**Robinson, Jacqueline (b. 26 October 1922, London, England; d. 8 July 2000, Paris, France)**

**Summary**

A Franco-British dancer, teacher, choreographer and historian, Jacqueline Robinson is one of the key figures of modern dance in France. Born in London, educated in music, art history and dance with Erina Brady and Mary Wigman, Robinson founded L’Atelier de la Danse in Paris in 1955. One of the first schools to offer modern dance training, the Atelier soon became a hub for international artists. A prolific choreographer who created more than 200 works, Robinson was particularly important for the development of dance education in France structured around choreographic composition, improvisation and music studies rather than a specific technique. She directed several companies – L’Ensemble de l’Atelier de la Danse, Le Thyrse and Le Zodiaque – and trained some of today’s most accomplished choreographers and dancers. The translator of writings by Doris Humphrey, John Martin and Mary Wigman, Robinson was the author of *L’Aventure de la danse moderne* *1920-1970* (*Modern Dance in France, 1920-1970: An Adventure*, 1990), a ground-breaking, now classic work of French dance scholarship. Head of the Fédération française de la danse from 1978-82, she became a Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters in 1999 for her outstanding contributions to the field of dance.

**Training**

As a child, Robinson studied rhythmic dance (*danse rythmique)* with Yvonne Redgis at her Paris studio. She went on to study piano with Yvonne Lefébure and returned to dance in 1941, studying with a Wigman-trained teacher, Erina Brady, in Dublin where her family settled as refugees during the Second World War. After the war, she took classes with the Jooss-trained dancer  Segurd Leeder, theatre workshops with  Mytho Bourgoin and Ludolf Schild, and in 1947 danced in Mila Cirul’s *Chemin de la vie* (*Path of Life*) at the choreographic competition sponsored by the Archives Internationales de la Danse (AID) in Copenhagen. Here she met Françoise and Dominique Dupuy. They became very close friends and over the next several decades undertook many collaborative teaching projects. A major turning point came in the 1950s when Robinson attended Mary Wigman’s workshops in Montreux (1952) and in Berlin (1956). She described the encounter with Wigman as a revelation and would incorporate the latter’s vision into her own teaching and composition classes, providing her students with tools for developing their own choreographic language.

**Contributions to the Field and to Modernism**

Robinson’s achievements can only be understood through her simultaneous and complementary engagements in dance. She founded her first school, the Jacqueline Robinson Dance Studio, in Nottingham in 1947, two years before settling in Paris. In 1955, with the strong encouragement of Pierre Tugal, the former AID director and head curator, Robinson founded the L’Atelier de la Danse at her Avenue Junot home in Paris with a goal of fostering the development of *danse d’expression* – or ‘expressive dance’ – through teaching, conferences and exhibitions, and by promoting research on the fundamentals of dance practice. Her pioneering school initiated a three-year professional dance training in 1961 when contemporary dance had yet to receive state recognition and sponsorship. Described by Robinson’s biographer Geneviève Piguet as neutral in stylistic orientation, the Atelier offered a well-rounded dance education intended to develop versatile dancers rather than a curriculum based on a codified technique. Dancers such as Jerome Andrews, Laura Sheleen and Susan Buirge taught at the Atelier, as did the painter Basil Rakoczi and the dance notator Jacqueline Challet-Haas, making it a truly international venue.

Robinson made her debut as a dance critic in the early 1950s, contributing articles to the magazines Art et danse (*Art and Dance*) and *Danser* (*Dancing*). Convinced of the importance of promoting contemporary dance through the written word, she published *Les Cahiers de l’atelier de la danse* (*The Journal of the Dance Studio*) from 1962-1975. Faithful to transmitting knowledge outside the dance studio, she wrote about dance teaching in *L’Enfant et la danse* [(*The Child and Dance*, 1988)in addition to translating Wigman’s *The Language of Dance*and Humphrey’s *The Art of Making Dances* into French.

Passionate about memory and history, in 1990 she published her seminal work *L’Aventure de la danse moderne 1920-1970* (*The Modern Dance Adventure 1920-1970*), which revealed, according to Dominique Dupuy, yesterday’s roots in today’s dance. In 1996 Robinson reconstructed *Stèle* (*Stone*) for the French-based Argentinian choreographer and dancer Marylén Breuker. Originally choreographed in 1969, the reconstruction was based on materials from Robinson’s archive, now in the collection of the Institut Mémoires de l’Edition Contemporaine (Institute for the Preservation of Contemporary Publishing Archives, IMEC). This is one of France’s largest dance repositories and a major source for the study of the country’s modern dance tradition.

**Legacy**

A committed activist, Robinson was associated with major French professional bodies such as the Syndicat national des auteurs et compositeurs (SNAC, National Union of Authors and Composers, SNAC), the Conseil national de la danse (National Council of Dance), as well as the Rencontres internationales de danse contemporaine (RIDC, International Association for Contemporary Dance). She headed the Fédération française de la danse (French Federation of Dance) from 1978-1982 and became a Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters in 1999. She taught generations of French contemporary dancers, such as Christine Gérard, Alexandre Witzman-Anaya, Nathalie Collantès and Stéphanie Roussel.

**List of Works: Choreography**

**Solo Dances**

*The Hooded Lover* (1946)

*Angelus* (1946)

*Kermesse* (1949)

*L’adieu* (1954)

*Chaconne* (1956)

*Le sablier* (1956)

*Charmes* (1958)

*Le jardin clos* (1965)

*Hommage à Cocteau* (1966)

*Rites* (1967) (revived in 1986)

*Oiseau triste* (1969)

*Stèle* (1969) (revived in 1996)

*Elégie pour Tristan* (1970)

*Nocturno*s (1972)

*Suite gaëlique* (1973)

*Lamento* (1974)

*Pietà* (1975)

*Passages* (1986)

*La Sibilla* (1987)

*Chemin critique* (1989)

**Group Works**

*Cantique pour la terre* (1959)

*Cantos de Mallorca* (1959)

*Danseries pour Noël* (1959)

*Les illuminations* (1963)

*La petite sirène* (1964)

*Portes et ombres* (1964)

*Concerto* (1967)

*Rites* (1967) (revived in 1986)

*Terre d’exil* (1968)

*Orbites* (1968)

*Algorythme* (1969)

*Magnificat* (1970)

*Fortuna* (1972)

*Aube* (1977)

*Epilogue* (1983)

**List of Works: Books and Articles**

Robinson, J. (2006) ‘The Lost Chapter: Modern Dance in 1940s Dublin’ in Mulrooney, D.*, Irish Moves: An Illustrated History of Dance and Physical Theatre in Ireland*, Dublin: The Liffey Press: 83-114. (Robinson’s reminiscences of Erina Brady and June Fryer in Dublin)

Robinson, J. (1997) *Une Certaine Idée de la danse, réflexions au fil des jours*, Paris: Chiron. (A collection of essays on what constitutes the essence of contemporary dance)

Robinson, J. (1995) *L’Atelier de la Danse 1955-1995 - Souvenirs*, Paris: self-published.

(A memoir of L’Atelier de la Danse)

Robinson, J. (1990) *L’Aventure de la danse moderne en France 1920-1970*, Paris: Bougé. An English-language version translated by Catherine Dale was published in 1997 as *Modern Dance in France, 1920-1970: An Adventure*, Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers. (A chronicle of modern dance pioneers in France divided into four chapters)

Robinson, J. (1975) *Mon enfant et la danse*, Paris: Editions universitaires. (Intended for children aged 8-13 as well as dance teachers, Robinson writes about the body, feeling, space, time and music.) A subsequent edition was published in 1988 under the title *L’Enfant et la danse*.

Robinson, J. (1962-63, 1973-75) *Les Cahiers de l’atelier*, Paris: self-published. (This was the bulletin of L’Atelier de la Danse)

**List of Works: Translations**

Humphrey, D. (1990) *Construire la danse*, Arles/Paris: Bernard Coutaz. (Translated from the English with a preface by Robinson)

Martin, J. (1991) *La danse moderne*, Paris: Actes sud. (Translated from the English by Robinson with the collaboration of Sonya Schoonejans)

Wigman, M. (1990) *Le langage de la danse*, Paris: Chiron. (Translated from the German with a preface by Robinson)

**Reference and Further Reading**

Andus L’Hotellier, S. (2012) *Les Archives Internationales de la Danse-Un projet inachevé 1931-1952*, Cœuvres-et-Valséry: Ressouvenances. (Includes a history of Robinson’s collaborations with Pierre Tugal and the Archives Internationales de la Danse)

Andus L’Hotellier, S. (2010) ‘Paroles de chercheurs-Les archives d’une veilleuse’, *La Lettre de l’IMEC* no.12, Paris : IMEC: 40-41. (Overview of the Jacqueline Robinson Collection at IMEC)

<http://www.imec-archives.com/la_lettre_12.pdf>

Baxmann, I., Rousier, C., Veroli, P. (ed.) (2006) *Les Archives internationales de la danse 1931-1952*, Pantin : CND. (Includes brief references to Robinson’s participation in the 1947 choreographic competition sponsored by the Archives Internationales de la Danse in Copenhagen)

Dupuy, D. (2001) ‘Adresse à Jacqueline Robinson, communication à l’occasion de l’hommage à Jacqueline Robinson au Centre national de la danse, octobre 1999’, in Dupuy, Françoise and Dominique, *Une danse à l’œuvre*, Pantin: CND and SN La Roche-sur-Yon, pp. 185-90. (Dominique Dupuy’s text for the homage to Jacqueline Robinson at the Centre National de la Danse, October 1999)

Piguet, G. (1990) ‘Jacqueline Robinson’ in Robinson, Jacqueline, *L’Aventure de la danse moderne en France 1920-1970*, Paris: Bougé, pp. 219-27. (A biography written by Geneviève Piguet, a former Atelier dancer, at Robinson’s request)

**Jacqueline Robinson Archives**

The Jacqueline Robinson Archives were given to the Institut Mémoires de l’Edition Contemporaine (IMEC) in Normandy in 1999. The series of materials under the heading JRB include manuscripts, work diaries and scrapbooks, editorial archives, trade union material, photographs, correspondence, press books, costumes and materials of her school L’Atelier de la Danse. The highlight of the archives is the collection of choreographic notes and programmes spanning 1935 to 1999 related to Robinson’s career as a dancer, choreographer and, finally, the head of one of the first professional contemporary dance schools in France. The Jacqueline Robinson Archives also hold collections given to Robinson by two friends and colleagues – the Swiss modern dancer Anne Gardon (1910-1999) and the Spanish composer Francisco Semprun (1928-1986) – making it the memory site of the international artistic family of modern dancers in France.

<http://www.imec-archives.com/fonds_archives_fiche.php?i=JRB>

**Moving Image Material**

*Terre d’exil: Que sont devenus les vaillants de ce monde?* (*Land of Exile: What Happened to the Courageous of this World?* 1968)

(Videotape of an open-air performance choreographed by Jacqueline Robinson. Music by Mikis Theodorakis and traditional songs. Costumes by Nicole Princet. Directed by Alain Lartigue. Performed by Christine Gérard, Marie Odile Langlère, and Jacqueline Robinson, with Nathalie Collantès and Borghild Dudde, Carole Durand, Madeleine Fajon, Huguette Maillard and Anne Mulliez. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

<http://nypl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/12168492052_terre_dexil>

**Websites**

This website about Jacqueline Robinson and her husband Octave Géliner, assembled by their children, includes photographs of Robinson (from her archives at IMEC) and a short biography.

<http://www.ogelinier-jrobinson.fr>

Nathalie Collantès’s projects on Jacqueline Robinson: <http://prodbabel.blogspot.com/p/cie-fbn-collantes-paris.html>

**Paratextual Material**

[Please see images, which have been sent as separate files.]

All images come from the Jacqueline Robinson Collection, Institut Mémoires de l’Edition Contemporaine (IMEC)

[www.imec-archives.com](http://www.imec-archives.com)

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Programme: Mytho Bourgoin presents Jacqueline Robinson at the Archives Internationales de la Danse (AID), Paris, 8 November 1949. Jacqueline Robinson Collection, IMEC.

Cover for the first issue of the *Cahiers de l’atelier de la danse*, September 1962. Jacqueline Robinson Collection, IMEC.

Choreographic notes for *Rites* (1967; revived 1986), indicating the entrance of the group of four dancers and the two soloists. The 1986 cast included Nathalie Collantès, Brigitte Dupré Latour, Christine Gérard, Marie-Odile Langlère, Dominique Lemarquis, Catherine Lika, Stéphanie Roussel and Dominique Schmitt. Jacqueline Robinson Collection, IMEC.

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