

RAMBERT HISTORY 1966-2002**SHOW UP****PUSH YOURSELF****MOVE THE WORLD**

These words from Rambert's current cause have been embodied by generations of brilliant and daring people who have contributed to our story.

Britain's oldest dance company was established in 1926 by Marie Rambert, a migrant woman who valued hard work, originality and creative risk-taking. In Marie's own words, she had a passion for dancing and choreography, "neither of which I really could do myself, but I got it out of people."

Marie Rambert was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1888. She was inspired to dance when she saw a performance by Isadora Duncan in 1904 in Poland. Although her parents would have preferred her to take up medicine, she began to study dance in Paris, where she spent three years studying eurhythmics with Emile Jacques Dalcroze.

From 1912-14, Marie Rambert worked with the Ballets Russes, a touring company from Russia that performed classical ballets alongside original choreography. Her eurhythmy skills were put to use when she was invited to assist Vaslav Nijinsky and his dancers with the complex rhythms of Stravinsky's music for 'Le Sacre du Printemps', The Rite of Spring in English.

This piece caused a riot in the theatre when it was first performed in Paris. Audiences reacted strongly to movement and music very different from what they were accustomed to in classical ballet, with arguments and fights breaking out between people who really loved it, and people who really hated it. Marie Rambert was in the thick of it, and later remembered audience members calling for a doctor.

In 1914, the First World War broke out and Marie Rambert moved to London for safety. She supported herself by giving tuition in dance and eurhythmics. She married the English playwright Ashley Dukes in 1918, and two years later she opened a school of dancing in Bedford Gardens, Kensington.

In 1923, Marie Rambert invited Frederick Ashton to train with her, supporting the early stages of his choreographic career. She and her dancers performed in his first work, 'A Tragedy of Fashion',

in 1926. As the first piece by a British choreographer to be performed by a British company, many people consider this performance to be the birth of British ballet. Marie Rambert's 'Ballet Club' performed regularly on Sundays at the Mercury Theatre in London's Notting Hill. It had a small, adventurous audience who came to expect original work and experimentation. In 1935 it changed its name to Ballet Rambert.

In 1939, war broke out again. During World War II, the company appeared in a range of venues including factory canteens as well as theatres. By the end of the Second World War Ballet Rambert was a full-time touring company. Its growing popularity meant it outgrew the tiny Mercury Theatre, and from 1946 London performances were often at the larger Sadler's Wells Theatre.

The change in performance activities during and immediately after the Second World War resulted in a new audience. In addition to the small but adventurous audience of the Ballet Club, who were used to seeing original work, Ballet Rambert now also drew a wider audience who looked forward to seeing longer ballet classics. In addition to their mixed bills of new works,

Ballet Rambert began to perform full evening versions of the well-known ballets 'Giselle' and 'Coppelia,' and the first major British productions of 'La Sylphide' and 'Don Quixote'.

Extensive touring for up to 35 weeks a year meant there was less time to create new works and there was no choreographer connected with the company at this time.

This began to change in 1958, when Norman Morrice became Resident Choreographer and created his first work 'Two Brothers'. While the movement vocabulary of this dance was balletic, "Two Brothers" was performed in modern dress and dealt with a contemporary theme. Norman Morrice worked with Ralph Koltai, who was Head of Theatre Design at Central School of Art and Design (now, Central Saint Martin's School of Art). This combination of ballet with current ideas and design was revolutionary for its time. Two Brothers was a cautious return to the original, more adventurous identity of Ballet Rambert.

By the early 1960s, it became apparent that Ballet Rambert could no longer sustain itself financially. By this time, public funding for the arts had become more organised. While Ballet Rambert was part of the original group of organisations to receive public funding, the budget could not sustain a touring company of expensive, large-scale ballet productions. If Ballet Rambert was to survive, it needed to change direction.

In 1962, Norman Morrice travelled to America on a Ford Foundation Grant in order to see the new developments in dance and to study with some of the major choreographers of the time, including Martha Graham. On his return, Norman Morrice encouraged Marie Rambert to return to the company's original values of creating original, adventurous work.

1966-1974

Artistic Director: Norman Morrice

In 1966, Norman Morrice was appointed Associate Artistic Director Ballet Rambert. In May 1966, Marie Rambert, Norman Morrice and administrator Frederick Bromwich created three aims for the company:



1. To encourage the production of new works by both new and established choreographers
2. To preserve as far as possible the masterworks which constitute the Ballet Rambert's artistic heritage
3. To give regular seasons in London and to tour selected dates in the provinces and abroad.

The Company transformed from a classical touring company to a smaller ensemble of eighteen dancers with an aim to create new works, as well as preserving the best of their older repertoire. The dancers in the new company were trained in both classical and contemporary dance techniques. Unlike the structure of a ballet company, each dancer was considered equal in status and they all became soloists in their own right. In the words of Marie Rambert, "It is young and eager people interested in team work and interested in what we are doing that mattered, not 'stars'."

Norman Morrice continued to bring design and dance together. He created works including 'That is the Show' which featured a white box set designed by Nadine Baylis, and they collaborated again on '1-2-3' and 'BlindSight'.

During his Directorship, Norman Morrice also brought in several American choreographers to make works for the company, including Anna Sokolow and Glen Tetley. 'The Tetley season', in 1967, included the works 'Freefall' and 'Ziggurat'. Tetley's works were extremely popular with audiences and increased publicity for the company as they moved in their new direction. The company also retained several pieces from its earlier repertoire such as 'Dark Elegies' by Antony Tudor and Nijinsky's 'L'Après-midi d'une Faune'.

In the late 1960s, regular choreographic workshops were also held for the dancers. Christopher Bruce, then a dancer in the company, began to emerge as a skillful choreographer.

In 1974, Norman Morrice resigned as Artistic Director to become a freelance choreographer.

1974-1980

Artistic Director: John Chesworth

From 1974 until 1980, Artistic Director John Chesworth continued to promote new work choreographed by company members. Christopher Bruce became Associate Director in 1975 and then Associate Choreographer in 1980.

John Chesworth helped to develop Rambert's educational activities as he supported outreach work in schools with his Young Friends programme. And after his time at Rambert, he set up the National Youth Dance Company.

John Chesworth also continued adding to the repertoire of the company through guest choreographers such as Jaap Flier and Cliff Keuter. While most



choreographers up until this point in the company's history had been white and male, some artists now began to bring a diversity of lived experience to the role. Two examples of this are Sara Sugihara and Siobhan Davies.

1981-1986

Artistic Director: Robert North

In the 1980s, the repertoire of Ballet Rambert focused on the work of three choreographers: Artistic Director Robert North, Christopher Bruce, and Richard Alston, who each played a huge part in the development of the company.

Robert North directed the company from 1981 to 1986. He wanted to develop the physicality, musicality and dramatic quality of the dancers.

Michael Clark, an overtly queer artist who plays subversively with gender in his work, had been a dancer in the company since 1979. He established the Michael Clark Company in 1984 and choreographed *Swamp* for Ballet Rambert in 1986.

1986-1992

Artistic Director: Richard Alston

Richard Alston became Resident Choreographer in 1980 and Artistic Director in 1986. He had previously studied at the Merce Cunningham Studio so there was a strong influence of this American choreographer at this time.

In 1987, the name of the company was changed to Rambert Dance Company. In 1989, Siobhan Davies was appointed Associate Choreographer, a position she held until 1993. She also established her own company, Siobhan Davies Dance.

1994-2002

Artistic Director: Christopher Bruce

As a past dancer and Associate Choreographer with the company, Christopher Bruce was uniquely qualified to take on the role of Artistic Director.

Christopher Bruce served as Artistic Director from 1994 until 2002. During this time, the company performed his original works, as well as commissioning guest choreographers and maintaining a repertoire of neo-classical and modern works.