



Left: The Northern Ballet Theatre perform *Romeo and Juliet*

Right: CandoCo contemporary dance company. Choreographer Jamie Watton

Far right: DVS Physical Theatre

Companies and choreographers

The Royal Ballet is Britain's national ballet company, founded in 1931. With a strong repertoire of classics and modern works, it also has the proud legacy of two of the most important choreographers of the twentieth century: Frederick Ashton, whose works include *La Fille mal gardée*, *Symphonic Variations* and *A Month in the Country*, and Kenneth MacMillan, choreographer of *Maoism*, *Eine Syncope* and an ever-popular *Romeo and Juliet*.

Originally formed in 1946 as the Royal Ballet's touring group, the Birmingham Royal Ballet, under the directorship of David Bintley, has since 1997 been a fully independent company. English National Ballet was founded in the 1950s as London Festival Ballet, and currently tours a strong programme of popular ballets and accessible contemporary works. Newer ballet companies include Northern Ballet Theatre, with a distinctive reputation for producing theatrical story-ballets, and Scottish Ballet, founded in the 1960s by Peter Darrell and now directed by Ashley Page.

Contemporary dance took off in the late 1960s, with the founding of London Contemporary Dance

Theatre and with Ballet Rambert changing from a classical to a contemporary style. Ballet Rambert continues as Rambert Dance Company, Britain's largest contemporary ensemble with an eclectic repertoire of works by both UK and international choreographers.

Though disbanded in 1990, London Contemporary Dance Theatre helped to generate many new companies and gave rise to such important choreographers as Richard Alton and Siobhan Davies, whose companies now produce some of the finest work, by some of the finest dancers, in the country. Like them, Rosemary Butcher also began choreographing in the 1970s, and continues to develop her own distinctive abstract style.

The 1980s saw an explosion of contemporary dance activity, with the growth of many independent choreographer-led companies, accompanied by a proliferation of artistic styles and personal approaches that continues to this day. Lloyd Newson's DVS Physical Theatre developed a high-risk performance style, and fostered such idiosyncratic dance-makers as Nigel Charnock and Wendy Houston. Lea Anderson's companies the all-female Chameleondeys and the all-male

Featherstonechaughs specialise in quirky gestural observations on human behaviour. The last decade has seen the emergence of many acclaimed choreographer-led companies, including those of Charles Limchan, Henri Oguike, Fin Walker and Jamin Vardimon, as well as Wayne McGregor's highly successful *Random Dance* Company, which has pioneered the use of digital technology and computer software in choreography and performance.

Several repertory-based companies also continue to thrive, including Ricochet, Diversions (the national dance company of Wales) and Scottish Dance Theatre. CandoCo is a groundbreaking repertory company that commissions new works from acclaimed choreographers for its integrated group of disabled and able-bodied performers.

For some time the borders between ballet and contemporary dance have become blurred and broken down. Many ballet-trained dancers have forged successful careers as contemporary choreographers, notably Michael Clark, Matthew Hawkins, Jonathan Burrows and Russell Maliphant. Contemporary choreographer Matthew Bourne, with his companies *Adventures in Motion* Pictures and later *New Adventures*, scored huge successes



with his reworkings of classical ballets, and former Royal Ballet dancers Michael Nuim and William Trevitt recently formed George Piper Dances which showcases a popular and eclectic mix of modern ballet and contemporary dance.

But these are not the only borders being crossed. Alongside the classical and contemporary scenes, Britain has established traditions of South Asian dance and African People's dance. Drawing on these, several choreographers – notably Shobana Jayasingh, Akram Khan and Peter Badojo – have developed their own hybrid and highly individual contemporary styles. Both Phoenix Dance Company and Union Dance Company have long been inspired by the diverse idioms of black dance, while choreographers Robert Hylton,

Jonzi D and Benji Reid have more recently explored street dance and hip-hop in contemporary performance.

Another thriving field is dance for screen and dance technology. The annual *Dance for the Camera* scheme has, since 1992, commissioned dance for television and video, while since 2001 the *Capture* series has commissioned a variety of experimental screen-based dance works encompassing film, digital video, and multimedia. The annual *Dance Umbrella* festival also features a special *Digital Dance* showcase of interactive and installation-based work. The resulting collaborations between choreographers, directors and digital artists have produced startling and award-winning pieces.



Festivals and venues

Founded in 1978 by Val Bourne, *Dance Umbrella* has grown to become the largest contemporary dance festival in the world, presenting the best of both UK and overseas dance and attracting visiting companies from around the globe. Based in London, the festival has also shown performances in other towns and promoted national tours by visiting groups. The *Resolution!* festival at London's Place Theatre is a platform for a wealth of aspiring and emerging new choreographers, with visits from selected European newcomers.

Nottingham (Nottingham) and New Moses (Glasgow) are two festivals that programme stimulating seasons of experimental dance from both UK and visiting companies. *Dance* also features in many arts festivals across the country and forms a vital part of the annual Edinburgh International Festival, and there are several specialist dance centres that organise performances, classes and workshops, including The Place (London), Lahan (London), *Dance City* (Newcastle), *Dancebase* (Edinburgh), Thamesdown Dance Studio (Swindon) and Yorkshire Dance Centre (Leeds).



Shobana Jayasingh Dance Company
in a piece called *(h)Interland*

Education and training

Britain is home to some of the world's most renowned training institutions, including the Royal Ballet School, English National Ballet School, London Contemporary Dance School, Laban and the Northern School of Contemporary Dance. Many of these schools also run undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses, alongside those offered by academic institutions such as the University of Surrey, Roehampton, and Middlesex University.

Dance is part of the National Curriculum, an optional subject in secondary schools and a prescribed part of primary education. Many dance companies offer education and community outreach programmes, while the long-established Larkin Dance Company specialises in working with schools and youth groups.

Scottish Dance Theatre



Support and development

Formerly divided into Regional Arts Boards, Arts Council England has recently been centralised into a single body, with those of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as separate entities. More than 30 dance companies and individual artists are funded, across a range of dance forms. Funding is offered both as year-round support and on a project-by-project basis.

Britain is renowned throughout the world for its community and audience development programmes, through organisations such as the Foundation for Community Dance. There are also several professional support schemes in the UK, including Dance UK's innovative Healthier Dancer Programme, the network of National Dance Agencies, Dancers' Career Development, and artistic development programmes such as Choreodrome, Performing Arts Lab and the Choreographers and Composers Exchange.



Sylvie Guillem as Manon, Jonathan Cope as Des Grieux,
Royal Ballet



Inspire

Dance in the UK

Useful websites

Arts Councils
www.artscouncil.org.uk [England]
www.artscouncil-ni.org [Northern Ireland]
www.sac.org.uk [Scotland]
www.cca-acw.org.uk [Wales]

Council for Dance Education and Training
www.cdnet.org.uk

Dance UK
www.danceuk.org

Foundation for Community Dance
www.communitydance.org.uk

London Dance
www.londondance.com

The Place
www.theplace.org.uk

Theatre/Dance/UK
theatredance.britishcouncil.org

Magazines/Reviews
Critical Dance (www.criticaldance.com)
Dancing Times
Dance Now
Dance Theatre Journal
Dance Europe

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Published by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office July 2003
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What is British dance?
Perhaps its most outstanding feature is its sheer diversity. A mere thirty years ago there existed just a handful of companies, but now there are several hundred, encompassing the whole spectrum of sizes and styles. Add to that the flourishing worlds of dance in education and in the community, in screen dance, and cross-arts and intercultural experimentation, and you begin to sense the breadth of British dance today. Vibrant and innovative, UK dance is a wide-ranging and varied mix that is uniquely British while truly international in outlook.



Rambert Dance Company