

## Deep In Dance

### An Outsider's Take On Contemporary Dance

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I shouldn't like dance.

That statement needs clarifying: I shouldn't like the kind of dance I'm about to discuss in this piece of writing. By that I mean that I come from a completely different world as to that of a 'standard' lover of the various forms of so-called 'high-brow' dance, be it classical ballet or contemporary dance, or anything in-between. Obviously, it is presumptuous (and likely fallacious) to assume there is such a thing as a 'standard' consumer of any kind of art, but in terms of culture, there is no basis in my background or surroundings for me to be drawn to any kind of appreciation of dance, or to have any affinity to the art form. No one in my family liked dance, none of my friends had any interest in it either, and it has never garnered much coverage on national television, so naturally I had very little exposure to the art growing up. Most aficionados will likely have formed a bond with the medium during childhood, or at least come into contact with it beyond the most superficial level, which enabled an interest that could blossom and continue into adulthood. Without wanting to get too Monty Python's Four Yorkshiremen about my upbringing (especially considering I'm a Lanky lad), I come from a world of rugby league and cribbage, born and bred within walking distance of a few hundred red brick mills, dancing was solely partaken in on a night out, with the objective being not to make yourself look like a complete idiot, and the actual outcome usually being the exact opposite. Theatre dance and ballet were so far from my mind as a child as to be as essentially abstract as the moon landings or the wars in the Balkans and the Middle East, something that's existence should be noted, but whose details were completely extraneous, having no relevance to my daily life.

Since my early teens, I have had an interest in dance *music* (as in electronic dance music like house and techno), which at that time was focussed on the then highly popular genres of trance and garage, with my tastes temporarily shifting towards rock, jazz and more experimental music as I reached the tail end of my teens and became more interested in making music myself. It wasn't until my early twenties that I even started to embrace any form of dancing, let alone choreographed dances for the stage. Due to several long term injuries I had sustained I was forced to attenuate my musical activities. To fill up the extra leisure time I had created by lessening my musical endeavours I took up painting, and although I still enjoy visual art, I have never had the same passion for it as music, so could never devote as many hours to it as instrumental practice and musical composition. Around this time I also decided to try to restore my health and rehabilitate my body after years of leading a rather sedentary lifestyle. Beginning with yoga and pilates, I gradually worked my way through all manner of physical exercise; calisthenics, walking, weight training, isometric contractions, tai chi, fell running etc. After discovering the hard way that long distance running wasn't for me, I began to search for another high-energy workout to maintain my cardiovascular health. Starting with simple aerobics, I managed to regain my fitness to a decent level and was relatively happy with my exercise routine; yoga and stretching, followed by aerobics and muscle

strengthening exercises, before finishing off with a pilates session. I found that I enjoyed the aerobic sections the most, especially learning the routines and working to the music. It was therefore quite a logical thought process that shifted my focus towards dance. Still, I didn't take the plunge into classical dance straight away, instead basing my sources of movement and creativity off the music I most enjoyed listening to at the time.

By this point I had already become familiar with a large amount of classical music from my listening experiences, analysing the old public domain sheet music on sites like IMSLP to enhance my understanding of music theory, and in turn I inevitably listened to my fair share of ballet music; Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, Copland, Prokofiev, Ravel, Delibes etc. However, at that time I only had an interest in the sounds and not the accompanying corporeal aspect of the artwork. I also underwent a personal dance (electronic dance music) and pop music renaissance not too long after my classical/experimental phase, so I was listening to a lot of the kind of things they were playing in the clubs, but I had gone deeper now, delving into the worlds of more niche, underground dance subcultures; footwork/juke from Chicago, vogue/ballroom from the east coast of the US, krumping and hip-hop dance from the west coast, kuduro, shangaan electro, capoeira, waacking, b-boying, popping, locking etc. At the same time my knowledge of dance music was sufficient enough that I knew the BPMs of the majority of the various styles. If I wanted high tempo I could whack on some jungle or footwork, or for more fun stuff hi-NRG, hardcore and gheftotech. If I wanted a more sedate workout I could opt for some disco or Balearic house, even taking it down to some funk or hip-hop, or going even further down into the treacly pedestrian zones of R&B slow jams, vapourwave and chill out. This was all well and good and I still enjoy all these kinds of dances and musics, but I was solely watching videos of top quality dancers, copping their moves and basically improvising around them through the filter of my own ability when I danced. I wanted some contrast, a more organised and structured form of dancing to provide some variation, so I looked to ballet and other kinds of highly polished and stylised choreographed theatre dance for inspiration.

Now, I am fully aware of my own limitations as a dancer; I have tight hamstrings, meaning tight lower back muscles, fairly weak wrists, and a relatively unsupple physique. However, I was in decent nick overall, (in boxing terminology, my weight naturally hovers around the lower welterweight limit, although with weigh-ins being conducted the day before the fight and modern rehydration techniques factored into the equation, I'm actually closer in size to a modern-day lightweight), so I started slowly, learning the basics for a time before feeling confident enough to try to imitate superior dancers. As I was only dancing for fun and for the exercise aspect, I listened to my body, not even attempting to perform anything that looked like it could cause injury until I felt entirely confident that I was adequately prepared. This also meant I was free to discover for myself which dancing styles I preferred without any external pressure to 'force' my body into performing techniques that disagreed with it. It wasn't long before I realised that although my original reason for committing more of my time to exercise was to improve my health and constitution, by the time I had built up my stamina sufficiently to dance for an extended period of time, I was less and less concerned with any physical benefits that I could gain from dancing, solely enjoying it for what it is; the means had become the end. Whilst I still continue to perform a range of exercises in order to strengthen and maintain areas of my body

that dancing may not target too efficiently, there is no doubt that dancing has become the highlight of my regime, and if for some reason I am incapable of dancing, then I genuinely feel like I have been deprived of a fairly significant part of my life, to the point where I have foolishly tried to dance through ailments like glandular fever and pulled muscles.

Anyway, as I watched more and more videos of dancing for new ideas and to study correct technique and form, I realised that I actually quite liked just watching the pieces themselves, regardless of my original motives for viewing. I don't know if I can honestly say that a piece of dancing (particularly when divorced from the music) has ever moved me emotionally in the same way that a piece of music or a film has (then again, I'm not sure any visual art or piece of literature has either, and I still regularly consume them), but nevertheless, I can enjoy it on a more basic level, there being the primal appreciation of the beauty of the finely-tuned, highly athletic physical forms on show, as well as the sheer awe factor of seeing individuals perform quite amazing feats of physical prowess. This combination of either beautiful people doing amazing things or amazing people doing beautiful things is at the core of my enjoyment of the art. For means of contrast, when I watch a sport like football or rugby league, I am waiting for those brief moments of amazing technical skill that make watching the hours of diving, fouling, wrestling in the ruck, time-wasting, unnecessary offsides, pointless possession play and groan inducing knock-ons all worthwhile. Conversely, when I am listening to music I try to disassociate the sounds from any effort necessary for their creation on the part of the artist and simply enjoy the abstract beauty of the sounds throughout the piece. I feel dance contains a synthesis of these two modes of appreciation into an art form that can function on multiple levels, affording me a number of ways to derive pleasure from the work. I can 'switch off' and just let the entire spectacle wash over me, or I can focus on one specific aspect of the piece and become transfixed by it; the choice is mine.

Moving to the meat of this article, I will state that whilst I do enjoy a wide variety of dancing, here I want to present the kind that I believe has the largest scope of possibilities, ergo the largest variety. I'm going to use *contemporary dance* as a catch-all term meaning dance created recently (here using the arbitrary cut-off point of 1980 as a loose guideline), rather than split hairs over the semantic distinctions between modern/contemporary and ballet/dance. This genre of dancing seems to incorporate many different styles, fusing them into a chimaera of potential variation, but an amalgam that can be formed into the image of its creator, permitting recognisable trademarks common to specific choreographers, companies and dancers. There are obviously plenty of contemporary (in the widest sense of the word) dance styles that don't feature in this article, but their omission is mostly to keep the scope of the piece down to a reasonable level, and to not stretch the limits of my knowledge beyond a feasible range. If I were to include all modern dance under genre labels like jazz, hip-hop, house, street etc., then this article would be an unreadable behemoth, chock full of ignorance and compromise on my part. So my restrictions on content are in place for both reasons of practicality and to appeal to a more specific audience (as opposed to producing a 'jack of all trades' item).

As you can gather from my introductory exposition I am no expert on the subject, but hopefully the reader isn't either, so I may function as the one-eyed man in the land of the blind.

When assessing a work I tend to divide the piece into three elements; 1. the choreography (and its execution), 2. the music (or sounds), and 3. the presentation (including costumes, lighting, stage design, art, direction etc.). This is also how I rate the importance of the elements, with good choreography taking priority over music and presentation, although the latter two components can 'rescue' even the worst choreography if interesting enough. I'd even go as far to say that it takes absolutely amazing dancing to compensate for music that doesn't agree with me, even more so if the presentation is uninspiring. All that is to say that I am not merely evaluating the dancing but the work in toto.

Anyway, here I present for you some of my favourite pieces of modern dance for your enjoyment. This list is by no means exhaustive, deliberately omitting both huge names who I feel didn't create their best work within my prescribed timeframe, and artists who I have yet to truly connect with any of their work. I'm also going to only cite pieces that feature dancing as the primary focus of the work, meaning instances where the corporeal aspect is relegated to a subordinate role (such as music videos and back-up dancing) will not be included.

*In a very rough order of preference, beginning with my most highly rated, and limiting myself to two pieces at most by the same choreographer (excluding collaborations).*

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**In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated** (William Forsythe, 1987)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NghGmjtxeak>

I haven't seen *Impressing the Czar*, but this really shines as a standalone ballet. I've written about Thom Willems powerful, industrialised score before, and I truly believe it would be harder to choreograph a substandard piece to it than a good one, yet Forsythe really hit it out of the park with this. It's just so sharp and precise, the leaps and extensions lining up with accents and suspensions in the music. Sylvia Guillem and Laurent Hilaire probably performed the strongest version, but I like Robert Bolle in the video above, and despite a bit of a slip, Zenaida Yanowsky does a fine job wrestling with the demands of the movements.

**Falling Angels** (Jiří Kylián, 1989)

[http://www.numeridanse.tv/en/video/1043\\_falling-angels/](http://www.numeridanse.tv/en/video/1043_falling-angels/)

The choreography manages to transform very minimal raw materials into an outstanding creation. Taking one of my least favourite Reich pieces (most of his early stuff gets boring quite quickly), plain apparel, and basic (albeit incredibly effective) lighting, Kylián spins gold from straw, with the 8 NDT dancers making those polyrhythms and shifts in phasing look like light work.

**Rave** (Karole Armitage, 2001)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGMeLd2IPro>

Voguing, catwalking, dramatics, brightly coloured body paint, outlandish headwear, garish garments, house, techno, big beat, breakbeat, samba. This work ticks a lot of boxes for me. I would have liked some Ha in there but David Shea does a fine job maintaining the groove, and Peter Speliopoulos' costumes really enhance the efficacy of the routines.

**Pulsation** (Vittorio Biagi, 1970?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0D8k1gw9mzU>

Yes, this was created before my cut-off point of 1980, and it might be a tad too high up on here for what it is, but something about the simplicity of it really appeals to me. A solo drum kit (imagine 'Moby Dick' or 'The Mule' without the actual 'song' elements), plain white leotards, no set design; everything is reliant upon the dancing, which although balletic, is stripped down to its barebones. I think the best description is 'clean'; every action seems almost isolated, but the flow is never herky-jerky. A celebration of the purity of dance.

**Bad Blood** (Ulysses Dove, 1984)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6d03fJqynE>

Two things. 1. What a great name that is; Ulysses Dove. 2. Laurie Anderson's music fits hand in glove with the choreography. (In that video above the music is obviously overdubbed and not recorded at the performance, yet the movements seem to be roughly in time with the audio. Anyway it's a good illustration of the work.)

**The Golden Section** (Twyla Tharp, 1983)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcBjK-Z5gfl>

I'm not too keen on the entirety of Twyla Tharp's collaboration with David Byrne, *The Catherine Wheel*, but the final part, *The Golden Section*, is just so genial and ebullient as to be irresistible. I don't even think the choreography fits that well with the music, but it's so manic and high-energy to paper over such trifling cracks. It's like Tharp has tried to cram as much as possible into these 15 minutes to dazzle the spectator with the sheer effort expended by the dancers.

**Signes** (Carolyn Carlson, 1997)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XaT68rONVjA>

Gorgeous looking ballet. The lavish costumes and set designs are particularly striking, like much of the Paris Opera Ballet's repertoire, adding an extra dimension of attractiveness to the spectacle. Marie-Agnès Gillot is one of my favourite dancers so we're already on to a winner here, but René Aubry's soundtrack is also lovely, especially the track 'Désordre', which occurs in the piece on two occasions, both times accompanying some of the best sections of dancing. The voguing pharaoh is probably the highlight however.

**Boléro** (Maurice Béjart, 1960)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHrYr7AgZOM>

Another one before 1980, but this could have been made last week it feels so fresh (all the more impressive considering the original score is almost 90 years old). Taking the less is more approach, gradually building the complexity in tandem with the crescendo of the music, the encircling male dancers becoming increasingly active in their ritualistic worship of the central étoile until the climax. I've opted for the Guillem version as the prime example of the choreography but there are numerous other worthy interpretations.

**The Second Detail** (William Forsythe, 1991)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSXHNPpzdGc>

*The Sleeping Beauty to In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated's Swan Lake.*

**Fandango** (Lar Lubovitch, 1990)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCt6vIAWCjo>

What? Bolero again?! Even though it is incredibly repetitive, (like a proto-Philip Glass piece), there is no denying it is near perfect for choreographing a dance to. Here, Lar Lubovitch and the MOMIX duo serve up the most sensual visual accompaniment to this tune imaginable. The directors use of a shifting light penetrating the smoky atmosphere furthering the steamy emotion, plus the eye level roaming perspective adds to the sense of voyeurism.

**Deca Dance** (Ohad Naharin, 2005)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bk-odQ-23\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bk-odQ-23_4)

Being a collage of several different ballets, naturally, this feels like a hodge-podge of styles, but it nevertheless has many positive aspects. The section with the trance version of 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' where audience members are invited onto the stage is a nice surprise. The two Baroque scored sections, the pas de deux and pas de trois are both pleasant set pieces, and the Reichian marimba accompanied bare-chested male part is interesting, but the two final pieces are the key elements. The women who appear to have gotten dressed to go to a pilates class but ended up in a synchronised, unison group dance class instead is one of the highlights, notably the floorwork routine with its slow-fast juxtapositions and the somewhat mental ticking/clicking bits. However, the counting section, where the number of steps is built up over and over again (1, 1-2, 1-2-3, 1-2-3-4, 1-2-3-4-5 etc.) each time with an ominous, down-pitched voice counting to 10 (or deca) is the most memorable spectacle.

**F.L.O.W** (Moses Pendleton, 2008)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j\\_dQm4FZjSw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_dQm4FZjSw)

Magical piece. The first black light section is charming, and the Diana Vishneva solo sections are both stunning and mesmerising in equal measure.

**Apartment** (Mats Ek, 2000)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjbgKtCYxhQ>

Why is she wearing a bidet on her head? Why did she roast the baby in the oven? Why are they dancing a highland jig with vacuum cleaners? What's the construction tape all about? I don't have a Scooby but that doesn't hinder my enjoyment of the piece.

**Para-Dice** (Saburō Teshigawara, 2002)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AzTEt5s7B8A>

Saburō Teshigawara's name in kanji is written 勅使川原三郎. This literally translates as imperial emissary (chokushi 勅使) dry riverbank (kawara 川原) third son (saburō 三郎). The more you know...

**Snow White** (Angelin Preljočaj, 2008)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0m5surgHRoQ>

Nagisa Shirai offers a fine performance as the titular heroine, but Céline Galli is imperious as the Evil Queen, with the 'mirror' sections being mind-bogglingly tight. The commando huntsmen are good, but the abseiling dwarfs are the true centrepiece. It also manages to make me forget how boring I usually find Mahler's output.

**Stamping Ground** (Jiří Kylián, 1983)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1F5dtmY7-U>

It was a toss up between this and *Bella Figura* for my second Kylián nomination, but seeing as this manages to hold my attention without the always appealing boon of exposed tits and beautiful music, I have to consider it the stronger in essence. Despite the fact the first half of the dance is in silence apart from the sounds of the dancer moving, stamping, sliding and slapping their body, the choreography manages to maintain my interest comfortably, then when the percussive music enters things pick up and the dancers let loose a bit more.

**Still Life at the Penguin Cafe** (David Bintley, 1988)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TyhEpzBLwd4>

I'm not big on environmental issues and animal conservation, even to the point of complete apathy about whether endangered species become extinct or not, but if it

inspires art then it serves its purpose for me. Everything about the ballet is *nice*, but the music is consistently joyous.

**Sylvia** (John Neumeier, 1997)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XeEtYomCA74>

Again, POB nail the presentation in a stylish take on Delibes classic. Dupont and Legris may be the leads but I feel Gillot and Le Riche (even dressed like Super Mario on smack) steal the show. The section with the bows is terrific, but I'm not sure what the change from dungarees to black tie suits is all about, but then again, I'm not the best at deducing narrative without dialogue or introductory synopses.

**Rosas danst Rosas** (Anne Teresa de Keersmaker, 1983)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vILZExpGBOY>

As much as the choreography itself, Thierry De Mey's direction and editing make this work excel. The initial floorwork routine can drag but the photography makes up for it, then in the chair section things skyrocket. De Mey and Peter Vermeersch's music adds impetus with its metronomic insistency, the choreography intensifying alongside, blending the diagetic and non-diagetic sounds together nicely. The flipping of the hair is particularly eye-catching and it would have been ideal if all the dancers had long hair, but that's a minor quibble.

**Déjà Vu** (Hans van Manen, 1995)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-Q33O0pPGY>

Arvo Pärt's 'Fratres' may be a bit overused but this is a very watchable little duet.

**Bamboo Dream** (Lin Hwai-Min, 2001)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_6JzOjJAWhw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6JzOjJAWhw)

Arvo Pärt again, but this time used in a far more unexpected format. Drawing inspiration from tai chi and ancient Chinese classicism, Lin Hwai-Min produces a thoroughly modern work that exudes what the Japanese call *shibusa* 渋さ, meaning a simple, unobtrusive beauty or an austere, refined elegance. The solo shakuhachi section toward the end, using the electric fans to blow the dancers hair and dresses is highly indicative of this aesthetic recognition.

**Sleeping Beauty** (Mats Ek, 1999)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGET5B09Fno>

Better than Petipa's. This version is made for the screen, with sections that are impossible without video trickery. The atmosphere is somewhere between a film noir and a cartoon, a bit like *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*; glamorous dames in smoky dives, eccentric chefs mutilating salmon, multiple versions of the same character,

flyaway hair, giant eggs (a recurring motif for Ek), and a Silver Fairy (Talia Paz) that resembles a fit Lady Gaga. Very unusual but very engaging.

**Standards** (Pierre Rigal, 2012)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Z2UzKNO7mE>

Effective incorporation of street dance elements alongside Nihil Bordures' heavy industrial electronic score that continually builds and releases the tension, never quite allowing things to reach critical mass, make this an engrossing work.

**Two** (Russell Maliphant, 2002)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldjAbhZi-QU>

I remember watching an NHK documentary about traditional exercise methods in Japan. It mentioned nanba running ナンバ走り, but the part that caught my attention was these shoulder blade exercises where the bones are made to stick out at acute angles from the back. Anyway, judging from this piece, Sylvie Guillem would be excellent at those exercises, the sinews and muscles in her upper back looking like a London tube map thanks to her finely tuned athleticism.

**Daphnis et Chloé** (Jean-Christophe Maillot, 2010)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1s9vEQsTGyg>

Erotically charged opus with Bernice Coppieters excelling as Lycénion. To compare Maillot to director Paul Verhoeven, if this is his *Basic Instinct*, then is there an equivalent to *Showgirls*? Or even better, *Robocop*? (On a huge tangent here but I think a ballet version of *Conan the Barbarian* using Basil Poledouris' score would be a sure-fire hit.)

**Golden Rain** (Carlos Carvajal, 1981)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iA7wIPUOyN8>

Gamelan + kecak + ballet + filthily suggestive title = winner

**Mechanics of the Dance Machine** (Karole Armitage, 2013)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeNeNhtrcHE>

I liked this as soon as I saw Craig Leon's name associated with it.

**Clavigo** (Roland Petit, 1999)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLQxMA2WUVI>

Not my favourite of Petit by some margin, but it conforms with my chronological restrictions and I wanted him on my list in some form or another. I like the pas de

deux with Le Riche and Osta, but yet again Gillot takes the top prize, her legs switching in the blink of an eye from stilettos piercing the air to a pair of wet noodles dangling from her hips.

**Les Nuits** (Angelin Preljoçaj, 2013)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxkRT017QK4>

Preljoçaj's *Le Parc* and his version of *The Rite of Spring* are both great but this ballet just pips them by virtue of one specific section. The initial sauna scene is nice, but the bit to 'It's a Man's Man's Man's World' is brilliant, especially the section on the floor where the sound of the bodies slapping on the ground is the only sonic component. The rest of the work is decent but that is definitely the choice cut.

**Genus** (Wayne McGregor, 2007)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27fWeDjPojY>

I think McGregor works better when he collaborates with companies other than Random Dance, and this reinforces my position; here employing the POB. The choreography is the among his most consistent in this work I think.

**Co(te)lette** (Ann van den Broek, 2007)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJWYYa7nu6o>

That nice kind of weird.

**Rooster** (Christopher Bruce, 1991)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bTW8tPL6qY>

Dancing is sweaty business at the best of times but dancing in suit and tie is a one way ticket to drench city.

**Dance** (Lucinda Childs, 1979)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjYS5PQ8KZY>

Superb physiological embodiment of the sounds, and like Philip Glass' repetitive score, can be both metronomically hypnotic or extremely tedious depending upon one's disposition at time of consumption. Either way, it's impeccably danced and effortlessly realised. (Yes, I know it's a year outside my cut-off point, but that's the way that love is.)

**Vissi d'Arte, Vissi d'Amore** (Margo Sappington, 1997)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgKxHIW1Gul>

More like Margo Soppo-ngton, eh? That doesn't bother me though, I can be a bit of a

soppy cunt too. Tina Turner's 'Dancing In My Dreams' is the kind of schmaltz I adore, and Valentina Kozlova's melodramatic gesticulations are a perfect companion to it.

**Maple Leaf Rag** (Martha Graham, 1990)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13y1diTWTJg>

Similar to Petit, this may not be Graham's magnum opus, but I enjoy it, nice tunage from Scott Joplin, understated yet smart clothing courtesy of Calvin Klein, and some inventive dancing. A simple yet potent mix.

**Velox** (Deborah Colker, 1995)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zkdkgozeq84>

Mesmerising. Insane. Astounding.

**Chroma** (Wayne McGregor, 2006)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SMmL6klx-w>

Another collaboration with a ballet company, this time the Royal Ballet, seems to get the best out of McGregor again. The orchestrations of The White Stripes tracks work well, as does the minimalist set design and costumes, both allowing the dancing the room to shine.

**Mozart à 2** (Thierry Malandain, 1997)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d38Vhqpjk3M>

Everything I've seen from Thierry Malandain I've found enjoyable in some way, his style being much of a muchness (in a positive way). Therefore I could recommend any number of ballets, but this duet edges out the other contenders purely for the bit where she bites his bum and appears to drag him by his trousers backwards with her teeth. Genius.

**From Before** (Garth Fagan, 1978)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y32mOnYzOkk>

The choreography is intriguing enough, but the main reason I like this work is because it uses Ralph MacDonald's *The Path*, which was sampled in the big club track from a few years ago by Ninetoes, 'Finder', which in turn reminds me of the Concept Neuf version. All are excellent but the Ninetoes track really conjures up a time and place in my mind. (Again, I know it's creation is prior to my cut-off point of 1980, but time keeps on slipping into the future)

**Adagietto** (Oscar Aráiz, 1984?)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxcSBtUP\\_DQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxcSBtUP_DQ)

The slower the dance, the more the viewer can scrutinise every little detail of the choreography. As the title suggests, this is a very slow piece, set to Mahler's famous music, with the dancing flowing as sedately as a glacier. But there is no icy coolness to be found here, only a soft and tender duet that melts away into the sentimentality of the strings' yearning melody.

**El Fuego de la Pasion** (Allister Madin, 2011)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnphD9hmOB0>

I am a big admirer of what the Japanese refer to as *kyakusenbi* (脚線美 each character denotes 'leg', 'line' and 'beauty', respectively, so can be translated as 'the beauty of leg lines'), and I have never seen a dance cater to this aspect of aesthetic appreciation as much as this work. Dancers generally have attractive legs by virtue of their frequent exercise of that part of the body, so it's hard to say whether the female dancer in this piece (Caroline Bance) has better legs than any other dancer, but the way the focus is thrust upon them in such a blatantly fetishistic manner definitely enhances their appearance, most notably in the section where a spotlight singles out her legs as she walks across the stage in an exaggerated gait, allowing a detailed inspection of the way in which the calf muscle flexes and relaxes with each progressive movement.

**Some Rooms** (Graeme Murphy, 1983)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxvxW9QR6c0>

Phantasmagorical.

**Sad Case** (Paul Lightfoot & Sol León, 1998)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDBn3Koho\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDBn3Koho_s)

Demented mambo.

**Mambo Suite** (Ana Maria Stekelman, 2000?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVwDIJ80Sbl>

Deconstructed mambo.

**Watch Time** (Liliana Merlo, 1982)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVpSNhXnRPs>

Way too short. I love the neoclassicism of the dancing contrasted with the futurism of the spaced-out synth-prog electro-disco courtesy of John Carpenter's *Escape from New York* soundtrack.

**Swan** (Luc Petton, 2012)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJHK\\_HwSmXY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJHK_HwSmXY)

Interesting concept, but those swans don't seem to be following the choreography, they're just improvising, which kind of belittles the efforts of the human players, never mind disrespecting the choreographer. If the birds could get with the program then this could be a classic dance piece, however, from my encounters with swans along canals and lakes, they can be quite temperamental little buggers, so I wouldn't recommend working with them; not as bad as Canada geese, who are just nobs, but I'd say the common mallard is a better proposition.

**In the Upper Room** (Twyla Tharp, 1986)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FoQ6LKjZeyA>

All I can think about when watching this is *Baywatch* and *Beetlejuice*.

**Pop Aerobics** (Allen & Karen Kaeja, 1989)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cayjTNdtEBw>

I know this is a parody or a lampooning of those aerobic workout videos that were hugely popular in the 80s (this piece being created a year before Traci Lords' meta-masterpiece), but I will defend stuff like Aerobics Oz Style to the hilt. To be semi-alliterative, the combination of babes, beaches, blue skies and body conditioning workouts is as good a pick me up as anything on a wet and windy mid-winter Manchester morning. Allen Kaeja's inane grin really makes this piece though. That and the use of a portable CRT TV as a weight. It's also perfect material to be appropriated as a video for a new tune, like what L-Vis 1990 did on his music video to Dance System's 'DS Theme'.

**Miniatures** (Douglas Lee, 2011)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oywp\\_rohCml](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oywp_rohCml)

I like how the female dancer is treated like a rag doll, constantly being lifted and positioned, yet she herself needs the rigidity and articulation of an action figure.

**Kaléidoscope** (Allister Madin, 2013)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9xvT\\_uFX68](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9xvT_uFX68)

This is a piece I just stumbled upon and took a liking to. That is all.

**Trois Gnostiennes** (Hans van Manen, 1982)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTJA8F7A3Ys>

A rather incongruous place to stage a ballet, but at least the abundance of space allows the director to do interesting effects like the constant 360° shots and go

wandering off away from the dancers so the viewer can't see what's going on. Anyway, the dance accompanying the final gnosienne is by far the best of the bunch for my money.

**Rota** (Deborah Colker, 1997)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBjm39bdhGs>

Human hamster wheel?

**Nascimento** (David Parsons, 1990)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwWLGeynAyg>

So sunny and sanguine yet deceptively languid.

**Groosland** (Maguy Marin, 1989)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLZUqqe-xpQ>

Bizarre, Terry Gilliam-esque farce that abuts the Brandenburg Concertos with dancers in full body fat suits, which by the end of the piece become denuded bar the men's little blue bowler hats. Perplexing and surreal.

**Light Rain** (Gerald Arpino, 1981)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0C97zjRfo>

Slight gain.

**Tuu** (Moses Pendleton, 2007)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqPNx0nauRg>

Astonishing display of physical strength and balance. The moment where the man holds them both in the air in a Y-shape on his hands only is high level stuff.

**Company B** (Paul Taylor, 1991)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18Vii-fO1u8>

A 40s period piece supported by the Andrews Sisters tight harmonies and swinging rhythms. Probably as nostalgic to the baby boomers as 80s aesthetics are to my Generation Y, reminiscent of a childhood before memory.

**Desperate Song** (Karen Kaeja, 2000)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2iw9pBtv7z8>

Although the Kaejas have created some heavy pieces centring on the Holocaust and

WWII, sometimes simplicity is better and a concept is superfluous.

### **Acts of Light** (Martha Graham, 1981)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6yBueE01LRQ>

Simplicity embodied. Carl Nielsen's tone poems provide the stream of emotion, the choreography just floats in its current like a loose reed. The unison sections are particularly potent, proving that it is often better to perform a simple thing well than a complicated one poorly (and that everything looks better with more people on stage). I also want to point out one of my favourite Youtube comments is on part 2 of this video, something about its understated directness says more about humanity than any other comment I have seen: "black man looks HOT in his tights". It's the kind of sentence you see all over the internet, but something about the composition is really impressionistic; the lack of the definite article, the capitalisation of 'hot', the specific reference to the tights being owned by said black man, but moreover the fact that somebody felt the need to post this observation is an intriguing sociological phenomena in itself.

### **Glass** (John Clifford, 2004)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=As23G4Djeag>

Regardless of whether the dancers are en pointe or not, Philip Glass was definitely on point in the 80s, evolving from the maddening repetition of his 70s output, and yet to wander into the mire of self-repetition of his 90s work. Using his small arsenal of trademarked arpeggios, he conjures up an astounding variety of moods for the dancers to immerse themselves in, to the point where choreographers almost have carte blanche to adopt whatever style they see fit. The dancing may not be the most technically advanced but that just emphasises the power of the music to compensate for any misgivings the viewer may have. If you want a more visually stunning ballet set to the same Glass pieces then Jerome Robbins aptly titled *Glass Pieces* is the more complete opus (I would list it separately but I can't find a good video of it), but here there are some nice comely lasses among the performers, and more importantly, black man looks HOT in his tights.

### **21 Études à Danser** (Michèle Anne de Mey, 1999)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Af8Mm9gqSuE>

The spoken parts would probably sound naff in English, but the French carry off pretence much more assuredly. Also, dancing in men's dress shoes is sometimes a pain, so I couldn't imagine the horrendousness of high heels.

### **Giselle** (Mats Ek, 1982)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u\\_8AepwrlVk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_8AepwrlVk)

The first half reminds me of Taz-Mania for some reason (maybe the giant eggs), whilst the second half is set in a psychiatric ward, replete with disembodied floating

appendages. Without knowing the title or recognising Adolphe Adam's score, I would have no idea this had anything to do with *that* Giselle. Whether that's a good or bad thing, I'm not sure. (I know this is the third work I've listed by Mats Ek, and he isn't even one of my favourite choreographers, but it's better to sleep on a beauty than let it slip.)

### **Nightlight** (Douglas Lee, 2010)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpLPs2JUryg>

I like toned legs and I can not lie  
You other dancers can't deny  
That when a girl waltzes in with an itty bitty waist  
And those fit thighs in your face  
You get hamstrung, wanna pull up tough  
'Cause you noticed those gams were buff  
Deep in the tights she's wearin'  
I'm hooked and I can't stop starin'  
Oh baby, I wanna pas wit'cha  
And see you tendu en croix  
My corps' boys tried to warn me  
But those legs you got make me so horny  
Ooh, ever-so-smooth-pin  
You say you'll chassé into my Benz  
Well, demi, demi  
'Cause you ain't Alessandra Ferri  
I've seen her dancin'  
To hell with a thin shin  
She's sweat, wet  
Got it goin' like a pirouette  
I'm tired of Balanchine  
Sayin' slim calves are the thing  
Take the average dance fan and ask him that  
She gotta pack much jack  
So, fellas (Yeah), fellas (Yeah)  
Has your girl got a pointed foot? (Hell yeah)  
Tell 'em to shake it (Shake it), Shake it (Shake it)  
Shake that healthy foot  
Baby got jack (Jeté lifts with the turned out bourré)

### **Inanna** (Carolyn Carlson, 2005)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rESlfsHLlRA>

I'm sure Ms Carlson is trying to convey some kind of message about femininity or society in this piece, but seeing as I don't make inferences in regards to meaning, I just appreciate the dancing, I have to wonder what those women were doing with grapefruits down their tops.

### **Vollmond** (Pina Bausch, 2006)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJneyBpvD4g>

Don't try to set your hair on fire!

**Élégie** (George Balanchine, 1982)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cgco0yQvNLA>

Not modern (although premiered in 1982 it was surely created much earlier), just pure fantasy.

**Les Yeux et l'Âme** (Trisha Brown, 2011)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGXl6j4uRRY>

Set to music from Jean-Philippe Rameau's *Pigmalion*.

**White Space** (Henri Oguike, 2004)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ok1rQICvtAI>

Piet Mondrian and Domenico Scarlatti won't often appear in the same sentence, so that's a small achievement if nothing else.

**Pos Vos Muero** (Nacho Duato, 1996)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZyccsiLO\\_Gw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZyccsiLO_Gw)

As much as Renaissance-era Spanish music is fine and dandy, this dance may work better to Beyoncé.

**Véronique Doisneau** (Jérôme Bel, 2004)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OlUWY5PInFs>

Although I imagine North Americans like John Oswald and John Cage could have formulated a piece like this, (it being positioned somewhere between performance art and plunderphonics), there is something intangibly French about its execution. Obviously, Véronique Doisneau speaks French in it, but more than that, her vocal delivery and mannerisms are inherently Gallic, somehow cool and aloof, verging on arrogant, yet the content is decidedly humble and sweet. This prevents the impression of the performance from veering towards the saccharine, grounding it in a sense of stark pathos.

**Caught** (David Parsons, 1982)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLRbY8CYaUQ>

One for the epileptics. A bit gimmicky, but thanks to the wonderful accumulating

loops of e-bowed guitar courtesy of Robert Fripp, the lulls in the lumen storm never drag on for too long.

**I Am Curious, Orange** (Michael Clark, 1988)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KiDS0T5vy-I>

Even though I was probably still just a foetus inside my/my mother's amniotic sac at the time this debuted, I can vividly recall seeing a full performance of this; the red polka dot knickers and bare arse hanging out of tights are etched onto my brain. Much like Mark E. Smith's singing, the dancing may be technically shite, but it's a unique kind of shiteness that spawns an idiosyncratic calling card.

**Symbiosis** (Michael Tracy, 2001)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOZ6KnVPvIU>

Accessible butō in a thong.

**Mona Lisa** (Itzik Galili, 2003)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIScLv2Tyz8>

Thomas Höfs' industrialised techno accompaniment is like a poor man's Thom Willems, and similarly the overall impression is that of an inferior *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated*. Don't get me wrong, I still like it, otherwise I wouldn't list it here, it's just a bit more monotone than Forsythe's work, the dancing is sharp and precise, but it lacks the force and whip-crack energy of the aforementioned, with it's relatively short length being a saving grace that stops it from descending into tedium.

**Enough** (Marie de la Palme, 2008?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4I6cANc-qY>

A curious blend of ancient tribalism and dynamic Futurism, like a set of Umberto Boccioni sculptures that have come to life and started practicing yoga.

**Walking Mad** (Johan Inger, 2001)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQntEkpCgmY>

Bolero really is a bit of a cop out for choreographers. Doubling that up with anything by Arvo Pärt just intensifies that sentiment, yet it manages to overcome the double whammy of overexposure with some nice ideas.

**Othello** (Lar Lubovitch, 1997)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PavZ-88Y4Zs>

In many ways a very old-school, no-nonsense ballet in the classical mould, but Elliot

Goldenthal's post-minimalist neo-Stravinskyian score helps to contemporise it.

**Counterpoint** (Shobana Jeyasingh, 2010)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSZUVgw2j3E>

Women playing silly buggers in some fountains.

**Amelia** (Édouard Lock, 2002)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHU5QLEjGAg>

Hey man, you shouldn't do that, don't you know you'll stain the carpet?

**Grace** (Ronald K. Brown, 1999)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmfYJwHOOSU>

Uses actual dance music, which is surprisingly rare for a contemporary dance piece, four-to-the-floor generally being shunned in favour of angular, irregular metres or ambient soundscapes. Not only is it 4x4 but it's proper funky, soulful house, which is just about the most uplifting style of music ever.

**Etude** (Robert Battle, 2008)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWJw8En6Wao>

Second only to Ulysses Dove in the awesome name rankings, this is Battle by name, battle by nature. Block-rocking beats fused with militaristic, tribal gestures to make a kind of refined haka.

**Baywatch** (Sascha Engel, 2006)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUUrea4x7Ys>

I'm a pretty 'a-' kind of guy; apolitical, apathetic, amoral, so the whole Guantanamo Bay thing is not of concern to me. The real appealing feature of this work is the appropriation of Britney Spears' and Madonna's lyrics and re-setting them in a totally different way.

**After the Rain** (Christopher Wheeldon, 2005)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VibqEWACdRo>

Arvo Pärt yet again. Yuan Yuan is almost painfully thin in this video, but her strength and rigidity are still amazing, totally *making* the piece. (It's also nice to see a performance in such an exotic location, and in daylight to boot.) My favourite large-scale piece from Wheeldon is *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, but that has over 90 minutes to fill with numerous ideas, whereas this is the polar opposite, a 10 minute vignette that relies on chemistry and ambiance rather than bombast and

imagination.

**Divining** (Judith Jamison, 1984)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCuZmDbIC3I>

This sends me to sleep, but I mean that in the best possible way, like it relaxes me into a meditative state of consciousness.

**Sospiri** (Jacquelyn Buglisi, 1989)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGb0tMzwj-E>

A note-perfect corporeal interpretation of the aching romance distilled by the Elgar adagio.

**Dichotomy** (Spencer Gavin Hering, 2010?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HteXCt3SXM>

Everything looks better synchronised.

**Tympani** (Laura Dean, 1980)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2hKV-piAd2E>

You *will* get dizzy.

**Everything Doesn't Happen at Once** (Benjamin Millepied, 2009)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVZRIGRrPGc>

Very busy and bustling. David Lang's clockwork soundtrack gives the work direction but there's so much going on it seems like it's bursting at the seams. So whilst *everything* might not happen at once, a lot of things do.

**Metamorphosis** (Tanja Pavlic, 2012?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qqm8mJoL9CY>

I'm normally pretty good at naming the capital cities of various nations but I had no idea that Ljubljana was the capital of Slovenia.

**Retore** (Aya Terasoma, Kōta Kihara, Yukako Shiokawa, 2012)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rj7QEbuuinY>

Yukio Saegusa's music makes for a lively backing, but the dancer's vocal only 'don, don, don' sections are the highlight.

**Opus 40** (Jean-Christophe Maillot, 2000)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zX06YW608y4>

The inimitable Meredith Monk shows that interesting music can not only enhance, but basically salvage the most ordinary choreography.

**Aeros** (Daniel Ezralow, David Parsons & Moses Pendleton, 2001)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1v3qxxRgPpQ>

Gymnasts can do things normal dancers can't, so why not utilise their skill set? Maybe due to the music reminding me of Kraftwerk and Geinoh Yamashirogumi, the section on the parallel bars and the pommel horse is my favourite, but it's all quite pleasant.

**Eighteen Person All-Star Ball Passing** (Charles Moulton, 1988)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYrwo709KSA>

This greatly exceeded my initial expectations. A simple concept extrapolated to extreme limits. The wave-like effect of the staggered movements works particularly well, with the plinky-plonky music teetering nicely on the boundary of grating and charmingly twee.

**Psycho Killer** (Daniel Ezralow, 1988?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rotDjf6-kVw>

The Ghostbusters don their best aviators and warm-up for a five-legged race to an a cappella rendition of the Talking Heads' hit.

**El Mar** (Oscar Aráiz, 2011?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CleMNJnf6eg>

*El mar, la mar, le mer, la mer.* Grammatical gender must be one of the most commonly accepted yet completely ludicrous things in existence. It makes sense when applied to organisms with a sex, but how can a non-living thing, (i.e. the sea), or an abstract concept have a gender?

**Paint en Pointe** (Patric Kuo, 2014)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qK6STj1K-Rs>

*Paint en Pointe* is a series of short pieces that feels very much a mixed bag to me, with some parts really shining whilst others drift along without much luminescence catching my eye at all. However, although Kuo's precisely planned movements don't always carry my interest, Eugene Ward's ultra-modern sculpted soundtrack does a sterling job of bearing the burden when necessary. The pummelling whacks and

smacks of *Somnium (Solo)* make it the most immediately intriguing of the works, but the percolations and pops of *Somnium (Group)* and the crunches and crackles of *Printed Matter (Large Group)* also stand out, as do the Ha crash-esque beats found in *Place (Small Group)*.

**Solos** (Kaori Ito, 2009)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UT1tu3mvV2Y>

Out of the four parts that constitute this work, the first two are easily the most interesting, with the final section kind of fizzling out under a veil of poor lighting. I can imagine people may find this type of piece a bit pretentious, but I like Ms Ito's presentation, which just about salvages it from inscrutability.

**Discontinyou** (Amos Ben-Tal, 2005)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DM3GYflm-s>

Proper meta, like a caricature of the parodies used in film and television to mock the perceived pretentiousness of contemporary dance. I'll give the choreographer the benefit of the doubt and trust that he was fully aware of this aspect of the work, rather than unconsciously reinforcing any stereotypes. Irony and sincerity are just about impossible to discern without explicit clarification from the creator, but it is definitely meant to be somewhat humorous. Uma Thurman.

**Re- (Part III)** (Shen Wei, 2009)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7v54m4OSJtU>

Most of Shen Wei's work is a mix of the esoteric and the bizarre, but factoring in the frequent use of visible tits, the overall effect is one of confusion and intrigue. This piece is one of his more traditionally orientated ones, with more apparent form and progression than his more out-there compositions.

**A Fine Line** (Amanda Drago, 2007)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKaN7VUaJJs>

An engaging use of light and shadow, and the piece builds up nicely over its duration.

**Flowers in the Rain** (?, 2011?)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_oH19z5I-uE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_oH19z5I-uE)

I know nothing about this piece other than it is danced by the Koresh Dance Company. Oh, and the title brings to mind the Vangelis classic 'Tears in Rain', and to a lesser extent Robin Beck's power ballad 'Tears in the Rain'.

**Table Music** (Thierry De May, 1987)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J91emaxq0iY>

Hand dancing? Main de trois? As much a musical piece as a choreographic one, this works best when viewing the hands as independent from the rest of the body, like tiny dancers, the slabs of wood their stage.

**Barber's Adagio** (Oleg Vinogradov, 1991?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMjvgdNa6BU>

That soft focus though.

**Ora** (José Navas, 2011)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-AHtUsO6Wc>

The interest in this work does hinge on the use of the thermal imaging technique, making it somewhat a novelty, but it's an intriguing enough effect to hold the attention, often by trying to work out how it was filmed and what elements are 'real'.

**The Most Incredible Thing** (Javier de Frutos, 2011)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27jyGvHjz7Q>

A bit of a mixed bag (and it possibly could have been trimmed down to about an hour), but it contains enough nice moments to squeeze onto this list, with the Muses' and Moses' sections being the minor standouts.

**Naked UnNaked** (Sara Gaardbo, 2011)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nyxxzotLcMA>

I'm not a massive fan of this piece, but there's an interesting idea in there, I just don't think it is realised as effectively as it could have been. I felt the message about gender inequality (expressed via the differing moral standards regarding the accepted obscenity of male and female chest exposure) is engaging, and the requirement of the dancers to cover the women's nipples up could have been transformed from a choreographic restriction into a defining feature that guided the movements, but I feel it isn't taken in the most thorough direction. Also, the choreography is improved in the second half of the dance, but the presentation lets it down, the costumes and lighting detracting from the overall experience. So props for the effort, I just would have liked a more daring execution.

**Sacred Ritual** (Marie de la Palme, 2012?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pE7tl5vVrE0>

Sometimes all you need is a strong man, a flexible woman and some non-abrasive music and everything falls into place nicely.

**Follow Back** (Brett Womack & Rachel Bowman, 2014?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBwDD3nE01Q>

See description directly above.

**Heyoka: Evolution** (Gerrard Martin, 2014?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68N6nMimchU>

Similar to Martin's *D-Illusion*, this is quite heavy on the symbolism and metaphorical allusions, although the work never gets bogged down by trying too hard to overtly convey its message.

**The Guide** (Lika Shevchenko, 2010)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSpmH0\\_r\\_\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSpmH0_r__U)

I Lika more than Andriy Shevchenko. (Actually, he seems like a nice guy, and was a great player for Milan, it's just a shame he tarnished his legacy by joining Chelsea.)

**Grounded** (Michelle Funderburk, 2015?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMOWNK2ncns>

Mad respect to the chunky dancers! If I'm carrying even a couple of extra kilos I feel in no shape to dance, so credit to these girls for not letting the excess timber get in their way (to be fair, I think one of the women may be in the early stages of pregnancy as her limbs look quite thin). Frankly, this piece isn't anything special, (the first track has a beat and a half, mind), I just wanted to select a work that didn't portray only those with the most peak athletic conditioning, and point out that fatties can cut it up too.

**Step Into My Dream** (David Parsons, 1994)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zfTuW2c7W5Y>

nice.jpg ↪

## Special mention:

**Dairakudakan** 大駱駝艦

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8IE6ZWstvU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USHtqdek17Q>

I've tried to get into butō (舞踏), or more specifically ankoku-butō (暗黒舞踏), but I

have hitherto failed to become in tune with whatever its supporters find so appealing about it. When I watch Tatsumi Hijikata or Eiko & Koma, or any artists in that mould (I've trawled through numerous Youtube pages like ArsPaforma in search of more obscure fare too, although the line between dance and performance art seems to be a very fine one when it comes to butō), I not only fail to perceive any beauty, I see solely its antithesis, ugliness, despair, desolation and all the other darker emotions available to the psyche. I accept that these moods have their place in art, but to focus exclusively on their creation just turns me right off. When used as a means of contrast they can be amazingly effective at bolstering the potency of the more cheerful, lighter emotions, and this is where I find their usage more comprehensible, as a *yin* to the other's *yang*. But more than just my inability to perceive beauty within the style, the apparent po-facedness is as big a detraction for my enjoyment, and when all is said and done dancing is about enjoyment, everything else being secondary.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdJ1U2fWbS4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lto4aXt9vRo>

I am well aware of the entirely subjective nature of the experiencing of pleasure from any form of art or entertainment, there being such a diversity among humanity as to allow the possibility of an individual finding pleasure in virtually anything, so what I mention here is purely my interpretation of the style. Nevertheless, I am firmly of the opinion that the medium of dance is best suited to convey the more upbeat and pleasant feelings that we can experience, whilst other, less abstract modes of artistic communication like film and television programmes, novels, plays and the like, are naturally stronger options for tackling more 'serious' or 'deeper' (this normally means 'darker') emotions. Dairakudakan appear to subscribe to this viewpoint too, and accordingly their shows are all about exuberance and gaiety. (The company does do more 'traditional' butō too under Akaji Maro's leadership, but I am focussing on one particular string to their bow here).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s66cdvdRuTs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUKelke13NA>

Now, I don't particularly mind weirdness and the left-field aspect of the work isn't really an obstacle to my appreciation, but why not have some fun while you're at it. That is where Dairakudakan excel where other butō practitioners fall flat. Their appearance isn't that much different from conventional butō dancers, with men having shaven heads and bodies covered in paint, but instead of the bone white *shiranuri* (白塗り), they use a gold paint, or *kinpun* (金粉), that gives a glossy metallic sheen to their bodies, giving rise to their nickname, the *goldens* (ゴールドデンス). Being almost entirely naked besides a small thong, or *fundoshi* (褌), obviously enhances the visual magnificence of the spectacle, accentuating the contours of the body's muscles and bone structure, similar to what bodybuilders try to achieve by using copious amounts of fake tan before a show.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJJW3CMnyWE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miRHdRrEBpI>

Clearly the reason for the deep banks of cameramen at the street performances will be the opportunity to ogle naked flesh, (which is in my opinion as valid [albeit somewhat peculiar considering the vast array of outlets available to satiate that particular want] a reason to attend as any, there being a far too puritanical view towards nudity and sex [the two are not intrinsically linked, yet often conflated by censors] in modern global society, especially considering the relative acceptance of more quantifiably harmful depictions of abuse and violence in the media, but that is a debate for another time), and this element is certainly beneficial to the appeal of the group, but more than that, the overarching joy expressed by the dancers radiates through to the audience. (I'll add here that traditionally in Japan [pre-Meiji Restoration] there was a much more tolerant view towards public nudity, but much like nations contaminated by the dogmas of the Abrahamic religions, the modern attitudes to nakedness in Japan are possibly even more prudish than the more secular Western countries.) Also, in contrast with traditional *ankoku butō*, it simply doesn't take itself too seriously; 'entertainment' and 'art' are purely semantic distinctions without concrete substance, and *Dairakudakan* accept this, never even flirting with the navel-gazing tendencies of the avant-garde, or the stuffiness of the high-brow brigade.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FezuT1sTg68>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yod\\_fWBN\\_8c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yod_fWBN_8c)

*Butō* literally means dance in Japanese (the difference between *butō* and *buyō*, and to a lesser extent *mai* and *odori*, are very fine indeed, with one being more indicative of traditional dancing and others being more inclusive and general), and these shows are 'dance' boiled down its essence; the choice cuts, all-killer-no-filler. The distinctions between high- and low-brow, serious and comedic, light and dark, traditional and modern, are shown to be inconsequential, the only gauge of the work being whether it is enjoyed or not. This is reflected in the troupe's choice of audio accompaniment. The music they use is a mishmash of all styles and genres, with the audience being as likely to hear The Chemical Brothers, Enya, Queen, Hot Butter, Geinoh Yamashirogumi, Angelo Badalamenti and Robert Miles as Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Carl Orff and Johann Pachelbel; rock, noh, taiko, gamelan, classical, world, ambient, klezmer, krautrock, house, psychedelia, trance, techno, funk, new age, bubblegum pop; basically, anything goes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSz6DMdLZI4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0fuloavRQM>

As for the actual dancing and choreography, then of course, it is technically of a poor standard compared to some of the pieces listed earlier, but the dancers are as competent as they need to be to achieve their goals. Of course, if some of them could dance like Fontaine and Nureyev, or Rogers and Astaire, then that would be a nice bonus, but it is not necessary to permit the desired objectives to be attained. Technique is a tool for expression, with greater technical ability normally going hand in hand with an increased range of expression, but when the message is a simple

one, extraneous technique can not only be superfluous but detrimental to the creation of the work. That is to say, if what is called for is a driver to transport a petrol tanker from London to Sheffield then hiring someone who can handle a Formula One car like Lewis Hamilton would be undesirable for both parties; it being a case of finding the best tool for the job at hand, not the best tool *overall*. Likewise, a highly skilled dancer may feel underemployed performing simple routines that don't utilise their expertise, which in turn will infiltrate their demeanour during the performance, and thus that sense of joy discernible among the dancers may be diminished. There is much more to producing an effective result than just physical proficiency and technical mastery, the intangible psychological emissions being of greater importance to the success of the piece in this instance.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzuy58sK6\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzuy58sK6_o)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1DFxVR90UuE>

The genial ethos of the dancers is the main attraction; the contagious attitude that pervades the entire atmosphere of their shows. Even when not in the fully golden look, the playfulness of the performers is still conveyed, demonstrating that the internal attitude of the dancers is as important as their external appearance. Obviously, the strangeness, nakedness and musical eclecticism play their part in the final package, but these would count for naught if not for the aura of warmth and jollity diffused by the dancers. I suppose it is like any line of work, if the person enjoys their work it is evident in the final product. Then again the truly versatile dancer is also a competent mime actor so can mask their distaste for the piece. Yet no matter how professional the performer, nothing can top an artisan who loves their immediate undertaking and pours their heart and soul into making it the best it can be.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4\\_CManTtZw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4_CManTtZw)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=194AttVWi-g>

However, the big question is would it work as well if the performers wore everyday clothes? Of course not, but neither would *La Sylphide* or *Pulcinella*. As stated before, my criteria for assessing a dance piece separates the work into 3 constituent parts, with the presentation often being the make-or-break element that elevates my enjoyment of the artwork. I don't want realism in dance, leave that to artists working in mediums like film and literature that are better suited to faithfully portraying the mundane world we inhabit. I want dance to be fantastical, absurd, extraordinary, mysterious, insane, larger-than-life, eccentric, basically anything but a reflection of daily life. Before the music and dancing begins, the first thing the audience sees is the outward appearance of the performer, so if a dancer is wearing jeans and a T-shirt, or a blouse and leggings, as if they're just wearing what they would wear on the street, then it's immediately put itself on the back foot, having to re-ignite my interest rather than maintain it. This also puts a heavy load on the two remaining pillars, the choreography and the music, structurally weakening the piece from the get-go. Dairakudakan ace this visual aspect, creating intrigue straight away and merely having to fulfil the early promise through a captivating routine, which they achieve assuredly.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0oAHs9ha3HM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBs50DIOXt0>

They seem to perform at a select few locations across Japan; mostly in Ōsu (in Nagoya) at the *Ōsu Daido Chōnin Matsuri* (大須大道町人祭), as well as occasionally various parts of Tōkyō (such as Kōenji, Ikebukuro, Shibuya, Ginza etc.) and a few other places (including Toyohashi in Aichi prefecture, Kamikoani in Akita, Hitachi in Ibaraki etc.), plus rare ventures overseas to France. There is a similar troupe of performers that go by the name Sasara Hōsara (ささらほうさら), but I find their presentation and musical choices cruder and far less palatable. Quite possibly there are other companies with similar traits that I am currently unaware of, some may even have more impressive choreography, or a more dazzling presentation, but to me Dairakudakan perfectly represent a quite unique fusion of an inherently Japanese ethos and an ephemeral global Zeitgeist that somehow roots it in 'the now'. Dance troupes from other nations should take note of them and cop some of their style. Think what it could do for Morris dancing in England if the dancers were mostly naked, covered in metallic body paint, wielding flaming swords and accompanied by more modern British musical genres like drum 'n' bass, garage, hardcore, grime and dubstep; it'd certainly attract the 'yoof'; #MorrisRevolution.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xL1ILG7kXc0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EuDD6OBniE>

未来

I doubt I have much to say that is news to the learned fan of dance, as I patently lack the knowledge of an individual who has devoted decades of their life to exploring a subject they love. However, from my experience, a good working knowledge of a subject often results in a loss of perspective. By this I mean an inability to view the subject from the standpoint of a layman or the mythical everyman. I have experienced this in regards to music, whereby I think a particular artist is a fairly well-known name, only to discover that among both my circle of acquaintances and the public at large, they are complete obscurities. The opposite of this is sometimes the case, when a song may be high in the charts or featured in a popular film/TV show/videogame, yet has totally passed me by. This phenomenon of losing perspective will be even more applicable to a more niche subject such as dance (or more specifically concert dance). Therefore, hopefully my dearth of acquired information about dance will be counteracted by my ability to impartially evaluate the situation the discipline (both the art and the industry) currently finds itself in, and, at the very least, by approaching the subject from a slightly different angle, offer an insight that whilst uneducated, is representative of a wider strata of society. I don't expect to unearth any ground-breaking ideas, or answer any existing problems facing contemporary dance, instead I hope to at least raise some new questions and provide fresh avenues for exploration.

Firstly, I'll state outright that I recognise and accept the complete subjectivity of art

(possibly the complete subjectivity of *everything*, but that's another debate entirely), meaning that there is nothing I can propose that will improve the artistic merits of the art form, all I can do is suggest how to make the art more appealing to myself, and by extension, people like me (people without a background in dance i.e. the mainstream/'casuals'/Joe Bloggs etc.). Yet whilst the artistic value may be subjective, as we all know, success can also be measured by the more objective standard of popularity, which in turn should equate to financial betterment. These two measures of worth can be reduced to the personal (artistic merit) and the impersonal (economic merit). I can clearly propose alterations to the art to better align it with my personal tastes (at least my current tastes, as obviously time changes everyone), but I can only speculate on the opinions of others, especially when referring to 'the public', so my propositions in regards to improving the non-artistic side of dance should be taken with a pinch of salt, being not only ill-informed but highly speculative. I'm not going to separate my thoughts into the two camps, the reader should be able to figure out when I'm suggesting ideas to make improvements for myself and when they are to enhance the prospects of the industry.

So what are the biggest obstacles in the way of popularising dance? I think there are two major ones: tradition and perception.

The natural process of the transformation of a fad or trend (or any kind of isolated cultural phenomenon) into an ingrained, widespread tradition will take at least a generation or two to fully diffuse away from the niche, the few or the elite. If the trend does enter into the mainstream it will probably take another generation to firmly cement its place as an essential element in the make-up of a cultural identity. If this stage is reached, the tradition can be said to be fully formed, and the modification or removal of it will have become incredibly difficult as its proponents view it as almost a part of themselves, a definition of their character. Religion is easily the most perfect example of this process, with numerous followers willing to base their entire model of life on a *belief*, with many even valuing this belief over their own life. Quite clearly the deciding factor in the adherence to a religion is not an informed, rationale choice to believe its tenets, but rather being determined by the traditions of the culture one is raised in. I want to get off the subject of religion as it just annoys and baffles me, but before I return to dance I want to discuss a relatively arbitrary example of the schisms of tradition, that of the divide between the codes of rugby football. Just look at the division of popularity between rugby league and rugby union; one is popular among certain strata, be it in England, France, Australia or New Zealand, whilst the other is popular among a very different group of people. Whether it be down to differences in social class or geographic location, the reason for this is largely down to ingrained traditions fostering a preconceived preference for one code over the other. In this day and age, with ease of transport and widespread television coverage, it is as easy to watch either code, no matter what your location, yet these traditions run deep and breaking them is difficult. I can't really promote myself as an example that disproves this, as I hail from the heartlands of rugby league on the M62 corridor, and do indeed prefer that sport, but I am aware that my preference is based on culture rather than an inherent superiority of the game. Similarly, theatre dance in this country is rooted in the traditions of ballet, a creation of the Italian upper classes during the Renaissance, imported into Britain from continental Europe via France. This means there was obviously no tradition of ballet

in this country at one point (as there wasn't in any country if one goes back far enough, but that is an unnecessary point to quibble over), yet it managed to become established to some degree among a certain demographic, particularly around the time of the Second World War. In other countries, like Russia and France, the traditional relationship with ballet is very different, thus accounting for the divergent reception to it among the citizens of these countries. As can be seen today with the ever popular programs featuring decades old Romantic and Neoclassical ballets, tradition holds sway over even the minority who do enjoy the form. These traditions also lead to the formation of perceptions regarding the art, perceptions which, whether based on fact or not, influence the opinions of the public.

The widespread perception of ballet can be boiled down to a series of hyphenated adjectives; fuddy-duddy, airy-fairy, namby-pamby, wishy-washy. All of which is to say that it is often viewed as old-fashioned and out-dated, a preserve of the cultural and intellectual elite (high-brow), and also that it is somehow feminine, (or more derogatorily, effeminate). Yet, conversely, this feminine connotation results in an inherently flawed association with (specifically male) homosexuality.

Contemporary/modern dance shares many of these stereotypical qualities (discounting the old-fashioned accusation), but is often seen as unnecessarily abstract, esoteric or just plain weird, as if attempting to deliberately estrange the audience, further promoting the fictitious high/low-brow partition. Moreover, both ballet and contemporary dance are obviously not 'cool', in fact being decidedly 'square', but this refers back to the accusations of effeminacy, and can be reduced to the association of idealised masculine traits in a society (rugged, independent, composed, rational, serious) to the concept of 'coolness', and the opposing feminine qualities (soft, trivial, emotional, sentimental, excitable) being supposedly 'uncool'. There are other elements that dictate the perception of 'coolness' such as nationality and race, but these are not fixed and subject to rapid change, meaning that whilst currently black, working-class, urban Americans tend to be the model of 'cool', this is mostly due to the popularity of music and fashion derived from this section of society, just as in the past people from as disparate locations as Paris, Merseyside, San Francisco, Berlin etc., could be seen as models of 'coolness'. Unfortunately for both ballet and, to a lesser extent, contemporary dance, none of their core, die-hard audience can be universally labelled as 'cool', the majority being decidedly the opposite.

Now, whilst some of these perceptions may be true (to an extent), even the ones that clearly aren't are a barrier for certain people to engage with the art, due to either their own prejudices, or the potential stigma that could be applied to them by others. Obviously, some of these accusations can be logically disproved, however, the correctness of these perceptions is immaterial, the fact that they exist and could potentially prevent people from enjoying the art is a problem that needs to be addressed. Some are social issues that can only possibly be solved through education and understanding, such as the unfortunate situation whereby the 'feminine' and 'homosexual' labels still carry strong negative connotations among some people. The onus is also on the artists and interested parties to make the field more inclusive. For example, if we agree the perception is that ballet is for girls, promote artists who are trying to make ballet for boys (how this is achieved is an entirely separate and more difficult problem to solve). If the perception is that contemporary is too esoteric, promote artists who are trying to make it accessible.

Really fucking simple stuff, but sometimes the easiest path is the least trodden, especially in an environment where descriptions like 'challenging', 'experimental', 'thought-provoking', 'profound' are valued over 'nice', 'pleasant', 'entertaining' and 'straight-forward'. It's also a kind of tightrope act whereby the artist must decide what constitutes an indispensable trait of the style and genre they are working within, yet at the same time be willing to confront the issues without too much compromise. A simple solution is to disregard the semantic baggage of terms like 'ballet' and 'modern', and just create 'dance'. But the destruction of definition leads to its own problems, not least of which, the ease and speed of which the audience can locate the kind of dance they are most deeply invested in, with the framework of genre preventing the potential viewer from facing a giant, amorphous mass of content to sift through to find what they want.

So how do artists working in the field of dance make their work appealing to the widest possible audience whilst maintaining their artistic vision and aesthetic sensibilities? Well, firstly, artists should do what they want to do. I'm not advocating that artists should fundamentally change themselves and their modes of expression, rather the non-artists associated with dance (administrators, patrons, directors, funders, critics, promoters etc.) should discover and nurture artists who are naturally inclined towards more 'populist' styles or who welcome more 'commercial' tactics, as well as the more avant-garde and innovative individuals. So to summarise my thoughts concisely:

It is not the duty of the artists or the audience to change their behaviour, it is up to the middlemen, the people who bring the art to the people, or the people to the art, to change their way of working in order to create the maximum possible audience for an artist's work, and to provide the audience with the maximum possible exposure to an artist's work.

Anyway, that's enough generalisations, let's get into some specifics.

We live in the age of the celebrity. Of course, throughout history celebrated people have intrigued the public. At one time they would have been leaders of men, great thinkers and academics, doers of legendary deeds, renowned beauties, persons of wealth and rank, mighty warriors and such people, nowadays they are anyone who features heavily in the media, be it modern versions of the aforementioned personages, or recently created categories of celebrity; the reality TV star, the Youtube sensation, the shock jock, the wind-up merchant/troll (think Katie Hopkins), the socialite etc. Names and faces are more important than content. The recognition and media interest that accompanies a big name celebrity is immeasurably valuable in providing exposure to a subject, as evidenced by the money spent by advertisers for celebrities to endorse their products/services, and the sudden flurries of interest on Google and social media caused by an association with a celebrity.

How to incorporate celebrities into theatre dance is the big obstacle. There are clearly degrees of fame, and the degree of celebrity is hard to gauge when immersed in the 'world' of the celebrity for a length of time (loss of perspective). I feel confident in suggesting that, in general, there are very few choreographers famous enough to be considered a household name, and in the arena of ballet and contemporary dance there would be none at all. Cunningham, Balanchine, Graham, Ashton et al.

may be giants in their field, but they are ants compared to the Strictly Come Dancing judges. People like Arlene Phillips and Louie Spence are possibly the biggest name choreographers working in Britain today, and although I recall the former presenting a series of short programmes for Sky Arts featuring snippets of classical ballets and some more modern pieces (I think it was called *Dance, Dance, Dance*), finding a way of employing either to enhance the awareness of a niche brand of art could easily feel like stuffing a square peg into a round hole. So that's one human component ruled out, the choreographers; next, the dancers. Again, people like Darcey Bussell are well-known and well-liked by many, and overseas there may be countries where dancers have higher profiles, but generally speaking there aren't enough with sufficient name recognition to attract the mainstream's attention. Another possibility is teaming up with fashion designers to outfit the dancers and visual artists to design the stage and props, which has of course been done on several occasions in the past, with prominent examples dating back nearly a century to Picasso collaborating with Massine and Satie for *Parade* or Cocteau working with Chanel and Milhaud on *Le Train Bleu*, and this will certainly expand the demographic of people that are aware of the production. However, unless the designer is a firm household name (of which there are infinitely more than dancers and choreographers), chances are only people who are already interested in the arts will be attracted by the increased gravity, meaning the exposure is extended from nook to cranny, eluding the centre stage, the limelight. Similarly, appointing an established director to film a performance or documentary is an effective method of dissemination, with films like Robert Altman's *The Company* and Wim Wenders' *Pina* helping immensely to cast a light on relatively obscure works, but as before, these directors are big names to people with a vested interest in film, but to the wider public are relatively niche auteurs, even if many have watched and enjoyed a film by them (maybe they were more recognisable names in the past, I'm not old enough to talk from experience). So the only integral option (as opposed to unrelated endorsement) that remains undiscussed is the inclusion of musicians with pulling power (a territory I am much more familiar with).

Now, even I'm not naive enough to think that there are a host of willing and available big-name musicians waiting to collaborate on a contemporary dance piece, especially considering there will likely be comparatively minor financial gain for such a venture, but there are musical artists out there who aren't afraid to take a risk, and who will definitely pull in a different audience, if not an excessively large one. In an ideal world, an artist like Beyonce or Taylor Swift will have an unconditional love for modern dance and will be willing to contribute as a labour of love, but that is unlikely. (On a related note, Beyonce's 'homage' to De Keersmaeker's *Rosas danst Rosas* in the music video for 'Countdown' will have a positive effect, solely in terms of widespread exposure, even if 99% of viewers are unaware of the reference, as will Taylor Swift dressing like a ballerina from Swan Lake in the video for 'Shake It Off', Sia using contemporary choreography in the video for 'Chandelier', the visual album sampler for Giorgio Moroder's star-studded *Déjà Vu*, or even something as simple as Ciara wearing pointe shoes in the video for 'I Bet'.) So moving away from megastars and concentrating on musicians who work within fields that probably don't have an audience that overlaps with that of concert dance but could still help promote it among different demographics.

I firstly want to stress that a specially commissioned work designed to accompany

the dance is more useful than simply using pre-existing music of an artist, as it both inherently links the two works, and also gives an incentive to go see the work, even if the primary reason is not to watch the dance but instead to hear the music, it at least enables the *possibility* of finding a receptive consumer. Again, this is nothing new. The Staatsballett Berlin collaborated with Berghain to create the 'techno ballets' *Shut Up and Dance! Updated* and *MASSE*, whilst Wayne McGregor frequently collaborates with acclaimed electronic artists like Jon Hopkins, Ben Frost, Mark Ronson and, most recently, Jamie xx, plus Stephen Petronio and the ensemble La La La Human Steps have worked with numerous pop musicians. However, I think more can be done in exploring this avenue of collaborative enlightenment.

It would be great if a current big name DJ/producer like Diplo, David Guetta, Skrillex or Calvin Harris would be willing to participate in a project, just due to their sheer popularity on the massive EDM circuit, but I think it will be unlikely to materialise, as would collaborations with slightly more underground artists like Rustie or Hudson Mohawke. As someone with a background in dance, the burgeoning FKA Twigs might be a decent bet, as would her favoured producer Arca. Even anonymous (well kind of) musicians with something of a cult following like Burial, Dean Blunt or Zomby might be up for it if the right offer came in, but I wouldn't hold my breath.

I think rather than just proposing who might be a sympathetic artist to approach, or good for exposure and expansion, I'll name some people whose music I just plain enjoy, but also who I think would carry off the job perfectly, both in terms of producing an excellent piece of music to choreograph a dance to, and attracting a different audience.

Okay, maybe a couple of outside bets to start with, but the South Africans Nozinja and DJ Spoko would definitely add some spice to the stage with their unique styles of Shangaan electro and Bacardi house, or possibly a kuduro expert like DJ Marfox for some other African (-Portuguese) representation. MikeQ would be perfect to provide the Ha for an updated take on ballroom a la Karole Armitage. One of the Night Slugs crew would be well-suited for a heavy-hitting Forsythe style piece methinks, with L-Vis 1990 being the prime candidate thanks to his dance-ready 'Workout Module 001', but both Bok Bok and Jam City would be good calls as well. For more frenetic fare, the Teklife crew would be an excellent choice, with RP Boo's abstract beats likely being ideal for contemporary dance, although proper old school ghetto house, a la DJ Deon and other Dance Mania alumni, would provide an interesting juxtaposition to the conventional scholarly accompaniment often found in modern pieces. For something more ambient or lyrical, less defined by powerful rhythms, Oneohtrix Point Never would no doubt do a sterling job, but if he isn't into the idea of scoring a dance, then Laurel Halo, Fatima al Qadiri, Claude Speed (there's supposed to be three e's), Egyptrixx, Logos or maybe even Shackleton would be consummate replacements. If it's colourful effects and sugar-rush energy you're after then surely PC Music are the perfect people for the job, my preferred nominee from the roster being the classically trained Danny L Harle. If you want to incorporate some exotic elements then dabke honcho Omar Souleyman would be a very interesting artist to work with, but it'll probably have to be work steeped in Syrian overtones to remain appropriate. Nina Kraviz is an artist who I could envisage having an earnest interest in ballet, not only is she Russian (all young Russian girls train to be ballet dancers, don't they?), she has the slender physique of a dancer and

might even be willing to participate on stage in the show if the right offer was made. Not a new artist but I can't believe Kraftwerk never did anything like this, their public personas and aesthetic tendencies would be perfect for a modern-day 'ballet mécanique'. Finally, some other artists who I think would be potentially devastating collaborators for choreographers/companies to entertain for one reason or another: Four Tet, James Holden, DJ Sprinkles, Yosi Horikawa, Dorian Concept, Caribou/Daphni, Robert Hood, Leyland Kirby, and I could picture Todd Terje provided a vibrant musical backdrop to a disco-fied dance delight. (On a slightly different note, Paki Zennaro and Gianni Visnadi's recently unearthed *Imaginary Choreography* surely deserves to be actualised as a new production.)

A common thread running through most of these suggestions is the advocacy of music that is conducive to dancing; strong, defined rhythms, a sense of groove or funkiness, a move away from the floaty, ethereal fare that seems to be favoured by many contemporary choreographers, but also a distancing from the decidedly melodic, lyrical music found in the classical canon. Classical music is all well and good, and it is often quite beautiful, but it is also often rather boring in many ways; the timbres employed are somewhat limited (especially compared to the arsenal of sound generating tools available to the electronic musician), the structure tends to favour complexity over simplicity (minimalists notwithstanding), but more than anything it gives the impression of stiffness and stuffiness; to put it bluntly, it's not that fun. Personally, I'm possibly too ascetically inclined to be a true hedonist, but I will always support the notion that art should foremost be pleasurable, and that more 'base' emotions like fun and happiness are as valid as the more deep and profound expressions of the human condition. Which is to say that I hope producers of dance works don't feel it necessary to justify the dancing by applying extra importance or subtext in order to give it artistic credence, when sometimes the piece is simply people moving their bodies in time with sounds, which is all dancing really needs to be to achieve acceptance.

I also want to stress that the musician should not try to compose music specifically for a ballet/dance/show (unless they also have extensive experience in the field of dance from the dancer's perspective); it should be the role of the choreographer to interpret whatever they are presented with by the musician. For my money, too many composers change their style in an effort to conform with what they think a dance piece *should* sound like, rather than just making music for dancing to and relying on the choreographer and dancers to accommodate their idiosyncratic style using their own special skill set (The Pet Shop Boys being understandably guilty of this in *The Most Incredible Thing*, although that's probably more down to the orchestration/arrangement than Tennant and Lowe's score). By working this way, the outcome is less likely to alienate the 'floating voters', (or the people who are still undecided on dance but came for the music), as it gives them more options to enjoy the performance (i.e. disregarding the intricacies of the choreography and focussing on the sounds). This leads into another point:

Cater to the 'casual' fans, the hardcore are already dedicated, so are much less likely to feel disillusioned and abandon something they love. Obviously, don't go out of the way to piss off the people who pay your wages (excluding organisations reliant on public funding, which, whilst often essential, is related to factors quite independent of public opinion), but be aware that they are not only hooked, but are

virtually in the keepnet; only a complete catastrophe will deter the true stalwart entirely. As an example, just look at the giant sports broadcasters in the UK: Sky and BT. The prices of their subscription packages go up year after year in order to compensate for their ridiculous prices paid for the rights to Premier League and Champions League football, and whilst there is a drop-off in subscribers with each price hike, they are more than able to recoup any potential losses (and then some) by cutting back in other departments within the package that don't 'sell' the bundles like PL football does (expenditure on the arts being one of the first to see a reduction). But returning to the subject at hand, there is a threat of alienating even the staunchest of supporters if the format is diverted from its traditional structure too greatly, but the ease at which the art form can estrange the *potential* fan if it lacks certain characteristics common to most current entertainment options are so perilous that adaptation to criticism (perception) is pretty much necessary for any kind of industrial growth. And there is one thing that I see appearing as a criticism for a lot of contemporary art (not only dance) among the public more than any other: an absence of a supposed meaning.

People look for meaning in everything, be it in everyday occurrences or in objet d'art, people want an explanation, a reason for things to happen, choices to be made, order amongst the chaos. In art, when the meaning is either unclear or not present, many people will be unable to understand the purpose of the work, rendering it pointless in their eyes. This can be seen in films and novels with no concrete plot or story arc, paintings without a subject based in reality, music with no lyrics, dances without a libretto or a setting; in short, anything abstract. The simple solution to this quandary is to (explicitly) feature a narrative in the piece, even if it is merely a pretence to satiate the expectations of the audience. I won't go as far as saying it is advantageous to make the narrative relatable to the audience, especially considering my preference for the fantastic and unrealistic in dance, but it must at least be identifiable to some degree, no matter how vague and clouded in intrigue. 'Magic' and amazement are productive substitutes for a clear story, dazzling with awe and wonderment the minds of the spectators will supersede any absence of plot. This extends beyond narrative into the presentation of the piece. As I mentioned when talking about Dairakudakan, I simply don't want to see dancers wearing everyday outfits as their presence immediately grounds the work in the mundane world we inhabit, dance being the wrong format for gritty realism and the addressing of social issues, and this should extend to every facet of the production. If a choreographer is dead set on trying to make pieces that tackle 'important' global topics, social issues or philosophical debate, then that is their prerogative, but I am decidedly of the opinion that dance is entertainment first and foremost, the promotion of beauty being more useful to enriching people's lives than highlighting the ugliness of reality.

Extending upon this ethos, I wouldn't mind a de-emphasising of the technical perfection and choreographic accuracy needed by the dancers in favour of the apotheosis of the spectacle, and the elevation of the general over the specific. By this, I mean that only a select few people care about the fidelity of the dancing to some kind of recondite standard, so rather than focus on deviation from such a standard, the priority should be on the 'atmosphere' and 'emotions' that are trying to be conveyed. This is obviously the target of some of the more experimental and improvisatory branches of contemporary dance, but I'd like to see it applied to the more traditional, conservative sections of the dance world as well.

Likewise, many choreographers seem to explore the possibilities of the human body, stretching it to its limits to discover new ways of expression. I find this can produce a rather diluted choreographic signature, too much variety reducing the sense of interconnectivity throughout both the work and the artists oeuvre as a whole. Instead, by imposing stricter restrictions on usable motions, a more clear-cut style can be realised. This narrower range can then be investigated to its limits, with the stretching of the boundaries resulting in unusual destinations being reached without breaking through into foreign territory and muddying the stylistic waters. I suppose this is already a description of how genre functions, so what I am suggesting is more along the lines of fusion, and the blending of genres into unknown configurations. Yeah, that sounds a lot easier than it probably is, especially considering that even in art forms not so reliant on as defined a template as the human form, the genesis of new styles are sporadic and dependent on the advancement of technology and scientific understanding. An example from an area I am more comfortable with, music, would be how modernist composers broke away from tonalism and equal temperament, (de-)evolving into atonalism, just intonation, microtonalism, noise music, musique concrète, field recordings, spectralism etc. Yet at the same time popular musicians operated within the confines of diatonic harmony, heptatonic scales, 12-tone equal temperament etc., but still managed to locate new genres and styles, constantly uncovering fresh veins to mine. Like I said, this is a bit harder if we only consider the possibilities of the human body, but if we factor in ways of utilising technological progress, then the scope is incalculably widened.

Technology can be applied in two main ways to enhance dance; firstly, to intrinsically alter the piece itself (or the viewing of the piece), and secondly, to improve the awareness concerning the piece (promotion/advertisement). The first use of technology can range from new types of lights being used to illuminate the stage, to the exploitation of new artificial polymers to fabricate previously impossible costumes. The most intriguing technique to explore would be the use of digital signal processing and CGI in conjunction with the dancers on stage, as well as the use of such technology to manipulate a video recording of the performance. A specific example I'd like to see employed would be a director taking advantage of the duality of the tempo of music genres like drum 'n' bass and footwork that operate in the 160/80 bpm range, switching the speed of the video between normal speed and half-speed/double-speed, creating effects like the performers floating in the air as if in low gravity or zooming around the stage like the Flash. Merce Cunningham's adoption of the LifeForms software is an early example of this kind of thinking, but with contemporary computational might, the potential to create something inconceivable a few years ago is entirely plausible. Whilst it is more difficult when considering how to incorporate the technology into a live setting, when transplanted into a post-production environment, the ability to transform the raw materials of the physical dance into a digital medium enables seemingly endless routes for invention. At its most extreme, the need for human dancers is no more, everything being created from scratch in-the-box, but I (like most dance fans I assume) believe the human form is at the core of the art, the bedrock onto which everything else is built. As such, the ideal use of technology is to augment this foundation rather than replace it. However, these technologies are just tools for the artist, new pigments for the palette, meaning they are solely aesthetic choices and inherently subjective, their use not essential for the future of the art. The second use of technology is much

more important to fully exploit if the industrial side (the objective aspect, as defined by capital income) of the art is to improve.

I'm not the most ardent proponent of social media, actually quite the opposite, viewing it as a potentially brilliant invention that is marred by being filled to the brim with absolute shite; the pointless vitriol and vain posturing overwhelming the more beautiful contributions, but in saying that, there is no denying its efficacy as a tool for promotion. Most major dance companies do take advantage of the benefits of Twitter, Facebook and the like, and they will aid in their cause, but it is also telling that Louie Spence's number of followers is probably greater than all the major ballet and contemporary dance companies in Britain combined (not that this stat demonstrates anything, it's just an interesting tidbit). Making videos of performances, rehearsals, interviews etc., uploading them onto Youtube and other sites is key to attracting new consumers, (even if they are just teasers, it's better than nowt), but I'd go as far as saying that much like music and sport, the emphasis should be placed on the 'live' aspect of the art, with the direction of all these fields becoming geared towards valuing the 'event' over the content.

At the risk of becoming repetitive, I'll reiterate that I am far from an expert on the subject I am discussing here. I don't know the exact working processes employed in the industry, how the business model functions, the nature of the income and expenditure etc. (not that I have any interest in that anyway, economics being a necessary evil that I try to steer well clear of as much as possible). I assume that most companies rely on some kind of donations or public funding to survive, and that ticket sales alone don't cover the costs of running the performances. I'll also assume that top level dancers earn a comfortable salary/wage, and that low level performers either earn just enough to subsist, or have to supplement their income through other means whilst dancing. Anyway, to use the classic comparison of excessive income, the Premier League footballer, as a reference, then it is safe to say that dancers are paid a pittance in comparison, especially considering the amount of effort and skill required to reach the top level in either field of work is approximately equal (mind you, rugby players get the worst deal with a salary only slightly better [depending on the code/country] than a dancer, but the potential for a career-ending injury being much higher). However, the more bums on seats, the more money circulating in the industry, the more the artists get paid. In the Premier League this happens to be packed stadiums of 40,000+ for the top teams, (although the TV deals are where the real silly money originates, Sky forking out over £4 billion for the latest contract), whereas in dance, venues of a few thousand seater capacity are the norm, resulting in attendances being dwarfed by the Premier League darts, never mind the football.

There is also the catch-22 situation regarding the relationship between popularity and media coverage. Newspapers and other media outlets dependent on either physical sales or online page hits to attract advertisers and sponsors will invariably try to cover topics that appeal to the broadest possible audience. This is why something as irrelevant to most people's daily lives as the birth of a royal baby is plastered all over the front pages of the tabloids instead of articles that could foreseeably have some impact on the readers circumstances; or why football dominates the back pages over and above cricket, tennis, golf and both codes of rugby; why chart music will occupy more column inches than art music (I dislike that term, much like the genre label IDM, it implies music not belonging to its categorical

classification is somehow less artistically worthy, but in this instance it rhymes with 'chart' so has a nice ring to it); and why dance will never get as much coverage as the more mainstream art forms. The content reflects the interests of the readership, and, mutually, the readership influence the coverage of the content. In other words, what is most popular gets the most exposure, and what gets the most exposure will become popular. This apparently impenetrable feedback loop results in only those outside of the dependence on an income directly related to popularity (e.g. the BBC), or those knowingly targeting a narrower audience demographic (e.g. specialist magazines) having the inclination and wherewithal to promote a niche concern. I can't speak for non-Anglophone nations, (the only other language I can read at an acceptable level is Japanese, but I don't regularly read any national Japanese newspapers), but the only nationwide newspapers in Britain and America that seem to regularly and thoroughly cover dance are *The Guardian* and *The NY Times*, both of which do mighty well on the limited budget they must have, but both inevitably suffer from, at best, a Westernised bias, or, at worst, a capital-centric (London and New York) outlook. (Other newspapers like *The Telegraph* and *The Independent* do have dance sections but seem to have much lighter coverage.) I'll mention here that I try to be as apolitical as possible, so normally avoid newspapers due to the dyed-in-the-wool political and ideological bias running throughout all sections of the publication (not to mention I simply don't care about *most* current affairs, whether 'important' or trivial, as they often have no tangible effect on my daily life, or worse, generate unnecessary fears and anxieties due to the disproportionate coverage of atrocities and stories designed to shock and outrage), but when there is so little coverage elsewhere (or more correctly, so little readily discoverable coverage), the online editions of these newspapers are almost essential to keeping abreast of the artistic spectrum without spending an inordinate amount of time digging around in the virtual wilderness oneself. This could be another case of my lack of knowledge, but I habitually follow a number of online music sites like FACT, Resident Advisor, Tiny Mix Tapes, Dummy, Pitchfork, XLR8R etc., to keep up to date on the latest developments in that field of interest, each magazine having overlapping concerns but enough of a unique focus to make them all worth checking out. Now, I am willing to accept the following statement is more down to my own incompetence in regards to scouring the worldwide web, but I have yet to find an equivalent to these numerous sites in the dance world, where the spotlight is heavily focussed on a small corner of the wider genre, with reports on relatively obscure artists as well as more general interest stories. This may be due to the heightened accessibility of music compared to dance, or it may be down to the lack of a link between an established network of information channels and the grassroots/do-it-yourself community, but whatever the case, there doesn't seem to be a readily observable 'roadmap' for the dance neophyte to reference and guide them towards their preferred niches within the totality of the art form. Anyway, I'm going off piste here, the key point is that the tail cannot wag the dog, any change in the popularity of dance has to initially emerge from the side of the public, most likely arising through incremental modifications of perception via role models or inexplicable and unpredictable fads, with the media then reacting to this groundswell of interest accordingly. And if there is one thing that is certain in life, it is that everything changes; just look at the music industry to see a fine example of how quick the status quo can shift, and how the industry has to be flexible enough to adapt to these alterations with equal rapidity or risk the monetary value of the art being irreversibly diminished.

In recent years, the way musicians earn their living has altered dramatically. Whereas, once the artists strived for a record contract, and the record companies recouped their investment in an artist through album and singles sales, with touring being used to promote the record, nowadays, (apart from the huge megastars), most artists release records to gain fans and increase exposure, then recoup the losses incurred issuing the records by raking it in at the live shows. This shift is mostly due to the move from physical album and singles to digital formats, with the prevalence of illegal downloads only adding to the abruptness of this transition. The rise of subscription services like Spotify and the new high-fidelity Tidal application may seem good value to the consumer, but the share of the profits that the artists receive is so minimal that the system is probably worse than the hybrid model in place 10-15 years ago, when everybody was still trying to figure out how to maximise the internet's musical potential. The system of 'name your price' digital downloads on Bandcamp is a better solution as it allows fans to directly support the artist by contributing well over the profit line if they so choose, whilst promoting the artists brand for those with less financial means, but on the other hand, does further the growing expectation that music should be 'free', which could be detrimental in the long run. Recently, many artists are releasing their music as a stream on Soundcloud or one of the online music sites prior to its official release, meaning people can experience the entire album for free without committing piracy. I like this system and find myself purchasing more physical records because I can handily try before I buy, rather than basing a judgement off 30-second samples or buying blind (deaf?). I believe a similar system could work for dance, releasing a full performance stream of either a dress rehearsal filmed prior to the premiere, or the actual premiere being available for a short amount of time. Adopting a 'name your price' system for downloadable content would be another possible option, having the dual effect of democratising the art by making more of it easily accessible to the less affluent, and also giving those with the means and desire the ability to support their passion with the added incentive of an immediate and tangible personal yield. This is a viable option because I believe many people value the live experience over the creative content, and the act of going to the theatre and losing yourself in the performance and the music is where the real worth is found. The uniqueness of a one-off live show adds the element of the unexpected into the equation that can't be replicated in recordings, and the whole process of physically going out and spending time among like-minded people enjoying the spectacle is an irreplaceable ingredient in the appeal of any live event.

This prioritisation of the event, or the experience, is also connected with the theory of FoMO, or the fear of missing out. By not attending a performance, there is a possibility that something truly spectacular is missed out on, thus the incentive to go is magnified. Take the buildup for the Mayweather vs Pacquiao fight. Anyone who knows anything about boxing knew the fight should have been made five years ago when both fighters were at their respective peaks (particularly Pacquiao), but all the time that elapsed in the interim only served to build the hype, and even though the contest likely would have been of a higher standard if it took place at an earlier date, the amount of public interest surrounding the bout was immeasurably greater than what it would have been circa 2010. So the potential quality of the product is secondary to the 'social thirst' for the event; most people were just happy the fight actually materialised. I, myself, was seriously tempted to fork out £19.95 and stay up

till 6am just for the off chance that the fight miraculously turned out to be a classic. Fortunately, I donned my logical hat, remembered previous Mayweather fights and how defensive, cagey, cat-and-mouse affairs they were, went to sleep at a sensible time and watched the fight for free the following morning. It turned out this was a pretty shrewd move as the contest was a bit of a non-event; completely one-sided and basically a defensive boxing masterclass by Mayweather. However, the fact that I was even considering stumping up the money for pay-per-view shows the power of FoMO and the accompanying promotional hype machine. Extrapolating this into the realm of dance is slightly tricky as performances tend not to be completely one-off productions like sporting events, with the work normally being performed multiple times in multiple places with minimal difference in the core presentation of the piece. However, works that include larger amounts of improvisation and aleatoricism in their creation have an increased level of uniqueness in each performance, resulting in a greater variability in the perceived quality of performances, which in turn fosters a stronger desire among the enthusiast to not miss out on the 'best' version of the piece, and therefore attending multiple showings. Then there are the truly one-off, one-time-only pieces that are akin to a limited edition collectible item; something that's value is astronomically increased just by the sheer fact of the scarcity of it, or in the case of a temporally ephemeral thing like a dance show, the exclusivity of the experience. This even (hypothetically) extends to pieces that have been performed numerous times over the years, if there was one particular performance of mythical stature that occurred; how much would certain people pay to have been in the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on the 29th of May 1913 to witness the premiere of *The Rite of Spring*?

However, the matter of how to generate the hype to promote an event is paradoxical; hype feeds hype. I've already discussed how the fascination with celebrity can augment publicity, and doing things like involving individuals with strongly defined personalities (whether positive or negative), those who court controversy, and those who have some kind of amazing or relatable 'story' can aid in catching people's attention. Yet I think there is an even more blatant way that dance can attract; its inherent *glamour*.

Glamour is a powerful weapon to the advertiser, second only to sex in their arsenal. (Realistically, glamour does incorporate a faint allusion to sex, so it can be seen as the socially acceptable face of it, the cleaned-up version, sanitised and smut-free.) Glamour tends to breed money, and money, glamour. The Premier League footballer is mainly glamorous because he is rich, and the luxurious lifestyle he can afford engenders glamour. The League Two footballer is not rich, therefore he is dependent on personal, innate glamour, as there is little superficial glamour to be found on a wet and windy Wednesday night at Gigg Lane. However, despite the lack of prodigious wealth, the ballet dancer is inherently glamorous. Schooled in elegant movement and graceful poise, possessing finely tuned physiques, capable of seductive displays of motion and breathtaking feats of athleticism, usually all in all rather well turned out, not only in the positions of the legs and feet, but in their entire demeanour. It may be a stretch to envisage dance competing with the raw machismo of sport for the attentions of young men and boys, but surely the promise of glamour and beauty is more receptive amongst young women and girls, with the dual appeal of aspirational female role models and attractive male targets of affection. Surely, this apparent allure can be capitalised on without degrading the value of the art,

there being a league of difference between the sexy and the smutty (well, that obviously depends on culture, as some parts of the world clearly have different views on that subject). But even more than an unwillingness to appear too salacious or ribald, an aversion to the rather indeterminate notion of 'cheesiness' is sometimes apparent in contemporary dance.

We're going into very conceptual realms here, and I may have lost sight of any common reference points with which to anchor my ideas, but there seems to be a definite desire to not appear cheesy or too kitsch and camp in contemporary dance. Most likely in effort to escape a past repertoire that includes 'The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy', and to elude the Broadway chintz of the *Fame* lineage, or even to disassociate themselves from the more populist dance shows, the contemporary choreographer often prefers to challenge the audience with unusual aggression, alien remoteness or impenetrable austerity instead of facing accusations of banality and triteness. I don't know, maybe I'm searching for things to be critical of and making a mountain out of a molehill, but I'd like to see some kind of equivalent to Jeff Koons in a choreographer, some form of post-ironic take on dancing similar to vapourwave and its satellite genres, only instead of smooth jazz and new age music, maybe a re-imagining of *Dirty Dancing* or an exploration of the intricacies of the Running Man (the dance move, not the Arnold Schwarzenegger film, although a ballet version of *The Terminator* might work, it would have to include the Robot when the T-800 endoskeleton emerges, sans flesh, from the flames of the exploded petrol truck, plus there could be a nice, romantic pas de deux when Reese and Sarah are in the motel room, and couple of big showpieces for the corps; the nightclub scene and the police station scene). Actually, I'll concede here that this criticism is probably unwarranted as I'm sure there is plenty of cheesy stuff out there without going full-on Broadway (some Mark Morris and Matthew Bourne may partially fit the bill, yet even then it's still done in a quite 'refined' way), and this oversight may again be down to my lack of knowledge on the subject, but I thought I'd raise the point anyway as the tiny quantity of works with this kind of aesthetic are drops in the ocean compared to the absolute deluge of po-faced, 'serious', intellectualised fare that seems to constitute a large portion of the genre (yeah, I don't know how dance can be intellectual either, but it at least aspires to some kind of academic pseudo-intellectuality).

There's also the problem with sincerity and irony in art, and if a work were to parody or emulate another style entirely, it would be almost impossible to stylistically differentiate it from its source material (unless the creator explicitly stated his intentions behind the piece), meaning it is often the case that artists choose to imbue the work with hints and references in order to assure those 'in the know' that they are aware of the presence of kitschiness and that they are intentionally channeling that style in a critical way (as well as in a potentially reverential way in the more sincere pieces). These references are often allusions to the 'masterpieces' of the past, intended to add credibility, or reinforce the notion that whilst the artist is peddling cheddar, he is well aware of this 'fact', and is showing the audience (or those 'in the know' among them) that there is more 'depth' to the work than there initially seems. Basically, the artist feels the need to justify the banality, even though in actuality this banality doesn't really exist, it is a remnant of a learned consensus built upon a fundamentally flawed belief in the objectivity of art, and by extension, the objectivity of experience; an unprovable belief that any two people can experience *exactly* the

same emotions from any *thing* (let alone a dance). This belief limits artistic freedom and results in only negative reactions to art. But this position is not always the case, and maybe what I'm questioning here is not the nature of the pieces themselves, but rather the reasons for them being distinguishable from others regarded as contemporary or modern (or postmodern); why only certain elements are seen as preferable within these categories and who decides what these elements are in the first place; the artists or the audience.

Anyway, getting back to somewhere near the main gist of the last few paragraphs. What is key is that the opening moments of a piece contain something that will create intrigue within the viewer and provide an inducement to continue paying their full attention to the piece; it needs to catch the eye. Whether this be through glamour and sex appeal, weirdness and mystery, shock and awe; whether the reaction is positive or negative is irrelevant to grabbing attention, only that some kind of strong reaction is generated.

I'm also of the opinion that everything is available for appropriation, and inspiration can come from anywhere. As long as credit is given to the originators, 'sampling' other people's works should be acceptable, even if it could be construed as overstepping the mark, moving from homage to plagiarism, the artist should be free to incorporate *anything* (with the obvious proviso of not violating universally accepted morals and deliberately doing something that could result in serious harm to others). On a related note, I don't think artists should worry about offending anybody by stealing their culture, or gentrifying it in some way by moulding it into a different framework, if anything the person offended should reassess their own reasons for feeling aggrieved, hopefully remembering it's only dance, not a matter of life and death. Also, I think it is a shrewd move for both choreographers and designers to keep an eye on the street and the clubs, monitoring what the kids are up to on the dancefloor will help keep them abreast of new sounds and styles, and open up some synaptic gateways in evolving the movements forward. Artists also shouldn't be afraid to abuse gimmicks and novelties, (like Louise Lecavalier and her barrel jumps in the 80s), or to insert references to popular culture to make the work more 'of its time'. An example would be Andrew Plotner's *Pokemon Ballet*, which I do enjoy, but mostly for the nostalgia and the guessing game of trying to work out what Pokemon each of the dancers are supposed to be portraying. If the same concept was realised more professionally and with a decent budget behind it, I think it'd really attract an audience, serving as both a kind of dance version of Britten's *A Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* that can introduce children to concert dance, and also as a way of making going to the theatre a family affair, with the big kids (i.e. the parents) who might have grown out of playing computer games and watching cartoons being able to enjoy the nostalgic aspect of the production. Any cultural entity that has this kind of intergenerational appeal is an ideal candidate for appropriation, but I think it is more important that the attraction is weighted towards the younger generation, not least because in this day and age they have more control over their parents time and money than at any time in history. Also, incorporating youth movements and contemporary subcultures is a great way to capture the *Zeitgeist* and create a work that will in the future be seen as a reflection of the times it was produced in, adding to its continuing relevance not only as an artwork but as a historical document. As a contemporary suggestion, some kind of large-scale kawaii piece with Kyary Pamyu Pamyu and Harajuku street fashion at its centre would be interesting (or a more

general take on Japanese street fashion with some kind of updated, diversified form of Para Para would be equally worth a punt).

Going off on a little tangent here, and maybe its just me, but there don't seem to be as many hyper specific youth subcultures these days, especially readily identifiable ones defined by a set costume or music of choice. Where are the modern day versions of the iconic cliques of yore like the mods, rockers, Teddy Boys, hippies, punks, New Romantics, goths, skinheads, crusties, casuals, rastas and so on. Things seem so homogenised now, with more of a mix 'n' match attitude to style. There's emo, but that's just a dilution of goth and punk culture into a modern fusion. Chavs and scallies are more derogatory terms than expressions for a unified youth movement, developing from the casuals, but not being affiliated with a specific music other than generic top 40 pop, rap and dance music. Then there are meta-cultures that only really exist online; seapunk and normcore being representative examples. The vague notion of hipsters is a common descriptor but it has become such an extensive category as to have essentially lost its meaning. I'm not saying this dearth of subcultures is a bad thing, as the pack mentality (or us vs them mindset) and devotion to fads that enables such cliques to be formed can result in their own problems, especially when extended to include human society as a whole, but they are undoubtedly a very intriguing phenomena to analyse, and provide great fodder for the inspiration of artists.

Basically, what I am seeing is the predominance of eclecticism. The internet has broken down so many barriers to the transmission of ideas that it is rare for an aesthetic to remain the sole preserve of a minority. Once it exists online, it's fair game. This variety in the artistic spectrum does create a sense of overwhelm, that there is such a wealth of choice out there waiting to be discovered, yet conversely, this gigantic jumble of modes leads to a muddying of the waters, a blending and bleeding of everything into one gloopy mess, often resulting in a lack of definition and an overpowering feeling of genericism. Don't misinterpret me here, I like the amount of choice that is afforded to me, and I don't think a return to the ultra conservatism of the past, where there was a clear-cut right and wrong way to go about things, would be the best move forward, but maybe a point will be reached where the only sensible artistic route left to tread will be a return to tradition. The big question being *which* tradition will that be exactly?

Back we come to those two obstacles I introduced earlier: tradition and perception. I have been speaking about ways of changing the two in order to help change the situation for the better, but there is also a case to be made for the roles these two play in maintaining a healthy status quo and therefore preventing a depreciation of the art form.

A person is a product of their environment, and it is impossible to fully modulate one's identity away from the culture it has been entrenched in for years. For every individual dissuaded by dance's public perception to ever even give the art a chance, there will be a percentage that feel an underlying proclivity towards it precisely because of that perception. A gay teenager might be turned away from football by the fact there are only a handful of openly gay players in the top leagues around Europe, finding the world of contemporary dance to be a more welcoming environment due to the relative profusion of openly homosexual dancers and

choreographers. Likewise, for every person who finds tanztheater and butō too weird, there will be a few who are attracted exactly because it is so unusual and idiosyncratic. And for all my decrying of the constraints of tradition, there will undoubtedly be plenty of little girls who are fascinated by the antiquated regalia of classical ballet, and drawn in by the lineal lore, so steeped in history. One man's barrier being another man's gateway. Therefore, any suggestions as to how to improve the art are entirely moot when projected beyond one's own personal preferences, and this even includes proposed improvements to the industry and infrastructure that supports the art. An increase in the capital circulating within the field will have effects that both please some people and displease others, meaning no action taken to financially better the circumstances of the art will unequivocally result in a positive outcome for all, or as Biggie sang; 'Mo Money Mo Problems'.

I apologise for continually returning to football but it's an interest I've harboured for longer than even music, let alone dance, so it serves as an expedient reference point for me. The Premier League is currently at a point where the man on the street is being priced out of going to games regularly, yet there is no rise in entertainment value over the games served up 20 or so years ago, in fact many (including myself) feel the style of play, (with the prevalence of cynical professionalism and outright cheating being key factors), has actually regressed since the league formed in 1992. You could even go back all the way to the post-war years, when players earned wages in line with the people in the stands, and claim the entertainment value (not technical standard) has decreased, as there are far fewer goals and altogether less entertaining defensive tactics being used in the modern game. Transcending the law of diminishing returns, not only does the increase in capital in the game not yield greater results, it conversely produces worse, the higher stakes on the result of a game leading to a 'win at all costs' mentality that eclipses many times over the secondary aim to provide entertainment for the fans. Similarly, if contemporary dance were to miraculously become as popular as top flight football, then despite the obvious increase in potential, (thanks to more artists and more money being involved), would the quality of the entire output improve? Well, seeing as I accept the innate subjectivity of art, then the answer is a succinct 'no'. However, there would be more of it, which is almost certainly a good thing, but considering not everyone is an artistic explorer, with many people sticking to what they know and like, even with the increase in the amount and variety of works, the more esoteric and furthest from traditional standards will inexorably be less popular. The relative measurements will remain the same, only the scope will change, although the potential for more cash overflow at least having the positive effect of allowing more artists to become professional and support themselves solely through their art.

Yet, conversely, the lack of money in the game (industry) means that those involved with it are most likely driven by a pure love of dance, with the role of the amateur being an essential cog in the machine. Of course, to develop flawless technique and impressive choreographic abilities takes years of intense training and effort, so the assistance of a professional set-up will aid in this endeavour, but as demonstrated by some of the pieces in my list above, talent and technique aren't everything, sometimes the simplest actions having the greatest impact. Essentially, I'm emphasising that there is a place for all under the umbrella of dance, a point poignantly proven by the likes of DV8 Physical Theatre's integration of disabled dancers, as well as any piece that challenges the boundaries of the form.

The purpose of this piece of writing is evidently flawed, there being no way to universally improve an art. Some people will like some things, others won't; that's the nature of the beast. Even speaking for myself, I am unsure whether or not I truly agree with all that I have stated above, and chances are in a few years time I'll agree with even less, but that really doesn't matter. The point is that people should at least try in some way to improve the things they love, whether that's through a direct input like dancing and choreographing works, or funding and patronising theatres and companies, or an indirect input like creating something that helps or inspires the former category of people. I hope this slew of words I have offered up here can contribute in some small way to the future of dance.

Anyway, I think I might have rambled for a few paragraphs too many there, so I'll try to wrap things up here.

As stated right at the beginning of this section, I have no answers, only questions, and each of these questions has an incredible multitude of answers, answers that can only be found by artists who interpret the current situation in their own unique way. What is important is not that the answers are good or bad, but that they are. I hope my humble and likely ill-informed views on the past (過去), present (現在) and future (未来) of dance have at least led to the formation of *an* answer.



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