

The Enduring Legacy of British Ballet During World War II: Perseverance, Innovation, and Triumph

The outbreak of World War II in 1939 cast a shadow over the world, and the arts were not spared. In Britain, the once-thriving ballet scene faced unprecedented challenges. Theaters were closed, dancers were called up to serve, and the future of the art form seemed uncertain.

However, amidst the chaos and uncertainty, a remarkable story of perseverance, innovation, and triumph unfolded. British ballet companies and dancers refused to be silenced, and they found creative ways to continue performing and creating. They toured the country, bringing ballet to audiences in even the darkest of times. They experimented with new forms and styles, pushing the boundaries of the art. And they produced some of the most iconic and enduring works of British ballet.



Albion's Dance: British Ballet during the Second World

War by Guillermo Dufranc

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The Royal Ballet and Sadler's Wells Theatre

The Royal Ballet and Sadler's Wells Theatre were the two leading ballet companies in Britain at the outbreak of war. Both companies had to adapt to the new circumstances, and they did so with great determination.

The Royal Ballet was evacuated to Oxford, where they performed in a variety of venues, including a converted cinema and a church hall. Sadler's Wells Theatre was damaged by bombing in 1940, but the company continued to perform in other theaters and on tour.

Despite the challenges, both companies managed to maintain a high standard of performance. They premiered new works by leading choreographers, such as Frederick Ashton and Robert Helpmann, and they continued to train and support young dancers.

Ballet Rambert

Ballet Rambert was a smaller company than the Royal Ballet or Sadler's Wells Theatre, but it was just as determined to continue performing during the war. The company toured the country extensively, bringing ballet to audiences in even the smallest towns and villages.

Ballet Rambert also became known for its innovative work. The company commissioned new ballets from young choreographers, and it experimented with new forms and styles. In 1942, the company premiered Frederick Ashton's "Symphonic Variations," which is now considered one of the masterpieces of British ballet.

Ninette de Valois

Ninette de Valois was the founder and artistic director of the Royal Ballet. She was a visionary leader who played a pivotal role in the development of British ballet. During the war, de Valois worked tirelessly to keep the company going. She secured funding, arranged for performances, and supported her dancers.

De Valois also choreographed several new works during the war, including "The Rake's Progress" (1945). This ballet was a powerful indictment of the war, and it became one of the most popular and enduring works in the Royal Ballet's repertoire.

Frederick Ashton

Frederick Ashton was one of the most important choreographers in British ballet history. He created some of the most iconic works of the Royal Ballet's repertoire, including "Symphonic Variations," "Cinderella," and "La Fille mal gardée."

During the war, Ashton continued to create new ballets, even though he was also serving in the Royal Air Force. He choreographed several ballets for the Royal Ballet, including "The Dream" (1945) and "Illuminations" (1946).

Ashton's ballets were known for their beauty, lyricism, and wit. They helped to define the unique style of British ballet.

Robert Helpmann

Robert Helpmann was another leading choreographer of British ballet. He created several successful ballets for the Royal Ballet and Sadler's Wells

Theatre, including "Hamlet" (1942) and "The Miracle in the Gorbals" (1944).

Helpmann was also a gifted dancer. He performed in many of the ballets he choreographed, and he was known for his athleticism and dramatic intensity.

Helpmann's work helped to shape the development of British ballet. He was a pioneer of new forms and styles, and he inspired a generation of dancers and choreographers.

Margot Fonteyn

Margot Fonteyn was one of the greatest ballerinas of all time. She was known for her beauty, grace, and technical brilliance. During the war, Fonteyn danced with the Royal Ballet and Sadler's Wells Theatre. She performed in many of the ballets created by Ashton and Helpmann, and she became one of the most popular dancers in the world.

Fonteyn's performances were a source of inspiration and joy for audiences during the war. She helped to keep ballet alive in Britain, and she played a major role in the development of the art form.

Moira Shearer

Moira Shearer was another leading ballerina of the Royal Ballet. She was known for her fiery temper and her dramatic intensity. During the war, Shearer danced in many of the same ballets as Fonteyn, and she became a popular favorite with audiences.

Shearer's most famous role was as the title character in the film "The Red Shoes" (1948). This film is considered one of the greatest ballet films ever

made, and it helped to introduce British ballet to a wider audience.

The British ballet scene faced unprecedented challenges during World War II. However, thanks to the perseverance, innovation, and triumph of its companies, dancers, and choreographers, the art form survived and even flourished.

British ballet during the war years was a testament to the power of art to uplift and inspire even in the darkest of times. The ballets created during this period remain some of the most popular and enduring works in the repertoire. And the legacy of the dancers, choreographers, and companies that kept ballet alive during the war continues to inspire and influence the art form today.



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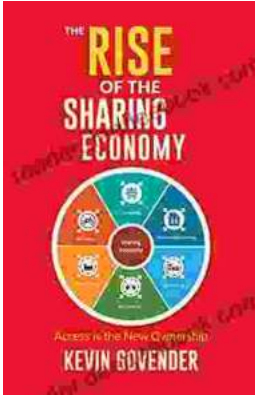
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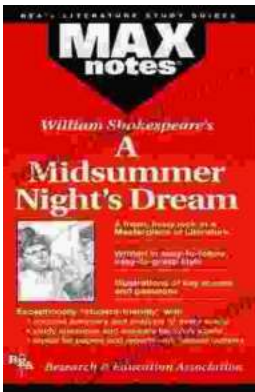
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