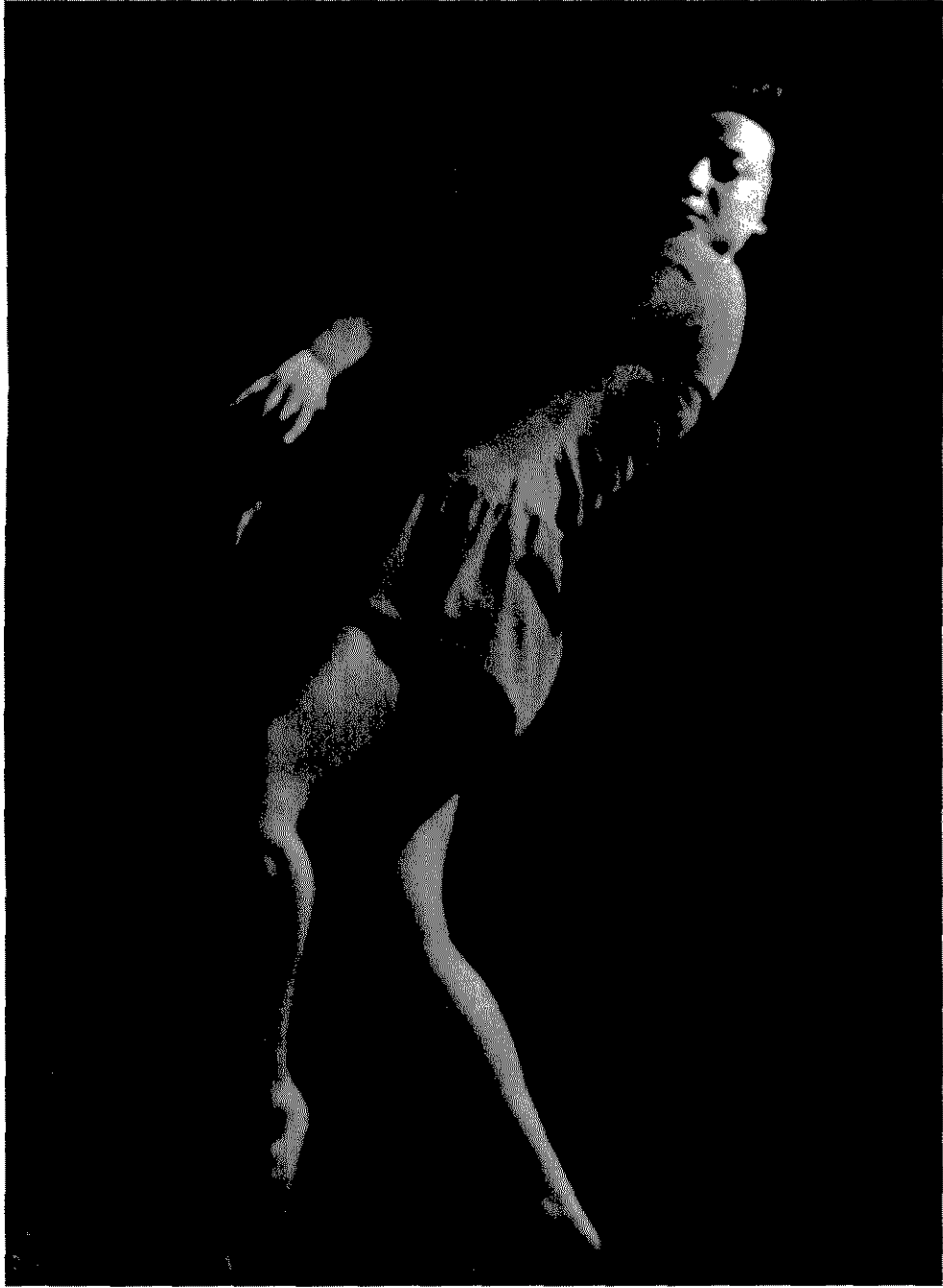


Fig. 4. Sonia Revid (c.1926). Photograph from postcard dated June, Dresden, 1926. (Courtesy of the Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia).



Fig. 5 Sonia Revid (c. 1928-1932). Photographer unknown. In this photograph, and fig. 4, we see Revid in more serious, pensive poses. These photographs were taken in Germany before her arrival in Australia and although they are more sombre, less ecstatic portraits they still maintain a quality which is quite different from photographs taken of her in Australia. This could be attributed to the preferences of the photographer, but as Revid was very particular about the control she maintained over other aspects of her career it is quite possible that photograph, such as those displayed in fig. 6 and 7 (which were taken in Australia after 1932) were composed under her instruction. These latter poses emphasise a 'femininity' which is absent in earlier examples. (Courtesy of the Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne)



Fig. 6. Sonia Revid (1933) photographer Dickson-Monteath. Published in The Home, October 2nd, 1933.



Fig. 7 Sonia Revid (c.1932-5). Photographer Ina Jones. (Courtesy of the Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia).

Rutherford created a genealogical tree for modern dance to accompany her article. Rudolf Von Laban was at its apex with Mary Wigman, Kurt Jooss and Gertrud Bodenwieser as its main branches. According to Rutherford it was Kurt Jooss, Gertrud Bodenwieser, and their pupils who found sympathetic audiences in London. Jooss, with his partner Sigurd Leeder, had reinstated the primacy of technique in his work, eventually re-acquainting his dancers with the traditional vocabulary of classical ballet. The Bodenwieser branch of Central European dance also enjoyed a general acceptance in Britain. Explaining the appeal of Bodenwieser, Rutherford declared:

The results of differing national temperament is clearly to be seen... The rather heavy sometimes depressing intellectualism of Germany could not hope to survive in Vienna, and so [Bodenwieser] developed along lighter, more pleasing and more pictorial lines.⁵⁷

Rutherford also claimed that one of Bodenwieser's pupils, Trudl Dubsky, was the "most successful of the Central European dancers in England" because her dancing was "essentially light and free"; "intellectual but never heavily so".⁵⁸

Reflecting the views of Rutherford, De Valois, and Levinson, Australian correspondent for the Sydney Morning Herald and The Listener, Kathleen Money Penny, also claimed that the work of Wigman, and another of her famous pupils Harald Kreutzberg, were 'typically' German. Money Penny observed this regional specificity when she visited Germany in 1936. Wigman and Kreutzberg's works were "strange".⁵⁹ They contained a "creative force" which "filled the mind with ideas", but there was also a sense of violence which assaulted the viewer. For Money Penny a Wigman work was:

⁵⁷ Ibid., 314

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Kathleen Money Penny, "Giants of the Dance in Germany: the Strange Technique of Mary Wigman", Sydney Morning Herald, no date, c. 1935/6. Copy of this article located in Folder "Joy Lodge", Box 9, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

...all strong, and, if not terrible, then melancholy. Her “Witches Dances” with her group, reminded me of the Witches Sabbath legends; she must have been through terrible depths to have produced it. It almost seemed as if she had deliberately explored the strange region of the unconscious in her work...⁶⁰

Like Rutherford, Money Penny attributed this disturbing style to the German temperament. This was, after all, the “country of psycho-analysis”.⁶¹ Those who offered a less violent, more romantic image received less qualified praise from the Australian critic. Even though Palucca was German, Money Penny was far more comfortable with her “beauty of line” and innate musicality.⁶²

This re-introduction of central aspects of traditional concepts of feminine deportment and sensibilities did not mean that artists like Revid and Palucca rejected all of Wigman’s challenges from the twenties. Like her more famous teacher Revid also felt that the “sweet rosy tales” of classical ballet had failed to speak to the new post WWI world. Absolute Dance, Expressive dance, Central European dance, or ‘Art’ dance as Revid preferred to call it, had much more to say to the contemporary human condition than its classical cousin.

Like Wigman, Sonia continually experimented with the boundaries of her medium, composing and performing to her own poetry as well as borrowing excerpts from published works, such as Oscar Wilde’s *Salome*.⁶³ Just as the Modernist painter Kandinsky believed that “every work of art had to proceed from an inner necessity” and “render the invisible visible”⁶⁴, Revid claimed that her dances were “born” from a deeper consciousness which enabled her to express human feeling more directly.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Kathleen Money Penny, “Modern German Dances”, *The Listener*, 7th October, 1936. Irene Vera Young papers, Manuscripts Section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ *Musical News*, April, 1934, Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne.

⁶⁴ *Dance of the Century* (video), Sonia Schoonejans (writer and director), Pierre-Francoise Decaufe and Eric Lambert (producers), joint English/French production, 1992.

⁶⁵ Sonia Revid, *Some Thoughts on Art Dance and Art in General*, Miss Ina Jones (publisher), Melbourne, 1936. A copy of this book has not been located, but evidence of its publication appears in reviews of Sonia Revid’s work after 1936. There is a duplicate copy of the manuscript in the P. R. Stephensen Papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales ,

She insisted that she did not intellectually create her compositions but that they were “first of all, born within”, being produced “before they reach[ed] the surface”⁶⁶ where they were expelled onto the canvas of the body in a manner more direct and ‘natural’ than the process involved in the creation of a classical work.

Art, Revid insisted, “demands to be experienced” in order to be “believed in” otherwise it was rendered “meaningless” to the contemporary world.⁶⁷ Like Wigman before her, a rejection of classical formalism was replaced by another essentialising search for ‘truth’, this time through the exposure of a more ‘natural’ human condition. Sonia’s ‘truths’ were specific to each performer but, once located, would also expose what could only be called, an ‘essential Truth’ - a truth that was in some way relevant not only to the performer but also to her audience. This complicated dialogue between individual expression and collective understanding was an intrinsic part of the creation of art within a Modernist dynamic. As the historian Daniel Joseph Segal has suggested, Modernism not only demanded the ‘new’ in production and experience but also attempted to fuse together the “disparate elements” of personal experience, into “new and original ‘wholes’”⁶⁸. These ‘wholes’ reconciled the conflict between freedom and control, tradition and innovation, experimentation and formalism, through a personal vision. As Revid’s explanations of her process illustrate, she was committed to the exploration of her own view of life. It was important to her that each dancer established themselves as an innovator rather than mere translators of someone else’s preferred mode of expression. As she stated:

...every great artistic personality creates her own style, has her own message to give, and adds to the growth of art.⁶⁹

Sydney. I am indebted to manuscript librarian Jim Andrigetti for bringing this copy to my attention. It is possible that Sonia Revid sent a copy of Some thoughts on Art dance and Art in General to P.R. Stephensen in the hope of interesting him in publishing it in 1935.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 10. Page numbers are from the unpublished manuscript in the P. R. Stephenson Papers, dated 1935.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Daniel Joseph Segal, “Towards a Definition of American Modernism”, American Quarterly, Vol. 39, Spring 1987: 12

⁶⁹ Revid, op. cit., 7

True to her own vision, Revid not only departed from Wigman's inter-war rejection of traditional notions of grace and femininity, she also insisted that emotive expression be reinstated as an essential ingredient in her work. For Revid this meant that her face had to "dance exactly as the body":

It must reflect the emotions expressed in the movements of the dance. Madame Wigman does not think that: she says the face should be immobile like stone when you dance, and so she likes to dance often in mask. But, no, I am sure she is wrong; it must be a dance of the whole body and soul.⁷⁰

As Christopher Butler acknowledges, Modernism contained a "willingness to rely on a psychological 'inner necessity'" and intuition, rather than upon "rational forms of debate".⁷¹ These ideas found an appropriate mode of expression in the 'primitive' which became a symbol of elemental and unmediated truth in art. Revid acknowledged the 'primitive' in her work through her insistence on the unadulterated immediacy of her expression. In this she followed her teacher Mary Wigman, but, as we saw earlier, Revid's belief in the rudimentary nature of her expression was tempered by her re-introduction of traditional feminine qualities which made her work less challenging, more accessible, and more easily equated with the artistic celebration of beauty.

Although Sonia Revid framed her form of expression within a search for the elemental, the unmediated, and the 'primitive', her practice was also in perfect harmony with an understanding of modern dance as a form of 'high' culture. In Berlin, and in her early years in Melbourne, she refused offers to perform in concert halls where she felt she would be artistically compromised by an association with theatre managers. She preferred to establish her own recitals or perform at private functions in the homes of Melbourne's more affluent citizens.⁷² Her association with

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism: literature, music and painting in Europe 1900-1916*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, 121

⁷² *Musical News*, op. cit, see also Mina Schuler, "The Stranger Within Our Gates: Women of the

the Ribush household, and their influential friendships with Melbourne and Sydney's artistic establishment, must have also encouraged and supported this attitude.

Although Revid's devotion to 'naturalism' and 'purity' in her work bordered on the religious, these principles also distance her work from an association with dance as 'entertainment'. When she performed Revid wore as "little make-up as possible". She would have ideally danced naked for certain dances of "great sensitiveness", had social attitudes allowed because, as she suggested:

...even the slightest touch of the finest silk is a disturbance to me. It is as if it interferes with the movement of the skin. With those dances I wish I could do without clothes...because it seems important for every part of the body to be seen undraped. This is, of course, impossible. Though my body is the pure instrument of my dance, one cannot believe in the pure instincts of the public.⁷³

By deflecting a possible association between her art and any less than "pure instincts", Revid diverted any accusation of impropriety in her performance, constructing it as the invention of the viewer. This exonerated Revid from any accusation of immorality and affirmed her association with high art by establishing her dance as accessible only to those with the "cultural competence" to see its significance.⁷⁴

This exclusivity made the practicalities of life and performance a burden for Sonia. She felt that everyday problems should be eliminated from the life of the 'true' artist. Money "should never exist in the world of art", she said, for then art could be made safe "from insult, speculation and prostitution".⁷⁵ When she became a "prophet of art" the dancer's "financial struggles...should be taken from her shoulders." An artist should not have to "struggle, bitterly and exhaustively for a living, while creating their immortal works"⁷⁶.

Russian Community in Melbourne", *Australian Women's World*, No. 152, Vol. 13, 1st August, 1933, 44

⁷³ Schuler, op. cit., 30

⁷⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1984, 2

⁷⁵ Revid, op. cit., 45

⁷⁶ Ibid., 46

It should be made possible for her to live her life without the burden of financial worries, surrounded by beauty...⁷⁷

Even the audience could be a burden for Revid at times:

I am often asked why I never give encores, nor accept flowers on the stage. I do not think encores are in good taste...The public can be very charming but at times very annoying...It is one of my dreams to receive the public's appreciation in silence.⁷⁸

In her early encounters with the Australian press Revid also articulated her concern for a necessary separation between the professional and the amateur dancer and the essential difference between her brand of Expressive or Art dance and the “physical jerks” of physical culture (a form which, as we shall see in the next chapter, had been gaining popularity throughout the late 1920s and the thirties). While conceding that the Wigman school had established, in line with the work of Laban, a link between physical culture and Absolute Dance, Revid also insisted that Wigman had “refined” these movements, giving them a more “spiritual” context.⁷⁹

Although many Australian performers, audience members and critics accepted, recognised and appreciated the elite status which Revid claimed for her art, one very vocal critic remained unconvinced. Basil Burdett, art reviewer for the Melbourne *Herald* (and occasional writer for *Home* magazine), challenged the very categorisation of modern dance as art. For him, Sonia Revid's “barefoot” dancing and her “free” movement were merely excuses for a lack of technique. In a piece on her for the *Herald* in 1934, Burdett suggested that the emergence of modern dance had simply been synonymous with the discarding of the “ballet shoe”. This padded pump, the “slim creation in pink satin from which balletomanes have often toasted their favourites in the past”, enabled the dancer to “achieve lightness and grace” which

⁷⁷ Ibid., 45

⁷⁸ Ibid., 48

⁷⁹ Ibid.

“according to classical technicians, at least, is unobtainable otherwise”.⁸⁰ Burdett therefore claimed that, when the modern dancer threw the ballet shoe “out the studio window”, she threw her technique out with it.⁸¹

Although Sonia Revid protested this assumption claiming that in modern dance the technique was certainly there, it just was “not so obvious”⁸², Burdett remained unconvinced:

...whether you agree with her and other followers of modern dance ideas, whether you think or not that the claim of a “natural” technique is specious and feel like replying testily that art, in any case, is a convention, and its technique necessarily artificial; whether you think that any comparison between classical and modern technique is absurd and some of the modern claims equally so - it is a good idea to know the basis of modern dance before you see it, certainly before you condemn it.⁸³

After observing her art first hand Burdett felt that his original accusations had simply been vindicated. In a review of Revid’s 1937 recital he admitted that she was a “graceful figure” who combined “liveliness with grace in effective style”, however he suggested that her dancing was “closer to Oriental dancing”⁸⁴ than to any Western model and considered this new style unworthy of comparison with the classical ballet, stating:

Last night’s performance...gave little evidence that [Sonia Revid] possessed the elevation considered so indispensable in the exponents of classical ballet, nor did it suggest a general control of the body movement superior to that of the average dancer in the older tradition, inside of the claims of a “natural” technique. More particularly in steps approximating to the turns of the classical repertoire, Miss Revid’s work hardly

⁸⁰ Basil Burdett, “The Modern Dancer has thrown Away her ballet shoes”, *Herald* (Melbourne), 25th May, 1934. Copy of this article available in Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ ‘B.B.’, *Herald* (Melbourne), 27th May, 1937. Copy of this article available in Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne.

⁸⁴ Burdett may have been referring to the style of dance discussed at length in chapter 3, but it is also likely that he used this term merely to emphasise the difference between Revid’s work and classical ballet and not as a source for a true comparison.

compared with good average technique observed here during a ballet season last year. It may be, as she says, that the technical demands of her form of dancing are greater than classical ballet. But this was not conclusively produced last night... the general conception and technical invention were hardly adequate... The emotional side tends to be far too dominant in her work.⁸⁵

For Burdett, Revid's abandonment of an identifiable technique was synonymous with the shedding of a vital sign which marked the separation between 'high' and 'popular' art and culture in Western society. With her 'natural' movement vocabulary she failed to remove herself from the realm of the everyday. Her abandonment of a physical demarcation between audience and performer meant that her work muddied the waters which separated the 'civilised' from the 'pagan', the 'formed' from the 'unformed', and the 'elite' from the 'popular'.

That Basil Burdett insisted on questioning the artistic integrity of Revid's work appears at first glance to sit uncomfortably with his profile as a rare promoter of Modernism in the visual arts in Australia during the thirties. He was by no means your average anti-modernist for whom all departure from standard forms of artistic expression were suspect. Five years after his first reviews of Sonia Revid he had been responsible for gathering together, what Alan McCulloch has called, the "most momentous exhibition in Australia's two hundred years of art history".⁸⁶ This exhibition, held in Melbourne in 1939, displayed examples of 'contemporary' French and British painting and added significantly, for McCulloch, to Burdett's reputation as a "strong supporter" of modern movements.⁸⁷

A supporter of modern art perhaps, but Burdett's was a very conservative view of Modernism. As art historian Richard Haese has suggested, Burdett's 1939 exhibition, being "restricted to the Anglo-French tradition":

⁸⁵ Burdett, 1937, *op. cit.* The ballet performance which Burdett referred to here was the tour of Colonel de Basil's Ballet Russes which will be discussed at length in chapter three.

⁸⁶ Alan McCulloch, *Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, Hutchison, Sydney, 1968, 105.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

...contained no examples of German or northern-European expressionism, or works by the German new-objectivity movement of the 1920s. There was no Russian painting and no Italian futurism. Nor were there examples of vorticism, dadaism, the more radical canvases and collages of Picasso's cubist work, or the abstracted fauvism of Matisse.⁸⁸

As Revid's art had emerged from an association with many of the traditions Haese listed above, especially German Expressionism, Burdett's dislike of her work seems less surprising. His definition of Modernism was not broad enough to include her dance or its related history in other art forms. Humphrey McQueen has also shed suspicion on Burdett's pro-Modernist credentials:

While attempting to justify Modernist Art in 1937, the Herald's critic, Basil Burdett, unwittingly exposed more than his pre-Modernist outlook when he claimed that "modern man sees beauty even in the machine". The inclusion of 'even' is the key to the attitudes of most Australians who spoke in favour of Modernism, but who generally were terrified of the forces which surrounded it.⁸⁹

Sonia Revid's inclusion of more traditional concepts of beauty and femininity in her work had alleviated that 'terror' for others but Basil Burdett questioned the very categorisation of her work as art. As has already been suggested, such complaints were not indicative of the critical reaction to Revid. The *Australian Musical News* summed up the dominant view in this way:

Outside music, where the pace of catching up has been rather wonderful in Melbourne during the past three or four years - all the handicaps considered - the arts in their most modern phases are scarcely known. Therefore a certain amount of ingenuous and un-analytical talk may be indulged in by the untravelled in relation to Sonia Revid's art. Yet for those who do understand such things there is something very remarkable in the way she rivets attention in such lovely studies as *Timidity*, *Dying*

⁸⁸ Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors: the Revolutionary Years of Australian Art*, Penguin Books, Sydney, 2nd edition, 1988, 61

⁸⁹ Humphrey McQueen, *The Black Swan of Trespass: The Emergence of Modernist Painting in Australia to 1944*, Alternative Publishing Company, Sydney, 1979, 64

Blossom, or the *Chiselled dances* with which she closed her programme on this occasion. It is an intimate, rare and sincere art.⁹⁰

Not only those journals more accustomed to a critique of the performing arts defended Sonia's work against criticism. Another Melbourne paper *The Star* informed its readers that Revid's "very individual ideas about the dance" were "received with considerable interest by members of artistic, musical and dramatic circles in Melbourne"⁹¹. Even the Melbourne *Truth* came to her defence, careful not to miss a chance to identify what it considered class-based snobbery in its home town:

In this conservative village [Melbourne] a few people still keep the old flag flying for the Ballet Russes, more because it is the done thing, than from some deep understanding of the Terpsichorean art. But there are among us a sprinkling of enlightened souls who realise the beauty of this new form of self-expression...⁹²

This acceptance of modern dance, even with its critics, seems unusual in a culture so renowned for its virulent, inter-war anti-modernism. The image of Australia as a place where modern art was predominantly considered a "cloak" for "bad drawing and sloppy painting"⁹³ before the Second World War, is called into question by the reception experienced by Sonia Revid. The idea that the dominant voice of anti-Modernism in Australia had restricted any development of 'real' Modernism "in its full sense" until the 1940s⁹⁴, a view shared by Humphrey McQueen and Richard Haese, is not supported by the history of modern dance in the same period. Although McQueen champions the work of Margaret Preston, both he and Haese place the development of 'real' Modernism in the 1940s, and dismiss the thirties as a derivative

⁹⁰ "Recital of Original Dances: Sonia Revid Wins Interest", *Australian Musical News*, 1st October, 1933, 15. Copy of this article in Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne.

⁹¹ *The Star*, 5th September, 1935, 23. Copy of this article in Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne.

⁹² *The Truth*, 30th November, 1935. Copy of this article in Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne.

⁹³ McQueen, op. cit.

⁹⁴ Haese, op. cit., 3

decade. This was possible because both historians restricted their identification of Modernism to that product which was somehow explicitly and nationally 'original'. Humphrey McQueen discounts most of the 1920s and thirties Modernism because it "arrived" in Australia rather than "emerged"⁹⁵. This, in his opinion, made it "superficial".⁹⁶ Richard Haese only allowed those who displayed a national particularity in their work into his Modernist camp.⁹⁷ As a result both historians discount a whole generation of Modernist artists who were painting and writing in the 1920s and thirties and performing in later decade. The fact that these artists were not using a form which Richard Haese would consider to be "recognisably Australian"⁹⁸ does not discount their Modernism, it simply places in an international rather than a strictly national context.

To some extent, the critical acclaim offered Revid in the early 1930s may challenge the assumption that Australians lagged so far behind the rest of the Western world in their acceptance of Modernism. However, any positive reaction experienced by dancers such as Joan Joske, Joan Henry, Sonia Revid, and Irene Vera Young becomes less of a challenge when the gender of these performers is taken into consideration. Almost all the Modernist dancer/choreographers in Australia in the 1920s and thirties were women. The only men involved in dance in this period (in Sydney at least) were either involved in ballet or ballroom dancing; and even then in very small numbers. Mischa Burlakov was Louise Lightfoot's co-director of the *First Australian Ballet*⁹⁹, Richard White had a school which taught ballet in the Dymocks Building in George Street, and Paul Ramonoff owned a studio in Wembley House in Central Square where he taught "Ballet, Tap and Russian". Apart from Mr Gow who instructed pupils in the art of tumbling and acrobatics at the Marcus Clarke Sports

⁹⁵ McQueen, op. cit.

⁹⁶ The only artist which McQueen accepted as a 'real' Modernist was Margaret Preston. This was perhaps because McQueen restricted his definition of Modernism by focusing it on a definitive association between Modernism and modernity or modernisation. McQueen, op. cit.

⁹⁷ Haese, op. cit., 3

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ *The Dance Magazine*, May 1936, 20

Pavilion in Pitt Street, only seven out of twenty eight ballroom dancing schools advertised in The Dance Magazine in 1933 were run by men.¹⁰⁰ Modern dance, by comparison, was entirely populated by women: the soloists were women; the participants in the small ensembles and the large group projects were all women; and classes held by female teachers were patronised by women. Even the personal pronoun for the dancer was female, writers like Sonia Revid and Irene Vera Young, and even Basil Burdett, referring to the modern dancer as 'she'.

This phenomenon was not peculiar to Australia. All over the Western world in the first four decades of the twentieth century women dominated modern dance. The lack of financial incentive in an unsubsidised, controversial field undoubtedly discouraged many men from pursuing a career this area. The highly emotive, subjective principles of Revid's art would also not have appealed to many men in cultures which constructed masculinity as the antithesis to these sensibilities. It is revealing that in Germany, where modern dance enjoyed the patronage of men, the practice was framed as strong, volatile and aggressive by British, American and Australian dancers and critics. Men who danced also often laboured under the suspicion of effeminacy. This was partly due to the continuing memory of the nineteenth century's "cavalier" male - a dancer who was subordinate in status and image to the ballerina.¹⁰¹

In comparison, dancing had developed into a very acceptable hobby for women from the end of the nineteenth century. It was considered the perfect physical complement in the education of girls. They could explore their creativity and attain grace and fitness. A fear of the voyeuristic aspects of the art was almost completely defused because dance classes were usually the exclusive domain of women.

The movement of women into professional dance was still fraught with difficulties, both financially and socially. Like their counterparts in visual art and literature, the lives led by middle class women did not mix easily with a career as an

¹⁰⁰ The Dance Magazine, 1st April, 1933, 14-15

¹⁰¹ Robin Grove, "Body Politics", Meanjin, Vol. 41, 1982, 211-225

artist. This situation affected women in both classical and modern dance. If a woman lacked benevolent patronage, life as an artist was almost impossible. Many dancers like Sonia Revid, Joan Henry, and Joan Joske had the support of their family, often remaining unmarried and childless through their careers. Others who did marry may have had the support of a successful husband. Irene Vera Young's partner was a lawyer and her only child Barbara was also involved in dance.

This situation reflected the experiences of women in many artistic fields. In literature, as Drusilla Modjeska has suggested, a woman needed a job, a husband, or a father to support her through the time consuming, financially unrewarding practice of writing.¹⁰² For writers such as Nettie Palmer, Eleanor Dark, Kylie Tennant, and Katharine Susannah Prichard, their experience as women "frequently contradicted and or clashed with their existence as writers".¹⁰³ As Modjeska suggests:

There was a fundamental contradiction between women's dependent social position and the mystique of the writer as a culturally transcendent being; a contradiction between their ability to write and their internal barriers against speaking out.¹⁰⁴

For women who earned a living wage from their work and often supported themselves and their family (writers such as Ruth Park, Betty Roland, or Gwen Meredith) the image of the writer as this 'culturally transcendent being' did not equate with a world where writing was not only an art but a means of employment. As Michelle Arrow has suggested, this meant that when women did manage to feed themselves and their families through the practice of their art - their work was subsequently considered of less value artistically.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Drusilla Modjeska, *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers 1825-1945*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1981, 11

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 11

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 11-12

¹⁰⁵ For further discussion of the problematic relationship between the notion of the culturally transcendence and earning a living wage from activities such as writing see Michelle Arrow, "'Career Playwrights': Writing and earning amongst Australian Women Playwrights, 1928-1968", unpublished conference paper, delivered at Australian Theatre History Conference, School of Theatre, Film, and Dance Studies, University of NSW, September, 1996.

In visual art women in Modernist circles in the inter-war period enjoyed what appears at first glance to be an uncharacteristic prominence.¹⁰⁶ However, as Jeanette Hoorn and Caroline Jordan have suggested, such prominence was only tolerated because Modernism itself was considered a marginal field in Australia prior to the Second World War.¹⁰⁷ The critical acclaim which painters such as Margaret Preston and Thea Proctor received may have been encouraging (when compared with the condemnation their fellow male Modernists were offered in the same period) but it did not challenge women's subordinate status as artists because the area in which they expressed their creativity was of less value in the eyes of the critics and establishment in Australia's art world. In this period, Modernism provided women with an unproblematic and acceptable path into a public but peripheral art space. As a marginalised group in political and social structures, women were allowed a dominant position in an art form which had also been banished to the margins.

In comparison, women in dance had always had a prominent place, even in the more conservative, established world of classical ballet. The marginal position of women had never been a numerical problem as dance had always been, to use Ann Daly's distinction, a "female populated" if not a "female-dominated" profession.¹⁰⁸ From the "ethereal ballerina" and the "overstuffed chorus girl" of the nineteenth century, through to the New Woman of modern dance in the early twentieth century, the feminine had been synonymous with dance.¹⁰⁹ However, just as the female body

¹⁰⁶ Those art historians who have attempted to re-assess the work and status of women in inter-war Australian Modernism include: Natalie Adamson, "Flashes of Lightning - Australian women artists of the 1920s and '30s: a positive portrait", *Lilith: a Feminist History Journal*, No. 6, Spring, 1989, 69-82; Jeanine Burke, *Australian Women Artists, 1840-1940*, Greenhouse Publications, Victoria, 1980; Mary Eagle, *Australian Modern Painting between the Wars 1914-1939*, Sydney, 1989. Jeanine Burke also challenges Bernard Smith's assertion that the prominence of women in the interwar period was due predominantly to the death of so many men in World War One. Burke, op. cit., 41

¹⁰⁷ Jeanette Hoorn, "Misogyny and Modernist Painting in Australia: How male critics made modernism their own", *Journal of Australian Studies*, 32, 1992, 7-17; Caroline Jordan, "Designing Women: Modernism and its Representation in *Art in Australia*", in Jeanette Hoorn, ed., *Strange Women: Essays in Art and Gender*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1994, 28-37.

¹⁰⁸ Ann Daly "Unlimited Partnership: Dance and Feminist Analysis", *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Spring, 1991, 2-5

¹⁰⁹ Manning, op. cit. 11

had always been a 'subject' for the painter, the female classical dancer had also filled that role for the choreographer. She was an object of the choreographer's, her partner's and the public's gaze. Her power as a performer was circumscribed by her subordination in the creative process. Modern dancers of the early twentieth century challenged this relationship. Artists like Joan Henry, Joan Joske, and Sonia Revid were in charge of the entire process of their craft, from creation to performance.

This fact further complicates the reception which a dancer like Revid received in Australia. As has already been suggested, women in dance were the norm rather than the exception, therefore the praise Revid received may not have emerged from the same critical location which characterised the reception of the successful female Modernists in the visual arts. There, as Jeanette Hoorn suggests, the promotion of women in Modernism within the conservative environment of Australia's inter-war artistic establishment, was the equivalent of "damning with faint praise"¹¹⁰. As mentioned earlier, their presence was accepted because the field in which they practiced was considered second rate. In the wider context of Western art, the entire profession of dance, in both its classical or modern forms, was located at the bottom of the artistic hierarchy because of its 'feminine' associations. Dance was a female dominated, therefore secondary art form when compared to the practices of painting and literature, but with the female body as its major vehicle for the display of the creative process the practice of women could not be entirely devalued. In ballet circles women were central to the form, even though they had been allocated a visually dominant but creatively subordinate role. When women took hold of the creative reins with their adventures into Modernism, and challenged their creative subordination, they were advancing their status within a space defined as feminine. This did not amount to the same challenge, in the wider artistic context, as that offered to the visual arts by the women who ventured into its ranks. Equally it did not mean that the praise these modern dancers received in the inter-war period was 'damned' for being

¹¹⁰ Hoorn, 1992, *op cit.*, 12

'faint'. They were women receiving acclaim in a feminine space. Praise may therefore have been an indication of a genuine appreciation of their art. Those who offered it had no apple cart to tip - dance was a feminised profession.

The life and work of dancers such as Joan Henry, Joan Joske, and Sonia Revid illustrates that Modernism in Australia had a varied history in the inter-war period. It was not only considered a "superficial" copy of its European derivative or a space to which women were allowed access only to be "damned with faint praise", Modernism was also, at least in dance, a place where Australian audiences and women flouted convention and abandoned their attachment to traditional modes of expression. There were undoubtedly those who appreciated, reviewed and acknowledged the work of these women for their 'exotic' value or their "theatrical novelty" rather than for any real commitment to supporting their aesthetic explorations, as Elizabeth Dempster has suggested.¹¹¹ The fact that Sonia Revid was an attractive, young, 'exotic' foreigner undoubtedly boosted her audience size on occasion and prompted her continued presence within the pages of local newspapers (a situation which will be explored in depth in the third chapter of this thesis). However, by the same token, the reviews this woman's work received often illustrated an acceptance and appreciation of those very same innovations. This paints a far less persecuted history of inter-war Modernism than that offered by art and literary historians.

These dancing women succeeded in carving out for themselves positions as minor celebrities and authorities on dance in Australia in the twenties and the 1930s. They did this through their association with the innovations of inter-war, and particularly German, Expressionism. They also succeeded in the promotion of their particular art form by the re-establishment of more acceptable links with traditional constructions of femininity which made their Modernism less problematic than the work of their precursors.

¹¹¹ Elizabeth Dempster, "Talking History", *Writings on Dance*, 4, Spring, 1989, 40

This assessment of the work of Sonia Revid, Joan Joske, Joan Henry, and Irene Vera Young is not meant to suggest that these women were central to the artistic life of Melbourne and Sydney in the inter-war period. These women were engaged in a fringe activity, “people doing strange things in church halls” as Joy Hart recalled.¹¹² They practiced their art on the fringes of mainstream society, but as their work changed to accommodate adjustments to the social, political and artistic climate of the late 1930s Sonia Revid, and more particularly Irene Vera Young, began to reconcile with the more popular aspects of Wigman’s legacy which in turn gained them a wider following. What will be identified in the next chapter as a ‘fascist’ aesthetic began to infect their work. In the mid to late 1930s certain aspects of Expressive dance which had been peripheral to the forms construction in the 1920s began to offer the art a more central location in the lives of women. The limited acknowledgment of an association with, what Sonia Revid had disparaging called “physical jerks” - Eurhythmics, Greek dance, or body culture - became a central component in the lives and work of Australia’s modern dancers. Fascism as a “movement”¹¹³ had a wide appeal in Australia through the thirties and, as we shall see, the dancing body was a pliable site for the articulation, promotion, and dissemination of a fascist aesthetic.

¹¹² Interview with Joy Hart, May 1994

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

Chapter Two

That “Fascinating fascism”¹: Expressive dance and its flirtation with a fascist aesthetic in the 1930s.

The re-fashioning of Mary Wigman’s principles of Absolute Dance by artists such as Joan Henry, Joan Joske, Sonia Revid and Irene Vera Young introduced a form of dance to Australia which, as we have seen in the last chapter, acknowledged some of the principal tenets of Modernism. These artists rejected the separation between art and life², they valued the exploration of the creative ‘process’ over the development of ‘form’³, and engaged with a highly personal, subjective vision of the world through movement. They held in “suspension the forces that persist from the past and those that grow from the novel present”⁴. Their work acknowledged the legacy of their precursors while reinstating traditional notions of grace and beauty in their work - a process which grew out of contemporary concerns but also reinvigorated a more distant past. These moves were directed by the personal aesthetic concerns of the dancer as each engaged with the terms of innovation within Modernism, but they also emerged from an engagement with the politics of the time and place in which they found themselves.

From the middle of the inter-war period most of the western world was experiencing the drama of an economic crisis instigated by excessive speculation on the American stock market. This situation caused a loss of confidence in over-valued commodity markets, the subsequent fall of Wall Street, and the onslaught of the Great Depression. Economic, social, and political instability in the twenties led to the rise of

¹ This title is borrowed from the Susan Sontag essay on the work of Leni Reifenstahl, “Fascinating Fascism”, originally published 1974, reprinted in *A Susan Sontag Reader*, Penguin, London, 1983 , 305-325

² Modris Ekstein, *Rites of Spring: the Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, Houghton and Mifflin, Boston, 1989, 40

³ This defining principle of Modernism appears in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane’s, *Modernism 1890-1930*, Harvard Press, Sussex, 1978, 25-26

⁴ *Ibid.*, 49

regulatory policies which were championed by both sides of the political spectrum. In the 1930s the outlooks of the Left and Right in many western political institutions were often unusually harmonious. Both sides of the political spectrum promoted the need for tighter government control over all aspects of contemporary life. Even though they arrived at this principle from different philosophic directions, support for interventionist strategies on the part of governments were a highlight of policies offered by political conservatives and radicals of most persuasions.

In what follows, this interventionist approach will be explored in relation to the social and the individual body as it was produced and performed within modern dance practices in the 1930s. What has been identified as a “fascist style” by the historian Michael Roe⁵, “proto-fascism” by dance theorist Susan Manning⁶, a “fascist movement” (as opposed to “fascism in power”) by George L. Mosse⁷, and a “fascist aesthetic” by social commentator Susan Sontag⁸, will be discussed here as a dominant but rarely acknowledged facet of Australian intellectual, social, and artistic life in the 1930s.⁹

A “fascist aesthetic” has been described by Susan Sontag as a “celebration of the primitive” and a “preoccupation with situations of control, submissive behaviour, exaggerated effort, and the endurance of pain”. For her this aesthetic also endorses two polar states - “egomania and servitude”. In what will be most relevant for our discussion of a fascist aesthetic in relation to the dance practices of the 1930s, Sontag

⁵ Michael Roe, Nine Australian Progressives: Vitalism in Bourgeois Social Thought, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1984, 13

⁶ Susan A. Manning, Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993, 131

⁷ George Mosse, Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe, Howard Fertig, New York, 1985, 153

⁸ Sontag, *op. cit.*, 316

⁹ There was opposition to the development of what will be referred to here as a ‘fascist aesthetic’ in Australia in the 1920s and thirties. Voices of dissent, many from the left of the political spectrum, were often also active in the local peace movement, but, as Carolyn Rasmussen has suggested in her study of this movement and the organised opposition to fascism in Australia from 1920 to 1941, these voices were isolated and relatively ineffective. Carolyn Rasmussen, The Lesser Evil?: Opposition to War and Fascism in Australia 1920-1941, University of Melbourne History Department, 1992, 1-4

also defined fascism as a “holding in or confining of force”.¹⁰ This aspect of fascist aesthetic was most explicitly captured in the thirties body. That anatomical collection of bones, muscles, ligaments, and organs which is always perceived, understood and constructed within culture, was re-fashioned in the thirties to accommodate a contemporary obsession with regulation, sacrifice, stability, and strength. Within proto-fascist rhetoric or a fascist aesthetic, freedom from disease, disturbance, and distortion in the collective body was offered through the promotion of a ‘natural’, healthy, individual body. This body was achieved through regimentation, effort, endurance and control over the corporeal’s unruly possibilities.

In Australian dance the work which offered the most obvious flirtation with a fascist aesthetic in the 1930s was that of Irene Vera Young. Young’s career in Australia spanned the thirties and forties. Her training, professional versatility, and personal commitment to the popularity of her craft, offers an ideal site for an examination of the growth, dissemination, and eventual demise of a popular fascist aesthetic in Australia from the mid 1930s to the 1940s.¹¹

Born in 1895, Young married C. Thorsby Young, a Sydney solicitor. Their daughter Barbara was born in 1915.¹² Mother and daughter spent from 1926 to 1932 in New York.¹³ Originally an actress, Young had come to dance in the United States

¹⁰ Sontag, *op. cit.*, 316-1317

¹¹ Irene Vera Young papers, reviews and ephemera were originally donated to the Wolanski Library, Opera House, Sydney, NSW. They have recently been acquired by the Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

¹² Lynn Fisher, “Irene Vera Young and the Early Modern Dance in Sydney”, *Brolga*, No. 2, June 1995, 13

¹³ As Fisher has suggested, there appears to be little evidence in Irene Vera Young’s writings or within her archival collection of the presence of her husband in the United States. Both these research areas offer very little insight into Young’s personal life. Following such a lack of apparent recorded involvement, Fisher has suggested that Irene Vera Young may have been yet another “in a long line of women who earned a good living in the dance and could afford to leave a husband”. Alternatively, as Fisher suggests, Young could simply have “kept her work and home life separate”. (Fisher, *op. cit.*) On further investigation it appears that the latter is in fact the case. In November 1935, three years after Irene Vera Young had returned to Australia, Mr C. Thorsby Young was mentioned in the program for a dance recital promoted by the NSW Teachers Society at the Conservatorium of Music in Sydney at which Irene Vera Young, her daughter Barbara, and several of her mother’s students (including Marjorie Crocker and Joyce Lodge) performed and choreographed alongside pupils and principles from various dance studios around Sydney. On the final page of the programme Mr C. Thorsby Young was thanked for his work at the Box Office. This indicates that Young’s husband (and Barbara’s father) may instead have had a continuing, if not

by default. In 1928 American Actors Equity began to crack down on “aliens” with the implementation of new regulations which specified that foreign born actors living in the United States had to have had at least one hundred weeks professional work between January 1923 and January 1928 to gain a listing with their organisation. Membership ensured the right to work.¹⁴ Young’s engagement with the Long Island Repertory Company was cut short when her professional experience fell outside these new requirements. She was denied an Equity card. Not willing to return to Australia at that time Young decided on a career change and enrolled in classes in a new form of dance which had just established a following in New York.

With this move, Young came under the influence of teachers and choreographers who followed the principles of the German artists Rudolf Laban and his former pupil Mary Wigman. Initially Young worked with Sarah Mildred Strauss and her dancers. Strauss had travelled to Germany to study the principles of Expressive dance first hand. On returning to the United States she gave New York audiences their first taste of dance performance without the accompaniment of music.¹⁵ Irene Vera Young was among her first small group of dancers. In 1930 Young left Strauss to join the Hans Wiener company.¹⁶ Wiener considered himself the “most authentic exponent of Central European modernist dance methods”¹⁷ in America and after two public seasons the New York Times called his company “one

necessarily uninterrupted, association with his family and their interest in dance

See Programme, “Dance Recital”, NSW Dance Teachers Society, located Folder 6, Box 8, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University.

¹⁴ New York Times, 8th August, 1928, 25 and 2nd November, 1928, 29

¹⁵ The Strauss recital took place on the 28th April 1928. See Evening World (New York), 30th April, 1928, and Morning Telegraph (New York), 6th May, 1928. Copies of these articles in Irene Vera Young papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. Lynn Fisher suggests that in fact New York audiences had seen dance performed without music prior to the Strauss recital with Doris Humphrey’s presentation of *Water Study*, also performed in silence. Fisher op. cit., 14. However, this Humphrey work premiered at the first independent Humphrey- Weidman (Charles) company concert in October, 1928, 5 months after the Strauss recital. See Marcia B. Siegel, Days on Earth: the Dance of Doris Humphrey, Duke University Press, Durham, 1993, 293

¹⁶ Wiener later changed his name to Jan Veen, Fisher, op. cit., 13

¹⁷ Herald Tribune (New York), 4th July 1930. Copy of this article in Irene Vera Young archives. For more details on Hans Wiener see Fisher, op. cit., 14-15 and “Jan Veen dies”, Dance magazine, July, 1967, 4-5

of the most capable and interesting ensembles”¹⁸ in New York. It was with this company Young was exposed to her first *Bewegungsschor*.

The *Bewegungsschor*, movement or motion choirs as they were usually called in English¹⁹, were developed by Rudolf Laban with the express aim of creating “a sense of community (*Gemeinschaft*) among members of an industrialised society (*Gesellschaft*)”²⁰. The *Bewegungsschor* offered a space in which a growing number of amateur dancers enrolled in classes at Laban’s various institutions could participate in performances. These dancers would appear in mass displays of anything from 50 to 200 participants.²¹ They would execute movements in unison, creating a spectacle which could stand on its own or act as a back drop to the work of Laban’s professionally trained pupils. The *Bewegungsschor*’s championing of community in the face of the alienating affects of contemporary society had a natural affiliation with the political Left. Communists, socialists, and pacifists, as well as the artistic avante-gard who collected around Laban at Monte Verita in Switzerland to wait out the 1914-18 war, saw in the *Bewegungsschor* the artistic representation of their political ideal - the development a cohesive, idealistic, communal utopia. This dance display imagined the potential of the organised mass unified under the masterful direction of one vision. However, interpreted from another perspective, the *Bewegungsschor* could be read as a warning against the mindlessness of mass rule. It had the capacity to slip fluidly between the ideologies of either side of the political spectrum but, as we shall see later in this chapter, the *Bewegungsschor* took on new, less ambiguous meanings and allegiances when the National Socialists were in power in Germany.

Blissfully unaware of the precarious political future awaiting the *Bewegungsschor* in particular and German dance in general, Irene Vera Young left the

¹⁸ *New York Times*, 7th April, 1930. Copy of this article in Irene Vera Young papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

¹⁹ Susan Manning translates the German *Bewegungsschor* into “movement choir”. See Manning, *op. cit.*, 133. However Irene Vera Young also called her versions of the *Bewegungsschor* - “motion choirs”.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

United States a confirmed devotee of the innovations of Laban and Mary Wigman, whom she had seen perform to critical acclaim in New York in 1930.²² Back in Sydney Young initially hoped to find the same developing interest in the new dance practice she had encountered in New York.²³ Instead she found a “vacuity of ignorance”.²⁴ Recalling her disappointment twelve months later Young wrote:

You see, I took it for granted that there would be German schools, and, by that I mean, schools that are entirely devoted to the study and production of the German Dance...I had entirely forgotten that only within the last five years had New York City been introduced to, and received unto itself, this new form of rhythm in movement... If that Great Modern sophisticate New York City, prodigal in outlook, prodigal in experience, had just been touched with the art of Mary Wigman,...it is not strange that Australia... should be as yet unfanned by the breath of her inspiration.²⁵

Without this ready-made avenue through which she could practice her art at home Young later recalled:

I quickly realised...that the only thing to do was to show my work...I took what seemed to be the quickest and best course. I sought and obtained a position as a teacher of German dance in a good and well-established school.²⁶

This well-established school was run by Frances Scully and, with a group of dancers she trained over the next three months, Young began recitals around Sydney. Her first Australian public appearance was in September 1932 with a week at the Hoyts Regent theatre with the Scully ballet and ‘Diedre’ as a ‘special stage

²² Irene Vera Young, “The German Dance”, *Dance Magazine*, July 1933, 6; Irene Vera Young, “The Dance - its Many Interpretations”, *Sun*, 8th July, 1934, 25. Copies of these articles located in the Irene Vera Young papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. For more on Young’s devotion to the motion choir and her association with Ilma Barnes’ Speech choir see Fisher, *op. cit.*, 15

²³ It is interesting to note here that *Ausdruckstanz* was renamed German dance, *Deutscher Tanz*, by the Nazi’s Cultural Ministry in 1934. This ministry made Wigman’s school (Laban taught at the only official state dance institution at this time) one of thirteen other official training centres in Germany which were designed around the requirements of Directive 34 which Susan Manning describes as “the statute setting out the certification examination for ‘artistic dance’” under the Nazis. For more on this re-design of *Ausdruckstanz* in Germany see Manning *op. cit.*, 202 - 203.

²⁴ Irene Vera Young, “The German Dance”, *Dance Magazine*, July 1933, 6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

attraction'. Diedre appears to have been a pseudonym which Young used for these early performances; perhaps in an attempt to disassociate herself from, what she would undoubtedly have seen as, the less than auspicious company in which she found herself. Along with the resident ballet at the Hoyts Theatre, Young appeared fourth on the programme after the Wurlitzer organist Owen Holland, that weeks Movietone News, and Stan Porter's Orchestra. Following her performance was a screening of the feature film, *Sinners in the Sun*, starring Carole Lombard and Chester Morris.²⁷

This tradition of offering vaudeville acts prior to the screening of an American 'talkie' was common practice in the new movie theatres throughout the inter-war period.²⁸ However Young's September 1933 recital at the art house cinema, the Savoy Theatre, was more in keeping with the image she favoured for herself, that of the serious artist, rather than an 'entertainer'.²⁹ In this setting Young discarded her pseudonym and, with her own 'motion choir', accompanied by the Ilma Barnes 'verse choir', opening night patrons had to be turned away at the door because the small theatre had been filled to capacity.³⁰ L. L. Woollacott, the author of a series on modern dance for the *Today* magazine, suggested that the apparent enthusiasm for Young's work was not due to "good publicity", as there had been virtually none. Instead Woollacott attributed this interest to the simple "genius" of Irene Vera Young.³¹

²⁷ Advertisements for the Hoyts Regent theatre, located in the Irene Vera Young papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney..

²⁸ See Richard Waterhouse, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville: the Australian Popular Stage 1788-1914*, NSW University Press, Sydney, 1990, 133

²⁹ Young's Hoyts performance was followed in 1933 by work on Farmers fashion parades and performances at the Blaxland Gallery, where the proceeds were donated to the Australian Mothercraft Society. For these charitable occasions she also dropped her pseudonym. See *Telegraph*, 7th April 1933. Copy of this article available in Irene Vera Young papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

³⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25th October, 1933, 17; L. L. Woollacott, "An Australian Woman of Genius", *Today: the News Magazine*, Vol. LXXI, No. 9, April, 1934, 10. Copies of these articles available in Irene Vera Young papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. For more on this first independent recital see Fisher, op. cit., 15-18

³¹ Woollacott, op. cit., 10



Fig. 8. Irene Vera Young (1934). *Today*, April 1st, 1934. The caption to this photograph reads "An Australian Woman of Genius".

Young's triumph at the Savoy was followed with further recitals through 1933 and 1934 at the Kings Theatre, the Sydney Conservatorium, and again at the Savoy.³² She also seems to have been quite popular among Sydney's social elite in those early years. The Australian novelist and prolific correspondent Miles Franklin, wrote to Mary Fullerton, Jean Hamilton and Mabel Singleton (friends living in London at the time) after one of Young's performances. In a letter dated 19th November 1934 Franklin wrote:

I have been home two years and in that time have seen only two real plays on a stage. One was a Vienesse thing, an imitation of Schnitzler, and the other was last Saturday night when one of the small theatre societies gave Wilde's *Salome*. We have a good dancer here to do the part, but her voice lacked authority in the words. She executed it in a petty nagging drawing-room minx in up-to-date evening dress but looked and moved very beautifully - one Irene Vera Young.³³

Young may have displayed 'genius' on stage, but she also possessed a genius for self-promotion. From when she first arrived in Sydney, Young had been patiently consolidating her reputation as a dancer and choreographer. Her association with the entrepreneurial teacher Vera Mathews helped introduce Young to a swag of prospective students and, by association, dance converts. After working with the Scully School, she became involved with Vera Mathews' School of Dancing. Here she taught what was advertised as "German Group Work" alongside classes in physical culture, eurhythmics, fencing and Greek dancing.³⁴ At this studio there also a well worn track on the carpeted floor where "bare and sandalled feet" had "pattered" to the weighing machine after the "Weight Reduction Classes".³⁵ Young's association with the blossoming health and physical culture scene meant that after a short time

³² *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1st August, 1934, 18, and 27th November, 1934, 12.

³³ Letter from Miles Franklin to Mary Fullerton, Jean Hamilton, Mabel Virginia Singleton, 19th November 1934, in Miles Franklin papers, General Correspondence, Mitchell Library, Sydney NSW, Microfilm frame 88.

³⁴ *Dance Magazine*, 1st April, 1933, 1-2

³⁵ *Telegraph*, Friday 7th April, 1933. Copy of this articles available in Irene Vera Young papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

with Mathews she was able to open her own studio, just a few floors up from her former employer at 215 George Street opposite Nock and Kirby's. She called the studio the *Irene Vera Young School of German Dance, Motion Choir and Body Culture* (see fig. 9).³⁶ Here the "famous New York professional", gave classes in "group work, body culture and individual tuition for teachers, professionals and students".³⁷

Like her contemporary Sonia Revid, Young's teaching at her George St school was devoted, on the whole, to Modernist principles. She believed that ballet had its place in the grand scheme of things³⁸ but insisted that her "German" dance was an art form of a particular kind. It was one of the few forms of expression in which "feelings of joy, hate, love and ambition" could be accurately expressed. Unlike ballet, this new form contained "no pretence and only genuine emotions" which allowed a "quick bond of sympathy and understanding" to develop between the performer and the audience.³⁹ For Young, Expressive dance had a decidedly topical contribution to make to the contemporary world. It also required the same dedication and skill as classical ballet. Young, like Revid, made a point of distancing her work from other popular forms of movement, at least in certain circles. Although she taught in studios alongside Grecian physical culturists and Eurhythmics instructors, Young found herself in competition with these teachers for media attention and, most importantly, students. It was therefore necessary to construct her practice as superior

³⁶ *Dance Magazine*, September-October, 1933, 28 and Irene Vera Young, "German Dance", *First Nights*, December, 1933. Copy of this edition of *First Nights* located in Irene Vera Young papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

³⁷ *Dance Magazine*, September-October, 1933, 28. Body culture was the preferred description of dance gymnastics for both Irene Vera Young and, later Sonia Revid. It was related more closely to the invention of Rudolf Laban than to the physical culture craze of later years. However, in reality, the form was a hybrid mix of dance and callisthenics which appealed directly to the fitness and health industry which was booming in the interwar years in Australia.

³⁸ Irene Vera Young, "Point for Balletomanes", *Australian Theatre News Monthly*, August, 1939, 10

³⁹ Irene Vera Young, "German Dance", *First Nights*, December, 1933. Copy of this edition of *First Nights* located in Irene Vera Young papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

Irene Vera Young
(New York)

PRESENTS

A Recital of Modern Dance

at the CONSERVATORIUM on
TUESDAY 31st. JULY, 1934

AT 8. 15 P.M.

THIS PROGRAMME WILL INCLUDE :-

Solo Dances by IRENE VERA YOUNG
and Modern Groupe Dances with her Motion Choir



Tickets : 5/4, 3/2, 2/1
Including Tax

PLAN AT NICHOLSONS
16th. JULY

"H"

IRENE VERA YOUNG
SCHOOL OF GERMAN DANCE
215 George Street, Sydney
Tel. B 1978

Fig. 9. Irene Vera Young poster (1934). (Courtesy of Irene Vera Young papers, Wolanski Library, Sydney Opera House, New South Wales. This archive is now lodged in the Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.)

to all others. In 1934 she offered the Home magazine this evidence of the supremacy of her “German” form:

The modern German dance should not be confused with Greek dancing, “eurhythmics,” or any of the so-called free rhythm schools. “Dancing,” says Miss Young, “should be based on an idea or an experience. Just to move about on the stage without putting an idea into form is not dance.”⁴⁰

Young then went on to suggest that “German” dance differed from other forms because, like any ‘true’ art, it required considerable skill which could only be achieved through a lengthy educative process. “German” dance had “a very definite technique”. “It cannot be taught” Young insisted, “in a few weeks”. In fact a “smattering of the German technique” would lead to “chaos and confusion”.⁴¹

In these statements we see Young’s commitment to the same Absolute Dance principles promoted by Wigman and offered to audiences in Melbourne by Joan Henry and Joan Joske in the 1920s and Sonia Revid a few years later. However, in some significant ways Irene Vera Young’s practice differed from the work of these women. Trained by devotees not only of Wigman but also Rudolf Laban, Young retained a philosophical commitment to the more populist principles of early twentieth century Expressive dance, which she promoted through her use of movement choirs. Young was emphatic that dance needed to be relevant to and reflective of ‘real’ life. It had to speak to the ‘masses’ as well as to a minority who appreciated its more avante-gard agenda.

As Susan Manning has pointed out in Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman, such a concern for reconciliation between the popular and elite or the individual and the collective was wide spread in German dance practice. Although this approach has been particularly attributed in dance historiography to the work of Rudolf Laban, Wigman also resolved the needs

⁴⁰ “Some Studies in Movement”, The Home, 1st December, 1934, 36.

⁴¹ Irene Vera Young, , “The German Dance”, Dance Magazine, July 1933, 6.

of the individual and their sublimation to the ensemble in the work she created for her all female dance company from 1924 to 1928. As Wigman stated:

The development of each dancer ought to be considered from a twofold viewpoint: On the one hand, perfecting the dance personality as an individual; and on the other hand, blending this individuality with an ensemble.⁴²

The former process did not negate a recognition of the latter. As Manning suggests, the idea of subordinating the dancer's individual will to the will of a "multiform organism" (the ensemble) did not necessarily dictate the relinquishing of individuality in Wigman's work, at least throughout the twenties.⁴³ This successful accommodation of a balance between both principles can be seen in the way critics from both the Left and Right of the political spectrum could "interpret [Wigman's] dramatisation of authoritarianism and individualism according to their own inclinations"⁴⁴, just as had been the case with Laban's motion choirs.

Interpretive ambiguity is an intrinsic feature of dance as it is an art form which, as was discussed in the introduction, does not provide a recognisable text for a western audience whose world is predominantly understood through printed or verbally produced symbols. This characteristic may go some way toward explaining the ease with which a cross-political interpretation of the work of Wigman and Laban could take place. What Manning has identified as *Führerprinzip*, or the "leadership principle"⁴⁵, had resonance for communists, socialists, liberals, and fascists alike. In Laban and Wigman's work the individual was subsumed, but not consumed, by the will of the mass. In the context of the 1920s at least, this fact allowed Expressive dance practices to function within the cross-political scope of *Führerprinzip*, and therefore within the ideological realms of a wide array of political allegiances.

⁴² Walter Sorrell, ed. and translator, *The Mary Wigman Book*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, 1975, quote cited in Manning, op. cit., 87-88

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 126

⁴⁵ Ibid.

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⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 126

⁴⁵ Ibid.

To a significant extent this situation also traversed geographical boundaries. America's Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey made a transition similar to that of Mary Wigman when they reduced the significance of their solo work of the early 1920s and began to create work for ensembles in the 1930s. In these American companies the principle of the "collective with one head"⁴⁶ - one charismatic individual whose ideas, creativity, technique and personal body were the driving force of the whole group's structure and choreography - dominated their practice.⁴⁷ However, most American histories place Graham and Humphrey squarely within a liberal understanding of *Führerprinzip*. Deborah Jowitt's interpretation is standard:

Immense movement choirs like those Laban built in Germany never caught on in America, despite the allure of Laban's visionary notion that participating collectively in an art experience would raise the individuals awareness of his place in some universal harmony. Perhaps the Americans saw, as Laban eventually did in 1938, when he decamped from Nazi Germany, that choirs of thousands moving together could be disconcertingly symbolic of the manipulable mob.⁴⁸

As Jowitt intimates but does not specify, the political and cultural meaning of much modern dance work is emphatically tied to its historical context. "Choirs of thousands moving together" could indeed be "disconcertingly symbolic of the manipulable mob" in a world constructed from the vantage point of a post WWII understanding of history; a position which is informed by the political, social and moral consequences of fascism in power. Representations of an ideology and a political order which celebrated the collective unity of the mass and the leadership of one, enigmatic individual were reflective of the National Socialist agenda, but, in the early 1930s before war was a reality, this type of symbolism was less clearly and exclusively associated with fascism. Laban's large motion choirs, Young's smaller

⁴⁶ Walter Sorell, *Hanya Holm: the Biography of an Artist*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, 1989, 21

⁴⁷ Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image*, William Morrow and Co. Inc, New York, 1988, 181

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

offerings, and Wigman's or Graham's collective with one head could also be interpreted as representations of democratic compromise or individual struggle in an earlier decade. This fluidity of representation allowed for the co-opting of German modern dance practice by the Nazis when the democratic, liberal, but politically volatile Weimar Republic of the 1920s gave way to the nationalistic, uniformity of the Third Reich.⁴⁹

That dancers such as Wigman, Laban, Harald Kreutzberg, Yvonne Georgi and Gret Palucca found themselves favoured under the Nazi regime, at least in the early years, was not due to a drastic adjustment of their principles or specific attempts to fall in line with the new political situation. Their accommodation emerged from a pre-existing commonality. As Susan Manning has revealed, fascism and German Expressive dance practices, known as *Ausdruckstanz* in Germany, shared an intellectual base. They both drew on "the neo-romanticism, life reformism, and cultural pessimism of turn-of-the-century Germany." This was characterised by a desire to:

... escape urban industrialisation and find a life more attuned to nature, the valuing of emotion and intuition over intellect and rationality, utopianism mixed with a sense of approaching apocalypse.⁵⁰

As Manning suggests:

Many of the dancers heard in Nazi rhetoric an echo of their own beliefs. Had they not always believed that the body possessed a truth inaccessible to the mind? If so, then was it such a leap to embrace the "cult of the irrational"? Had not they also believed in dance as a way of creating community (*Gemeinschaft*)? If so, then was it such a leap to embrace the ideal of *Volksgemeinschaft*?⁵¹

⁴⁹As a result, dancers like Laban and Wigman found themselves in a position to benefit from subsidies offered by the Nazi's artistic institutions, particularly from 1933 to 1938. This situation was highly preferable to the late twenties and the first two years of the thirties when many dancers had found themselves out of work and busking on street corners to make ends meet. For more on the situation for German dancers in the Depression see Horst Koegler, "In the Shadow of the Swastika: Dance in Germany, 1927-1936", *Dance Perspectives*, 57, Spring, 1974, 19, 28 and Manning op. cit., 170

⁵⁰Manning, op. cit, 172

⁵¹Ibid, 172-173. *Gemeinschaft* describes the utopian reconciliation of the authority and autonomy

With this common ideological history many Expressive dancers intentionally, pragmatically or naively accommodated Nazi ideals. In dance historiography (specifically works in English) this accommodation has been explained as an essential component in these artists' creative and personal survival in the volatile days of the National Socialist's rise to power in Germany.⁵² With the exception of the work of Susan Manning, scholarship has generally failed to discuss the presence of fascist sympathies in dance or a fascist aesthetic within the performance practice of countries where fascism was never a ruling ideology. More often than not, the accommodation of such an aesthetic has been identified as a peculiarly German phenomenon, as we saw in the case of Deborah Jowitt's assessment of American dance artists' lack of interest in motion choirs. However, we need not look very far to discover America's own version of those mass displays of unified human expression. In the movies of Busby Berkeley those very same "coordinated masses" were on display. Here there was a parade of 'ideal types', dressed identically, moving as a coordinated mass and filmed from a great height to emphasise the wonder of their collective potential rather than the volatility of their individuality. These dancers were organised, orderly, physically perfect, and representative of the wonders of American breeding. Although each Berkeley number was interspersed with close-ups of America's Caucasian 'lovelies', these individual framings merely served to enhance the uniformity of the display as one face replaced the other without any particular differentiation between each youthful image. As Jowitt suggests, America's rising dance Modernists may not

which Mary Wigman managed to produce in the works she choreographed in the 1920s. *Volksgemeinschaft* stands for the 'folk community'. In the twenties *Volksgemeinschaft* was a mythical, nostalgic view of Germany as a folk community made up exclusively of Aryan stock. This was also a popular symbol within the rhetoric of National Socialism as it developed in the inter-war period but had also enjoyed a long history of support among the middle classes in the later half of the 19th century and into the early 20th century and fringe organisations, such as the commune at Monte Verita at which Laban and Wigman developed their ideas on dance. It was also popular with German youth organisations with their emphasis on physical and racial improvement which had a decidedly nationalistic streak. This came to the fore in the Nazi's development of the Hitler Youth movements. For more information on this see A.J. Nicholls "Germany", in *Fascism in Europe*, S.J. Woolf, ed., Methuen, London, 1981, 77-97.

⁵² See Preston-Dunlop, op. cit.; Manning, op. cit., 255-285

have possessed the means or the inclination to engage in this type of imagery, but the films of Busby Berkeley offer an alternative site in which a fascist aesthetic can be seen to exist in an American context.

In the case of Australia's dance historiography a similar lack of complexity threatens to plague any assessment of the influence of a fascist aesthetic in the 1930s. Although there are very few secondary articles which canvas the history of Australian modern dance before the Second World War, Lynn Fisher's study of the life and work of Irene Vera Young is also tainted by a lack of engagement with the historical reality of the wide-spread acceptance of a fascist aesthetic prior to the declaration of war in 1939. Fisher finds the acceptance of Irene Vera Young's rhetorical and philosophical promotion of things German in this period disturbing.

How could Australians embrace the German dance which Young described as uniting body and mind in a spiritual journey and requiring absolute devotion to an ideal when they were warned thus about the German menace in 1934?

"The Nazi dictatorship is fashioned psychologically, spiritually and physically, above everything else, to create a nation of warriors of the Nordic type (like the Germans of Tacts) and a civil population educated blindly to follow the God-sent Leader... German youth, male and female, is to use the language of Mr Aldose Huxley, being conditioned for war. Germany is to be Sparta of the modern world."⁵³

To a certain extent Lynn Fisher answers her own query when she states earlier in her article that Irene Vera Young had been prone to using expressions such as New Man, New Age and New Day in her writings; these were "common parlance among cultural leaders and politicians alike" in the 1930s.⁵⁴ Of course, as Fisher also indicates, there were a vocal few who warned Australians against the rise of fascism, but these voices were often overwhelmed by those who found the same ideology

⁵³ Lynn Fisher, op cit., 20. Quote from Francis Jackson's "The Brave New World of Hitler", *To-day*, 1st April, 1934, 13. Copy of this edition of *To-day* available in Irene Vera Young papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 20

appealing. The Australian media may have “carried graphic stories about fascism and the threats to peace building in Germany and Italy”⁵⁵, but the significance of these warnings must be tempered with an acknowledgment that in Australia there existed an equally strident, and often more dominant, sense of affiliation with many proto-fascist principles.

As the work of the historians Michael Roe, Humphrey McQueen, David Walker, and Roslyn Pesman Cooper have indicated, liberalism in the 1930s had lost much of its appeal for Irene Vera Young’s generation. Many a heart and mind in Australia, Britain and the United States accommodated principles which were later attributed almost exclusively to fascism in Germany and Italy. In Australia, fascist sympathies were prevalent in more aspects of public life than the well documented, but politically ineffectual, organisations such as the New Guard.⁵⁶ Demands for efficiency, stability, moral and ethical simplicity transformed influential movements such as Progressivism, Vitalism and National Efficiency into ideologies which advocated, what Michael Roe has called, an “exclusivist, racist and uniformitarian”⁵⁷ brand of nationalism which reflected an acceptance of fascism, if not “in power” then at least as a social or aesthetic “movement”⁵⁸.

Much of the symbolism of the period emphasised “heroic” over “human” values.⁵⁹ In Australia, symbolic representations of national identity favoured the World War I ‘Digger’, a body born within the supposed ‘glory’ of war, or the Bondi Lifesaver, a body born at the ‘war’ against the elements.⁶⁰ In the inter-war period beauty was also “democratised”⁶¹ with women encouraged to acquire the ‘perfect’

⁵⁵ Ibid., note 54, 28

⁵⁶ For the history of this movement see Michael Cathcart, Defending the National Tuck Shop: Australia’s secret army intrigue of 1931; McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1988

⁵⁷ Michael Roe, “Efficiency: the Fascist Dynamic in American Progressivism”, Teaching History, Vol. 8, Part 2, August, 1974, 42

⁵⁸ Mosse op. cit., 153

⁵⁹ Roe, 1974, op. cit., 42

⁶⁰ For more on the symbols of national identity see Richard White, Inventing Australia, Allen & Unwin, 1981, 125-157

⁶¹ Jill Julius Mathews, “Building the Body Beautiful”, Australian Feminist Studies, No. 5, Summer, 1987, 31

physique, which was achieved through physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle. These bodies were perfected from the inside out. Unlike in the 1920s when the perfect shape could be achieved from the outside in, through corsetry and strapping, the thirties body required “regular/regulated training”⁶².

In the thirties, fascism was not the “synonym for evil which both reality and rhetoric later made it”.⁶³ It was a reaction to the contemporary world. Many Australians admired the efficiencies of the German, Italian and Japanese social, economic and political structures in the wake of the uncertain years of the Great Depression. As Humphrey McQueen has observed:

By 1931, a large and influential body of Australians thought that a fascist style abolition of party politics was just what their country needed.⁶⁴

Many of these same individuals admired Mussolini’s record with organisation and strike breaking in Italy. The Italian dictator received favourable comment with the Australian press which emphasised the “conservative anti-revolutionary” qualities of his regime, suggesting that he had in fact saved Italy from the “impending destruction” of the Bolsheviks and a “stultifying party system”.⁶⁵ For many Bolshevism, communism, socialism, laissez-faire capitalism, and multi-party politics, were the real enemies of national prosperity, development, and orderly growth in the thirties. As Roslyn Pesman Cooper has suggested, the admiration of Australians’ for Mussolini was based on what was seen as his implementation of basic Progressive principles. Principles which centralised the:

..cult of efficiency, discipline, work, national effort, the disillusionment with laissez faire policies, the emphasis on the expert and on strong and dynamic leadership.⁶⁶

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Michael Roe, 1984, op. cit., 6

⁶⁴ McQueen, 1979, op. cit., 65

⁶⁵ Roslyn Pesman Cooper, “‘We want a Mussolini’: views of fascist Italy in Australia”, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 1993, 350

⁶⁶ Ibid., 354.

Although Hitler did not receive the same uncritical praise as his Italian counterpart, the German people were definitely in vogue, as this description in a May 1933 edition of Health and Physical Culture magazine implies:

The world, once so anti-German, has now been completely converted to pro-Germanism...Why? Because the German genius for survival is inherent...She proved to the world her power in the arts of peace and in science. And the world was won to her constructive usefulness.⁶⁷

Representing Germany in the 1930s as a country of “constructive usefulness” with a “genius for survival” promoted a definite, although in some circles qualified, support for the defiance Germany showed in the wake of its defeat in WWI. Even the quote cited earlier, which was offered by Lyn Fisher as proof of an apparent awareness of the threat of German military build up in the 1930s in Australia, could be read as a guarded appreciation of this developing “nation of warriors”, these “Nordic types” with their modern day Spartans who were being blindly “conditioned for war”. Such rhetoric could be seen as a ‘call to arms’ for Australians, or at least an attempt to promote the emulation of Germany’s successful rise to power and the Nazi’s ability to galvanise the German people into a unified political and social front; a force to be reckoned with, even as they strode toward the horrors of their “brave new world”⁶⁸.

In dance, evidence of a developing fascist aesthetic in the 1930s can be seen in the gradual accommodation of the principles of physical culture. Australians had quite a long association with this form of regimented dance/exercise by the time Irene Vera Young returned to Australia in 1932. In the 1920s physical culturists and ‘Greek’ dancers such as Gladys Talma and Thea Stanley Hughes returned from studying overseas. The styles they brought back with them had been greatly influenced by the work of Francois Delsarte with his stress on flexibility and balance rather than the manufacture of bulk, particularly for the female body, which he developed in the later

⁶⁷ Max Hammel, “P.C. Clubs or Battalions?”, Health and Physical Culture, 1st May, 1933, 58

⁶⁸ The title of the Jackson article is most likely a reference to the repression, regimentation and regulation of the world depicted in Aldous Huxley novel Brave New World which had been published in 1932.

half of the 19th century. Delsarte encouraged a more mobile torso, strong legs and a vigorous, rhythmic approach to movement and music.⁶⁹ As this new form caught on many physical culturists also came under the influence of the work of Isadora Duncan. The British Ruby Ginner and Margaret Morris and the American Genevieve Stebbins⁷⁰ developed a hybrid physical vocabulary which was promoted as beneficial to young ladies from the upper and middle classes in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Ruby Ginner, who became aware of the innovations of Isadora Duncan in the 1910s, was impressed by the more emotive aspects of Duncan's work. In contrast, many of her fellow physical culturists found this the least attractive of the famous dancer's principles. Duncan's emphasis on 'expression' often appeared too "theatrical" and "soppy" for a movement philosophy which emphasised health and moral improvement rather than romanticism and liberation.⁷¹ However, Ginner managed to accommodate these particular prejudices by devising a restrained vocabulary of movement based on Duncan's classicism which also suited the constraints of more traditional physical culture. She called her particular system the "Greek Revival" movement.⁷²

Margaret Morris's "Grecian dance" had also developed out of Duncan's work and more traditional physical culture.⁷³ One of Sydney's own Grecian dance experts was Gladys Talma, a graduate of the Morris school (the *Isadora Duncan-Margaret Morris Academy of Grecian Dancing*). Opening her own teaching academy in Australia around 1922, Talma emphasised the fact that this type of dance/physical culture offered the Australian woman a path to "health, grace and mental well being".

⁶⁹ Jowitt, *op. cit.*, 77

⁷⁰ For more on the career of Genevieve Stebbins see, Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, "Antique longings: Genevieve Stebbins and American Delsartean performance", in Susan Leigh Foster, ed., *Corporealities: Dance, Knowledge and Power*, Routledge, London, 1996, 70-89

⁷¹ Sheila Fletcher, *Women First: the Female Tradition in English Physical Culture 1880-1980*, Athlone Press, London, 1984, 93

⁷² Ruby Ginner, *The Revived Greek Dance: its art and technique*, Methuen and Company, London, 1933.

⁷³ Margaret Morris, *Margaret Morris Dancing*, Kegan Paul, Trench and Company, London, 1926.

In keeping with the claims of Morris and Ginner, she also considered her Grecian dance to be an 'art' because it was inspired by a "creative impulse" and utilised improvisation.⁷⁴

As well as Gladys Talma's Grecian dance practice there was The Langridge School of Physical Culture in Sydney, the Tasmanian Eileen Edward's Modern Physical Culture school; Kath Gordon who taught Greek dance and physical culture in Perth⁷⁵; and the Bjelke-Petersen School of Physical Culture which consolidated its following through the twenties boasting 72 clubs throughout Australia by 1935.⁷⁶ Miss Thea Stanley Hughes was another dance/physical culturist who opened a school in Sydney. A former pupil of Ruby Ginner, the Laban trained Annie Fligg (who worked out of Britain in the 1930s), and Prunella Bagot-Stack (founder of the Women's League of Health and Beauty), Hughes' intention was to bring the aims of Bagot-Stack and her Women's League to Sydney in the 1930s. The League had been formed in Britain in 1930 with 16 members. It boasted 70,000 members by the mid 1930s. As Hughes told the Sydney Morning Herald, Bagot-Stack had given up her classes at exclusive London hotels where she taught the social elite, in order to "carry the system into the lives of all women". Stack:

... envisioned a movement which, with racial health for its aim, would embrace women of all ages and countries, binding them together in a bond of mutual interest...⁷⁷

As we saw earlier, Irene Vera Young, along with her Melbourne contemporary Sonia Revid, had originally tried to distance herself from Grecian physical culturists such as Talma and Hughes, but by the mid 1930s such a separation

⁷⁴ Gladys Talma, "The Grace that came from Greece", Health and Physical Culture, 1st April 1932,

28

⁷⁵ For more on the career of Kath Gordon see Lynn Fisher, Dance Class: a History of professional dance and dance training from 1895 to 1940, MA Thesis, History Department, University of Western Australia, 1992, 235

⁷⁶ Marion K. Stell, Half the Race: a History of Australian Women in Sport, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1991, 82-83

⁷⁷ K.R., "New Health Club: English Movement Comes to Sydney", Sydney Morning Herald, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

proved impractical. It was clear by then that an association with physical culture was advantageous for the small scale, independent performer in Australia. Body culture students helped to develop an appreciative, informed audience for their less lucrative recital work. Classes in body culture also subsidised dance classes for a smaller number of the advanced students whom Young often used in her recital work.⁷⁸

By 1934 Irene Vera Young had embraced the more 'populist' aspects of Expressive dance more emphatically than her Melbourne counterpart. In the article for the literary periodical *Manuscripts* Young illustrated her attachment to the more egalitarian aspects of Expressive dance. Her "German" dance was "of the people, for the people, by the people"⁷⁹. It was:

...rooted in the every-day experience of humanity [and] draws its strength from the emotions common to mankind. It makes contact with the masses, and they can understand it...⁸⁰

At night in her studio Young believed she performed miracles on the Sydney business girls who attended her classes. These "milliners, clerks, typists, and shop assistants", were transformed into "human beings" and "identities" when she introduced them to the transformative wonders of German dance.⁸¹

Irene Vera Young was not entirely alone in this accommodation of physical culture and her promotion of a more populist line within Expressionist dance practice

⁷⁸As Susan Manning has shown, this accommodation of physical culture principles and practices was a major part of the work of Wigman and Laban throughout the mid 1920s for much the same reasons indicated above. See Manning, op. cit., 132-134 This was also the case in the 1930s in the United States where America's modern dancers - Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman and Hanya Holm (Holm was originally German and Wigman trained but migrated to America) - all became directly associated with university campuses and college Physical Education units. Relying on the work of women's physical educationalists to sustain their more avante-garde status, physical education teachers and their courses helped to create audiences and students for the 'New York Moderns'. They also provided performance venues, funds, and teaching facilities. For more on this see Julia Foulkes, *Dancing America: Modern Dance and Cultural Nationalism 1925-1950*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1997, 51-53

⁷⁹Irene Vera Young, *Manuscripts: a miscellany of Art and Letters*, No. 9, 22nd May, 1934. Copy of this edition of *Manuscripts: a miscellany of Art and Letters*, available in Irene Vera Young papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid

in 1930s Australia. Young may have been a much earlier convert but even the more romantic Sonia Revid conceded to the growing popularity of physical culture in the later half of the 1930s. For example, Revid's school, which was advertised in the early 1930s as the *Sonia Revid's School of Modern Art Dance*, became the *Sonia Revid School of Art and Body Culture* in the later half of the decade (see fig. 10). Her 1938 recitals were also introduced by a speech from the Melbourne City Health Officer, Dr. John Dale. Dale would extol the virtues of Revid's style of movement for the mental and physical health of participants before she and her pupils took to the stage to perform.⁸²

Even in the prospectus for her school, Revid suggested that the "meaning and importance of Modern Art dance" was to be achieved through the:

...development of the body in perfect harmony [with] the development of imagination, concentration and expression of any emotional feeling combined with rhythmical and musical sense. ⁸³

To eliminate the imaginative and the emotional would have been sacrilege for Revid, but for those unaccustomed to the finer points of her art, the philosophy for her school must have borne a distinct resemblance to the aspirations of many physical culturists; even before she restructured the name to accommodate her growing need for students.

Like Young, the later writings of Sonia Revid also showed a marked concern for the masses and their social elevation. In the latter years of the 1930s Revid made reference to the plight of the poor, the physical well being of workers, the political and emotional consequences of war, and the promotion of nationalism. In 1936 she

⁸² For another view of the early prominence of physical culture in Australia see Fisher, 1995, op. cit., 9-11

⁸³ Sonia Revid, *Some Thoughts on Art Dance and Art in General*, Miss Ina Jones (publisher), Melbourne, 1936. A duplicate copy of the transcript exists in the P. R. Stephenson papers, Manuscripts collection, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. Also see Note 56 Chapter One of this thesis for more detail.

NATIONAL THEATRE

ST. PETER'S HALL

EASTERN HILL

TUESDAY, 3rd JUNE, 1941

at 8.15 p.m.



Dickson-Messersch Photo

Sonia Revid

Dance Recital

Programme Includes —

BACH — Chaconne
 TSCHAIKOWSKY — Symphony No. 5, E Minor
 SCHUBERT — Symphony No. 8, B Minor (Unfinished)
 SIBELIUS — Valse Triste

THE SONIA REVID SCHOOL OF ART AND BODY CULTURE
 FIFTH FLOOR, 465 COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE WIN. 7596

ADMISSION:

4/5, 5/5, 2/2 (inc. Tax)

A. SUNDBERG, *Manager*
 Cent. 9590

BOX PLAN OPENS AT ALLAN'S, WEDNESDAY, 28th MAY

Fig. 10 Sonia Revid poster (1941). (Courtesy of the Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne)

published the pamphlet Do Slum Children Distinguish Dark from Light⁸⁴ which coincided with her expeditions into the slums of Melbourne to teach the children to dance, give impromptu recitals, or bring them food. Discussing these experiences with the Argus in 1938 Revid explained her motives:

When I, for the first time, met the children I am working with I could have covered my face with both hands and cried... How will I manage these untamed, tragically noisy, untidy little creatures... My first aim, which I considered the most important one, was to make them stand, sit down, move, quietly and gracefully; to plant into them some seeds of culture...⁸⁵

As with Young's office girls, Revid's slum children would be elevated through their exposure to "culture". Expressive dance would free the masses by teaching them order and discipline.

Irene Vera Young and Sonia Revid's belief in art's redemptive properties and their desire for organisation, discipline and order in the attainment of that redemption were, as we have already seen, philosophies reflective of wider social concerns in the thirties. Combined with, what has been identified here as a fascist aesthetic with its appreciation of authority, organisation and efficiency, there was also a distinctive promotion of a particular brand of nationalism which centralised biological uniformity. This was a stance reminiscent of not only fascism as a "movement" but fascism "in power".⁸⁶

In 1937 Irene Vera Young, who often wrote for the publication Health and Physical Culture, told her readers that German women exercised as "regularly as they brushed their teeth". She admonished Australian women for their lack of effort suggesting that they "simply must endeavour to improve themselves physically".

⁸⁴ Sonia Revid, Do Slum Children Distinguish Dark from Light, Ruskin Press Ltd, Melbourne, 1936 (this date appears to have been stamped on the booklet by Mitchell library). Revid also wrote an article called "Not God that Kills", about the horrors of war (no date or location) and the pamphlet Fighting Occupational Fatigue: a series of exercises for Health, Grace and Improvement of Bad Posture, 1943. Article and pamphlets available in Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne.

⁸⁵ Argus, 27th September, 1938, 5

⁸⁶ Mosse, *op. cit.*, 316-319

Towards this end she advocated a “national movement based on the schemes adopted in European countries to improve the health and well-being of the people.”⁸⁷ Ever the pragmatist, Young also insisted that her call for a national approach to physical fitness did not mean the automatic adoption of German, or any other foreign methods:

It does not mean that because other nations have taken certain steps to achieve certain results that Australia must take precisely those same steps, but she must realise that physical fitness is of exactly the same value and importance to our nation...Let the Government call on and take advantage of the knowledge and experience of her own citizens, remember that each nation has a soul to express and the expression must come into being through the physical bodies of her own people.⁸⁸

By advocating a particular form of physical culture for Australia, Irene Vera Young was securing a space for herself in its development. She was also reflecting the growing nationalist rhetoric which was so much a part of a fascist aesthetic in this period. For, as she pointed out, the idea was not to *be* German, just to be more like them. This development was formulated in stark competition with the internationalism of Modernism which the same Expressive dancers had promoted in the twenties and early thirties.

This style of nationalism reflected a movement in most Western countries where the hearts, minds and bodies of individual men and women were seen as the raw material for future national survival, prosperity, and greatness. A panic over the declining birth-rate of the middle-classes and the perceived deterioration of the physical health of the ‘average’ man and woman, had encouraged the emergence of a rhetoric which promoted efficiency, scientific management and civic responsibility with an emphasis on social control throughout the 1930s.⁸⁹ For example, Health and Physical Culture, a magazine which had encouraged the libertarian practices of nudism and vegetarianism through the mid 1920s, became increasingly concerned

⁸⁷ Sydney Morning Herald, 10th April, 1937

⁸⁸ Irene Vera Young, “Viewed as a Nation We are Not Physically Fit”, Health and Physical Culture, 1st July, 1938, 38

⁸⁹ Roe, 1974, op. cit., 55; G. R. Searle, Quest for National Efficiency: a study of British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1971, 60-65.

with the battles against the “menace of effeminacy”⁹⁰ and the “coming of the half-breed peril”⁹¹ by the 1930s, when Young was a regular contributor. In 1932 the editor asked his readers “Will the White Man Survive?”. This article lamented the changes that were taking place in the modern world as, in the “seething cauldron of humanity[,] all sorts of crosses are being made in breeds”. This “mingling of stocks” would see the mix of “colours and origins” increase at an “alarming rate” and as “white man’s supremacy is faced with a challenge... its total extinction is more than an apprehensive dream”.⁹² Thankfully, Australia had an advantage over other white societies as far as this writer was concerned. It was geographically isolated and its citizens came from “a more or less homogenous stock - the British”. “Our blood is not mixed... and we are not subject to the intense inter-breeding that has gone on for thousands of years in some parts of the world”⁹³ stated the magazine. In the same periodical a year earlier Francis J. Gallagher had suggested that “Only Physical Education can Save Humanity”.⁹⁴ As the white race was “careering to destruction because psychology failed, and still fails, to visualise the dependence of mentality on physical factors” it was the “culture of the body” that would be the “science of the future”.⁹⁵ It would be one of the few things that would avoid “the suicide of the white races”.⁹⁶

As Gallanger suggested, the prime site for the dissemination and implementation of the principles of racial purity and the practice of Eugenics was the human body. However, attempts to regulate the body were not confined to the politics of fascism. Socialists and liberals also attempted to inscribe the anatomical, individual body with the moral, cultural and political principles of their philosophies.

⁹⁰ Carl Hertzig, “The Menace of Effeminacy”, Health and Physical Culture, 1st January, 1932, 14-15

⁹¹ “Will the White Man Survive?: the Coming of the Half Breed Peril”, Health and Physical Culture, 1st July, 1932, 15

⁹² *Ibid.*, 14

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 16

⁹⁴ Francis J. Gallagher, ‘Only Physical Education can Save Humanity’, Health and Physical Culture, 1st January, 1931, 27

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Interestingly, all ideologies favoured very similar constructions, producing images that were almost inter-changeable. Unity of race and the adoration of physical perfection were inscribed on the thirties body by all political persuasions through a rhetoric of freedom; freedom ‘from’ rather than a freedom ‘to’. For socialists it was freedom from international capitalism and the rule of elites. For liberals it was freedom from government intervention and mass rule, and for fascists, freedom from the inefficiencies of party politics. All ideologies offered freedom from national and biological annihilation with a common rhetoric which framed individual bodies as representative of the nation. Freedom from disease, disturbance and distortion of the individual body was to be achieved through regimentation, effort, endurance and control.

For women, freedom from the artificial constraints of the 1920s was offered through the promise of a return to a ‘natural’ body; a corporeality shaped from inside out. As Jill Mathews has suggested, this body was now shaped by inner control and personal will.⁹⁷ The thirties body could become the site of perfection both personally and nationally, achieved through courage, denial, and effort. This body had been “democratised”.⁹⁸ Not a democracy which accepted all as equal but that which offered equal ‘opportunity’ for all to be recreated into a prescribed ideal. In this world beauty, health, and well-being could be everyone’s through dedication and effort. This would in turn provide an organised and successful life and a unified and powerful nation.

This emphasis on the transformation and reform of the personal and, subsequently, the national, had been a driving force behind the inter-war physical culture movement. As Elli Bjorksten reminded readers in Principles of Gymnastics for Women and Girls published in 1932, physical exercise could make a young man or woman:

⁹⁷ Mathews, *op. cit.*, 29-30

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 30

..the possessor of a beautiful, well coordinated body, a joyous sense of what is great and good, a quick, clean mind, a strong character and the will to make his own way in the world and to contribute his share to the life of mankind.⁹⁹

Young offered similar results to Bjorsten for the young women who participated in her "German" dance:

The modern dance...promotes youth and strength...The dancing of the joyous spirit is the finest beauty course possible to devise. It admits of no fear, no sluggishness, no worry. It promotes the only true form of beauty - the beauty that comes from within.¹⁰⁰

In 1935 Sonia Revid saw this reconciliation of freedom and control in terms of her own body:

It is this body of mine that I must train and control, form and chisel, tend and love, so that finally it becomes a work of art.¹⁰¹

These bodies were caught in what Ezra Pound once called fascism's fear of the "infinite wobble"¹⁰². In dance, regulation, control, and the achievement of physical perfection were as important to Revid and Young as their commitment to Modernist principles which led them in the late twenties to abandon an association with formal technique, use improvisation in the creation of their dances, and to champion individual, internal inspiration as a source of creativity. However, by the mid thirties these women were struggling with their need to resolve their avante-garde attachment to these elitist principles with the redemptive qualities which they believed their art offered the masses, their need to include those masses in the actual practice in order to make their art relevant to contemporary society, and a fear that their inclusion would dilute the status of their art. Through teaching they tried to negotiate

⁹⁹ Elli Bjorksten, Principles of Gymnastics for Women and Girls, J. & A. Churchill, London, 1932,

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¹⁰⁰ Irene Vera Young, "Dance your way to Strength and Beauty", Health and Physical Culture, 1st July, 1933, 19

¹⁰¹ Revid, 1935, *op. cit.*, 25

¹⁰² cited in Mosse, 1985 *op. cit.*, 153

a space where the principles of control, containment, and collective perfection could live alongside ideas of personal, political and artistic freedom. Irene Vera Young and Sonia Revid successfully negotiated these contradictory spaces by including the principles of physical culture in their work, calling it by another name - body culture - and then criticising other movement vocabularies such as Greek Revival or Eurhythmics, declaring them amateur adventures into physical jerks with little or no accommodation of art for art's sake. During the mid to late 1930s this compromise proved possible and profitable. By 1945 it had become a troublesome liability.

Post-WWII Australia differed markedly from the society which had accommodated these contradictions discussed above. To begin with, any direct or implied association with things German became a problem rather than an asset. In a world informed by the consequences of fascism "in power" and its subsequent military defeat, a new found revulsion toward the symbolic images and artefacts of a fascist aesthetic dictated a move away from any obvious association with a right wing dynamic. These new circumstances not only inspired a denial of an allegiance to a pre-war fascist ideology on the part of the Allies¹⁰³ but also an abandonment of the anti-Modernist stance prevalent within artistic establishments prior to WWII. This retreat gave Modernists a new acceptability in Australia. As Jeanette Hoorn has observed:

It was not until the defeat of fascism... that Modernism became a dominant discourse in this country. The destruction of Modernist pictures and the spectre of 'decadent' art exhibitions of the Third Reich were too close to the position of the art establishment for comfort.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ As Stefan Kuhl has suggested, the Nazis obtained much of their philosophical support for Eugenicist beliefs from inter-war American scientific Eugenics. However it was not until Eugenics became problematic after World War Two that Americans denied their own 'proto-fascist' stance on issues of race, breeding, health, national efficiency, and good government in their own Progressive and Eugenicist movements. See Stefan Kuhl, *Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism and German National Socialism*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1994

¹⁰⁴ Jeanette Hoorn, "Misogyny and Modernist Painting in Australia: How Male critics made Modernism their own", *Journal of Australian Studies*, 32, 1992, 17

Artists, writers and painters who had once been considered subversive or inept became, what David Harvey has described as, the new “guardians of high taste”.¹⁰⁵ Modernism’s geographical location shifted from Europe to the United States. American Modernism offered “just enough violent fragmentation and creative destruction” to be seen as the product of a society “committed to liberty of expression, rugged individualism and creative freedom”. However, as Harvey suggested, acceptance camouflaged the “McCarthyite repression” which actually dominated American political and social life in the post war era.¹⁰⁶

American dancers embraced Modernism in much the same way as their art establishment, through a redefinition of the aesthetic which accommodated local flavour and a burgeoning sense of nationalism. After WWII modern dance became identified as intrinsically American. Critics and promoters re-designed their dancing past by locating the work and vision of major American names from the 1930s - Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman among them - as exclusive players. As Susan Manning has revealed, they re-constructed their history at the expense of any real acknowledgment of the influence of German Expressionism on the American dance scene. Even Wigman’s student Hanya Holm, who had moved to America in 1931 and set up a school originally based on Wigman’s principles, saw her historical influence on American dance minimised in post-1960s historiography.¹⁰⁷ When Mary Wigman’s contribution was acknowledged the complex relationship she had with National Socialism in the 1930s was conveniently sanitised.¹⁰⁸

In keeping with the new status of Modernism, American modern dance also developed a formalism that rivalled ballet’s. Choreographers began to create codified movement structures to support their choreography and train their companies. The resurrection of this older, more legitimate pathway to the establishment of an

¹⁰⁵ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, 35

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 37

¹⁰⁷ For further discussion of the re-writing of American dance history and the experiences of Hanya Holm and her New York school in the 1930s see Manning, *op. cit.*, 271-284

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 278-279

association with 'high' art saw the invention of new techniques in American modern dance which rivalled the intricacies of classical ballet and, in turn, boosted the status of Modernism in post WWII America.

In Australia, Irene Vera Young tried to steer modern dance practice in the same direction. She joined forces with Gertrud Bodenwieser in 1941 and together they formulated a syllabus for a modern dance technique. This syllabus had a process of assessment through examination. One of the first problems they encountered was what to call their new technique. In a lecture written for delivery at one of their first publicly-attended examinations, Young discussed this problem. She suggested that the term 'modern' could not be used because it would be too easily associated with new styles of ballroom dancing. In the end the title 'Creative Dance' was agreed upon. Interestingly Young disregarded, without apparent comment, the label which had served her so successfully in the 1930s - "German" dance.¹⁰⁹

Before the Second World War Young had felt no pressing need to distance herself from the ideas and symbolism of Germany or fascism. Not only did she call her dance practice "German" but, as we saw earlier, she also encourage the emulation of that country's national philosophy. Reporters, editors, and critics were equally relaxed about an association with things German or fascist. Captions accompanying photographs of Irene Vera Young and her dancers in the Daily Telegraph in 1938 quite unproblematically identified one pose as a "Human Swastika".¹¹⁰ In The Home, Young and her partners 'Swastika pose' was called an "interesting array of humanity"¹¹¹ (See Fig. 11). There was no evidence of distaste or parody in either of these statements.¹¹² However, as has already been discussed, by 1941 Young had

¹⁰⁹ A typed transcript of Irene Vera Young's lecture is located in the Irene Vera Young papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

¹¹⁰ "Human Swastika", Daily Telegraph, April 1938. This photo and caption is located in the Irene Vera Young papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

¹¹¹ The Home, December, 1933, 28

¹¹² Similarly, in the late 1930s a German physical culture club openly joined a parade down Brisbane streets displaying a swastika on their float bringing no apparent harm to the participants or protest from the crowd. Photograph reproduced in Peter Luck, This Fabulous Century, Lansdowne Press, 1980, 132

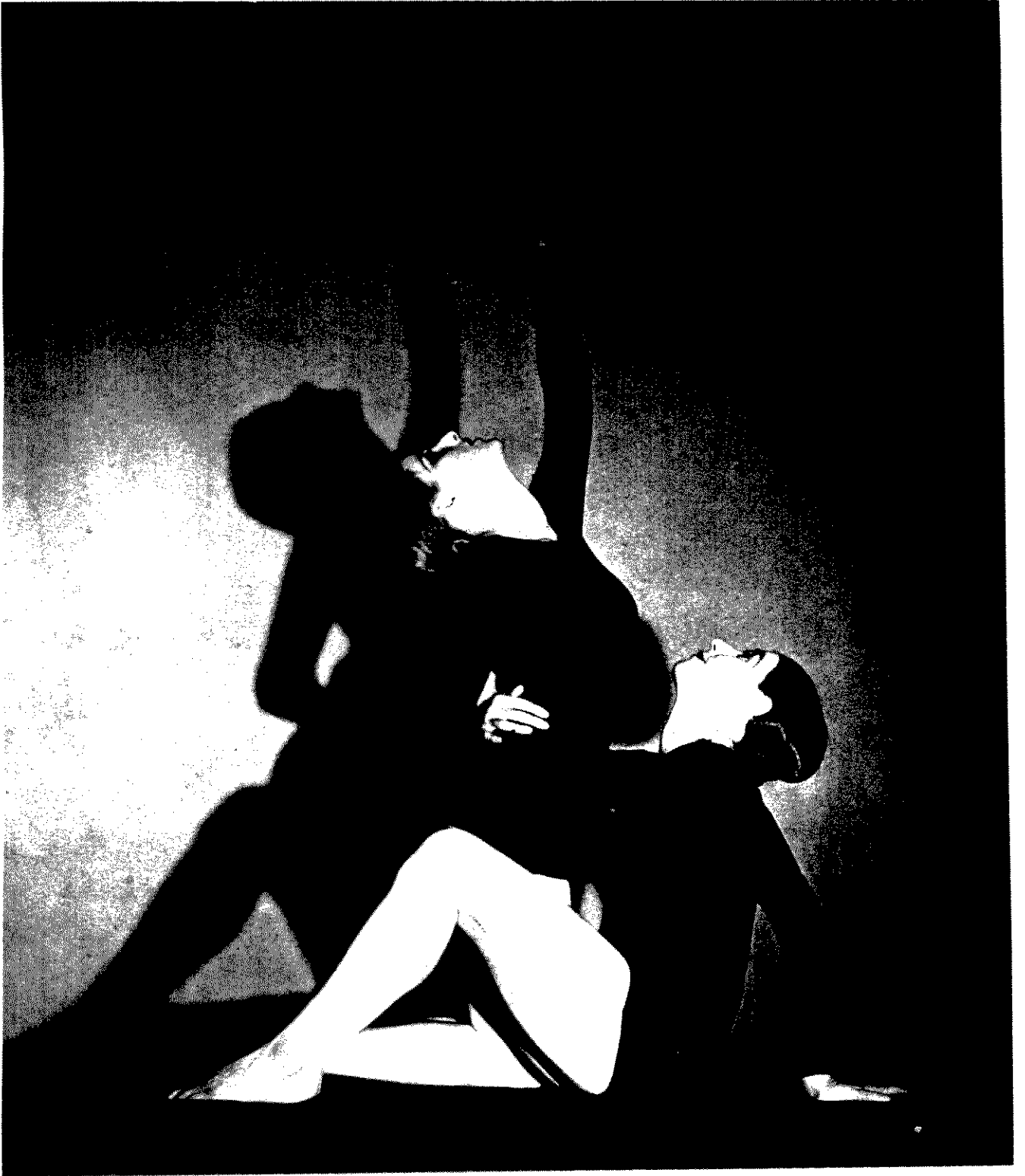


Fig. 11. Irene Vera Young (1933). The Home, December, 1933, 28

discarded the identification of her practice as “German”. The rhetoric which had championed principles of racial purity, embodied sacrifice, and personal improvement for the benefit of the nation also disappeared. A new formalism entered her work through her association with Bodenwieser. However, even with this adjustment Young’s art did not benefit from the same status shift enjoyed by modern dance in America. Her practice was still ‘foreign’. It could not be re-constructed to accommodate the new nationalist sensibility that pervaded post WWII Modernism. Even though she was a local Young had not invented a new *Australian* form in the same way that America’s Martha Graham had been credited with. As such the new acceptance of a Modernist aesthetic by-passed Expressive dancers like Young and Sonia Revid. Their Modernism was deemed derivative. It came from Europe and it could not be constructed to reflect a post WWII flowering of national particularity.

Had Sonia Revid survived the war, she, like America’s Hanya Holm, may have been able to shed the problematic inter-war association she had with German Modernism; through her rejection of the more volatile elements of 1920s Expressive dance and her commitment to a less confrontational form than that of her mentor Mary Wigman. Her acquiescence with a popular 1930s fascist aesthetic had also been minor when compared to that of Irene Vera Young. Revid was far more closely attached to the avante-gard status of her art, therefore her work may have been able to make the transition from a foreign, tainted practice to a reformed, nationally particular art form in line with such shifts in the United States. We shall never know. On 13th of January 1945¹¹³ Sonia Revid died. She did not see the end of the war she so despised or a rise in the status the art form to which she had dedicated her life. To date, the later years of Irene Vera Young’s life remain a mystery.¹¹⁴ The remaining

¹¹³ “Obituary”, *Argus*, 15th January, 1945. In a letter written by Keith Glennon to Rosa Ribush (c.1955-60), Sonia’s sister, there is mention of Sonia suffering from a prolonged illness through the Second World War. This letter is located in the Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne.

¹¹⁴ Young wrote a book called *A System of Body Culture for Young and Old* W. Paxton and Co. Pty Ltd, Britain, in which she displayed her technique. However, there is no date on this publication, but as the pictures in the book indicate, Young’s hair is greying and, as Lynn Fisher suggests, this could mean that she was in her fifties at the time of publication. See Fisher, op. cit., 24. However,

Expressive dance influence on postwar WWII Australia appears to be Gertrud Bodenwieser and the various dancers she brought with her from Europe: Joanna (Hanny) Kolm Exiner, Evelyn Ippen, Bettina Vernon, Elizabeth Russell, and Shona Dunlop MacTavish. Other dancers working in this style through the 1950s included: Ruth Berger, Jean Dembitzka, Nell Johnson, Elena Kepalaite, Margo Thomas, Vera Vetra, and Elizbet Wiener.¹¹⁵

Despite the continued influence of these women on the dance culture of Australia throughout the 1950s, Expressive dance never again enjoyed the status offered to Joan Henry, Joan Joske, Sonia Revid and Irene Vera Young in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s. Teachers like Bodenwieser still enjoyed some influence and the patronage of dedicated students but it was the direct association with celebrated American Modernists which carried increasing prestige in the decades following the Second World War. When the Bodenwieser trained Coralie Hinkley returned to Australia in December 1960 after three years in America she told the Sydney Morning Herald that Expressive dance was now decidedly “old hat”. In New York they had:

...entirely left behind the old Germanic style. They have revolted against the improvisation where dancers kicked off their shoes and ran around in gauze shirts with scarves... The new result is contemporary dance that is stripped of everything, no exaggerated or extra movements and no movements without a reason. Nothing is wasted.¹¹⁶

Hinkley had left Australia in December of 1957 as the first dancer to be awarded a Fullbright Scholarship.¹¹⁷ She attended Julliard for dance training with Doris Humphrey, won a scholarship to work at the Martha Graham school where she

there is also nothing to indicate whether Young was in Australia, Britain or America at the time of this book's publication. The Irene Vera Young papers were donated to the Wolanski Library, Sydney Opera House, by Young's daughter Barbara. The last known address for Barbara Young in Australia was in the 1960s. Attempts to locate her have been unsuccessful to date.

¹¹⁵ A short biography of each of these dancers appears in Appendix 1.

¹¹⁶ “Expressive Dancing is ‘Old Hat’”, Sydney Morning Herald, 7th December, 1960, 29.

¹¹⁷ “A New Antill Ballet”, Sydney Morning Herald, 22nd December, 1957, 59.

remained for two years while simultaneously completing a bachelors degree in Education at New York University.¹¹⁸ She also did classes with Merce Cunningham. Hinkley saw herself as one among this new breed of dancer. She had seen “the most advanced ideas in technique and composition” in America.¹¹⁹ For Hinkley, Martha Graham had “devised a completely new way of movement”¹²⁰ with a complex technique which moved the dancer beyond the realm of mere personal expression and into a space where technique was now essential.¹²¹

With this move, modern dance had finally resolved the nagging dilemma experienced by inter-war Modernists who had struggled to reconcile the popular aspects of Expressive dance with its avante-garde status. After WWII modern dance developed a ‘mainstream’ position in direct and equal competition to classical ballet through the development of a recognisable, reproducible, identifiable technique. This new formalism devalued the work of dancers who had seen personal expression and emotive exploration as a legitimate form of technique. A reliance on these principles meant that their work was seen as trivial and their contribution dismissed by dancers who had discovered the new and improved status of American post-war Modernism. Expressive dance was now antiquated. It had content without form. It was a highly personalised aesthetic which was embedded in its own time and place. The historical affiliation which had developed between Expressive dance and the principles of physical culture and, a now discredited fascist aesthetic, had become a liability after WWII. This art did not “transcend the flux of specific ideologies to touch something that remain[ed] constant throughout human experience”¹²²; it was specific and situated. At this time in the history of post WWII dance development in the western

¹¹⁸ “Expressive Dancing is ‘Old Hat’”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7th December, 1960, 29.

¹¹⁹ “Australian Dancer in Own Ballet”, *Music and Dance*, February, 1962, 21.

¹²⁰ “Expressive Dancing is ‘Old Hat’”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7th December, 1960, 29.

¹²¹ It is also quite revealing that the personal pronoun of the dancer had shifted in Hinkley’s post WWII rhetoric from the feminine to the masculine. This is just one illustration of the gradual shift in the embodied gender representation of dance in the post WWII period. This change is discussed at length in chapter seven, and the ramifications for women explored further in the conclusion of this thesis.

¹²² Karen Van Ulzen, “Moving on the bandwagon”, *Dance Australia*, October/November, 1988, 29

world, modern dance was consolidating its reputation as a 'fine' art. It developed a technique which took the art form and the dancer beyond the realm of the everyday and offered works which championed the exploration of the act of moving rather than the narrative or sentiment being portrayed. Following on from these changes the history of the Expressive dancers working in Australia in the inter-war period faded from the collective memory until, by 1970, it seemed that nothing had occurred in Australian modern dance before the technique of the Americans had arrived from across the Pacific.

As this chapter has suggested, Expressive dancers like Irene Vera Young and, to a lesser degree Sonia Revid, married a personalised, elitist, 'art-for-art's-sake' approach to performance with an embodied pursuit of social, racial, class and gender improvement. This mix appealed to artists, students, audiences, and critics in the 1930s. Through a fascist aesthetic, Irene Vera Young in particular offered a site where the body's disruptive possibilities could be tempered. Through self-control and physical efficiency she offered a personal, localised, embodied site for the implementation of broader social goals and the regulation of the potentially unruly body. However, as the next chapter will show, these restraints did not completely extinguish that body's potential volatility or the historically loaded association that had been established between the practice of dance and the primal or primitive.

Chapter Three

“Negroes in Ballet? How Absurd!”¹: encounters with the exotic in Australian dance.

Dance has been associated with the pre-linguistic for most of its history in the western world. Classical ballet had fought against this image with moderate success through the implementation of codes and practices which elevated the body out of an association with the everyday. The invention of a codified vocabulary and equipment like the point shoe meant that the ballet dancer could execute a variety of movements which bore little resemblance to ordinary human motion, leading the art form out of the reach of masses and establishing its place as a ‘high-brow’ practice. When the ‘Moderns’ came along at the turn of the century they reinstated the primacy of the ‘natural’ body. As dance writer Roger Copeland has suggested, artists like Isadora Duncan and Mary Wigman, envisaged dance as “the last remaining link between the hyper-civilised present and the otherwise vanishing vitality of the primitive past.”²

As we saw in the last two chapters artists like Joan Henry, Joan Joske, Sonia Revid and Irene Vera Young maintained an association with the natural, the primal, and the primitive through a celebration of personal vision and the championing of unmediated expression. Although the freedoms pursued by Revid and Young were tempered by a flirtation with a fascist aesthetic in the late 1930s, as with the dancers before them, they saw no particular separation between representation and essence. They claimed for themselves a direct linkage to an elemental, universal human condition. They professed to be in touch with an ‘original’ experience. An experience unmediated by consciousness and reason. Most early modern dance artists were fascinated with this search for origins. They celebrated the a-historical and the essential.³ They sought a link between nature and human movement.⁴ Artists like

¹ Ward Flemming and Theodore Hancock, “Negroes in ballet!”, *Dance & Dancers*, October, 1957, 9

² Roger Copeland, “The Search for Origins”, *Dance Theatre Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Summer, 1996,

10

³ *Ibid.*, 11

Sonia Revid were disillusioned with the civilising processes which had taken place in their rapidly changing world which not only led to the attempted restraint of chaos through the control and regimentation of the body but also inspired a search for an untainted expression, a pre-civilised corporeality. Revid located this embodied vision within the exposure of unmediated emotional action. Other dancers like Joan Henry and Joan Joske found their natural or primal in societies deemed to be primitive, or at least untainted by Western notions of development and progress. The most famous exponent of the latter in dance was the American Isadora Duncan. Duncan re-invented the world of the ancient Greeks through her choreographic explorations of images from antiquity. This combination of Greek Classicism and the exotic first came to Australia with the visit of Duncan's contemporary Maud Allen.

A Canadian by birth, Allen had made a name for herself in Britain where some critics preferred her style to that of the more celebrated Duncan. As her biographer Felix Cherniavsky has suggested, Allen's work was considered "prettier and more musical" than Duncan's when they both performed in London in 1908.⁵ Allen's most famous piece was a version of the Salome story which she called *Vision of Salome*. Arriving in Australia in 1914, at the tail end of a long world tour, Maud Allen's two piece 'Oriental' costume, which exposed her midriff, almost saw her performances cancelled. Allen calmed concerned authorities by establishing an aesthetic association between her exposed middle and the classical traditions of the Ancient Greeks. Reassured, the Australian censors dropped their earlier objections and her performances went ahead as scheduled.⁶

⁴ Ibid., 10

⁵ Felix Cherniavsky, "Maud Allen, Part 1: the Early Years 1873-1903", *Dance Chronicle*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1983: 1; Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image*, William Morrow, New York, 1988, 99

⁶ Edward Pask, *Enter the Colonies Dancing: History of Dance in Australia 1835-1940*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1979, 112. For more on the controversy and popularity of Maud Allen's dance *Vision of Salome* (both in Britain and Australia). See Cherniavsky, 1983, op. cit.; Felix Cherniavsky, *The Salome Dancer: the Life and Times of Maud Allen*, McClelland and Stewart Inc, Toronto, 1991; Amy Koritz, "Dancing the Orient for England: Maud Allen's 'The Vision of Salome'", *Theatre Journal*, March, 26 (1), 1994; and Janette Joy Prichard "Salomé and the 'cult of the clitoris'", unpublished paper, June, 1996

Accompanied by a group of musicians, the Cherniavsky Trio, Allen enjoyed highly successful seasons in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth. In Sydney the Daily Telegraph reported that she “charmed everyone with the culture and grace of her dancing”.⁷ In Melbourne, Nellie Melba and her friends showered the stage with flowers and led the audience in a series of ovations, demanding five encores from Allen at the Tahiti Room.⁸ However, it appears that Allen’s most vocal and appreciative audience was in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia. In this outback mining district many locals were attracted by the prospect of seeing the controversial *Vision of Salome* when Allen came to town. On opening night a “sizeable minority” of the audience were miners.⁹ As one of the Cherniavsky trio would recall some years later, Maud Allen:

...the world famous dancer, recent idol of London audiences, erstwhile toast of royalty and the rich, made her way through her performance [to] cries of “Open up yer legs more, darlin’,” and “Get back down on yer back again, Maudie”.¹⁰

In a review the next morning the Kalgoorlie Miner remarked that “to the majority of the spectators last night Miss Allen proved novel and delightful”. Those ‘delighted’ miners did not return for the second performance the following evening, much to the relief of Allen’s tour manager.¹¹

This discrepancy between readings of Allen’s work illustrates the tenuous grasp that these early adventures into modern dance had on their elite aesthetic location. Allen’s body, exposed on stage firstly through her position as a performer and secondly through the revealing nature of her attire and movement vocabulary, needed a certain social location in order to be read as art rather than sexual titillation. Here was a woman’s body outside the confines of its usual space within the domestic realm. The Kalgoorlie miners lacked the reference points needed to recognise Allen’s

⁷ Cherniavsky, 1991, op. cit., 40

⁸ Ibid., 42

⁹ Ibid., 40

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

display as anything other than an erotic burlesque or strip-tease. In other circles, such as the Tahiti Room in Melbourne, the performance could be framed as 'high' art, an avante-garde example of the Expressive dance practices that had been sweeping Europe. As Amy Koritz suggests, Allen's Salome tapped into the fashion and passion for Orientalism which was prevalent in the early decades of the twentieth century. Her persona was "not Egyptian, Algerian, or Syrian" but "Eastern". As Koritz remarks:

While Westerners might have national identities - American or English, for example - the East, like Woman, [was] characterised by eternal qualities shared by all its inhabitants. This similarity between Orientalism and Femininity as ideological constructs placed a Western woman performing the East in a complex position.¹²

This complex position stimulated the varied reception Allen experienced at her concerts in Australia. At Kalgoorlie and the Tahiti Room, Allen was allowed the space to perform through her assumption of the role of 'Other'. She shielded her personal sense of propriety as a woman of the West behind her portrayal of a character - a woman from the 'East'. In the Tahiti Room that exotic Other invited objectification but provided a space where her impropriety (the erotic portrayal of Salome, a volatile woman blinded by unrequited passion) could be explored without demeaning her personal status as an artist. In Kalgoorlie this subtle re-alignment was impossible. Those miners knew a mediocre "hootchy-kootchy" or "shimmy" dancer when they saw one.¹³

Whether the 'Oriental' dancer was presented in the theatre, as art, or in burlesque, as erotic display, the exotic offered western women an alternative space to their usual social, sexual position in respectable society in the early twentieth century. It was not only dance that was influenced by things Oriental - theatre, music, art, design and fashion had succumb to the allure of the exotic in the first two decades of

¹² Koritz, op. cit., 73

¹³ For details on the popularity of hootchy-kootchy and shimmy dances in America see Robert Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1991, 227-236.

the 20th century. As Gaylyn Studlar has suggested, women's attraction to "orientalia" from 1900 to the 1920s should be understood as a feminine desire to:

...escape bourgeois domesticity's constraints and to create other transformative identities that were convergent with [the] qualities of the New Woman...¹⁴

The American dancer Ruth St Denis was one of the most celebrated Orientalists of the early twentieth century. She was inspired by the dances of India but also was particularly taken with the performances of the Japanese artist Sada Yacco, whom she saw in Paris in 1900. St Denis recalled in her autobiography:

For the first time I beheld and understood the beautiful austerities of Japanese art. Here, in [Mm. Sada Yacco's] dancing...was the antithesis of the flamboyant, overblown exuberance of our American acrobatics. Here was a costuming in which the colo[u]rs were vivid yet so related to the mood that they seemed to emanate from a different palette.¹⁵

The concentrated subtlety of Yacco's style of dancing also inspired the Australian artists Joan Henry and Joan Joske. There is no evidence that Henry or Joske had seen, or even heard of, the American dancer/choreographer Ruth St Denis or Sada Yacco, but their fascination with the exotic emerged from a similar space. These dancer/choreographers practiced a more restrained representation of the exotic 'East' than St Denis or Maud Allen. It's hard to imagine Henry and Joske, with their love of medieval, Greek and Japanese dance and costume, and their attention to historical and philosophic detail, performing the rather risqué elements required in a Salome recital, but their explorations of the 'Orient' allowed them a creative space in which they could escape the normal constraints of their middle class status and their gender.

These women approached their work with zealous reverence. Dedication, concentration, and historical investigation went into the reproductions of 'authentic'

¹⁴ Gaylyn Studlar, "'Out-Salomeing Salome': Dance, the New Woman, and Fan Magazine Orientalism", *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Vol. 34, No. 4, Fall 1995, 491

¹⁵ Ruth St Denis, *An Unfinished Life*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1939, 40

Oriental dances and dramas. As we saw in chapter one, Joan Henry and Joan Joske developed an appreciation of the improvisation techniques of Expressive dance through their early training with Lola Laban and the principles of Dance Absolute but they also became frustrated with what they saw as Laban's European bias. Laban showed no apparent interest in the culturally diverse histories, philosophies, and aesthetic principles of dance from other parts of the world. In contrast Henry and Joske performances over the late '20s and early thirties at St Chad, The Little Theatre, the Rumpelmeyer ballroom gradually developed around a combination of Dance Absolute principles and the research they undertook into other philosophic, historical and geographical dance traditions. They were particularly interested in, what Henry called, "Oriental systems" of thought and cultural production. Like many Orientalists before them, they gleaned much of their early material and understanding from books rather than immediate experience. Henry recalled in 1967:

It was our designer, David Bethel who taught us how to use the Public Library. He was very keen on the value of research work. We had good, receptive minds and curiosities stimulated by awareness that we were cut off from systematic teaching. In fact, there were not even textbooks on much that we wanted to know. We would note down a paragraph or two from a travel book here, a chapter if we were lucky, there; and so we acquired a body of notes which gave us a good world map of the dance in our minds.¹⁶

Henry also made the study of 'Oriental styles' an essential component in her teaching. She and her students would work "not only from travel books but also books on the theatre, costume design, geographical books and magazines, and books on anthropology."¹⁷ Among the Indian, Egyptian, Medieval, Greek and Japanese dances Henry and Joske produced it was *Katisubata* and *Hagaromo*, "two Noh plays" produced in 1934, of which Henry seemed most proud.¹⁸

¹⁶ Letter written by Joan Henry to Keith Glennon dated 20th July 1967. Located in Folder 10, Box 9, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Joan Henry makes a special reference to these dances in her letters to Keith Glennon, wishing

Pre-publicity for these performances suggested that “Ninth and Tenth century Japan” would “rear its fantastic head both literally and symbolically” at the Studio of Absolute Dance. With every movement taken from “pictures, mural decorations, pottery and literature of the period”, and with “amazing head-dresses” which were offered as “exact replicas of those worn by 10th century women, priests and fisherman in Japan”, Henry and Joske would ‘become’ Japanese through the “mannerisms...of the period”. Their movements were dictated by the attire they wore and props they used. According to their preliminary advertising, audiences would see “a remarkable illusion of old Japan” in *Katisubata* and *Hagaromo* through the way the performers held their fans, positioned their heads through a particular straining of the neck, and turned in their toes, keeping their knees together as they walked.¹⁹

For *Hagaromo* Henry used “as many Japanese theatrical conventions as possible”, except for the use of life-size masks or the tradition which dictated that men played women’s roles. Suggestions of masking were achieved instead by the use of “mask-like make-up” and “restrained facial gestures”. Joan Joske mimed the role of Tennin, with her characters voice emerging from a chorus member which Henry believed gave her a dislocated, “ethereal” quality. In a cloak made of bronze peacock feathers worn over an ivory kimono, Joske “glided from start to finish with invisible foot movements” telling the story of Tennin with “traditional fan gestures”.²⁰ Just as the two Joans had hung the space with the latest paintings of, among others, their friend and sister Margaret Joske in other productions, for *Kakitsubata* and *Hagaromo* the studio was decorated with Japanese prints from the private collection of a Dr Clive Stephen.

particularly to be remembered for these productions. See letters from Joan Henry to Keith Glennon dated 3rd and 20th July 1967. Located in Folder 10, Box 9, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

¹⁹ Newspaper article, “Plays of Old Japan: Life Copied From Vases”, no date (c.1934), Folder 10, Box 9, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

²⁰ Letter written by Joan Henry to Keith Glennon dated 20th July 1967. Located in Folder 10, Box 9, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

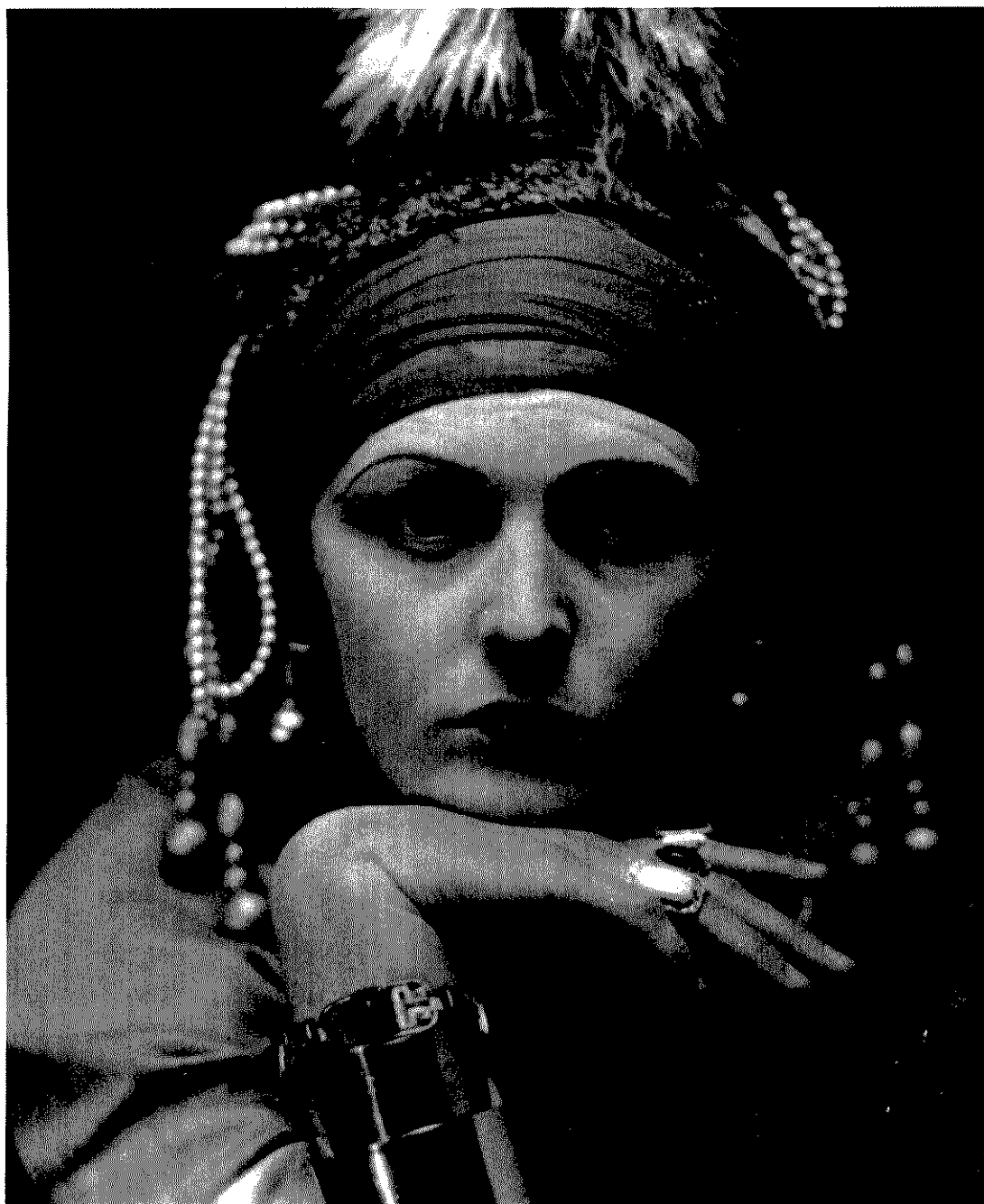


Fig. 12. Joan Henry (c. 1933-4), from *In the Steppes of Central Asia*. Photographer Unknown. (Courtesy of the Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia).



Fig. 13. Joan Joske (c.1934), from *Katisubata*. Photographer unknown. (Courtesy of the Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia).

Like Orientalists of the 19th century Joan Henry and Joan Joske believed they were reproducing accurate replicas of the times and places they visited in their productions. They saw their artistic contributions as authentic representations of traditions they had often never seen but were convinced existed somewhere. Henry and Joske, like many other armchair anthropologists, gained “strength and identity” as European performers by setting themselves off against the Orient as, what Edward Said called a “sort of surrogate and even underground self”.²¹ As Said exposed in relation to the writer Flaubert’s fascination with the Orient²², western artists were able to reproduce the East because they were in a position to do so, a position of relative power. They were able to understand and reproduce the cultures they performed with little or no actual experience of the locations because the culture they inhabited was at the centre of their known world. The Orient sat idle and unchanging out on the periphery, unproblematically ripe for appropriation by the West. By framing their efforts as art, Henry and Joske also believed they suspended any sense of insult to the culture they appropriated.

However for women, an association with things Oriental in the early twentieth century was more complex than a simple desire for unlimited access and an untethered right to interpretation. Orientalism provided the two Joans with a space in which to combat their powerlessness as women. Escape from the constraints of polite Melbourne society was possible through a historical and geographical disguise. For, as Studlar has suggested:

Dance as a “classic” art stood as an ideal symbolic merger between middle-class female gentility and contemporary ideals of feminine freedom from bodily and imaginative restraint.²³

Like Australia’s modernist painters of the late 19th Century,²⁴ Henry and Joske were not simply fascinated by the visualised culture of Japan or India. They also

²¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Routledge, London, 1978, 3

²² *Ibid.*, 6

²³ Studlar, *op. cit.*, 497

²⁴ For a discussion of a fascination with the art of Japan in Australian works see Alison Broinowski,

professed an interest in the aesthetic and philosophic traditions of the culture they sought to emulate. Authenticity was an essential aim in all their productions. There was no sense of parody or pantomime in their Indian, Japanese or, for that matter, their Medieval dances. As dancers, and as women, Joan Henry and Joan Joske had found within their Orientalism a useful space between the real and the imagined. They did not need to worry about the complexities of the cultures they visited in their work because their offerings were consumed at home. As Roger Celéstine has suggested, the exotic does not require “individuation”. It does not “entail a demarcation from one’s culture, from Home” or disrupt “local, national, even imperial codes” in that location.²⁵

Henry and Joske’s forays into the exotic did not challenge the dominant culture in which they lived. By performing the Other, without any actual association with the geographical or social reality of the places where that Other resided, these women left their own culture, “Home” as Celéstine calls it, intact and unchallenged. Their liberation was circumscribed by the stage on which they performed. The Orient or the exotic provided an escape but that escape was temporary, a masquerade which was relinquished when their show came to an end.

Other forms of the exotic in Australian dance were not shed once the performance finished. Visiting soloists and companies from Europe not only played the exotic on the Australian stage, they also personified the Other once their performances come to an end. When Sonia Revid arrived from Germany in 1932 she was the focus of articles in The Leader, The Age, The Herald (Melbourne), The Star, The Australian Musical News, Everylady’s Journal, The New Nation Magazine, The Australian Woman’s World, and The Home. Revid captivated the local press. For The Truth she was “dark and volatile”²⁶, for The Age “brooding” and “impressive”²⁷. The

The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1992

²⁵ Roger Celéstine, From Cannibals to Radicals: Figures and limits of Exoticism, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996, 2

²⁶ The Truth, 30th November, 1935. Article is located in the Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne, Victoria

²⁷ The Age, 25th March, 1935. Ibid.

Herald called her “temperamental”²⁸, and The Argus - “artistic and emotional to her fingertips”.²⁹ These images fuelled Revid’s persona as the exotic artist; the volatile dancer with a foreign temperament and a “delicious accent”³⁰. She fulfilled established fantasies. Her foreign birth combined with an ‘artistic’ temperament to create an exotic cocktail. Revid was Russian, female, and an avante-gard dancer.³¹ Her gender, artistic practice and status all contributed to her construction as the exotic Other, but the most vital component was her nationality. As a Russian, Revid was located further down the evolutionary ladder in the hierarchy of nations than the peoples of Western Europe or Britain. However she was not as far removed from the centre as those of the Orient or Africa. The Eastern ‘Slavic’ nations were seen as less sophisticated, their civilisations less complicated. They provided Western Europeans with a more localised reflection of their own evolution processes.³² They also offered an antidote to a disenchantment with the ordered, rational, modernising age of the early decades of the twentieth century.³³

²⁸ Herald, 5th December, 1935. Ibid.

²⁹ Argus, 26th November, 1932. Ibid.

³⁰ “A Russian Dancer in Melbourne: Sonia Revid Talks of Her Art”, The Leader, 10th December, 1932, 38. Ibid.

³¹ Revid’s contemporary Irene Vera Young also benefited from a similar exotic framing, but Young’s image had more to do with her association with modernity than the exotic nature of her birthplace. As we saw in chapter one, Young’s particular draw card when she first returned to Australia was her emergence from the metropolis - New York city. In her own writings Young constructed herself as the child of this hub of modernity. “Recently from New York” was a phrase which almost always accompanied her name in the local newspapers and she often promoted herself as the “famous New York Professional” in advertisements for her classes with various dance schools. See articles such as “The Advent of the New Dance”, Dance Magazine, July 1933: 6; “Interstate and Overseas Travellers”, Daily Telegraph, 28th January, 1937; “Dance and Verse: Irene Vera Young’s Success”, Sydney Morning Herald, 25th October, 1933; “Dance - Its many interpretations”, The Sun, 8th July 1934; L. L. Woollacott, “An Australian Woman of Genius”, To-day: the News Magazine, Vol. LXXI, No. 9, April, 1934. Articles and a copy of this edition of To-day are located in the Irene Vera Young papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

³² For a discussion of the history of the idea of ‘Eastern’ Europe, and the construction of its shifting geographical location as pre-civilised (when compared to Western Europe’s understanding of its own development, sophistication, and/or over-civilised history) see Larry Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe: the map of civilisation on the mind of the Enlightenment, Stanford University Press, California, 1994

³³ For more on this see Modris Ekstein, Rites of Spring: the Great War and the Birth of Modernism, Houghton and Mifflin, Boston, 1989; Lynn Garafola, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, Oxford University Press New York, 1989; and John M. MacKenzie, Orientalism: History, theory and the arts, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995

Although Revid had fulfilled this fantasy for Australians in the early 1930s, the most famous exotic Other in dance was the Ballet Russes under the leadership of Serge Diaghilev when they arrived in Paris in 1909. This company created an explosion of interest in the fantasy of the exotic, both as it related to the Orient and to Europe's imagined past. The Ballet Russes offered French audiences something shrouded in mystery. Their mode of expression, classical ballet, had developed a long, though not always consistent, historical association with the aristocracy in France, Italy and Imperial Russia, but the Ballet Russes had taken this technique and bent it into a 20th century shape. They allowed their subject matter and context to infect their movement vocabulary. Influenced by Modernism in art, design and modern dance practices, choreographers such as Fokine and Nijinsky wanted to adjust the classical technique in order to accommodate a search for aesthetic 'honesty' and 'truth' in representation. They looked for a way to make their ballets more 'natural'. Their results were very different. Nijinsky's attempts caused a furore and his works hardly survived their premieres (only being resurrected by later generations when their content was recognised as a rare innovation of early 20th century Modernism). In contrast, the work of Michel Fokine was less of a challenge but his innovations changed the classical ballet aesthetic permanently.

Michel Fokine's ballets, most of which were produced between 1909 and 1914 for the original Ballet Russes, helped to foster a minor revolution for which the Diaghilev company has become famous. Inspired by an established body of work which idealised the 'Orient' and the other 'folk' cultures of the world, Fokine's Orientalist fantasies - *The Polovtsian Dances* (1909), *Cléopâtre* (1909) *Schéhérazade* (1910), *The Firebird* (1910), *Les Orientales* (1910), *Petrouchka* (1911), and *Thamar* (1912) - fascinated Parisians and in the decades that followed conquered the hearts of ballet audiences in Britain, Australia and the United States.

When he created the works listed above, Fokine joined the ranks of the 'armchair' anthropologists, but, unlike Joan Henry and Joan Joske, Fokine did not consider his ballets to be *representations* of cultures with 'real' locations. What was

more important for him was the aesthetic challenge that these imagined exotic locations offered to the movement conventions of ballet. The classical aesthetic which had been established by the choreographer Mauris Petipa in Russia in the late 19th century centralised hierarchies and theatrical conventions which stilted the flow of the narrative and bore little relationship to the real world. Fokine's Orientalism offered him a space within which he could explore new movement structure without completely abandoning the classical form, as Nijinsky was later accused of doing. As John MacKenzie has suggested, Fokine centralised sensuality, giving his works a "raw and abandoned quality which filled the theatre and took the artistic world by storm".³⁴ He worked his innovations into the confines of the established classical vocabulary but added a sense of flow not only to the movement, but also narrative structures. Dance historian Lynn Garafola described this process as Fokine's liberation rather than reinvention of the classical aesthetic.³⁵ His Orientalist works were pure fantasy offering pre-war Parisians a "luxuriant opulence"³⁶ imposed over a liberated, but recognisable artistic form.

It was through these same ballets that Australian dance audiences were offered another encounter with the exotic. Thirty years after their creation within Diaghilev's Ballet Russes, the entrepreneur Colonel Wassily de Basil brought the works of Fokine to Australia. De Basil's Ballet Russes, as the company was called for their first Australian tour, had been formed after the death of Diaghilev in 1929 and the subsequent break-up of the original company. De Basil formed various organisations using the Ballet Russes name which toured through Europe, Britain, America and Australia from the 1930s to the 1950s.³⁷ Arriving in Adelaide in August 1936³⁸, Colonel de Basil's Ballet Russes, which simply came to be called the Russian Ballet by

³⁴ Garafola, *op. cit.*, 287; MacKenzie, *op. cit.*, 198

³⁵ Garafola, *op. cit.*, 3-49

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 46

³⁷ For a detailed description of the tours of these various companies see Katherine Sorley Walker's, *De Basil's Ballets Russes*, Hutchison, London, 1982

³⁸ Colonel de Basil's companies toured Australia as Colonel de Basil's Ballet Russes from August 1936 to July 1937; Covent Garden Russian Ballet from September 1938 to April 1939; and the Original Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo toured from December 1939 to August 1940.

locals, toured Melbourne, Sydney, New Zealand, and Brisbane with a return season in Melbourne over the next nine months. Australian dancer Martin Rubinstein recalled the impact of this company (and the Fokine ballets in particular) when he first saw them in Melbourne:

I would sit up in the gods every second night and see all those glorious ballets like [*Le*] *Coq D'or*, *Cinderella*, *Paganini* and *Firebird* - and my big love was the first time I saw Yurek Shabelevsky as the Golden Slave in *Schéhérazade* and I thought: 'If I dance nothing else I must dance that role'. The other great role, which I also saw Shabelevsky dance, was *Petrouchka*, and again I thought: 'That is me.'³⁹

When de Basil's Ballet Russes arrived in Australia it was not the first time that local audiences had experienced the revolutionary qualities of Fokine's innovations. Anna Pavlova (inspired by the work of Isadora Duncan and Vaslav Nijinsky, as well as Fokine) had already introduced the latter's more 'naturalistic' approach to classical movement vocabulary when she performed in Australia in 1926 and 1929. What had been inventive in the 1910s had become the new standards of the mid 1930s. In fact, the popularity of Fokine's *Schéhérazade*, *Firebird*, *Petrouchka*, and *The Polovtsian Dances*⁴⁰ amongst inter-war Australian audiences should not be attributed to a recognition of their innovation so much as an appreciation of the anachronistic conservatism of what had become an established revolution in form and content.

Fokine's ballets were beholden to a Modernist aesthetic which centralised a fascination with the primitive, the elemental, and the establishment of a 'natural' technique. Their success was also promoted by the foregrounding of spectacle which other Modernists such as Sonia Revid had chosen to ignore. Modris Ekstein has described Modernism as a "culture of the sensational event, through which art and life both become a matter of energy and are fused as one".⁴¹ Although Modernists

³⁹ Patricia Laughlin, "Triumph over Adversity", *Dance Australia*, June/July, 1987, 24. *Paganini* was a premier for the de Basil company in 1936

⁴⁰ Originally *The Polovtsian Dances* were staged for Borodin's opera *Prince Igor* in 1909 by Fokine. See Garafola, op. cit., 13.

⁴¹ Ekstein, op. cit., 40

working in Expressive dance in the twenties and early thirties would have agreed with Ekstein that art and life should be as one, the creation of a “sensational event” was of less importance. However, sensationalism was an essential part of ballet. This was not so much an aspect of a new adventure into a contemporary understanding of Modernism, as the maintenance of a traditional feature of the classical style. Ballet had been home for spectacle and fantasy for decades and although Fokine and Nijinsky dabbled with an early twentieth century Modernist principles, spectacle was not so much a part of their Modernism as a residual of a tradition within the classical art form.⁴² Costumes, lighting, scenery were designed to impress in the ballet. The transportation of the audience from the real world to an imagined space where everything was more fantastic was the aim of each production. Sensations were heightened. Love was more tragic, death more excruciating, and betrayal was a popular dramatic vehicle.

In a ballet like Fokine’s *Schéhérazade* spectacle was provided by the stage design, the costuming, and the characterisation. When the de Basil dancer Leon Wolsikowsky performed the role of the Golden Slave in Sydney in 1936 the critic for the Sydney Morning Herald commented:

The extraordinary litheness of Wolzikowsky's movements; his electric swiftness; and the number of turns he could make during a dart into the air made the slave a wildly elemental and exciting phenomenon.⁴³

Ten years later when Martin Rubinstein finally performed this role (fig. 14) in Australia for the company formed by a former de Basil dancer Edouard Borovansky,

⁴² To a certain extent Modris Ekstein is able to insist on the essentially Modernist nature of spectacle because his work concentrates on the Ballet Russes’ *Rite of Spring*, choreographed by Nijinsky. This controversial work was unusual within the popular Ballet Russe repertoire. There were a variety of examples of a Modernist aesthetic from other choreographers for whom spectacle was not a major concern. See Bronislava Nijinska’s *Les Noces* (1923) for example. As *Rite of Spring* is sole example of Modernism in dance in the early twentieth century for a wide ranging discussion on Modernism within the Ballet Russes. A wider referencing of works may have tempered Ekstein’s assumption that spectacle was an intrinsic part of Modernism at the turn of the century. For more on Modernism and the Ballet Russes see Garafola, op. cit.

⁴³ “The Ballet”, Sydney Morning Herald, 28th December, 1936, 4

“L.B.” of the *Sydney Morning Herald* praised Rubinstein’s “spectacular leaps”. His Golden Slave, who was “ready to take his liberty and take liberties too”, pulsed throughout with “lithe animal movements”.⁴⁴ For Frank Salter, Rubinstein’s biographer, his slave was:

...a thing of such savagery and abandon it was impossible to be anything but stunned by the animal sexuality of the creature.⁴⁵

The relationship between spectacle, the exotic, and the erotic were essential components to the classical form. Although usually accused of being a ‘high’ or elitist art, ballet has survived through an accommodation of principles of entertainment which have had more in common with ‘popular’ or ‘low brow’ theatre than with the rarefied sensibilities of elite art practices. Long before Diahgilev saw the value of spectacle in the creation of a work, ballet had succumbed to the same influences and theatrical conventions as eighteenth century Melodrama.

Melodrama was a form of theatre developed in late 18th century Britain and post revolutionary France at a time when the emerging middle-classes had begun to wrestle power, both politically and socially, from the aristocracy.⁴⁶ As the new bourgeoisie took control of theatres and attempted to re-imagine the structure and form of entertainment over the following decades they also had to take into account market forces which dictated the accommodation of the tastes of the lower classes and the ‘popular’ theatre they attended. As Gledhill suggests, “melodrama arose to exploit these new conditions of production”. It successfully:

... initiated audiences into a range of cultural forms, both ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’, and prepared the way for aesthetic transmutation between genres and modes - for a welding of fantasy, spectacle and realism...⁴⁷

⁴⁴ L.B., “Schéhérazade in New Programme”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4th August, 1947, 8

⁴⁵ Frank Salter, *Borovansky: the Man who Made Australian Ballet*, Wildcat Press, Sydney, 1980, 136

⁴⁶ Christine Gledhill, “The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation”, in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and Woman’s Film*, British Film Institute Publishing, London, 1987, 16; Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*, New York, 1976, 14

⁴⁷ Gledhill, *op. cit.*, 18

Classical ballet was also influenced by this “aesthetic transmutation”. In the 19th century, choreographers began to foreground heroism, romance, spectacle and violence. These sensations were dragged into a marriage with bourgeoisie values which promoted art as a source of moral elevation. The rise of what has been called the ‘Romantic era’ in ballet production saw the voluptuous girl of questionable morals from the *corps de ballet* turned into a Sylph, a “vaporous, beckoning woman”⁴⁸ who enticed men with her ‘other-worldly-ness’. The positioning of the ballerina as the ethereal temptress, accompanied by her increased technical expertise as a performer, lifted the spectacle of Sylph’s union with her leading man on stage (and her admiring onlooker in the audience) out of an association with the sins of the flesh or of mere ‘entertainment’. This especially suited the moral codes of the Victorian middle classes who, as Modris Ekstein has suggested, “interpreted pleasure in primarily spiritual and moral rather than physical or sensual terms”.⁴⁹ The Sylph’s body was not of this earth. She evaded the world of the physical but she was still a site of erotic pleasure. She was a fantasy elevated to an ethereal plane where desire could be imagined but accusations of impropriety successfully avoided. Ballets such as *Les Sylphide* (1832) and *Giselle* (1841) were representative of this era.⁵⁰

Similarly, the Sylph’s more “accessible cousin”⁵¹, the harem or temple dancer, plied her trade within the confines of 19th century melodramatic conventions. This “denizen of a pasha’s harem or a temple dancer subjected to a high priest’s whims”⁵² fought either for her chastity or her right to the man of her choice and, if she failed to accomplish this in life, colluded in her own, suitably violent, death, which then guaranteed her goal.⁵³ This framework remained a staple within classical ballets, even

⁴⁸ Jowitt, *op. cit.*, 31

⁴⁹ Ekstein, *op. cit.*, 33

⁵⁰ For more on the Romantic Era and the ballerina as ethereal temptress see Jowitt, *op. cit.*, 29-47. For a discussion of the reception of the new Romantic ballets in America see Robert C. Allen, *op. cit.*, 87-92

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 49

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *La Révolte des femmes* (1833) and *Le Péri* (1843) were two such ballets. For more on these ballets and the ballerina as Oriental temptress see Jowitt, *op. cit.*, 49-65. For a detailed discussion of

into the early decades of the 20th century. Ballets full of “sylphs and sirens”⁵⁴ were restaged continually throughout the thirties and into the 1950s⁵⁵, their popular appeal hardly waning until the 1960s. With each re-construction these works could become more extreme in their display of spectacle, drama, sex and violence as notions of physical and sexual propriety began to relax and choreographers could take more risks with their portrayal of sensual pleasures (as long as the exploration of those pleasures carried dramatic and violent retributions). Peter Brooks has suggested that the survival of melodramatic principles beyond their late 18th century and early 19th century creation can be attributed to, what he calls, the persistent appeal of a “melodramatic imagination”⁵⁶. Brook suggests that this imagination was revealed through an:

... indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarisation and schematisation; extreme states of being, situation, actions; overt villainy; persecution of the good and fine; reward of virtue; inflated and exaggerated expression; dark plottings [and] suspense...⁵⁷

La Révolte des femmes see Jellen A. Meglin, “Feminism or Fetishism?: *La Révolte des femmes* and Women’s Liberation in France in the 1830s”, in Lynn Garafola, ed., *Rethinking the Sylph: New Perspectives on the Romantic Ballet*, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover, 1997, 69-90

⁵⁴ This phrase is taken from the title of Christy Adair’s, *Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens*, Macmillan, London, 1992

⁵⁵ Many books on the art and craft of melodrama place the form within the confines of the late 18th and 19th centuries. As Australian historian Richard Waterhouse has suggested, melodrama survived longer in Australia than in Europe or the United States, but after the First World War it had also lost relevance as a popular form of theatre in Australia. See Richard Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures. Public Leisure: A history of Australian popular culture since 1788*, Longman, Melbourne, 1995, 68-69. However, as this chapter will suggest, a melodramatic principle is embedded in the classical form, if we see melodrama as an imagined aesthetic sensibility rather than a description of a particular kind of theatre. See notes 55 of this chapter for further discussion of this point.

⁵⁶ In contrast with many historians of melodrama, Peter Brook has suggested that there is such a thing as a melodramatic aesthetic or, as he calls it, a “melodramatic imagination”, which was not only present in the form of popular 19th century theatre called melodrama, but also in literature from many periods since then. Other theorists have taken Brooks idea and applied it to other performance genres from different historical periods. For examples see Jane Gaines and her investigation of a “melodrama rhetoric” within the costuming of female stars in Hollywoods movies from 1920s-1950s in Jane Gaines, “Costume and narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman’s Story”, in Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog, eds., *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, Routledge, New York, 1990, 180-211. Also see Christine Gledhill, ed., *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and Woman’s Film*, British Film Institute Publishing, London, 1987

⁵⁷ Gaines, op. cit., 11-12

A perfect example of such principles at work in dance was in Fokine's *Schéhérazade*. The Golden Slave gave the ballet its eroticism and love interest. The Eunuch and the Shah provided the villainy and the "dark plotting and suspense". The Shah's favourite wife, Zobeide, gave *Schéhérazade* its passion, violence and moral retribution.⁵⁸

When the curtain rose on a performance of *Schéhérazade*, the Shah was seen leaving his harem on the pretext of going hunting with his brother. The head Eunuch was left in charge. Almost as soon as he departed Zobeide commanded the Eunuch to open the slaves quarters. The slaves escaped their confinement with an appropriately spectacular entrance but the most magnificent appearance was reserved for their leader. Zobeide, seeing the Golden slave, was entranced and, along with the other wives, participated in a frenzied orgy (see fig. 14). Naturally the Shah and his brother returned from hunting sooner than expected. They had not been hunting at all, the whole exercise had been manufactured by the Shah to test the fidelity of his wives. Discovering their licentious behaviour the Shah ordered all to be put to the sword. The Golden Slave's death throes were long and painfully exaggerated. Finally the only person left alive was Zobeide. The Shah faltered in his resolve to kill his favourite wife. Zobeide stabbed herself in despair, united with her love in death, she fell at her ruler's feet. As this plot illustrates, Zobeide was the quintessential, melodramatic heroine. Her behaviour offered sexual promiscuity veiled in the discovery of true passion for which she had to pay the ultimate price. It also framed this process within the realm of fantasy where the viewer's separation from the action (physically and morally) was maintained.

⁵⁸ The character of Zobeide was danced by Tamara Tchinarova, opposite Rubenstein's Golden Slave and Borovansky's Eunuch. Tchinarova remounted the piece from memory having danced the ballet many times with the various de Basil companies. There was a version of *Schéhérazade* produced in Australia before Fokine's arrival with de Basil's Ballet Russes in 1936. Louise Lightfoot mounted *Schéhérazade* (along with her own version of *Petrouchka*) in the early thirties. She created these ballets from books which described the Fokine productions in Diaghilev's Ballet Russes in the early years of the 20th century. Letter from Louise Lightfoot to Keith Glennon, 8th March 1967, located in Folder 7, Box 10, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith library, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

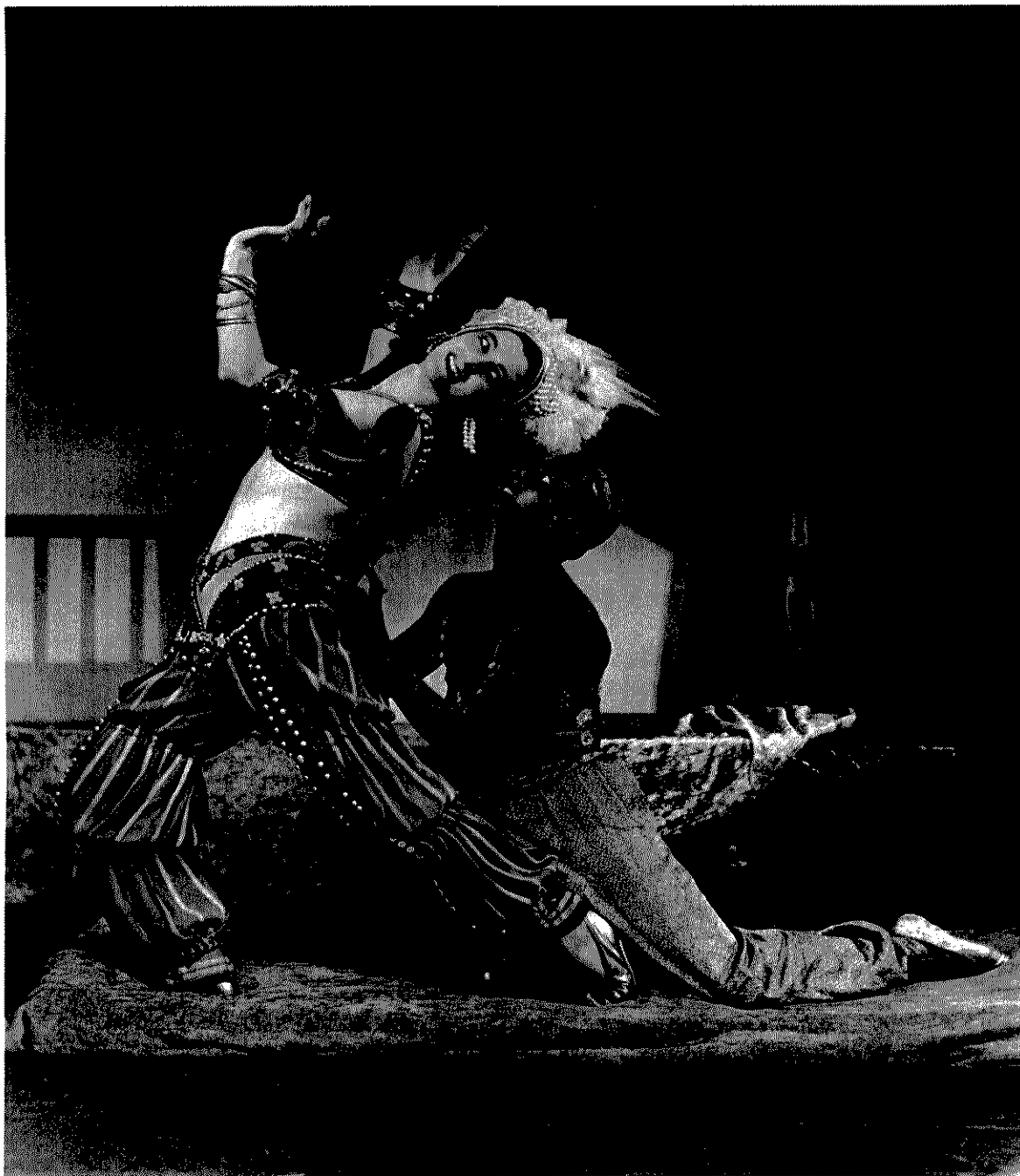


Fig. 14. Martin Rubinstein as the Golden Slave and Tamara Tchinarova as Zobeide in *Schéhérazade*, Borovansky Ballet (c.1946). Photographer Hal Williamson. (Courtesy of the Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia).

As the earlier reviews of *Schéhérazade* by Australian journalists illustrate, this piece, and others like it with their exotic and spectacular plots, design, and choreography, maintained their fascination for Western audiences long after their premier performances in Paris in the 1910s. Ballets like *Schéhérazade*, *The Polovtsian Dances*, *Petrouchka*, and the *Firebird*, among other classical favourites, became staples for the various re-incarnations of the Ballet Russes throughout the 1930s and into the 1950s. Reflecting on the 1950 tour of de Basil's Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo in America, critic Jack Anderson marvelled at the way *Schéhérazade*, that "tale of an orgy in a harem", still had the capacity to "titillate" audiences in the late forties and through the 1950s.⁵⁹ One Washington critic in 1950 called the ballet "nothing but organised lechery" and a religious group campaigned to have this "offensive", "immoral", and "downright lascivious" ballet removed from the programme when Colonel de Basil's company came to their city in the same year. In an attempt to appease these particular critics, Serge Denham (a Moscow financier and director of the company for their American tour⁶⁰) emphatically denied the accusation of immorality and, to prove his point, invited the group to a viewing of the ballet in rehearsal. As Anderson suggested, this was a shrewd move. The dancers performed the run-through in practice clothes and without "Bakst's opulent setting".

When the performance was over, the would-be censors had conceded that Denham was right, their leader scratching his head and remarking, "It really wasn't so bad, after all. Somehow, it just seemed worse on stage."⁶¹

This discrepancy between the ballet viewed with costumes, lighting, and sets, and that offered without such exotic detail, reveals the essential contribution that the imagination, and the historical understanding of Orientalism, played in the re-creation

⁵⁹ Jack Anderson, *The One and Only Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo*, Dance Horizons, New York, 1981, 251

⁶⁰ Katherine Walker Sorley indicates that Serge Denham was actually Sergi Dokouchaiev. Sorley, *op. cit.*, 68 & 82

⁶¹ Anderson, *op. cit.*

of the exotic on the stages of Europe, Australia and the United States. Stripped of the visual markers (along with the erotic characterisations which a convincing performance of this ballet would have demanded in performance) the Fokine vocabulary looked completely harmless. It was hardly a display of offensive, immoral and lascivious behaviour without the bodies adorned in harem pants, bare midrifts, and naked upper torsos painted with dark pancake. When covered in the correct fantasies these ordinary dancers became the personification of an imagined exotic - volatile, unpredictable, and dangerously sexual.

However, in Australia at least, this illusion of Other'ness' did not end at the stage door. The dancers of de Basil's Ballet Russes personified the exotic in much the same way as Sonia Revid had done. Volatility, brilliance, purity, and originality were qualities constructed as innate to de Basil's performers. These were direct descendants of the great Diaghilev Ballet Russes. They were of the "Russian school", the "Slavic race", and J.C. Williamson assured their prospective audiences that they were the most "vital" dancers and choreographers in the world.⁶² However, as their English spokesman Arnold Haskell freely admitted (and many in the audience knew) a substantial proportion of these exotic 'Slavs' were not Russian at all. Many of the dancers had simply taken Russian names in order to complete the glamorous, exotic persona constructed for them. After all, as Haskell told the Sydney Morning Herald, it was not important that the *dancers* came from Russia but the *dances* were Russian.⁶³ For audiences, critics, and historians a convenient slippage occurred between the two. These dancers *became* the 'Other' they portrayed on stage through the publicity sponsored by J. C. Williamson and the desires of the ballet audiences.

These dancers were stars. As Haskell recalled:

⁶² J.C. Williamson Magazine, 1936, located in J. C. Williamson papers, Manuscript section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

⁶³ "Russian Ballet: reasons for its name", Sydney Morning Herald, 15th January, 1937, 12

From the start a crowd of devotees surrounded the ballet, autograph fans, local dancers, and artists genuinely interested in the work, and there were parties on a scale I had never seen before.⁶⁴

When the company left by train from Melbourne on their way to Sydney, fans crowded the railway station in hope of a glimpse of their favourite star or an autograph from any one of the dancers.⁶⁵ In Adelaide, Melbourne, and Sydney local balletomanes chose their favourite dancer, arguing the merits of each against the other.⁶⁶ Dr J. Ringland Anderson, an eye specialist with a chair at the University of Melbourne, was one of those devoted admirers. He followed the company throughout their tour filming almost everything they did.⁶⁷ Dance writer Patricia Laughlin was also a loyal fan. Along with many others, Laughlin and her sisters would wait outside the stage door “even when we were not going to the performance” in order to get a glimpse of their “adored one” as they arrived at the theatre.⁶⁸ J.C. Williamson published numerous photographs of the dancers, some in traditional ballet poses and others created in the style of the Hollywood glamour portrait, to cater for and fuel such adulation.

These constructions were an illusion, but ballet audiences understood the deception. They were not a duped mass being led by clever marketing. The exotic images offered to them fulfilled their fantasies. In return they voluntarily suspended disbelief. As Annette Kuhn has suggested in her assessment of the glamour portraits of the Hollywood beauties in the inter-war period, the identification of someone as possessing glamour or being glamorous was often understood to imply “a sense of deceptive fascination, of groomed beauty, of charm enhanced by illusion”.⁶⁹ Such images relied on “surface appearances” and were known as such by the enthusiastic

⁶⁴ Arnold Haskell, *Dancing Round the World*, Victor, Gollancz, London, 1937, 90

⁶⁵ Haskell, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ Letter from dancer Thomas Armour, quoted in Walker, *op. cit.*, 200

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 219

⁶⁸ Patricia Laughlin, “Old friends in Emotional Re-union”, *Dance Australia*, 24, June/July, 1986, 28

⁶⁹ Annette Kuhn, *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality*, Routledge, London, 1985, 13

consumer who observed the creations. The fan of the glamorous Hollywood star, just like the fan of the de basil Ballet Russes, were willing players in the deception.

The trade off between scepticism and illusion meant that little distinction was made between the de Basil performers as created within the confines of a proscenium arch and their 'real' lives and histories. Although, as we have already seen, many of these dancers were not Russian at all, when they were on stage as the Golden Slave or Zobeide in *Schéhérazade*, or the warriors dancing the 'barbaric' *Polovtsian Dances* from the opera *Prince Igor* they became the very personification of the barbarism and volatility they portrayed. They became slaves to the 'Slavic' natures of the productions and they carried these personas into the streets of Australian cities. Years later, in her history of the de basil Ballet Russes, Katherine Sorley Walker illustrated the persistent nature of this exotic construction when she suggested that the apparent lack of technique these dancers displayed, when compared to late 20th century performers, was more than compensated for by the passion, virility and "unashamedly full blooded" execution they offered their audiences. For Walker, the de Basil company was "astonishing in its grandeur [and] virtuosity".⁷⁰

As the contemporary reception and historical reconstruction of the de Basil tours of Australia in the late 1930s suggests, these dancers fulfilled their role as examples of the exotic to perfection. Firstly, their 'realities' were devoured by their performance of the exotic Other both on and off stage, to the point where these constructions did not need to display any relationship to the reality of the place or persona represented. Secondly, as 'Slavs' (the European primitive) they offered little challenge to the established norms within Australian society.

A much more complicated encounter with the exotic arrived on the Australian scene with the help of Louise Lightfoot and an Indian dancer Ananda Shivaram. Lightfoot had studied English folk-dance at High School in Melbourne. Later, at Melbourne University, she took up architecture and became apprentice to the office of

⁷⁰ Walker, op. cit., 219-220

Walter Burley Griffin, moving to the Sydney branch in Castlecrag where she work as a draughts-person. It was Marion Griffin, Walter's wife, who first encouraged Louise's interest in dance. Lightfoot studied Greek dance with Gertrud Seivers, a form she found "a little dull", but in 1926, after seeing Anna Pavlova's performances Lightfoot developed a passion for classical ballet and all things Russian. This passion led to her work with Misha Burlakov, a character dancer and the only Russian performer Lightfoot could find in Sydney.⁷¹

For the next few years Louise supplemented her work with Burlakov by taking ballet class with Daphne Dean at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and, in 1928, with Ivan Sergeiff who worked with Pavlova on her second visit to Australia. It was for a "Community concert", which the Burley Griffins organised at Castlecrag, that Lightfoot and Burlakov began their artistic collaboration. After further successful showings at the Savoy Theatre in Sydney, in which they produced *Coppélia*, the pair began to call the group of dancers they had gathered around them the First Australian Ballet.

During the performance of *Coppélia*, in the scene where various dolls in Dr Coppelius's factory perform the dances of their particular ethnic origin, Madame Rukmini Devi, an Indian dancer visiting Sydney at the time, was employed by Lightfoot and Burlakov to offer an Indian dance. Devi reconstructed the *Nautch Dance* she had seen in Pavlova's production of the *Indian Wedding*. Rukmini Devi, like Lightfoot, had originally been fascinated by ballet, and particularly Anna Pavlova, but under the encouragement of this famous European dancer, Devi also began to re-learn and develop the dances of her own country, creating the Kalakshetra Dance Company in Adyar (a suburb of Madras) in 1936. This school was dedicated to the re-vitalisation of Indian temple dance - particularly that of *Bharata Natyam*. As the wife of a leading Theosophist, a philosophy in which Louise Lightfoot also maintained

⁷¹ Letter from Louise Lightfoot to Keith Glennon, from Venezuela, dated December 28th 1966. Located in Folder 7, Box 10, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith library, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

an interest, Rukmini Devi's friendship provided Lightfoot with her first taste of 'authentic' Indian dance practices.⁷² Inspired by Devi's work, Lightfoot created her first hybrid Indian/classical ballet, *The Blue God*, for the dancers of her First Australian Ballet company in the thirties.⁷³ However, by the end of that decade, Lightfoot had moved away from hybrid experimentation. So far away in fact that she went to live in India.

Elizabeth Russell, a former pupil of Lightfoot's, recalled that in 1939 Louise took up the study of *Kathakali* at the Kalamandalm School in Kerala. This was rather unusual because *Kathakali* was rarely taught to women, but at the Kalamandalm School Lightfoot became apprentice to Ananda Shivaram, a young lead dancer in the Vallathol troupe and a *Kathakali* devotee.⁷⁴ Over the next two years Lightfoot moved to Madras, running a school for Shivaram and helping him present his performances in local cities. She also taught ballet in Bombay and Bangalore.

Lightfoot's interest in *Kathakali* and other dance forms, particularly *Bharata Natyam*⁷⁵, blossomed at a time when Indians were engaged in a re-assessment of the value of their cultural traditions. During British rule, which lasted from 1861 to 1947, dance traditions which had been preserved and promoted in the courts and temples of India came under close scrutiny from the British who wished to reform Indian society and sever the country's links with its pre-colonial past. British reformers, and their Indian converts, found many of the traditions surrounding the creation, exchange, and teaching of dance problematic. Practices which involved the dedication of young girls to a temple where they would become *devandasis* were thought of as particularly archaic and offensive. British reformers not only objected to this practice within the

⁷² Letter from Louise Lightfoot to Keith Glennon from Colombia, South America, dated 5th February, 1967. Located in Folder 7, Box 10, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith library, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

⁷³ Elizabeth Russell, "Lousie Lightfoot, dancing from East to West", *Dance Australia*, 8, June/August, 1982, 60-61

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 61

⁷⁵ There are various spellings of this word when translated into English, however *Bharata Natyam* seems to appear most frequently. See Judith Lynne Hanna, "Classical Indian Dance and Women's Studies", in Helen Thomas, ed., *Dance, Gender and Culture*, St Martin's Press, New York, 1993.

temples but also confused the work, lifestyle and dance forms of the *devandasis* with a later development (established particularly for the entertainment of British soldiers and tourists) called *Nautch* dancing. *Nautch* was a dance form which had more in common with the Western practice of cabaret than with the devotions of the *devandasis*. Many *Nautch* dancers were suspected of being engaged in prostitution as well as entertainment.⁷⁶

During the 1930s India's urban and educated classes began to see India's dance culture as a source of national pride rather than antiquated residue of a pre-modern past. In the rhetoric which accompanied their resurrection of practices such as *Kathakali*, *Bharata Natyam*, and the old tradition of the *guru-sishya* (in which the dance is passed onto the performer through his or her apprenticeship to a guru)⁷⁷, these nationalist reformers emphasised the religious status and unique nature of these dance forms. Longevity as a form of cultural expression became essential to the location of these dances within the nationalist re-awakening. They were a means of legitimating pre-Raj culture and challenging contemporary British rule.⁷⁸

As Joan Erdman has observed, by choosing to honour *Kathakali* and *Bharata Natyam*, Indian nationalists were "min[ing] the past for the dance of the present." In the pursuit of something authentic they:

... invented a new dance tradition based on claimed antiquity, asserted authenticity, well-intentioned chauvinism, and middle class purity.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Ibid., 126

⁷⁷ Leela Vankataraman, "Transcending the Cultural Divide", *The Drama Review*, Vol. 38, No. 2, (T142), Summer, 1994, 81

⁷⁸ Hanna, op. cit. 126

⁷⁹ Joan Erdman, "Dance Discourses: Rethinking the History of the 'Oriental Dance'", in Gay Morris, ed., *Moving Words: re-writing dance*, Routledge, London, 1996, 293. Following on from this Erdman suggests that in the study of "Oriental dance" the historian must be careful to take into account the fact that some of the inspiration for the re-discovery of Indian cultural traditions emerged from the West in the 1920s and 1930s through the performances of Anna Pavlova and Ruth St Denis. As Erdman indicates, "internationalism propelled the popularity of the oriental dance back to India and engendered the invention of a modern tradition in Indian dance". Ibid., 300

When Louise Lightfoot went to India she was swept up in this independence movement through her interest in Indian dance. In her apprenticeship to Shivaram she had also teamed up with one of a growing number of dancers who were attracted to the idea of making their art accessible to the West. Shivaram had spent a year working with Uday Shankar.⁸⁰ Through this connection he was introduced to the ‘modernisation’ of India’s traditional dance practices. Such a movement was not particularly favoured by Indian nationalists, but artists like Shankar had learnt that through the translation of the various Indian dance techniques, and their musical accompaniment, artists could make Indian forms palatable to Western aesthetic understandings and expectations. These adjustments also offered a lucrative avenue for travel and performance outside India.⁸¹ Shankar knew his financial and artistic success in the West “depended on attracting, keeping, and amazing” audiences and critics.⁸² He also knew what Westerners expected from their encounters with this particular version of the “Orient”. To this end he selected:

...stories and themes, images and costumes, moods, and relationships which were both accurately Indian and acceptably close to European expectations.⁸³

Shankar was the first artist to be credited with, and criticised for, this ‘modernising’ of Indian dance and he was very successful in America throughout the 1940s and ’50s. Lightfoot’s friend and mentor, Shivaram, followed suit. After leaving Shankar, Shivaram joined Lightfoot in Bangalore and together they began touring and creating works for foreign as well as local consumption.⁸⁴ In 1942 the pair toured Madras, the Carnatic states and Ceylon (today known as Sri Lanka) along with

⁸⁰ Letter from Louise Lightfoot to Keith Glennon from Montreal, dated 9th April, 1967. Available in Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

⁸¹ Joan Erdman, “Performance as Translation: Uday Shankar in the West”, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 31, No. 1, (T113), Spring, 1987, 67

⁸² Erdman, 1996, op. cit., 78

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 76

⁸⁴ Letter from Louise Lightfoot to Keith Glennon from Montreal, dated 9th April, 1967. Located in Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

another group of dancers called the Kulkarni troupe. Shivaram was a guest dancer in this ensemble and Lightfoot the stage-manager and lighting director. In 1944 Lightfoot formed her own troupe of 15 dancers and again toured to Ceylon with Shivaram as lead dancer. She recalled in a letter some years later:

I managed to get home [from this tour] alive with the help of an Indian Agent in Ceylon and decided never again to manage an Indian troupe.⁸⁵

As the Second World War ended Lightfoot found a job doing publicity for a film company, Madra United Artists, who produced a film on the life of Krishna with Shivaram as one of the cast.⁸⁶ In 1947 she brought Shivaram to Australia and over the next 10 years this Indian artist and his local entrepreneur made regular trips to Australia as well as touring Europe and the United States. In the programme featured in fig. 16, 17, and 18 (and most likely produced around the early 1950s⁸⁷), Lightfoot foregrounds what Joan Erdman called the “claimed antiquity, asserted authenticity” of Indian dance. Presenting a genealogy of the Indian forms, the programme stated:

Tradition has it that Brahma (the Creator), of the Hindu Trinity of gods, distilled the essence of the four Vedas and compounded literature, music, gesture and aesthetic sentiment into a new creation, “Natya”. When greed had taken the place of virtue on earth, Brahman announced, “Natya will represent truth and will show the proper way of all action to the world”. “Natya” may be called “The Dance Art”.⁸⁸

Lightfoot also highlighted the longevity and sacred nature of *Natya*, tracing its history from the *Natya Sastra*, a Sanskrit text from 500 A.D., to the present day.⁸⁹ In this way Indian dance was offered to Australian audiences as a form with an artistic validity which matched, and even exceeded, that of Western classical dance. Indian dance had developed within the court for the pleasure of royalty and it laid claim to a

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Programme, *Louise Lightfoot Presents: Shivaram Indian Dance Recitals*, c. 1950s. This programme is most likely from the 1950s as Shivaram and Lightfoot’s tours of 1947 and 1949 are mentioned.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

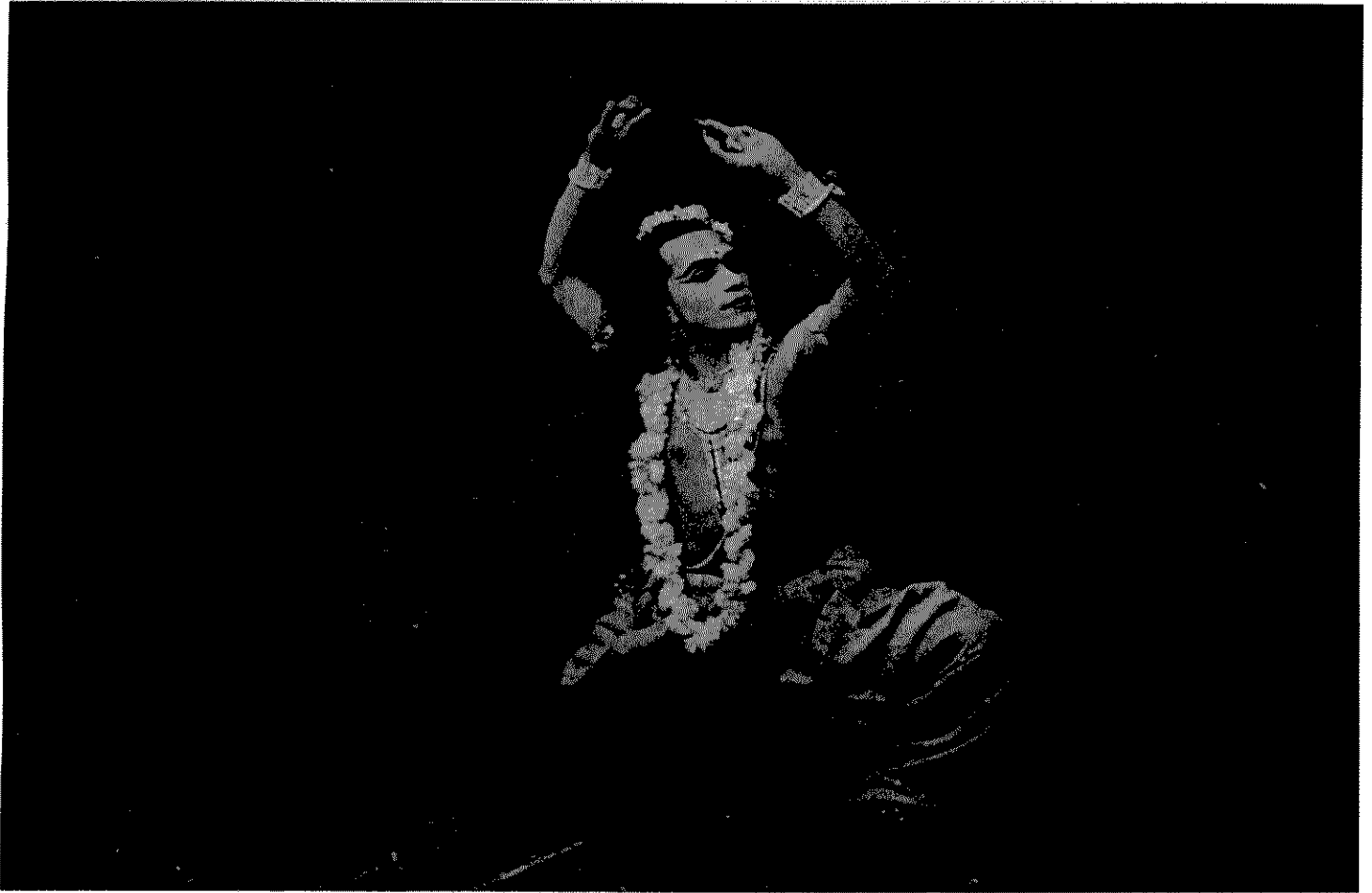


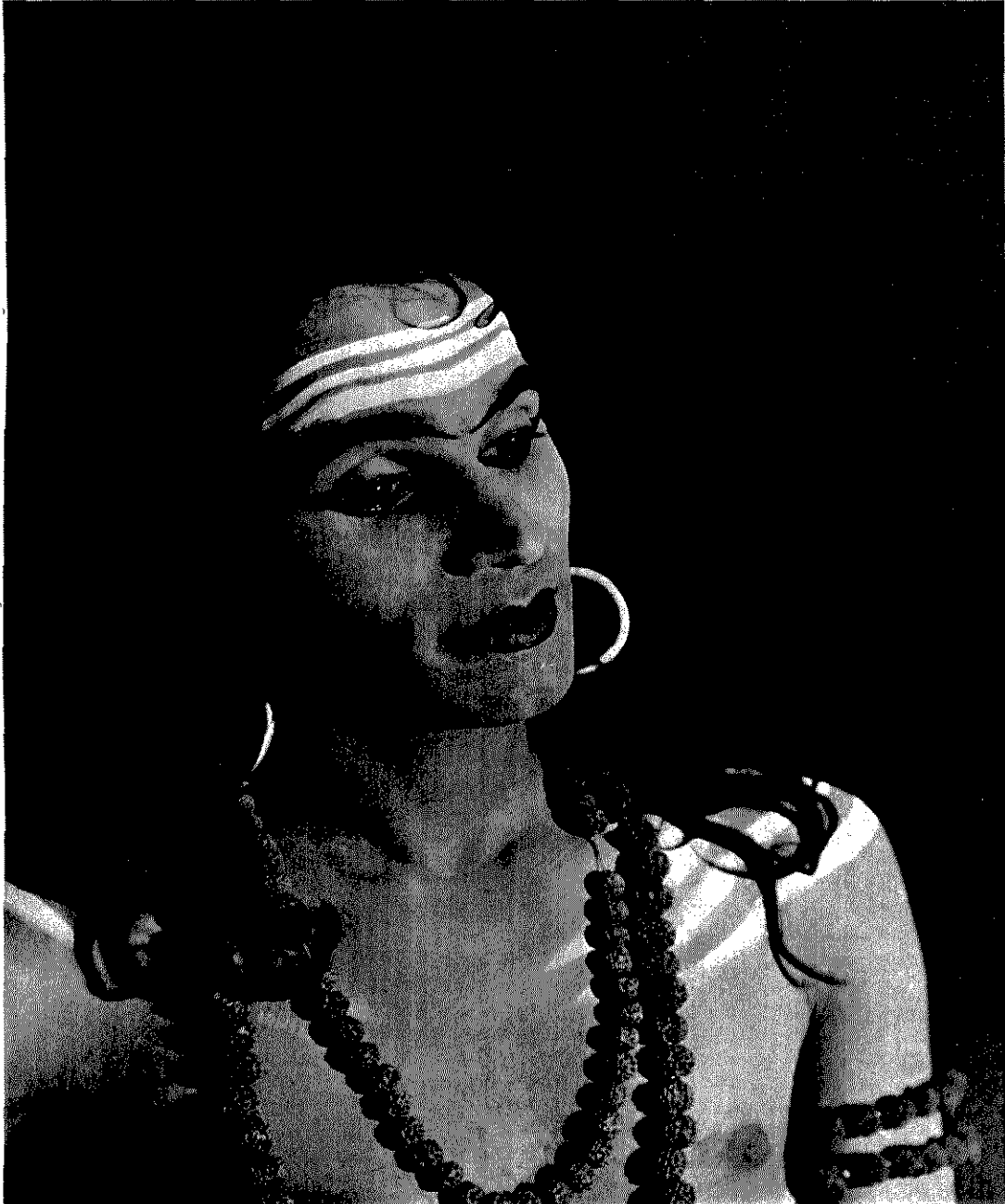
Fig. 15. Ananda Shivaram with the Victorian Ballet Guild. (c.1950s). Photographer Jean Stewart. (Courtesy of the Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia).

Louise Lightfoot Presents



Shivaram Indian Dance Recitals

Fig. 16. Programme for Shivaram and Lightfoot tour of Australia (c. 1950s). Author's Personal collection.



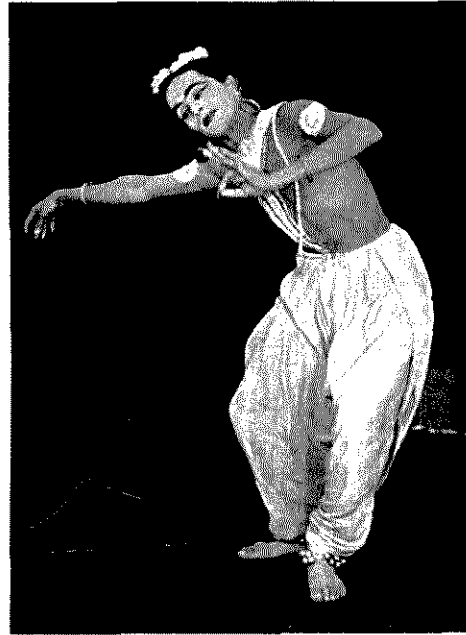
(Photographed by Therese le Prat during a performance at the Museum of Asiatic Arts, Paris.)

SHIVARAM, first ambassador of Indian art to Australia.

Fig. 17. Shivaram, from programme for Shivaram and Lightfoot tour of Australia (c. 1950s). Author's personal collection.



(Photo by Ronald Esler.)
Shivaram appearing as "Indra" (the Hindu "Jupiter") at the Princess Theatre, Melbourne, in 1949.



(Photo by Picture Post.)
Shivaram dancing "Kamadeva" (Cupid) at Torch Theatre, London.



(Photo by Royal Studio, Ernakulam, S. India.)
Shivaram photographed with his impresario — Louise Lightfoot.



★
Miss Louise Lightfoot was a student of architecture at Melbourne University and under Walter Burley Griffin, designer of Canberra. After seeing ballet for the first time (Anna Pavlova Co.), she turned her attention to dancing and choreography, and became a producer of amateur Australian ballet in Sydney.

In 1937, while abroad, she heard of Kathakali and visited India. In 1938, she left Australia to study in India, and remained eight years touring with Indian troupes and presenting Shivaram.



Cover-design and booklet-sketches are by Miss Lightfoot.

formal technique which was not only passed down from teacher to pupil but was also reproducible in textual form. This longevity, aristocratic association, and formalised vocabulary explains, to a certain extent, the reverence accorded to Indian dance when it came to Australia in the late forties and throughout the 1950s. Shivaram was not only foreign and exotic (see fig. 15 and 16). He was also located outside a Western theatrical, geographical, and social milieu, his chosen form had a classic heritage in its standardised vocabulary, its longevity, and royal associations.

Not all Indian dancers who visited Australia were granted as favourable a reading as Shivaram. When the young female dancer Ibetombi joined Shivaram on his 1957 tour the critic Roland Robinson described her as a “savage, cruel, fierce Mongolian beauty”.⁹⁰ Ibetombi’s art came from Manipur in Eastern India and her demonstration of what Robinson identified as the Jagoi technique was considered “primitive” and “tribal”⁹¹.

She can be withdrawn, like an exotic flower, with a delicate, lyrical quality of understatement. She can be possessed by turns of a sensuous, fragrance-exuding languor, a barbarous regal quality or an intense tribal savagery.⁹²

Shivaram’s work was not completely immune to associations with the primitive. His “intimate identification... with the animals, birds, flowers and trees” allowed Roland Robinson to compare his work to the “dance and powers of mime” displayed by the local ‘primitive’ - Australia’s Aboriginal people from Arnhem Land and Roper River. However, the art of *Kathakali* was more frequently described as “beautiful and traditional”.⁹³ Shivaram’s dancing was “superb”, where as Ibetombi’s had a “simple childlike grace”.⁹⁴ That Shivaram was excused from a completely essentialised association with the primitive can be explained by the fact that his art

⁹⁰ Ibetombi eventually married Shivaram.

⁹¹ Roland Robinson, “Recital of Hindu Dances”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13th June, 1957, 5

⁹² Roland Robinson, “Traditional dances of India”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7th June, 1957, 5

⁹³ Roland Robinson, “Recital of Hindu Dances”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13th June, 1957, 5.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

form was considered classical where as Ibetombi's Manipur technique had more literal associations with 'folk' culture. Complementing this division were the performers' gender. Shivaram's art of *Kathakali* was traditionally performed exclusively by men. This unusual fact, when compared with Western dance practices, undoubtedly contributed to the form's higher status when compared to those styles practiced by women.

For Shivaram and Ibetombi, along with the various other Indian dancers who came to Australia in the late 1950s⁹⁵, these complex associations between the exotic, tradition, class, gender, and classicism sheltered their art from more exclusive associations with the 'primitive'. Indian dance resembled the principles of early 20th century Modernism in which artists such as Michel Fokine and Vaslav Nijinsky had searched for a link between the elemental, the 'natural', the primitive, and their classic, European aristocratic heritage. Artists from the Indian subcontinent were definitely considered exotic, but their long association with a cultural form which resembled the hierarchical institutions of the West allowed their dance to slip in and out of an association with the primitive, especially when it was performed by men or European women. A more essentialised association with the 'primitive' was reserved for the work of dancers and companies from Africa, the Caribbean, and Black America. One such company arrived in Australia in 1956. Led by American Katherine Dunham. This group of dancers, singers and musicians caused a sensation when they played Sydney and Melbourne.

Katherine Dunham was an African American dancer with an anthropology degree from Chicago University. She had travelled to the West Indies in 1936 and studied the dances of Afro-Caribbean peoples in places like Martinique, Jamaica, Trinidad and Haiti. Returning to the United States in 1937 she combined the two strands of her education in a career that included concert dance performances, the formulation of her own technique, the creation of a teaching institution, and a long

⁹⁵ This included Shri K.K. Shetty and his troupe, Jyotikana Ray, and Indrani (daughter of Regini Devi) all who came to Australia in 1957.

career on Broadway and touring with her own company.⁹⁶ As the dance writer Joyce Aschenbrenner has suggested, Dunham's performances and choreography throughout her career confused viewers and critics. They consistently tried to evaluate her work's artistic merit against its anthropological origins, its modern dance principles, and its popular motifs. At the same time her work was mostly seen within white communities as tantalisingly entertaining. As Aschenbrenner has suggested, Dunham's work "unleashed" in American dance and theatre critics a previously "untapped store of adjectives".⁹⁷

When Dunham toured Britain in 1950 and 1952 and Australia 1956/7 the effect was similar. England's Alexander Bland declared that all critics "must cling hard to their seats if they are not to be knocked side-ways by Katherine Dunham's entertainment".⁹⁸ He likened her "mixture of lust and colour" to Fokine's *Schéhérazade*, but Bland appreciated the fact that, with these dancers, "there is no white rings at neck and wrist where the make-up ends and the costume begins".⁹⁹ These were not fascinating fantasies, they were exotic incarnate, the real thing. They were:

... all Negro, with everything that this connotes - natural rhythm, superlubrication, skins which catch the light to show the smallest movement, and above all an easy relationship with the audience which makes one really like the performers.¹⁰⁰

In the dance *Shango*, Bland saw "a religious orgy from the West Indies" in which:

[e]ach dancer seems to be caught up in a private whirlwind... swept along by the general current. The stage is alive with writhing black muscles and flying white robes...¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Lynne Fauley Emery, *Black Dance: From 1619 to Today*, Dance Horizons, Second Edition, 1988, 251-260.

⁹⁷ Joyce Aschenbrenner, "Katherine Dunham: Reflections on the Social and Political Contexts of Afro-American Culture", *Dance Research Journal*, XII CORD, New York, 1980, 41

⁹⁸ Alexander Bland, "Katherine Dunham and Company", *Ballet*, Vol. 12, No. 3, March 1952, 4

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 4

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 11

Australian reviewers provided their readers with an equally imaginative storehouse of superlatives, tools with which they could recognise the 'primitive' aspects of Dunham's work. Performing at the Tivoli in Sydney in September 1956 Dunham and her company were alternatively described as voluptuous, virile, ecstatically agonised, barbarous, hypnotic, frenzied, infectious, primal, opulent, and sinuous. Their performances displayed "jungle vitality", "suspended intensity", and were a "bewildering, enriching and disturbing spectacle".¹⁰² Her dance *Fertility Ritual* from the larger work *Rites of Passage* was a "mating dance dramatic with phallic significance"; *Rara Tonga* and *L'ag'ya* were "orgiastic".¹⁰³ Dunham herself was described as an "uninhibited voluptuous dark goddess".¹⁰⁴

Australian critic Roland Robinson, like his English counterpart, saw a similarity between the impact of these "[o]pulent, sensuous Negresses" and male dancers with "magnificent physiques", and that "barbaric virility" that had been displayed by de Basil's Ballet Russes almost 20 years earlier. However, for Robinson, Dunham's "bewildering, enriching disturbing spectacle" highlighted classical ballet's "over-civilised and worked-out" impetus. Although he found Dunham's choreography lacking in "criticism of our life and times", he resolved that the programme was, after all, essentially about entertainment and spectacle. This was therefore "in itself" the programme's justification.¹⁰⁵

Alexander Bland also had trouble categorising the work of this company. In reply to his question - "What kind of entertainment does all this add up to?", he answered:

¹⁰² 'R.R.', "Company of Dancers at Tivoli", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15th September, 1956, 5; 'R.R.', "Company of Dancers at Tivoli", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15th September, 1956, 6.

¹⁰³ G. Foley, *Daily Telegraph*, 12th February, 1957. Copy of article located in Folder 3, Box 10, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

¹⁰⁴ Roland Robinson, "Recital of Hindu Dances", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13th June, 1957, 5.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*



Fig. 19. Katherine Dunham. Programme 1956/7 Australian Tour. Authors personal collection.

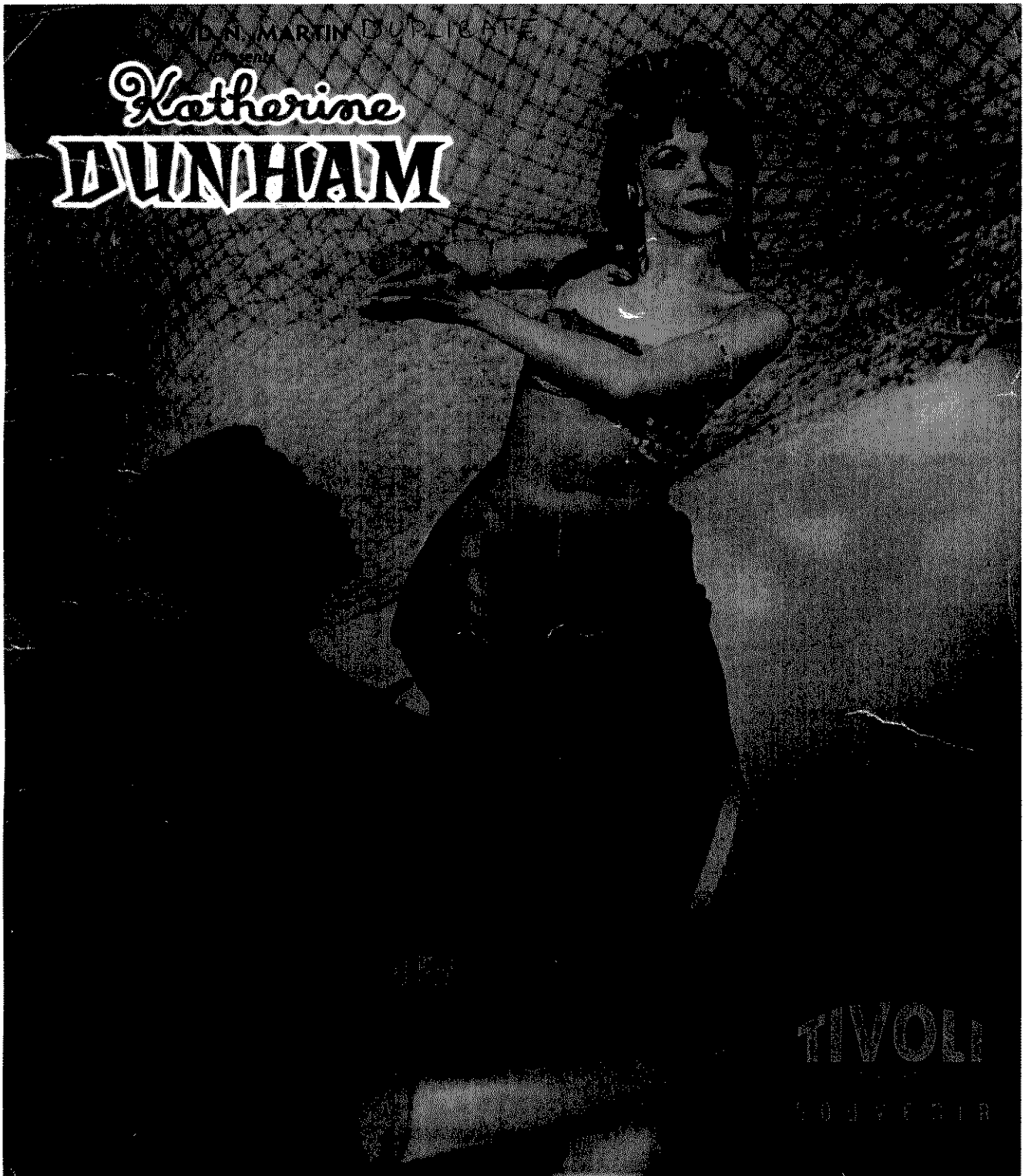


Fig. 20. Katherine Dunham Souvenir Programme Australian Tour 1956/7. Authors personal collection.

Every item in it consists at least in part, of dancing. Yet it is not ballet; it lacks the precision, refinement (in the literal sense of the word) and stylisation of which that art consists... Parts of this entertainment are well on the music-hall side of the boundary, and the lavish expenditure of energy and invention with everything, so to say, in the shop window will prevent any of it from becoming a classic.¹⁰⁶

As these reviews illustrate, Dunham's work failed to offer Western critics and audiences the structured hierarchies they recognised within their own culture. The 'black' body and Black dance, even when it claimed a contemporary location, were seen as inferior historical representations of dancing's anachronistic past. Although Dunham considered her ballets explorations of anthropological material through personal innovation which she derived from her experimentations within a modern theatrical context, her black body and the dance vocabulary of African-Caribbean culture was framed by white critics as a reminder of an earlier stage of human development. These dances were a replica of a primitive past. Dunham and her dancers had a 'natural' ability and a 'natural' rhythm which was considered an innate trait of their genealogy, rather than a result of considered study or hard work.

That African American's were somehow more innately attuned to rhythm and movement was a popular notion. When the New York Negro Ballet, a classical company made up of African-American dancers, arrived in Britain in 1957, an article in Dance & Dancers read: "Negroes in ballet! How Absurd!", but the staff writer retorted with "why absurd?":

Negroes have a greater sense of natural rhythm and of movement than almost any other of this earth's peoples. There is no reason why this talent should not be disciplined into ballet form rather than into a lot of cabaret numbers.¹⁰⁷

The recognition of this innate ability was considered by Flemming and Hancock as praise but in reality it demeaned the expertise of these performers, locating their work as a product of natural, primitive attributes rather than

¹⁰⁶ Bland, op. cit., 13-14, 17

¹⁰⁷ Flemming and Hancock, op. cit., 9

concentrated, designed intention. After all, if African-Americans were to succeed in the classical realm then they would have to “discipline” themselves rather than simply rely on innate abilities more attuned with other folk, popular, or primitive dance forms.

For critics like Bland, Flemming, and Hancock, classical ballet was not about the search for rhythm and ease of movement but an exploration of precision, refinement and stylisation. The classical technique was a learnt process. This technique was steeped, historically and philosophically, in the developmental stages of European civilisation. Refinement was a mark of a civilising process. As these reviews of the New York Negro Ballet and Katherine Dunham and her dancers suggest, critics were much more comfortable with black bodies when the material they performed represented an earlier stage of development within a progressive, evolutionary history of dance practice.¹⁰⁸

When the Alvin Ailey company, the *American Dance Theatre*, came to Australia in 1962¹⁰⁹, this association between the black body and popular dance forms was still fundamental to the framing of black dancers. Rehearsing at the Palace Theatre before opening night, Ailey’s dancers, according to a *Sydney Morning Herald* reporter, “shattered” the “gilt and plush atmosphere” of the theatre with the “raw rhythms and pungent harmonies of Negro jazz and ‘blues’”.¹¹⁰ In a series of “muscle-knotting exercises” these performers displayed an art form which was “as far from the cold formality of classical ballet as New Orleans is from Leningrad”.¹¹¹ Although it is likely the technique observed by the reporter as he watched class and rehearsal was actually derived from Ailey’s early training in Eric Hawkins and Martha Graham techniques (both white American teachers), the fact that it was reproduced on black bodies gave it a black historical location. In comparison to the earlier work

¹⁰⁸ This was the case only when, as has already been suggested, the form did not have the advantage of an aristocratic association, as was the case with Indian dance.

¹⁰⁹ The company returned after a highly successful season in 1965.

¹¹⁰ “Negroes’ Folk Music comes to Sydney”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3rd February, 1962, 3

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

of Michel Fokine, which, as we saw, lost its exotic association for audiences when the imaginary Orient was removed through the abandoning of costuming, scenery and a 'lusty' portrayal, the opposite was the case when the black body executed any form of European-based movement vocabulary. When Alvin Ailey used Western modern dance techniques, exoticism was automatically added to those western form. 'Blackness' itself was exotic, no matter how it chose to move.

Ailey's experimentation with a combination of classical ballet, a modern vocabulary learnt from Hawkins and Graham, social dance practices experienced in the dance halls of Harlem, and spirituals created from Ailey's memory of religious gatherings in the American South, were understood and appreciated by some critics. Griffin Foley of the Daily Telegraph in Sydney thought it "fascinating to watch how sharp rhythms and angularities have been wedded to the disciplined suppleness of the old techniques". Others found the very same combination disturbing. Mary Clarke of London's Dancing Times suggested that when "certain elements of classical dancing" were introduced into Ailey's piece *Roots of the Blues*, the combination is "not always happy":

It is disturbing suddenly to see a classical arabesque or double turn, and stylistically I think that to use such steps in this kind of number - based so firmly on social dance rhythms - is wrong.¹¹²

For Clarke, Ailey's work belonged squarely on the popular stage or within a Broadway tradition. Clarke described as "vintage Ailey" the piece *Revelations*, which was choreographed to spirituals and gospel music. This was the kind of work, Clarke argued, which would have been best placed within C.B. Cochran's "great revues" in the West End where patrons would have "cried and laughed and applauded it for months".¹¹³ However, this use of a black traditions moved this work away from any association with high-brow art in a western sense for Clarke. There was a definitive

¹¹² Mary Clarke, "Blue and Holy Blues", Dancing Times, (London), November 1964, 65

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

message in these reviews of Ailey, as well as in the critiques of Katherine Dunham's work. 'Blackness', both culturally and physically, belonged in the vaudeville house and on the musical stage not in the production of serious art in the West.

Although there was evidence of a dissension among critics in Australia, Britain and America about the true nature and the correct categorisation of the work of Katherine Dunham and Ailey's American Dance Theatre, when it came to performances by companies which arrived directly from Africa a far less complicated association between black bodies and ideas of 'natural' exoticism were apparent. Les Ballets Africains came to Australia in 1963 and '65 and the African Dances Ballet Company toured in the latter 1965. Les Ballets Africains were from Guyana. Beth Dean, reviewing at the time for the Sydney Morning Herald, suggested that these dancers offered modern civilisation a view of its own primitive exuberant, elemental state:

Within each of us there is a primal core that stretches to the beginning of time. In modern urban man it has become effete and slack but last night we felt its pull, taut and unbroken as the African dancers unleashed their dance arts at the Tivoli Theatre.¹¹⁴

As with Roland Robertson's review of Katherine Dunham, Dean's descriptive language associated with Les Ballets Africains bordered on the sensually ecstatic:

An atmosphere of wild mystery and jungle fear, of joyous elation or sensuous pleasure in the rolling sounds of the drums...was framed in true theatre splash and swirl by the exciting dancers of Les Ballets Africains. There was the shimmering of quivering muscles as the men in prodigious leaps flung themselves through the air... the women, fleet and supple, have a body lilt that weaves rhythmic sound into sight patterns...¹¹⁵

The African Dance Ballet Company, brought to Australia by Celebrity Theatre Circuit Pty Ltd by arrangement with J.C. Williamson, was billed as offering Australian audiences a similar exposure to their distant past and 'primitive' soul. From South

¹¹⁴ Beth Dean, "Tempo of the Jungle", Sydney Morning Herald. Article located in Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Africa, this group of black dancers were “uncompromising to the white man’s convention in their authenticity”.¹¹⁶ Their dances were both “barbaric and beautiful”.

They were:

...true uninhibited children of the earth, as unspoiled and natural as their environment - a proud, picturesque, primitive race with a sheer joy for the basic essentials of life - health, strength and happiness.¹¹⁷

With each piece they performed, these “children of the earth” promised to show Australian audiences:

...an exciting new facet of South African traditional magico-religious practices, embracing initiation ceremonies, fertility rituals and savage tribal justice, each given blood tingling emphasis by the staccato rhythms of wild jungle-drums.¹¹⁸

All these company’s were viewed in relationship to what they confirmed about the culture they were visiting. They did not disrupt the existing norms in Australian society but highlighted that culture’s superior Western heritage. Les Ballet Africains and the African Dance Ballet Company confirmed the hierarchical distinction between white and the black, between the centre and the periphery. African American writer Toni Morrison has suggested that the reflective position of ‘blackness’ in a Western culture arises out of the “collective needs” of ‘whiteness’. She frames her discussion within an American context but there are similarities across Western cultures which also make her insights useful when looking at Australian’s reaction to black dance and black bodies dancing, whether they were African, African-American, African-Caribbean, or, as we shall see in the next chapter, Australian Aboriginal. What Morrison calls “Africanism”, “a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm and desire”, is a vehicle through which:

¹¹⁶ Programme of the *Africa Dances Ballet Company*, Adelaide Season, Her Majesty’s Theatre, 30th August 1965, 2. Programme located in Her Majesty’s Box 1964 -1965, Folder 1965, 1.

Ephemera Collection, State Library of South Australia, Adelaide.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*



MAETSANE THIYE. — Sensuous, exotic exponent of the various tribal dances of South Africa.

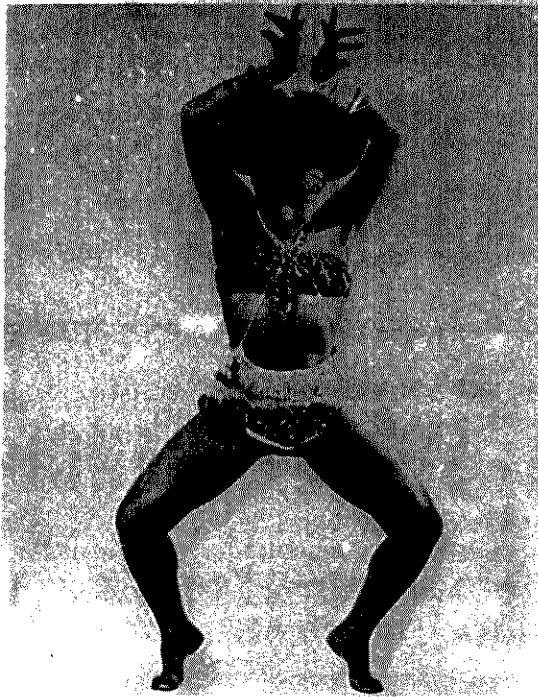


SCHWAPHI DLADLA. — Another of the principal dancers, specialising in Zulu and Xhosa and Shangani tribal dances.

Page Four

Fig. 21. Programme of the Africa Dances Ballet Company, Adelaide Season, Her Majesty's Theatre, 30th August 1965, 4. (Courtesy of the Ephemera Collection, State Library of South Australia, Adelaide)

THOBEKILE SHABALANA. — Principal dancer who plays in the part of Ntombi Zedwa, the girl friend of Dingaan in the story of Chaka, King of the Zulus.



MIEKIE MONAMODI. — One of the principal dancers who portrays the part of Kholiswa, the daughter of Moonjeni, the Witch-Doctor from the story of Chaka, King of the Zulus.

Page Eleven

Fig. 22. Programme of the Africa Dances Ballet Company, Adelaide Season, Her Majesty's Theatre, 30th August 1965, 11. (Courtesy of the Ephemera Collection, State Library of South Australia, Adelaide)

...the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution; but a progressive fulfilment of destiny.¹¹⁹

In an Australian context the reflection of Western historical progress was mirrored by the a-historical reading of performances of these companies from Africa, as well as dancers who were African American, Afro-Caribbean, Indian, and Russian. Their direct association with the past gave more value to the idea that Western history was progressive, and that its art practice was in a constant state of refinement. As this chapter has suggested, when the exotic was defined in an opposition to Home, safely housed in the body of the theatrical Other, local culture could remain unaffected. However, when Home adopted the exotic, when local bodies begin to accommodate the primitive, what Roger Celéstine called a “subjective distantiation” or a “break” occurred¹²⁰; the relationship between the subject and Home was disturbed. The subject left Home (by practicing a foreign dance form) but Home is never entirely left behind because those who embodied the exotic needed Home as audience to their escape. By the same token, those who embodied the exotic could never really return Home again when the Other had become a defining principle in their existence, or, in this case, their art. These localised encounters with the exoticism also dictated that, by varying degrees, Home itself would never be the same.

The career of Lousie Lightfoot is a good illustration of this point. Lightfoot first attempted to satisfy her need for separation from Home by becoming a classical dancer in the Russian tradition. When she discovered Indian dance she initially left Australia to become the exotic, moving to India to study with Shivaram in 1939. While acquiring the separation she needed, she none the less came back to where an audience could confirm her exoticism, but she could never really come Home because that exotic had become a defining principle of her ‘self’. Together with the ‘genuine

¹¹⁹ Tony Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: ‘whiteness’ and the literary imagination*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1992, 52

¹²⁰ Celéstine, *op. cit.*, 2

article', the Indian dancer Shivaram, Lightfoot subsequently changed the local dance scene on her return. Dancers active in the 1950s and early sixties - Ruth Berger, Anita Ardell, Elizabeth Russell, Vija Vetra, Joy Lodge, and Jack Manuel - all studied with Louise and/or Shivaram at various times. They too saw the Indian exotic as a means of escape from the confines of their location but, like Lightfoot, they needed to perform in Australia because their exoticism required context and confirmation. Those performers who took on the mantle of the 'Indian' dancer needed to be reminded of their assumed Otherness. As a result of remaining in Australia, performing here, and incorporating their new found identity as a local manifestation of the foreign exotic into their work, these artists changed that place from which they originally intended to escape and allowed Australian dance culture the space to explore other possible worlds in movement.

Chapter Four

In Pursuit of the 'Primitive': the appropriation of Aboriginal dance in the 1950s.

When Diaghilev and his Ballet Russes first performed in Paris the critic Benois marvelled at the way Parisians allowed these new “barbarians” to seduce their “hearts and minds”. Assessing the impact of the Russians Benois wrote:

The barbarians once again conquered Rome, and its curious that contemporary Romans welcome this, their captivity, for they feel they will benefit from it, that the newcomers with their fresh blood and clear art will infuse new blood into their exhausted bodies. ¹

The attraction of Diaghilev’s company at the turn of the century was not only the captivating exoticism they manufactured through their Orientalist ballets but also their personification of the ‘primitive’. As the dance writer Roger Copeland suggested:

To the Parisian intellectuals... the Russians weren’t Europeans. They were Slavs (which is to say, ‘Primitives’). Lacking Western ego or personal individuation, they had (according to the myth of primitivism) not yet fallen from collective grace into the evils of competitive individualism.²

As we saw in the last chapter, this search for untarnished beginnings as inspiration for art was very much a part of early 20th century Modernism. Even the “barbarians” had an exotic of their own, located within the folk practices of their own culture. The Russian choreographers Michel Fokin and Vaslav Nijinsky both utilised the myths and legends of their native Russia in an attempt to connect their art with, what they believed to be, the primordial beginnings of human development. As Lynn Garafola suggests, in his controversial 1913 ballet *Le Sacre du Printemps* (The Rite

¹ Benois 1909, quote cited in Roger Copeland, “The Search for Origins”, *Dance Theatre Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Summer, 1996, 13

² *Ibid.*

of Spring) Nijinsky (and the composer Stravinsky) used the Russian Steppes as the location for the “heart of darkness” in their tale of primitive sacrifice.³

This ‘primitive’ - those Russian barbarians and other exotic characters from Africa, America, and India - had a profound impact on Australian dance from the 1920s to the 1960s. They helped frame the foreign and, in turn, define that which was Home. However, after WWII, the ‘Other’ also became a useful tool in the search for local originality, particularly through the identification and championing of a home-grown ‘primitive’. During this period the culture of the local ‘barbarians’ had, once again, conquered ‘Rome’.

In the early decades of Australia’s invasion and colonisation, Aboriginal people offered little more to local white society than a subject for the reflection of Western evolutionary history. For many, these people were an anachronistic throwback, an illustration of how far white Europeans had progressed from their own primitive origins. This attitude prevailed well into the twentieth century with Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen suggesting in 1927:

Australia is the present home and refuge of creatures, often crude and quaint, that elsewhere have passed away and given place to higher forms. This applies equally to the [A]boriginal as to the platypus and the kangaroo. Just as the platypus, laying its eggs and feebly suckling its young, reveals a mammal in the making, so does the Aboriginal show us, at least in broad outline, what every man must have been like before he learned to read and write, domesticate animals, cultivate crops and use a metal tool. It has been possible to study in Australia human beings that still remain on the cultural level of men of the Stone Age.⁴

The apparent anthropological and historical usefulness of Australia’s indigenous peoples in the creation of this hierarchy of human development (which placed white men at the top of the evolutionary tree) was countered by the fact that these people offered white civilisation an unnerving reminder of the proximity of their

³ Lynn Garafola, *Diahgilev’s Ballet Russes*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1989, 73

⁴ Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *The Arunta: A Study of a Stone Age People*, 1927; quote cited in Bain Attwood, “Introduction”, *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, special issue of the *Journal of Australian Studies*, La Trobe University Press, Melbourne, 1992: vi

own primitive past and the possibility that there still lurked a resonance of that history in the contemporary psyches of the modern Anglo-Australian. As art historians Candice Bruce and Anita Callaway have illustrated, although colonial painters were fascinated with Aboriginal people as subject matter, the works they produced were not always simple renditions of “ethnographic specimens”, nor were they representations which fitted neatly into Bernard Smith’s categories of the ‘noble’, ‘romantic’, or ‘ignoble’ savage. Bruce and Callaway suggest that the corroboree paintings of colonial artists dating from around 1820 transformed indigenous Australians into:

...magical creatures of the night, who were physically and sexually potent and seemingly untouched by the mighty hand of British colonialism.⁵

Such volatile potential in the framing of Aboriginal subjects was evidence of a complex response to the presence of these so called ‘primitive’ people. The Aboriginal, “patronised... pitied... or persecuted” during the day, became a frightening and fascinating image of primitive potential, especially in works which depicted the corroboree after dark.⁶ The potency of this image needed to be defused if the white invading classes could command their position as conquerors of a ‘naturally’ inferior race. The artists Bruce and Callaway studied managed this by offering the corroboree as ‘entertainment’ for a European spectator who they included as an onlooker at the periphery of their paintings.⁷

⁵ Candice Bruce and Anita Callaway, “Dancing in the Dark: Black Corroboree or White Spectacle?”, *Australian Journal of Art*, Vol. IX, 1991, 81. The work of James Wallis (c.1820) was not the first impression of a corroboree by a European artist. The first known image was by Charles Leseur in 1803, however, as Bruce and Callaway suggest, that these earlier works were less ambiguous in their readings. It was not until James Wallis that the corroboree became a space in which Europeans fascination with, and fear of, their own sexuality, manifested itself in the depiction (and attempted control) of the ‘primitive’ sexuality which the Aboriginal and their corroboree dancing came to represent.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 86

⁷ *Ibid.*, 82-91

Just as Toni Morrison proposed that ‘blackness’ was a useful tool in American society for the creation, definition and maintenance of the power of ‘whiteness’⁸, so too Aboriginality offered white Australia a reflection of what it had left behind, but that which it feared still lurked somewhere close at hand. Aboriginal people were “internalised into the white man’s psyche”. They were “rendered as the spiritual aesthetic of the Western self”. They became that “unconscious realm of meaning”. They occupied a place that white Australians needed to “regain” if they were to acquire a sense of “wholeness”, and a sense of belonging to the land they occupied.⁹

As we saw in chapter one, this process of re-establishing a sense of ‘wholeness’ was one of the major projects of Modernism in western society. To Modernists the primitive offered a space where simplicity, immediacy, and originality could reside. Visiting that space the artists could leave behind the world of “empirical perception” for “one of simpler, but emotionally direct, conception”¹⁰. There they could practice their art unencumbered by the inherited rationality, order, ethics, and morality of a post-Enlightenment world. They could manufacture a sense of an unmediated, authentic experience which would stimulate originality in the art they produced.

In Australia an appreciation of the value of the primitive, not only as a reflection of the hierarchical development of white civilisation but also as potential stimulation in the appreciation and creation of art, had some early advocates. In 1929 the National Museum of Adelaide offered patrons their first exhibition of Aboriginal artefacts which framed the pieces as art rather than anthropological curiosities.¹¹ Art galleries began purchasing paintings by Aboriginal people in 1936. In 1939 the Art

⁸ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: ‘whiteness’ and the literary imagination*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1992, 52

⁹ Andrew Lattas, “Primitivism, Nationalism and Individualism in Australian Popular Culture”, in Bain Attwood and John Arnold, eds., *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, 1992, La Trobe University, Melbourne, 1992, 57. (Special edition of *Journal of Australian Studies*)

¹⁰ Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism: literature, music and painting in Europe 1900-1916*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, 121.

¹¹ Howard Morphy, “Audience for Art”, in Anne Curthoys, A.W. Martin, and Tim Rowse, eds., *Australians since 1938*, Fairfax, Syne and Weldon, Sydney, 1987, 169

Gallery of South Australia acquired Albert Namatjira's *Haasts Bluff (Alhkura)*. By the 1950s the Anglican Church Missionary Society had begun to sell Aboriginal art to the Australian public through their Sydney office (and at the Royal Easter Show in 1956). The Art Gallery of NSW purchased the Scougall Collection of Aboriginal art.¹²

One of the few Australian artists who saw value in Aboriginal art as a source of inspiration in this period was Margaret Preston. In 1925 Preston wrote an article called "The Indigenous Art of Australia" for the journal *Art in Australia*. Here she advocated the use of the symbols and practices of Aboriginal art as a source for a distinctive Australian art practice.¹³ Five years later "The Appreciation of Aboriginal Design" appeared in the same publication.¹⁴ For Preston the authenticity of her borrowings from Aboriginal culture was not the issue, what she was interested in was the form's usefulness as an example of the primitive in order to satisfy her own Modernist agenda.¹⁵ She borrowed the use of colour and some of the symbolism she found in the art of Australians indigenous people but the maintenance of any sense of authenticity was unimportant.

In dance a peripheral fascination with Aboriginal culture began in the late 1930s. From the depiction of a Corroboree in the musical comedy *Collits' Inn* (1932)¹⁶ until the 1950s, 'Dreamtime' legends (often drawn from the fertile imaginations of very white story tellers) were particularly favoured. Stories of the tragic (but inevitable) demise of indigenous peoples and the depiction of them as interesting human equivalents to the unusual flora and fauna of the region were also popular. Ballet companies such as the First Australian Ballet Company, under the direction of Misha Burlakov by the 1940s¹⁷, produced *Billabong* during WWII. This

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Anne-Marie Willis, *Illusions of Identity: the Art of Nation*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1993, 151. More about the relationship between Aboriginality and the development of a national art practice will be discussed in chapter seven of this thesis.

¹⁴ Ibid., 153

¹⁵ Ibid., 150

¹⁶ Katherine Brisbane (ed.), *Entertaining Australia: the performing arts as cultural history*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1991, 222; Jean Garling, *Australian Notes on The Ballet*, Legend Press, Sydney, 1951, 27

¹⁷ In the 1930s this company had been co-directed by Louise Lightfoot. See chapter three of this

piece revolved around a bush picnic in which an Aboriginal presence was included along with other unique flora and fauna of Australia. Phillippe Perrott and Rachel Cameron choreographed *Arckaringa* (1945) for the Australian Ballet Society, to music by Gwen Cooper.¹⁸ Joanne Priest created *Nerida and Berwain* (1946) and Jean Alexander did *Euroka* (1947) to the music of James Penberthy which included a didgeridoo. Edouard Borovansky tackled the history of invasion in 1788 with his ballet *Terra Australia* (1946). Contemporary reaction to this latter story of the inevitable destruction of the Australia's indigenous peoples was highly favourable. This success was due, in part, to the thinly veiled references the ballet made to entrenched assumptions surrounding the history of colonisation, the future of Aboriginal people, and the claim of the European invader to their chosen place.¹⁹

Aboriginal theme ballets in the 1950s included Laurel Martyn's created *Mathinna* (1954) created to music by Esther Rofe. This ballet, adapted from a radio play by Margaret Murray, was based on the tragic life of the Aboriginal adopted daughter of Sir John Franklin, Governor of Tasmania. Mathinna had been left behind to her tragic fate, rejected by both white and Aboriginal communities, when the Franklins returned to England.²⁰ *Brolga* (1957) and *Koori in the Mists* (1960) were two of Kira Bousloff's contributions to this growing number of Aboriginal ballets for the West Australian ballet. *Brolga* offered the story of a young Aboriginal girl's path to initiation. *Koori in the Mist*, with music by James Penberthy, was created for a young West Australian ballet dancer Mary Miller. Miller was described as an "inspired and beautiful young dancer".²¹ James Penberthy was amazed when he saw this young

thesis for a short discussion of Lightfoot's association with Burlakov.

¹⁸ Garling, *op. cit.*, 32

¹⁹ A lengthy discussion of this ballet in relation to the construction of national identity appears in chapter seven of this thesis.

²⁰ Edward Pask, *Ballet in Australia: the Second Act 1840-1980*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1982, 167

²¹ James Penberthy, "West Australian Ballet Season, June 1960", *Music and Dance*, July, 1960, 28-29

Aboriginal dancer perform. How could so much drama, feeling, and understanding emerge from a young girl of only sixteen?²²

Modern dance choreographers also used Aboriginal motifs and stories in their ballets. In 1956 Gertrud Bodenwieser explored what her biographer Shona Dunlop MacTavish has called “indigenous themes” in the creation of her *Central Australian Suite*, and *Aboriginal Spear Dance*. Margaret Barr produced *Breaking the Drought* (1958), a story of conflict between indigenous and white Australians over the growing scarcity of natural resources. Barr also created *Three Households* (1959) with a script by Mona Brand and music by Bruce Hembrowe which tackled the problem of racial discrimination at a country school.²³

These ballets used Aboriginal characters, situations, and stories but their movement vocabulary still had allegiance to established dance forms developed within a Western, classic or modern tradition. Specific attempts to deal with Aboriginal themes through the use of indigenous dance vocabularies appears to have begun in earnest with an ex-Borovansky dancer Ena Noel. Noel, an arts undergraduate at Sydney University, performed her Aboriginal dances in the late forties for the Queen and Commonwealth Exhibition and around teacher training colleges in Britain. The central figure in her performances was *Nabied* a “mythical siren who haunts rock pools in the Australian bush, and lures [A]boriginal men to their doom.”²⁴ Her dances were accompanied by “native rhythms” collected by Professor A. P. Elkin. These were then orchestrated for the piano by John Antill, who added the accompaniment of “native sticks” for “authentic” effect.²⁵ Apart from Noel’s adventures into Aboriginal dance culture, the most distinctive borrowings of Aboriginal movement occurred with

²² Ibid.

²³ Caryll von Sturmer, *Margaret Barr: Epic Individual*, L. Von Sturmer, Sydney, 1993, 79, 172. Barr and Bodenwieser are explored in more detail in relation to the development of national representation in dance in chapter seven of this thesis.

²⁴ *The Advertiser*, 15th April 1951. Article located in folder “Miscellaneous Australian Dances”, 38686, No. 3, Festival Centre Performing Arts Dance Collection, held at the Festival Centre, Adelaide, South Australia.

²⁵ Ibid

two interpretations of John Antill's orchestral piece *Corroboree*, the first in 1950 and the second in 1954.²⁶

Antill's score for this ballet had been completed in 1943 and first performed in Australia in 1946. It was inspired by, what Antill described as, "snatches of tunes" he heard as a young boy performed by Aboriginal people of La Perouse in the 1930s. As *People* magazine told its readers in 1950, after hearing the Aboriginal songs, the imagination of this "quiet studious" boy "began to stir, and a strange music, full of barbaric vitality and vivid colour, whirled in his brain."²⁷ On reflection Antill felt certain that the inspiration for *Corroboree* had not only emerged from his "strong emotional feeling for the Australian scene" but also from his own "detailed study" of their practices. His work was "anthropologically authentic as well as musically emotional."²⁸

In an effort to produce such authenticity, Antill chose "strange" percussion instruments which included the Trora, Bullroarer, whirling ratchets, gongs and symbols.²⁹ These whirling ratchets caused havoc at one particular performance when the mobile metal head left the safety of its supporting stick careering off into the auditorium almost decapitating one audience member.³⁰ When all instruments managed to remain fastened to their supports, reaction to Antill's 'Australian' composition was enthusiastic. "E.A." of the *Sydney Morning Herald* recalled that, the

²⁶ Critic Cornelius Conyn suggested that there had been another interpretation of the Antill score by Robert Helpmann in Britain between 1950 and 1954. However other evidence suggests that Helpmann was offered the chance to create a ballet by Dorothy Helmrich but refused. See Catrina Vignando, "Corroboree: Aboriginal Inspiration in Contemporary Australian Ballet", *Olive Pink Society Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1991, 11. For Cornelius Conyn see transcript of 2BL radio programme dated the 12th February 10pm, possibly 1954/5 (as Conyn mentions the Beth Dean version of *Corroboree* which was first produced in 1954). This transcript located in black folder, Envelope 26, Beth Dean collection, Australian Museum archives, ACT.

²⁷ *People*, 5th July 1950. Article located in "National Ballet Company", Folder 46683, Festival Centre Performing Arts Dance Collection, held at the Festival Centre, Adelaide, South Australia.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Australia Presents: the Australian Ballet 'Corroboree'*, (film), the National Theatre Ballet Company and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, produced by the Department of the Interior for the Australian National Film Board, 1951.

³⁰ This incident was recalled by Verdon Williams in a video interview with Williams and Jack Manuel conducted by Alan Brissenden. Festival Centre Performing Arts Dance Collection, held at the Festival Centre, Adelaide, South Australia. Viewed with the kind assistance of Margaret Abbie Denton, Research Officer, Dance Collection, Adelaide Festival Centre, South Australia.

rhythms of *Corroboree* were “punched out with almost frightening monotony”, reaching a “massive climax in the closing fire ceremony”.³¹ In 1950 this music became the inspiration for the first of many ballets. Created with support from the NSW division of the Arts Council of Australia under the directorship of Dorothy Helmrich, the first *Corroboree* ballet was choreographed by Rex Reid, and began a short season running for 4 nights and two matinees at the Empire Theatre in Sydney. It was estimated that 2,500 people attended opening night on the 3rd of July.³² William Constable created the set which, in the opinion of the critic Jean Garling, “conveyed the overwhelming loneliness so typical of the Australian inland” with its “grand sweep of sky, desert and rock”.³³ Robin Lovejoy designed the costumes which had enlarged, padded thighs built into the black tights to give the impression of masculinity to the bodies of the predominantly female caste.³⁴ The silver zips down the back of the black leotards were generally thought to detract from the overall authenticity of the garments³⁵, but Lovejoy’s masks were a triumph. Worn by all the performers, their wide nostrils, high foreheads, black dreadlocks and shaggy pointed beards³⁶ complied with the favoured images of Aboriginal people in the 1950s (see fig. 24);

³¹ “E.A.”, “Australian Ballet of Genius”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4th July, 1950, 5

³² “Corroboree had World Premiere”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 4th 1950, 1; “E.A.”, op. cit., Alan Brissenden and Keith Glennon, “Australia Dances”, 1955, unpublished manuscript, located in the Keith Glennon Papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia. For detailed description of this manuscript’s history see Note 2, Chapter 2 of this thesis.

³³ Jean Garling, 1951, op. cit., 38-39

³⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9th July, 1950: 9; Cornelius Conyn, 2BL Radio programme, black folder, Envelope 26, Beth Dean collection, Australian Museum archives, ACT.

³⁵ Interview - Verdon Williams and Jack Manuel with Alan Brissenden, Festival Centre Performing Arts Dance Collection, held at the Festival Centre, Adelaide, South Australia.

³⁶ The masks have not survived, they were lost along with their wicker container on the country tour somewhere between Adelaide and Perth. Ibid. However, the film *Australia Presents: the Australian Ballet “Corroboree”*, shows the masks in detail. There may also be some discrepancy as to who exactly made the masks for *Corroboree*. Most sources mention Robin Lovejoy, however in her book *Australian Notes on the Ballet* the critic Jean Garling suggests that the masks were made by Clem Kennedy and on the 8th June 1950 the *Sydney Morning Herald* carried a photograph of Clement Kennedy putting the finishing touches to the masks for the premiers. See Jean Garling *Australian Notes on the Ballet*, Legend Press, Sydney, 1951, 39, and *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 8th, 1950,



Fig. 23. *Corroboree*, choreography Rex Reid. (1950). Photographer W. Brindle. Official photograph of the Department of the Interior, News and Information Bureau. Against the William Constable backdrop the "Fish and Frog men, with the Medicine Man gesticulating in their midst, perform a dance to cause rain to fall". Caption by C. Slocombe. (Courtesy of the Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia).



Fig. 24. *Corroboree*, choreography Rex Reid. (1950). Photographer W. Brindle. Official photograph of the Department of the Interior, News and Information Bureau. *Dance of the Small Flies* led the “entrance of the totems of various tribes for the spectacular totem procession and fire ceremony.” Caption by C. Slocombe. (Courtesy of the Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia).

images which were regularly produced in this period among the pages of the photographic, geographic journal *Walkabout*.³⁷

Rex Reid's *Corroboree* followed the themes of the Antill score. Here Alan Brissenden recalls the scenario and impact of the piece on opening night:

The mysteriousness of sacred ritual which permeates the music was established with the curtain's rising on a darkened stage, the light of a few fires flickering on a huge table rock, looming in the background. As the light gradually brightens, two groups of old men are seen sitting in the foreground. A perky theme on the trumpets then announces men of the Witchetty Grub and Emu totems, who dance a Welcome Ceremony. They appear from behind the rock and the Medicine Man [played by Jack Manuel] makes his stand on a ledge, slightly above the main dancing ground, from where he is to give directions throughout the seven parts of the Corroboree. His quick jerky movement is represented in the music by a repetitive falling phrase of three notes.

The sound of the didgeridoo introduces the people of the legendary Thippa Thippa Bird and the Bell Bird totems who perform a swaying graceful dance in honour of the evening star. This is followed by a dramatic rain dance by the Frog men, their croaking suggested by the clapping of pronged trora sticks and other tympani. As they are joined by the Fishmen the dancing grows more furious, broken sharply by pauses for incantations to the clouds; they are rewarded with a burst of thunder, and then another, until at last, after all the frantic noise and gestures, just two drops of rain fall.

A dance to the Spirit of the Wind by the Snake totem is followed by the Kangaroo men, who pay homage to the rising sun, and a dignified dance to the morning star by a member of the Hakea flower totem. This is a quiet interlude to a procession in which men of the Lace Lizard, Cockatoo, Honey Ant, Wild Cat and Small Fly totems take part. The music rises to an orgiastic pitch, then, as a gong crashes, the Medicine Man gestures for silence; there is brief pause, the dancers light huge touches, and the Fire Ceremony begins. The stage becomes a mass of shields, spears and brandished torches, whirling in the darkened air; the sound of the sacred bullroarer is heard, the music drives on to an even greater frenzy, and the curtain falls.³⁸

³⁷ For examples see *Walkabout* November 1st 1953, 28; March 1st 1954, 24; September 1st 1954, 26; September 1st, 1957, 25; November 1st, 1958, 26; September 1st, 1957, 25; May 1st, 1959, 37,40

³⁸ Alan Brissenden and Keith Glennon described the action of the ballet in this way for their unpublished manuscript *Australia Dances*, 1955, Keith Glennon Papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

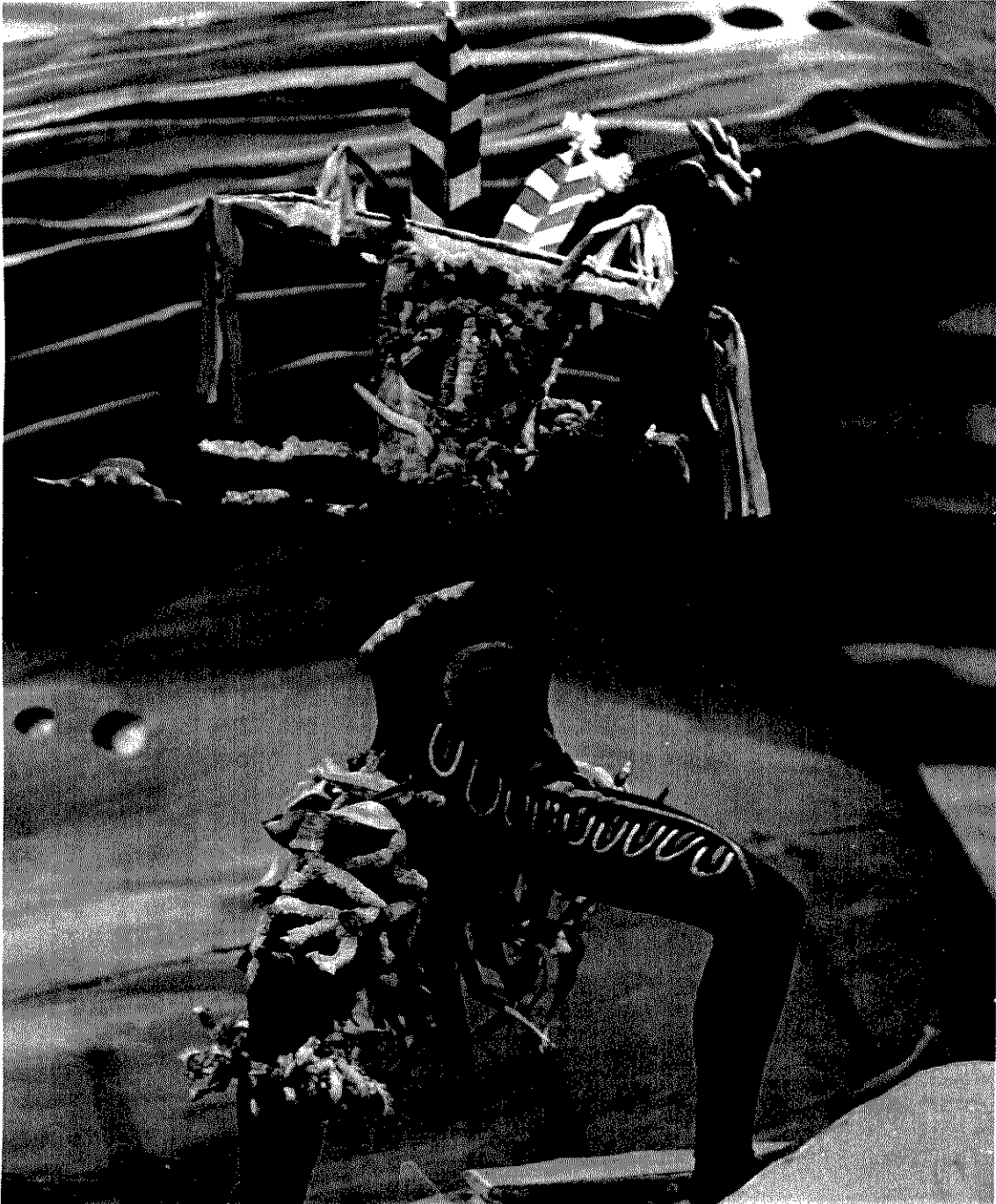


Fig. 25. *Corroboree*, choreography Rex Reid. (1950). Photographer W. Brindle. Official photograph of the Department of the Interior, News and Information Bureau. "Medicine Man - John Manuel, 21 year old South Australian". Caption by C. Slocombe. (Courtesy of the Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia).

One of the main choreographic motifs used in the ballet was a second position *plié* in which the feet were turned out, the knees bent and the thighs opened in wide stance with the hips lowered toward the ground (see fig. 25). In this position the performers stood, stamped, jumped, and shimmied their thighs. This deep second position *plié* has been a motif associated with the primitive for most of the twentieth century. As Bruce and Callaway have illustrated, it has also fascinated white Australian painters. In 1793 Captain John Hunter describing this position (and corresponding movement) as an “extraordinary exertion of the muscles of the thighs and legs...such as none of us could imitate”³⁹. Similarly Jane Franklin, when touring New South Wales in 1839, described the “principle feat performed by these savages” was one in which they “stretched out their legs as wide as possible” and made them “quiver with great rapidity”. Franklin claimed that such a movement was almost “indescribable”.⁴⁰

This position, also favoured in classical ballet (minus the quivering thighs), has been interpreted by some feminist/dance historians as a site of vulnerability when executed by a female classical dancer. It is a stance which opens up the underside of the leg for public viewing flattening the body and making the subject exposed and vulnerable.⁴¹ In the context of Aboriginal dance the second position *plié* appears to have taken on a completely different meaning. From colonial art of the early 19th century to the concert stage of the mid 20th century, it was offered as an example of the innate primitiveness of the Aboriginal people and their culture. The centre of the performers body, the hips and stomach, were closer to the earth. It exposed the genital area to view. This gave the body a more base, earthy, and dangerously sexualized appearance to the Western viewer. In the ballet *Corroboree*, Reid

³⁹ Captain John Hunter, An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island, London, 1793, 193, quote cited in Bruce and Callaway, *op. cit.*, 83

⁴⁰ Originally quoted in Olive Havard, “Lady Franklin’s visit to New South Wales, 1839”, Journal of the Royal Historical Society, vol. 29, no. 5, 1943, 295. Cited in Bruce and Callaway, *op. cit.*, 83

⁴¹ See Ann Daly, “The Balanchine Women: of Hummingbirds and Channel Swimmers”, The Drama Review, T113, No. 312, (1), 1987, 8-21.

exploited this motif as an identifiable, established representation of the primitive, one with which his audience would have been very familiar.

Reid's version of *Corroboree* received another showing in February 1951 for the Commonwealth Jubilee Celebrations. John Antill conducted the Sydney Symphony orchestra on this occasion and Rex Reid made some small changes to the choreography. These performances were followed by an Australian tour in the first half on 1951. Although the entire ballet fascinated most critics, it was the finale which continually impressed audiences. "Unconventional" and "barbaric" were the words used by a staff reporter for the Sydney Morning Herald, to describe the "torch-waving climax"⁴² of Reid's *Corroboree*. For this critic the ballet reached:

... an almost unbearable pitch of bacchanalian frenzy as the powerful rhythmic music beats its way to one crashing crescendo after another and the stage shakes to the strutting and prancing of Reid's masked warriors.⁴³

The Mail (Adelaide) also marvelled at the finale, describing it as a "spectacular tableaux of wild dancing".

The large torches are ablaze and sway crazily. The air is filled with blazing fragments and thick smoke. The mysterious bullroarer sounds a sinister note. The mass of howling, dancing men grotesquely bedaubed, create an atmosphere that can only be described as fiendish. The curtain falls on a scene of absolute chaos.⁴⁴

After such a finish the excited capacity audience:

...applauded for more than 10 minutes, and cheers and stamping greeted the composer-conductor, Antill, when called to the stage by the company's director Joyce Graham.⁴⁵

⁴² Alan Brissenden, "Corroboree: dances to sundry notes in music", Honi Soit, 13th July, 1950, 5

⁴³ Sydney Morning Herald, 20th February, 1951, 4

⁴⁴ The Mail, July 1951. Article located in Folder 39294, "Rex Reid", Festival Centre Performing Arts Dance Collection, held at the Festival Centre, Adelaide, South Australia.

⁴⁵ Catherine Veitch, "Ballet Triumph for Australian Artists", 1951. Article located Folder 39294, "Rex Reid", Festival Centre Performing Arts Dance Collection, held at the Festival Centre, Adelaide, South Australia.

Despite this general enthusiasm for the ballet, reviews also illustrated the ambiguous manner in which a piece like *Corroboree* could be viewed and understood in the 1950s. "E.A." of the Sydney Morning Herald and Alan Brissenden, writing at the time for the University of Sydney's student paper Honi Soit, were amazed by the fact that Australians could produce what they saw as a first rate contemporary success in the traditional arena of European art. As "E.A." exclaimed:

Never before has native re-resourcefulness in the field of ballet achieved such an immediate and empathic success.⁴⁶

Alan Brissenden was similarly struck by the quality of *Corroboree*, proclaiming that it was "unreal that Australia could have produced such a work". Despite his astonishment, Brissenden also stated that such a ballet could only have been created in Australia.⁴⁷ This contrary experience stemmed from the dual referencing taking place in both the music and the movement of Rex Reid's *Corroboree*. This ballet was non-European art filtered through the supposed sophistication of European idioms. As "E.A." suggested, this piece was not a "real [C]orroboree" but a "boldly glamorised pattern of ceremonial dances inspired directly by the dynamic Antill rhythms."⁴⁸ This glamourisation assured that the ballet was "artistically satisfying and often breath-taking."⁴⁹ Brissenden made a similar observation:

Although few classical steps are used, those of the [A]boriginal have been refined and developed by grouping and smooth continuity... From the eerie opening of green and red spotlights to the fiendish torch-waving climax "Corroboree" is a spell-binding experience.⁵⁰

These "artistically satisfying" experiences were only possible because the local, appropriated culture was filtered through aspects of a Western concert

⁴⁶ "E.A." op. cit.

⁴⁷ Brissenden, 1950, op. cit.

⁴⁸ "E.A.", 1950, op. cit.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Brissenden, 1950, op. cit., 5

tradition. These included a formal orchestration with conductor and orchestra, constructed dance steps performed by professional dancers, all of whom were engaged in the construction of a fantasy, viewed within a proscenium arch. However, by the same token, these experiences were “spell-binding” and “breath-taking” because *Corroboree* centralised something deemed ‘naturally’ and exclusively Australian. In 1950 one construction could not survive without the other.

Both cultures had been borrowed: the ‘primitive’ Aboriginal from the lower ‘Other’, the ‘sophisticated’ European from the higher ‘Other’. This attempted duplication of European high-culture by Australians, suspended out on the periphery, was re-centred in a significant way by the exclusivity of the Aboriginal culture on which the ballet *Corroboree* was based. Although Rex Reid, when interviewed by Michelle Potter in later years, insisted that his choreography for *Corroboree* took the “course of sheer invention”, as Potter suggests:

...despite [his] emphasis on a ‘middle course’, and his conviction that he could never create anything truly Aboriginal, Reid was, nevertheless, concerned with displaying what he thought was some kind of authenticity in the choreography. His emphasis on depicting animal movements and hunting poses is a clear indication of this concern, as [was] his desire to legitimise his approach by consulting [the anthropologist] Charles Mountford...⁵¹

From this early marriage of the lower and higher ‘Other’ in the first production of *Corroboree* the continuing story of this music and its interpretation into movement illustrates the shifting relationship between representation, authenticity and the ‘primitive’ in Australia’s post war cultural landscape. In 1953⁵² Dorothy Helmrich, once again representing the NSW branch of the Arts Council of Australia, commissioned another interpretation of the Antill score; this time for a Gala

⁵¹ Michelle Potter, “Making Australian Dance: Themes and Variations”, *Voices*, Vol. VI, No.2, Winter, 1996, 16.

⁵² Reid’s choreography had a return season at the Tivoli Theatre in Sydney for the Jubilee Celebrations on the 19th February 1951.

performance to be held at the Tivoli Theatre to entertain the newly crowned Queen Elizabeth II on her first Royal Tour to Australia in 1954.

This visit of the young monarch was a real occasion in Australian post war society. As Jane Connors has suggested in her study of the Royal Tour, if the Queen “blinked in Lismore... they immediately heard about it in Adelaide”.⁵³ The visiting Royals also united many disparate voices in Australia. So popular was this new Queen that a usually cynical press and people of the vocal republican and labour movements found it impractical to complain about the expense, reverence and ‘hoop-la’ afforded the monarch’s visit. Labour and conservative politicians alike took part in the festivities without any apparent threat of the boycott which had marred the tour of the Prince of Wales 35 years earlier.⁵⁴

With all this consensus, pomp, and circumstance, being asked to produce a ballet for this Gala was considerable honour, which went to a relative newcomer to Australia, the American dancer Beth Dean. Dean, who originally hailed from Denver, began her association with Australia when she married the expatriate singer Victor Carell in the United States. In 1947 Carell returned to Australia with Dean as part of the cast of *Annie Get Your Gun*. Carell played Foster Wilson and Dean, the Riding Mistress.⁵⁵ This musical had been expected to run for six months but both Dean and Carell stayed with the show for three years.

For both artists an interest in Aboriginal dance, music and song had been inspired by a chance meeting with C. P. Mountford while they were researching for a radio programme on songs from around the world in New York some years earlier. Dean recalled that the three days she and Carell spent with Mountford, as he told his “tales of the Australian [A]borigines”, changed their lives.⁵⁶

⁵³ Jane Connors, “The 1954 Royal Tour of Australia”, *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 100, April 1993, 374

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 373

⁵⁵ “Annie Get Your Gun”, *J.C. Williamson Magazine*, 27th August 1948, no page numbers supplied in publication.

⁵⁶ “Beth Dean”, Oral History Tape 902, *De Berg Tapes*, transcript of interviewed, 4th December 1975, 10

[O]ur imaginations were so fired that [we] were able to leap out over the surrounding skyscrapers...over the vast modern country and the ocean between... past Sydney's golden beaches, to light in the centre of a continent where, surrounded by empty silence, an old man, with beared face and jutting eyebrows, sat chanting. Out of his strange medley of sounds came stories of great spirit heroes wandering through the world when it was young, creating the rivers and making the mountains. The shadows about him were peopled with leaping virile young men, their dark glistening bodies ochre-daubed and decorated in fantastic designs.⁵⁷

After leaving *Annie Get Your Gun*, and being already familiar with anthropological films, books and lectures on Aboriginal culture through a friendship with Mountford, A. P. Elkin and T. G. H. Strenlow⁵⁸, Dean and Carell embarked on a series of tours inspired not only by Aboriginal but also Maori, Aztec, African-American, and Native American dance and music. From Sydney to Perth, London to New York, Dean performed their dances and Carell sang their songs. Included in their hybrid shows was also a smattering of modern and classical items from a Western tradition.

With these performances Beth Dean, and many who observed and appreciated her work at the time, felt she was a "missionary" for the people and cultures she portrayed.⁵⁹ Speaking to a local newspaper in Tasmania in 1952, she suggested that her dance was "deeper than folk dances". "What I do" Dean insisted "is an ethnic dance to express the soul of the people in movement".⁶⁰ In Auckland others agreed:

In her American Indian, [N]egro spiritual and Spanish dances [Dean] revealed an ability not merely to perform the characteristic movements, but to "get inside the skins" of the people of these races.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Beth Dean and Victor Carell, *Dust for Dancers*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1955, 2

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 3

⁵⁹ *Sunday News*, 9th December, 1951. Article located in Envelope 2, Box 17, Beth Dean collection, Australian Museum archives, ACT

⁶⁰ Untitled article, Tasmania, 1952, Envelope 2, Box 17, Beth Dean collection, Australian Museum archives, ACT.

⁶¹ Auckland, 13th October, 1952, Envelope 2, Box 17, Beth Dean collection, Australian Museum archives, ACT.

As with the American Ruth St Denis, the Latin-American performer La Meri⁶², the American duo Reginald and Gladys Laubin⁶³, and the Australians Ena Noel and Rex Reid, Dean qualified her claim to authenticity by highlighting her process of interpretation. She felt that her authority came from an emotive affinity with her subject based on practical research portrayed through a personal creative language.

What undoubtedly attracted Dorothy Helmrich to Beth Dean as a potential choreographer for the second *Corroboree* was not only her reputation as a performer but also her amateur anthropological credentials. However, most of the knowledge Dean and Carell had acquired about Australia's indigenous peoples had arrived through their associations with white academics, their own reading, and the viewing of films in possession of the Australian Department of Information. In the winter of 1953 Dean augmented her reputation as a "student of Aboriginal Lore"⁶⁴ by embarking on a "voyage of discovery" in which she and Carell drove 10,000 miles, over eight months in a Holden Utility (donated by General Motors). They travelled into the Australian centre, that "empty silence" they had imagined in New York. From Melbourne to Katherine, Darwin and then into Arnhem Land, Dean and Carell (with assistance from locals) recorded the music and dance of the area and collected local artefacts.

As in her earlier anthropologically inspired creations, Dean believed that her collection and reproduction of indigenous movement in Australia was part of a social, cultural and artistic crusade. She was rescuing Aboriginal dance vocabulary and the stories of the people of Arnhem Land from what she saw as their inevitable extinction as a people and a culture. Dean also wanted to offer this culture to western theatre

⁶² La Meri was hailed in America, Europe and Australia (where she performed in 1936) as one of the great interpretive folk dancers of the 1930s. For short coverage of her Australian tour and photographs see *The Home*, 1st December, 1936, 43

⁶³ The Laubins travelled the United States performing Native American dances from the 1940s. See Amanda Card, "A benevolent masquerade: Reginald and Gladys Laubin 'play Indian', 1940-1970", unpublished paper, 1999.

⁶⁴ *Sun Herald*, January 27th 1954, 52

audiences as inspiration for a truly 'Australian' dance vocabulary. In this project Dean moved one step further than other artists who toyed with Aboriginal narratives in the forties and fifties. She tried to offer authenticity within a framework of innovation. As this chapter will illustrate, this dual allegiance was almost impossible to maintain. Not only did her emphatic insistence on innovation, which was an essential component of her chosen aesthetic - modern dance, challenge the possibility of maintaining authenticity of any kind, Dean's political and social circumstances, as a white choreographer borrowing from a black world, also meant that her project would be compromised by the problems of appropriation.

Dance writer Carole Johnson has suggested that appropriation occurs when the "stories, images, and practices of less powerful cultural groups" are taken for the "creative enrichment of the art and culture of the more powerful"⁶⁵. As such a definition infers and this chapter will illustrate, the appropriation of Aboriginal movement by white Australians was not simply enacted in order to defuse the radical potential of local indigenous art forms, although in many circumstances this was one outcome. It was also used as a location for the creation of a local product and as a source for the acquisition of a home-grown originality and 'truth' in the practice of Australian modern dance.

Dean's mission was two fold. She believed that her appropriations would not only save Aboriginal movement vocabularies from their inevitable extinction but also re-invigorate western theatrical dance practice in Australia. In 1952 she stated:

Ballets based on the wealth of [A]boriginal legend stories, and using either static or the continuous roundness of [A]boriginal movement are theatrically valid. Such ballets would be capable of bringing the stark beauty of a primal stone age quality into a theatre world weary with a surfeit of hackneyed ideas.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ See Carole Johnson and Amanda Card, "Creative Appropriation of Aboriginal Dance", in Aline Scott-Maxwell and John Whiteoak (ed.), *Companion to Music and Dance in Australia*, Currency Press, Sydney, forthcoming publication, 1999.

⁶⁶ Beth Dean, "Dance of the dreaming times", *Dance Magazine*, June, 1952, 23

With her version of *Corroboree* Dean believed she had succeeded in combining indigenous, local movement practices and imported, western dance vocabularies to the benefit of both cultures. Describing the creation of her ballet in Dust for Dancers, published in 1955, Dean recalled:

Our months of living among [A]borigines had been the prelude to a great moment of our lives - the corroboree of the blackfellow had become theatre in the true sense of the word. The ballet *Corroboree* is a proudly dignified yet sincerely humble offering of the fruit of years of earnest endeavour to understand the activating spirit of aboriginal lore and to translate it into live theatre for all to share.⁶⁷

For her *Corroboree* Dean had chosen to develop a distinctive narrative rather than simply follow the scenario dictated by the Antill score, as Rex Reid had done. Dean's story revolved around the initiation of a young boy. She wove through her tale visitations from spirit beings who, along with the men of the tribe representing their different totems, challenged the boy on his journey to manhood which culminated, not in circumcision (a bit to graphic for 1950s theatre patrons) but in a grand leap through fire. In 1954 Dean danced the role of the initiate herself (see fig. 26).

As she insisted on more than one occasion through the fifties and sixties, the dance steps she created for her 'Aboriginal' characters in *Corroboree* were completely "authentic".⁶⁸ Interviewed in 1970, Dean confirmed her claim, stating that:

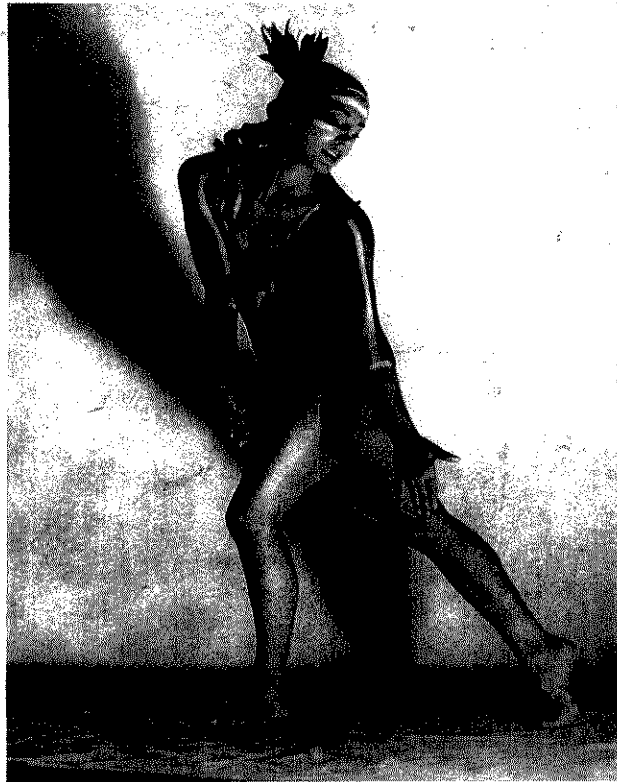
...for the roles of the [A]boriginal people themselves... the women and men who danced on the stage before Her Majesty [danced] exactly as I had seen [Aboriginal people] dancing in the Outback.⁶⁹

Accompanying these 'Aboriginal' characters were a variety of spirit beings or "supernatural creatures" for whom Dean used more poetic licence in her movement vocabulary.

⁶⁷ Dean 1955, op. cit., 211

⁶⁸ Beth Dean, The Many Worlds of Dance, Murray, Sydney, 1966, 14

⁶⁹ Ibid.



Photograph by Hal Williamson

BETH DEAN, as she appeared in the ballet *Corroboree* in the performance played before Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh. Beth played the lead as the aboriginal boy at his initiation to manhood.

Fig. 26. Beth Dean as the boy initiate in *Corroboree* (1954). Photographer Hal Williamson. (Beth Dean and Victor Carell, *Dust for Dancers*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1955, back cover.)



Fig. 27. Scene from Beth Dean's *Corroboree* (1954). (Courtesy of the Keith Glenmon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia).

Their dream quality made it possible to give them exciting movements with freedom, a kind of poetic licence in choreography which it was not possible to give the movements of the [A]boriginal dancers.⁷⁰

Reviews of the piece illustrate, once again, the complex manner in which this combination of anthropological authenticity and artistic innovation were viewed in the fifties. For Eunice Gardiner of the Sunday Telegraph and Jean Garling at Tempo & Television, it was the interpretive skill of Dean's choreography that made *Corroboree* great. The "compromise between authenticity and presentation"⁷¹ and the "stylised...spirit and...emotional content" meant that the ballet transcended "mere local interest"⁷². For J. B. Russell of the Sun Herald it was the use of "authentic dance steps and movement patterns" which made the work worthwhile. These dancers "wiggled, gyrated, stamped, rolled over the floor" offering the audience a view of something that "might be very like a real corroboree, with a lot of excited running about to Antill's shattering climax at the end."⁷³ Russell found value and authenticity in the 'primitive' chaos. Garling and Gardiner found artistic credibility in the works structured interpretation.

For less enthusiastic reviewers, *Corroboree's* "anthropological aspects", those "precise clay-brown colours, the precise native steps, the precise costumes", made the piece informative but far from "exciting".⁷⁴ Matt Hayes of the Newcastle Sun found the attempted "mimicry" of Aboriginal culture not only unsuccessful but also an "intrusion into unfamiliar and somewhat sacred ground".⁷⁵ This rendered the whole exercise problematic in Hayes's opinion.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Jean Garling, Tempo & Television, Vol. 17, No. 5, February 1954, 1

⁷² Eunice Gardner, "Tivoli Review", Sunday Telegraph, February 7th, 1954, 45. Article located in Box 17, Envelope 7, Beth Dean collection, Australian Museum archives, ACT.

⁷³ J. B. Russell, "Ballet Highlight of Gala", Sun Herald, 8th February, 1954, 52. Article located in Box 17, Envelope 7, Beth Dean collection, Australian Museum archives, ACT.

⁷⁴ Sydney Morning Herald, February 8th 1954, 4

⁷⁵ Matt Hayes, Newcastle Sun, March 31st, 1954. Article located in Envelope 7, Box 17, Beth Dean collection, Australian Museum archives, ACT.

Debates over authenticity aside, most reviewers were unanimous in their praise of the ballet's 'Australianness'. For Eunice Gardner *Corroboree* had a "stone-age antiquity in its atmosphere that makes it supremely 'Australian'".⁷⁶ Cornelius Conyn thought the work was "pervaded by the soul of an unknown and age-old continent".⁷⁷ But perhaps the most explicit praise came from the critic for the *Grafton Daily Examiner*. This regional paper proclaimed:

In Grafton yesterday, we saw John Antill's music interpreted in a way that brings all "dinki di" Australians to a pitch of possessive emotion for the little understood original denizens of our old, old land... British audiences reacted favourably to Antill's music - goodness knows why for they cannot have the faintest conception about what it all means. Only those who know something about the great outback... and the integrity of the natives... can get within the facade of the weird music. Beth Dean, plumbing her soul to the depths, has given something quite historic to Australian art in that, for the first time to many Australians, she has made us look at the [A]borigines as a vital living people, with customs, rituals and standards which put most of us to shame. In one grand soul-exposing sweep Beth Dean, an American, shows, as even our best writers have not been able to do, what is basically Australian... *Corroboree* represents the real Australian continent - the first outback. Some of that outback has entered our individual and national character.⁷⁸

As this review shows, *Corroboree* offered evidence to white Australia of their ultimate 'belonging' to the environment in which they lived. It confirmed a local distinctiveness and offered a source of artistic comfort for a group of people suspended out on the periphery of the 'civilised' world. In fact, this ballet provided more than mere comfort, it promised the prospect of international recognition through the emulation of something which was locally distinctive (filtered, of course, through acceptable constructions within a European artistic tradition). This particularly excited the critics of the time. Cornelius Conyn assured Western Australians that "both

⁷⁶ Gardiner, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷ Cornelius Conyn, *Western Australian*, 26th June 1954. Article located in Envelope 7, Box 17, Beth Dean collection, Australian Museum archives, ACT

⁷⁸ "Bush Ballet for Britain", *Daily Examiner* (Grafton), 16th March 1954. Article located in Envelope 7, Box 17, Beth Dean collection, Australian Museum archives, ACT

Europe and the USA would applaud the unique work".⁷⁹ Eunice Gardiner's "bones" told her that "at Sadlers Wells or the New York City Centre" Dean's *Corroboree* would "create a furore".⁸⁰

For Grafton's *Examiner* this ballet also represented a country which was 'coming of age'.⁸¹ It reflected the changing shape of Australia's ethnic mix and illustrated a growing maturity in post war society. The culture of Aboriginal people offered a unifying symbol for an assimilated, integrated future.

Not only did the company play true to Australia, and to Australian music, but they are a combination of "just us" and New Australians. What extraordinary propaganda for our migration policy if this self same company went overseas! Not only have we benefited from European and American culture but we find representatives from half a dozen countries co-operating in a most significant fashion to present Australia as it should be known. And it is done through the medium of the [A]borigines. How perfectly normal, but how surprising to most of us.⁸²

Dean's *Corroboree* offered Aboriginal culture as a source of future cohesion through the construction of a shared past which suited the changing demographic mix of post World War II Australian society. As Andrew Lattas has suggested, Aboriginal culture offered white Australia a "mythic consciousness", if not a path to

⁷⁹ Conyn, 1954, op. cit.

⁸⁰ "Music of the Week", *Telegraph*, no date. Copy of this article available in Envelope 7, Box 17, Beth Dean collection, Australian Museum archives, ACT. Although this version of *Corroboree* was never seen in live performance in London or New York, Dean did have the ballet filmed for America's Dinah Shore Show 1960. Dean claimed at the time that it would be "the first time in history that Australia has been able to export theatre-art in any form." She added that "I've every reason to believe that it won't be the last. America is hungry to know of Australia's contributions to the world of expressive art- now they'll have a chance." *Parramatta and Cumberland Mail*, 17th August, 1960. Article located Envelope 7, Box 17, Beth Dean collection, Australian Museum archives, ACT. Dean believed, and the critics Conyn and Garling agreed, that *Corroboree* was successful because it combined the international and the distinctive. They also suggested that this was where the future of Australian art lay. For a more lengthy discussion of the incentives for, and effect of, this combination on the creation of a national dance culture see chapter seven.

⁸¹ Australia seemed to be constantly 'coming of age'. This was a popular term used to describe Australia during the inter-war period. See White, op. cit., 151. It was also popular rhetoric in the 1950s with events such as the Melbourne Olympics of 1956 and the development by the Australian Elizabethan Trust of local drama, ballet, and opera companies. See Richard Waterhouse, "Lola Montez and High Culture: the Elizabethan Theatre Trust in post-war Australia", *Journal of Australian Studies*, Number 52, 1997, 148-158.

⁸² "Bush Ballet for Britain", *Daily Examiner* (Grafton), 16th March 1954. Article located Envelope 7, Box 17, Beth Dean collection, Australian Museum archives, ACT.

“consciousness itself”.⁸³ It helped create a “sense of depth” and a past more substantial than that offered by a mere 150 years of European occupation.⁸⁴ However, the custodians of this culture, Australia’s indigenous people, were considered unfit to bear the responsibility for the corporeal articulation of that mythic past. This honour was assumed by white locals. It was these dancers from “half a dozen countries” (from the Bodenwieser company and Cornelius Conyn’s ballet) who were to “mirror...the excitement of an [A]boriginal ceremony”. It was they who had to “learn to feel the dance quality” of the Aboriginal people and “infect each audience member with the beauty and thrill of this pristine ideal of the [A]boriginal mind”.⁸⁵ Through her anthropological and interpretive dance processes Dean believed that her choreography offered a “continuous line, direct from the [A]borigines in Central Australia to a city audience in Sydney”.⁸⁶

A sympathetic portrayal of indigenous culture was important to Dean. Her Aborigines, as Cornelius Conyn suggested, were no longer the “weird symbols of stone age men in masks” but “living, sometimes lovable, always interesting human beings”⁸⁷. The heavy masks which were such a feature of Lovejoy’s costuming in Reid’s 1950 version of *Corroboree* (see fig. 24) may have gone but the more authentic or ‘human’ portrayal attributed to Dean still accommodated the physical features attributed at the time to the ‘real’ Aborigine; Dean just managed to create these illusions in a less obvious manner. As *Tempo & Television* told its readers, the adjustment of the European features of the dancers for Dean’s work was under the guiding hand of a make-up artist.

Alteration of European features to the opposite characteristics of a primitive race, was in the hands of expert Dorothy Denckley, who spent

⁸³ Andrew Lattas, *op. cit.*, 56.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* Andrew Lattas actually makes these observations in the context of the 1980s, but his insights also have resonance within the context of the work of Beth Dean in the 1950s.

⁸⁵ Dean, *op. cit.*, 1955, 209

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Cornelius Conyn, “Corroboree into ballet”, *The Weekly News*, Auckland, 2nd June, 1954. Article located Envelope 7, Box 17, Beth Dean collection, Australian Museum archives, ACT.

hours working out the correct contour and colours. Lips had to be puffed out, nose plugs manufactured to widen the nostrils, eyebrows faded out and new bushy ones created.⁸⁸

As the rhetoric surrounding the production, performance and critique of a ballet like *Corroboree* illustrates, the choice of Aboriginal culture as a source for a unified, mythological past brought its own distinct problems in the 1950s. In keeping with much of the anthropological rhetoric to which she had become accustomed, Dean's attitude to the Aboriginal people was a mixture of amazement, condescension and benevolence. These Arnhem land people were the "last remnants of stone-age man" who came from a place of incredible "primal contrasts"⁸⁹. Yet Dean was elevating the cultural products of a people who had been named 'primitive' since the invasion of Australia in 1788 to the status of art. In this complicated exchange the dilemma for Dean was that her *Corroboree* was required to be authentic, in an anthropological sense, and yet still a credible piece of theatre in the European tradition. In order to satisfy both demands Dean based the piece on "as wide a variety of authentic [A]boriginal steps as possible". Yet she had to also frame those steps with a theme "sufficiently universal to appeal to the widest possible public". Her intention was to bring "clearly into focus the truth of the [A]boriginal mind" for people who knew very little about indigenous Australians.⁹⁰

Under the strain of these contradictory projects Dean's claims to authenticity began to mix uncomfortably with her acts of interpretation. In order for Aboriginal culture to offer the ancestral authority demanded for a legitimate claim to cultural distinctiveness, its product had to be authentic. However, to satisfy the necessary criteria for a place as a work of art in a Western context the work had to reflect an innovative process revealed through personal interpretation. How could one interpret

⁸⁸ *Tempo & Television*, Vol. 17, No. 5, February, 1954, 1.

⁸⁹ Beth Dean and Victor Carell, "In search of Stone-Age Dancing", *Walkabout*, May 1st, 1955, 15-20.

⁹⁰ Dean, 1966, *op. cit.*, 13

the authentic? This was Dean's constant dilemma throughout her association with the Antill music over the next twenty years.

Beth Dean reproduced *Corroboree* in 1958 for the Australian country tour. She was also involved in the creation of *Burrangorang Dream Time* to a John Antill score in 1959 and choreographed *First Boomerang* and *The Birth of the Waratah* for *Dream Time Legends* which were performed during the Pageant of Nationhood in honour of Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh on their 1963 tour. These pieces were filmed two years later for ABC TV and screened on Australia Day. In 1968 she produced *Kukaitcha* for the Cultural Olympics in Mexico. This ballet was based on a story which appeared in her husband's book *Naked We Were Born*, which told of:

...the happenings that occurred during the walkabout of an old song man accompanied by a didgeridoo player. In the traditional manner he tells of a ritual spearing. Aboriginal tribal sanctions are invoked by Kukaitcha, the old Wiseman, the leader, against Wura, a young woman who witnessed forbidden sacred ceremonies and handled forbidden churinga.⁹¹

Russell Drysdale designed the set for this piece and Desmonde Downing created the costumes. For the music Dean used "authentic taped didgeridoo, vocal sounds, songs and beating sticks from Arnhem Land."⁹² From 1970 both Dean and Victor Carell became involved in the promotion of the dance traditions of the South Sea Islands. Dancers from Fiji, the Cook Islands, Tonga, Niue, Suva, Easter Island, and the Solomon Islands, along with Maori dancers from New Zealand and Aboriginal performers from Bathurst Island, Mornington Island, Tirkkala, Port Keats, and Millingimbi, performed in *The Ballet of the South Pacific* which was promoted by J.C. Williamson, the government of the Cook Islands, and the Aboriginal Dancers of Australia. This show was produced by Victor Carell and ran in conjunction with the

⁹¹ Beth Dean, "String Quartets and Didgeridoos", *Masque*, No.7, December, 1968, 13

⁹² *Ibid.*

Captain Cook Bicentennial celebrations where Dean's *Corroboree* was also reproduced.⁹³

The recreation of *Corroboree* in 1977 shows how Dean's insistence on authenticity had become a liability in the changing social and cultural back drop of the times. When Dean offered *Corroboree* to the Australia Council for the Arts for the Cook bicentenary she was dismayed when she received, along with an expression of interest from Dr H.C. (Nugget) Coombs, the suggestion that the Aboriginal parts be filled by local Aboriginal people rather than white dancers. In reply to this request Dean told Coombs:

...you must be aware that, except for possibly a handful who may have been down in recent years, [Urban Aboriginal people] are not culturally [A]boriginal. Except for their small percentage of [A]boriginal blood they are between two worlds. They have been away from their culture for many generations and know nothing of their people's traditional dance and song. On the other hand there are a large number of very good [A]boriginal dancers in the Northern Territory and Arnhem land and Central Australia, who continue to perform their age old art forms.⁹⁴

Despite Coomb's request, Dean did not feel any pressing need to use these latter dancers in her work, and the idea of teaching untrained, urban Aboriginal people the dances of Arnhem land obviously also held little appeal. Instead she persisted with her use of European trained modern and classical dancers making only one concession to the changing sensibilities of the 1970s - she gave the part of the initiate to Ronne Arnold. Arnold, an African-American dancer who had arrived in Australia with the 1960 tour of the musical *West Side Story*, had made Australia his home when the show closed. He may not have been Aboriginal but at least he was a bloke and black.

That by 1970 a request for an adjustment to the casting of *Corroboree* could be made from official circles attests to the changing social and political climate

⁹³ In 1972 Beth Dean and Victor Carell also became involved in the creation and promotion of the South Pacific Festival of the Arts held in Suva, Fiji in 1972. See Boxes 16, 17, 19, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

⁹⁴ Letter from Beth Dean to H.C. Coombs, dated August 8th 1969. Letter located in Folder 5, Box 46, Beth Dean collection, Australian Museum archives, ACT.

experienced in Australia since the ballet's first production in 1950. Admittedly Nugget Coombs was an enlightened politician when it came to Aboriginal affairs but during the fifties and sixties it had become obvious to many white Australians that the indigenous population of Australia was not inevitably headed for their 'natural' (or assisted) demise through extinction or assimilation as predicted. It was during the 1950s that Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples began to actively question their low social, economic, and political status. With the assistance of white 'fellow travellers' who helped form organisations such as the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement and the Aboriginal-Australia Fellowship in the late fifties⁹⁵, the very idea of the appropriation and/or interpretation of Aboriginal culture by non-Aboriginal people began to lose its political and cultural validity by the end of the decade.

Across this period Aboriginal people became more visible in white society with collective moves against discrimination and an organised battle for citizenship. These issues became central in Australia's political and social life with Aboriginal people demanding the right to 'integrate' rather than 'assimilate'.⁹⁶ Organisations such as the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement insisted that a process of integration would help Aboriginal people acquire full and equal citizenship while at the same time preserving their cultural distinctiveness. A constitutional referendum in 1967 saw Aboriginal people gain equal status as citizens through the abolishment of section 127 of the Constitution which had excluded them from being counted in Government census. This referendum also transferred the power to legislate for Aboriginal people from the states to federal parliament.⁹⁷ With these changes,

⁹⁵For more on the history and structure of these organisations see: Faith Bandler and Len Fox, *The Time is Ripe*, Alternative Publishing Co-operative Ltd, Sydney, 1983 and pamphlet of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement. Copy of pamphlet located in Folder "Aborigines", Box 8, Margaret Barr papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ John Rickard, *Australia: a Cultural History*, Longman, London, 1988, 236-238.

appropriations of indigenous culture continued but they became harder and harder to justify.

One particular dance event symbolised the beginning of the end for the development of a national dance form based around the appropriation of indigenous culture by non-Aboriginal people; the tour of what came to be called The Aboriginal Theatre. This dance/theatre group was comprised of performers from Bathurst Island, Yirrkala and Daly River brought together under the direction of Stephan Haag of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. With these performances actual Aboriginal bodies began reclaiming their ancestral art, and as these dancers performed on the proscenium arches of major theatres in Sydney and Melbourne in 1963 they drove a preliminary wedge between acts of cultural appropriation and claims to authenticity.

What is interesting about the reception of the newly formed Aboriginal dance theatre was that once the product had been returned to the producers the movement vocabulary which had formally been touted as a source of a distinctively Australian art form during the 1950s (when performed by white dancers) was re-aligned to more exclusive associations with the 'primitive'; of anthropological rather than artistic interest. Articles heralding the arrival of Stephan Haag's Aboriginal Theatre trace this realignment.

Sydney's Wallace Crouch offered the readers of the Daily Telegraph this introduction to the Aboriginal Dance Theatre:

The audience will see 43 men and two women, black as coal, whirl, twist and stamp, their bodies and faces coated in ochre, naked except for *nagas* (loincloths), heads and arms bedecked with wildgoose and parakeet feathers. The theatre will echo to a tumult of noise ancient tribal sing-songs sounding like Gregorian chants. And piercing cries and roars and Kookaburra-like laughs as men mimic the creatures and birds of their scorched dry homeland.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Wallace Crouch, "Arnhem Land Comes to Newtown", Daily Telegraph, 27th November, 1963. Article located Box 12, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.



Fig. 28. The Aboriginal Theatre arrive in Sydney. Daily Telegraph, 2nd December, 1963. (Courtesy of the Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia).



Fig. 29. The Aboriginal Theatre. Photographer David Beal. (Courtesy of the Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia).



Fig. 30. The Aboriginal Theatre. Photographer David Beal. (Courtesy of the Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia).

As this review suggests, authenticity was once again the order of the day, but this time it was the ‘full-blood’ status of the performers (along with a back drop made up of vegetation imported from the Northern Territory which wilted as the performances progressed), that provided this quality. On seeing the performances of the Aboriginal Theatre in Melbourne Geoffrey Hutton of The Age was amazed by the “subtlety and complete sense of absorption” displayed by the performers. The music’s rhythm was “more fundamental than melody”⁹⁹ and the dancers moved instinctively “as though driven by a single current”.¹⁰⁰ They were “natural” choreographers and “splendidly relaxed mimes”.¹⁰¹ Another critic described the opening of The Aboriginal Theatre performance at the Tivoli in this way:

The high-pitched clash of beaten sticks rings out rhythmically from the darkness. Light grows on a small huddle of [A]borigines rubbing smoke and sparks from firesticks and tinder. Shadows resolve into the fronds and tufts of scrub on an Arnhem Land Shoreline. Sudden sun light catches the superb figure of a hunter balanced one-legged on a rock, pride and watchfulness in every line of his body, a freshly killed kangaroo slung across his shoulders. It is the beginning of “The Aboriginal Theatre”...¹⁰²

This image of the stately Aboriginal perched on a rocky outcrop harked back to images of the ‘noble savage’; a classic representation which had been a popular for all indigenous peoples in Western societies for decades.¹⁰³ As Ann Marie Willis has

⁹⁹ Geoffrey Hutton, “Aboriginal Ballet a Genuine Art”, The Age, 15th November, 1963. Article locate Box 12, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

¹⁰⁰ “The Aboriginal Theatre”, manuscript notes for Brissenden and Glennon’s “Australia Dances”, Folder 1, Box 1, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia. .

¹⁰¹ Hutton, op. cit.,

¹⁰² “R.C”, “Aboriginal Theatre”, Sydney Morning Herald, 6th December, 1963. Article located Box 12, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

¹⁰³ Interest in these dancers was widespread and the constructions offered by the Sydney and Melbourne papers included not only the classic ‘noble savage’, but also the ‘bush larrikin’ - that laid back, undaunted bloke who was bemused by the city and all the fuss. This latter image was particularly favoured by the Daily Telegraph and the Daily Mirror. See Ron Saw, “Dreamtime ballet: Aboriginals will dance for Sydney”, Daily Mirror, 4th December, 1963, article located in Box 12 Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia, and Crouch, op. cit. Despite this variation, all papers debated the issue of authenticity, most coming to

suggested, this image has never been one which offered power and control for the group it portrayed. It was instead a “crude nationalistic trope” in which a powerless individual “gazes into the future while being rooted in the past”. What was being evoked through this proud and watchful hunter was not an “Aboriginal future for the nation” but rather an image of Aboriginality which was overlaid with meaning for the white culture it served.¹⁰⁴ The noble savage was a tamed representation of Aboriginality, conveniently devoid of challenge. It served a similar function to that offered by 19th century visual representations of Aboriginal corroborees by white painters. It controlled and dissipated the fear of the ‘primitive’ and re-allocated the power with those for whom the image was being created. The noble savage served as a reminder of white Australia’s legitimate membership of the ‘civilised’ world, but it also offered a romantic challenge to that same civilising process. The Aboriginal standing on a rock, spear in hand, was yet another representation of what Dean had called, the “primal core that stretches... taut and unbroken... to the beginning of time”.¹⁰⁵

Beth Dean, as we shall see in chapter seven, was not the only choreographer who actively pursued a relationship between Aboriginality and national identity in dance. In fact, indigenous practices have become a potent source in the search for a distinctive, local dance form over the past forty years. Following the impact of The Aboriginal Theatre, dance companies such as the Wooera Dance Teams, Latje Latje Dance Group, Doonooch Dancers, Tjapikai Dance Theatre, the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre, Bangarra, and Naroo have been responsible for the creation,

the conclusion that The Aboriginal Theatre was about as authentic as you could get. See “Authentic”, *The Bulletin*, 14 December 1963; “Stone Age Flies Into Jet Age”, *Daily Telegraph*, 2nd December, 1963; “Corroboree of the Dreamtime: Modern Setting got Stone-Age Dance”, *The Age*, 14th November, 1963. These articles located in Box 12, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

¹⁰⁴ “R.C”, “Aboriginal Theatre”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6th December, 1963. Article located in Box 12, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

¹⁰⁵ Beth Dean, “Tempo of the Jungle”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, no date. Article located in Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

performance and adaptation of indigenous movement.¹⁰⁶ What is ironic is the fact that a society so reluctant to redress historical injustices visited on Aboriginal people, enthusiastically embraces their cultural products, even to the point of declaring them central to the understanding of a local national identity. Culture is, it seems, a safer place from which to accord indigenous people a central location.

Despite the gradual reclamation of the movement vocabularies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures by indigenous dancers, choreographers, and the companies listed above, Aboriginal themes continued to attract non-Aboriginal artists. Kinetic Energy's Graham Jones produced *Visionary Figures* in 1976. This work was based on images from Aboriginal rock paintings. John Antill's *Corroboree* has also inspired choreographers other than Beth Dean. Elizabeth Dalman created her version for the Australian Dance Theatre in 1971. Stanton Welch produced his *Corroboree* in 1995 for the United We Dance Festival in San Francisco (organised to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations charter). Reviewer for the New York magazine *Attitude* told readers that Welch's *Corroboree* had the feeling of a "native ritual". Similarly, American critic Leland Windreich declared the ballet a "whitened version of an Aboriginal ritual" which amounted to "little more than tourist kitsch". Despite the fact that these American critics were in no doubt as to the indigenous inspiration for the piece, Welch himself insisted that he "never thought of his piece as an Aboriginal work". He claimed instead that the piece had an "urban tribal" theme.

To date Stanton Welch's *Corroboree* has not been seen in Australia. There may be numerous reasons for this, but undoubtedly the political minefield surrounding intellectual, artistic, and cultural property rights within Aboriginal cultural industries has had something to do with its absence from the Australian Ballet's local repertoire.

¹⁰⁶ For a description of the formation of these companies see Carole Johnson, "Australian Indigenous Dance Companies", in Aline Scott-Maxwell and John Whiteoak, eds., *Companion to Music and Dance in Australia*, Currency Press, Sydney, forthcoming publication, 1999.

In the 1970s the borrowing of Aboriginal motif and imagery had gradually become less possible; in the nineties acts of appropriation have become highly problematic.¹⁰⁷

However, to a certain, acts of appropriation paved the way for reclamation. Beth Dean's adventures into the dance vocabularies of Arnhem land encouraged dancers, choreographers, funding bodies, and audiences to see Aboriginal dance as more than an anthropological curiosity. Her attempted reconciliation of appropriation, interpretation, and authenticity seems highly inappropriate today, but nevertheless, Dean's work provided a place where western constructions of artistic excellence and the distinctive movement vocabularies of Australia's indigenous peoples could be seen as complementary. Attempting a balance between authenticity, appropriation, and innovation proved impossible, but it was at that very point where these processes could no longer accommodate one another that indigenous people could be reunited with their own heritage, and their actual bodies, as well as their culture, could eventually be offered to the Australian public as a representation of a unified, local past and a unique, local present.¹⁰⁸

As we have seen throughout this and the previous chapter, the impact of the primitive or the exotic on Australian dance has been profound. The dance practices of visiting artists challenged the way Australian's understood what dance could be, where it could come from, and what it could mean. But these were foreign bodies and foreign techniques, safely separate from Home. Although their exoticism leached out of their 'Otherness' infecting the local dance community, it was the masquerade of

¹⁰⁷ Although the exchange of dances occurs between urban and tribal Aboriginal groups in the contemporary dance world, appropriation would not be an appropriate term to describe this process. For example, the exchange that occurs between a company like Bangarra and the Yirrkala people, is circumscribed by respect, reciprocity, and a process of negotiation which has been established between the urban Aboriginal dance company, the people of Yirrkala, and the general Aboriginal community. Equally the use of Western traditions by Aboriginal people is not equal to appropriation because, as Carole Johnson has suggested, the power relationship does not reflect that which exists when the dominant borrows from the oppressed. See, Johnson and Card, op. cit.

¹⁰⁸ Maxine Ewert, "Dance History of South Australia. Can Modern Dance Exist in South Australia: the ramifications of government subsidies", BA Honours Thesis, Social Sciences Department, Flinders University, Adelaide, 1988; Leland Windreich, "Reviews: San Francisco", *Dance International*, Vol. XXIII, No.2, Summer 1995, 47; Promotional material for exhibition *Dance People Dance*, Michelle Potter (curator), National Library of Australia, 1997; *Australian Ballet News*, 8, 1995, 3. For more on Stanton Welch's *Corroboree* see Potter, 1996, op. cit, 18-20

Rex Reid's *Corroboree*, Beth Dean's hybrid movement vocabulary, and local indigenous dancers from companies like The Aboriginal Theatre, that changed the way Australia understood the 'local' in dance practice. Aboriginality, once a thing to be ridiculed, feared, or parodied, had become a legitimate site for the display of local particularity; to the point in the 1990s where Aboriginal dancers have found themselves at the core rather than on the periphery, highly visible rather than invisible, and central to the celebration of a national heritage.

Chapter Five

The “Great articulation of the inarticulate”¹: reading the jazz body, 1940-1970.

In 1957 *People* magazine declared, in a blaze of jungle type, that Australian dance had “Gone All Primitive”. Choreographers of musical comedy had found themselves hypnotised by rhythms of Africa, “inspired by the African Negro and his music”.² As Bryan Fraser told his readers, this new style was called “modern jazz” but “the link with the jungle is so close that the throb of the tomtoms comes right over the footlights”.³ This “sophisticated native dancing”, which had “more than a suggestion of the deep passions that move primitive people to dance for days and nights on end”⁴ was first observed by Fraser at rehearsals for J.C. Williamson’s production of the American musical *The Pajama Game*.

Betty Pounder, dance mistress for J.C. Williamson, agreed with Fraser’s assessment of this new dance form. She had just returned from New York where she had observed an increasing “African” influence on choreographers and professional dancers.⁵ This was also the case on the social dance scene. Swap the dance floor for “jungle clearings” and, Pounder suggested, these “less disciplined versions” of the new jazz style could also have easily passed for “tribal dances”.⁶

The influence of the primitive, the exotic, and the indigenous on the practices of Expressive, modern, and classical choreographers has been discussed at length in the last two chapters. In this chapter we will explore another space where the

¹ Jack Cole, dancer and jazz choreographer in America from the 1940s to the 1960s, described jazz as an “urban folk” tradition. It “reflected the society that gave it birth”. It was the “great articulation of the inarticulate”. See Clayton Cole, “Its all gone silly”, *Dance Magazine*, December, 1963, reprinted in Gus Giordano, *Anthology of American Jazz Dance*, Orion Publishing, New York, 1986, 72-73

² Bryan Fraser, “Its Gone all Primitive”, *People*, 4th September, 1957, 13-16

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Although Pounder saw this influence as coming from Africa, that continents culture had been filtered through the African American experience. Pounder was therefore seeing, as this chapter will illustrate, the influence of African American culture on dance.

⁶ Fraser, *op. cit.*, 13-16

'primitive' had a profound affect - the popular stage. Here the rhythms of African American slave culture, which combined the principles of African music with that of their European oppressors, travelled over the Pacific and affected the bodies of Australian dancers in the 1950s and 1960s.

Betty Pounder's association with jazz in general, and *Pajama Game* in particular, had begun in 1957. The Firm, as J. C. Williamson was also known, sent Pounder across to Broadway to observe this musical first hand. Her task was to bring home a carbon copy for a season at Melbourne's Her Majesty's and Sydney's Empire Theatres. When Pounder first saw the show she was convinced that J.C. Williamson did not need to import an American cast for their Australian run. Normally the Firm had duplicated their purchases from Broadway right down to the American birth certificates of the majority of the cast, but when Pounder saw *The Pajama Game* she felt sure that the dancers, actors and singers she knew back in Australia could carry it off as well, if not better, than any second string cast the Americans could muster. Willing to take a punt on Pounder's recommendations J.C. Williamson agreed to supply local talent, as long as the right candidates could be found, artists who could not only dance but also sing and act.⁷

This situation was new to musical comedy circles. In the days when Betty Pounder was a performer with J.C. Williamson, dancers for musicals were employed as part of a '*corps de ballet*'. This group remained with the company from one season's show to the next. Pounder affectionately called the musicals they performed under these contracts in the forties and fifties, 'revivals'⁸. With a change of wig and costume, dancers would be carried from one revival musical to the next, their numbers serving as interludes between the action rather than being essential components of the plot. In these circumstances, dancers had to be 'all rounders', proficient in tap, acrobatics, and able to keep up in a chorus line. Classical ballet was also a pre-requisite as Williamson's ballet mistress at the time, Hazel Meldrum, often

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

threw in a 'pointe ballet' for good measure. These classical interludes had little relevance to the plot, but they did offer the musical a 'touch of class'.

When the new integrated musical arrived via Broadway this association between the performer and the show began to alter.⁹ With this style of performance - *The Pajama Game* being one example, but *Okalahoma!* (1949)¹⁰ the most celebrated, along with *Annie Get Your Gun* (1947), *Kiss Me Kate* (1951), *South Pacific* (1953), *Kismet* (1956)¹¹ - the singer/actor had to also be an excellent, or at least proficient, dancer and vice-versa. This meant a dramatic change in the process of casting for musical comedy. Characters became associated with particular people and a specific look. Once the integrated musical became the accepted norm, casting had to be made on 'type' as well as talent.

One particular casting problem for *The Pajama Game* in Australia was finding the right person to play Gladys, the mad-cap secretary at the pyjama factory. Carole Haney had put her stamp on the part in New York and when Joyce (Tikki) Taylor was chosen for the role in Australia she had to endure a complete make-over.¹² Taylor had been picked for the part while playing the lead in the Firm's *Can-Can* in New Zealand. Fred Herbert, the American producer assisting Pounder with the mounting of the show, saw potential in Taylor and he set about re-fashioning her in the image of her Broadway counterpart.¹³ To achieve this transformation Taylor's long blonde hair was cut into "a Leslie Caron crop"¹⁴, also known as an "Idiot Boy" hair cut, and her

⁹ For more on the integrated musical see Jerome Delamater, *Dance and the Hollywood Musical*, UMI Research, 1981, Michigan, 97-132; and Christina L. Schlundt, "Jerome Robbins and his contribution to the theatre of musical comedy", in Glenn Lovey, ed., *Musical Theatre in America*, Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 1984, 331-337

¹⁰ These years are the opening dates for the musicals in Australia.

¹¹ Many of these 'integrated' productions integrated the *dances* but not *dancers*. Although it is true that movement supported the dramatic progression of the plot, this phenomenon was often achieved through dream sequences, as in *Okalahoma* where the singing character of Laurey was replaced by her dancing alter ego. This was not the case in productions like *The Pajama Game* where singer/actors also danced.

¹² Joyce Taylor is almost always referred to by her stage name Tikki Taylor in the 1950s. A reference to her christened name appears in Harold Love, ed., *The Australian Stage: a documentary history*, New South Wales University Press, Sydney, 1984, 236

¹³ Carol Haney also played the part of Gladys in the 1957 film of *The Pajama Game* which appeared later that same year in Australia.

¹⁴ *Tempo & Television*, December/January, 1957/8, 27

make-up was adjusted. Herbert and Pounder also taught her how to sing, dance, walk, and talk like Haney. In fact, as *Tempo & Television* stated, they made “a *new woman* of her”, transforming Tikki Taylor into a cute little “show stealer”.¹⁵

Before Tikki Taylor and the rest of the Australian cast which included Taylor’s husband John Newman, Toni Lamond, Keith Petersen, Jill Perryman, Don Richards, and Reginald Newson, could bring this musical to Australian audiences, Betty Pounder had to learn everything she could about *The Pajama Game*. The cast may have been Australian, but the production had to be a carbon copy of the American original. This authenticity was not only stipulated by the American producers of the show but also dictated by the expectations of the Australian public. These musicals were, first and foremost, American; a fact that was promoted as an attractive asset by J.C. Williamson. Advanced publicity for the Sydney season of *The Pajama Game* highlighted the fact that this show, which had run for three years with “more than 1,000 performances” on Broadway, was to be under the “personal supervision” of not only Pounder but also Fred Herbert, who had been stage-director for two years on the original version in New York. It was his task to make sure the show was “exactly modelled on the original Broadway version”. As J.C. Williamson assured the public, the Australian production would capture “all the swing and laughter and colour of the overseas success”.¹⁶ It would be, in short, completely authentic.

Arriving at the Schubert Theatre in New York at the end of 1956, Pounder found no one prepared to teach her the musical numbers or the staging for the show. Some of the dancers, and Fred Herbert, did what they could to help, but Pounder still found herself, night after night, standing in the dark at the back of the stalls scribbling steps and staging on scraps of paper. She developed her own shorthand; “o” for girls and “x” for boys. After the show she would return to her hotel room and decipher her

¹⁵ “For Tikki, the show always goes on”, *Tempo & Television*, July, 1957, 9

¹⁶ Advanced publicity for *The Pajama Game* at The Empire Theatre Sydney. J.C. Williamson papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

scrawls and squiggles, block what she could read and remember, then return the next night to record what she had missed. She saw *The Pajama Game* eight times.¹⁷

Although Pounder had encountered 'jazz' in dance before, through the successful tours to Australia of Katherine Dunham and her company in 1956¹⁸, Bob Fosse's choreography had a style all its own. It was the first time Pounder had seen, what she termed, a new form of jazz dance, and it made a deep impression on her.¹⁹ Fosse's "small tight movements, parallel legs and sharp head movements" were fascinating to watch but difficult to replicate. This was because Fosse's movement vocabulary was formulated from both African-American and European dance traditions. It linked the poise and control of classical ballet with the humour and absurdity of the vaudeville stage and the syncopation and isolation found in African-American dance. The referencing of such disparate styles was what gave his work its edge and excitement. The 'jazz feel' in Fosse's movement vocabulary - its explosive energy and its sense of 'swing' or 'cool' - came primarily from principles embedded in African-American music, particularly jazz and rhythm & blues.

These styles had their origins in a combination of African and European cultural elements. They were a rich mix of rhythmic, tonic and muscular conflict.²⁰ The tension which emerged from the mixing of slave culture and ideas of social and physical propriety within the ruling white communities created a very particular style within African American music and dance. The musicologist/sociologist John Shepherd has suggested that this tension can be directly attributed to the hybridity of

¹⁷ *Betty Pounder* (video), Australian Arts Council Archive Series, AFI Distribution Ltd, Peter Campbell (producer), James Murdoch (Interviewer), November, 1988. Pounder is reputed to have had a photographic memory when it came to dance steps. This could explain her ability to pick up the intricacies of Bob Fosse's choreography after only seeing the production 8 times. However, Pounder also admitted to Jean Garling in July 1957 that she "pepped up" some of the group dance sequences because she found them too wedded to characterisation rather than making the most of the overall visual affect. What licence Pounder did take with the choreography is unclear, but there was probably a moderate amount of interpretation of the original movement vocabulary. See Jean Garling, "Pajama Game Choreographer", *Tempo & Television*, July, 1957, 35

¹⁸ *Betty Pounder* (video), op. cit.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ For a discussion of the development of African American culture both during and after slavery see Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977.

African-American culture.²¹ Shepherd's discussion centres around music but is useful when attempting to examine a similar tension evident in much of the jazz dance which will be discussed throughout this chapter. Rhythms embedded in jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock-'n'-roll have usually accommodated, what Shepherd calls, a divisive metre framework which is also known as functional tonality in Western classical music. This tonal emphasis is characterised by the use of 4/4 or, the less regularly, 3/4 time signatures.²² What differs in African-American music (and its derivatives) is the fact that the stress patterns in this rhythmic metre continue to reflect an African musical heritage. Instead of stressing the first and (to lesser degree) the third beat in the bar, as is usual in traditional functional tonal music (1 2 3 4), African-American music often stresses the second and fourth beat (1 2 3 4). When listening to this different rhythmic structure, which often has an added stress pattern overlaid on the basic rhythm, the listener:

...gains the feeling that the legacy of additive metre is trying to break out of the constraining divisive metre derived from or imposed by functional tonality.²³

This "breaking out" is further emphasised by a rhythmic inflection derived from African music in which the blues, jazz or rock-'n'-roll musician may play "on top" of the regular beat or "lay back" behind that beat rather than falling exactly on the beat as is often the case when functional tonal music patterns are followed. This retarding or interruption of action is occasionally made more dramatic by suspending the creation of sound all together, and for extended periods of time. As Henry Louis

²¹ John Shepherd, *Music as Social Text*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991, 128-9.

²² Even in developments within jazz which used the irregular metre, the use of 5/4, 19/4 or 172/8 time signatures can be reduced, as Michael J. Budds has suggested, to composites of western rhythmic structures. Budds locates these innovations in the jazz movements of the 1960s and illustrates his point by offering the metre structure of Don Ellis's "New Nine" from his *Live at Monterey* album. As he suggests "the subdivisions of the unit measure are derived from permutations of the binary, ternary groupings of the nine component beats of each measure: 2-2-2-3, 2-2-3-2, 2-3-2-2, 3-2-2-2, 3-3-3." Michael J. Budds, *Jazz in the Sixties: The Expansion of Musical Resources and Techniques*, University of Iowa Press, Iowa, 1990, 64

²³ Shepherd, *op. cit.*, 131

Gates has suggested, these silences imply the beat²⁴ but they also help to place an anxiety or tension within African-American music.

Another area where African traditions impinge on European structures is in the articulation of melody and metre. African American music pushes notes out of shape by 'bending' them and often uses a pentatonic scale (made up of 5 notes) rather than diatonic (7) or chromatic (12) scales. Harmonically this type of music uses a basic functional tonal framework but musicians are prone to moving and sliding around, and within, that frame. This has often been illustrated by the use of 'dirty' timbres. These are timbres which are "much more rasping and nasal in character" than those usually summonsed from a musical instrument played by a traditional Western musician. There the tonal qualities of the instrument are usually "'clean' and stable".²⁵

As Shepherd suggests:

Musicians studying in Western conservatoriums spend much time learning to coax the 'correct' tone from their instrument or voice. Much African music is marked not only by dirty timbres.. but by timbres which have highly personal characteristics. ²⁶

African American musicians also use, what John Gennari describes as, "higher extensions of a chord to rationalise the use of notes that had previously been called 'wrong'" ²⁷

This dialogue between the African and European elements in African-American music is a source of excitement and tension which arises most predominantly in a musical form like jazz. Tensions created through competing inspirational derivatives are also evident in the various dance forms which have been labelled 'jazz' in western dance practices since the late 19th century. As French

²⁴ Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Signifying Monkey: a Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988, xxvii. See also Robert Walser, "'Out of Notes': Signification, Interpretation and the Problem of Miles Davis", in Krin Gabbard, ed., *Jazz Among the Discourses*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1995, 176-177

²⁵ Shepherd, op., cit., 130

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ John Gennari, "Jazz Criticism: Its Development and Ideologies", *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 25, No. 3, Fall, 1991, 4

writer, artist and historian Laurence Louppe has observed, the jazz dancer combines the “vertical pulsation and Baroque syncopation of the west with the lateralized power of African movement” which has resulted in a “new culture expressed in new ‘modes’”, rather than “just the enactment of juxtaposed motive figures.”²⁸ Although the source of syncopation in jazz dance was more likely to owe its allegiance to African rhythmic structures than the Baroque, Louppe’s observation that these two forces are at work in the one technique is illuminating. This “vertical pulsation” combined with that “lateralized power” is the source of physical tension in many jazz vocabularies. It has been a dominant inspiration in the work of many 20th century choreographers in western theatrical dance practices (from the popular to the modern and classical stage) for the majority of the twentieth century, and it was the back bone of the Fosse style. These were also the elements which Betty Ponder found so fascinating but so difficult to reproduce. The dance “Steam Heat” from the *Pajama Game* was a case in point.

The movement vocabulary used in this number illustrates perfectly not only Fosse’s particular style but also some of the essential principles which combined to make up the ‘jazz body’ from the twenties through the 1960s. There were the broken angular limbs, the hunched upper body, the collapsed isolated joints, and the staccato movement of the feet. All these elements rotated around a lifted, articulated centre.

As with the music from which it took its name, this jazz body was also characterised by the use of syncopation and isolation. When watching Carole Haney, Buzz Miller and Eddie Phillips dance “Steam Heat” in the movie of the *Pajama Game* (1957) (seen in figs. 31-33), one is struck by the way the dancers were always catching their movement, holding back the execution of a step, retarding their motion until they almost trip themselves up, and using the next movement to recover their

²⁸ Laurence Louppe, “Hybrid Bodies”, *Writings on Dance*, 15, Winter, 1996, 63



Fig. 31. "Steam Heat" *Pajama Game* (1957).
Note here the hunched shoulders and contracted ribs.



Fig. 32. "Steam Heat" *Pajama Game* (1957).
Note here the hunched shoulders and the isolation of the knee.



Fig. 33. "Steam Heat" *Pajama Game* (1957).
Note here the isolated supporting knee and alternate isolation of the working hip.

balance.²⁹ As the American dancer and film maker Mura Dehn observed in 1946, “the pause” in jazz was never simply an “empty waiting time, but a stop charged with held rhythm and energy.” For Dehn this was what gave jazz “such a contagious quality”:

The movement, no matter how explosive, has not used itself to the end.
There is always a reserve.³⁰

This use of stillness or hesitation added to the tension which circulated in the jazz body Fosse created. Reflecting on his choreographic style in later life, Fosse recalled that he had learnt the value of inaction not only from watching other choreographers but also from his work with the director Sandy Meisner. Meisner had a poster on the wall which said “Don’t say something stand there”. Fosse found that this process applied to dance as well:

I found out in choreography, frequently, that less movement, more economical movement, or no movement all makes a stronger statement than frenzied activity.³¹

This physical syncopation favoured by Fosse was then contrasted with an abandonment of energy which exploded into the limbs, only to be reined in almost immediately by a drawing of that energy to the centre which restored the body’s composure through a contraction after that explosive release of energy. Although Fosse’s work was very different from anything Pounder had encountered before, these same elements had been evident in jazz dance long before Bob Fosse began to emulate them.

²⁹ See *The Pajama Game* (Video), George Abbott and Stanley Donen (director/producers), Warner Bros., 1957. These same elements can be seen in other examples of Fosse’s early work which are available for viewing on commercial videos such as *Kiss Me Kate*, director George Sidney, 1953; *Damn Yankees*, Producer/ directors George Abbott and Stanley Donen, Warner Bros, 1958; and *Sweet Charity*, director Bob Fosse, Universal, 1968. Choreography for *Kiss Me Kate* is attributed to Hermes Pan however Fosse’s former wife, dancer Gwen Verdon, suggests that Pan allowed Fosse to choreograph his own dance sequences throughout the film, see *Bob Fosse* (television special), Judy Kinberg (producer), WNet/Thirteen Productions, United States, 1990. All figures in this chapter were with QVideo Snap Magic Video Frame Grabber.

³⁰ Mura Dehn, “More Respect for the Clown”, *Dance Magazine*, March 1946, 45

³¹ *Bob Fosse* (video), op. cit.

In dances like the Lindy Hop³², practiced in the dance halls of Harlem in the 1930s and early '40s, these same principles of syncopation, isolation, angularity, and staccato execution (with outbursts of energy circumscribed by a restrained articulated centre) were already present.³³ In the Lindy the performer's limbs did not adhere to the controlled arrangement dictated by traditional western dance practice. The combination and juxtaposition of lateral and vertical movement made this dance look wild, energised and out of control. However, in order to allow such freedom of extension the centre of the body (the abdomen and stomach) needed to be strongly composed and lifted. The lateral angle of the upper body and the staccato swinging of the lower leg were counter balanced by a lifted centre (see fig. 34).³⁴

Many Lindy dancers also worked to the beat rather than the melody in the music they danced to. If the beat slid around so did the dancer. Leon James, recalling his time at the Savoy dancing to the music of Dizzy Gillespie, illustrated the dialogue that could take place between dancer and musician when he told Gerald Jones:

Every time [Gillespie] played a crazy lick, we cut a crazy step to go with it. And he dug us and blew even crazier stuff to see if we could dance to it... [This became], a kind of game, with the musicians and dancers challenging each other.³⁵

Not all dances at the Savoy were as frenetic and energetic as the Lindy. To a slower beat the same loose limbs could swing languidly around a controlled, lifted centre. The 'cool' exterior of this jazz body hid a 'hot' interior of controlled energy.³⁶

³² For a more detailed discussion of the Lindy Hop see Barbara Engelbrecht, "Swinging at the Savoy", *Dance Research Journal*, 15/2, Spring, 1983, 3-10

³³ Jazz elements were evident within popular social dance practices in both black and white communities well before the 1930s, with the cake walk and other jazz inspired dances. However the combination of the elements described above were more evident within the social dances inspired by changes in jazz music and corresponding dance principles in the late 1930s.

³⁴ For examples of the Lindy Hop see the Marx Brothers movie *A Day at the Races*, MGM, (1937) and the series *Dancing*, (video) Thirteen/ WNet and BBC production, 1993.

³⁵ Gerald Jones, *Dancing: the Power of Dance Around the World*, BBC Books, London, 1993, 179. For more evidence of this relationship between dancers and jazz musicians in this period see Jacqui Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues: the Visible Rhythms of African American Dance*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1996, 101-103.

³⁶ For examples of this style see *Dancing* (video), op. cit.

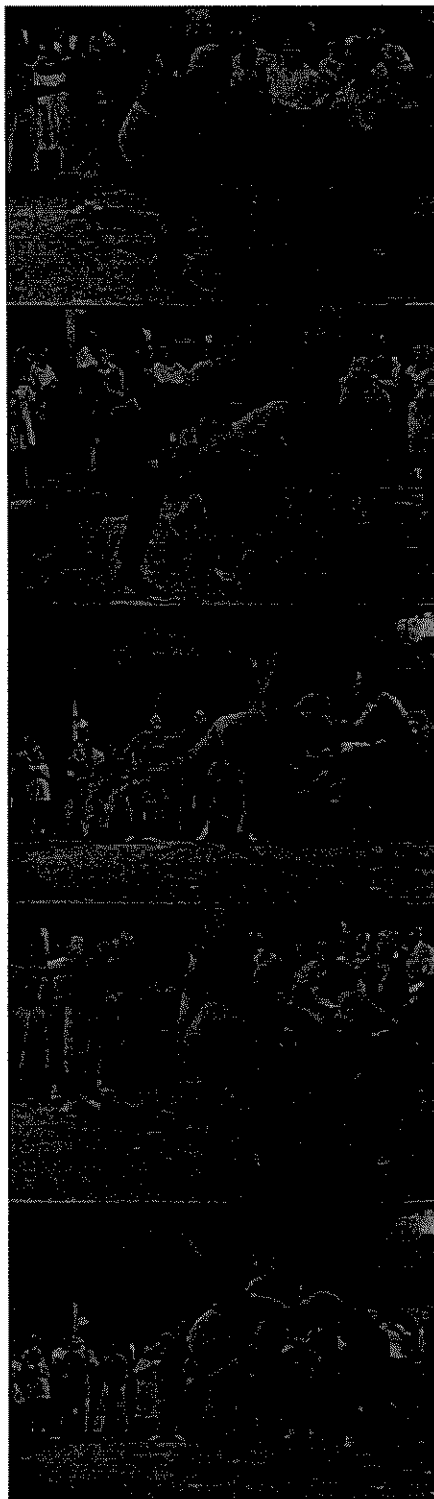


Fig. 34. Whitey's Lindy Hoppers, *A Day at the Races* (1937). Note in this sequence of photographs how the centre of the body remained lifted in order that the dancers limbs could swing freely and their upper torso lean dramatically forward as they executed their moves.

In the 1930s and the early forties styles like the Lindy were not entirely the province of black dancers in black neighbourhoods. Groups of white dancers visited black dance halls like the Savoy learning the steps and trading them within their own communities. Not all white versions of the Lindy adhered to quite the same principles as their Black forms. With dances like 'the Shag' those transplanted movements could become stilted and dry under the gaze of different codes of physical propriety. One white dancer, Ernie Smith, who prided himself in being one of the 'in-crowd' at the Savoy in the late thirties, disparagingly named those who performed these dances the "saddle-shoe set" or "corn huskers". All they did, according to Smith, was a lot of "jumping up and down on the spot". They weren't, what he called, "cool".³⁷

This distinction made between the more sanitised white dances and their ecstatic black forms was not an exclusively American phenomenon. One Australian dancer Lee Neilson, made a definite distinction between the moves she and her partners copied from African-American soldiers stationed in Australia during WWII and those which were more acceptable within the white community. Neilson called the former style the jitterbug. Steps performed to "smoother music" like George Gershwin she called the jive.³⁸ The jive had none of the swing out lifts, over the shoulder, and slide through the legs that characterised the jitterbug in Neilson's world. The "mad jitterbugging" she did at the Albert Palais in Leichhardt or the Marrickville Town Hall (both in Sydney) were performed to what Neilson identified as "real jazz and blues". This was any music to which she and her partners could "boogie". To these freer forms Neilson told the Australian jazz writer John Clare:

³⁷ *Dancing* (video), op. cit.

³⁸ The historian Jon Stratton also confirms that the distinction was made between the jitterbug and its more sedate cousin the jive and suggests that the latter was more acceptable among the majority of white Australian dancing couples during the war. Jon Stratton, *The Young Ones: Working-Class Culture, Consumption and the Category of Youth*, Black Swan Press, Perth, 1992, 94, 134. Barbara Engelbrecht has also suggested that there were two types of Lindy practiced at the Savoy in Harlem - the "floor Lindy" and the "aerial Lindy". Dancers who practiced the "aerial Lindy" (equivalent to the Jitterbug) graduated to what was called the "Cat's Corner" where only the best dancers could strut their stuff. See Engelbrecht, op. cit., 6-7

We'd leave our partner, turn our back and boogie back. It was very sensual, full of stops, hesitations - you'd wait for the music and come in.³⁹

As the painter Donald Friend observed on a trip to Queensland during the Second World War, the influence of American jazz was profound. Though black American service men were restricted to the south side of the river that divided Brisbane (where the only dance hall available to them was the Trocadero⁴⁰), Friend recalled that this city was christened the "American Village". Observing dancers at the Brisbane Town Hall Friend wrote:

I remember how Queensland danced a little while ago: waltzes, two-steps, the Pride of Erin and those Victorian affairs. Now they jitterbug at a terrific speed. Burns and I were hysterical with laughter at the sight; kicking, belly wobbling, bum popping, tapping, wiggling insanely like possessed devils... [the girls] seemed drugged, while their bodies... pulsed erotic contortions of rhythm. The dancing sailors [were] especially abandoned - a direct sexual expression. Every jaw in the hall champed in syncopation on a cud of chewing gum. The few Australian soldiers were pathetic. The girls wouldn't dance with them. They huddled together in a little bunch, staring pop-eyed at the mad witches' sabbath, and swearing furiously.⁴¹

The influence of dances like the Lindy and the Jitterbug did not remain strictly within the confines of the social dance circuit in Australia or the United States. Some dancers took these moves out of their social context and into the realm of performance. In the United States this move had begun to take place in the 1930s. New York's Whitey's Lindy Hoppers, an African-American group of performers who had learnt their craft on the dance floors of Harlem, performed various versions of the Lindy on stage, at exhibitions, and in movies such as *Hellzapoppin'*⁴² and the Marx Brother's *A Day at the Races*.⁴³ Other performers combined these popular dances

³⁹ John Clare and Gail Brennan, *Bodgie Dada and the Cult of Cool*, University of NSW Press, Sydney, 1995, 25

⁴⁰ Stratton, op. cit., 134

⁴¹ Donald Friend, *Painter's Journal*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1946, 23-24. A section of this quote originally cited in David Walker, "The Getting of Manhood", in Peter Spearritt and David Walker, eds., *Australian Popular Culture*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1979, 134

⁴² A sequence from this 1941 Olsen and Johnson movie appears in *Dancing* (video) op. cit.

⁴³ *A Day at the Races*, op. cit. For more on Whitey's Lindy Hoppers see Malone, op. cit., 103-106

with more formalised vocabularies such as classical ballet and modern dance, creating very particular styles in jazz.

One choreographer who experimented with such combinations was a white American, Jack Cole. Like many others, Cole first encountered the Lindy as a fifteen year old at the Savoy Ballroom. He would sneak there after his more formal dance training at the Denishawn school in New York.⁴⁴ From this varied experience Cole gradually developed a hybrid style which appropriated movement not only from the 'Orient', a legacy of one of Denishawn's principals Ruth St Denis⁴⁵, but also from Latin-American and African-American dance traditions.

The tension and excitement which Cole's multiple appropriations stimulated is most obvious in a review of his work by the American critic John Martin when he stated, in 1948:

[Jack Cole's] art is strictly high-tension; it is nervous, gaunt, flagellant, yet with opulent sensuous beauty that sets up a violent cross-current of conflict at its very source...⁴⁶

Describing Cole's dancing Martin also remarked:

.... for all his prodigious expenditure, he always has a smouldering reserve energy; with bent knees he seems ready always to jump.⁴⁷

This internal tension and "smouldering reserve of energy" which Martin observed emerged from Cole's combination of movement styles whose principles worked against each other. Cole accentuated the lifted centre characteristic of classical ballet

⁴⁴ As Russell Gold suggests, the Savoy Ballroom was one of the "most popular public spaces servicing the African American community in Harlem and beyond". A third of the ballrooms clientele were white. Gold suggests that these white Americans came to the Savoy to "enjoy the artistry of the big bands and the thrilling improvisation of the Lindy Hoppers". See Russell Gold, "Guilty of Syncopation, Joy, and Animation: the Closing of Harlem's Savoy Ballroom", in *Studies in Dance History*, Vol. V, No. 1, Spring 1994, 50, 53, 61.

⁴⁵ Denishawn was a school run by Ruth St Denis and Ted Shawn. They had a school in California and New York. For details of Jack Cole's experience at Denishawn see Jerome Delamater, "Interview with Jack Cole", *Dance in the Hollywood Musical*, UMI Research Press, Michigan, 1981, 191-199.

⁴⁶ John Martin "The Dance: Jack Cole", *New York Times*, 1948 reprinted in Gus Giordano, op. cit.,

²⁷

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 28

(or Indian dance⁴⁸) with the syncopation, isolation, and angularity of dances created within the African American, Indian and Latin American communities.⁴⁹ Such referencing was also an essential ingredient in the work of Bob Fosse. Jack Cole was a great influence on Fosse, but the latter also borrowed moves he saw on the bodies of dancers in the local dance halls, in the work of black 'flash' tap acts like the Nicholas Brothers, vaudeville acts, Fred Astaire, and strip tease acts.⁵⁰

That the commercial theatre, both in the United States and Australia, found jazz an appropriate form of expression is not entirely surprising. Musical theatre by its very nature was a hybrid form borrowing from the popular and the classic in order to parody the latter or validate its own existence by its emulation. A classical 'number', or what attempted to pass for one, would, as we saw earlier, often interrupt the narrative in one of J.C. Williamson's revival musicals performed throughout the forties and early fifties. However, what was more unusual than this relationship between the popular and the classic was a dialogue which emerged in dance between the classical and the folk. As we shall see later, when the work of Jerome Robbins is discussed, the adoption of the classical form was thought to add structure to freedom, form to expression, and civilisation to the 'primitive' in jazz; but the latter reciprocated by offering freedom, relevance and popularity to the former.

Beginning in the forties both classical and modern choreographers, many of whom had spent the first three decades of the twentieth century defining their particular forms by rejecting not only each others theories but also the popular,

⁴⁸ "Indian" refers here to the continent of India rather than the dance of Native Americans.

⁴⁹ As Cole worked extensively on Broadway and around the club circuit for much of his career there are very few examples of his work which can be easily accessed today. He choreographed for Marilyn Monroe in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) and *There's No Business Like Show Business* (1954) but these are rather limited examples of his technique due to Monroe's fairly basic talent as a dancer. The musical *Kismet*, director Vincent Minnelli, 1955, is one of the few readily accessible examples of Cole's style. The over-bearing 'Orientalism' of this choreography does not entirely obscure the use of syncopation, isolation and the restrained energy which John Martin described in his reviews. For more on Jack Cole see Kevin Lewis, "Gwen Verdon: the Jack Cole years", *Dance Pages*, Spring, 1992, 28-29; Svea Becker, "Jack Cole in Hollywood", *Proceedings of the 12th Annual conference of the Society of Dance History Scholars*, 1989, 8-14; and Glen Loney, *Unsung Genius: the Passion of a Dancer/choreographer Jack Cole*, Franklin Watts, New York, 1994

⁵⁰ *Bob Fosse* (television special), op. cit.

commercial, or 'folk' nature of tap and jazz⁵¹, began to pay attention to innovations in jazz music and dance. This was not an entirely new phenomenon. Jazz had been appropriated by classical choreographers in Paris as far back as the 1920s. Dance historian Constance Valis Hill's research has shown that in this period classical choreographers such as Bronislava Nijinska and Léonide Massine, both working in Paris for Diahgilev in the twenties, borrowed vocabulary from shows such as *La Revue Nègre* and performers like Josphine Baker.⁵² As Massine told The Dancing Times in 1925:

To make dancing vital, we must learn all we can from the Italo-French school of 300 years ago and transpose it into... modern jazz. We have altered the direction of the ancient school and, by adapting its form and its steps, create a new spirit representative of the spirit of the times.⁵³

However for Hill, as well as dance historians Sally Banes⁵⁴ and Brenda Dixon Gottschild⁵⁵, it was the American rather than European classical dancer on whom jazz would have its "most visible effect", particularly through the work of another choreographer who developed a fascination for Black dance forms in 1920s and thirties in Europe - George Balanchine. Although Balanchine used a few explicitly identifiable jazz references through his choice of music and titles with pieces such as *Pas-de deux - blues* (1940), *Modern Jazz Variations* (1961), *Ragtime II* (1966), *Concerto for Jazz Band and Orchestra* (1971), it was his dance vocabulary (his

⁵¹ Sonia Revid stated in 1940 "With excess jazz, immoral plots in literature and films, [and] cheap amusements... no nation can grow up and develop healthily and decently". See Sonia Revid, "Not God who kills...", Women' World, October, 1940. Article located in Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne. Also see Ann Daly's discussion of Isadora Duncan's objection to jazz in Ann Daly, Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1995, 114 -115

⁵² Constance Valis Hill, "Jazz Modernism", in Gay Morris, ed., Moving Words: re-writing dance, Routledge, London, 1996, 236-237.

⁵³ Ibid., 238

⁵⁴ See Sally Banes, Rethinking the Balanchine Legacy: Balanchine Jazz and Popular Dance, lecture by Sally Banes at the New York Arts Library 1993(b), copy of video of lecture available in the Dance Collection, Performing Arts Library, New York; and Sally Banes, "Balanchine and Black Dance", Writing Dance in an Age of Postmodernism, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover, 1994, 53-69.

⁵⁵ Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Digging the Africanist presence in American performance dance, Greenwood Publishing, 1996.

alternative use of line, speed, weight, and phrasing⁵⁶) which owed much to a jazz sensibility. In the work of both Hill, Gottschild, and Banes the syntax of Balanchine's work has been re-examined. The syncopation and angularity which infected his movement vocabulary (along with the flexed limp wrists, throwaway limbs, and jutting hip extensions which all became a memorable part of Balanchine's movement repertoire) illustrated the influence of jazz on his work.⁵⁷ These aspects have been attributed not only to his understanding of black popular dance forms but also his intention to create a truly 'American' way of moving. Through Balanchine, when the choreographer immigrated to America in 1933, jazz in ballet had, in Hill's assessment, "come home to roost".⁵⁸

Apart from the work of Balanchine, identifiable borrowings from black vernacular dance gained increasing popularity in classical circles in America in the 1940s. This particular referencing was more explicit than Balanchine's but just as influential in the development of classical ballet in the United States and Australia in the 1960s. One particular choreographer, Jerome Robbins, had a major influence on both jazz and classical ballet from the 1940s to the 1970s.

Although most well known in commercial circles for his work on the 1956 musical *West Side Story*, Jerome Robbins actually began his experimentation with a jazz movement vocabulary over twenty years earlier; and on the ballet rather than popular stage. In April 1944 Robbins offered audiences at the Metropolitan in New York his ballet *Fancy Free*. This piece, danced by the American Ballet Theatre, used a classical vocabulary peppered with, what the American critic Edwin Denby described as:

⁵⁶ Banes, 1994, op. cit., 63-69

⁵⁷ For examples of this style see *The Four Temperaments* and *Agon*, both choreographed by George Balanchine. Extracts of these ballets appear in *Dance of the 20th Century*, Sonia Schoonejans (writer and director), Pierre-Francoise Decaufe and Eric Lambert (producers), Joint English/French production, 1992.

⁵⁸ Hill, op. cit., 240

...dance-hall steps, as they are done from Roseland to the Savoy: trucking, the boogie, knee drops, even a round-the-back done in slow motion.⁵⁹

For Denby this piece was the perfect hybrid. It reminded him of a “superb vaudeville turn” and yet it was also the “perfect American character ballet”.⁶⁰ *On the Town*, another Robbins’ ballet to a Leonard Bernstein score, received a similar reception from the New York World Telegram and Sun critic Louis Biancolli. Considered a more consummate popularisation of the ballet form than its fore runner, *On the Town* was for Biancolli, a “rich blend of classic technique, jive, tap and... adagio”.⁶¹ This ballet proved to the New York critic that, although the company repertoires in American ballet would continue to produce works within the pure classic tradition, “more and more elbow room” was being given to “new styles in technique and content.”⁶²

Other forms of African American culture, such as gospel and blues, represented to many other white, as well as black performers, an expression of a ‘grassroots’ American experience. A selection of modern choreographers were as susceptible to this trend as their classical counterparts. Ted Shawn, Agnes de Mille, Ruth Page, Helen Tamiris and Anna Sokolow all experimented with spirituals and/or blues in their choreography in the 1930s and forties.⁶³

In the 1960s jazz, as a vocabulary which could add spice to the classical technique, became even more popular in the repertoire of classical dance companies in America, Britain and Australia. The American Ballet Theatre produced *Points on Jazz* in 1963 with choreography by Danis Krupska and music by Dave Brubeck. Ballet 1960, located on the west coast of the United States, produced a piece which

⁵⁹ Edwin Denby, “Fancy Free”, April 19th 1944, reprinted in Robert Cornfield and William Mackay, eds., Edwin Denby: Dance writings, Dance Books, London, 1986, 219

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 218

⁶¹ Louis Biancolli, “‘On the Town’ Ballet dusts off tradition”, New York World Telegram and Sun, February, 1945. Reprinted in Gus Giordano, Anthology of American Jazz Dance, Orion Publishing House, Illinois, 1978, 22

⁶² *Ibid.*, 23

⁶³ See Erza Goodman, “Broadway Choreographers”, Dance Magazine, Vol. 21, No. 3, 1947, 14 - 15. Also see Julie Foulkes, “Dancing America: Modern Dance and Cultural Nationalism 1925-1950”, unpublished dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1997

combined classical and jazz movements to *Concerto for Jazz Band and Symphony Orchestra* by Rolf Lubermann. The San Francisco Ballet premiered *Session III* by Terry Orr in their Ballet '62 season. Hans Van Manen produced *Kain and Abel* for Dutch Television in 1961 (with the Netherlands Dance Theatre).⁶⁴ Some English choreographers were also affected by this new trend. John Butler created *Triad* in 1958 and Frederick Ashton produced *Jazz Calendar* in 1968.

In Australia the development of a national ballet company also saw jazz taken seriously. The Australian Ballet produced Rex Reid's *The Night is a Sorceress* to a popular jazz score by Sidney Bechet. Originally created for the Victorian Ballet Guild in 1959, The Australian Ballet remounted the work for its Sydney season at Her Majesty's Theatre in 1962.⁶⁵ However, the most obvious use of a jazz in this company was choreographed by Betty Pounder in 1964. *Jazz Spectrum*, was created for the Adelaide Festival with Les Patching, a Melbourne musician, producing a score which had a explicit "jazz flavour".⁶⁶ *Jazz Spectrum* was later staged in Sydney at the Elizabethan Theatre in the same year after moderate success in Adelaide.⁶⁷ The piece was described by Ian F. Brown as a "modern illustration of the interplay of the primary colours with their various blends and shades." It was a "visual experience of the changing colours evoked by music, mood and movement". The work consisted of nine sections: Reflection, Refraction, Defraction, Primary, Effusion, Diffusion, Suffusion, and Spectrum.⁶⁸

For Pounder the ballet was a tribute to the breaking down of barriers between all types of music and dance. She told the Adelaide *Advertiser* during the ballet's run at the festival:

⁶⁴ See *The History of Dance on Film and Video IV: Hans van Manen* (video), Marc Noyons, ed., Editions a voir (pub.), 1998

⁶⁵ Edward Pask, *Ballet in Australia: the Second Act, 1940-1980*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1982, 168

⁶⁶ *Australian Opera and Ballet programme*, 1964. Programme available in Box 17, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

⁶⁷ This piece was over shadowed by the triumphant reception of an other ballet premiered at the same festival - *The Display* choreographed by Robert Helpmann. This latter ballet will be discussed at length in chapter six.

⁶⁸ Ian F. Brown, *The Australian Ballet: 1962-1965*, Longman, Victoria, 1967, 84-6

...one of the most exciting developments in world entertainment during the past 10 years has been the “breakdown” in barriers between musical comedy and opera, popular dance and the ballet, jazz and the symphony.⁶⁹

Jazz Spectrum, under the new title of *Jazz Suite*, enjoyed a return season in 1966 with a change of costume and revamped choreography.⁷⁰ The soft tunics for the women and the simple ballet tights and shirts for the men were replaced by unitards⁷¹ sporting flared legs. This was a new trend in ballet attire which was a direct reference to the popular street style of the day.

The use of jazz as a movement vocabulary, as well as the employment of a choreographer with a reputation in musical theatre rather than classical ballet, reflected the image that The Australian Ballet wished to promote in the early days of its existence. As will be discussed in more detail later, jazz in dance was associated with youth. It was the perfect symbol for contemporary times. In a country like Australia, which was attempting to acquire a sense of contemporary, artistic sophistication, jazz offered the new Australian ballet company a space in which it could claim some kind of contemporary relevance.⁷²

⁶⁹ “Choreographer is a ‘frustrated’ Actress”, *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 17th March, 1964. Article located in Box 17, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

⁷⁰ Pask, op. cit., 139

⁷¹ A unitard is an all-in-one, stretch outfit.

⁷² As Richard Waterhouse has observed, this push for topicality was very particular to the history of ballet in this period. Other ‘high’ art forms, opera in particular, were immune to such pressures in the 1950s and early sixties. Although ballet was also considered an example of a ‘high’ art by the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, who had been funding the development of both opera and ballet in the 1950s in Australia, the management installed to govern the direction of the new national ballet company argued that the very existence of the ballet in Australia was dependent on the production of works which could be identified as new and/or distinctively Australian. They stated that this company needed to “seek inspiration from the Australian environment”, and avoid creating a repertoire which simply replicated the classics produced by more established, foreign classical companies overseas. As Waterhouse indicates, the opera company (which the Trust financed in 1956) was not asked for the same local commitment. See Richard Waterhouse, “Lola Montez and High Culture: the Elizabethan Theatre Trust in post-war Australia”, *Journal of Australian Studies*, Number 52, 1997, 148-158.

To a certain extent these differences are a reflection of a particular, historical relationship between the practitioner and choreographer which will be discussed at length in the final chapter of this thesis. In the context of this discussion of the influence of jazz on ballet companies in the 1960s, it is important to realise that dance, with its distinctive vocabulary, has always been considered more ephemeral than other text based performance genres. As was suggested in the introduction, dance

That The Australian Ballet felt compelled to include at least a small reference to jazz in their repertoire in the 1960s attests to the influence and popularity of jazz at this time. This situation, as we have seen, was inspired by a variety of visitors from the United States: American vaudeville acts, American GIs, and modern dance companies headed by Katherine Dunham and Alvin Ailey. However it was American musicals such as *The Pajama Game* and *West Side Story* that inspired a whole generation of Australian choreographers and dancers to take notice of jazz.

West Side Story had premiered in New York in 1957. With music by Leonard Bernstein, choreography and direction by Jerome Robbins, the work ran on Broadway for four years and played in London for two. Riding on the reputations of its major contributors, many critics in both these cities felt that the show had finally given the musical, and by association its main vehicle of expression - jazz - a new tone of respectability. The New York reporter Michael Smuin suggested that with Bernstein

does not have an 'everyday' lexicon or text with which the audience is regularly familiar and on which future re-productions could be measured. Dance has therefore been far less prone to static reproduction and inflexibility in the face of tradition than arts like opera. Although classical ballet has usually been constructed within the wider context of western dance history as a static, archaic form, the centrality of movement dictates that it too is not immune to variation and change. Therefore departures from traditional renditions of the a ballet step are harder to identify, for those who do not make a detailed study of the tradition (which is the majority of audience members, and management of funding institutions). Most members of both groups would be hard pressed to recognise even rather dramatic deviations from traditional executions of a particular movement or a position of the body. For example, a *posé* (or step) onto point in which the traditional equilibrium of the body is not maintained (when the spine does not remain erect with the centre of balance over the supporting leg but tips at the waist) hardly offers the same identifiable departure for the average onlooker as an Italian Opera translated into English and then sung with an Australian accent. With opera's more identifiable system of communication (words), departures from traditional practice is far more recognisable than the challenge which a similar adjustment would inspire in movement. With this in mind, the inclusion of a jazz twist or 'feel' to a classical step was unlikely to offer the same radical departure from identifiable traditions as the Italian aria sung with an 'Aussie' accent. Naturally the well informed balletomane could reject the adjustment of a traditional step as vehemently as the opera buff would object to such a translation, but, as far as management, general audiences, and the reputations of the two forms are concerned, ballet did not have as many identifiable markers and signs which could reinforce an insistence on the accurate reproduction of traditional performance.

This difference between the nature of these two performing arts goes some way toward explaining the more flexible attitude apparent within the creation and adjustment of vocabulary and style in ballet. In fact, as Richard Waterhouse has indicated, the management of The Australian Ballet insisted on such flexibility. They encouraged the creation of new works for the company, relating this to the very survival of the form in Australia. Without hard textual evidence of tradition, an insistence on the maintenance of the past was too hard to justify and too easy to dispute in dance. Therefore, innovation, flexibility, and topicality were regarded, even in a 'high art' like ballet, could be seen as a justification for continued existence, promotion and funding.

on music and Robbins on dance, musical comedy had been turned into a “mature art form, worthy of the concert stage” and jazz dance had finally become as “artistically satisfying as ballet”⁷³. Praising jazz specifically, Smuin wrote:

The high degree of development of this dance form makes very high demands on the dancer. Jazz dancers today must be highly efficient, like all well-trained athletes... Ballet movements and Jazz movements are so closely related that it is hard to say “This is ballet”, or “This is Jazz”. Many times the music is the only difference. Ballet and Jazz choreography are completely creative arts.⁷⁴

In Smuin’s review there was no mention of the allegiance jazz owed to African American, South American or Western ‘folk’ traditions. Attempting to give the form a classic status precluded any reference to this alternative genealogy. What this critic wanted to bestow on jazz was a legitimacy it had not previously enjoyed. The claim that jazz was a “creative art”, and that it required a high degree of development and expertise from the dancer, was instrumental in elevating the status of the form but left Smuin unable to acknowledge its more popular ingredients.

When *West Side Story* reached the London stage in 1958 John Warrick had a similar reaction to the piece. Warrick suggested that the musical had now been turned into an “honest woman” through the “marriage” of, what he identified as “American dance technique” and the score of a “respectable composer”. It was not only the reputation of the composer but also the choreographer which helped *West Side Story* surmount its normal identification as light weight or popular entertainment. When compared to his contemporaries (Jack Cole or Bob Fosse) Jerome Robbins produced a more emphatic referencing of the classical form when he created his jazz vocabulary. In Robbins’s work the classical principles of pointed feet, long extended limbs, turn out, and a vertical lift and suspension of the spine (which were secondary elements for Fosse and Cole) were emphasised. These references were then

⁷³ Michael, Smuin, “Jazz and the Dance”, *Dance Digest*, February 1960, reprinted in Giordano, op. cit., 54

⁷⁴ Ibid.

interwoven and juxtaposed with a jazz vocabulary which gave central importance to syncopation, isolation, hesitation, and angularity. These latter referents were seen as interesting flavours rather than the main course. This reversal of primary ingredients promised that Robbins' work had a clearer path to an identification as 'high' art, with all the restrictions and possibilities that implied.

In Australia the reaction to *West Side Story* was similar to that in the USA and Britain. This "rock version of Romeo and Juliet"⁷⁵ had, for Harry Cox of *Pix* magazine, brought together one of the world's greatest choreographers who had finally succeeded in "uniting the classical techniques to modern dance forms".⁷⁶ Cox even went so far as to offer this new form as a possible replacement for traditional ballet in Australia:

With professional grand ballet coming to an end here for the time being, when the Borovansky Ballet disbands in Melbourne this week, "West Side Story" is of special interest. Is this the new theatre dance form which is going to replace the old classical ballets and bring audiences back to see good dancing?⁷⁷

"R.C." of the *Sydney Morning Herald* observed that *West Side Story* challenged the high/low divide between classic and popular entertainment when he stated:

This musical has swallowed and juxtaposed such diverse material that, in theory it ought to have resulted in theatrical indigestion...⁷⁸

That it did not, was attributed by "R.C." to the brilliance of Leonard Bernstein:

Bernstein's masterly score has here a spasm of Stravinsky or a silver whisper from the Modern Jazz Quartet, there a fleck of Bartok to add to the gorgeous chatter of South American sounds - not to mention the pure

⁷⁵ Harry Cox, "A rock version of Romeo and Juliet", *Pix*, 18th February, 1961, 30

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ R.C., *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10th February, 1961. Article untitled, located in MS2185, Item: YV 140, *J.C. Williamson archive*, Mitchell Library, Sydney .

brass of Broadway or the endearing shame-lessness of pumped up andante religioso.⁷⁹

The same critic later marvelled at the “concentrated and unified impact” of the show which offered such a disparate range of references.⁸⁰

Not all reviewers saw this mixing of genres in such a positive way. In London, Harold Hobson suggested that, like “*War and Peace* translated into Zulu”, this musical was “Shakespeare pillaged in pidgin-English”.⁸¹ For Hobson the “voice of a Patti” had never been successfully combined “with the ankles of a Pavlova”⁸² so why, all of a sudden, did Bernstein and Robbins think they could do it? Some Australian critics agreed. The *Bulletin* questioned not only the calibre of the singing, by performers so obviously chosen for their dancing ability, but also the wisdom of Bernstein who, as a “serious composer”, had attempted to elevate jazz to a higher plane, when others before him had merely proven that “Tinpan Alley” could do better. The same reviewer also asked if the “purity of music and choreography”, or the reflections of ‘high’ culture in *West Side Story*, had simply diluted the power of the popular by “watering down the warmth, wit, and spontaneous energy of rock-‘n’-roll?”.⁸³

Although each of these critics assessed the value and success of the musical differently their assumptions were the same; *West Side Story* had attempted to challenge the established separation between so called ‘high’ or classic and ‘low’ or popular/folk culture. Harold Hobson and the *Bulletin* pilloried the very audacity of the attempt while John Warrick and Harry Cox envisaged the development of a new

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Harold Hobson, review of London season of *West Side Story*, untitled, no date given (c. 1958). Article located in press clipping file, VC/Her Majesty’s Theatre London, 1958, Wolanski Library, Sydney Opera House, New South Wales.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ That this Australian critic called, what others defined as, the ‘jazz’ element in jazz dance ‘rock-‘n’-roll’ is due to a lack of clear demarcation between the two terms. As John Clare has suggested, much popular music in the inter-war period had simply labelled jazz, whether in contained a jazz element or not. In the post-war era these three terms (jazz, rock-‘n’-roll, and popular music) were still interchangeable for in some circles. See Clare, op. cit., 74-80.

genre, but each felt that with *West Side Story*, established boundaries had been blurred and categorisations challenged.

What really excited those who saw and appreciated this musical's innovations was the youth, energy, urgency, exuberance and tension created in a musical which used movement to tell the story. Harry Cox told the readers of *Pix* magazine:

[*West Side Story*] unwinds with all its mixture of tragedy and tenderness, not in a talked-out plot but in a movement of human bodies. As the muscles of the dancers are tensed and untensed, they convey the excitement of the story direct to the muscles, as well as the minds, of the audience.⁸⁴

The *Herald* review of opening night in Sydney saw a similar tension which spilled over the footlights and excited the viewer:

The thrust and jab of its movement, the pace and rattling excitement of its delivery were of a quality to leave any spectator limp with exhausted tension and yet still tingling with the pleasure of an experience that may have been matched or surprised on other occasions, but certainly not duplicated. At the end of such an evening, it seems almost irrelevant to separate the ingredients... From the moment that the rival gangs of jets and Sharks shrug themselves into action at the beginning of the first act the stage is rarely at peace from stealthy tension, explosive gaiety, and acrobatic pummelling.⁸⁵

Despite predominantly favourable reviews in Australia, *West Side Story* was not a raging success at the box office. Garnet Carroll was reported to have lost £30,000.⁸⁶ One of the American dancers, Rita Tannino (who played Anita), blamed the lack of audiences in Sydney on the conservative reception the company received in Melbourne. According to Tannino, some Melburnians seemed unable to discriminate between real and imagined delinquency. "They accused us of being delinquents, hoodlums and even dope addicts!", she said, "No wonder, after this..."

⁸⁴ Cox, *op. cit.*, 31

⁸⁵ R.C., *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 February 1961. Article located in J.C. Williamson papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

⁸⁶ "Editorial", *Theatregoer*, 4, May-July, 1961, 10; Frank Morgan "Who Runs Australia's Show Business", *Everybody's*, 13th September, 1961, 20.

publicity, people didn't want to come and see us."⁸⁷ Frank Van Stratten blamed the short run in Sydney (11 weeks) on the venue. The "cavernous Tivoli" was more comfortable staging "glamorous reviews". It was "hardly a fitting home for so revolutionary a theatrical creation".⁸⁸ The editor of the magazine *Theatregoer* had another idea. Although New York, London, Melbourne and Sydney each had an equal amount, pro rata, of audience members who appreciated an innovative musical like *West Side Story*, Australia's smaller population couldn't boast enough of those kind of people to maintain the show.⁸⁹ It was also suggested that Australians were "immature theatrically" and could only appreciate "the lollipop musical or the assured harmlessness of *My Fair Lady*"⁹⁰, which had opened at the same time in Sydney.⁹¹ Local audiences were also used to a "good way of life". They were not "endangered by juvenile delinquency, organised crime and the problems of immigrants." Therefore they avoided entertainment like *West Side Story* which dealt with "problems which appear frighteningly unsolvable".⁹²

The film of *West Side Story* did not suffer the same fate as the stage play. Produced in 1961 the movie version, which employed many of the same dancers who had worked on the Broadway production, was a raging success. This could be attributed to the fact that film was a more accessible medium for young people, both socially and financially. It was also a more remote medium. Delinquents on the screen carried a less immediate, confrontational association for an audience than the same characters in live theatre. What ever the reason, over the next 10 years Australian popular, modern and classical theatre responded to an increased interest in jazz. So did local dance schools who increasingly offer jazz "ballet" classes, as they came to be called, to their usual fair of classical, tap, and the occasional singing lesson.

⁸⁷ "Editorial", *Theatregoer*, 4, May/June, 1961, 10

⁸⁸ Stratton, op. cit., 5

⁸⁹ "Editorial" *Theatregoer*, 4, May/June, 1961, 10.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Stratton, op. cit.

⁹² "Editorial", *Theatregoer*, 4, May/June, 1961, 10.

One person who particularly promoted the spread of interest in jazz was Ronne Arnold. Arnold came to Australia with the original cast of *West Side Story* to play Luis, a Puerto Rican who belonged to the gang the Sharks.⁹³ When the show closed Arnold began teaching for Rex Reid in Melbourne, Valrene Tweedie, Joan and Monica Halliday and the Seger studio in Sydney. Jane Farrelly, a young dancer who worked with Ronne Arnold in the early sixties, recalled recently that if it hadn't have been for the work Arnold generated and the interest he, and *West Side Story*, had inspired in jazz, she, and many other young Australian dancers, would not have been able to establish a career in dance and be ready for what Farrelly called, the "dance boom" in Australia in late sixties and seventies. Ronne Arnold's jazz and contemporary work provided artists like Farrelly semi-constant employment as they moved between modern and jazz styles and companies in the 1960s.⁹⁴

However, this wave of enthusiasm for jazz dance did not emanate solely from Arnold's dedication and persistence. When the director Joe Calvan, musical director Dobbs Franks, and choreographer/dancer Ben Vargas came to Australia to remount *West Side Story*⁹⁵ for Garnet Carroll they also picked up a few young Australian dancers to supplement the American cast. Many of these performers also went on to promote jazz in dance schools, clubs and on television across the country. Keith Little, a young dancer with the Borovansky Ballet who played the Shark Anxious⁹⁶, choreographed for cabaret and television through the 1960s. Jack Manuel, also originally with Borovansky, went to New York in 1964 to further his training after his experience in *West Side Story*. Manuel took classes with the modern choreographer Eric Hawkins and the jazz teacher Luigi. After returning to Melbourne in 1965 he

⁹³ Programme of *West Side Story* located in press clippings, Folder AG2/Tivoli Theatre Sydney 1961, Wolanski Library, Sydney Opera House, New South Wales.

⁹⁴ Personal interview with Jane Farrelly, 7th May 1996

⁹⁵ "Jazz-dance Packs a Punch", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13th April, 1961, 3 and Geoffrey W. Hutton, "The boldest experiment of all...", *Music & Dance*, November, 1960, 23.

⁹⁶ Programme of *West Side Story*, op. cit.

choreographed for television and took over from Betty Pounder as jazz teacher at The Australian Ballet, remaining there for five years.⁹⁷

Another couple who promoted jazz dance in Australia were Anita Ardell and her partner Cor de Regt. As a pupil of Gertrud Bodenwieser, the Indian dancer Shivaram, and a dancer with Katherine Dunham and company for their Australian tour in 1956/7, Anita Ardell followed the lead of American choreographers such as Jack Cole when she produced her own choreography in the 1960s. She combined jazz and modern dance styles with Indian dance practices. When Ballet Australia produced their 1967 season at the Cell Block Theatre, Ardell, having returned from Europe and America where she had worked with American choreographers on the Italian jazz circuit, restaged a work she had created for a Bodenwieser workshop in 1959, *Transitions*.⁹⁸ She also created a new piece, *Indo-jazz Suite*. *Indo-jazz Suite* combined Ardell's experience of jazz, classical Indian and modern dance. Keith Glennon and Alan Brissenden saw the piece as a disciplined work of "serious innovation":

Indo-Jazz Suite, showed both Miss Ardell's newer technique and the influence of Jyotikana Ray and of Shivaram, who had taught her briefly at Nell Johnson's studio. Its combination of jazz ballet and Indian movement was performed by a group of eleven girls whose action was amplified by the leading pair, Marilyn Stratford and Cor de Regt. As an interpretation of the overture section of John Meyer's suite of the same title, it created an effect of stylishly controlled verve.⁹⁹

Glennon and Brissenden went on to suggest that Ardell and de Regt had much to offer Australian dance:

⁹⁷ Personal interview with Jack Manuel 2nd July 1997, Melbourne.

⁹⁸ *Transitions* had originally been staged at workshop performance at the Independent Theatre in 1959 with eight Bodenwieser dancers. At this time Glennon and Brissenden identified both Bodenwieser's and Katherine Dunham's influences on the work of Ardell. See Keith Glennon and Alan Brissenden, Folder 2, "Some Modern Dancers", Box 1, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*.

They may be absorbed by the increasing demand for jazz ballet, but however fashion may change, the breadth of technique that these two dancers share should ensure their value as teachers in a developing dance tradition.¹⁰⁰

As Glennon and Brissenden observed there was indeed an increasing demand for jazz in the 1960s: in dance studios, clubs, musicals, and on the contemporary and classical stage. Even Robert Helpmann, as we shall see in the next chapter, paid homage to the relevance of jazz in his ballet *The Display*, produced in 1964 for The Australian Ballet.

The reasons for the popularity of jazz are many and varied. First, jazz was considered quintessentially American. This was the one of the few facts on which all American, British and Australian advocates and critics of the form could agree.¹⁰¹ In 1964 Ronne Arnold did suggest that Australia could develop its own style of jazz:

At present [jazz dancing] tends to be much the same style as “West Side Story”, but as it takes on more here, and there are more teachers and dancers, we should evolve an Australian style.¹⁰²

Such a unique style never really emerged. Most dancers seriously interested in jazz either left Australia to study with American teachers such as Luigi and Matt Mattox¹⁰³, or they studied with American-trained jazz dancers in Australia and Britain. Peggy Watson, who had arrived in Australia from England in 1960, was a case in point. She started her training with Ronne Arnold and Ron Walker (a Luigi student who taught class at the Rudas School in Sydney). Ten years later she returned

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ For some examples of definitions of jazz in the late 40's and fifties see Dehn, 1946 op. cit.; Mura Dehn, “Is Jazz Choreographic”, *Dance*, February, 1948; Karen Backstein, “Keeping the Spirit Alive: The Jazz Dance Testament of Mura Dehn”, in Krin Gabbard, ed., *Representing Jazz*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1995; Marshall Stearns “Is Modern Jazz Dance hopelessly square?”, *Dance Magazine*, June 1959

¹⁰² “Summer School of Art: Ballet - and all that jazz!”, *Sunday Telegraph*, 12th January 1964. Article located, Box 17, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

¹⁰³ Anita Ardell and Jack Manuel both left Australia at different times to work with these famous American jazz teachers. Interview with Anita Ardell, March 1996, and interview with Jack Manuel, op. cit..

to Britain to take classes with the Luigi-trained Molly Molloy.¹⁰⁴ Associations with these famous teachers gave Australian dancers and teachers the necessary pedigree with which to return home and take up positions teaching jazz and performing on stage and television in the sixties and early seventies.

This migration of styles and teaching vocabularies from the United States to Australia and Britain reflects the growing globalisation which was influencing all forms of western cultural expression in the post World War II world. This globalisation emphasised an appreciation of youth, speed, and the benefits of rapid change. It promised progressive development and the egalitarian access to the acquisition of luxuries. Jazz represented all those qualities, it was fast, free, and it challenged cultural divides between the elite and the popular.

Rachel McNary of Kogarah summed up her love for jazz dance in this way in 1964:

Its wonderful... you can let yourself go. Its not so restrained as classical ballet.¹⁰⁵

For Rachel, jazz spoke to where she wanted to be. It had a tantalising tension and excitement. It encapsulated a sense of freedom and possibility that came from a new sense of material prosperity. It also articulated the tension and off-balanced uncertainty of a world fringed by the problems of the Cold War. The classical additive offered a boundary to that freedom, tension, excitement and uncertainty.

This sense of restrained freedom emerged in Robbins' choreography as a metaphor for the problems he observed in post War World II America. The psychological impact of 'the Bomb'¹⁰⁶, the tension which emerged between communist and capitalist states, and the subsequent nuclear arms race, were seen by Robbins as stimuli for the emergence of a generation of despondent youth whose lack

¹⁰⁴ Jennifer Thurston, "The Feeling for Jazz", *Australasian Dance*, Vol. 1, No. 2, April, 1971, 11.

¹⁰⁵ *Sunday Telegraph*, 12th January 1964. Article available, Box 17, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University, South Australia.

¹⁰⁶ Robbins referred here to the Atom Bomb dropped on Hiroshima on the 6th August 1945

of motivation, tribalism, and explosive energy, were instigated by the fear and uncertainty generated in contemporary times.

Interviewed by David Boroff for *Dance Magazine*, as he was rehearsing with the dancers for *West Side Story*, Jerome Robbins told the reporter about the ‘field work’ he engaged in while creating this musical. From his office on Lexington Ave and 74th Street, Robbins would venture out into the Upper West Side of Manhattan and over to Brooklyn Heights in an attempt to view (and understand) the social reality of the teenagers who were to be the subject of his musical. “Its funny how insulated we are”, he told a reporter, “just twenty blocks away life is very different”.¹⁰⁷

The streets are darker... and the people lead their lives on the sidewalks. Those kids live like pressure cookers....There’s a constant tension, a feeling of the kids having steam that they don’t know how to let off... I think they have been born into one of the worst worlds possible... fall-out, hydrogen bombs. You get the feeling that they think they have to live their lives now - without delay.¹⁰⁸

Robbins then offered his assessment of why these young people formed gangs and fought over a piece of turf:

[T]hey have a fantastic sense of security when they are together... That’s the function of a gang... For them right is right; there are no grey tones. Everything is passionate....But underneath...each boy is individually lost. They want love, but only the gang is their family.¹⁰⁹

This sense of isolation from the adult world was articulated in the script of *West Side Story* when one of the Sharks, ‘Action’, exclaims to Doc, the owner of the store where the boys hang out:

When you were our age! When my father was our age! You was none of you our age an’ the sooner you get hip to that, the sooner you’ll dig us.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ David Boroff, “West Side Story”, *Dance Magazine*, August, 1957, 16-17

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 17

¹¹⁰ *West Side Story*, MGM, Jerome Robbins (choreographer), Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins (directors), Robert Wise (director), Ernest Lehman (screenplay), Leonard Bernstein (Music), 1961

Action and his friends represented the feared, and terminally misunderstood, juvenile delinquent. Jerome Robbins, along with the lyricist Stephen Sondheim, set designer Oliver Smith, and costume designer Irene Sharaff, were not only affected by the fifties construction of this teenage hoodlum, they also fed the image as they searched for an ‘authentic’ representation of the juvenile delinquent for reproduction in their musical. The images they sought had been inspired by a mid-1950s obsession with the idea that American youth, in fact American culture as a whole, had lost its way. As James Gilbert has suggested in his social history of the idea of juvenile delinquency in 1950s, the rise of mass consumer culture and the adoption of social practices usually associated with the working classes in the United States were invading the lives, values and behavioural patterns of middle class teenagers.¹¹¹ Parents, teachers, and policy makers were worried. *West Side Story* tapped into this contemporary fear. In the Sondheim lyrics of ‘Gee Officer Crupky’, those all American juvenile delinquents, the Jets, were given a profile. The song outlined a series of reasons for their delinquency. They had come from broken homes, their siblings smoked marijuana and cross-dressed, and they had battered and/or alcoholic mothers. ‘Gee Officer Crupky’ also made fun of society’s attempts to remedy their unsociable reactions to these unfortunate circumstances, with mock visits to shrinks, social workers, and finally the juvenile court.

These images of delinquency in *West Side Story* were not considered flights of fancy concocted for mere effect. Robbins and his crew were convinced they were emulating real situations. They offer a “social reality” on stage which they believed they had seen first hand. As Robbins related during the filming of the movie version of *West Side Story* :

While choreographing *West Side Story* for the stage I went to the territory of the delinquents we were supposed to be telling about. I went to their social directors, talked to gang members and leaders. I went to their

¹¹¹James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America’s Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986.

dances. Not that I was looking for anything specific, only the key, the one small thing you discover that opens up larger vistas.¹¹²

The key for Robbins was the juxtaposition of fear and freedom which were translated onto the bodies of his young dancers through the referencing of disparate dance genres and the tension that referencing stimulated. This is most obviously illustrated in the song and dance "Cool". In this sequence Riff's lieutenant attempts to keep a lid on the gang members' rage and fear after Riff and Bernado, the leaders of the rival gangs, are killed in a Rumble. He explains to the rest of the Jets that the important thing is to keep "cool". :

No matter who or what is eatin' you, man you show it and you are dead!... Man you wanna get past the cops when they start askin' about tonight... you play it cool.... You wanna live in this lousy world - you play it cool.¹¹³

The dance which followed embodied that sentiment. The hot interior, constrained by a cool exterior, was expressed through the escaping of extended limbs into long open runs and high *grands battements* (see fig. 35 and 36)¹¹⁴ which were reigned in by a contracted centre. This contraction insisted that the rest of the limbs succumbed, as the upper body hunched over and legs were drawn into the waist with raised heels and bent knees. In these moments the dancers looked as if they were in pain, trying to contain the hate, tension and fear that was seen as intrinsic to their contemporary world (see fig. 38 and 39).

¹¹² Hollis Alpert, "West Side Story: a brilliant stage production starts to become a movie", *Dance Magazine*, October, 1960, 39. Also see Borof, op. cit.,

¹¹³ *West Side Story* (video), op. cit.

¹¹⁴ A *grands battements* is a sustained, swinging kick of the working leg. This move was borrowed from classical ballet but can be altered in the jazz vocabulary by bending the knee to flick the foreleg into the height of the extension. In Jerome Robbins' choreography the arms were also extended (one over the head and the other following the line of the lifted leg), with fingers splayed, head released backwards with eyes to the ceiling and the lower leg on *relevé* (a *relevé* occurs when the heel is raised and the balance is maintained on the toes and metatarsal of the working leg). Alternatively the working leg was swung around in an arc, passing through its highest point at the side of the body (called second position). For examples of this move see *West Side Story* (video) op. cit., and Figures 35 and 37.

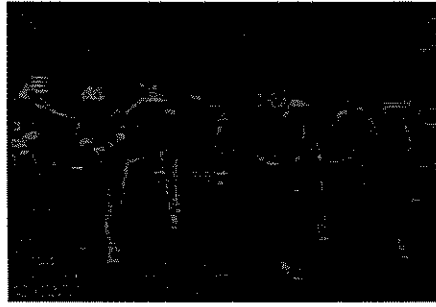


Fig. 35. "Cool", *West Side Story* (1961).

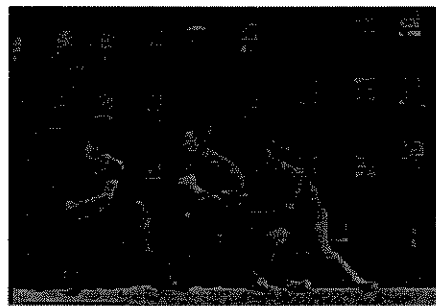
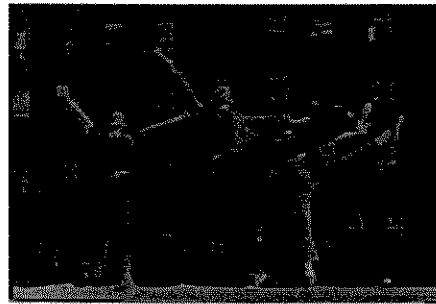


Fig. 36. "Intro", *West Side Story* (1961).
Here, and in figure 35, we see the jazz *grand battement* which was followed by the constraint of contraction.

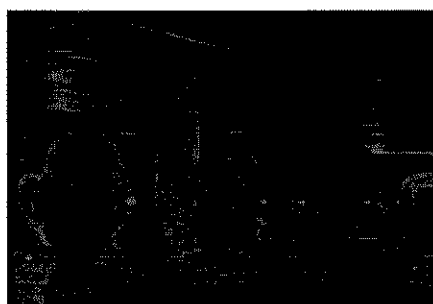
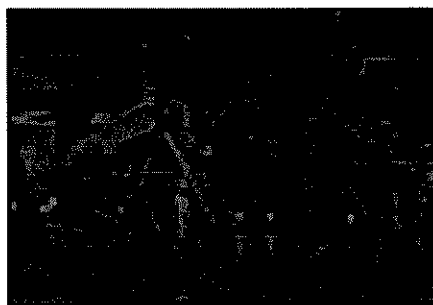
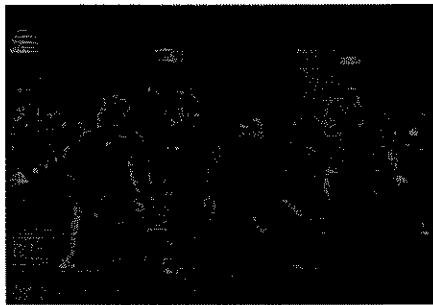


Fig. 37. "Cool", *West Side Story* (1961).
Here are other examples of the way in which the lifted centre was juxtaposed by the collapsed limbs that were so indicative of the 1950s and sixties jazz style of Jerome Robbins.



Fig. 38. "Cool", *West Side Story* (1961).

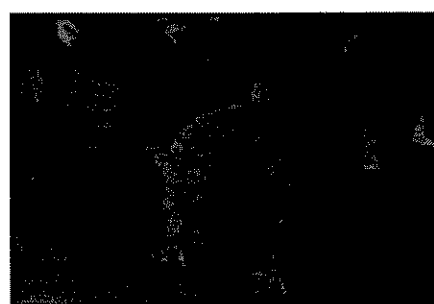
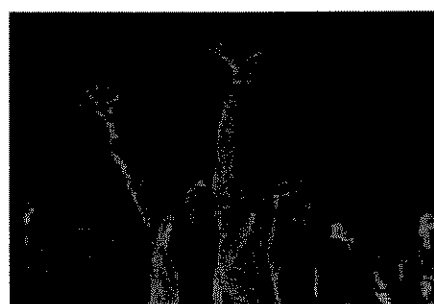
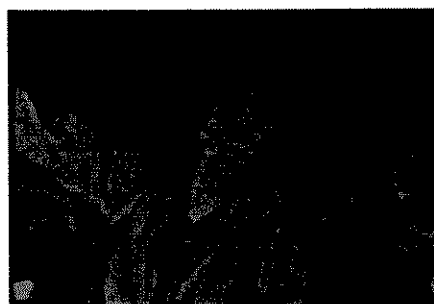


Fig. 39. “Cool” *West Side Story* (1961) Here we also see how the Robbins’ choreography embodied the tension of the moment through the explosive use of contraction and release.

However, this musical also showed sympathy toward these young people which was explored through the heightened, romantic tragedy of their lives. *West Side Story* highlighted their vulnerability and it offered them hope and redemption. There was a “place” for them “somewhere”, as the song promised.¹¹⁵ With the death of Riff, Bernado, and finally Tony, the gangs are seen to resolve their feud, however momentarily, in the face of tragedy. As they join to raise Tony’s body on their shoulders and carry him off stage their differences were humbled by Maria’s accusation that Tony’s death and her own heartache are the fault of both gangs. This sense of redemption, the fact that even the delinquent was just a misunderstood, neglected teenager, had been gaining support in academic circles in the last years of the 1950s. As James Gilbert and Jon Stratton have suggested, the teenager had begun to be recognised as having a unique developmental category, a new social group with their own culture and highly exploitable consumption pattern.¹¹⁶

As both these theorists suggest, Gilbert in his exploration of the American teenager and Stratton in his investigation of the same social group in Australia, the idea of ‘youth’ which had caused such consternation in both countries in the years immediately following the Second World, had begun to lose its derogatory connotations by the late fifties and the early sixties. The teenager began to be catered to and exploited rather than feared. However, this general acceptance was qualified. It was only granted if the energy, volatility and rebellion of youth was managed and controlled.¹¹⁷ Here we can see how jazz fitted so neatly into the world of the late fifties and early sixties. It was the embodiment of a youthful outlook with all its potential dangers and yet it also contained a restraining element (the classical vocabulary) which guaranteed that the unruly energy of its popular elements would never realise their complete potential.

¹¹⁵ The lyrics referred to here are “There’s a place for us, Somewhere a place for us. Peace and quiet and open air, waits for us... Somewhere.”

¹¹⁶ For a more detailed exploration of this phenomenon see Stratton, *op. cit.* and Gilbert, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁷ Stratton, *op. cit.*, 189-197

That jazz displayed contemporary relevance in its referencing and construction, and also became directly associated with the development of youth culture, goes some way toward explaining the popularity of this dance form in the 1950s and 1960s. Other important ingredients were its recognition and referencing of the past and its use of parody. Jazz had inherited these traits from its black heritage. It actively engaged in, what Henry Louis Gates Jr has called, signifyin(g).

Although Gates developed an understanding of signifyin(g) in relation to the African-American literary traditions, this is also a very useful concept to employ when looking at other art forms which have been influenced by African and Black American culture. As Robert Walser has shown in his study of a Miles Davis recording of *My Funny Valentine*, Gates' notion of signifyin(g) has multiple applications. Walser suggests that signifyin(g), in a black context, works "through reference, gesture, and dialogue to suggest multiple meanings."¹¹⁸ He deconstructs *My Funny Valentine* by revealing, among other things, the way in which Davis referenced versions of the song he had heard before as well as on those he had played himself. Equally, Davis was signifyin(g) for his audience on the versions they had encountered.¹¹⁹ The connection between the Davis performance and the audience was therefore not limited to the current event but also had the appeal of collective recognition in an historical context.

Walser's application of Gates is a useful model when trying to understand the popularity of jazz in dance in the 1960s, but his definition of white signifying ("logical, rational, limited" with meanings that are "denotative, fixed, exact and exclusive") is not born out by the history of jazz in dance. Gates original definition positioned pastiche and parody as central to signifyin(g). In order for signifyin(g) to be in operation in a text both these devices had to exist.¹²⁰ Therefore jazz dance, with its essential hybridity, can be considered a signifyin(g) mode of expression (in the black sense) even when danced and choreographed by whites.

¹¹⁸ Walser, op. cit., 168

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 173

¹²⁰ Gates, op. cit., xxvii

Pastiche, which is implied through “homage to an antecedent text”¹²¹, has been present in jazz choreography from at least the 1930s. For example, Black tap dancer Honi Coles borrowed and moulded his style from the work of Bill Robinson and John Bubbles.¹²² However, evidence of pastiche is not restricted to Black dance or African-American dancers. Bob Fosse’s “Steam Heat” from *The Pajama Game* was a perfect illustration of pastiche at work in the jazz form. Here there were references to flash tap acts with moves like the knee slide. There were vaudeville references in the use of the hat to accompany a cross over step. The ‘Charlie Chaplin’ shuffle (in which the feet are turned out and the body was perambulated forward by the wiggling of the knees and shuffling along), the use of the hat, as well as oversized, high knee runs, were also reminiscent of a vaudeville style. The Lindy appeared here too, with Fosse’s use of head isolations and crawling backwards on the back across the floor. There were even references to a slave Ring Shout which was characterised by the rhythmic stamping of the feet and clapping of the hands.¹²³ (See figs. 40-43) Fosse freely admitted to this use of pastiche. He called *his* signifyin(g) ‘inspiration’, but this was a process which dealt, ultimately, with the same act - the borrowing and redefining of another’s invention.

A sense of parody was also evident in jazz dance. In fact parody was the essence of the jazz body. The lifted stomach and abdomen (or ‘centre’), the use of turn out, and the high *relevé* of the feet (all borrowed from classical ballet) were parodied by the collapsed upper torso, the bent knees, tilted pelvis, raised hunched shoulders, and very deep *plie* seen in much of Fosse’s, Jerome Robbins’ and Jack Cole’s work.

121 *Ibid.*

122 *Class Act of Tap - Honi Coles*, (television special), Swenson Company, United States, 1994.

123 There is no evidence that Bob Fosse consciously referenced the ring shout, but the rhythmic foot stamping and hand clapping used in “Steam Heat” looks decidedly similar to that practiced in the action of the Ring Shout. For a comparison of these see *The Pajama Game* op. cit., and, for an example of the Ring Shout, see the video series *Dancing*, op. cit.



Fig. 40. "Steam Heat" *The Pajama Game* (1957)
Knee Slides.



Fig. 41. "Steam Heat" *The Pajama Game* (1957)
Note the various uses of the hat.

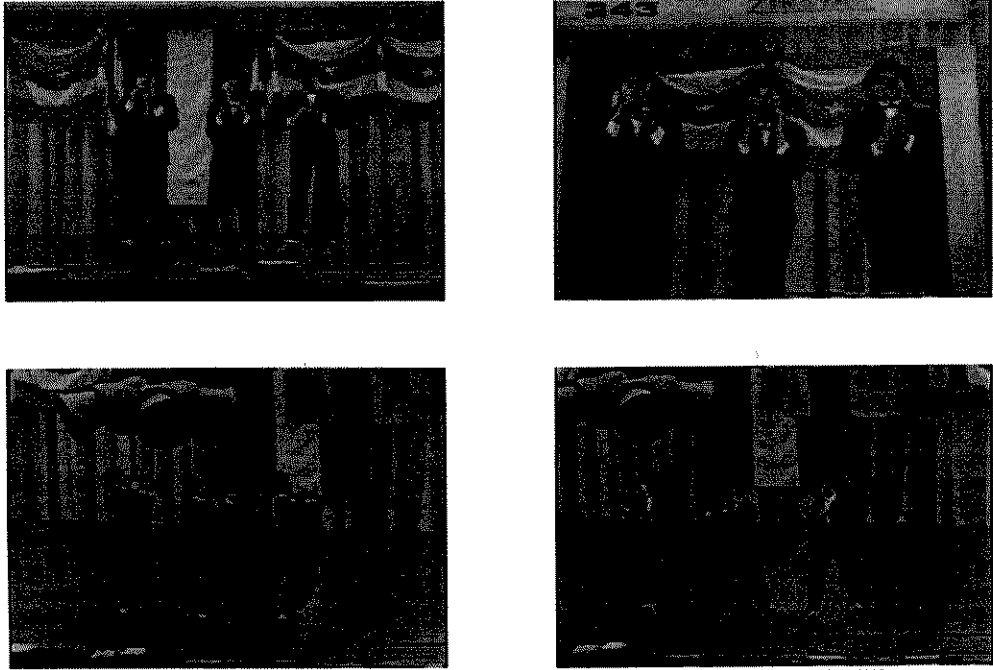


Fig. 42. "Steam Heat", *The Pajama Game* (1957). Here we see Fosse's use of hand clapping which is reminiscent of the Ring Shout.

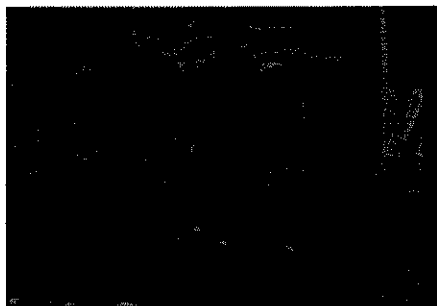
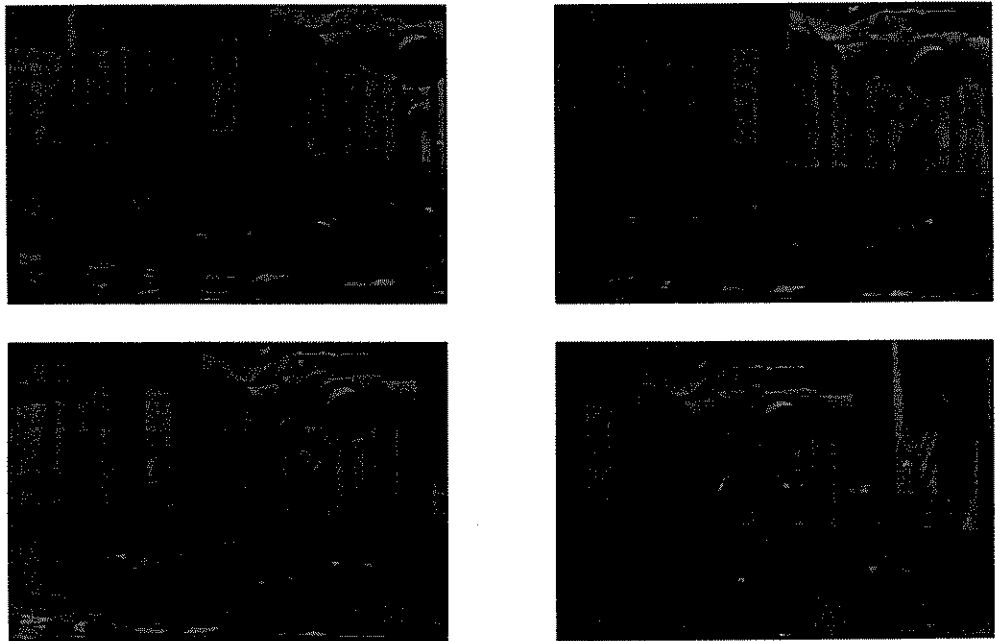


Fig. 43. "Steam Heat" *Pajama Game* (1957) Back Slide sequence.

Of course the genealogy of Gates' signifyin(g) in the work of these choreographers is not quite as straight forward as the process of pastiche and parody in an African-American context. There was a double dose of signifying taking place. White choreographers were signifying the signifyin(g) of a black dance tradition. When Bob Fosse referenced vaudeville he was not only signifyin(g) his own cultural history but also referencing a form which had been derived from an even earlier Black cultural product. In the case of Jerome Robbins the signification was less convoluted than Fosse's in relationship to his European additives. Robbins's accommodation of the principles of classical ballet came directly from his own history, but as with all the other choreographers mentioned in this chapter, the other elements he utilised to 'spice up' that referent were derived from a black tradition. Louis Henry Gates Jr has called African American literature a "black English vernacular tradition"¹²⁴, perhaps then jazz dance, when created by whites, could be called a white, African American, vernacular tradition. For as Ernie Smith strutting his stuff at the Savoy explained, the Lindy hop, "even when it is done by whites", was still a *black* dance.¹²⁵

The use of pastiche and parody in the work of Jerome Robbins, Jack Cole, Bob Fosse is not only noticeable with the advantage of hindsight. As the reviews of the *Pajama Game* and *West Side Story* illustrate, the multiple referencing and irreverence were obvious. Through the act of signifyin(g), western audiences within an increasingly transnational culture, could see themselves and their pasts in the movement on stage and screen. A nod to popular and folk traditions helped stimulate in them an active engagement with the form. The vaudeville, flash tap, Lindy Hop, Jitterbug, ballroom and classical ballet references were all part of the collective history which those viewing the work of Fosse, Cole, Robbins, Pounder, Arnold, and Ardell brought with them to the theatre, the movie house and into the classroom.

¹²⁴ Gates, *op. cit.*, xxiii

¹²⁵ *Dancing*, (Video), *op. cit.*

Through its popularity and relevance in the 1960s jazz found its way into a multitude of spaces and places challenging the notion of an established separation between the high and the low in western culture. As late as 1969, when Bob Fosse produced *Sweet Charity*, the GoGo inspired movement from this musical still rotated around the basic principles of a jazz vocabulary: the lifted centre, energetic outbursts circumscribed by controlled stillness, with the use of parody and pastiche.¹²⁶ However, by the end of that decade jazz in dance was gradually being re-allocated to a singular space, returned within the boundaries of a strictly popular or 'folk' tradition by choreographers.

This change occurred for various reasons. With the rise of disco the defining features which had made jazz dance relevant to a wide audience in the 1960s had slipped from view. The syncopation of jazz, the emphasis on the second and third beat of the bar rather than a diminishing emphasis from an emphatic first beat, had helped to create a sense of excitement in the form. In the 1970s this element had all but disappeared. Disco steps were created with the emphasis squarely on the first and third beat, eliminating the tension offered by the syncopated style.

John Travolta was one of the most famous disco dancers of the late 1970s. In *Saturday Night Fever*, the movie which encapsulated the new disco identity, Travolta's character Tony revealed this adherence to a more pedestrian beat pattern in his dance displays on the neon floor of his local dance hall.¹²⁷ Here Travolta's struts, step-ball-changes, hip isolations, and Russian Cossack squats all emphasised the first and third beat of the bar in the Bee Gees' song, "You should be dancing".

In Australia Raymond Nock, a Sydney dancer who carved out a space for himself as a professional disco dancer in the late 1970s, illustrated these new, more conservative rhythmic patterns in his instructional handbook, *Disco Dancing*. In this

¹²⁶ Fosse referenced soul and rhythm & blues dance movement in his use of a GoGo motif in *Sweet Charity* and parodied the 'smart set' of the period in the high strutting of the smoking male figures which are featured throughout "The Aloof" and "The Big Finish". The titles of the dances such as "The Big Finish" also parody the idea of performance. See *Sweet Charity* (video), op. cit.

¹²⁷ See *Saturday Night Fever* (video), Paramount Pictures, (choreographer), John Badham (director), Robert Stigwood (producer), 1978.

booklet, Nock told his readers that the most important feature of the form was to “do what you are doing in time with the music.” As Nock insisted:

Whether it be clapping your hands, stamping your feet or rocking your head, they must all be done in time with the heavy beat that is a feature of the disco sound.¹²⁸

One of the few legacies of the jazz era in disco was the use of isolation. Hips, ribs or head could still be articulated against the flow of motion favoured by the rest of the body, but the more pedantic adherence to functional tonal stress patterns over a 4/4 time signature, meant that those isolations had a more pedantic quality. Such principles made disco an easy dance to replicate but as the popular referent for jazz dance in the seventies it did not contain the innate tension and excitement offered by the Lindy in the forties and fifties and GoGo in the 1960s. It was also devoid of the hybrid tension that had challenged the classic/folk separation in the jazz of the 1960s.

With this loss of appropriate stimulation from its popular referent, jazz also lost its cross-genre appeal for the Australian dance community. Ronne Arnold choreographed jazz inspired works such as *Lets Get Together* with music by Max Roach and *New Blues* with music by George Gershwin, for his Contemporary Dance Company of Australia (which he formed in 1967). Kinetic Energy added a jazz number to their 1977 programme at the Seymour Centre in Sydney. However, a review of the latter by Mary Emery, shows how jazz had lost its ‘cutting edge’ status through its association with disco:

Jazz Suite, a collection of jazz dances, was undemanding entertainment showing what first-rate jazz ballet is. This much-abused generic description is usually applied, quite wrongly, to tenth-rate disco sludge.¹²⁹

In 1977 jazz still had a certain amount of credibility but instead of being a new dance for a new age (as it had been in the late fifties and the early sixties) jazz in the

¹²⁸ Raymond Nock, *Disco Dancing*, Horwitz Publications, Cammeray, 1979, 3

¹²⁹ Mary Emery, “Disco energy plus”, *The Australian*, 14th November, 1977.

seventies was seen as “undemanding”, a redundant form for a company trying to establish a reputation (and funding allocation) as a ‘serious’ modern dance company. For, not only had jazz lost its dynamism on the popular stage, but the introduction of government subsidies for small dance companies in the early seventies also dictated a definitive division between the folk and the classic, the high and the low, in modern as well as classical circles.

In the previous decade most dance companies had led a rather precarious existence as they attempted to rely on box office takings for survival. When government funding became a reality and companies such as the Australian Dance Theatre (South Australia), The Dance Company (NSW), Dance Exchange (Sydney), One Extra Dance Theatre (Sydney), and Kinetic Energy (Sydney) began to compete for available funds. This climate of competition saw more concentration on the production of ‘serious’ art, using movement vocabularies with an established relationship to ‘high’ art practices or the contemporary avante-gard. References to the popular were out of favour. Purity of form dominated the contemporary dance scene. As Twyla Tharp, one of the new breed of American dancer/choreographers on the cutting edge of dance development in the 1960s, recalled of the time:

When I started working the last thing on the face of the earth I wanted to be was *entertaining*! I was an *artist* and artists did not *entertain*! Artists do what they *must* do! They do what they *believed in*... and to *hell* with you[the audience]! [I]f you’re lucky you will find something for yourself. [But] you’re out there. You’re on your own! We’re *not* there at your service. We do not *serve* you!¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Twyla Tharp offered this reflection on the relationship between avant-garde sixties choreographers and their audiences when interviewed for “The Individual and Tradition”, *Dancing* (video series), op. cit. There was a sense of irony present in her delivery of these comments and she closed by saying “Ah... This has taken a lot of re-examining on my part”. Here Tharp refers to the gradual introduction of ‘entertaining’ devices such as humour or the referencing of a variety of sources from the vocabularies of the popular as well as the classical dance stage in her work. For examples of this change see *Eight Jelly Rolls* (1971), *Nine Sinatra Songs* (1982), and *In the Upper Room* (1986). For more on her work and life see Twyla Tharp, *Push Comes to Shove*, Bantam Books, New York, 1992.

In this changing climate the reliance of jazz on popular sources led to the form's direct association with more commercial locations. Australian companies like Kinetic Energy still offered a smattering of jazz along with their Graham based¹³¹ repertoire, but one of the few companies who really took jazz along for an extended ride as they formulated their company repertoire through the 1960s and the 1970s was the American company founded by Alvin Ailey which, as we saw in the last chapter, had toured Australia in 1964. When many other companies had left the form to the commercial field, Alvin Ailey and his dance group were able to establish a legitimate place for jazz, and still maintained their status as a modern dance company. This was possible primarily because the company, at the time, were all of African, Afro-Caribbean, or African American descent. Black bodies 'owned' jazz in the seventies. These dancers were once again identified with a form their ancestors had been instrumental in creating. However, as with women's flirtation with Modernism in the 1930s (discussed in chapter one), Black dancers were now afforded a claim over jazz at the very time that it was marginalised, and the dominant 'high brow' dance culture no longer saw any apparent use for it. The Alvin Ailey dance company took advantage of this realignment, as did other Black dancers. One prominent American jazz dancer and teacher Dolores Kirton Cayou claimed in 1971 that jazz was, and had always been, a *black* experience.¹³² It was no longer something white folks had taken, tamed, and re-defined through the refinement of its unruly black soul. For her it was a *black* form, with all the subsequent re-positioning of its genealogical history that this inspired. Cayou emphasised the essential African roots of jazz. Jazz movement for her was distinguished by the articulation of one section of the body in isolation from the rest. It was based on movement which was initiated from the pelvis. It had an exaggerated use of *plié* with a very low centre of gravity and a

¹³¹ This refers to the principles of the American Modernist Martha Graham.

¹³² Dolores Kirton Cayou, *Modern Jazz Dance*, Dance Books, London, 1971, xi

psychological attitude which promoted individual style within a group relationship. It also had an essential relationship to music.¹³³

Although this re-emphasis of the African roots of jazz inspired pride within Black communities, jazz now offered another safe place from which white society could observe and appropriate the Black body. In the 1970s jazz offered a popular vantage point from which to view 'Blackness'. It was a far less challenging, volatile, and unruly position than that offered by contemporary black activists such as the Americans Eldridge Clever and Angela Davis or the Australians Gary Foley and Roberta Sykes.

In the late sixties Ronne Arnold shrewdly distanced himself from these more radical elements within Black activism. Reporter Marie Dunn described Arnold as being "interested in Negro aspirations" but not "a black power advocate or a militant". "I am a person, not necessarily a Negro or an American" Arnold stated, "I dance for everyone".¹³⁴ Ronne Arnold may have preferred a more conciliatory mode of expression than that offered by the more radical principles of the black power movement, but, as this chapter has shown, the form of expression that he had chosen did contain its own radical elements. With jazz, African American and Latin American derived forms of expression had momentarily taken centre stage in both American and Australian dance cultures. Within the work of Katherine Dunham, George Balanchine, Jack Cole, Bob Fosse, Jerome Robbins, Betty Ponder, Ronne Arnold, Anita Ardell, and Alvin Ailey, dance derived from black cultural experiences not only successfully challenged the hierarchical distinction between 'high' and 'low' forms of culture, it also helped to make familiar and fashionable the products of a people who had been formerly considered foreign, exotic, and primitive. Jazz crossed boundaries and challenged hierarchies. It embodied freedom and control, tension and release, the past and the present. It had an irreverence for purity and categorisation. It did not maintain

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ See Marie Dunn, "Groovy Sydney", *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 20th 1969, 12

its pervasive influence after the 1960s, but for a time it captured the contemporary imagination.

Chapter Six

Muscle in Motion: heterosexual masculinity and dance, 1939-1964.

In 1967 William Gill told Australian Dance:

Women in Sydney have a stranglehold on ballet - and you can print that.¹

Gill, a former dancer with the Borovansky Ballet, Robert Pomie's Australian Ballet Le Francis, and the London Festival Ballet, was incensed by what he saw as the "hen-house atmosphere of girls ballet schools", suggesting that "only a boy endowed with awesome qualities of courage and perseverance" could possibly survive such a place. For the former ballet dancer turned television jazz choreographer, this situation led to the high drop-out rate of boys in dance because they inevitably "dislike[d] being in classes of girls".² In Gill's assessment, even if a boy was lucky enough to find an accommodating female teacher and class mates, learning from a woman and being surrounded by women meant that he was still doomed as a performer because he inevitably developed "feminine movements", which were unacceptable and hard to correct at a later stage.

Fifteen years later, similar advice was given to aspiring male dancers by Richard Glasston in his book Male Dancing as a Career:

Some boys are effeminate by nature, without being homosexual. Others may acquire effeminate mannerisms by imitation and association; but like affectations of any kind, they are deplored and rejected by all good artists.

¹ "Laying in right on the line: the Male Look", Australian Dance, Vol. 1, No. 4, May 1967, 2

² Ibid. By the time William Gill made this protest against the supposed dominance of women in the Sydney ballet scene he had actually left the ballet world and taken up jazz dance and choreography for television. In London he had worked with the BBC and I.T.V., in Amsterdam with Eurovision, and when he returned to Australia he starred in musical comedies such as *Sail Away* and a revival of *Annie Get Your Gun*. He also worked with Bill McGrath (one half of the popular dance couple Carlou Carter and Bill McGrath) on Channel 7. By 1967 he was choreographing popular dance numbers for ABC and a new show called "I'm Alright Now" which employed a stable of dancers and also starred Reg Livermore, Rick Hutton, Toni Lamond, and Ruth Cracknell, among others.

Any boy or man who dances like a girl or a women is not a good dancer.
Effeminate male dancing is quite simply bad dancing.³

For Glasston, as for Gill, the feminine was to be avoided at all costs. Boys who ‘naturally’ displayed feminine affectations were simply “bad” dancers. Others who had such mannerisms thrust upon them, mostly by tyrannical women in Australian training institutions if William Gill was to be believed, were “bad” dancers by association.

This fear of the feminine has been the concern of dance educators, artists and choreographers who have worked with men in western dance practices ever since the renaissance of classical ballet at the beginning of the 19th century. It has continued throughout all the various ‘revolutions’ in dance: from the Modernism of Diaghilev’s Ballet Russes, through the expressive dance practices of the German school in the interwar period, and on into the American modern dance explosion in the 1930s, forties and fifties. The popular dance scene has also been a site where the contest over acceptable representations of heterosexual, western, masculinity has been played out.

Jazz dance was one area within which accusations of effeminacy in relation to the dancing male body were met with a decisive challenge. In its musical form jazz was always constructed as a ‘man’s’ art. The African American musician Dizzy Gillespie, often spoke of the “virility of black jazz music”.⁴ This was illustrated not only by how Gillespie played but also by the way he constructed his personal image. With his ‘cool’ persona, and the bending of the bell of his trumpet skyward, Gillespie offered himself and his music as a location for the display of heterosexual masculinity. With this permanent erection, from which those speedy musical climaxes he created could escape, his music left its restrained location within his Black American body and affirmed the relationship between jazz music and male power. As Krin Gabbard has suggested, jazz provided Gillespie with a “wide latitude for expression of masculinity

³ Quoted in review of Richard Glasstone’s book, *Male Dancing as a Career*, by Lynn MacPherson, “Boy’s own dance book”, *Dance Australia*, Issue 7, March/May, 1982, 56

⁴ Krin Gabbard, “Signifyin(g) the Phallus: Mo’ Better Blues and the Representation of the Jazz Trumpet”, in Krin Gabbard, *Jazz Among the Discourses*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1995, 105

while avoiding the less mediated assertions of phallic power that were regularly punished in white society”⁵ when displayed by Black men. Jazz also gave Gillespie a place from which to parody the few restrictive locations that were afforded the African American male, in particular, his location as a more sexualised male when compared with his more cerebral white cousin.⁶

In dance, jazz had a history of male dominance. From the 1920s the form was populated by many African American, male artists. Through the work of famous tap dancers like Bill Robinson (Bojangles), John Bubbles, Earl (Snake Hips) Tucker, Fayard and Harold Nicholas (the Nicholas Brothers), Honi Coles, and Baby Laurence⁷, jazz was one of few professional western dance practices where men were prominent. As we saw in the last chapter, jazz also offered white men a place in dance, especially from the 1940s. In American musicals, cabarets and in Hollywood films, Jack Cole, Bob Fosse, Jerome Robbins, Fred Astaire, and Gene Kelly were central figures. They attained a dominance in the commercial dance field which matched that enjoyed by men in other areas of western social and political life; a location which had been denied them in dance since the early 19th century. In keeping with dominant constructions of heterosexual, western masculinity, these men rarely remained dancers who interpreted other people’s choreography. They became instigators of their own work. They were in control of the image being viewed. As chapter five illustrated, jazz choreographers referenced the past, combined it with the present, and created a form which expressed the tension and excitement of their times. It also displayed an overt masculinity which added to the popularity and general acceptance of jazz especially in the decades immediately following the Second World War.

⁵ Ibid., 108

⁶ For a discussion of the power relationship between the image of the size of the penis and Black and white men in western history see Mary Spongberg, “Are Small Penises Necessary for Civilisation? The Male Body and the Body Politic”, *Australian Feminist Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 25, 1997, 24-26.

⁷ Stearns, Marshall and Jean, *Jazz Dance: the Story of American Vernacular Dance*, Da Capo Press, New York, 1994, (originally published in 1968).

Jerome Robbins was particularly instrumental in severing the automatic link between dance and femininity. His use of jazz in ballet contradicted the feminine in the classical form. One critic, Alexander Bland, compared the Robbins' choreographic language to the American school of Action Painting, with its accent on vitality of a particularly physical kind.⁸ When his earlier work *Fancy Free* appeared in 1944, Edward Denby congratulated Robbins on the excellence of his comic, exuberant, and intelligent piece: "Its a direct, manly piece", wrote Denby. Robbins's masculine style was matched by his public persona as a dancer, choreographer and director. When rehearsing for *West Side Story* Alexander Borof suggested that Robbins looked like "an earnest young basketball coach" rather than a ballet dancer in his t-shirt and shorts.⁹

The choreography for *West Side Story* also boosted the image of jazz as a possible location for the acceptable display of heterosexual masculinity. Robbins achieved this through the maintenance of a 'cool' exterior which hid a 'hot' interior of restrained energy, which was discussed at length in chapter five. This particular juxtaposition of 'cool' rationality which tempered a potentially 'hot' sexuality came from a different space to the masculinity displayed in the work of the jazz musician Dizzy Gillespie. With Gillespie, the unruliness of jazz was used to explode the restraint imposed by western notions of propriety on the Black body and in Black music. In contrast, Robbins's work used a western tradition, classical ballet, to restrain the 'primitive' potential of his jazz referent. In this way Robbins satisfied an essential principle in the maintenance of white, male, western, heterosexual power - he restrained jazz's potentially 'uncivilising' processes.

As the historian Mary Spongberg has suggested, this restraint had been an essential principle in the maintenance of white middle class patriarchal power since the creation of the modern civil state. In her article "Are Small Penises Necessary for

⁸ Alexander Bland, "Two-way Stretch", *London Observer*, September, 1959, reprinted in Gus Giordano, *Anthology of American Jazz Dance*, Orion Publishing House, Illinois, 1978, 51

⁹ David Boroff, "West Side Story", *Dance Magazine*, August, 1957, 19

Civilisation?: the Male Body and the Body Politic”¹⁰, Spongberg shows that the oversized penis, with smaller or invisible testicles of the Black male body image was a means by which white, upper class men could identify themselves (and their bodies) as civilised. In contrast the image of the white male body was created with a corresponding small or invisible penis and relatively larger testicles. These different corporeal representations assisted in the demarcation of the white male as civilised. The long, dangling, unruly penis with small testicles gave the Black man a body of excess without purpose. It also reminded white men of their own, possibly rampant and uncontrollable, sexuality; a sexuality that had to be tamed in order for the civilising process to be maintained. Sexual desire and its visual manifestations had to be restrained on the white male body in order for their power to remain absolute and unchallenged.¹¹

In the jazz body created by Jerome Robbins the restraint offered by the classical vocabulary (an invention of the white world) to its jazz ingredient (an invention of the Black or Latino world) offered an acceptable location for white, heterosexual, male display. The jazz dancer was a sexualised but civilised citizen. In the context of this discussion, it is also interesting to note that jazz was at its most acceptable when men were clothed in jeans or loose pants. This attire rendered the penis, if not completely ‘invisible’, then at least less vulnerable than it appeared in the body hugging tights traditionally worn by men in the classical tradition. In this latter image, the penis was well and truly on public display. In defiance of its normal location as an invisible source of, what Maxine Sheets-Johnstone has called, “unassailable power”¹², the classical penis, in tights and leotard, could be located and measured. It was “shrouded”, not in “mystery”¹³, but by the thin protection of a jock

¹⁰ Spongberg, op. cit.

¹¹ Ibid., 19-28

¹² Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, “Corporeal Archetypes and Power”, *Hypatia*, Vol. 7, No.3, Summer, 1992, 69; originally cited in Susan Bordo, “Reading the Male Body”, in Laurence Goldstein, ed., *The Male Body*, University of Michigan University Press, Michigan 1994, 267

¹³ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone has suggested that the penis in western culture has been able to maintain its location as the imagined source of phallic power because it has never gone “public”. It has never been put on the “measuring line” as has been the case with the female sexual anatomy. It

strap which arrested its motion but not the reality of its presence. This visibility, and its need for protection, offered a challenge to the organ's stature and power in western culture. The problem for classical ballet was the fact that the aesthetic relied not on the juxtaposition of energy and constraint, as was the case with jazz, but on the creation and maintenance of 'line' in body placement. Anatomical visibility was therefore essential, whether the body being viewed was male or female. As such, the classical male dancer was always a vulnerable site in the historical construction of heterosexual masculinity. The jazz body, with its more conventional attire, alleviated this problematic visual challenge. Despite this apparent non compliance with the traditional relationship between the male body and representations of phallic power, classical ballet was not immune to these constructions. The vulnerability of a man in tights did not rock the foundations of male power structures; instead it merely fuelled suspicions surrounding the nature of the classical male's sexual orientation. As the protestations of William Gill and Richard Galston suggested, men in classical dance had to be constantly vigilant against the suspicion of effeminacy. Throughout the twentieth century, dancers, choreographers and teachers tried to counteract this association. Various strategies were developed in order to impose, confirm, and defend traditional constructions of masculinity on the classical stage.

When Colonel de Basil brought his Ballet Russes to Australia in 1936, this company's confirmation of the heterosexual, masculine image was of a very particular kind. De Basil had brought with him a new style of male dancer. This performer was the epitome of power and prowess. As we saw in chapter three, these men were described by critics as 'virile' or 'manly' and their presence had a profound effect on the development of the male dancer in Australia.

To understand the impact of these dancers, it is important to realise that de Basil's style of male star was fostered (if not invented) in Diaghilev's Ballet Russes almost two decades earlier. Famous Diaghilev dancers such as Nijinsky paved the way

has therefore been "shrouded in mystery". Ibid.

for a new style of masculinity on the ballet stage. What was different about Nijinsky and other men favoured by Diaghilev was the fact that these men were not traditional “*danseur noble* types”. As Deborah Jowitt reminds us, although they were all well trained dancers, had they stayed in Russia instead of accompanying Diaghilev to Paris they would have been performing minor, character roles (“slaves and jesters and barbarian warriors”) for most of their careers. Their physics and style suited these characterisations. However, with Diaghilev those slaves and barbarian warriors were the new stars of his revolutionary ballet.¹⁴

As the earlier study of the exotic suggested, much of the success of this company, its repertoire, and its male dancers, can be attributed to the framing of all these aspects as foreign. These dancers were exotic Slavs. Their bodies were on display. The male dancer was no longer a prop for the ballerina but an object of the audience’s gaze. That audience was made up of both men and women, and dancers like Nijinsky provided a focal point for not only the homosexual but also the heterosexual gaze. This dual accommodation was very much a part of the Ballet Russes’ success. The ambiguity of these images provided all things to all people. However, this viewed male body did not directly challenge nineteenth century constructions of masculinity. As Ramsey Burt has suggested, French audiences (male and female, heterosexual and homosexual) were happy to accept Nijinsky’s ambiguities because they emerged within the confines of their contemporary appreciation of physical prowess and notions of ‘genius’. Nijinsky’s spectacular elevation, brilliant turning ability, and his reputation as an excellent partner for his ballerinas, framed any challenge that his sexualised, displayed body offered to preferred constructions of Victorian masculinity. Improprieties and sexual ambiguities were also diffused by Nijinsky’s image as the exotic Other.¹⁵

Fokine’s *Schéhérazaïde*, *Prince Igor*, and *Cléopâtre* foregrounded this new classical male. In the ballet *Schéhérazaïde*, and particularly the role of the Golden (or

¹⁴ Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image*, William Morrow, New York, 1988, 121

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 79

Favourite) Slave made famous by Vaslav Nijinsky in 1910, this tale of betrayal, lust and retribution (discussed at length in chapter three) offered the male body as a sexualised object of display. This tale of unbridled lust and horrible retribution maintained its ability to incite, entertain and fascinate forty years after its premier performance. When the men of Colonel de Basil's Ballet Russes arrived in Australia they were perceived as the epitome of heterosexual manhood. On and off stage they were acknowledged as 'real' men without the faintest whiff or accusation of effeminacy. They were described by the local press as "virile to a degree", the epitome of "sturdy masculinity".¹⁶ Martin Rubenstein followed in their wake, as did other Australian dancers who worked with Edouard Borovansky. Vassilie Trunoff, a member of the Ballet Rambert for their Australian Tour (1947) and the London Festival Ballet (1950-1952 and 1958-1980), was similarly described as electric and dominant. He had a "bounding virility"¹⁷ when he performed with the Borovansky Ballet in 1953.

This is not meant to suggest that an appreciation of the *danseur noble* faded from view. Versatility and virtuosity were still considered essential for any first rate male classical performer and, as we shall see later, questions relating to sexual orientation continued to dog the dancing male. However, the more "princely demeanour" required for ballets like *Swan Lake*, *La Sylphide*, or *Giselle* was achieved by dancers like Rubenstein or Trunoff when they curbed their "natural exuberance".¹⁸ After all, the *danseur noble* was seen as antithetical to the 'true' nature of men in general, and these new leading men in particular. A good male dancer from the 1930s to the 1970s in Australia was therefore constructed by many reviewers and critics as having to work hard to achieve the more refined portrayals in the classical repertoire. In contrast, the more aggressive, spectacular character roles such as the Golden Slave were thought to emanate from their innate, Heroic manliness.

¹⁶ Quote from the Adelaide *Advertiser*, 20th October, 1936, reprinted in Edward Pask, *Enter the Colonies Dancing*, Oxford University Press, 1979, 142

¹⁷ Patricia Laughlin, "Vassilie Trunoff", *Dance Australia*, 19, March/May, 1985, 46

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

These images were not only encouraged by choreographers, critics, performers and an adoring public, they were also advanced by directors and teachers. As Borovansky's biographer, Frank Salter suggests, Boro encouraged the development of an overtly heterosexual image of masculinity when he taught male dancers:

Boro had a particular dislike for effeminacy, and many earnest, if willowy, young men never got beyond their first classes with him. Savagely he caricatured the slightest limpness in any of these boys, drooping his wrist, rolling his shoulders, and mincing across the classroom floor to demonstrate a correction. It had to be a very tough or totally insensitive homo-sexual boy who could withstand this kind of derision. So, while one could usually find a few effeminate young men in beginners classes, their ranks thinned out as time progressed, or they acquired a covering of the 'masculinity' Boro demanded of them. Boro's homosexual male dancers learned to behave like stevedores in his presence...¹⁹

Emphatic constructions of heterosexual masculinity were not only encouraged by the likes of Borovansky. Distinctions between men and women were embedded in the vocabulary of the classical form. Measures applied by teachers to produce 'manly' men simply reinforced gender demarcations within the traditional language of ballet. In fact, theorists like Ann Daly maintain that sexual segregation is essential to the classical form. Daly argues that if the embodied articulation of typical, western, gender specifications are not present, then the practice is not ballet.²⁰ Although Daly's notion of the automatic association between the narrative, philosophical, and physiological constructions of classical ballet is open for debate²¹, it is true that ballet's archaic 19th century associations (and the corresponding, embodied

¹⁹ Frank Salter, *Borovansky: the Man who made Australian Ballet*, Wildcat Press, Sydney, 1980, 91. Here Salter assumes that those who Borovansky ridiculed for their apparent effeminacy were inevitably homosexual. The notion that there is a direct correlation between sexual orientation and the way a person moves is highly problematic, but it is an assumption that has often been made before and after Borovansky and Salter.

²⁰ Ann Daly, "The Balanchine Women: of Hummingbirds and Channel Swimmers", *The Drama Review*, T113, No. 312, (1), 1987, 8-21.

²¹ See Amanda Card, "Female Subjectivity and the Dancing Body", unpublished paper, 1997. This paper argues that it may be possible to disconnect the embodied sexual demarcation from the actual structured movement of the classical technique if certain training practices and narrative constructions are alleviated from the practice.

distinctions between men and women) have been maintained through many of the training regimes offered by ballet academies for most of this century. The movement language of ballet has been constructed to produce specifically gendered representations of both sexes. However, accompanying (and fuelling) these gendered developments in ballet's vocabulary and performance style, was the need for men in dance in the western world to avoid any association with effeminacy. Such avoidance has been gradually and successfully embedded in the construction of classical ballet's training regime and movement vocabulary over the century²², but it has never been enough to maintain this gender demarcation simply through the creation of particularly gendered dancing bodies. In fact, the very idea of men on stage - viewed, observed, and inspected - has always challenged one of the mainstream constructions of masculinity which requires the strict avoidance of objectification of the male body.

²² Women in classical ballet are either chosen for, or trained to create, a very specific body type and aesthetic sensibility. They usually possess a body which has a small and flexible frame with loose hip joints and lean muscle structure. The path to this physical development is achieved through the encouragement of girls with particular physical attributes and extended years of practice in the classroom which emphasises stretching over the development of muscle bulk and power. This has traditionally allowed the classical female body to achieve the high extensions of the working leg and 90 degree turn out of each hip joint which has become an essential asset.

In contrast to the training of women, the emphasis for men has been on the development of strength at the expense of flexibility. In order to achieve this men are traditionally encouraged to keep their legs at a lower level. This allows their thighs and hip flexes to develop, which is also aided by their use of a shallower *plié* and a restricted use of turnout. These differences are then displayed within performance through the particularly gendered execution of most classical vocabulary. This is especially true of spectacular moves such as the *pirouette* (turns executed predominantly on one leg), *petite batterie* (jumps in which the legs perform multiple scissor actions in the air), and the *grand jeté*. This latter move, a leap which resembles an over-extended run, is a particularly obvious case in point. For men the main aim when executing this move is to achieve a long suspension in the air at a great height. To create this image a tremendous amount of power in the legs is needed in order to launch the dancer into a sailing motion which sees the pelvic area suspended above the feet. For women the same movement has usually been constructed to give the impression of darting across the room, the suspension being momentary, the legs parallel to the floor. The path to the performance of these specifically gendered moves has once again been developed back in the classroom in front of the studio mirror where women practice the creation of sustainable flexibility and men develop strength and power.

This gendering of classical technique has also been reflected in traditional examples of classical partnering. The spectacle of the *pas de deux* has traditionally been dependent on the male's ability to catch, release, lift, turn and hold his female partners entire body weight. This affirmation of traditional masculinity has been re-enforced by the quality of 'grace' the female is required to display as she is balanced, rotated, spun, and tipped upside down, thrown and caught by her partner. Although the *pointe* shoe worn by women often introduces some equilibrium of height between partners, in a *pas de deux* the male dancer is often choreographed into a position of dominance from where he territorially gazes down at his partner while she balances below him.

The American dancer Igor Youskevitch articulated the problematic nature of this objectification when he suggested that the 'viewed' position on the dancing stage should be the exclusive territory of the female dancer. Men, as Youskevitch proposed, should attempt to avoid this position at all costs, never concentrating "purely on dances steps" which promoted the "display" of the body as "the principal goal" in dance. 'Real' men could avoid objectification through the creation of a "role", even in an abstract ballet. Youskevitch advised that they become an active subject, with personal intention and motivation, rather than a passive object who was directed by others. In this way they could retain some form of power even when being placed in the difficult position of being viewed on stage. For Youskevitch, pure display of physical ability had moved the male dancer "dangerously close to a female interpretation"²³ and, in order to be seen as a 'real' man, the dancer needed to always strive to become an active subject rather than a passive object of the audience's gaze. Such a strategy was encouraged by Igor Youskevitch in an attempt to erase the inherent ambiguity offered by the display of the male body on stage in a world dominated by constructions of heterosexual masculinity which have not, until very recently, sanctioned the male body as the object of a desiring gaze.

In the early 20th century the work of one particular dancer, choreographer and teacher epitomised the struggle between objectification and masculinity - the American Ted Shawn. Although Shawn had begun as partner to Ruth St Denis in life, dance and business, by the early thirties he had become disillusioned with St Denis's ecstatic, Orientalist explorations and began collecting around himself a group of men from whom he eventually formed a dance company. These men were often trained gymnasts rather than dancers and, after Shawn acquired patronage and established a studio and choreographic laboratory on a farm in Berkshire, known as Jacobs Pillow, he set about training his new breed of dancing men.²⁴

²³ Igor Youskevitch, "Masculinity in Dance", *Ballet Review*, Vol. 9, No.5, Fall, 1981, 91

²⁴ For more on Ted Shawn's see Walter Terry, *Ted Shawn: Father of American Culture*, Dial Press, New York, 1976; Joseph Mazo, *Prime Movers: the Makers of Modern Dance in America*, Adam and Charles Black, London, 1977; Jane Sherman and Barton Mumaw, *Barton Mumaw, dancer: From*

Shawn was convinced that concert dance had become “anaemic and sterile” as a result of the dominance of classical technique and of women.²⁵ He was particularly worried about the low status that dance endured when compared to other art forms. This was caused by a lack of “masculine vigour and power”²⁶ in the profession, and Shawn believed that, through a study of “primitive peoples” and the “civilisations of the past” he could prove that dance had until recent times been “largely, and sometimes exclusively, a man’s occupation”.²⁷ The saving of dance from obscurity therefore relied on “its restoration as a legitimate medium for the creative male artist”.²⁸ Shawn hoped to achieve this by linking the physicality of what he called “men’s work” with the movement vocabulary of his all male dance company. This “men’s work” (represented by the labour of tradesmen or the exploits of adventurers) was transformed from practical realities to the “mythical fantasies” which Shawn and his men displayed on the concert stage.

As Michael Kimmel’s work on the history of American masculinity has shown there was a dramatic shift in the way masculinity was perceived from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. In the 1700s the notion of *manhood* prevailed. This was defined at the time as an “expression of inner character” and was embodied in the “inner directed autonomous American producer”.²⁹ In contrast the 1800s saw the invention of the idea of *masculinity* which was based instead on a “set of qualities that denoted the acquisition of gender identity”. Masculinity was now a “process constantly in need of validation, of demonstration, [and] of proof”. There was a shift in the 19th century from “manhood-as-character” to “masculinity-as-personality”. Manhood was no longer a quality which was thought to emanate from “inside to be expressed through the body” but a set of qualities “applied to the body, as evidence of

Denishawn to Jacob’s Pillow and Beyond, Dance Horizons, New York, 1986.

²⁵ Ted Shawn, “Man Must Dance”, Dance Magazine, November, 1936, 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Michael S. Kimmel, “Consuming Manhood: the Feminisation of American Culture and the Recreation of the Male Body”, 1832-1920, in The Male Body, Laurence Goldstein ed., University of Michigan Press, 38

inner experience".³⁰ American men felt they had lost their "virtuous self" acquired from "years of hard physical labour" with the rapid industrialising of their world and the changing nature of work in the 19th century. This was especially true for middle class men, who set about reclaiming the image of manhood through a work-out in the gymnasium or recreational sport rather than through purposeful, physical work. They traded the "inner strength" of 18th century manhood for a "doctrine of physicality and the body".³¹ In other words they replaced a widely lived "reality" with a nostalgic "fantasy".³²

At Jacobs Pillow, when Shawn and his dancers were not engaged in class or touring, they maintained this fantasy by working the farm they lived on. After all, as Shawn argued:

The life of men has been largely out of doors. Men have sailed the seas; they have travelled vast distances, confronted on the way many dangers; they have blazed trails through unexplored and hostile lands; and they have learned to protect themselves against the destroying powers of adverse elements that nature set in their paths. And so in the dance, the movement of men should project itself beyond the body of the dancer and create in the mind of the audience a sense of spaciousness, great distances and invincible strength.³³

The labour of men in the fields became the language of men in dance.

When we come into the studio to create a labour symphony... it is no mere abstraction. The sweat of these forms of primitive labour is on our backs, our muscles are sore with it, and our hands are callused with it.³⁴

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 22

³² Ibid. Michael Gilding agrees with Kimmel's assessment of contemporary constructions of masculinity when he suggests that men "require instruction because their masculinity is not a guaranteed outcome", Michael Gilding, "Men, Masculinity and Australian History", *Southern Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2, July, 1992, 162-194, 21. For more on the changing structure of manhood in the 19th century, particularly in the American context, see, E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood, Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*, Basic Books, New York, 1993

³³ Shawn, op. cit., 10

³⁴ Ibid.

Shawn did not see a reclamation of dance for men as tied to the discovery of new forms. For him, as dance writer Lynn Fisher has suggested, the “future of dance lay in men reclaiming their traditional and rightful place”³⁵. Dance had to return to former glories, a memory of men defined by an agrarian lifestyle or heroic exploration; a mythologised ideal. Then, and only then, could dance accommodate men adequately.

Complementing this ethos of the working man was Ted Shawn’s resurrection of the dances of ancient or ‘primitive’ civilisations. He created ballets around Native American, Aztec and African American cultures which he researched at libraries and through travel. In 1947 he came to Australia at the invitation of Ida Beeby who, along with her husband Bill, ran the Patch Theatre in Perth. Shawn saw this trip as a perfect chance to observe Aboriginal culture first hand and add the dance of Australia’s indigenous peoples to his growing ‘anthropological’ sources for the re-vitalisation of the dance of men.

After teaching and giving recitals in Perth for three months, Shawn received confirmation from the Ministry of the Interior that his application to travel to Delissaville Aboriginal reserve had been granted.³⁶ Bill Harney, patrol officer for the Ministry, was assigned to Shawn as his official guide, along with a Darwin newspaper correspondent, Doug Lockwood, the superintendent of the Delissaville Aboriginal Reserve, Tom Wake, and John Ewers, who later wrote about the experience in an article for *Walkabout*³⁷ and a book called *With the Sun on My Back*.³⁸ In Autumn of 1947, Shawn found himself on the Bilyuin Creek among the Wargaitj people.³⁹

After this ‘outback’ experience Shawn toured Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney. In Sydney he told local reporters that he found Australia a very masculine country. An original dance language could easily be created here. This vocabulary would not be a “replica of other countries” but a “masculine dance, purely

³⁵ Lynn Fisher, “Dance Class: a history of Professional Dance and Dance Training from 1895 to 1940”, unpublished MA Thesis, Department of History University of Western Australia, 1992, 74

³⁶ John K. Ewers, *With the Sun on My Back*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1953, 1-31

³⁷ John K. Ewers, “Aboriginal Ballet”, *Walkabout*, December 1st 1947, 29-34

³⁸ Ewers, 1953, op. cit.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 1

Australian in conception". It could even draw its participants from one of Australia's most celebrated archetypes, the lifesaver.⁴⁰

As Fisher has pointed out, Shawn's work showed no direct influence on participation of men in dance in Australia.⁴¹ However, it did reinforce the re-definition of the status of the male dancer. As suggested earlier, change had crept into the preferred constructions of masculinity on the dancing stage with the visits of the De Basil companies and the work of Edouard Borovansky. Admittedly these 'new' men were exotic personalities, performing characters in stories that were removed from the direct experience of Australian audiences. These characters waltzed with princesses, ravished harem girls, and promenaded on the plains of Russia. Their bodies, although recognisably masculine, were safely contained within the realm of the exotic. Their problematic objectification was subsumed by their foreign personas. However, Shawn had articulated the possibility that a viewed male body could be local and familiar.

This call for a locally derived dance practice in 1947 was one among many in the post WWII dance environment. As we shall see in the next chapter, choreographers began to create 'Australian' ballets and critics gradually promoted and encouraged the notion of locally produced and locally reflective practices. In response to this promotion and appreciation of home grown talent, attempts were also made to fit the dancing man into acceptable constructions of Australian post war masculinity. Male dancers were gradually offered new characters to portray which valorised 'real' men; not through the exotic characterisations favoured in the thirties, but with national archetypes such as the digger, the explorer, the lifesaver, and the Aussie larrikin. The dancing men could now be framed as 'one of us' rather than the 'Other'. This reconciliation between ballet's 19th century aesthetic and the newly valorised heterosexual male was difficult. The feminine history of dance, and the central role of the viewed and objectified body, sat uncomfortably with the promotion

⁴⁰ "Surf Carnivals May be Basis of Male Ballet", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25th August, 1947, 4

⁴¹ Fisher, *op. cit.*, 74

of a traditional view of heterosexual masculinity embedded within these Australian archetypes. Negotiating a space where both constructions could be accommodated led to a shifting relationship between dance and men in post WWII Australia.

One particular dancer whose life, work, and his relationship to his place of birth which epitomised the growing contradictions inherent in being an Australian, dancing man was Robert Helpmann. Helpmann's early dancing career had begun, officially, when Anna Pavlova accepted him as a pupil during her 1926 tour of Australia. Later Helpmann became a dancer with the J.C. Williamson group, performing in cabaret and musicals, until he finally 'escaped' Australia at the invitation of the actress Margaret Rawlins who had been appearing in the Australian tour of Wilfred Walter's *Happy and Glorious*.⁴² Together Rawlins, her husband, and the young Robert Helpmann sailed for London in 1932.⁴³ By 1939, Helpmann had made his mark on the British classical stage as a leading member of Ninette De Valois's Sadlers Wells Ballet Company.⁴⁴

Although he stimulated a little publicity as a young dancer on the Australian stage in the late 1920s and the early 1930s, Helpmann's success in Britain from the late thirties to the mid fifties inspired a far greater interest than he had ever commanded when at home. During the Second World War the Australian media took great delight in re-printing reports about Helpmann's career which had originally appeared in newspapers from London or New York. Through these articles, Helpmann was re-introduced to the Australian public as their prodigal, but never the less home-grown, genius.

It is in these early reports that the first evidence of a growing rift between the reality of men on stage and dominant preferences for heterosexual constructions of masculinity in Australia emerged in relation to Robert Helpmann's life and career. Helpmann's dubious sexual orientation was covertly acknowledged but conveniently

⁴² Elizabeth Salter, *Helpmann: the authorised biography of Sir Robert Helpmann, CBE*, Angus and Robertson, United Kingdom, 1978, 29-46

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 46

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 54

realigned through references to his image as a ‘man about town’ in the 1940s and the 1950s. His re-creation as the urbane sophisticate, linked to famous women such as Vivian Leigh and Katherine Hepburn, saw the young man who was unceremoniously dumped into the Bondi surf in the late 1920s by locals (who had taken offence to his pink shirt, purple tie, Oxford bags, painted nails, and plucked eyebrows⁴⁵), reconstructed as the quintessential celebrity/bachelor. As the Adelaide Advertiser told its readers in 1946⁴⁶:

Ballet was invented in France, perfected in Russia, adopted in England and transformed by Robert Helpmann... Slight and shapely, with the wide brow of an intellectual and the big trusting eyes of a basset-hound, Helpmann couldn't be anything other than graceful, whether on the stage or in his dressing-room curled up on the sofa smoking a cigarette. He has the vivid personality, restless and colourful, of an artist who lives on his nerves and works with his emotions for a gay ephemeral art. It has made him interesting, hyper-sensitive, reactive to his surroundings and absent-minded. Helpmann hasn't time for very much outside the theatre. But he plays hard. He loves private parties during the week and a night club after the show on Saturdays.⁴⁷

Images of grace, hyper-sensitivity, intellectualism, and a “slight and shapely” physic “curled up” on a sofa, could be interpreted as covert signals which offered evidence of Helpmann’s homosexuality. Undoubtedly, these characteristics were interpreted by some Australians as just that, but these qualities were also constructions which fitted perfectly into the roll-call of characteristics for the artist as sophisticated bohemian. This image was also supported by the identification of Helpmann as an urbane sophisticate. He was the ‘man about town’. As the Advertiser suggested, when Helpmann was out and about in the evenings he played hard, regularly attended night clubs and was “always ready to party”. He loved to gamble “losing money at poker and roulette”, and kept a butler to look after him in his London home. He was also

⁴⁵ Ibid., 40

⁴⁶ “Mount Gambier at the top of the tree”, Adelaide Advertiser, no date. Article located in Sheila Helpman scrap books, . There is no date on this article, however it mentions Helpmann’s age as 37 which, if it is correct, would mean publication date is sometime in 1946.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

the confidant of the rich and famous and a regular weekend visitor to the home of Sir Lawrence and Lady Olivier.⁴⁸

Essential to, and running parallel with, this image of the sophisticated, artistic ‘man of the world’ was another construction essential to the accommodation of Robert Helpmann as an artist Australians could call their own. He was a larrikin. Any controversy or irreverent behaviour was seized upon as proof of the influence of Helpmann’s birth place. His valiant, irreverent conduct during the tour of the Sadlers Wells Company on the eve of the invasion of the Netherlands by Hitler’s armies in 1940 was widely reported in the Australian press.⁴⁹ Such local distinctiveness was also highlighted in Helpmann’s apparent ability to beat the ‘Poms’ at their own game. Australia, that “down-to-earth and self-consciously masculine country”⁵⁰, may not have been the right place in the late 1920s for a young man who “admired Nijinsky rather than Ponsford, and who yearned to play Hamlet rather than the Sydney Stock Exchange”⁵¹, but reporter Douglas Brass was certain that Australia had given Helpmann the ability to put British ballet “on its feet”. For Brass, he had made ballet “original and exciting where it had been both imitative and dull”⁵²:

Helpmann’s own ballets, such as the allegorical *Adam Zero* and the brutally macabre *Miracle in the Gorbals*, have brought theatre controversy to boiling point, disgusting those who like their ballet pretty-pretty and ravishing the others who prefer it with a bit of guts...⁵³

Brass obviously preferred his ballet with “a bit of guts” and he was convinced that the “down to earth” ethos of Australian culture had provided Helpmann with a muscularity of invention needed to produce such works. The challenging nature of these ballets also helped to neutralise Helpmann’s more feminine qualities: his “gnome like figure”, his “soft and liquid” eyes and his addiction to “red socks and gold wrist

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Salter, 1978, op. cit., 97-98

⁵⁰ Douglas Brass, *The Age*, Melbourne, 1948, no month or day. Article locate in Sheila Helpman scrap books, Wolanski Library, Sydney Opera House, New South Wales.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

chains". Brass would undoubtedly have attributed these later traits to the influence of living in Britain. It was the Brits, after all, who preferred their ballet "pretty-pretty" and "imitative" rather than muscular and original.

This emphasis on supposedly typically Australian traits displayed in Helpmann's character (and the minimisation of other more questionable attributes), continued throughout the reportage on Helpmann's life. In a 1955 edition of the Bulletin, Herbert Holman confided that when he met Helpmann he was surprised at how "unaffected" the star was:

He laughs robustly at the fantastic idea of Helpmann's son taking up ballet, he talks easily and freely about Adelaide and his old connections there...⁵⁴

Holman concluded that Helpmann is a very "down to earth man"⁵⁵. He laughed "robustly", he was patriotic (showing appropriate affection for his roots), and he just happened to be an Australian male who did ballet. The latter was an amusing contradiction rather than a source of suspicion. These constructions added to the image encouraged by Brass, while it still dealt with the ambiguities of an association between the star, the ballet and effeminacy.

Helpmann was also an active participant in the creation of these images. In the 1940s and fifties he developed a rhetorical style which fitted perfectly with his representation within the Australian media. Speaking to the Sydney Morning Herald in 1950, he insisted that his success and inclination to hard work should be attributed to his "typical Australian vitality".⁵⁶ He also suggested that his flair and knowledge of theatre had been gained in Australia rather than Britain.

Undoubtedly aware of the homophobia prevalent in the social, political, and legal structures in both Britain and Australia, Helpmann was careful to play to the sensibilities and prejudices of his audience. He was instrumental in creating and

⁵⁴ The Bulletin, 27th April, 1955, 25.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Sydney Morning Herald, 1st July, 1950. Article located in Sheila Helpman scrap books, Wolanski Library, Sydney Opera House, New South Wales.

encouraging the image of a smart, talented sophisticate, especially when he began returning to Australia after a twenty year absence.

On this first trip back, Helpmann was accompanied by the American actress Katherine Hepburn and the director of Britain's Old Vic Theatre Company, Michael Benthall. Helpmann and Hepburn appeared in a collection of Shakespearian plays over several months. As 'stars', they were swooped on by the Australian press as they hit the tarmac at Mascot in June 1955. Magazines and newspapers were full of photographs, commentary and interviews with the pair. Their humorous banter, their easy familiarity, and their fashion sense mesmerised the Australian media. They were seen as the epitome of "good taste".⁵⁷

The inevitable question arose - were Hepburn and Helpmann an 'item'? A reporter for the Sydney Morning Herald recounted Helpmann's ambiguous reply to persistent attempts to link him romantically with Hepburn: "I have been asked that three times... since I arrived here several hours ago' Helpmann said. 'Am I going to marry Kate? Could be. Could be.'" Helpmann's "languid voice" then fell away on these words as he turned to field another question.⁵⁸

Similarly, in an article entitled "Man's Angle on Women", Helpmann was again responding to questions about his marital status. In reply, he initially suggested that he simply "couldn't afford" to get married, and besides, as he later confessed, "the only two women I've wanted to marry already have husbands and didn't care enough for me to leave them".⁵⁹ These diversions thrown up through the encouragement of rumoured relationships with Katherine Hepburn, Vivian Leigh and various ballerinas, not only consolidated an image of Helpmann as a sophisticated

⁵⁷ Sydney Morning Herald, 14th June, 1955, 1. For other examples of the fascination the Australian media showed for Hepburn and Helpmann see: Sydney Morning Herald, 5th May, 1955, 1; 8th May, 1955, 30; 10th May, 1955, 5, 10; 14th May, 1955, 1, 2; 16th May, 1955, 2; 21st May, 1955, 3; 5th June, 1955, 9; 1st July, 1955, 5; 12th September, 1955, 1; 15th November, 1955; Sun Herald, 15th May, 1955; The Bulletin, 11th May, 1955, 18; 27th April, 1955, 25, 27, 30; Daily Mirror, 17th March, 1955; Telegraph (Brisbane), 12th July, 1955; 26th July, 1955. Articles located in Sheila Helpman scrap books, Wolanski Library, Sydney Opera House, New South Wales.

⁵⁸ Sydney Morning Herald, 14th June, 1955, 1.

⁵⁹ Article date 10th May, 1955, location not identified. Article available in Sheila Helpman scrap books, Wolanski Library, Sydney Opera House, New South Wales.

(possibly) heterosexual man but they also helped to settle his relationship with Michael Benthal into the less problematic frame of the swinging, cohabiting bachelors.

Helpmann and Benthal had shared a three storey Georgian house in London for some years. In 1951, *People* magazine offered its Australian readers an insiders view of their apartment. The house had “a touch of chi-chi” with its:

...purple and yellow decor in the sitting room and the purple velvet headpiece above Helpmann’s bed... on the walls are fine collections of modern paintings... Bon and Chelsea figures decorate the mantle shelves and Helpmann is fond of arranging huge bowls of flowers on the tables and in niches.⁶⁰

Such references to a touch of *chi-chi* (the purple, yellow and velvet decor in the sitting room and Helpmann’s love of flower arranging) could be seen as a reference to “gay chic”; indicating, however covertly, Helpmann’s apparently ambiguous sexuality.⁶¹ However there was another prominent construction overlaying this ambiguity, that of the swinging bachelor. In Australia, as in America, Hollywood’s invention of the ‘bachelor’ in the 1950s was seen as a valid representation of masculinity. Helpmann’s image tapped into this development which, as Joan Mellen suggests, gave the single man a more “sensitive and thoughtful” demeanour.⁶² As Mellen observed:

In an era of nationally orchestrated paranoias, Hollywood on screen turned with unprecedented openness and intensity to the exploration of what it means to be a man... Hollywood replaced social dissent with a fascination and serious examination of *sexual* politics.⁶³

At this time, Hollywood was redefining the feminine. Accompanying the new “sensitive and thoughtful” fifties male was a newly demeaned and sexualised female in

⁶⁰ *People*, 26th September, 1951, 11

⁶¹ I thank historian Richard White, History Department, University of Sydney, New South Wales, for this insight.

⁶² Joan Mellen, *Big Bad Wolves: Masculinity in the American Film*, Elm Tree Books, London, 1978, 23

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 192

post World War Two cinema.⁶⁴ This re-privatised female required a new, more “infinitely desirable” male who could encourage her to assume her right and proper place, among her post-war gadgetry, at home. Her new man was strongly heterosexual but quite capable of arranging a dinner with “candle light and soft music”. He was “living evidence that a strong man is not immune to the finer things” that consumer society could offer.⁶⁵

Although these constructions of the bachelor life style were a fantasy offered to, and consumed by, men and women who would probably never actually be in a position to enjoy such a life, people like Helpmann and Benthal were living proof that this bachelor lifestyle was probable and possible; if not for the ‘average’ man then at least for the successful artists, free of wife and children.⁶⁶ The new fifties male, created to accommodate a new post war consumer boom and encourage women to leave the work force, also opened a space where personalities like Robert Helpmann and Michael Benthal could exist, even in a highly homophobic community such as Australia in the 1950s.

These images were also re-enforced by the success of other dancing men who epitomised the new, improved Hollywood male. As Michael Cohen proposed in his study of Fred Astaire, Hollywood musicals, particularly after the Second World War, “re-imagined American masculinity” in “spectacular terms”.⁶⁷ Cohen suggests that Astaire’s stardom and “charismatic persona” on film were built around tropes formally considered feminine: *narcissism* “which defines his body in terms of boundless energy, and joyful motion”; *exhibitionism* “which defines his performance in terms of self-conscious spectacle and display of style”; and *masquerade*, “which defines his

⁶⁴ Ibid., 16-23

⁶⁵ Ibid., 244

⁶⁶ For more on men as the target of consumer culture in Australia see Richard White “The Importance of Being *Man*”, in Peter Spearitt and David Walker, ed., *Australian Popular Culture*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1979, 145-168.

⁶⁷ Steve Cohen, “‘Feminising’ the Song and Dance Man: Fred Astaire and the spectacle of masculinity in the Hollywood musical”, in Steven Cohen and Ina Rae Hark, ed., *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, Routledge, 1993, 61

identity in terms of theatrical play and social manners". Yet Astaire's public masculinity, oscillated successfully between:

...a fictional character grounded in the static and reductive binarism of traditional gender roles and... a musical persona whose energy choreographs a libidinal force that revises conventional masculinity and linear desire.⁶⁸

Like Astaire, Helpmann also played a public role which accommodated the "static and reductive binarism of traditional gender roles", both on and off stage. However, his viewed, objectified, dancing body simultaneously disrupted the very masculinity it wished to accommodate. His body was located on stage, an object of the gaze of both the media and the audience. Such exposure continually threatened to wrestle this dancing man's body from its association with heterosexual masculinity. This was not peculiar to Helpmann, but particularly important in his case because his actual body continually threatened escape (unlike that of the less ambiguous Fred Astaire). Helpmann's dancing body and his public persona fluttered dangerously between masculinity and effeminacy throughout his public career. As a result, the ties that bound him to an image of heterosexuality and masculinity needed to be more strenuously policed in order for Australians to claim this man as a home grown hero and celebrity in the 1950s.

Of particular interest within the context of the media construction of Helpmann and Michael Benthal's relationship is the manner in which, as the fifties progressed, articles which acknowledged or celebrated their co-habitation declined. This could be attributed directly to changing social awareness of homosexuality and to the 'fall-out' from two influential reports on male sexuality, Alfred Kinsey's 1948 Sexual Behaviour of the Human Male, and the report of Britain's Wolfenden Committee published in 1957.⁶⁹ Garry Wotherspoon has suggested that the former report had little real impact on Australia until the late 1960s when the gay liberation

⁶⁸ Ibid., 63-64

⁶⁹

movement had begun in earnest⁷⁰, but, along with the findings of the Wolfenden Committee, magazines such as People afforded the topic of male sexuality a five page spread in 1957.⁷¹ This magazine published findings which challenged some contemporary misconceptions about the nature of homosexuality.⁷² For example, the idea that homosexuality was restricted to small pockets of society was canvassed in the People article. Formerly it was intellectuals and artists who were suspected of being prone to such 'deviant' behaviour. This view meant that reports on Helpmann in the 1930s and 1940s could survive the hint of sexual ambiguity even though they sat rather uncomfortably beside his reconstruction as the quintessential Australian larrikin in the same period. He was, after all, an *artiste*, and such men and women were excused their 'differences' to a certain extent. However, by the 1950s the Kingsey and Wolfenden reports had informed not only the medical profession and the police, but also the general public (through magazines like People) that homosexuality, or at least some experimentation with homosexual activities, had been experienced by a far greater cross section of the community than originally expected. These reports also shifted the framing of homosexuality from an exclusively criminal problem (to be dealt with by the courts) to a medical problem from which one could be cured.⁷³ In this period it was suggested then that incarcerated homosexuals should be allocated to a separate wing of jails or mental institutions where the public could not only be 'protected' from these men (and women), but a "committee of sociologists, psychiatrists, educationalists, psycho-analysts, endocrinologists, doctors, and

⁷⁰ Garry Wotherspoon, Being Different, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1986, 17

⁷¹ "Shock Sex Report", People, 16th October, 1957, 7-11.

⁷² There seems to have been a distinct discrepancy between the coverage of the Wolfenden Committees findings in different publications through the late '50s. As the gay activist Lex Watson told Garry Wotherspoon, the Sydney Morning Herald could never bring itself to mention the homosexuality in the wake of the Wolfenden report. For the Herald homosexuality remained a "perversion". See Garry Wotherspoon City of the Plain: History of a Gay Sub-culture, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1991, 175.

⁷³ Wotherspoon, 1986, op. cit., 104. Also see Richard Davenport Hines, Sex, Death and Punishment: attitudes to sex and sexuality in Britain since the renaissance, Collins, London, 1990, 228-229, and Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, Penguin, London, 1979, 62-64.

ministers of religion” could be on hand to “examine” offenders and aid in their ‘recovery’.⁷⁴

Therefore, in the cultural, political, legal and medical climate of 1950s in Australia, the pursuit of a homosexual lifestyle was far from simple. It was instead, fraught not only with the fear of entrapment, persecution, violence and prosecution, but also medical intervention. As Wotherspoon has made clear, this kept many homosexuals hidden behind the veil of respectability through the emulation of a heterosexual lifestyle. Being regularly seen in the company of women was a common decoy.⁷⁵ In the case of Robert Helpmann the string of associations he had with various beautiful and famous women throughout the 1950s proved very useful. Another useful tale picked up by the media at this time was the adoration he had received from female ballet fans in the 1940s. Speaking to the Daily Mail in London in 1958 (the article being reprinted in the Adelaide Advertiser to coincide with his second trip to Australia), Helpmann told Robert Muller that his unexpected return to the ballet stage in ’58 had nothing to do with a craving for the kind of attention he once enjoyed from young women. This sought of adulation “sickened him”:

I certainly don’t want to go through that again. Nostalgia? It was sex: simply that.⁷⁶

Even though the mature Helpmann rejected the attention of such frenzied women at the stage door, the fact that his presence and performance had once encouraged such behaviour did his 1950s image no harm at all.

Such overt constructions of Helpmann as a ‘full-blooded’, heterosexual Australian male were further enhanced by the physical displays of ‘manliness’ he offered Australian papers. These photos emphasised aspects of popular constructions

⁷⁴ Sydney Morning Herald, 25th March, 1955, 8 and 28th, March, 1955, 2

⁷⁵ See Wotherspoon 1986, op. cit. For more on strategies used by homosexuals in Australia in the 1950s to avoid detection. Also see Garry Wotherspoon, City of the Plain: History of a Gay Sub-culture, Hale & Iremonger, 1991.

⁷⁶ Advertiser (Adelaide), 18th January, 1958. Sheila Helpman scrap books, Wolanski Library, Sydney Opera House, New South Wales.

of Australian masculinity - physical strength and virility as well as a healthy dose of anti-authoritarianism. Staged to advertise the Old Vic's 1955 season of Shakespearian plays, the association between Helpmann's body and the strength and virility of heterosexual manhood were quite pointed. In People magazine Helpmann was captured tying up and 'beating' the recalcitrant (but smiling) 'Shrew', Katherine Hepburn. In another he was practicing his whip cracking outside the rehearsal room, minus his shirt. The caption under this picture read:

Robert Helpmann has learnt to crack the whip he will use in the Old Vic production of the "Taming of the Shrew". Warmed by his exertions, he stripped to the waist yesterday despite the bitter weather.⁷⁷

In yet another image, taken by the Telegraph when he returned to his old school to open a new wing, Helpmann was framed once again as the quintessential Australian larrikin. Taken in the grounds of Prince Albert College Adelaide, this photo showed Helpmann surrounded by an admiring throng of boys who were now attending his old college. Helpmann had been expelled for refusing to wear his regulation school cap and for smoking. Displaying the offending cap on his mature head, with cigarette dangling from his lips Helpmann was the epitome of the popular, laconic rebel.⁷⁸

In the latter years of the 1950s Helpmann added a new found patriotism to his public persona which enhanced his local status even further. Returning to Australia on two occasions in 1958, he arrived at the end of March to produce and star in the Noel Coward play "Nude with a Violin" for J.C. Williamson and again in October for the Royal Ballet's tour, which also went to New Zealand. Earlier in the same year Helpmann had unexpectedly returned to the ballet stage dancing the title role in Ninette de Valois' *The Rake's Progress* with the Royal Ballet in March and also performing Dr Coppélius in *Coppélia*, the title role in *Petrouchka* and his own *Hamlet* throughout the company's Covent Garden Season. On arrival he confessed that he

⁷⁷ Sydney Morning Herald, 1955, 3, no month indicated. Article located in Sheila Helpman scrap books, Wolanski Library, Sydney Opera House, New South Wales.

⁷⁸ Salter, 1978, op. cit., 184

had three main aspirations for this trip home. He wanted to dance again in Australia, to act with an Australian cast, and to spend Christmas “enjoying the surf”. He managed to fulfil the first of these desires with his Royal Ballet performances in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide.⁷⁹ The second he accommodated by casting the 14 roles for *Nude with a Violin* in Sydney. He also paid homage to the third six years later with his first (and only) adventure into pop music recording his send up of the surfy scene “Surfer Doll” and “I Still Could Care” in Hawaii on his way to Australia where he was scheduled to create, what was to become, his most famous ballet in Australia - *The Display*.⁸⁰

Helpmann’s patriotism was also expressed through his new-found regard for what Australia had to offer in life-style choices. Interviewed at length by Peter Hastings for *The Observer* in October 1958, Helpmann expressed surprise at what he observed as a new sense of sophistication in late 1950s Australia. “The change is incredible” Helpmann told Hastings:

Every-body looks well-dressed except some of the men who look rather sloppy if you ask me. I asked in David Jones whether people *really* bought the clothes they had on the rack and they said without a moment’s hesitation: “They buy them alright” and by God, so they do. However, if I had worn a pair of suede shoes here in 1932 they’d have thrown me to the sharks or leaned out of the tram and *whistled* at me. Now you can wear anything... Things have changed, buildings, food, services, manners. Katie [Hepburn] used to plague me when she was here, “But Bobbie, where is the Great Australian Accent?” Well, where *is* it? I warned her what it would be like and when we got here we found it no longer existed.⁸¹

Although this article also made reference to Helpmann’s dubious masculinity: “We found him in shoes, black socks and patterned yellow dressing gown deftly penciling in a farouche pair of side leavers”⁸², it was far more concerned with this famous

⁷⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24th May, 1958, 5, and Pask, 1982, op. cit., 106-107.

⁸⁰ For more on Helpmann’s two surfing pop songs see “Surfy-wompie surfer boy from the Ballet” *TV Times*, February 19th, 1964, and “Oh Robert, how could you!”, *Sydney Scene*, 29th January, 1964. Both articles located in Sheila Helpman scrap books, Wolanski Library, Sydney Opera House, New South Wales. Also see *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29th January, 1964, 10.

⁸¹ Peter Hastings, “Robert Helpmann”, *The Observer*, 18th October 1958, 554.

⁸² *Ibid.*

expatriate's impressions of Australia. Helpmann's rather unorthodox profession and demeanour were subsumed, tolerated, or at least seen as of secondary importance, to his role as an informed critic whose judgement of his homeland, especially in this new and positive light, was highly appreciated.

Helpmann found this new role stimulating and useful, especially when he started work on *The Display* for The Australian Ballet and the 1964 Adelaide Festival. *The Display* consolidated Helpmann's role as the local boy made good. With his ballet he offered Australians a glimpse of their own identity not only in his person, but also in the construction of a work of art.

The Display revolved around an encounter between the leading ballerina, simply called 'the female', and a lyrebird, 'the man', out in the Australian bush.⁸³ In the original cast Kathleen Gorham played 'the female'. *The Display* began with Gorham's first encounter with the bird. She was alone in the bush and became enthralled by the lyrebird's mating ritual, known in ornithological circles as 'the display'. The site of this strutting bird with his plumage in full bloom aroused deep passions in the girl which were portrayed in a recurring choreographic motif in which Gorham ran her hands up and down her body in response to the drama of the birds 'advances'. Frightened by her own response Gorham fled the stage.

In the next scene, and in another bush clearing, a group of young people entered the space to begin a picnic. Kathleen Gorham was among them. The boys entered, tossing a football around among themselves and handing out beers to each other. This was followed by a lot of 'toasting' choreography in which the men stepped toward each other clinking beer bottles, taking a swig, and moving on to toast another friend. These actions were reminiscent of scenes in many traditional classical works in which 'men behaved like men' in tavern or bar scenes. However in this ballet, replacing the customary tights and jerkins of period pieces such as *Giselle*

⁸³ This description of *The Display* is re-constructed from a viewing of a video of the piece made by the ABC with the original cast and directed by Brian Faull. Viewing was made possible by the kind assistance of Lee Christofis, and the staff at the Australian Ballet, Heather Gouley and Angela Embleton.

or *Swan Lake*, the men were dressed in contemporary 1960s attire - light coloured jeans and shirts.

After the boys danced briefly with their girlfriends (in which it is established that Gorham and 'the leader', Brian Lawrence, were an item) the group split into two. The boys 'horsed around' as they challenged each other to perform more spectacular moves, beer in hand. The girls congregated in another section of the space to chat, lying around on the rugs and cushions, chatting. Here Helpmann offered comment on the standard view that Australians favoured sexual segregation on social occasions. Slightly separated from all the action, Gorham was obviously disinterested in the whole proceedings. She lay down, perhaps to day-dream about her close encounter with the lyrebird.

Into this innocent picnic scene wandered 'the outsider', Garth Welch. Initially the group were quite welcoming and the boys offered the intruder a beer, but while the men practiced passing the ball between them in a typical AFL style⁸⁴, Welch and Gorham, 'the outsider' and 'the female', noticed one another. Gorham flirted with the new-comer whose movement vocabulary was more languid and sensual than that displayed by the other boys. Gorham was attracted to this difference. Encouraged by her attentiveness Welch made a move toward Gorham. The pair were noticed by the others. The girls circled Gorham leading her away from the stranger. The boys advanced toward Welch, dispersed and regrouped, displaying their menacing strength as a unified force against the intrusion of the interloper.

In the following scenes, Helpmann's choreography offered a sense of solidarity for the men. Their formation as a group, and much of their movement, was reminiscent of the style foregrounded in *West Side Story*. This was especially evident in one section where a jazz, drag lunge was used as the boys pulled away from their prey. Such referencing was also apparent when the men lined up in two lines, the first line turning to kneel on one knee on a sharp crescendo of the music, the back line

⁸⁴ This requires that the ball be held in one hand and punched forward with the closed fist of the other.

following but remaining standing on the next crescendo. Positioned in this line up, not unlike those created by Jerome Robbins for the Jets and Sharks, the bodies of the men in *The Display* took on a similarly angular composition. There was a contained tension in the stances they assumed. The intrinsic and identifiable masculinity of the jazz style seemed to have been useful to Helpmann in his attempt to show 'real' Australian males on the ballet stage. Although there is no direct evidence that Helpmann intended to mirror a jazz sensibility, a contemporary viewing of the film of *The Display* confirms the presence of such referencing. This reading is not possible with the advantage of hindsight. The critic Roland Robertson noticed the similarities between the two works on opening night in Adelaide in 1964.⁸⁵

The jazz style's virile, aggressive masculinity and social tribalism was reinforced in Helpmann's work by classical moves which had also been designed to promote an image of virile masculinity. As the fight in *The Display* unfolded the boys broke out into a series of jumps, turns, and *tours* (spinning turns executed in the air) - all stock in trade for the contemporary, male classical performer. 'The leader', Bryan Lawrence, performed a particularly acrobatic display which was intended to impress and ward off 'the outsider'. Later (in a line up reminiscent of that offered within a ballet such as *Cinderella* in which the princess encountered each of her suitors who took her hand in order to assist her to perform a particular number of pirouettes or to balance impressively with each gentleman) the boys formed a line along which Bryan Lawrence travelled. He executed multiple pirouettes in front of each of his mates who then offered him a beer as reward when he completed his spins. He grabbed the bottle from each boy, took a swig, getting drunker and drunker as he moved along the line.⁸⁶ Throughout this action Gorham had been inviting the attention of 'the outsider' once again. Moving always just outside his reach, Gorham was finally

⁸⁵ See the Roland Robinson review, "Premiere of Ballet By Helpmann", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16th March 1964. Sheila Helpman scrap books, Wolanski Library, Sydney Opera House, New South Wales.

⁸⁶ Although there is no written evidence that such a line up was a parody of ballets like *Cinderella*, Helpmann's reputation encourages such an interpretation.

grabbed and kissed. With this overt display Lawrence finally attacked Welch. Welch retaliated by smashing a bottle at the back of the stage and threatening Lawrence with the jagged remains.⁸⁷ In the struggle that followed one of the boys managed to wrestle the broken bottle away from Welch and the group moved between him and the increasingly distressed Gorham. At this point 'the outsider' and 'the leader' began to fight in earnest. The group separated Gorham and the audience from a view of the action. They formed a solid mass in front of the fighters reacting to each blow by a dramatic lunge from one side to the next. This action informed the audience, and Gorham, of the continuing state of the battle between the two men.

Unable to stand the fight any longer Gorham fled the scene, dropping her scarf behind her. The group then moved aside to reveal the body of Garth Welch on the floor. The boys circled him as he grabbed his genital area with one hand and his chest with the other. Welch's body eventually succumbed to the pain of the blows he had sustained. He collapsed and convulsed on the floor. The rest of the crowd circled him before leaving the stage. Lawrence gave Welch's motionless body one last prod with his foot before leaving him lying alone. After a moments stillness Welch's body contracted, he lifted himself onto his knees, one hand over his mouth, the other grabbing his genitals. Then he saw the scarf Gorham had left behind. Welch grimaced, realising that his fate had been sealed by this 'wayward' female. He left the stage in search of her, intent on extracting his revenge.⁸⁸

In the next scene Gorham entered the forest where she had first caught sight of the lyrebird. She was running wildly, confused and exhilarated but also frightened. She could hear the lyrebird's song which sent her into a frenzy of movement. She lashed her body with her hands and, with her hair flowing, swept her torso in a full

⁸⁷ This moment was particularly spectacular on the film as the director employed a tight, close-up of the action with Welch smashing and brandishing the jagged bottle.

⁸⁸ The action of Welch grabbing his genitals to reinforce the pain and humiliation of his defeat is an unusual choreographic decision by Helpmann. It is rare for a choreographer, especially in the ballet, to pull the focus so emphatically to the male sexual organ. This action focuses the audiences attention of the outsider's emasculation at the hands of the group.

circular motion while she did a *plié* and *relevé* in second position. This gave the impression that she was gradually losing control. She finally collapsed.

'The outsider' then entered the space. Finding 'the female' on the ground he attempted to seize and kiss her. There was a struggle in which Gorham's dress was ripped off. Welch then took Gorham by the waist, raised her above his head and her legs opened out in a wide second split. He then brought her down onto his body where she wrapped her legs around his waist and their bodies were thrust together. This action was repeated. Then Gorham fell to the floor, Welch falling on top of her. They rolled around. These actions signified, rather unambiguously, the raping of the female by the outsider.⁸⁹

After all this frenetic activity, there was another moment's stillness. Welch, still lying near Gorham's body, stirred. He lifted himself off the floor, consciousness dawning. Horrified by what he had done, Welch rose to walk away, shame etched on his face. Gorham crawled after him, a delirious smile on her face. She seemed to be pleading for him to stay, apparently aroused by his violence (see fig. 44). He tried to leave but she followed him, flinging her arms around his chest gradually sliding to the floor as he continued to drag her behind him.

Left alone on the floor, Gorham's body began to quiver as the sound of the lyrebird's call returned. She sat up clutching her face and running her hands over her body. As the bird approached Gorham rose, her movements dramatic and wild. As he got closer she kneeled at the front of the stage with her back to the audience. The music reduced to a dramatic drum beat as the bird's huge tail bowed over the female's waiting body. Gorham bent backwards as the tail covered her, reaching her arms up between the feathers, her hands quivered as they protruded above the tale. At the last dramatic beat, Gorham dropped further into her back bend, arms collapsed by her side, shrouded by the feathers - exhausted and spent (see fig. 45).

⁸⁹ This rape scene is the means through which the outsider re-instates his disqualified phallic power. For a discussion of the imaginary construction of this power in relation to the reality of the penis see Sheets-Johnstone, *op. cit.*, Bordo, *op. cit.*, and Spongberg, *op. cit.*.

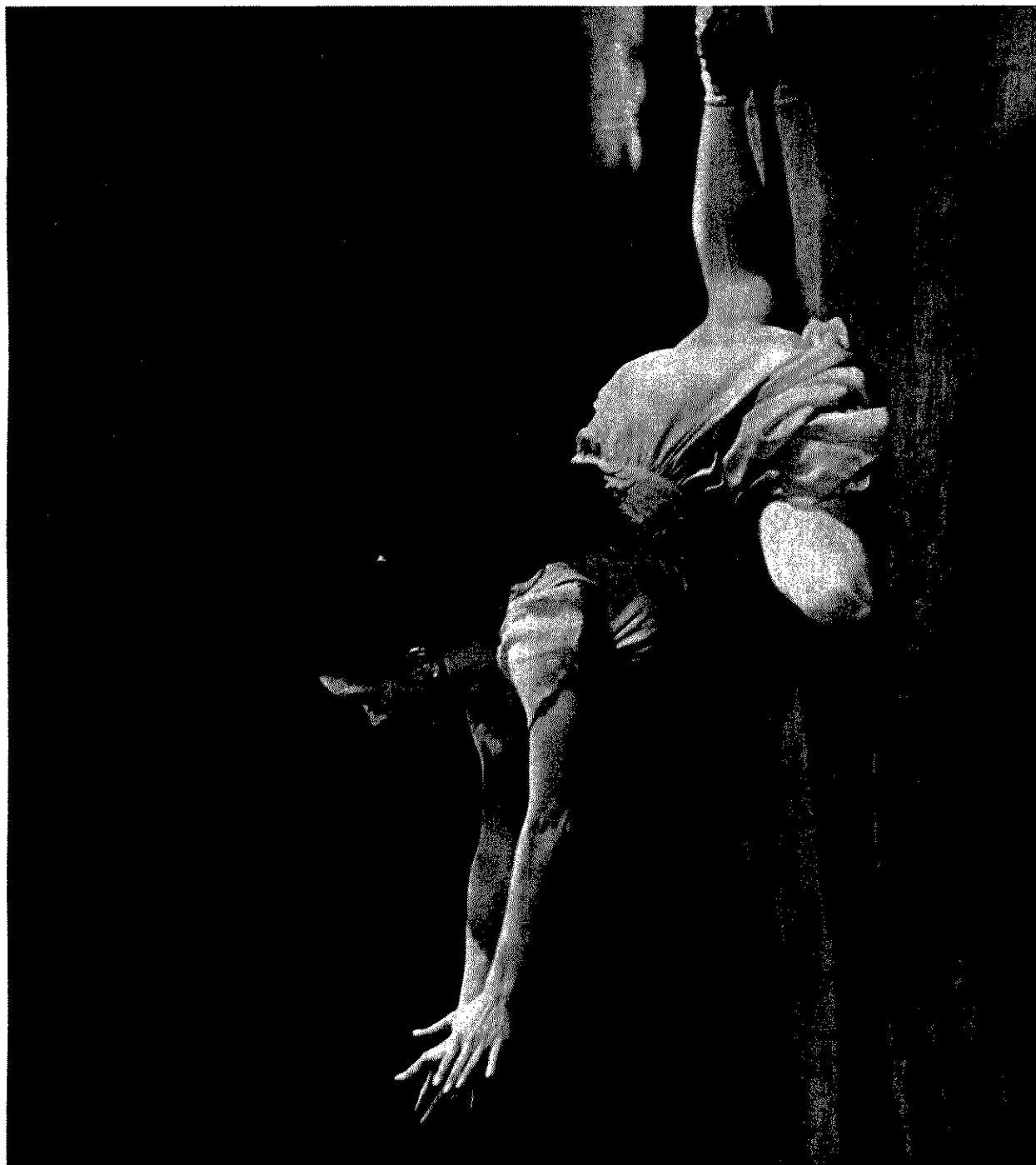


Fig. 44. Kathleen Gorham, *The Display* (1964) Photographer W.T. Baxter. Ian F. Brown, *The Australian Ballet*, Longmans of Australia Pty Ltd, Croydon, Victoria, 1967, 79



Fig. 45. Kathleen Gorham and Barry Kitcher, *The Display* (1964) Photographer James Robinson. Ian F. Brown, *The Australian Ballet*, Longmans of Australia Pty Ltd, Croydon, Victoria, 1967, 79

As Elizabeth Slater observed in her biography of Helpmann, this “symbolic” sexual union of bird and girl through the mist at the end of *The Display* was considered rather shocking by some members of the audience but completely wasted on others. Two ladies at a matinee interpreted what Slater called the “uncompromising sexual dénouement” as “the lovely lyre bird protecting the girl against the bush fire”.⁹⁰

Although not all who saw *The Display* understood or appreciated this sexually explicit ending, the piece was still considered of major significance by most contemporary commentators, even those who intensely disliked the work. One critic, Robin Grove, called the ballet a “seismographic record of a disordered sensibility” and an adventure in crass commercialism. However, he conceded that it was also “a cultural phenomenon and a social document of some significance”, even if this was only because it showed up Australia’s ballet public, the “metropolitan upper middle class”, as having “little interest in the life of the intellect”, a trait which Grove believed Helpmann himself displayed.⁹¹

In contrast, Roland Robertson of the Sydney Morning Herald considered the ballet rather “mature” and hailed its particularly Australian flavour as a “long awaited event”. *The Display* for this critic was:

...a wholly Australian ballet with respect to its inspiration, its composition, and to the talented company of dancers which performed it. In all aspects this ballet merits acclaim.⁹²

James Glenlock of the Sunday Mail was equally flattering. He suggested that, when the history of Australian ballet was written, “mention will be made of tonight’s world premiere of Robert Helpmann’s *The Display*”⁹³. Glenlock was correct. Most books

⁹⁰ Salter, 1978, op. cit., 216

⁹¹ Robin Grove, “Robert Helpmann’s Ballet ‘The Display’”, Meanjin, Vol. 23, No.1, 1965, 127-8.

⁹² Robinson, op. cit.

⁹³ James Govenlock, “A Highlight of Festival: Ballet triumph for Australia”, Sunday Mail, 15th March, 1964. Sheila Helpman scrap books, Wolanski Library, Sydney Opera House, New South Wales.

and articles that have dealt with a national dance heritage in Australia mention *The Display*. They also almost always include a photograph of the ballet's famous finale. Ian Brown's 1967 publication covering the first five years of The Australian Ballet called *The Display* a "powerful dramatic work, intended to be very Australian"⁹⁴. Edward Pask's, Ballet in Australia: the Second Act 1940-1980 (1982) marvelled at the distinctiveness of the piece and reprinted the entire 1964 review by Harold Tidemann for the Adelaide Advertiser.⁹⁵ Christopher Sexton's biography of the former Artistic Director of the Australian Ballet, Peggy Van Praag, also mentioned the impact of *The Display* on the company and the Australian public. For this author, like many local journalists thirty years earlier, Helpmann's Australian birth gave him an innate sensitivity to the local social climate. Sexton felt that Helpmann inevitably understood the "antagonism of Australian males to ballet and, above all, to the sight of men in tights"⁹⁶.

[By] dressing the males in jeans and the females in summer dresses, Helpmann introduced on to the Australian stage perfectly ordinary-looking young people out in the bush for a picnic, partaking in normal Australian pastimes and social conventions.⁹⁷

As we have seen, these "normal Australian pastimes" included the pursuit of fun in the great outdoors, the segregation of the sexes, drinking to excess, playing Aussie Rules, an overblown sense of tribalism, and a penchant for flirting, fighting, and rape.

The drama of *The Display* and the images favoured in the piece have much to say about the development of national identity through Australian dance practice, an issue which will be discussed at length in the next chapter, but in the context of the creation and negotiation of masculinity on the Australian stage, *The Display* is equally fascinating. There was a certain amount of social criticism embedded in Helpmann's choreography as he made 'the outsider' the butt of prejudice and fear. Garth Welch,

⁹⁴ Ian F. Brown, The Australian Ballet, Longman, Australia, 1967, 79

⁹⁵ Edward Pask, Ballet in Australia: the Second Act, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1982, 121

⁹⁶ Christopher Sexton, Peggy Van Praag: A Life of Dance, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1985, 137

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 137

with a more languid, sensual choreographic vocabulary, could be read as representing Helpmann's own outsider status as a performer and homosexual who had spent over thirty years shielding himself from the narrow minded tribalism of Australian culture and the entrenched, legalised homophobia in western communities. However, the ballet also had a certain affection for traditional notions of western masculinity. It was one of the first attempts to accommodate an identifiably Australian man on stage through movement as well as narrative. In order to achieve this Helpmann had to move away from a strict classical vocabulary and venture into more popular language with references to jazz. As was suggested, the large jumps and *tours* executed by the boys were steps which had been established as particularly 'masculine' within the traditional ballet repertoire since the turn of the century, yet the jazz idiom was especially useful in the creation of an atmosphere of strength, competition, virility and violence. This more popular vocabulary may have been the source of Robin Grove's "crass commercialism", but as other reviews of the piece illustrated, *The Display* was appreciated for its local flavour. It was an artistic milestone. The men in Helpmann's work were 'typical' Australian males. They drank beer and got into fights. They were mates, always ready to defend each other, their 'property' and their territory. Helpmann's men embodied their sex, but perhaps, more importantly, they played footy.

Helpmann's men were not *danseur nobles*. Nor were they exotic. There was not a whiff of ambiguity about their masculinity. These men were consummate athletics; a description which was confirmed by none other than the AFL⁹⁸ doyenne Ron Barassi. During the creation of Helpmann's *The Display*, Barassi had visited the rehearsal studio. Helpmann had invited him to teach the men of the Australian Ballet how to toss a football, Aussie Rules style. Legend has it that Barassi was so impressed with the expertise (and by inference the innate masculinity) of these dancers, that he suggested his footballers would benefit from doing a few dance

⁹⁸ The AFL, Australian Football League, was formerly known by each states initials. In 1964 Ron Barassi would have been involved in the VFL, the Victorian Football League.

classes themselves.⁹⁹ It is not clear if Barassi ever took his boys to a ballet class, but the important point in this story is the fact that this archetype of Australian manhood, this famous Aussie Rules player and coach, had observed the expertise of the Australian male ballet dancer and pronounced him an accomplished athlete - a 'real' man.

The dancer as athlete proved a very useful paradigm, but no matter how successful the realignment of the relationship between men and dance became, these blokes were still bodies on stage. Even more importantly, they were *male* bodies, and they were being uncharacteristically viewed and objectified. This objectification meant that the image of man in dance slid dangerously between the feminine and the masculine throughout the twentieth century. It claimed a fluid space which could have worked to the advantage of the dancing male had the aim of their liberation been the shedding of stereotypes and the creation of new constructions of western, heterosexual masculinity. However, as this chapter has shown, this was not the case. The point of the new male was not to rock the gender boat but to rescue him from a sea of ambiguity and innuendo.

As this chapter has suggested, dancers and choreographers had been working toward the construction, production and acceptance of a western, heterosexual, masculine sensibility on the dancing stage since the turn of the century. Colonel de Basil's Ballet Russes, jazz dance, and pieces like *The Display* saw the beginning of the liberation of men from their secondary status in, what had been until then, the art of women. Traditional notions of what constituted a 'man' in the west were gradually accommodated within Australian dance but the particular masculinity which was adopted was a simple replica of that which circulated in wider society.¹⁰⁰ As already

⁹⁹ Pask, 1982, op. cit., 121

¹⁰⁰ Although a contemporary viewing of *The Display* could suggest that Helpmann was actually commenting on these dominant constructions, particularly with his creation of the outsider as different to those who would eventually punish him for his transgressions against the group, it is not apparent that critics and audiences who observed the piece in 1964 saw such a critique as the primary highlight of the work. On the whole they favoured a simpler reading, seeing the ballet as being of national significance, or shame, rather than as a piece of critical social commentary.

suggested, this was not liberation in the true sense of the word. It was liberation to an archetype. Emancipation to a limitation. Here was a place where men could be men, but that was all they could be.

Chapter Seven

Choreographing a Continent: national identity in Australian dance.

The dance critic Jean Garling¹ proclaimed in 1951:

Man's history is one of gradual awareness of himself, through dawning consciousness. Dance reflects his reaction to environment, for it is every art, and in its quality can be read the characteristics of a nation... What then is Australia going to reflect through her dance?²

For Garling a national culture was at once an inevitable impulse stimulated by external forces and a display of quality and content arrived at through conscious choice. In the above quote she initially emphasised the reflective nature of art by offering the notion that environment acts upon creativity, stimulating an inevitable distinctiveness. However, she also concluded that Australian dancers had a choice as to what they offered as a reflection of their national identity. This idea that the creative stimulus for the manufacture of a distinctive cultural product could be located in both active and reactive responses to the local environment has been a feature of Australian dance practice since the Second World War.

In other forms of Australian art, this search for a national flavour has a longer history. The effect of the environment on creativity has been continually debated among influential groups of practitioners, patrons, critics and historians of art, literature, and performance in Australia since the late 19th century. Then, Australian artists tended to celebrate the colonial aspects of their country with very Anglo-centric views of what constituted local culture. Artists celebrated their settler society with the creation of poetry, stories, and paintings which fictionalised the lives of people occupied in the invasion, exploration, and settlement of the Australian outback. Writers who worked for The Bulletin in the late 1800s³ and the painters of

¹ Jean Garling, Australian Notes on the Ballet, The Legend Press, Sydney, 1951.

² *Ibid.*, 39.

³ These included Henry Lawson, A.B. (Banjo) Patterson, and Steele Rudd. For a discussion of moves

the Heidelberg School⁴ developed and celebrated the legends of the 'bush'.⁵ They immortalised the image of the stockman, the bush ranger, and the outback wife/mother in stories and paintings which reflected a fascination with (and fear of) the landscape. They attempted to carve out for themselves a distinctive geographical identity as artists. As Richard White has suggested:

For the writers and artists, it was in their professional interest to adopt and popularise a nationalist interpretation of Australian cultural development, to perpetuate the ideas that the particular image of Australia which they had created was somehow purer, and more real, than any other.⁶

Accompanying this trend toward the creation of an Australian 'bush' legend was a view that the path to maturity, 'civilisation', and "cultural credibility"⁷ for a settler society could be most successfully attained through the emulation of European art practices. In the interwar period foreign dance artists were accepted as Australia's only link to 'great' and 'timeless' Art. They were the source for contemporary, avant-garde innovation. Audiences craved the imported exotic. For some it confirmed the civilised nature of their own cultural heritage and for others it offered a release from the confines of their own history. As we have seen in earlier chapters, for the Australian dancer from the 1920s to the 1950s, these centres were located in Paris

to created a national literary style in late 19th and early 20th centuries in Australian literature see Shirley Walker, "Perceptions of Australia, 1855-1915", in Laurie Hergenhan, ed., *New Literary History of Australia*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1988, 157-173; Geoffrey Serle, "National Inspiration, c.1885-", *From Deserts the Prophets Come: the Creative Spirit in Australia 1788-1972*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1973, 60-88; Richard White, *Inventing Australia*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1981, 85-109.

⁴ This collection of Australian painters included Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, Charles Conder and Frederick McCubbin. For more on this school of painting in the context of the construction of national identity see Anne-Marie Willis, *Illusions of a Nation: the Art of Nation*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1993, 71-84.

⁵ Richard White suggests that this was not only specific to Australia. At the time artists from many countries were experimenting with the creation of particularly nationalistic product. White, op. cit., 85.

⁶ White, op. cit., 106. For a longer discussion of the changing relationship between writing as 'calling' and a profession, and the affect this had on the development of a particularly national form of literature, see White, op. cit., 89-109 and Michelle Arrow, "'Career Playwrights': Writing and earning amongst Australian Women Playwrights, 1928-1968", unpublished conference paper, delivered at Australian Theatre History Conference, School of Theatre, Film, and Dance Studies, University of NSW, September, 1996.

⁷ Willis, op. cit., 28.

and St Petersburg for ballet, and Germany, New York, and Vienna for Expressive dance.

Although dance artists such as Irene Vera Young and Sonia Revid made small concessions to an exploration of national sentiment in their later work (Sonia Revid produced her "Bush Fire Drama" at the Little Theatre in 1939⁸), it was not until the 1950s that calls for a truly national representation in Australian dance began to gain momentum. This change was inspired by dramatic adjustments which were taking place within the politics, aesthetics, and demographics of a post WWII Australia.

The rest of the world had also changed. Europe had been decimated by the war and America had become the centre of the modern world. As a result of this shift, Australians increasingly saw the political, strategic, economic, and social advantages of strengthening their affiliation with this latter hub of modernity. As historian John Rickard suggests, the new alliance which developed between America and Australia did not reflect the relationship of dependence which had formerly existed between Australia and Britain. America had no established, historical ties or former strategic interest in Australia. This was not a "colonial-imperial relationship" but a strategic, economic alliance which left many other aspects of Australian society potentially unaligned. This change offered Australians a space in which to concentrate more fully on the development of a particular national identity, an identity separate from their persistent, but fading, ties with Britain.⁹ Increased immigration and an influx of what came to be called 'New Australians' (from places not formerly favoured as sources of immigration - southern and central, eastern Europe) further encouraged this move away from a reliance on a colonial past. As Jon Stratton and Ien Ang have suggested:

⁸ Review, no date or reference. Article located in Sonia Revid papers, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, Victorian State Library, Melbourne.

⁹ For more on the changing reliance of Australia on Britain and the USA see John Rickard, "Dependence", *Australia: a Cultural History*, Longman, London, 1988, 199-223. Richard Waterhouse suggests that, although many historians place the influences of American culture on Australia as a product of WWII, such influence was well and truly established by 1914 and the outbreak of WWI. WWII and the presence of American troops in Australia during that war, simply confirmed this culture, for many Australians, as one worthy of emulation. Richard Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure: A History of Australian Popular Culture since 1788*, Longman, Melbourne, 1995, 185-189.

...with the admission of non-British European migrants, “whiteness” could no longer be related directly to the (British-derived) racial purity of the “Australian type”. Racial homogeneity and cultural homogeneity could no longer be assumed to be one and the same thing.¹⁰

This shift in strategic alliances and social demographics stimulated a move toward a unifying construction which placed an Australian identity within a more inclusive, but equally restrictive, paradigm. ‘Britishness’, or membership of the Empire, may no longer have been a source of adequate symbolism for social unity within Australia, but these symbols were simply replaced by what Richard White has identified as the Australian ‘way of life’.

This development was not peculiarly local. The notion of a ‘way of life’ as a unifying strategy with a settler society had also been a central tenet in the establishment of the United States of America. Here the idea of a ‘way of life’ offered people of diverse ethnic origins a sense of themselves as a unified culture. It also offered the category ‘American’ the imagined status of a collective nationality. This identity was constructed from a different premise to that which would be offered to Australians after WWII. America’s ‘way of life’ was based on “universal *ideological* principles which supposedly transcended cultural and ethnic specificity.”¹¹ Race was central to this construction. It highlighted difference within the culture, but that difference was seen in America as something to be overcome, not accommodated.¹² In comparison Australia’s ‘way of life’ was justified within *cultural* rather than *ideological* principles. It was essentially a category of exclusion; an attempt to keep certain ‘foreigners’ out and a strategy to keep those it deemed unsuitable out of sight. It was not a way of accommodating Australia’s growing ethnic minorities, but a means through which to insist on their assimilation through the acquisition of symbols of a modern identity. These symbols often merely amounted to the purchase and

¹⁰ Jon Stratton and Ien Ang, “Multicultural Imaged Communities: Cultural Difference and National Identity in Australia and the USA”, *Continuum*, Vol.8, No.2, 1994, 145.

¹¹ Stratton and Ang, *op. cit.*, 134. Emphasis not in original text.

¹² *Ibid.*

maintenance of a car, a family, a house, and a garden, along with a “uniformly middle-class lifestyle”.¹³ This made the Australian ‘way of life’ a veneer under which foreign cultural allegiances and practices could be maintained.

Although the image of the modern Australian ‘way of life’ in the 1950s offered a space within which to acquire the trappings of a local identity (if resources allowed), the construction lacked “historical and cultural density”.¹⁴ It also does not appear to have provided a satisfying location for the creation of a national identity through art. Dance practitioners continued to look toward older archetypes in an attempt to create a space in which both the immigrant and the native born could be offered national exclusivity, a mythological past, and a unified present.¹⁵

From the 1940s, the particular space and shape that was Australia’s geography, and the history of the people who had settled, tamed and been transformed by the landscape, were still very powerful symbols. The ‘bush legend’ enjoyed continued representation. The internationalist anachronisms of the ballet and the universalising principles of the American modern dance boom still inspired many Australian choreographers, teachers and performers, but when dance makers were intent on offering their audiences a representation of their local identity, those old ‘Aussie’ archetypes still proved popular.

In 1940, Colonel de Basil director of the Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo joined his company on their second season in Australia. On this trip de Basil offered Australians a chance to design a ballet of their own on an Australian theme. Although previously he claimed that Australians did not possess the “art, the finesse, the fine

¹³ White. *op. cit.*, 166; Stratton and Ang, *op. cit.*, 147. See also Stephen S. Castles, Mary Kalantzis, Bill Cope, and Michael Morrissey, Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1988, 114

¹⁴ Stratton and Ang, *op. cit.*, 147

¹⁵ As we saw in chapter one, this was even the case within the ranks of post WWII Australian modernism in the visual arts where the techniques of a form which had been shunned by the art establishment prior to WWII were happily accommodated in the post-war period, but with a new nationalistic streak which insisted that the subject of the work be somehow reflective of the uniqueness of its location. See, Jeanette Hoorn “Misogyny and Modernist Painting in Australia: How male critics made modernism their own”, Journal of Australian Studies, 32, 1992 and for a comparison Richard Haese, Rebels and Precursors: the Revolutionary Years of Australian Art, (originally published 1981), 2nd edition, Penguin Books, Sydney, 1988.

feeling, the grace, the deportment, the sensitiveness, the tradition, the inspiration, [or] the gifts to make ballet dancers”¹⁶, de Basil formed a committee in May of 1940 to oversee the judging of a competition in which local designers were asked to “submit sketches with a brief note of their ideas” for an Australian ballet, which would then be produced by his company.¹⁷ The criteria for the competition was that the subject matter be drawn from “the earlier period, such as Sydney or Hobart in the days of Macquarie”, “the gold rush”, or “Sydney’s surf beaches”.¹⁸ The artist Donald Friend won with his design for *Hold Up*, created around the life and times of the bush ranger Ned Kelly and his gang. The ballet was never produced. A suitable amount of sponsorship money could not be found¹⁹, but as is suggested by the criteria for the competition and the subject matter of the winning entry, those faithful old archetypes were still very much a part of the way in which an Australian national identity was understood and represented in the 1940s.

Little changed in the ballet world over the next two decades. In the mid 1940s dance artists offered stories of colonial bravery, exploration, triumph over adversity, and the taming of the “wide brown land”²⁰ as favoured representations of local particularity. In 1946 Ebouard Borovansky choreographed *The Bush Fire Ballet* and *Terra Australis*. In 1949 he created *The Black Swan* and in 1951 *The Outlaw*. In *The Bushfire Ballet*, Corrie Ladders danced the “Spirit of Fire” in a costume of “glittering red sequins”²¹. *The Black Swan* explored the discovery of Rottenest Island and the naming of the Swan River by Captain Vlaming of the Dutch East India Company.²² *The Outlaw*, once again, revolved round the life of Ned Kelly. Not all who saw this

¹⁶ Quote cited in Lynn Fisher, “Dance Class: a History of professional dance and dance training from 1895 to 1940”, MA Thesis, History Department, University of Western Australia, 1992, 94.

¹⁷ Eight years later another ‘Australiana’ ballet was proposed by a visiting company - the Ballet Rambert. To be choreographed by Tamara Tchinarova, *Dhoogor*, a piece based on Aboriginal “mystic beliefs”, was also never produced. See Edward Pask, *Ballet in Australia: the Second Act, 1940-1980*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1982, 41.

¹⁸ Katherine Sorley Walker, *De Basil’s Ballet Russes*, Hutchison, London, 1982, 215.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ This quote is from a line in the Dorothea MacKellar poem “I love a Sunburnt Country”.

²¹ Hugh Hall, *Ballet in Australia: from Pavlova to Rambert*, Georgian House, Melbourne, 1948, 173.

²² Pask, 1982, *op. cit.*, 32.

latter work were particularly impressed. Edward Pask stated that *The Outlaw* was “no masterpiece”²³, and “M.L.” of the *Sydney Morning Herald* complained that it “never seemed to find its idiom”, being hampered by a “disturbing mix of styles”²⁴. However, the ballet was commended for its subject matter, which “M.L.” considered a “bold and sometimes striking attempt at an adult and sophisticated ballet on an Australian theme”²⁵.

Valrene Tweedie²⁶ also produced a popular ballet on an outback theme - *Wakooka* - for the Elizabethan Opera Ballet in 1957. Set on a sheep station, this work opened with shearers shearing and rouseabouts racing around yelling “Tar here” while a group of young ladies arrived in carriages in anticipation of the barbecue and dance to be held that evening at the Wakooka station. After a short exploration of a love triangle between one of the girls, a shearer, and the dashing young engineer, the second act opened out into a lively bush dance with the young workers and ladies flirting and dancing “under the stars” to a shearer’s concertina.²⁷ For the critic Roland Robinson, *Wakooka* was the perfect complement to Ray Lawler’s play *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. If *The Doll* was an illustration of the “tragic late summer of humanity”, then *Wakooka* was a story of “the springtime of youth... love and happiness”²⁸ in the Australian outback.

Other ballets produced around Australian themes included Laurel Martin’s *The Sentimental Bloke* (1952), Joanne Priest’s *Lady Augusta* (1951) Kira Bousloff *The Beach Inspector and the Mermaid* (1958); Robert Pomie’s *The Surfers* (1959),

²³ Ibid., 76.

²⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19th May 1951, 2. For this ballet at the Empire Theatre, 18th May 1951, Paul Grinwis danced the role of Ned Kelly, decor by William Constable and music by Verdon Williams.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Valerie Tweedie was one of the few Australian dancers picked up by Colonel De Basil’s Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo when they visited in the 1940s. She became artistic director of Australia’s National Theatre Ballet from 1953 to 1955 after a distinguished career as a dancer in America and Cuba. See Pask, op. cit., 54-56

²⁷ “R.R.” (Roland Robinson), “Australian Ballet About Station Life”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4th September, 1957, 6. For *Wakooka* the music was by John Antill (created around “traditional Australian airs”) and decor by Elaine Haxton (which featured a homestead reminiscent of those depicted in the paintings of William Drysdale).

²⁸ Ibid.

and Edward Miller's *Fire at Ross' Farm* (1961). Martyn's *The Sentimental Bloke*, with a score by John Tallis and set and costumes by Charles Bush, was considered by The Age to be a highly successful portrayal of a "typically racy and humorous 'slice of life' in an Australian idiom".²⁹ Pomie's *The Surfers*³⁰, first performed by his own Ballet de la Français and remounted by the Borovansky Ballet in 1961³¹, was a "delightful satire on the Australian beach scene" and a "big hit" with the local audiences.³²

Ballet's accommodation of particularly Australian themes was limited by the necessity for local choreographers to acknowledge and reproduce works which were in keeping with the art form's 19th century history. Ballets such as Borovansky's *Terra Australis* or Pomie's *The Surfers* had to vie for attention along side reworkings of old favourites such as *Les Sylphides*, *Schéhérazade*, *Swan Lake*, or *Giselle*.³³ In comparison, modern dance in the 1950s, particularly in the work of the Sydney choreographer Margaret Barr, had a far more pronounced association with nationalist settings and themes. Barr began producing her 'Australian' pieces in the 1950s with *The Fence* in 1953 followed by *Flood* (1955), *Bushfire* (1955), *Colonial Portraits* (1957), *P.S. from Queensland* (1958), *Outback Conversations* (1958), *Three Households* (1959) and *Breaking the Drought* (1959). Through the 1960s she continued to draw on similar themes producing *Snowy* in 1961, then *The Explorers* (1963), *Ballad of a Drover's Wife* (1964), *1st Tuesday, 11th Month, 2.45 PM, Melbourne* - known as *Melbourne Cup* for short (1967), *The Hurdlers* (1969), and *Highway* (1970). Through the next two decades Barr dealt with only a sprinkling of Australian themes by comparison - *Portrait of a Lady with a CBE* (1971), *Judith*

²⁹ Pask, *op. cit.*, 165.

³⁰ *The Surfers* was also called *Ballet Surf* and *Le Surf*. Pask, *op. cit.*, 96.

³¹ Pask, *op. cit.*, 96.

³² See Review of this Pomie ballet, no date or location. Article in Box 12, Keith Glennon papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

³³ *Les Sylphides*, *Schéhérazade* and *Swan Lake* were performed in the Borovansky Ballet's May 1946 season alongside the premiere of *Terra Australis*. *Giselle* and *The Nutcracker* accompanied Pomie's *The Surfers* when the latter ballet was re-mounted for by the Borovansky Company in January 1961. See Pask, *op. cit.*, 28-29, 96

Wright (1974), *Three Sisters of Katoomba* (1975), *Enclosures* (1977), *Katherine Mansfield* (1978), *Murals on a Cave Wall* (1980), *The Wild Colonial Boy* (1987) and *Australian Diary* (1988).³⁴ In these later decades she returned to more international concerns, choreographing works around the Vietnam War, Chile, Guatemala, Cuba and Ireland with studies of international rather than Australian figures such as Pablo Neruda and Mahatma Gandhi, Constance Gore-Booth Markeiweiz and Margaret Mead.

Barr did not arrive in Australia until 1950. Naturally her Australian inspired work could hardly have begun before her acquaintance with the country, but, from her days in England working in the experimental thirties environment of Dartington Hall, through to her independent work in London and then New Zealand in the forties, Barr's choreography had much more to do with international politics than with national representation. As a member of organisations like the Worker Education Association (WEA) while at Dartington, and the Communist Party of Britain and the Friends of the Soviet Union in London³⁵, her early works aligned themselves with the concerns of the Left. Pieces such as *Breadline*, *Miners*, *We the People*, *Mothers* and *Factory* (all produced between 1926 and 1944) dealt with the plight of the worker and their salvation through unified action.

It was at Dartington between 1932 and 1933 that Barr's favoured means of artistic expression, dance-drama, acquired its philosophic base. For Barr dance-drama was a process through which people could:

...create directly from their own everyday experience. To think and imagine and feel a thing through from the very start instead of having plays thrust upon them out of their sphere, technical grasp and imaginative background...³⁶

³⁴ Caryll Von Sturmer, *Margaret Barr: Epic Individual*, Lesma Von Sturmer, Dee Why, 1994

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 20, 30

³⁶ "Occasional Diary 1932-1933", located in Box 2, Margaret Barr papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

At Dartington, and in London, Barr wrestled with conflicting beliefs embedded with her chosen medium; just as Sonia Revid and Irene Vera Young had done. On the one hand Barr believed in the power of dance to instigate social change through the participation of the ‘masses’, on the other she recognised the need for the dictatorial role of an individual creative vision. Barr’s dance-drama may have been “the communication, as economically and clearly as possible, of an idea” created by “the people” but at the same time it was the “outcome of the experiences of the particular leader”³⁷.

When she migrated to New Zealand in 1940 Barr continued with international/socialist themes, experimenting with the Living Newspaper format (a theatre style modelled on Brecht’s Epic Theatre but produced under the influence of the American Left and the work of the Federal Theatre Project in 1930s³⁸). Again this concept reflected internationalist and socialist concerns created out of, what Barr considered, “the most burning questions of the hour”³⁹. These works also continued to explore the collaborative approach she had favoured at Dartington. In comparison, when she began working in Sydney, a more localised sensibility emerged in her work. Although always maintaining her socialist sentiments, Barr gradually acquired, what her biographer Caryll Von Sturmer has called, her “Australianisation”. For Von Sturmer, her “fascination with the country” caused Barr to:

...create imaginative yet true works, extracting drama and excitement like precious minerals from the land, the people and its history.⁴⁰

Contemporary critics agreed with Von Sturmer. Roland Robinson found her work “powerful and profoundly imaginative”⁴¹. He called her a “unique genius”⁴²

³⁷ Hand written reflections by Margaret Barr, located in Box 2, Margaret Barr papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

³⁸ For a description of the Living Newspaper and examples of plays produced in that format for the Federal Theatre Project see Lorraine Brown, ed., *Liberty Deferred and other Living Newspapers of the 1930s*, George Mason University press, Virginia, 1989.

³⁹ *New Zealand Freelance*, September 19th 1945, 22. Article in Box 11, Margaret Barr papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴¹ “RR” (Roland Robinson), “Dance Drama Groups Performance”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16th

and, by 1960, the most “fertile choreographer Australia possesses”⁴³. Barr still collaborated on many of her works in Australia. She used scripts by Mona Brand, Lesma Von Sturmer, and Roy Agnew, and music by young composers such as Arnold Butcher, but in conception and movement her creative dictatorship was complete by the fifties. Barr resolved her collective/individualist dichotomy with a clear view of her personal mission and the development of a slightly more avant-garde approach to her work. This latter development caused concern among her Left leaning advocates. Writers at The Tribune, a communist paper in Sydney with whom Barr’s politics was generally aligned, had little quarrel with her subject matter in performance or her insistence on using relatively untrained dancers. What they did find problematic was the form in which her ideas were presented. It was all far too obscure and interpretive, one Tribune critic warning her in a 1956 review:

You cannot expect an art to have a broad appeal when the audience is forever searching its mind for the meaning of obscure movements.⁴⁴

For those who were less concerned with political statements in art, Barr’s vocabulary, with its simplistic, pedestrian quality, and its attention to symbolic gesture and mime, proved rather disappointing. Jean Garling remained fairly critical of Barr’s work throughout the fifties. This critic claimed that Barr’s “imagination and intellectual conception of contemporary forces” were commendable, but also suggested that there was “too little grasp of the elements of air, wind and sky and the corresponding elevated body movements” in her work. This meant that Barr kept her dancers too earth bound for Garling. She never allowed them to touch “the infinite” which was the essential element and elevated “all art from the mundane”.⁴⁵

September, 1957, 5.

⁴² “RR”, “Concert in Aid of the Aborigines”, Sydney Morning Herald, 5th September, 1958, 4.

⁴³ “RR”, “Benefit Concert by Dance Group”, Sydney Morning Herald, 29th August, 1960, 6.

⁴⁴ Tribune, 1956, no month or day. Article available in Box 8, Margaret Barr papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

⁴⁵ Jean Garling, “Australiana in Dance Land”, Tempo and Television, Vol. 21, No. 10, September, 1958, 26

Despite these criticisms, when discussing the 'Australian' material in Barr's Sydney Dance-Drama Group's repertoire, both her critics and champions commended her exploration and portrayal of specifically "Australian problems".⁴⁶ For the *Tribune*, her September 1958 programme (which included *Outback Conversations*, *Bushfire*, *Flood*, *The Fence*, and *Colonial Portraits*) was a locally distinctive triumph:

Miss Barr's direction and creative approach in this last programme indicate that she is taking seriously and with considerable ability the creation of Australian characters and the expression in dramatic form of many aspects of our Australian life.⁴⁷

For Roland Robinson, Barr's *Breaking the Drought* was the most "effective evocation of a merciless drought in the outback"⁴⁸. Her friend and former dancer Lesma Von Sturmer commended Barr's work for the way in which it "searched and explored the Australian soul in its poetic depths". For Von Sturmer, Barr had captured something that was typically Australian, particularly in *The Fence* which could have "belonged to no other land".⁴⁹ Even Jean Garling conceded that the Sydney Dance Drama Group contributed "unobtrusively but importantly" to Australia's "dance development" through Barr's exploration of Australian characters and situations.⁵⁰

These works, with a distinctively 'Australian' feel, did not only surface at the hands of artists whose politics favoured the Left. Gertrud Bodenwieser, who originally considered Australia a "cultural desert" (an attitude she wisely learned to keep to herself, or at least "within her own circle of continental friends"⁵¹), also began producing 'Australian' ballets in the fifties. These pieces included *Waltzing Matilda* (1954), *The Kunkarunkara Woman* (1955), *Trilogy of Central Australian*

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ *Tribune*, September 10th 1958. Article in Box 8, Margaret Barr papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

⁴⁸ "RR", 1958, op. cit., 4

⁴⁹ Lesma Von Sturma, "Settler With a Cyclorama". Article available in Box 2, Margaret Barr papers, Manuscripts section, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

⁵⁰ Jean Garling, "Dance Drama", *Tempo and Television*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 1957, 34

⁵¹ Shona Dunlop MacTavish, *An Ecstasy of Purpose: the Life and Art of Gertrud Bodenwieser*, Shona Dunlop MacTavish, Les Humphrey and Associates, Dunedin, 1981, 96

Suite (1956), *Aboriginal Spear Dance* (1956), and *Blue Mountains Waltz* (1957).⁵² By the time these ballets were created, as her biographer Shona Dunlop MacTavish has claimed, Bodenwieser had acquired the lucid vision of a naturalised artist. The environment had infected her work. The “harshness of the Australian landscape, and sparsity of the people living in the outback” had inspired “an indigenous and more robust earthy style”.⁵³ With the introduction of local dancers into her company, Bodenwieser’s transition from foreign Modernist to local artist was enhanced even further.⁵⁴

Both Margaret Barr’s and Gertrud Bodenwieser’s biographers and contemporary critics assumed that this acquisition of a distinctively Australian flavour in their work was one of the most powerful and valuable contributions they made to the local dance scene. Their transformation into ‘local’ artists was also tied directly to their experience of the landscape. The continental Bodenwieser and the “Pommy”⁵⁵ Barr turned into ‘Australian’ artists through their acknowledgment, appreciation, and gradual understanding of their new land. The land was where the ‘real’ Australia lurked, and once these choreographers had come to terms with that, or were affected by that fact, their mutation was considered complete.

These transformations were also essential in the posthumous elevation of an artist to the status of national pioneer. A cultured, aristocratic, well-travelled Viennese like Bodenwieser who saw Australia as a ‘cultural backwater’, was hardly an adequate vehicle for the creation of a unique Australian artefact or for the construction of a local dance pioneer in an Australian context. Equally, a woman who had been born in India, trained in America, and an active socialist in Britain and New Zealand - Margaret Barr - did not offer an ideal site for the manufacture of ‘typically’ Australian works. The conversion of these women into ‘naturalised’ artists, in tune

⁵² MacTavish, *op. cit.*, 146, and Katherine Brisbane, ed., *Entertaining Australia: The Performing Arts as Cultural History*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1991, 277

⁵³ MacTavish, *op. cit.*, 98

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Caryll Von Sturmer, *op. cit.*, 64

with their new location, was essential in an environment where, as we saw in chapter one, local particularity had become a central component of post WWII Modernism.

The framing of these artists as ‘local’ had not only been instigated by their gradual acquaintance with their new environment, they also acquired their naturalised vision through their employment of ‘native’ born dancers. For Shona Dunlop MacTavish, local dancers had a more immediate association with the land. That arid “harshness” and those wide open spaces had bred in them distinctive ‘Australianness’ which Bodenwieser could tap into as she attempted to capture a local sensibility. One such dancer was Coralie Hinkley, a member of the first “all-Australian Bodenwieser Ballet”⁵⁶ in the fifties. Hinkley, as we saw in chapter three, became a devotee of Martha Graham after touring Australia and Europe with Bodenwieser and being granted a Fullbright Scholarship to study in America in 1957. Although she abandoned Expressive dance in the 1960s, when Hinkley left for the USA in the late fifties she took with her a ballet of her own creation called *Unknown Land*. Like Barr and Bodenwieser before her, Hinkley attempted to explore a specifically Australian sensibility in this work through the representation and understanding of her country’s geography. To a John Antill score and recitations of Rex Ingamells’ poems, Hinkley’s choreography offered confirmation that a national dance identity could be best captured through a work which centralised an association between Australian dancing bodies and the Australian landscape. Before she flew to America, Hinkley described her piece to reporters in this way:

The first part... depicts the stark, brooding, solitary and withdrawn atmosphere of outback Australia. The second part, I feel, expresses the repressed spirit of the [A]boriginal and is a cry to be free. The third part expresses the pioneer woman’s spirit. Women discovering a new land, resenting it at first, then gradually overcoming the early struggle, resolving to build for the future.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ MacTavish, op. cit., 175

⁵⁷ “A New Antill Ballet”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22nd December, 1957, 59

At the end of the piece, the land had transformed Hinkley's outback women. Her characters had been re-made through the landscape, just as her former mentor, Gertud Bodenwieser, had been.

With *Unknown Land*, Coralie Hinkley had begun from the vantage point of a 'native' born. This not only allowed her access to a presumed distinctive understanding of her country, it also supplied her with an individuality that could serve her well in the United States. However, even as a 'native' born Australian, her confirmation as a local artist relied on a process that was very similar to that offered to and by the immigrants, Bodenwieser and Barr. Through the description of her piece, and in its title - *Unknown Land* - Hinkley suggested that being Australian was necessarily about coming to terms with the landscape and being transformed by an understanding of it. In the transformation of Margaret Barr and Gertud Bodenwieser, any sense of another place and space (which had been severed by distance and immigration) had to be filled or re-invented. An understanding and appreciation of the land offered a path to that transformation. For Hinkley, her cultural space had also been manufactured elsewhere - she too was an immigrant. The expression of her national particularity therefore required a transformation through understanding, not only of the land, but also of the people who first occupied that land: the Aboriginal people. All three choreographers were "in transit...located somewhere between 'foreigner' and 'native-born'"⁵⁸. Bodenwieser and Barr existed between their transplanted past and their local present. Hinkley dwelt between her ancestral past and that of the local indigenous people.

Just as earlier invaders and immigrants had established themselves precariously around the country's seaboard in the late eighteenth century and attempted to make the land recognisable, not only with their invading bodies, but through the imposition of their spatial and aesthetic assumptions⁵⁹, these later settlers re-made the landscape

⁵⁸ Willis, op. cit., 35

⁵⁹ Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, London, 1987, xxi, cited in Bain Attwood "Introduction", in Bain Attwood and John Arnold, eds., *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, special issue of the *Journal of Australian Studies*, La Trobe University Press, Melbourne, 1992, i

in their own reflection in order to reproduce and reflect their new place and space as its knowing subject; its 'native'. As the works of these artists illustrates, the 'bush' as the social, cultural and aesthetic habitat of the 'real' Australian was a favoured image. They, and the land they occupied, became the 'truth'. Geography became, what Anne-Marie Willis has called, "a final resting place of meaning".⁶⁰

However, finality implies resolution and national identity in Australian history has been anything but resolved. In fact, as was suggested at the beginning of this chapter, there has been an almost continuous obsession with searching for forms and content through which a distinctive identity could be captured and displayed. This search has stemmed from the particular way in which a national identity has been conceptualised in Australia. As Andrew Lattas has suggested, the Australian identity is about not having one. It is a nationalism constructed around the "perception of a sense of lack".⁶¹ Subsequently the issue of national identity has never been resolved. Perhaps this is the fate of all invading, settler societies, where images of national depth are never satisfactory because they are offered to and by an immigrant population. A population who has left behind what they brought with them; subjects whose identity and heritages are simultaneously of the 'Us' and of the 'Other'.

In a society with so many possible locations for ancestral and/or cultural allegiance, any attempt to compensate for this "sense of lack" had to be provided by images which existed outside the lives and memories of the very people they were being created for. A common history or mythology could provide unity where there was only diversity. To this end, as we have already seen, older established traditions of the Australian 'type' and the 'bush legend' were useful to choreographers because they bore little resemblance to the actual experiences of the increasingly urban, industrial, suburban, multi-ethnic society in post WWII Australia.

⁶⁰ Willis, *op. cit.*, 35

⁶¹ Andrew Lattas, "Primitivism, Nationalism and Individualism in Australian Popular Culture", in Bain Attwood and John Arnold, eds., *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, special issue of the *Journal of Australian Studies*, La Trobe University Press, Melbourne, 1992, 58

Another ideal location for this unifying process, as Hinkley had found, was the culture of indigenous people. Here were the 'real' locals. They may have been stripped of their land and their social and cultural rights as original inhabitants, but they were still a very useful group within which to locate a collective representation of national identity. As Annette Hamilton has suggested, this new found regard for the culture of Aboriginal people was not concerned with the representation of the 'real' but with an "appropriation of commodified images" which permitted Australians to:

... claim certain critical and valuable aspects of the Other as essentially part of [themselves], and thereby claim both a mythological and spiritual community of identity which [was] otherwise lacking.⁶²

As was noted in chapter four, indigenous people were thought to be essentially linked to the land. This inherent and inherited association was a vital ingredient in the construction of a claim to sovereignty and the development of a local identity. The Aboriginal people had been stripped of their claim to the land through *terra nullius*; which understood Australia, prior to invasion, as essentially uninhabited. To European eyes the land had not been obviously improved in any way and therefore the place was ripe for invasion and settlement, without recognition of any former rights of sovereignty; rights which would have impeded the process of settlement and colonisation of this new territory.⁶³ However, the land was not empty in 1788, and the continued presence of former occupants haunted the creation of a sense of belonging for those who immigrated to Australia.

In the context of this history, white Australians felt they had a right to the land, but imaginatively a real sense of connection continued to elude the white invader. They struggled to fill that sense of 'lack' which their recent, or historical, immigration had inspired. Various attempts were made to fill this imaginative void

⁶² Annette Hamilton, "Fear and Desire: Aborigines, Asians and the National Imaginary", *Australian Cultural History*, 1990, No.9, 18

⁶³ The legality of this assumption has since been challenged by the Mabo decision of the High Court of Australia. For more on the legal and social implications of *terra nullius* see Henry Reynolds, *Frontier*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1997, and Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath, and Marian Quartly, *Creating a Nation 1788-1990*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1994.

through dance. One such project was Edouard Borovansky's ballet *Terra Australis*, produced in 1946⁶⁴. This work was a classic example of the way in which a sense of mythological and spiritual connection to the land could be constructed by a white immigrant artist practicing in Australia. In his book, Ballet in Australia: the Second Act 1940-1980, Edward Pask describes the narrative structure of *Terra Australis* in this way:

Australia - a beautiful young woman - is courted by her aboriginal lover. Into their peace intrudes the explorer. In great fear they hide. The explorer is enchanted by the rich unexploited surroundings and the promise of earth. Despite her fear, Australia ventures out, drawn towards the explorer and he to her - both impelled by a predestined attraction. Suddenly, the [A]boriginal darts out on their love-making and in jealous anguish threatens fight, but Australia soothes his fears with a lullaby. Once he is asleep the explorer and Australia yield to their intense passion. The [A]boriginal awakens to find he has been duped. In terrible despair he works himself up into a fury and attacks the explorer, but in the fight he himself is killed. Mortally wounded the tragic figure of the [A]boriginal falters backwards down into the earth who laments with compassion over him. With solace she lays him to rest, weaves him into her timeless way until he is part of the earth. Deeply moved by the tragedy, Australia and the explorer turn to [the] earth with whom they now seek the promise of the future.⁶⁵

Contemporary reaction to this story of the inevitable demise of the Aboriginal people was highly favourable. In 1982, Edward Pask suggested that *Terra Australis* was Borovansky's "most important original creation", declaring that the "vitality of its story and conception regularly brings forth pleas that it could - *and should!* - be restored to the performing repertoire."⁶⁶ Its success was due, in part, to the thinly veiled references the ballet offered to many contemporary constructions of the history of colonisation, the future of Aboriginal people, and the claim of the invader to their chosen place. *Terra Australis* manufactured a metaphorical space where the invasion of the continent by white explorers, settlers and western capitalism could be

⁶⁴ *Terra Australis* was created from a story by Tom Rothfield, with a score by Esther Rofe and sets and costume by Eve Harris, see Pask, op. cit., 28

⁶⁵ Ibid. 28-29

⁶⁶ Emphasis in original text, Pask, op. cit., 29. Pask is referring here to the repertoire of The Australian Ballet.

constructed as necessary and inevitable. Australia, in both its feminine and earthly form, offered the Aboriginal a 'soft pillow' on which to lie as he encountered his inevitable destruction.

What is particularly interesting within a discussion of the creation and maintenance of national identity through dance, is the way in which the geography of Australia had a central location in manufacturing a sense of belonging for the explorer in *Terra Australis*. His attraction to Australia - as woman - was predetermined. Both were unable to combat the inevitable intensity of their passion for one another. The land needed its invader and the invader was transformed by his passion for the land and her sacrificial denial of the Aboriginal's claim over her. The explorer, by the end of the ballet, belonged to his new place. Like the 'naturalised' choreographers discussed early, the land had accepted the immigrant as her knowing subject. By the end of the ballet the intruder was entrusted with the representation and well being of the land for the future.

Terra Australis offers us a glimpse of how the appropriation of the position of the local 'Other' could be historically justified. Here the land was a source of "mythic consciousness"⁶⁷. The construction of its acquisition as an inevitable and righteous process metaphorically re-designed a rather sordid history. The acquisition of the position of the Aboriginal in the ballet offered a location for the recognition of the invader as the new local. Like the Anglo-centric portrayals of those colonial archetypes, *Terra Australis* offered the land as a space in which an increasingly diverse nation could acquire a unifying history formulated outside their disparate experiences.

This process was pushed to another level in the early fifties with the production of Rex Reid and Beth Dean's versions of the ballet *Corroboree*. Here, the space that was offered as a location for a unifying local identity was Aboriginality itself (rather than the land these people occupied). In these ballets the indigenous

⁶⁷ Andrew Lattas, op. cit., 56.

cultures offered the invader, what Andrew Lattas has described as, a necessary “sense of depth” and a “common unifying unconscious”.⁶⁸ By appropriating the embodied cultural practices of Australia’s indigenous people, through the appropriation of their dances, Beth Dean in particular believed that a ‘true’ understanding of the land and a real sense of collective identity could be manufactured for a nation of immigrants.

In comparison to Dean’s *Corroboree*, the ‘Australian’ works by Borovansky, Pomie, Bousloff, Tweedie, Priest, Bodenwieser and Barr were nationalistic in name and narrative only. Many of these theme ballets were local products offered through a vocabulary which was anything but ‘typically’ Australian. As the dance critic Jill Sykes has suggested:

While the arrangement of steps offered character and freshness, there was little in the way of originality or invention that suggested a different style of movement. Take away the titles and the costumes, and most of the ‘Australian’ works would be in a kind of European limbo.⁶⁹

Although ballets such as Valerine Tweedie’s *Wakooka* or Borovansky’s *Terra Australis*, had identifiably local environments, their medium of expression remained the product of an ancient, European art form. The same could be said for Barr and Bodenwieser, even though theirs was a language of more contemporary times. All these ballets had Australian *settings* but not a necessarily *Australian* movement vocabulary.

Some local choreographers had been commended for their attempts to bring a national flavour to the internationalism of the ballet vocabulary. Laurel Martyn’s *The Sentimental Bloke* came in for particular praise from Alan Brissenden who recalled that this ballet was “a combination of classical steps and movement typical of Australian expressions and customs”⁷⁰. Other small companies, the Studio Theatre Ballet in Adelaide and Sydney’s Ballet Group with their individual choreographers

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Jill Sykes, “Finding an Australian Identity in Dance”, *Voices*, Vol. VI, No.2, Winter, 43

⁷⁰ See notes for Alan Brissenden and Keith Glennon’s unpublished manuscript *Australia Dances* in Folder 5, “The Ballet Guild”, Box 2, Keith Glennon Papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

(Joanne Priest and Joan and Monica Halliday), were also congratulated for their inventiveness with Brissenden suggesting that these teacher/choreographers were “achieving more for Australian culture” than the larger company run by Edouard Borovansky.⁷¹ However, in many of the cases cited by Brissenden, these choreographers were influenced by what should be framed as a *modernising* rather than a *nationalising* process. As with the work of their more famous contemporary, George Balanchine, the innovation which these choreographers offered ballet were still circumscribed by the internationalism of the classical language. A *relève* may have been executed with an off balance twist, a lean of the torso, or a hand gesture which could somehow be construed as ‘typically Australian’, but these departures were additives to a formal tradition; flavours rather than any emphatic adjustment to the main meal. In this context, a ballet like Laurel Martyn’s *The Sentimental Bloke* was innovative within a circumscribed pattern of universal symbolism. It was essentially a ‘modern’ ballet created by an Australian choreographer, rather than a Australian ballet with an ‘indigenous’ vocabulary.⁷²

⁷¹ “Roger Allen” (Alan Brissenden), “The responsibility of the Borovansky Ballet”, *Voice*, Vol.4, No.3, January, 1955, 27. Also see Alan Brissenden, “Ballet in Australia needs Vitality and Assistance”, *Voice*, Vol.5, No.1, January, 1956, 23-24; Alan Brissenden, “Present-day Ballet in Australia”, *Meanjin*, Vol. XV, No.4, Summer, 1956, 357-363; Alan Brissenden, “New Directions”, *The Observer*, Vol.2, No.26, December 26th, 1959, 18-19. The editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* agreed with Brissenden. With the Borovansky Ballet moving into recess in 1956 it was suggested that funds should be utilised in the support of these smaller institutions. Such companies could be artistically more adventurous than the Borovansky Ballet, according to the editor, because they were not expected to produce “great classical ballets with their massed battalions”. This would allow the smaller company space to “try and develop a more modern and individual style suited to Australian themes”. See “Ballet after Borovansky”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2nd April, 1956, 2. Edouard Borovansky and Frank S. Fay (Managing Director of J.C. Williamson - the company which had bank rolled the Borovansky Ballet for much of its latter career) wrote letters to the editor five days later protesting the assertion that the Borovansky Ballet had disbanded indefinitely or that there was any real need for a smaller, more diverse companies to take its place. See “Future Shape of the Ballet: Part of Australian Culture”, letters to the editor from Edouard Borovansky and Frank S. Fay, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7th April 1956, 2. In reply on the 14th April, Alan Brissenden and Keith Glennon congratulated the editor of the Sydney paper, suggesting that support for smaller, more innovative institutions should have been “acclaimed by everyone interested in the development of an Australian tradition in ballet”. See “Borovansky Ballet”, letter to the editor from Alan Brissenden and Keith Glennon, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14th April, 1956, 2

⁷² These observations emerge from the viewing of a sizeable proportion of the filmed version of Laurel Martyn’s *The Sentimental Bloke*, recorded for television by the ABC in the 1960s and shown at the 1997 Green Mill, “Heritage and Heresy”, June/July in Melbourne, Victoria. This viewing accompanied the tribute to Laurel Martyn offered by Robin Grove.

Yet even within these restrictions there was a growing belief within the Australian dance community in the 1950s that, although these ballets often used the international language of the classics or Modernism, there was still a sense in which they could claim to produce local works; not through the creation of an indigenous vocabulary but through a particularly local way in which the dancers moved.

What gradually began to surface in the 1950s was the re-alignment of a nationally identifiable dance practice from content to execution, a process which gained considerable momentum over the next forty years. In this context it was the way the Australian dancer moved, rather than the narratives they portrayed or the steps they executed, that became the space in which choreographers, dancers and critics were beginning to locate the identifiably 'Australian'.

In 1953 Peggy Sager, a former member of the Kirsova Ballet and the Borovansky Ballet, returned from a nine week trip overseas in which she had observed a variety of ballet companies. As she told the Sydney Morning Herald, she had seen "all the leading British companies", as well as the Royal Danish Ballet and the American Ballet Theatre. Commenting on the state of ballet in Australia, Sager suggested that the standard here was "commendably high". In fact, she believed that there was "more enthusiasm and vitality among young ballerinas in Australia than England".⁷³ Jean Garling made a similar observation four years later when she commented that:

Australian dancers... are already much admired overseas and their vitality and endurance are a byword.⁷⁴

Both Garling and Sager saw Australian dancers as possessing an innate vitality, a sense of enthusiasm, and a certain 'staying power'. These particularities were, once again, attributed to an association with the Australian landscape. For Garling this "vitality" and "endurance" emerged from the climate and environment in

⁷³ Sydney Morning Herald, 4th October, 1953, 23

⁷⁴ Jean Garling, "Ballet in Australia", Hemisphere, April, 1957, 19

which the Australian dancer found her or himself. Here they could enjoy “plentiful sunshine and the facilities for making use of it” and a “high standard of living” which seemed to make their bodies move in a very particular way.⁷⁵

This shift from a concern with the creation of a nationally identified narrative form, or the production of a particular vocabulary, to the encouragement of an imagined local *way* of moving, was again not exclusively Australian. It was instead a general trend in the development and criticism of post WWII western dance practice. When the New York City Ballet arrived in Australia in 1958, with a heavy representation of Balanchine ballets, J.L.J. Wilson was particularly impressed with the individualistic style of the company. “They exploited some of the attitudes and qualities of the nation they represent” commented Wilson:

The ease and “Americanness” of *Interplay* and *Introduction to the Orchestra* are unique. These ballets are the way a company training in the traditions of the Russian Ballet must go if it is to be more than an imitation of the model; they have grown from the company’s sympathies and potentialities.⁷⁶

Wilson went on to advise that this was “a lesson our would be Australian companies must learn”, and over the next forty years Australian choreographers have heeded the call, as they engaged with the idea that the locally particular could be constructed as a property of movement rather than a quality embedded in the narratives they portrayed or the vocabulary they executed. Whether the company of dancers was American, Russian, French, Danish, English, or Australian, many commentators believed, as Charles Lisner did, that each company should reflect:

...a quality which could not by any stretch of the imagination be within the province of another, unless by mere imitation.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ J.L.J. Wilson, “Culture in Australia - the Year’s Clip”, *Current Affairs Bulletin*, (published by the Tutorial Classes Department of Sydney University) Vol.23, No.4, December 15th 1958, 57-58

⁷⁷ Charles Lisner, “National Identity”, in Charles Lisner, *The Australian Ballet: 21 Years*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1983, 47

As Jean Garling had stressed in 1951 (in the opening quote to this chapter), this quality was not only thought to be a matter of rational choice but an inevitable product of the effect of living in a distinctive environment. National particularity was a reaction to the land. It was a necessary adjustment to the wide open spaces; a gradual physical unification with the geography; an assimilation into the mythological history of the space and shape of the country. Through these images a sense of 'belonging' could gradually be offered as an embodied experience, articulated through the very way an Australian dancer moved. As Shirley McKechnie suggested in 1991:

For many of us, the Australian landscape seems to be both an experienced reality and a poetic construct, a potent symbol of our spatial predicament; an unlimited source of powerful metaphors for the satisfactions and frustrations of our spirits. Perhaps we will never acquire that deep affinity with the land which is the heritage of the Aboriginal people. In my mind, however, there is no doubt that our imaginations are being shaped by this land in ways we do not always fully apprehend but which are recognisable to those whose experience of space is entirely different.⁷⁸

Here, McKechnie attempted to locate an attachment to landscape in a frame similar to that offered by Garling forty years earlier. McKechnie's "affinity to the land" was a symbolic fiction (or a "poetic construct") as well as an identifiable *fact* acquired through first hand experience. However, much had changed in forty years. In the wake of increased immigration and the establishment of a federally sponsored re-definition of Australian culture, which had attempted to re-locate national identity through the accommodation of multiple cultures,⁷⁹ (a process which was named multiculturalism in the 1970s), McKechnie found herself more attracted to the idea that an expression of identity could somehow emerge inevitably from the experience of the local environment. The idea that this process could be a metaphorical fiction

⁷⁸ Shirley McKechnie, "Australians Making Dances: the Spatial Imperative", *Dance Australia Made*, Papers and Proceedings, AADE, National Biennial Conference, Perth, 1991, 6

⁷⁹ For more on the creation, history and consequences of the development of federal multiculturalism in Australia since the 1970s see, Stratton and Ang, op. cit.; and Castles, et.al., op. cit.

began to be subsumed by the *fact* of its embodied existence. As McKechnie stated later in the same article:

Our preoccupation with space is not an indulgent fancy; it is the truth of our daily lives which colours every dance which is made in Australia. It is the source of our greatest distinction...⁸⁰

This great distinction, this ‘Australian’ way of moving, has been characterised by particular traits, which over the last forty years have been articulated by a procession of commentators. Following the early proclamations of Peggy Sager, Jean Garling, Charles Lisner, Shona Dunlop MacTavish, and Shirley McKechnie, a series of contemporary critics have recently articulated their understanding of this national trait. In 1980, the National Folk Dance Company of Australia⁸¹ found its repertoire being described in 1980 as ‘typically Australian’, this time by Diana Thurborn. Although the repertoire of this company was reliant on the folk dance traditions of Europe, Thurborn suggested that The National Folk Dance Company offered:

...the beginning of a truly Australian culture reflecting Australia today and our history. Something uniquely Australian - something other than meat pies, tinnies and kangaroos.⁸²

Hilary Crampton described an Australian way of moving as a “boldness of movement and a robust and generous use of space”.⁸³ What is interesting about Crampton’s

⁸⁰ McKechnie, *op. cit.*, 7

⁸¹ The National Folk Dance Company of Australia was originally called Kolobok Folkloric Dance Company when it was formed in 1970. Kolobok became a subsidised, professional company in 1974.

⁸² Diana Thurbon, “Folkloric: an introduction to the National Folk Dance Company of Australia”, *Dance Australia*, Vol.1, No.2, December-February, 1980/81, 4. The National Folk Dance Company may have avoided meat pies, tinnies and kangaroos but they were not immune to the allure of those ever popular Anglo-centric archetypes which seemed to haunt Australian dance culture. When Kolobok became the National Folk Dance Company it also began producing original ballets on ‘Australian’ themes which were thought to complement their international dance pieces. In 1980 a ballet was produced which centred around a sheep station and a season of sheering in the 1850s. In 1981 *Beginner’s Luck* offered audiences a story set in the gold fields with music composed by the Ants Bush Band. This tale of a migrant family who accidentally stumbled on a gold nugget, was commended by critics for the manner in which it added the dances of Australia’s colonial past to the predominantly Eastern European folk repertoire which had dominated Kolobok’s earlier years. The National Folk Dance Company of Australia disband in 1981 and Madame Berezowsky and Eva Segal reformed the group and re-instated the name Kolobok. For more on this company see Thurbon, *op. cit.*, and Hilary Crampton, “Informed Grace”, *Voices*, Vol.VI, No.2, Winter, 1996, 66-76.

comments is the fact that they were made in relation to a local Indian dance performance:

The soft drone typical of Indian music to Western ears, combined with a stage set of glowing luminosity, ...created the ambience for an evening of dance firmly based within the traditions of Bharata-Natya. Yet it also displays characteristics that seem distinctively Australian: a boldness of movement and a robust and generous use of space.⁸⁴

Another local dance commentator, Jill Sykes, called this distinctiveness a “more open way of moving, a breadth of gesture and a directness that distinguishes [the Australian dancer] from their colleagues overseas”.⁸⁵ Sykes made this particular description in relation to the work of Graeme Murphy, the director of the Sydney Dance Company since 1976. The ballet which inspired this comment was the 1988 work *Vast*. *Vast* was created for the Bicentennial which celebrated 200 years of European occupation of the Australian continent and brought together dancers from an array of smaller, government subsidised companies who joined the Sydney Dance Company under the general direction of Graeme Murphy. These included The Queensland Ballet, the West Australian Ballet, and the Australian Dance Theatre from South Australia. *Vast* was divided into three acts: Act One included “The Sea” and “The Coast”; Act Two “The Centre”; and Act Three was called “The Cities”. Speaking about the work, Murphy told Andrea Borsay that, along with his collaborative team - Barry Conyngham (composer) and Andrew Carter (designer) - he had “toyed with various concepts” but finally decided to contribute to the Bicentennial celebrations with an exploration of the Australian landscape in design, sound, and movement.⁸⁶ “I wanted [the work to] emerge from the oceans,” said Murphy:

⁸³ Crampton, op. cit., 67.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Sykes, op. cit., 45

⁸⁶ Andrea Borsay, “Vast”, *Dance Australia*, February/March, 1988, 15

...then lift up over the coastline, almost like a helicopter ride, zooming in on aspects of the landscape and the people who dwell in it, and then take off across the country to the city; and then finally to take a huge lift so that you try to see a totality at the end of the piece... To me it would be foolish to tackle it any other way, because I'm so inspired by this country.⁸⁷

Although there were no "convicts and explorers" in *Vast*, Borsay assured her readers that this "non-narrative project" would not prevent Murphy from making "profound statements about Australia."⁸⁸

Since 1976 Graham Murphy had been establishing a reputation as an 'Australian' choreographer, with works like *Glimpses* (1976), *Rumours* (1979), *Daisy Bates* (1982), *Homelands* (1982), *Nearly Beloved* (1986), and *Vast* (1988). By 1990 the company's early flag waving seemed to cause the choreographer some embarrassment. However, Murphy admitted that in those early years he had intentionally used his Australian'ness' as a "weapon" in his company's survival.⁸⁹

Interviewed in 1981 by Hazel de Berg, Murphy had set out his agenda in this way:

To me it is important that we don't follow trends simply because they've been successful overseas. I've always felt that we are like an Australian plant that grows in Australian soil and can survive the harshness of drought, or the extremes of temperature. I've often felt that the imported rose garden of culture that sometimes comes to Australia is a transitory thing that will die in the first harsh attack of the elements or whatever. To me that's an important difference. I wanted to be a much hardier plant, and of course, those hardy plants are not always the delicate, beautiful things like the rose. They are frequently less appealing immediately to look at. But when you look at them in art, when you look at them through the eyes of dance, you can see their depth, their beauty, their resilience. That's what I look for in dance, and that's what I try to create - something that will be resilient, will reflect this country, that will excite our audiences. And our audiences are obviously different from European or American audiences.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Graham Murphy, Oral History Interview conducted by Shirley McKechnie, 1990, *Oral History Collection*, National Library of Australia, this section of interview cited in Michelle Potter, "Making Australian Dance: Themes and Variations", *Voices*, Vol. VI, No.2, Winter, 1996, 14

⁹⁰ "Growing in Australian Soil: an Interview with Graeme Murphy recorded by Hazel de Berg 1981", *Brolga*, Issue 1, December, 1994, 25-26

Just as Douglas Brass had framed the work of the young Robert Helpmann (choreographing in England in the 1940s) as the product of the harsh, robust environment of the country in which he had spent his formative years, Murphy positioned his individuality, forty years later, within those same unforgiving extremes of the Australian landscape. He framed his creations as unique, robust flowers which were typically Australian and sprang from the soil of his homeland.

Such imagery also located an Australian sensibility within the confines of very masculine rhetoric. This work had a rugged beauty. It was about hardy survival and robust resilience. These images offered Australian dance compensation for its lack of, what Russell Dumas has called, “stylistic authenticity”. As Dumas suggested, mainstream dance practitioners in Australia promoted a “spunky muscularity” which was “befitting a young and vigorous colony”.⁹¹ Although Dumas found these images distasteful, he was correct to suggest that being an ‘Australian’ dancer had increasingly become synonymous with not only youthful vigour but also muscular virility. However, for many Australian dancers, choreographers, critics, and audience members this did not amount to more of the same jingoistic, self congratulatory work that Dumas found so problematic in 1988. This “spunky muscularity”⁹² was instead the very “stylistic authenticity”⁹³ that many had been searching for in Australian dance since the Second World War.

In recent years the quest for local authenticity and the relationship between an Australian identity and its preferred apotheosis - the heterosexual, Heroic Australian male - has been most profoundly captured by the former welder turned tap dance specialist, Dean Perry. Given the history outlined in this chapter, Perry, along with his company Tap Dogs, offers us a view of the inevitable consequences of this search for “stylistic authenticity” and its discovery within local geography. In what has been called the ‘Newcastle’ style, Perry linked contemporary notions of an Australian ‘way

⁹¹ Russell Dumas, “Dislocated, Isolated, Seduced and Abandoned”, *Writings on Dance*, 3, Winter 1988, 34

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

of moving' with old, colonial archetypes, and found a local particularity within the landscape, and the embodiment, of the working class male. The old and the new combined here to offer Australian audiences something which was uniquely local and overtly nostalgic.

Perry's original Tap Dogs, that all male ensemble of Aussie 'blokes' in King Gee trousers, blue singlets, flannelette shirts and Blundstone boots (with taps attached), prompted the Sydney critic Jill Sykes to ask: "what makes this husky bunch of tapping blokes so special?" The answer lay in the boys:

...nerve, verve, hustle and muscle - not to mention the skill, the discipline and sheer audacity to get out and make a show that is tapping from start to finish.⁹⁴

The Tap Dogs also offered an "Australian perspective".⁹⁵ With their "nerve, verve, hustle and muscle", their skill, discipline and "sheer audacity", these guys were quintessentially Australian. For Sykes, their show was about "breaking rules and shaping fresh boundaries"⁹⁶, but the success of Tap Dogs was not due to a process of innovation. It was instead the appeal of the comfortable, and comforting, archetypes their show resurrected. Here were the itinerant worker, the labourer, the explorer, the shearer, and the Newcastle miner embodied on the contemporary stage. As we saw earlier, this bloke had been around for some time in Australia's identity mythology. He had been a staple in late 19th century art and, despite repeated challenges to his relevancy, he had re-surfaced throughout mid-twentieth century. In ballets which explored the Ned Kelly legend, life on a sheep station, or the larrikin and the lifesaver this bloke had regularly found his way onto the Australian stage. However, his influence was even more pervasive when he became the staple for the Australian 'way' of moving. In a post WWII world, youth, vigour, expansiveness, and virility

⁹⁴ Sykes, 1996, 46

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

had gradually come to represent the national body. In 1994, the Tap Dogs were the realisation of a journey that had started back in the late 1930s.

The Tap Dogs were also, however unwittingly, engaging in a very contemporary debate. Their hero - the heroic, working class male - had increasingly become an archetype without a reality. As the English critic David Jays has suggested, these boys were offering their answer to the “increasingly pressing” question: “what on earth [are] modern men good for?”. As Jay continued:

In olden days [men] had jobs, real manly jobs doing real manly things. Now of course, that's all gone, and the scaffolded set of the Tap Dogs only confirms the fact. Like a once proud coal mine transformed into a heritage theme park, the show refashions the defining site of masculinity into spectacle, a gawping simulation of work. ⁹⁷

As the publicity for their show suggested, here were young Australian men doing what young Australian men should - they were working hard. Throughout the show the boys acted as performers and roadies. They frequently rearranged the set, which was constructed to mimic the landscape of ‘real’ labourers. As if to further confirm their ‘work ethic’, the staging also allowed the audience to see the performers collapsed on the side of the stage, guzzling water, waiting for their turn to re-enter the space (their place of work), the result of their exertions on full display.

To satisfy the constant re-affirmation needed to maintain the truth of their representation the Tap Dogs had to work twice as hard, jump twice as high, and move twice as fast as anyone else. It was a tough battle to stay in front of the constant threat of objectification, and, as Jay suggested, despite all their efforts the Tap Dogs could not avoid the ambiguities of their location. By placing these rampantly heterosexual images on a proscenium arch, those aggressive male bodies found themselves occupying a slippery space between affirmations of heterosexual display and the homo-erotic.⁹⁸ The inevitable objectification of their bodies on stage disabled their attempts to reconstruct Heroic, heterosexual masculinity. Their image slid into

⁹⁷ David Jays, “Of myths and men”, *Dance Now*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Summer, 1996, 75

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

ambiguity, to the point at which they seemed to be a parody the very thing they were attempting to valorise.

With the work of Dean Perry it appeared that years of struggle to offer Australian audiences the quintessential heterosexual male, and, by association, a recognisable local identity were united to the advantage of both constructions. However, this group also reflected an adjustment to the way in which dance itself was perceived in the late 20th century. When calls for the development of an Australian dance practice shifted from an experimentation with narrative, through the attempted development of a distinctively local vocabulary, to the recognition of a locally distinctive 'way' of moving, the position of men within the structure, production and development of dance also gradually changed. The taint of homosexuality, which had dogged the career of Robert Helpmann in the forties and fifties, began to fade if not completely disappear. Men began to be represented and featured more centrally in the work of major choreographers. What had assisted in this process was not so much the changing attitudes of society, although this helped, but an adjustment to the very way in which movement was created and executed, as well as what it was asked to represent. Dance was no longer the feminine art. It had become a location for a virile, expansive, and robust form of national representation. Australian dancers were bold, athletic, and irreverent. They had learned to embody their nation. That embodiment and its acceptance meant that the focus of dance shifted away from the form's historical location as the art of women, with its place at the margins of society, to a more central location where dance was offered as a valid expression of local particularity.

Conclusion

Why can't a woman be more like a man?

Darkness has fallen. The air outside cuts like a scalpel. Its is the kind of cold which numbs your fingers and face in seconds; and takes just a little longer to destroy your brain and soul. Its coming up for five o'clock. The filming is due to finish at three in the morning. One immediately asks oneself how the eight men in the cast are going to manage to perform in these sub zero temperatures at all, let alone do it for ten hours?... Their mettle is about to be tested as they are called out of the narrow boat for line-ups, rehearsal and filming. The cold air packs a punch and is painful to breathe.... While the camera turns Jordi Cartes-Molina bounces a football up and down for what seems an eternity. Eventually his hands become numb... Ice forms on the water. The dancers go through their paces... Midnight comes and goes. Ross [Hounslow] and Juan [Kruz Diaz de Garaio Esnaola] are both ill with stomach problems. Ross vomits. By 1 a.m. [Lloyd] Newson is experiencing headaches and throws up in the canal. Work continues. David [Emanuel], starkers, has to repeatedly withstand the bare concrete of the frozen towpath. He begins to get very shaky after the fourth take. On the edge of hypothermia, he is bundled into blankets, but after a few minutes he is back on the concrete again. The shooting of *Enter Achilles* finally ends as 4 a.m. approaches...¹

This is a description of the filming of Lloyd Newson's dance piece *Enter Achilles*. There is cold, darkness, vomiting, hypothermia, endurance, and pain - all played out on the flesh of men. Like their popular brothers the Tap Dogs, these are not just men dancing, but men at work. They are sacrificing their own safety for the sake of their art and entertainment.

With *Enter Achilles* the Australian born choreographer Lloyd Newson produced a powerful, controversial study of relationships between men. His characters displayed a complex fascination with their masculinity, as well as a fear of their capacity for intimacy, and the slippery nature of the distinction between mateship and the homo-erotic. Like his earlier work, *Dead Dreams and Monochrome Men* (1988), Newson's choreography displayed (and then unravelled) embodied understandings of Western masculinity. Gestures which captured the essence of the

¹ Mike Dixon, "Filming Enter Achilles", *Dance Europe*, No.2, February/March, 1996, 14, 15

male-male relationship - back slapping, swaggering, beer drinking, and other traditional examples of 'macho' behaviour - were rolled out of shape as Newson's movement phrases revealed the fragile, manufactured nature of a heterosexual man's grasp on his 'manliness'. However, when the filming of the work was recounted by the reporter Mike Dixon, what emerged was not a reverential description of Newson's exposure of the fragile state of Western masculinity, but a fascination with men doing 'manly' things. What appealed to Dixon was the sight of men working hard; men putting their bodies on the line. Dixon marvelled at the "relentless professionalism of these dancers".² Their dedication was "awesome", "riveting", and few who saw the work would "ever realise what a punishing hell the dancers went through to film the piece for posterity."³

This sensational reading of *Enter Achilles* is not entirely the responsibility of the reporter. Lloyd Newson⁴ offered his work as a strident criticism of the construction of gender relations and the isolating affects of homophobia in Western social systems, but in order to make this critique he also had to display the very thing he wished to deconstruct. Newson used the 'work' and 'play' of men as a site for an analysis of masculine physical languages, but his men still moved in ways which foregrounds strength and aggression. Particularly in his all male works, Newson offered tenderness and affection as fleeting aberrations in the lives of his characters. With pieces like *Dead Dreams and Monochrome Men* and *Enter Achilles*, he gave his audiences the same energy, violence, and aggression which made the work of Dean

² Ibid., 15

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lloyd Newson originally trained with Margaret Lasica in Melbourne but has spent most of his choreographic career in Britain where he formed DV8 Physical Theatre. For more on his career and work see: Sophie Constanti, "Giving Birth to Dead Dreams", *Dance Theatre Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 1989, 5-6; Keith Watson, "DV8's all New Departure", *Dance Theatre Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 4, Summer, 1992, 4-5, 27; Gary Carter, "In the Plush Hush of the Mainstream", *Dance Theatre Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 4, Autumn, 1993, 6-9, 53; Fiona Buckland, "Towards a Language of the Stage: the work of DV8 Physical Theatre", *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 44, November, 1995, 371-380; Rupert Christiansen, "Weakness in the heel", *Dance Theatre Journal*, Vol. 113, No. 1, Summer, 1996, 4-5; Keith Watson, "Bound to Please", *Dance Now*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Summer, 1997, 8-15; Francis Anne Barbe, "Physical Movement in Collaborative Theatre: Australian Dance Theatre and Integrative Theatre Practices in an International Context", Honours Thesis, English Department, University of Queensland, 1993.

Perry and Tap Dogs so popular in Australia. As Mike Dixon's report of the filming of *Enter Achilles* illustrates, although Newson's displays of masculinity had a critical edge, his work could still be revered for the excitement, volatility, strength and sacrifice it revealed on the bodies of men. While challenging standard constructions of embodied masculinity through subtle shifts in the framing of traditional, gendered, physical symbols, Newson's work still stimulated a reverence for the very thing his choreography challenged - the spectacle of masculine display.

Although these works were produced on male bodies, the processes and principles favoured in their construction have also had a profound affect on the bodies of dancing women. In what has come to be known as 'physical theatre'⁵ - speed, strength, aggression, and the exploration of physical danger are defining principles.⁶ The movement vocabulary and performance style favoured by those who practice this dance form reflects a preference for movement which is traditionally seen as the preserve of men in Western cultures. However, women have not been excluded from this aesthetic. They have in fact been encouraged to emulate physical theatre's spectacular way of moving. As with women's adventures into Modernism and the

⁵ Physical theatre has also been called 'Eurocrash'. For more on these style see Jean Marc Adolphe, "A Dance of Disaster", *Ballet International*, January, 1994, 10-13.

⁶Physical theatre was originally created as a development of, and a departure from, the work of the American and European dance avante-garde of the sixties and seventies. These choreographers, (Americans Merce Cunningham, Deborah Hay, Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Judith Skinner, Trish Brown, and the Australians Nanette Hassell and Russell Dumas for example) attempted to neutralise the display of gender in their works by exploring an androgynous style of movement. Contact Improvisation and Release technique were two formalised vocabularies which emerged from this experimentation. Both forms strove to eliminate the performative aspects of dance. They neutralised gender relations, defused the objectification of the dancer in the performance space, and demolished the hierarchical relationship between choreographer and performer by utilising improvisational techniques. Contact Improvisation provided a vocabulary in which bodies were offered equal access to the bearing of another's weight, challenging the traditional gendered relationship between the 'lifter' and 'lifted'. Release technique attempted to offer a neutral space where the body was seen as an anatomical assemblage of integrated, moving, conscious parts, with no specific accommodation of gendered specificities. Dancers were presented with ways in which they could produce movement through an integration of imagery with non-dance vocabularies such as Tai Chi, or Alexander Technique. In Release the idea of difference was subsumed by a concentration on the anatomical reality of the body and the neutralising of any socially constructed affirmations of gender. For more on the Contact Improvisation see Cynthia Novak, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1990. For a description of Skinner-Release Technique see Elizabeth Dempster, "The Releasing Aesthetic: Joan Skinner Interview", *Writings on Dance*, 14, Summer, 1995/6, 17-26. For more on the historical roots of the physical theatre style see Adolphe op. cit. and Buckland, op. cit.

exotic from the 1920s to the 1950s, physical theatre practices in the 1980s offered women an escape from established understandings of femininity in western societies. Sustained by second wave feminisms' understanding of equality⁷, and moving on from attempts by choreographers in the 1960s and seventies to relieve dance of its gender bias⁸, many women found that the new movement vocabularies of physical theatre⁹ offered a space where they could take pride in the acquisition of muscle definition and

⁷ Dancers working in the 1960s and seventies, may not have identified themselves as feminists, but their attempt to neutralise the historical affects of gendering in their work was in sympathy with liberal and socialist feminist views on gender construction, liberation and notions of equality. Many feminists in this period saw the manufacture of gender and the fact of sex as separate issues. Gender was the socially constructed category which subordinated women, but sex, or more particularly the sexed body, was seen as a pure accident of biology. For these feminists everyone had the *potential* in contemporary society to be understood (and imagined) as a citizen (a neutral, non-gendered subject) within the confines of liberal, democratic or socialist institutions. Once patriarchy's gender distinctions were demolished the discrimination apparent within western social and political institutions based on sex would be neutralised; the neutral body would be inhabited by a non-gendered citizen. However, writers like Moira Gatens, Anne Phillips or Carole Pateman have challenged the very idea of a singular, non-gendered, social, philosophic, or political subject. (See Moira Gatens "A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction", in J. Allen and P. Patton, eds., *Beyond Marxism: Interventions after Marxism*, Intervention Publications, 1983, 143-160; Moira Gatens, "Power, Bodies and Difference", in M. Barrett and Anne Phillips, eds, *Destabilising Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992; and Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: ethics, power and Corporeality*, Routledge, London, 1996; Anne Phillips, "Universal Pretensions in Political Thought", in M. Barrett and Anne Phillips, eds, *Destabilising Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992; and Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Polity Press, Oxford, 1988. These authors made it clear that although the idea of a neutral subject had been very influential within second wave feminism, this construction had no historically locatable reality for women. As Gatens suggested, this neutrality had always been identified with the "historically and culturally determined powers and capacities" of the male body which was seen as "the norm or the standard" in western societies. (Gatens, 1992, op. cit., 125)

⁸ Just as liberal and socialist feminists had offered women a view of a gender neutral subject or citizen, dancers dedicated to the liberating aspects of Contact Improvisation and Release technique in the seventies were also working toward an androgynous space for the dancing body. Their liberation of the body was offered through a deconstruction of the physical manifestations of gender which had designated certain movement capabilities to women, and others to men. Within their processes these artists struggled for neutral ground. They sought anatomical confirmation of social equality.

⁹ Physical theatre and Eurocrash built on this idea of an androgynous space or a neutral body favoured in the 1970s. However, by the eighties any pretence of the neutral or universal body/subject had been subsumed under a more obvious admission that the neutral body/subject was actually a masculine one. This was not necessarily a conscious decision of the part of these young choreographers, or an immediate result of feminisms' shift in the understanding of sexual discriminations in western history and society, but, embedded in the assumptions of the physical theatre aesthetic (and in the nature of their movement vocabularies) were images, actions, and motivations that were traditionally offered as a sign of the 'masculine' rather than the 'feminine' in Western societies. In the work of choreographers such as Wim Vanderkeybus, Edouard Lock, and Lloyd Newson, as well as Australians Gideon Oberzanek and Garry Stewart - energy, provocation, aggression, and danger were played out on a body whose virtuosity was lodged squarely within the historically specific constructions of masculinity as they had been formulated in Western cultures since the late 19th century. This construction was seen as the preferred, contemporary, fashionable norm for both men and women.

shed the constant battle to trim *down* the body; allowing it to be developed into an efficient, spectacular instrument, capable of matching the expertise prized on the bodies of men. Here was a place where a woman's strength, if she possessed it, could become an asset rather than a liability.

The experience of Australian dancer Kate Champion is a case in point. Champion, who worked with the One Extra Company in Sydney and Newson's DV8 Physical Theatre before leaving company structures to freelance and create her own work, found that in the early days of her career she was praised when she "thinned down" her muscular body.¹⁰ What she called her "naturally muscular thighs" were commented on by teachers and directors who gave her advice on how to decrease their size in order to benefit her dancing as well as her employment options.¹¹ As Champion recalled, it all got rather confusing back when she was a younger dancer because she was praised more when she was thinner, therefore she presumed that she was also a better dancer when she lost weight, but the problem was, when she shed the weight she could no longer maintain her ability to jump (which had been highlighted as one of her major assets as a performer). Her jump disappeared along with (what she had been told were) extra or unnecessary bits of flesh.¹² By the late 1980s and the early nineties the fate of the 'Kate Champion' body had changed dramatically. Her 'naturally muscular thighs' became an asset rather than a liability and Champion became an example of the new eighties woman in dance. This woman had a strong frame with a muscular construction, often enhanced through weight training or the practice of the increasingly popular Pilates¹³ method of stretching and strengthening.

This new woman was not exclusive to Australian dance. As Christy Adair observed in her book Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens, this "very fit, powerful, energetic" specimen was also represented by the American Molissa Fenley, or the

¹⁰ Amy Clyde and Cyndi Tebbel, "The Brave New Body", New Woman, August, 1993, 80

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³

English director of the Cholmondeleys Lea Anderson. These two formulated their styles, in part, as a challenge to the construction of the female dancer as a “passive and submissive”, manipulable creature.¹⁴ This change also meant that Tina Fehlandt of the Mark Morris company, described as a “big cat of a woman” (169cm tall, weighing 63.5 kilos, with “substantial thighs, sturdy hips, and a butt that jiggles”)¹⁵, could be celebrated as one of the “Brave New Bodies” of women in contemporary dance.¹⁶ Another New Woman was Canada’s Louise Lecavalier. Lecavalier had an “elastic, powerful, acrobatic body”. She was famous for “risky actions, executed with virtuosity”, and the way in which she flirted with “the constant danger of injury or exhaustion”.¹⁷ Lecavalier was the essence of the physical theatre style - she matched the guys, blow for blow.¹⁸

For these dancers physical theatre practices provided a welcomed expansion of the possibilities for their experience as moving bodies. Dancers like Lecavalier, Fehlandt, Fenley, Anderson, and Australia’s Kate Champion, Narelle Benjamin, or Felice Burns (see fig. 46) emerged from a culture in which the “super fit, superwoman image” had been promoted as the new norm. Theirs was not the volatile, unpredictable, oozing flesh of Woman (as she had been historically constructed in western society) but a corporeal image and reality controlled and commanded by will and expertise. This was not the body which had placed women in a subordinate position within their culture. It was a reflection of Man; the counterpart to the idealised white, middle class, western male body with controlled, contained, and conquered flesh. Not only did physical theatre offer yet another defiant challenge to understandings of embodied constructions of femininity, it also realised a re-assessment of the gender allegiance of dance itself. In the second half of the

¹⁴ Christy Adair, *Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens*, Macmillan, London, 1992, 217

¹⁵ Clyde and Tebbel, *op. cit.*, 78.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Adolphe, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ For more on Lecavalier see Ann Copper Albright, “Techno Bodies: Muscling with Gender in Contemporary Dance”, *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover, 1997, 28-55



Fig. 46. Felice Burns (1993). Photographer Greg Barrett. From Greg Barrett *Danceshots*, Gore & Osment Publications, Sydney, 1993. (Courtesy of Gore & Osment Publications Ltd)

twentieth century, dance had gradually moved away from its position as a feminine (therefore secondary) practice, to become a more masculine (therefore more central) art form.

As the last two chapters have indicated, this shift had been taking place in Australian dance from the late 1950s. However, a careful distinction must be made here between the embodied realisation of this gender shift and its philosophic or imaginative location. Seen from the latter perspective, the Expressive dancers of the 1920s and thirties, and women like Beth Dean in the 1950s, also practiced within the realm of 'masculine' principles. Dancers such as Sonia Revid, Irene Vera Young, and Dean were not dancing as 'every-Woman' but as 'every-Man'. They positioned their bodies as vessels for the emulation of universal principles. They 'imagined' themselves at the centre, a place reserved for Man in patriarchal systems. As we saw in chapter one, this location was made possible in the 1930s because their chosen aesthetic - Modernism - was considered marginal. Women from this era had re-instated movement principles which complied with traditional understandings of the 'feminine' in western cultures, therefore the radicalism of women like Revid and Young was not located within their active, 'real' bodies on stage but within the assumption that those same bodies could represent a universal subject; the 'I' or 'We' of common experience. However, when choreographic preferences shifted and the emulation of the motion of men began to attract choreographers in the late 1940s, the 'real' and the 'imagined' body were gradually united. For a short time the window of transition allowed choreographers like Beth Dean, and jazz artists such as Anita Ardell, the space to be and dance as 'Man', but in the latter half of the twentieth century the action of bodies on stage and the imaginary site of the universal subject slowly joined in the bodies, or more importantly, the traditional movement capacities of men. Then the radical, imaginary, "female masculinity"¹⁹ was traded for a more predictable 'male

¹⁹ Mark Franko describes a similar assumption within the historical assessment of the pre-WWII work of the American Modernist Martha Graham. As Franko suggests: "Graham's revolt against the classical tradition seemed to be a revolt against an artificial 'feminine' in the name of an essential 'masculine'. Yet her rhetoric allows for a third term to show through in which the feminine is

masculinity' which moved the art form out of its peripheral location to where, by the late 1990s, dance became an acceptable site for the emulation of local identity. Post-war Australian dance was expansive, youthful, vigorous and virile. These principles became the imagined essence of an Australian 'way of moving', but they were also representative of the idealised, traditional, physical attributes which were characteristic of conservative constructions of masculinity in western societies.

As we have seen in this thesis, from the 1920s to the 1950s the bodies of women revealed the rebellious and yet conservative nature of inter-war Australian Modernism. They offered insights into a local fascination with a fascist aesthetic and the usefulness of the exotic or the indigenous 'Other' in the definition and defiance of the norms of Home. In the 1950s the popularity of the motion of men offered new freedoms not only to the dancing male but also dancing women. By the 1960s those freedoms were circumscribed by the conventional constraints of Heroic, heterosexual masculinity. In general, the pre-1960s dancing body was feminine, radical but marginal. The post-1960s body was masculine, central, but inevitably more conservative. Modernism, fascism, the exotic, the primitive, and the popular, as well as constructions of sexuality and the local landscape, infected the way the individual body moved on stage, which in turn affected and reflected the way the national body was constructed and understood in Australia from 1920 to 1970. As Rhoda Graver has stated:

Dance changes with every body that dances; it changes with the time; the country; even the weather. [I]t does not have one history but many.²⁰

This has been but one of those histories.

recuperated: an imaginary feminine masculinity. There is this a double consciousness through which Graham articulates her own experience in male terms, but also re-introduces the feminine." Mark Franko, *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1995, 56
Sonia Revid and Irene Vera Young's re-introduction of the feminine did not emerge from the same radical position as Graham's but the 'imaginary' location for their work could fit with what Franko calls "feminine masculinity".

²⁰Rhoda Graver, "Preface", in Geraldine Jones, *Dancing: the Power of Dance Around the World*, BBC Books, London, 1992, 11

Appendix

This appendix is not intended to be a comprehensive roll call of the dancers working in Australia from the 1920s to the 1950s. It is instead a list of artists whose names appeared in the press of the day but on whom comprehensive detail was either too sketchy to warrant their inclusion in the body of this thesis or their work did not contribute in any significant way to the major themes which are explored here. Some biographies are very short, but this should not be taken as an indication of the importance of the performer to Australian dance history. More research needs to be done on many of these women and this list is merely intended to assist in that process.

Eve Atwyn

Studied with Mary Wigman and Rudolf Von Laban.

Keith Glennon Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Special collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia

Ida Beeby

Ida Beeby began her career as a pianist with the Auckland Symphony Orchestra in New Zealand. Arriving in Australia in 1924 Beeby settled in Perth in 1938 where she formed the Patch Theatre with her husband Bill. A devotee of the principles of Isadora Duncan, Ida Beeby studied the Delsarte method of rhythmic exercise from the American Ted Shawn when he came to Australia and stayed in Perth for three months teaching at the Patch Theatre school. Beeby declared that dance was the “mother of the arts”. She derided popular dance calling “jazzing and jitterbugging” a “species of untra-civilized decadence, drugging to decent and healthy emotion, and appalling in its effect.” In comparison her form of expressive, Delsartian movement derived, as she proclaimed, from the “great Art of Dance”. It offered participants a path to “strength, beauty, [and] truth”. For Beeby the modern dancer was no longer “an automaton, forced into stylisation by tradition”, as was the case with classical ballet, but a “creature of individual expression, physically, psychologically, and spiritually free.”

Patch Theatre Archive, 1944-1948, PR8938, Battye Library, State Library of Western Australia, Perth.

Ruth Berger

Choreographed *The Wedding* for the Victorian Ballet Guild in 1956.

Keith Glennon Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Special collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia

Jean Dembitzka

Born in Poland, Jean Dembitzka was trained at the Academy of Music and Art in Vienna. After graduation she performed with the Grete Gross group, touring Europe and dancing in films and stage productions by Max Reinhardt. From 1933-36 she studied with Harald Kreutzberg in Salzburg. Dembitzka was in Poland when it was occupied by the Russians. She worked with the Opera company there from 1939 but in from 1942 to 1945, with Poland now under German occupation, Dembitzka was

unable to continue performing and lived the last years of the war under an assumed identity. In 1947 she migrated to Australia. Here she choreographed for the National Opera's 1951 seasons of *Carmen* and the Independent Theatre's productions of *Le Guihomme Bourgoise* and the *Dancing Slipper*, and built up a school where she taught "Modern dance, jazz, primitive, stage movement and Spanish dancing". In 1956 she began teaching dance at Sydney University where her "Studio Group" produced various recitals, one of which featured Dembitzka's interpretation of *Brolga* with music by John Antill. In 1959 she choreographed "Peter and the Wolf" for ATN 7. She also taught movement at the Independent Theatre and for the WEA (Workers Education Association). Jean Dembitzka died on the 20th July 1998.

Keith Glennon Papers, Folder 5, Box 9, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia

Robyn Strum, "Jean Dembitska", *Dance Network News*, October, 1998, 9

Pat Edye (Martyn)

Student of Joan Henry and Joan Joske, Pat Edye later moved to study with Sonia Revid in Melbourne. She created a *Lyre Bird dance*, which she believed to be the first dance inspired by the bird, and performed with Ruth Bergner at the Union theatre. Like many of the early modern dancers in Australia, Edye felt that her contribution to Australian dance had been minimal. She told Keith Glennon in a letter dated 13th June, 1967 that she "personally would not warrant a mention in a book on dance" in Australia, but "I only recall", she stated later, "that I suffered sweat and blood because of the climate of prejudice against Modern Dance... In the early days dancers were striving with great idealism and courage, but the results disintegrated into thin air."

Keith Glennon Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Special collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia

Dorothy Flemming (Hollingsworth)

Born in 1914, Dorothy Flemming trained with the Perth ballet teacher Lindley Wilson, but in 1937, with the help of an Orient travelling scholarship went to London where she studied with Greek dance with Ruby Ginner and mime with Irene Mawer from 1938. Back in Australia in 1940 Flemming began teaching physical education in schools and began her own classes for adults whom she taught the Ginner-Mawer method in 1941.

Noel Stewart, "Mrs. Dorothy Hollingsworth: Children's Radio Pioneer", *As I Remember Them*, Artlook Books, Perth, 1987, 208-212. Lynn Fisher, op. cit., 342-3

For more on Lindly Wilson see Lynn Fisher, *Dance Class: A history of professional dance and dance training from 1895-1940*, M.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Western Australia, 1992

Heather Gell

A major figure in the Eurhythmics movement in Australia, Heather Gell, a former kindergarten teacher, trained in London in 1923 at the London School of Dalcroze Eurhythmics, returning in 1951 for further study. From 1939 to the late 1950s Gell hosted her "Music Thro' Movement" series on ABC radio. She opened a training

school, "The Australian School of Music and Movement", which offered its first examinations in 1957. Gell described her method as a way of developing the "individual personality through music which is used to *control*, to *co-ordinate*, and to inspire *creative* expression."

Programme for a class demonstration of Dalcroze Eurhythmics, 1956, located in Keith Glennon Papers, Box 12, Special collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia.
 Natalie Tingey, ed., A Record of the London School of Dalcroze Eurhythmics and its graduates at Home and overseas 1913-1973, Dalcroze Teachers union, London, 1974.
 Heather Gell papers, Manuscripts section, State Library of South Australia, Adelaide, SA.

Gerda Haas

Born in Vienna of Czech parents, Gerda Haas studied in Vienna at the State Academy for Music and Art. Her main teachers were Professor Gross and Grete Wiesenthal. After graduation she became an assistant at the school and performed with the school's dance group and continued her studies obtaining a Diploma in Physical Education. Later Haas worked with Mary Wigman and Gret Palucca in Dresden, Germany, and opened her own school in Vienna where she also taught at the Peoples University. Came to Australia in 1939 where she taught for the University of Melbourne's Physical Education Department and the Council of Adult Education and created performances with her own Movement Chorus. Haas described this group as amateurs who came together from her Adult Education Classes where she taught gymnastics, rhythmic movement and dancing. Haas believed:

..ordinary people can express themselves, find pleasure and artistic satisfaction in movement, rhythm and music. Dancing is a form of artistic expression, like singing, painting, drawing, in which all can, if they wish, take part.

Programme, "The Movement Chorus in Modern Ballet", located in the Keith Glennon Papers , Folder 13, Box 9, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

Evelyn Ippen and Bettina Vernon

An original members of the Bodenwieser Ballet who arrived in Australia in 1939 where they were re-united with Gertrud Bodenwieser. They left Bodenwieser to pursue their own interests, often working together. The critic Cornelius Conyn described Ippen as possessing a "virile elevation" while Vernon showed "graceful femininity". For Conyn both were:

...typical products of their schooling, which betrays at times a curious lack of musical insight. They make up for this with a deft adaptation of Oriental styles... or the incorporation of many folklore motives.... They reveal what the free-movement dance can do - infinite range of subject , and intellectual approach expressed with a combination of mime and movement. At its best it is a vision of grace and charm.

Cornelius Conyn, "Ballet verses the 'Free-Movement' Dance", Australia, Vol. 7, No. 9, August, 1946, 54-55.

"Modern Dancers", Focus, Vol. 1, No. 5, June 1946, 31.

Denys Searley, "A Plea for the Modern Expressive dance", Focus, Vol. 1, No. 7, August, 1946, 27.

Nell Johnson

A pupil of Gertrud Bodenwieser's, Nell Johnson opened her own School of Interpretive Movement in Brisbane in 1946.

Keith Glennon Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Special collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia

Elena Kepalaite

Born in Lithuania, Elena Kepalaite trained with Mary Wigman. Described by Roland Robinson as an well trained extremely "feminine dancer" with a "capable technique and a well-developed sense of design", this critic commended Kepalaite on the "flowing rippling lines and gentle characterisation" of her choreography, at her May 1951 recital at the Conservatorium of Music in Sydney. At a performance in June 1957, again at the Conservatorium of music, the same critic commended Kepalaite as a "serious, profound and imaginative artist". Her ballet *Angelus* was a "good composition" with "gothic-like inspiring forms" and *Destitute* was a "revealing" portrayal of a "grotesquely marked drudge of a woman, denied beauty and love yet possessing the same desires and aspirations which reside in the most beautiful of women."

"R.R", "Recital of Expressive Dance", Sydney Morning Herald, 1st June, 1957, 4

"R.R", Sydney Morning Herald, 12th may, 1951, 5

Joanna (Hanny) Kolm (Exiner)

Original member of the Bodenwieser Ballet. Moved to Melbourne and took over the Contemporary Dance School of Melbourne in 1951 which had been originally run by Daisy Pirnitzer (Behrend). Became a lecturer in Movement and Dance at the Melbourne Institute of Early Childhood Development in Victoria. Kolm began the Modern Ballet Group in 1953 with an October season at the Arrow Theatre Melbourne. Kolm encouraged the members of the ensemble to choreograph their own works with dancers such as Daisy Pirnitzer, Liane Allert, Margaret Wickham, Janice Ingles, Shirley Biner, Ted Fitton, Beverlye McClure and Hanny Kolm contributing pieces to the groups 1955 May/June season.

Shona Dunlop McTavish, An Ecstasy of Purpose: The Life and Art of Gertrud Bodenwieser, Shona Dunlop MacTavish, Les Humphrey and Associates, Dunedin, 1981, 174;

Programme Modern Ballet Theatre, 1955 Season. Located in Keith Glennon Papers, Folder 11, Box 9, Special collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia

Joyce Lodge

Born 15th July, 1910 in Rockhampton Joyce Lodge came to Sydney in 1932. There she became a pupil of Irene Vera Young's working with Young for four years. In 1935 she won the student teacher section of the Sydney Eisteddfod, in 1936 she choreographed *Invitation* which was included in the June recital of the visiting German dancer Norda Mata. A month later she created *Ace of Spades* for the New

South Wales Dance Teachers Society's 4th Annual recital. In October 1936 Lodge created her first full length solo recital appearing at the Savoy Theatre in Sydney. The Sydney Morning Herald Reported that:

...to display such startling impressionism was undoubtedly a bold move, but [Joyce Lodge's] personality, her sincerity, and her quiet grace soon won her the applause of an audience which was obviously sceptical at first. ...her forceful interpretation of the *Dance of the Witch Doctor*, with its barbaric rhythm, was a skilful delineation of a work which bordered dangerously on the comic.

In that same year Lodge opened her own studio and taught at the Hillcrest College and the Australian Dramatic Talent School. At the latter institution she taught "grace and deportment for the radio, stage and screen". In June 1938 Lodge sailed for England accompanied by her sister, Phyllis who was a ballroom dancer. In England Lodge spent 6 months studying with Kurt Joss at Dartington Hall and then opened her own studio in London, where she taught modern dance and 'body culture' while her sister taught ballroom dancing. In 1939 Lodge competed in the *Concours International de Danse in Brussels* where she was awarded a soloists diploma.

Sydney Morning Herald, 7th October, 1936, 14

Rockhampton Bulletin, 6th June 1938, reproduced in Joyce Lodge, *Dance Me a Poem*, Lodjprint, Sydney, 1996

Daisy Pirnitzer (Behrend)

A student of Gertrud Bodenwieser and Elinor Hoffman-Cerarke in Vienna, Pirnitzer opened her own studio in Melbourne in 1939 from which she created works until 1949. In 1951 she retired handing the Studio over to Johanna (Hanny) Kolm (Exiner) who had been her assistant for some years.

Keith Glennon Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Special collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia

Inge Stange

Born in Germany, Inge Stange arrived in Australia in 1931. She founded a school in Sydney. After a recital at the Prince Edward Theatre in October, 1933 and a subsequent interview with Stange a reporter for To-day magazine described her as a young "earnest cosmopolitan, steel hard in her desire to fulfil herself and win a permanent place in the new nation that she has adopted as her own."

L.L. Woolacott, "The Art of Inge Stange", To-day, November 1st, 1933, 11

Margo Thomas

Trained by Zelia Raye in London, where she studied classical ballet, Rudolf Von Laban's principles of movement and acting, Margo Thomas arrived in Australia in 1941. She choreographed pieces based on the poems, drawings and philosophy of the eighteenth century mystic William Blake. In these dances Thomas combined poetry, song, spoken word, and dance performing *Songs of Innocence and Experience* throughout the 1950s. She was occasionally being invited to perform in churches, around Australia and in London.

"Dancer in the Pulpit", Sun Herald, 24th April, 1955, 24

Keith Glennon Papers, Folder 7, Box 9, Special collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia

Vera Vetra

Born in Latvia and having studied in Vienna, Vera Vetra arrived in Australia in 1948. She joined the Bodenwieser Ballet in the 1950s and also danced in J.C. Williamson's production of *Kismet* and for the Beth Dean Royal Gala performance of *Corroboree*. Vetra became interested in Indian dance producing *Indian Suite* and *Ritual Fire Dance* which she performed along with Latvian, modern and classical inspired dances in Sydney in June, 1955, and again at the Conservatorium in December, 1957. Her interest in Indian dance was mostly inspired by books and poetry until she visited India in 1960/61 and studied in Madras with Choklingam Pillai. Prior to this trip to India which also included a tour of Britain, Spain (where she studied Flamenco with La Quica in Madrid), and Paris. Vetra opened her own studio in Melbourne (Brighton) where she taught Modern Expressive dance, Classical ballet, and Character dance, which included Indian, Spanish and Slavic traditions.

"R.R", "Recital of Modern Dancing", Sydney Morning Herald, 2nd June, 1955, 14

"Vija Vetra", A.B.C. Weekly, Vol. 19, No. 51, 18th December, 1957, 11

"Vija Vetra Dance Recital", Tempo & Television, Vol. 21, No.1, October, 1957, 38

"Vija Vetra Guest Dancer in Covent Garden's "Carmen"", Music and Dance, October, 1961, 23

Elizabet Wiener

Elizabet Wiener began her dance studies with Isadora Duncan's sister Elizabeth and the Trumpy school of gymnastics. She worked with Mary Wigman for one season, but when Hitler came to power fled Germany for America where she gained employment with the Hungarian actor/director, turned MGM choreographer, Ernest Matray. Wiener returned to Berlin after the war. When she arrived in Melbourne in the late forties she opened a dance studio on the corner of Domain and Punt roads South Yarra which she christened "The Loft". Here Wiener taught "Modern Expressive Dance, using Central European Technique for beginner and advanced students", with "special classes" for "business girls". She also formed a dance group called the Australian Contemporary Dance Company. In May 1946, at a recital in Melbourne's Repertory Theatre, Wiener performed with Ruth Berger, Patricia Edye, Valerie Grieg, Margaret Reed, Jeanette Read, and Jocelyn Wood. At this recital the group was commended by a critic from View magazine for displaying "through natural movement, human joys and fears of the peoples of the world to-day". In one dance "Out of the Depths" it was suggested by the same critic that Wiener became the very embodiment in "expression and movement" of the "sinister conflict inherent in each personality". In comparison another critic, simply identified as "I.R.H.", suggested that Elizabet Wiener's Union Theatre recital of 1947 (which was funded by the Army education programme) was an example of dance which "snubbed composers" with "interminable ugly gestures, intimate wiggles and cribs". It had "all been done before" claimed this critic, who also asked:

Why, Miss Wiener must the term "Contemporary Art" be saddled with such a grisly load, or is "Contemporary Art" just another mark for ineptitude.

Pat Edye (Martyn) described Wiener as one of the “very finest” dancers in Melbourne in the 1940s.

Most information on Elizbet Wiener from the Margaret Lasica’s collection viewed with the kind permission of Shelley Lasica (Melbourne).

Also see Keith Glennon Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Special collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

“Grave and Gay Contemporary Dance”, *View*, Melbourne, Vol.1, No.4, May 1946.

Advertisement for Wiener’s school in *Focus*, Vol. 1, No. 7, August, 1946, 27.

Letter from Pat Edye (Martyn) to Keith Glennon , 13th June 1967, located in Keith Glennon Papers, Box 9, Folder 13, Special collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

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