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| Ginner, Ruby (1886-1978) |
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| Working primarily during the second and third decades of the twentieth century, Ruby Ginner devised a new dance form called Revived Greek Dance (later changed to Classical Greek Dance). Fully cognizant of the impossibility of reconstructing dances from ancient Greece, she was inspired by their spirit, principles of movement, dramatic styles and contexts of production. Extensive research on the artefacts, theatre, literature and thematic narratives of ancient Greece informed the development of a new movement vocabulary. With the mime artist Irene Mawer, Ginner established her own school, and her work was disseminated in the theatre, in education and through her published writings. |
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While undertaking research on the role of the Greek chorus, she became interested in its potential for dance and movement. In 1913, she founded the Grecian Dancers and, shortly afterwards, her own school. She developed a systematic approach to the development of technical, dramatic and expressive dance skills through engagement with Greek performance modes such as the lyric, gymnopaedic, bacchic, pyrrhic, tragic, and choric. Ginner claimed, for example, that ‘the Gymnopaedic and Pyrrhic [techniques] produce physical elasticity, strength, control and stability, Lyric dances give grace and beauty of movement, and the tragic, ritual and Bacchic dances develop the power of using the body as a means of dramatic and emotional expression’ (Ginner, Gateway to the Dance 169-70). Contributions to the Field and to Modernism Ginner’s career followed a two-fold trajectory, developing both in the theatre and in education. With her artistic partner Irene Mawer and using dancers from the Ginner-Mawer School of Dance and Drama (and a growing number of associated schools), Ginner presented choreography based on themes from the ancient world and from nature. Her works were largely choreographed to nineteenth-century classical music and costumed in simple chiton-style tunics of varying lengths. Properties such as spears and cymbals were frequently used, both because they served a narrative function and demanded dexterity in their manipulation. Presented in a wide range of public venues, Ginner’s work culminated in a series of extremely popular concerts during the 1930s for huge audiences at London’s Royal Albert Hall and — inspired by the performing context of ancient Greek theatre — in ten annual open-air seasons in Hyde Park. These productions included historical and national dances as well as Mawer’s mime plays. In 1930, the company was invited to perform at the Delphic Festival in Athens. In 1936, the Ginner-Mawer dancers appeared in a live performance from the British Broadcasting Corporation’s studios at Alexandra Palace in London, only a month after regular television transmission had started. A further indication of how Greek dance had entered public consciousness is evident in a cartoon that appeared in the *Daily Express* on 3 June 1933, in which a group of politicians, including Winston Churchill, are shown dancing in a park in chiton-style tunics.  Parallel to her theatre work, but with more lasting consequences, Ginner evolved and disseminated her codified system of dance training not only in her own school but also through the education sector, including physical training colleges. Her methods were absorbed by the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) and in the Royal Academy of Dance Free Movement syllabus. She was committed to the idea that the survival of a new dance form depended on the existence of a sound technique based on a scientific understanding of the body in movement.  Ginner was convinced of the importance of dance for physical wellbeing. During the First World War, she taught classes in Greek dance to war workers, a venture which highlighted for her its educative and community functions. Ginner was also an advocate for classical Greek dance and its modern form through her writing. She published two books and articles in journals and magazines such as *The* *Dancing Times*.  During the Second World War, the School was evacuated to Cornwall. When the war ended, Ginner did not return to London but settled in Cheltenham, where her theatre and education work declined. Ginner herself remained active, and in 1968 she was awarded an MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire). Legacy Like so many others across cultural and artistic fields during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ginner took her inspiration from fifth-century BCE Hellenic culture. However, she transformed these practices through the codification of a technique and highly crafted choreography, to meet the demands of a growing modern dance phenomenon which required efficient, repeatable, but artistically expressive methods of transmission to ensure its longevity. She also privileged the dramatic and lyrical capacities of dance, which she saw as under-exploited in the theatre dance of the late nineteenth century. In general terms, the work of Ruby Ginner and her British contemporaries such as Madge Atkinson and Margaret Morris, resonate with a late twentieth-century resurgence of ideas in dance about the relationship between the organic functions of the body and its expressive and stylistic capabilities. Classical Greek Dance continues to be taught under the auspices of the ISTD. The Ruby Ginner awards for solo dances are presented annually, and every two years the ISTD mounts a Greek Dance Festival. Selected List of Works: *The Dales of Arcadia* (c. 1917)  *The Call of the Sea* (c. 1924)  *Fire* (c. 1925)  *On Mount Lycaeus* (c. 1928)  *The Masque of the Sea* (c. 1928)  *The Armies of the Earth and Air* (c. 1929)  *Greek Dances* (throughout 1920s/1930s)  *Lyric Dance for Children* (c. 1936)  *Faun and Dryad* (c. 1931)  *The Corn Harvest* (c. 1932) |
| Further reading:  (Alter)  (Carter and Fensham)  (Churchill, Griffiths and Roberts)  (Explore Dance and Choreography Online)  (Ginner)  (Ginner, Gateway to the Dance)  (Macintosh) |