

THE DANCE RESEARCH COMMITTEE - THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

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It is with great pleasure that I am able, on behalf of the Dance Research Committee of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing, to talk to you at this conference organised by the Dolmetsch Society, entitled On Common Ground.

Especially so, as this conference is to celebrate the Dolmetsch Society's 25th birthday and the Dance Research Committee will be celebrating its 5th birthday in March of this year.

Whereas our preference would have been to present a practical demonstration, this is not possible due to the work commitments of the Committee, availability of dancers and the uncertainty of Michael Holmes' health after a recent heart by-pass operation.

However the kind invitation to participate in this conference provides an excellent opportunity to tell you something about the activities and focus of the Dance Research Committee during the first five years of its existence.

First I would like to say a few words about the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing. The following is taken from their information leaflet.

The Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing is one of the leading and largest dance organisations in the world, It began in 1904 and today is registered as an educational charity under the Charities Act.

The Society is formed into ten Faculties which cover every form of theatrical, recreational and social dance.

Theatre Faculties include Classical Ballet (both Cecchetti and Imperial Syllabi) Classical Greek Dance. National Dance (which now includes Scottish and Highland Dancing) and Modern Theatre Dance (including Tap and Jazz).

Ballroom Faculties include Modern Ballroom, Latin American, Sequence and Disc/Freestyle and Rock 'n' Roll.

In addition the Dance Research Committee provide courses in Historical Dance and the Society offers examinations in Applied Anatomy & Physiology and the History and Development of Western European Dance.

The Dance Research Committee is the inheritor of the research work of Melusine Wood. In 1950 at the request of Cyril Beaumont her work became part of the Imperial Society, and was known as the Historical Dance Branch. Belinda Quirey, who was for many years Melusine Wood's demonstrator was to become synonymous with the work of this Branch and with Historical Dance.

The Historical Branch in the fifties and sixties under different chairmanships, Quirey, Holmes and Pfister, established Elementary and Intermediate level examinations.

By the late eighties the Historical Branch, as a part of the I.S.T.D. had all but ceased to function. Belinda had spent much of her energies working for the English Bach Festival and teaching many dance, drama and music students all over the country. In 1990 Belinda had a severe stroke, this came as a real shock to many of us in the dance

world, who suddenly realised that Belinda could not go on working for ever. The continuation of her work, to educate the dance profession, in any cohesive form looked uncertain.

It had long been Belinda's wish that a new group be formulated and that an Advisory Panel made up from members of the Dance, Music and Associated Arts should support any such group. After one unsuccessful attempt the perfect opportunity presented itself. In 1990 in line with EEC requirements the I.S.T.D. had to renew its articles of Association and Memorandum. This provided the means by which an Advisory Panel and Administrative Committee could be set up within the Imperial Society with a different brief from the other Branches (now called Faculties).

During the Summer of 1990 with the support of Dame Beryl Grey, at that time chairman of the I.S.T.D., invitations were sent out to twenty six well known and respected people in the world of Dance and related arts, to form an Advisory Panel all of whom accepted. The Advisory Panel includes:

Professor Brian Trowell
Professor Christopher Bannerman
Mr Richard Glasstone
Mr David Coleman
Miss Francine Watson Coleman
Mr Alastair Macaulay

In March 1991 a reception was held to officially launch the Committee hosted by Dame Beryl Grey.

The Administrative Committee initially consisted of Phroso Pfister, Belinda Quirey, Diana Scrivener and myself. In December of 1990 prior to our official launch, Michael Holmes, already on the Advisory Panel, joined the Administrative Committee.

In the Autumn of 1995 the Committee was further extended to include Susan Danby - Principal of the College of the Royal Academy of Dancing, until this time also a member of the Advisory Panel.

Another much valued member of our Advisory Panel who attends our Administrative Committee meetings is Terry Worroll director of Music at St James Spanish Place.

In 1991 one of the most immediate needs was to provide courses offering practical information, principally at this time to the dancing profession. Over the five years the courses have extended their appeal to include musicians, artists, choreographers and others. These One Day Courses now run four times a year with plans to extend to five in the next academic year. Their aim is to teach, not only the steps and patterns of the early dance repertoire, but to improve the performance of these dances, as well as trying to set the dances in an historical context.

The mailing list for these courses now stands at about 220. In addition to course and evening class information a newsletter and advance publicity of dates is also sent out.

Whereas the Committee recognises that courses of this nature may seem like a drop in the ocean, they have to be set against the extremely pressed and demanding work of many dance teachers and other professionals who attend these courses. Dance teachers work long hours including weekends, and in recent years have had to learn many new syllabi in order to earn a living.

With an eye to the future, the Administrative Committee decided to introduce a Scholarship Scheme to encourage young dancers and actors who are in full time tertiary education to attend our One Day Courses. The Committee approached six well known personalities in the dancing profession to lend their support to this scheme. In December 1994 it was with great pleasure that we could announce that:

Dame Beryl Grey D.B.E.
Peter Brinson sadly now deceased
Belinda Quirey MBE
Dr Ann Hutchinson Guest &
Mr Clement Crisp both on the Advisory Panel
Miss Joyce Percy now Chairman of the I.S.T.D.

would support this idea by each of them giving their name to a Scholarship place.

In October 1994 seven students (The Dance Research Committee also gave one place) attended our 4 One day courses. They were:

Carol Martin - Surrey University Dance Department
Fiona Sheehan - The College of the Royal Academy of Dancing
Charlotte Anderson - The Royal Ballet School Teachers Training Course
Nick Irons - Guildhall School of Music and Drama
Alexander Simkins - Central School of Ballet
Andrew Faulkner - L.A.M.D.A.
Tom Kanavan - Guildford School of Acting

This Scholarship scheme will run bi-annually. For the courses in 1996/97 we have also approached Music Colleges to present students to participate in this scheme.

The increase of people attending courses has also meant an increased demand for written information. This has led to an exciting project with Dr Ann Hutchinson Guest, also president of the Dolmetsch Society.

The increased contact I had with Ann over the Scholarship scheme and a by now notorious historical dance video, resulted in Ann and myself meeting to discuss the possibility of notating our reference material. Ann had already notated some work with Belinda and Phrosso in the sixties, but nothing had come of it. I was very keen, as the Committee will tell you, that this project went through despite the enormous amount of work entailed for several reasons.

- 1 The need to provide accurate notes for our course participants
- 2 To record in more sophisticated form the work of Melusine Wood
- 3 As a means of being able to communicate with others working in Early Dance in both this country and internationally, where Laban is the main notation system used.

The problem is not just notating this work but supplying people with sufficient information to be able to read it. Ann and I have worked hard to overcome this problem in several ways. First we will be offering an introductory course which will be geared specifically to the reading of this reference work. The lack of complex body shapes in Early Dance makes it an ideal medium through which notation can be learnt without too many hours of study. Second a simple glossary is being drawn up to assist people further and it will be included in the first volume. In September of this year we plan to present the first volume containing simple Chain dances, Branles and Basse Danse.

Of course this is a very long project and will always be on going, but a start had to be made.

Alongside this project, Terry Worroll has been persuaded to undertake the huge task of compiling relevant music for teachers working in a class or rehearsal situation. This music will be published in volumes running parallel to the notated material

Another project, and probably of particular interest to you here today, is to re-examine and extend the research of Melusine Wood into the dances of Domenico and Guglielmo. These beautiful and yet remote dances are of course open to many interpretations, but I think it would be fair to say that the main concern of Michael Holmes, who has led this research in conjunction with Terry Worroll, is that the interpretation should stand up to modern day performance standards.

The Research to date has included *Ingrata*, *Belfiore* and *Leoncello*. It is hoped to produce for our fifth birthday celebration next month each dance published in a separate volume, Labanotated and with a working piano arrangement for class and rehearsal purposes. By publishing each dance separately the possibility of updating and changing research is made easier. No one version is meant to be definitive.

Other activities in our first five years have included participating in the I.S.T.D. annual Congress, the production of a publicity leaflet, the compiling of what we called our Guidelines which includes much information relevant to the teaching of the work of the Dance Research Committee.

Of course none of us on the Administrative Committee are just occupied with work for the Committee, a Committee in any case is made up of individuals.

Phroso Pfister now the chair spends many hours preparing lectures for the I.S.T.D. History of Western European Dance exams, her knowledge of History and Dance extending from the Ancient Greeks to the present day is a great asset to the Imperial. These exams formerly under the Royal Society of Arts but now administered by the Imperial were the brain child of Diana Barker. It was her wish that dance teachers should be better educated and have a higher status in society.

Phroso is also a well known teacher of Natural Movement a dance technique developed by Madge Atkinson in the thirties. And of Course for many years she was the Principal of London College, now part of Middlesex University who are kindly lending their premises for this conference. It was the ethos of London College that supported the view that dance teachers should to know something of their own history. Phroso taught the history of dance course there for forty years

Diana Scrivener has also been active in the performing, teaching and choreography of historical dance for the past twenty years. At present she teaches at the Academy of Live and Recorded Arts as well as teaching regularly in Dorset. Diana has her own dance group *Coranto* which gives performances and lecture demonstrations, she has collaborated with English Heritage in it's special events programmes since 1990. Diana also worked with Belinda and Michael for many years with the English Bach Festival.

Susan Danby is as, I am sure many of you are aware Principal of the College of the Royal Academy of Dancing, which at present is responsible for two degree courses, the first two in classical ballet in this country. She also sits on the Dance Teachers Benevolent Board and the Council for Dance Education and Training, and is about to embark on a Masters Degree.

As for myself, my other activities apart from administrating the Dance Research Committee, are varied but often are related to my interest in dance history. I am part of the faculty for the College of the Royal Academy of Dancing who also take the view that dance teachers should be conversant with their own history. Here I lecture in practical Dance History on the new BA Hons degree in the Art and Teaching of Classical Ballet.

My interest in Early Dance was also initially responsible for my very heavy involvement in the Junior Associates of the Royal Ballet School whom I have been teaching this Morning.

The head of the Junior Associates, Jocelyn Mather, also on our Advisory Panel, has always had a firm belief that the children should learn dance material that is rooted in the past. I have been called upon to use my knowledge of Playford in both their training and repertoire. The other period of interest has been the nineteenth century social dances which share the same period of development as classical ballet and as such are a valuable addition to the children's training.

I would like here to express my thanks to Chris and Ellis Rogers, also on our Advisory Panel, who have shared their deep knowledge with me over several projects. Most importantly was an arrangement of Allemandes I choreographed for the Junior Associates to perform at the Royal Ballet School performance at the Royal Opera House, without their generosity in sharing their research, this would not have been possible.

Lastly I would like to mention Michael Holmes whose work is well known to many of you. His contribution to the success of the Dance Research Committee is invaluable. Michael is one of the foremost teachers, lecturers and choreographers in the field of Early Dance. For many years he has combined his knowledge of the dance world, dance history choreography and a unique personality to produce many exciting projects. In particular his work in Holland with Gustav Leonhart, in Austria with Nikolaus Harnoncourt and in this country with the English Bach Festival. Michael is also in constant demand offering advice to professional choreographers, notably Kate Flatt in her work for Welsh Opera's recent production of Gloriana.

At the request of a colleague of mine, Michael and I have worked on several projects introducing dance, mainly Baroque dance, to musicians.

In the Summer he choreographed a wonderful twenty-five minute programme for a performance at Houghton Towers - Lancashire, to music by Croft, Purcell and Handel.

Michael more recently has had a triple heart bi-pass operation and is making a splendid recovery.

I am hope that this brief overview of our first five years has been of interest to you today and that you will appreciate the range of areas in which we are involved. Of course it is not perfect but then life never is. I hope that over the next five years we can continue to make Early Dance available to those in the dance profession and that it is seen not as remote from the core of current dance training but as essential ingredient in the whole.