

NFSA-CP-Lester

DANCE REPRESENTATIONS AT THE NFSA Dr Garry Lester has worked in the area of performance for more than thirty years as a performer, choreographer & teacher.

As a Fellow at the Centre for Scholarly & Archival Research hosted by the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra, Dr Lester had access to its many treasures. In this lecture he will talk about the significance of his discoveries & reflect upon the challenges of 'locating' & 'accessing' resources within a national archive.

Searching for Dance Gems at the NFSA

Let me commence this paper with some poetry:

Blood, Blood, Blood, Blood
Play the deadly voodoo rattle
Voodoo rattle
Voodoo rattle

Harry, the Upland
Harry, the Upland

Steal all the cattle
Steal all the cattle

Rattle, rattle, rattle, rattle, rattle, rattle, rattle.
Bing.

Boong lay
Boong lay
Boong lay.
Boong.

Be careful, what you do, what you do.

Oh, Mumbo Jumbo God of the Congo
And all of the other Gods of the Congo

Hoodoo, hoodoo, hoodoo you
Hoodoo, hoodoo, hoodoo you
Mumbo Jumbo hoodoo you
Mumbo Jumbo hoodoo you

Hoodoo, hoodoo, hoodoo you

Hoodoo, hoodoo, hoodoo you

Pooooffff.

You. You¹.

The significance of this recitation will become apparent later in this discussion.

When one searches the catalogue and enters the word 'dance' there are almost 2000 listings to peruse. If the word 'ballet' is entered there are over 900 catalogue entries. When one uses dance specific terms such as modern dance, expressionist dance, post-modernism, or ausdruckstanz there is either no recognition of the term or a very limited response.

Many of the ballet entries have a comprehensive listing of the content of the film or artefact but this is not the case with non-ballet holdings. If you know exactly what you are searching for in the world of modern dance, say the work of the Australian Dance Theatre (ADT) you will find a number of entries. If you are searching ADT at the time that Elizabeth Cameron Wilson was its director it is helpful to know that she was known at that time as Elizabeth Dalman, still it is not a difficult navigation exercise to determine if the archive has the resources you are searching for. If you are searching the ADT repertoire during the tenure of former directors Jonathan Taylor, the interim directorship of Anthony Steel and Lenny Westerdijk, Leigh Warren, Meryl Tankard, or the current director Garry Stewart the name search will provide you with a number of listings. This is the case with many recognized companies and choreographers but there are gaps in the system and it is usually in the non-ballet or 'modern' dance listings.

A database is only as good as the data it contains and unfortunately MAVIS, the Merged Audio Visual Information System can let you down when you are searching the non-ballet dance representations within the archive.

Very soon into my Fellowship at the Centre for Scholarly and Archival Research it became clear that in terms of documentation of the dance resources at the National Film and Sound Archive there needs to be a concerted effort to clearly identify, categorize, and list the content of the artefact, including; the name of the work; key personnel; including the choreographer and wherever possible the dancers; where the work was recorded and by whom. There is one exception to this problematic and that is the Classical Ballet entries. "Ballet knows its place" and in the time of the *Keep Dancing* project collaboration between the NFSA and the National Library of Australia, there was a Curator who knew the ballet and documented a substantial number of the ballet holdings. Since that time there has been little expert attention given to cataloguing what is a quite extraordinary and broad ranging dance collection. It would be to the benefit of the institution and the ever-increasing number of people who are interested in dance to invest in ongoing dance specific curatorial expertise.

In terms of ‘discovering’ previously unknown resources within the collection it is still a pioneer’s frontier. Because of the paucity of recognition of dance-based key words (such as by style or genre) and also a lack of familiarity with important early practitioners whose work has been neglected in the contemporary world, there are many ‘gems’ that await discovery by creative and lateral thinking. A case in point is the work of Irene Vera Young, which will become apparent later in this paper. Simply put, the breadth of the content of the dance holdings cannot be easily located in the manner you would by a google search unless more expertise is used to describe each and every dance artefact in the catalogue.

My research was focused on the work of two distinguished Australian choreographers, Margaret Barr and Kai Tai Chan, who used ‘dance as a social forum’, that is work that deals with social, cultural and political issues, rather than simply focusing on questions of kinaesthesia. Both these choreographers valued the intrinsic qualities of movement, not as an end in itself but as a means of expressing ideas about the world in which they found themselves. To arrive at an understanding of what they did and how they went about it, not only did I have to investigate their work but I had to contextualize it in terms of the cultural and creative landscape of the time.

I decided that the best way to utilize my three months as a CSAR Fellow was to view as much as I possibly could and (as a secondary focus) to update the database when I came across entries that were either inaccurate or without substantive provenance. One of the privileges of being a Fellow is that we live in a residence next door to the NFSA with onsite viewing suites, which allows us to work as long as we wish to in any twenty-four hour timeframe. It is simply a matter of ordering the resources and the helpful CSAR staff will deliver ‘access copies’ (usually in VHS format) by the trolley load.

In terms of ‘discovering’ previously unknown resources within the collection it is still a pioneer’s frontier. Because of the paucity of recognition of dance-based key words (such as by style or genre) and also a lack of familiarity with important early practitioners whose work has been neglected in the contemporary world, there are many ‘gems’ that await discovery by creative and lateral thinking. A case in point is the work of Irene Vera Young, which will become apparent later in this paper. Simply put, the breadth of the content of the dance holdings cannot be easily located in the manner you would by a google search unless more expertise is used to describe each and every dance artefact in the catalogue.

There is such a wealth of dance material in the NFSA collection and the vast majority of it is easily accessible. The only difficulty I encountered was gaining access to films that were of great value due to their rarity or the volatility of the medium itself. In those cases they were designated strictly as preservation copies. It presents a conundrum in that the artefacts still exist but no one has access to them. There is also a political dimension associated with films

designated as preservation copies. There is a prioritized list of such films, which are slowly being given the careful attention and expertise they require to restore them and also to make accessible copies. Unfortunately, dance artefacts appear not to be a priority and so we have some very interesting films that just sit in a protected environment, unable to be accessed by anybody.

During the course of my research I came across a particularly alarming issue and that is the question of “repatriation” of films. I discovered three very important documents of such rarity and significance, not only to the national estate but also in terms of the history of twentieth century modernism that have been repatriated. Those films, all from 1925, are *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit — Ein Film über moderne Körperkultur (The Golden Road to Health and Beauty)*², and two films dealing with Callisthenics, a system of body movement exercise that promotes both strength and grace. The first of these calisthenics films presents the groundbreaking work in early kinesiology of *Dr Bess Mensendieck*,³ and the second, the Alice Bloch method⁴, demonstrates the aesthetic potential of the form.

The Golden Road to Health and Beauty (1925) was directed by Wilhelm Prager, with a screenplay by Nicholas Kaufmann, Wilhelm Prager, and Ernst Krieger, based on an original idea by the playwright Friedrich Wolf. It shows aspects of German expressionist dance and physical culture, including individuals and groups dancing with and without masks, and exercises carried out on a beach. The final scene from Rudolph Laban’s dance-drama *The Living Idol* is shown and Dusia Bereska from the Laban School performs *The Orchid*. There is also some exciting footage of Mary Wigman’s Tanzgruppe performing *The Wandering*. The cast is listed as: Rudolf Bode, Carola de la Riva, Jack Dempsey, Lloyd George, Jenny Hasselqvist, Gerhart Hauptmann, Camilla Horn, Niddy Impekoven, Bac Ishii, Konami Ishii, La Jana, Tamara Karsavina, Rocky Knight, Rudolf Kobs, Eve Liebenberg, Bess Mensendieck, Benito Mussolini, Ellen Petz, Babe Ruth, Hertha von Walther, Johnny Weissmüller, Carr Wills, Helen Wills, Peter Vladimiroff, and many others, with, The Dancers of the Mary Wigman School including Leni Riefenstahl. There is ongoing debate as to whether Riefenstahl actually appears in the film.

None of these three films was made in Australia, and the term ‘repatriation’ means ‘to restore or return (something) to its native land’. At face value it would seem a sensible solution to the problem of preserving and caring for rare and fragile artefacts that do not appear relevant to a national collection. Appearances are often deceptive and in this instance we have quite literally given away an important key to understanding the history and the philosophical underpinnings of the European modern dance heritage of this country.

Let me explain and amplify the significance of these artefacts by focusing on one example in particular. *The Golden Road to Health and Beauty* presents a social agenda about the benefits for society as a whole of encouraging health and fitness in its population, creating a discourse that linked these current concerns

with an idealized construction of the halcyon past of the Greco-Roman Empire in which ‘the body’ was re-imagined as a site that extended beyond physical fitness and prowess. In doing so, this call to ‘history’ was used to ‘reclaim’ and validate a contemporary ideological position about corporeality and its relationship to the life of the mind.

It also expresses a modernist concern with the subjectivity of the individual, given the rise of industrialism and the concomitant increase in leisure time for an increasing section of the population. This film harnesses medical and scientific discourses related to the physical, psychological, and spiritual benefits of exercise in a range of pursuits represented across the areas of sports, dance, and recreation, validating its message not only through demonstrations by practitioners but also the rhetoric of world leaders and eminent thinkers, not least of whom was David Lloyd George Britain’s Prime Minister during the First World War and statesman. While we are all familiar with the adage that links ‘a healthy body to a healthy mind,’ these discourses went even further creating a link between body culture and moral and ethical values: it was assumed that corporeal training also created rectitude.

There has been much scholarly research on the phenomenon of what has become known as “body culture”, or “the utopian search for perfect health and beauty” in Germany from the 1890s to the early 1930s, particularly in the work of Michael Hau⁵ and Karl Toepfer⁶. Hau presents the thesis that modern industrialisation caused deep seated anxiety about the physical and moral degeneration of German society (in particular), not only in terms of the sedentary lifestyle of many modern workers but also in terms of a middle class neurotic preoccupation with status within the changing social and economic order. While Hau’s book focuses on the competing ideological positions manifest across a broad range of aesthetic practices, Toepfer focuses specifically on the area of dance.

Both Hau and Toepfer give a fascinating account of the competing social groups ranging from alternative lifestyle devotees to modern medical practitioners who were united in their belief that the cultivation of a particular physicality signified ‘health’ and ‘beauty’, not only in a corporeal sense but also in terms of the psyche and the soul. Part of the fascination of these discourses is how we might find connections between these early 20th century constructions and the ways in which we presently attempt to create personal identity and our position within the social order through the shaping of our physicality. Our contemporary obsession with ‘the body’ and ‘the physical’ conflates the corporeal with the aesthetic and the moral in a manner that is reminiscent of this earlier wave of body culture.

While we may think this is a peculiar attitude I would like to suggest the situation is not so very different from our attitude to sports men and women in the contemporary world. There is an implicit assumption that their sporting prowess

connotes strong moral integrity in character and actions. Why else would there be such an outcry when one of these sporting heroes goes off the rails.

Perhaps it was thought that these ‘foreign’ films had little relevance to the Australian dance ecology. Nothing could be further from the truth. Many of the pioneers of modern dance in this country were European refugees who escaped the rising tide of Nazism and Fascism in the late 1930s. The most well known of these is of course Gertrud Bodenwieser and her group but there are so many others including Sonia Revid⁷, Elisabet Wiener, Ruth Bergner, Daisy Pirnitzer, Hanny Kolm, and of course the many who arrived after the second world war including Jean Dembitzka, and even later Zora Semberova who escaped from Prague as the Russian tanks invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968. Even Margaret Barr, the iconoclastic dance-drama pioneer whose formative training was in the USA affirmed the debt she owed to the European pioneers of expressionist dance⁸.

Each of these women brought to Australia a body of knowledge and a philosophical understanding of the nature and purpose of dance that was informed by these particular discourses. Given the inter-relationship between these films and local practice (in both the historical and contemporary sense), as part of an ongoing commitment to the richness and complexity of its dance collection the NFSA should give serious consideration to obtaining dance expertise when deciding whether to repatriate dance and ‘body culture’ films.

Before I continue I feel the need to unburden myself about a particularly strange phenomenon that occurred during my time as a CSAR Fellow. The memory of it evokes strong emotion even to this day:

Not long after I commenced my research I began to sense that something strange was happening within the storage facilities at the NFSA. It happened at the same time every night, between 3.15 am and 3.25 am, not quite the bewitching hour but film time alters our perception of the moments of our days. No matter where I was or what I was doing my consciousness would be altered and I would find myself in a disordered state of mind, full of frenzied excitement, verging on *ekstasis*.

This delirium was caused by the spirit of Terpsichore, Muse of choral songs and dance, releasing the captured images of our dancing past, creating a veritable corroboree of cinematic performance. That which was previously locked away and contained in separate media, different and incompatible film and video formats, was released into the ether. And in that ethereal state there was celebration and community as the different genres and styles of dance from diverse historical epochs conjoined in revelry.

Each night there would be new faces and fresh acquaintances yet there was a central and consistent core of lively entertainment as Katherine Dunham⁹, from

her bath of milk and honey watched the arrival of Anna Pavlova¹⁰ in Melbourne, while a group of maypole dancers from Kempsey wove intricate patterns with their ribbons and a group of Aboriginal men in traditional dress looked on¹¹. Russell Dumas and the Dance Exchange¹² cavorted with the cast of *No, No, Nanette*¹³, while adagio dancers performed atop a high building¹⁴, and Mischa Burlakov and Louise Lightfoot, in the tranquil confines of Castlecrag on Middle Harbour, reprised their Arabian-inspired play¹⁵. This joyous abandon and surrender, was blessed by artists of the Australian Ballet and Bangarra Dance Theatre as they performed their *Rites*¹⁶, and even though she no longer resides there, Mary Wigman and her group enacted *The Wandering*¹⁷...

Let us now turn to some of the wonders and small gems of the collection. For those who have any knowledge about the history of modern dance in Australia, particularly the European Expressive Dance, the most well known exponent of the form is Gertrud Bodenwieser. The NFSA has a substantial holding of Bodenwieser films, many of which were made by Eric Cuckson and his company Rondo films in the late 1950s including *Central Australian Suite*, *Blue Mountains Waltz*, *Demon Machine*, and *Dance Israeli* among others. There is also a copy of Cuckson's *The Living Art of the Dance*, produced in 1971 in which a number of Bodenwieser's early Viennese works dating from 1920 – 1939 were reconstructed by students.

While these films are valuable research tools in that the broadcast quality 16mm format documents the content of the work there is another film containing some wonderful moments from three of Bodenwieser's works and they are shot by a cinematographer who understands the medium of dance. This is the 1948 film *Spotlight on Australian Ballet*¹⁸, which was written, edited, and directed by Doc K Sternberg, with cinematography by (John) William Trerise, and produced by the Australian National Film Board. Trerise's credit in the film is designated as "Photography by William Trerise", which is not surprising, given the (Australian) Association of Cinematographers was not formed until 1958.

In terms of the cinematography, "Bill" Trerise has done a wonderful job in documenting what is a notoriously difficult art form. He is inventive in the choice of camera angles, often shooting from overhead and zooming into the dance action, giving a sense of the flow of movement, and is clearly aware that the whole body and massed action is important in understanding the choreography and thereby framing the dance. While this is the only dance related film I know of his involvement in, Trerise had a long history in the Australian film industry. He is credited as a cameraman on Norman Dawn's 1929 feature *For the Term of His Natural Life*, the Tim Gurr 1944 short documentary *Jungle Patrol*, filmed in New Guinea, and Charles Chauvel's 1955 film *Jedda*, among others. We see three excerpts from the Bodenwieser repertoire in the film and these are *Demon Machine*, *Blue Danube*, and *Waterlilies*.

Demon Machine: In the early 20th century the potentialities of the machine age were a site of widely divergent opinion in the representations of the visual and performing arts. At one extreme the Italian Futurists celebrated its possibilities embodied in Marinetti's famous manifesto, while at the other extreme the Arts and Crafts movement wished to retreat into a state of bucolic grace denying its very existence. It held a great fascination for artists of the Bauhaus movement, particularly Oskar Schlemmer who displayed great irony and wit in his costume designs and choreography for the Mechanical Ballets. Yet in the film world it became the visual metaphor for enslavement under capitalism in Fritz Lang's 1927 masterpiece Metropolis.

Interestingly in 1924 Gertrud Bodenwieser created a cautionary tale about its potential dehumanising effect, which predates Fritz Lang's masterpiece. *Dämon Maschine (Demon Machine)* is one part of a four-part work titled *Gewalten des Lebens (The Forces of Life)*. Her programme note for *Demon Machine* states:

The machine is gaining ascendancy over the souls of people instead of the people dominating the machine.¹⁹

Throughout the twenty years of the Bodenwieser Ballet in Australia *Demon Machine* became a staple and a 'stand alone' work in the Bodenwieser repertoire. To date I have found no record that she performed all four sections of *The Forces of Life* in Australia. Marie Cuckson, the Bodenwieser historian and patron has suggested that one of the reasons for its appeal on the extended country tours by the company was that the men in her audiences, who had been dragged along by their wives to a dance concert, found they could finally relate to the subject matter of a ballet.

The movement choices used in *Demon Machine* owes a debt to callisthenics in their formal, regimented, mechanistic and repetitive nature and it is a reminder of the value of the repatriated callisthenics films I mentioned earlier in this paper. This mechanistic quality is an extreme contrast to the lyrical flowing movements that begin the dance. The dancer on her knee performing the sweeping arc with her arms and torso is Shona Dunlop MacTavish who was a dancer in Madame's company in Vienna in the 1930s, and who remained with the company in Australia during the 1940s. At the age of 88 Shona is still teaching Expressionist dance in Dunedin in New Zealand.

The fascination of the machine has become a site of investigation for a number of contemporary choreographers in this new century, particularly in the work of Garry Stewart at ADT. Stewart's work appears to contain no critique of its potential, seeming to have at its core a sense of fascination with the prosthetic and robotic interface between man and machine and a celebration of cyborg technology. Like the Performance Artist Stelarc whose body of work over more than 30 years embraces this brave new world, Stewart's work seems imbued

with the spirit of both the Bauhaus and the Futurists rather than the cautionary ethos of Frau Gertie and Fritz Lang.

The Blue Danube assumes an even greater poignancy when one realises this version of *The Blue Danube* was created in 1940 after the outbreak of the Second World War and Bodenwieser's necessary departure from Austria. The joy expressed by the dancers is bitter sweet in its recognition of present circumstances and defiant in its belief that civilized culture will once more prevail.

Hanny Exiner who danced with Bodenwieser in Vienna as Hanny Kolm and on the first Australian tour in 1940 has commented on the dynamic range of her work:

Bodenwieser's style reflected her personality: impulsive, dramatic. She favoured circles, waves, figures of eight, spirals. Her movements were strong but not sharp, gentle but not sweet. They were full of dynamic impulses and (extended passages of) free flowing (movement), yet at every moment the dance pattern produced a satisfying sculptural effect. There was much use of floor level, of high leaps, of powerful leg movements and whirling turns, as well as most delicate and sensitive gestures of hands, heads and torso.

All Bodenwieser's images became truly dance. Although she gave much prominence to facial expression and hand movements, there was never any trace of balletic pantomime, except in her parodies. Movement, music, and costuming, all became one in conveying what she wanted to say to her audience. She was a master in creating just that kind of atmosphere which would give her dances the strength to speak with total conviction, and furthermore to transcend the purely personal into a realm of wider and more universal significance²⁰.

In talking with one of our tribal elders (Professor) Shirley McKechnie, I was reminded of the fact that Madame's waltzes contained not only deep back arches but these were executed with a simultaneous drop to the side. Bodenwieser herself acknowledged the debt she owed to Grete Wiesenthal²¹ and named the turning sequences in her Waltzes "Wiesenthal Turns".

Waterlilies: The next work I would like to discuss is a small section of Bodenwieser's 1925 dance called *Passionsblumen* or *Waterlilies*. The performers are Evelyn Ippen and Bettina Vernon and it has been set outdoors at Centennial Park. One might almost say that the director and cinematographer have 'gilded the lily' in an attempt to amplify the subject matter of the dance. There is an elegance and simplicity in the small lyrical gestures of the two women who represent a movement visualisation of Edward MacDowell's piano composition *To a Waterlily*. It is a work of stark dissimilarity to *Demon Machine* and by its very contrast illustrates the breadth of movement qualities and

dynamic range in Bodenwieser's dances. It also alerts the viewer to the recurring motif of the multi-limbed being in many of her works: the two dancers at times seem to merge into one being. Karl Toepfer in his commentary on *Frau Gertie's ausdruckstanz* has also suggested there is a highly charged homoeroticism manifest in these small studies.

Spotlight on Australian Ballet contains one other wonderful snippet of the contemporary dance world of 1948 and that is a brief look inside the studio of Elisabet Wiener where an improvisation session is taking place. Given the focus of the film is ballet, the way the film is structured and the examples that are given suggests that dance is only created by a 'master' choreographer who then teaches the material to the dancers. One of the hallmarks of the Expressive dance tradition is the valuing of creative exploration through improvisation. Wiener's pupils create simple sequences of movement while travelling diagonally across the studio space demonstrating that dancers may have 'agency' in the creative process.

A program note from a 1947 concert helps to understand Elisabet Wiener's dance heritage:

Continental dancer Elisabet Wiener studied modern dance at the Wigman School, Berlin, under the direction of Berte Bartholome Trumy, and classical ballet under Eugenia Edwardova. She danced under Gertrud Maudrick at the Opera in Berlin, toured America with Ernest Matray's company in 1935 and Italy as partner of Ernesto Campodini in 1936.²²

It wasn't long after that tour that she migrated to Melbourne where she set up her school and a series of dance groups, the most famous of which was the Australian Contemporary Dance Company. A considerable number of very interesting modern dancers including Valerie Grieg, Mernda Knox, and Ruth Bergner, worked with her during the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s.

I have long been fascinated by the work of the early modern dance pioneer Irene Vera Young²³ the highly regarded exponent of the German Dance in 1930s Sydney. Her archives are stored at the State Library of NSW and the dance historian Lynn Fisher has written an illuminating paper on her published by Brolga.

Young trained in the German Expressive dance with Sarah Mildred Strauss, and Hans Wiener (later known as Jan Veen), in New York between 1926 and 1932. In 1936 she won a gold medal at the Cultural Olympiad of the Berlin Olympics.

She had a great reputation for her solo work and Movement Choirs here in Sydney throughout the 1930s. One of the most talked about performances was her collaboration with Ilma Barnes and her Speech Choir. While there are

photographic records of her various concerts we have until now had no audio-visual record of her work.

When I scoured the NFSA catalogue I had no luck when I entered Young's name and that of Ilma Barnes, or German Dance, or Movement Choirs, and I was about to give up the search when I entered "Congo", which is part of the title of one of her works. The film is a little over a minute and comes from 1934 Newsreel footage and it shows a very brief section from the Movement and Speech Choir collaboration performed by a small group of her students, including her daughter Barbara, on the roof-top of a building in the Sydney CBD. The title of the Newsreel/Magazine footage is "Sydney Girls Get Congo Fever Badly".²⁴

While I had no luck when I entered Irene Vera Young's name and there were no suggestions offered, when I entered Congo and found what I was looking for, the content description lists Irene Young. In a true google search if I listed 'dance' and 'Irene Vera Young,' and there was an entry for a dancer without the middle name google would ask me if I meant 'Irene Young.'

The steps are relatively simple and the compositional shape of the work is arranged so as to mirror the rhythmical structure of the poem. While we do not see Young performing, she is beating the drum and intoning the poem. Given the photographic evidence of her prowess in performance (available on the State Library of NSW website and in the photographic collection of her Manuscript collection), her solo dance would have had a greater level of sophistication and technical expertise than the group work of the Movement Choir, which displays compositional competence but little creative imagination.

The poem composed by Vachel Lindsay in 1914 is titled The Congo: a Study of the Negro Race. It is a substantial poem divided into three sections and Irene Vera Young's recitation comes from section one with slight variations from the original text. The poem is highly problematic in its depiction of black people, put simply it is racist, but there is a level of complexity in Lindsay's personal attitude to race. He was an early champion of the little known and later famous black American poet, novelist, playwright, and short story writer of the Jazz Age, Langston Hughes.

A number of critics have described the verse as a precursor to 'sound poetry': a form of literary or musical composition in which the phonetic aspects of human speech are fore-grounded at the expense of more conventional semantic and syntactic values. By definition, sound poetry is intended primarily for performance. Even if we treat it as 'sound poetry' the problematic of the construction of race is amplified because it is embedded in the pseudo 'primitive' movement of the performers, which brings our attention back to the content of the words.

Before we discuss the next snippet titled *Outdoor Ballet: Brisbane*²⁵ I need to comment on the voice-over by Charles Lawrence that accompanies it. It isn't long before any researcher who accesses Cinesound Review footage comes across what is supposed to be the droll commentary of Mr Lawrence. In this instance it is simple ridicule but there are occasions where his voice-over is racist and obscene. The content of his commentaries would make a fascinating research project but I will leave that to a braver soul than I. A brief history of Cinesound is interesting because of its longevity and the range of subjects it covered:

Launched on November 7th 1931 and running to episode 2031, in October 1970, Cinesound Review was part of Cinesound Productions (a subsidiary of the Union Theatres/Greater Union group). It was famous for its kangaroo logo and the voice of popular commentator Charles Lawrence. Cinesound was noted for its frequent expression of 'editorial' opinion on current issues.²⁶

And now we turn to the subject of this film clip. It is from the late 1930s and comes from the oldest ballet school in Queensland, what is now called the Ashgrove Dance Studio in Brisbane. It was founded in 1899 by Nellie Lawrence, and directed by Katie Cannan from 1913 to 1922, the directors at the time this footage was shot were Thelma Robertson and Brenda McCullough. The school was a member of the Society of Operatic Dancing, which became, by Royal Charter, the Royal Academy of Dancing in 1936. While the predominant focus of the school was classical ballet, there was also syllabus work in the Revived Greek Dancing and early modern dance techniques, the influence of which can be seen in the group of barefoot young women working with the large piece of fabric. This segment is clearly reminiscent of Doris Humphrey's 1920 work for 5 women titled *Soaring*,²⁷ a music visualisation that seeks to interpret Schumann's *Aufschwung* and what Humphrey described as "the lyrical idea of wind, wave and cloud in fleeting form of a great veil".

It is interesting to note that at the same time as our ballerina en pointe is portraying a peacock there was, in Melbourne, a modern dancer called Patricia Edie who was famous for her barefoot and earthy interpretation of the Lyrebird.

In terms of adjunct techniques taught by the RAD, the Revived Greek Dance has in recent times been replaced by the study of Hip Hop.

I would like to conclude this paper by drawing your attention to a wonderful gem of the collection titled "Menace – or Just another Craze. The Widgies and the Bodgies,"²⁸ which takes us into the dance and fashion mad world of a group of young working class men and women in Sydney in 1951. While the film clips I have referred to throughout this paper give a fascinating glimpse into the little known world of modernism in Australian dance, those images also represent performance practices of predominantly middle class dancers. The widgies and

the bodgies were working class and their dances were recreational pursuits to be enjoyed by all participants. Of course there are elements of display and spectacle just as we see in the 'performance' genre of dance but active participation was the primary aim of the activity and it is a wonderful insight into another little known era of our dance history.

These dancers display a remarkable level of technique that was achieved not through classroom training but through the act of participating in the activity. While the technique is apparent it is not the primary goal of the dance: their technical prowess serves to heighten their enjoyment of the activity.

At present dance is making a cultural resurgence thanks to programs like So You think You Can Dance and video music programs that are driven just as much by the dance component as the music.

It is fascinating to see that the energetic but pacific gyrations of these young men and women were once seen as a threat to the very fabric of civil society. The Mazengarb Report (Report of the Special Committee on Moral Delinquency in Children and Adolescents) of 1954 was partly a response to the emergence of the bodgie & widgie subculture.

In 1956, the Sydney Morning Herald suggested:

The first bodgies were World War 2 Australian seamen who as well as impersonating Americans were black marketers and the first bodgie gang was the 'Woolloomooloo Yanks' who congregated in Cathedral Street Woolloomooloo. By 1948, about 200 bodgies were regularly frequenting Kings Cross milk bars. Soon, bodgie gangs formed at other inner-Sydney locations. After a time, moccasins and American drape suits complete with pegged trousers replaced their attire of blue jeans and leather American Airline jackets or zoot suits. For bodgies, almost all of whom were working class, emulating the high status Americans who had so recently occupied Australia as military personnel was easier than achieving upward social mobility.²⁹

In 1983, the Melbourne Age suggested:

...the term "bodgie" arose around the Darlinghurst area in Sydney. It was just after the end of World War II and rationing had caused a flourishing black market in American-made cloth. "People used to try and pass off inferior cloth as American-made when in fact it was not: so it was called bodgie"... "When some of the young guys started talking with American accents to big-note themselves they were called bodgies."³⁰

Let me conclude this paper by suggesting that given the wealth of material I have discovered at the NFSA, some of it previously unknown and most of it not familiar

to a broad public, I would like to continue my investigation and develop a documentary and a series of DVD's that reveal some of the breadth of a quite extraordinary dance history we have in this country. Who knows, I may even be able to capture the ecstatic corroboree of performance that took place in the wee small hours of the mornings of my Fellowship...

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NOTES

¹ See - The Congo: a Study of the Negro Race by Vachel Lindsay, a poem in three parts. (1) Their Basic Savagery (2) Their Irrepressible High Spirits (3) The Hope of Their Religion. What I have quoted is a transcription of Irene Vera Young's recitation of a section of part (1) of Lindsay's poem. Young has taken liberties with the original text, and the variations are clear when you read the original poem.

² *The Golden Road to Health and Beauty* garnered international popularity after its release and was shown widely in Australia in the 1930s. It was shown at Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, the silent film festival in Pordenone, Italy as recently as October 2007 (Title No: 106673 Rack No: XBX001588)

³ *Callisthenics: Dr Bess Mensendieck*: (1925) shows women performing calisthenics, naked, in the open air. In the early history of modern dance and expressive dance, the medical discourses surrounding the benefits of exercise and movement efficiency were very influential in the dance world. Practitioners embraced these 'scientific' findings and incorporated them in a kinaesthetic framework. (Title No: 9779 Rack No: XBW001258)

⁴ *Callisthenics: Alice Bloch Method* (1925). The German inter-title states “Der sinn fur rhythmus slummert in jeden menschen; er mur nur gerweckt werden”, which means “The need for rhythm in all humankind; they must surrender to it”. The film shows women dancing rhythmically in the open air in an early form of leotard. (Title No: 9740 Rack No: XBX002990)

⁵ Hau, M. *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany: A Social History 1890 – 1930*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2003

⁶ Toepfer, K. *Empire of Ecstasy*, University of California Press, California, 1997

⁷ See Amanda Card, ‘Prominence in Obscurity, Sonia Revid in Melbourne 1932 – 1945’ in *Brolga 10*, June 1999, Ausdance ACT (pp 6 – 19)

⁸ For further discussion on these important figures see Alan Brissenden and Keith Glennon’s long awaited publication *Australia Dances, Creating Australian Dance 1945 – 1965*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, South Australia – in press – publication Summer 2008/2009

⁹ See Kathrine Dunham (sic) Title No: 123038 Movietone News, 1957 (Women and Hygiene)

¹⁰ See Anna Pavlova Title No: 71976 Newsreels/Magazines, 1926

¹¹ See Maypole and Aboriginal men Title No: 128523 Homemovies/recording, 1936

¹² See Russell Dumas and Dance Exchange Titles: 384524, 384551, and 384540, all 1982

¹³ See *No, No, Nanette*, Title No: 690385 videorecording undated

¹⁴ See Adagio dancers on rooftop Title No: 260831, 1939

¹⁵ See Mischa Burlakov and Louise Lightfoot, Title No: 14539, c 1927

¹⁶ See *Rites* Title No: 334506, Advertisement/promotion/commercial, 1997

¹⁷ See Mary Wigman, The Golden Road to Health and Beauty Title No: 106673 Rack No XBX001588, 1925, Repatriated

¹⁸ See *Spotlight on Australian Ballet*, 1948 (Moving picture), 16 mm film, directed by Doc K. Sternberg; black and white, sound, 47 mins. (Title No: 11165) and *Spotlight on Australian Ballet outtakes* (Title No: 11425)

¹⁹ Program note for the 1940 Australian Tour of The Viennese Ballet

²⁰ Hanny Exiner quoted in Dunlop MacTavish, S. An Ecstasy of Purpose: The Life and Art of Gertrud Bodenwieser, Shona Dunlop MacTavish, Les Humphrey and Associates, (ISBN 0-473-00494-1) Sydney, 1987, (p 16)

²¹ In 1908, Grete Wiesenthal made her debut at the Viennese Fledermaus Cabaret, where she presented what established her fame: exhilarating dance whirling in spinning movements from waltz melodies

²² Elizabeth Wiener 1947 concert program held in the collection of the present author

²³ See Lynn Fisher, ‘Irene Vera Young and the Early Modern Dance in Sydney’, in *Brolga* 2, June 1995, Ausdance ACT, (pp 7 – 29)

²⁴ See, Sydney Girls Get Congo Fever Badly: Pupils of Irene Young Give Interesting Interpretation of African Rhythm in Modernistic Ballet (Title No: 133693) Fox Movietone 1934

²⁵ See, Outdoor Ballet: Brisbane (Title No: 227708) Cinesound Productions, 1939

²⁶ See www.nfsa.gov.au/thecollection Charles Lawrence

²⁷ See www.dancehorizons.com/humphrey.htm#choreo

²⁸ See, Menace - Or Just Another Craze: Bodgies and the Widgies (Title No: 84244) Cinesound Productions 1951

²⁹ See, the Sydney Morning Herald, 21st January 1956

³⁰ See, The Age, 12th August 1983, p 2. I have been unable to find the origin and provenance of the term “widgie.”