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| **Howard, Andrée (1910-1968)** |
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| Andrée Howard belonged to a group of British choreographers, including Frederick Ashton and Antony Tudor, who began their careers with the Polish-born Marie Rambert in London. As a choreographer Howard worked predominantly within a ballet idiom, but she extended and exploited this to develop the potential for dramatic expression in the medium of modern ballet. Her versatile approaches to genre included the use of abstract and narrative forms and a witty penchant for comedy, and her styles ranged from lyrical and poetic to strikingly theatrical. During the 1930s and 1940s, Howard danced with, and created many ballets for, Rambert’s Ballet Club and the Ballet Rambert company. She found artistic collaboration within the intimate atmosphere of a small group most congenial, and her best choreography is represented by ‘chamber’ ballets created amongst individuals familiar with her working methods. As a talented visual artist, she frequently designed the sets and costumes for her ballets. Her major choreographic innovations belonged to the field of narrative ballet, where her focus on psychological expression was often inspired by literary text, as in *Lady into Fox* (1939) and *La Fête étrange* (*The Strange Celebration*, 1940), although she did not exclusively work in this medium. She also produced pure dance works throughout her career, including *Assembly Ball* (1946) and *Veneziana* (1953) for Sadler’s Wells Ballet. |
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She studied with Olga Preobrajenska in Paris, and in 1924 began full-time training with Rambert, giving her first performance with Rambert’s Ballet Club in 1927. A brief spell with the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo in 1932-3 gave her first-hand experience of the work of Léonide Massine (she danced in the premiere of Massine’s *Les Présages* in 1933) and Bronislava Nijinska, both of whom influenced her later choreography.  Howard had a distinguished career as a dancer as well as a choreographer. She performed both classical roles – including the Bluebird *pas de deux* and the Diamond Fairy variation from *Aurora’s Wedding* (1922), and Papillon in Fokine’s *Carnaval* (1910) – and contemporary ones. She frequently danced in new Rambert productions, including her own ballets; in 1932 Ashton created a solo, *Pompette* for her, and in 1938 she took over the role of the Fourth Song in Tudor’s *Dark Elegies* (1937) when Agnes de Mille, who originated the role, returned to the United States. Major Contributions to the Field and to Modernism Although Howard extended the existing boundaries of narrative ballet, she began by choreographing solos and divertissements. However, in 1933, when she produced a new version of Susan Salaman’s 1930 ballet *Our Lady’s Juggler* for Rambert, Howard’s gift for dramatic form was immediately evident. Equally evident was her gift her creating ‘non-human’ characters, in the form of animals, birds and insects, who figure in so many of her ballets, including *Lady into Fox* (1939) *Carnival of Animals* (1943) and *Le Festin d’airaignée* (*The Spider’s Banquet*, 1944).  Apart from Ballet Rambert, Howard worked with many groups and companies including the Camargo Society, London Ballet, Ballet Theatre, Sadler’s Wells, London Festival Ballet (for whom she contributed choreography for a notable production of the *Nutcracker* in 1965) and the Turkish State Ballet. She also worked in the commercial theatre and for television, and between 1936 and 1939 she choreographed plays for Birmingham Repertory Company, where she was well known as choreographer, dancer and designer. In 1937, a year after the release of the Reinhardt-Nijinska Hollywood film of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Howard contributed to the choreography and production of this play in Birmingham. Other notable contributions to drama included her choreography for *Romeo and Juliet* (1939), directed by Tyrone Guthrie, and for the 1944 Old Vic Company production of *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus*.  Howard’s literary sensibility was profound, and she frequently transposed literary works into dance form, as in her early comic piece inspired by Alexander Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* (1935). In several more serious narrative ballets, Howard often returned to the theme of an abandoned woman, isolated by social and patriarchal forces, where the dissemination of narrative through choreographed movement principally charts the inner conflict of the female protagonist. Sometimes her approach favoured a more poetically abstract style, as in *Death and the Maiden* (1937), but often her work was strictly narrative in a generic sense. She achieved critical recognition with *Lady into Fox*, based on a 1922 novel by David Garnett, with music by Arthur Honegger and designs by Nadia Benois. This was a contemporary ‘Ovidian’ metamorphosis in which an Edwardian wife, trapped in a life of oppressive social formality, prefers to occupy the pastoral rather than the domestic realm, becoming the fox of the title.  Howard travelled with Tudor to New York in 1939 to stage and to dance the leading roles in *Lady into Fox* and *Death and the Maiden* for Ballet Theatre’s debut season in 1940. She returned to Britain that same year to choreograph *La Fête étrange* for the London Ballet, with Maude Lloyd in the principal role. Using music by Gabriel Fauré and designs by Sophie Fedorovitch, Howard developed this work from Ronald Crichton’s idea to use a scenario based on an incident in Henri Alain-Fournier’s 1913 novella, *Le Grand Meaulnes* (*The Great Meaulnes*). Howard produced an atmospheric and poetic ballet presenting a bride’s internal discord as she enters upon marriage. *Fête* became the most distinguished ballet of Howard’s career, and was revived by several companies including Sadler’s Wells (1947), the Scottish Ballet (1971) and the Royal Ballet, first in 1958, when the part of the Bride was a notable vehicle for Svetlana Beriosova, and then in 2005 with Darcy Bussell as the Bride.  Howard followed the success of *Fête* with further ballets on literary or narrative themes, such as *Twelfth Night* (1942) for Mona Inglesby’s International Ballet and *The Fugitive* (1944) for Ballet Rambert. With *The Sailor’s Return* for Rambert in 1947 she again dramatised a 1925 Garnett novel, and in *A Mirror for Witches* (1952), for Sadler’s Wells, she used Ester Forbes’s 1928 novel of the same title – a fictional precursor of Arthur Miller’s play *The Crucible* (1952). Howard’s discrete but evocative transmission of the literary into the choreographed through corporeal expression, without recourse to histrionic effects, was both modernist in its emphasis on expressing interiority and pioneering in its sensitivity to the reciprocal relationship between literature and dance.  Howard made a frequently overlooked contribution to costume and stage design. *Mermaid* (1934, with Susan Salaman) set a precedent for Howard’s practice of designing for her own work, and her innovative sense of scenic ‘transformation’ in this ballet, based on Hans Christian Anderson’s fairy tale, anticipates later twentieth-century experimentation in British stage design. Her scenery for the *Sailor’s Return* (which moved from a West African jungle to a Victorian Dorset village), like her careful manuscript instructions to Norman Adam, who designed *A Mirror for Witches* (explaining the dream-like flight of the heroine between a domestic and woodland environment), illustrated Howard’s striking versatility in manipulating the modern stage space. With her Rambert colleague, William Chappell, whose designs for ballet were exhibited in 1993 alongside the work of Fedorovitch, John Piper and David Hockney, Howard deserves recognition as a Rambert dancer who contributed innovative design to British dance. Legacy Howard’s choreographic influence on others was implicit rather than overt. Less well known than Tudor, Howard choreographed *La Fête êtrange* with equal subtlety as Tudor’s *Jardin aux lilas* (*Lilac Garden*, 1936), and, like Tudor, her work was important for its representation of human psychology. Howard’s distinctive contributions to Rambert and Sadler’s Wells companies helped to sustain the context for close literary connections between ballet and drama in Britain, and contributed to a mode of narrative expression in British ballet which continues to this day. Her innovative style, her attention to choreographic detail and precise understanding of female expression through the dancer’s medium has been praised by Rambert, Ninette de Valois, and many others. Amongst her early contemporaries at Rambert, Frederick Ashton echoes something of her wit as well as her restrained classicism. Moments of Ashton’s *Cinderella* for Sadler’s Wells (1948) reflect Howard’s 1935 *Cinderella* for Rambert, and Ashton’s *Ondine* (1958) reveals discrete visual allusions to Howard’s 1934 *Mermaid*. Mark Baldwin produced an imaginative recreation of *Lady into Fox* for Ballet Rambert in 2006.  Of all the Rambert choreographers of the early period, Howard came closest to expressing in dance a specifically female experience, exploring female psychological states and isolation in a way that recalls the formal experimentation of the modernist novel. Richard Buckle’s description of Howard in a 1953 review in *The Observer* as ‘the Virginia Woolf of choreographers’ characterised her unique contribution to dramatic ballet in Britain in the twentieth century.  Selected List of Works *Scherzo* (solo, 1931)  *La Belle écuyère* (*The Beautiful Cavalier*, solo, 1932)  *Our Lady’s Juggler* (1933, after Susan Salaman)  *Mermaid* (1934, with Susan Salaman)  *Alcina Suite* (1934)  *Cinderella* (1935)  *The Rape of the Lock* (1935)  *La Muse s’amuse* (*The Muse Has Fun*, 1936)  *Death and the Maiden* (1937)  *Croquis de Mercure* (*Sketches of Mercury*, 1938)  *Lady into Fox* (1939)  *La Fête étrange* (*The Strange Celebration*, 1940)  *Twelfth Night* (1942)  *Carnival of Animals* (1943)  *Le Festin de l’airaignée* (*The Spider’s Banquet*, 1944)  *The Fugitive* (1944)  *Assembly Ball* (1946)  *Mardi Gras* (1946)  *The Sailor’s Return* (1947)  *Selina* (1948)  *Ballamento* (1949)  *A Mirror for Witches* (1952)  *Veneziana* (1953)  *Vis-à vis* (1953)  *Conte Fatastique* (*Fantasy Tale*, 1957)  *La Belle dame sans merci* (*The Beautiful Lady without Mercy*, 1958)  *Les Barricades mystérieuses* (*The Mysterious Barricades*, 1962-3)  *The Tempest* (1964) Selected Choreography for Plays, Opera and Musical Theatre *Beau Brummel* (musical play, 1933)  *Televariety* (revue, 1935)  *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (play, 1936)  *The Insect Play* (TV play, 1937)  *The Golden Apple* (TV ballet, 1937)  *Acis and Galatea* (opera, 1938)  *An Elephant in Arcady* (musical play, 1938)  *The Swiss Family Robinson* (musical play, 1938)  *Arlecchino* (opera, 1939)  *Romeo and Juliet* (play, 1939)  *Big Top* (Cochran revue, 1942)  *It’s Foolish but it’s Fun* (revue, 1943)  *The Tragedy of Dr Faustus* (play, 1944)  *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (play with music, 1948)  *Sauce Tartare* (revue, 1949)  *Sauce Piquante* (revue, 1950)  *Orlando’s Silver Wedding* (sung narrative, 1951)  *Merrie England* (comic opera, 1960) |
| Further reading:  (Gilmour)  (Jones)  (Lloyd)  (Pritchard)  (Pritchard, Stepping Through History: The Transformation of Lady into Fox)  (Rambert)  (Sorley Walker)  (Mathieson)  (Ballet Rambert: The First Fifty Years)  (Rambert at 90) |