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| Tudor, Antony (1908-1987) |
| William Cook |
| Born into a modest household in London’s East End, Antony Tudor changed the way we look at ballet and what it was thought to express. Using the classical idiom in a new way, he evoked nuanced passions and subtle moods to convey his characters’ deepest thoughts. Though his ballets have narratives, they defy logical actions, instead following the emotional journeys of his characters as they struggle to come to terms with their dilemmas. His best-known ballets — *Jardin aux Lilas* (also known as *Lilac Garden*, 1936), *Dark Elegies* (1937), and *Pillar of Fire* (1942) — reveal the sensitivity, wit and psychological bite typical of his best work. In 1939, after briefly directing his own company, the London Ballet, he settled in New York, where he began a long association with Ballet Theatre (later American Ballet Theatre, ABT). In 1951, he joined the faculty of the Juilliard School of Music’s newly founded Dance Department, where he taught composition and choreography. He directed the Metropolitan Ballet from 1950 to 1962 and the Royal Swedish Ballet in 1962, and remained a presence at ABT until he died. |
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He directed the Metropolitan Ballet from 1950 to 1962 and the Royal Swedish Ballet in 1962, and remained a presence at ABT until he died.  Fig.1: Portrait  Portrait of Antony Tudor. Photo by Enar Merkel-Rydberg. Courtesy of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. Training Tudor was initially drawn to acting while working as a young clerk in London’s Smithfield meat market. After seeing Anna Pavlova perform, he began to study ballet with Marie Rambert, quickly demonstrating a talent and passion for choreographing. (Margaret Craske, the Cecchetti advocate and a future Ballet Theatre and Juilliard colleague, was another early teacher.) An avid reader of modernist writers such as James Joyce, Marcel Proust, and Henrik Ibsen, he was also a keen theatre-goer, who found London’s diverse and lively theatre scene a continuing source of inspiration. He attended performances of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes throughout the 1920s, seasons by its successor companies and the Ballets Jooss in the 1930s, recitals by Uday Shankar and Vicente Escudero and modern dance concerts with Mary Wigman, Harald Kreutzberg, and Annie Boalth, a Wigman disciple with whom he studied. He created his first ballet, *Cross-Garter’d* for Rambert’s Mercury Theatre in 1931 and, as his repertoire grew, began to attract critical attention. Among the dancers he worked with on a regular basis, both as a choreographer and as a teacher, were Hugh Laing, Maude Lloyd, and Agnes de Mille; most of them followed him when he left the Mercury Theatre to form the London Ballet, which debuted in 1938 at Toynbee Hall, an adult education centre in the East End. Major Contributions to the Field and to Modernism In virtually all his ballets Tudor created unorthodox scenarios and narratives that often shocked audiences with their daring, unpleasant emotional content: the death of children in *Dark Elegies*, a woman’s lust in *Pillar of Fire*, the prospect of a loveless marriage in *Lilac Garden*, a ‘sordid sex murder’ in *Undertow* (1945). It was not only Tudor’s stories that countered the fluffy frivolities of many ballets of the interwar years, however; it was also his unusual way of phrasing movement, his choice of ‘difficult’ modern music, his anti-academicism and his sensitive approach to gesture. Diminishing the use of classical arm positions, Tudor created subtle hand gestures, sometimes based on natural or pedestrian movement, to communicate the feelings of his stage people, or allowed the arms to drift quietly by the sides of the body. In *Dark Elegies* he gave one of the men a kind of foot tic which resonates with hidden anger; in *Pillar* he has Hagar touch her cheek so sensually we know exactly what she is thinking; in *Lilac Garden* he whisked the lovers around the stage until they vanished from each other’s sight and lives. For all the emphasis on repressed emotion, Tudor’s ballets bristle with eroticism. In *Pillar* when ‘The Man Opposite’ touches Hagar’s hand, which lies on her breast, their duet becomes, in critic Edwin Denby’s words, ‘a pantomime of psychological shock.’ His ballets were thought to define a new dance genre: the psychological ballet.  Fig.2: Lilac Garden  *Jardin aux Lilas* (*Lilac Garden*), with Antony Tudor, Maude Lloyd, Hugh Laing, Ann Gee and Elisabeth Schooling, 1936. Courtesy of the Rambert Archives. Legacy By the 1960s, Tudor’s productivity had diminished, although he continued to create small-scale works for students. Meanwhile, his older works had gone out of fashion: the triumph of neo-classicism, above all the work of George Balanchine, and the climate of sexual liberation made his period settings, dramatic narratives, and sexually and emotionally repressed characters seem old-fashioned. In 1972 the influential music critic Harold C. Schoenberg wrote an unusual article praising Tudor’s artistry: ‘Never sentimental, never a mere entertainer, never merely fashionable, he accomplished his aims with taste and a Proustian feeling for character’. When Tudor won the Capezio Award in 1986, ABT’s artistic director Mikhail Baryshnikov said: ‘We do Tudor’s ballets because we must. Tudor is our conscience’.  Tudor made a deep imprint on several generations of leading dancers, including Hugh Laing, Nora Kaye, Alicia Alonso, Sallie Wilson and Gelsey Kirkland, all of whom praised his gift for eliciting unspoken psychological motivations in his ballets. He influenced choreographers as different as Agnes de Mille, Jerome Robbins, Eliot Feld, Robert Joffrey, and Jiri Kilian. His unconventional composition and technique classes left a lasting impression on his Juilliard students, especially Paul Taylor and Pina Bausch, who danced for Tudor at the Metropolitan Ballet and whose later work built upon the dramatic realism and expression of his ballets. In the history of twentieth-century dance, especially in the mid-century United States, Tudor’s ballets offered a salutary counterpoint to the abstract neo-classical approach identified with Balanchine. Finally, Tudor’s extraordinary musical skills and his unconventional way of using ballet movement revealed how an inherited, codified form could be meaningfully recreated both as a modern art and as a means of personal expression. Selected List of Works: *Crossgarter’d* (1931)  *Lysistrata* (1932)  *Atalanta of the East* (1933)  *The Planets* (1934)  *The Descent of Hebe* (1935)  *Jardin aux Lilas* [*Lilac Garden*] (1936)  *Dark Elegies* (1937)  *Gallant Assembly* (1937)  *Judgment of Paris (1938)*  *Gala Performance* (1938)  *Pillar of Fire* (1942)  *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* (1943)  *Dim Lustre* (1943)  *Undertow* (1945)  *Shadow of the Wind* (1948)  *La Gloire* (1952)  *Trio Con Brio* 1952)  *Little Improvisations* (1953)  *Offenbach in the Underworld; or, Le Bar Du Can-Can*  *Fandango* (1963)  *Echoing of Trumpets)* 1963)  *Shadowplay* (1967)  *The Divine Horsemen* (1969)  *Sunflowers (*1971)  *Continuo* (1971)  *The Leaves are Fading* (1975)  *The Tiller in the Fields* (1978) |
| Further reading:  (The Antony Tudor Ballet Trust)  (Chazin-Bennahum)  (Denby)  (Duerden)  (Jordan)  (Martin)  (Perlmutter)  (Sawyer)  (Schoenberg)  (Topaz)  (Vaughan) |