

Molly Boys and Queens: Homosocial dance as refuge and a conduit for self-expression
By Ricardo Barros

From 17th-century Molly houses to 20th century American ballroom culture, social dancing has been a form of escapism where queer people can truly express themselves. Strict civil laws and religious fundamentalism have proactively attempted, over the centuries, to outcast homosexuality and queerness from view. Openly discriminatory actions can only cause a reaction: for like-minded queer people to seek safe places to gather. More than identifying places for self-expression, this paper produces historical evidence on how social dancing congregations have also symbolised a place of refuge and resistance against repression imposed by a heteronormative society.

The Histories we need? As the contexts for the practice of queer Tango evolve, ought its histories be reappraised?

By Ray Batchelor

Queer tango was originally conceived of as a riposte to actual and perceived heteronormative constraints embedded in the mainstream dance – a man “in control” of a woman – and by implication, in society itself. In the “safe spaces” of queer tango, alternatives were joyously explored, not least same-sex dancing, which by default, became its emblem. Yet, since its emergence out of the feminist and gay liberation movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, wider society, mainstream tango and queer tango itself have all changed, not to mention their related social and political discourses. All these changes question the premises on which queer tango was built. Now, mainstream tango often accommodates queer and same sex couples. Dual role tango dancing is flourishing, in which both women and men (outnumbered by women) routinely practice “the other role”. In 2023, what is queer tango for? I suggest parts of the answer may come from a re-examination of queer tango’s prehistory (from the late 19th century onwards) for queer, and most especially trans, precedents. These might help us reflect on recent changes in discourses. In addition, examining some queer tango developments in last 20 years or so might usefully enable queer tango’s social and political purposes to be reviewed, renewed and re-purposed for present circumstances.

Popular Song

By Keith Cavers

Two men dancing together in a ballet would hardly raise an eyebrow in 2023 but in that ‘other country’ “the past” things were slightly different – but even then was there a sexual element? – if there was did anyone notice it or mention it at the time? or did it pass unnoticed by the majority of the audience? This paper addresses an instance of such a performance, some of its context, and its dire consequences for one member of the audience. Its records are extremely sparse, but is that due to its subject matter or fashion.

Two Spirit, Sacred Dance: A review of the tradition and evolution of the Joyas of Southwest America and the Mahu of Maui.

By Diana Dicker

The binary concept of only men or women is a contemporary, mainstream construct. Many indigenous cultures have a third path.

This paper looks at the traditions of two such groups: the mahu of Maui and the Two-Spirit people of Southwest America. Both peoples are third gender with spiritual and social roles, especially in dance, within their cultures. The paper compares the similarity of the third gender role in two very different cultures.

Mahu became a pejorative term but since the 1980s there is great pride and resurgence of the mahu culture including their role as hula dancers and teachers.

Two-spirit is a pan-Native American term, each tribe having its own language, for third gender people with specific social, ceremonial and dance roles. The Hopi word is Joyas.

Beyond tradition, these third gender peoples are evolving into a modern, mainstream presence.

From Characters to Caricatures: An examination of stereotypes, androgyny, and representation in Massine ballets

By Lisa Fusillo

This paper examines the dance roles that Léonide Massine choreographed in ballets he created for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes company and later as an independent choreographer. Diaghilev's control over and influence on the various choreographers in his company has been very well investigated, documented, discussed, and has been the center of many serious critical studies about the Ballets Russes. Yet, there is still more to uncover about the great choreographer Léonide Massine and his innovations.

Through a 21st century lens, this research will examine the changing focus of dance roles and movement invention of characters in Massine's ballets before he left the Diaghilev company and afterwards when he became a leading choreographer in world during the mid-20th century. The presentation will provide further insight and reflection on an era of contradictions and complexities regarding gender roles and representation in modern ballets of the time.

Gender Fluidity in British Ballet

By Rosie Gerhard and Lauren Showler

Ballet has a reputation for being very gender specific in terms of vocabulary and technique, and restricted in relation to how gender is represented on stage. However, there is a tradition of subverting gender norms in certain scenarios. The Royal Ballet's recent run of *Cinderella* (Ashton, 1948) has seen both female and male identifying dancers perform the Step-Sisters, while the last time English National Ballet staged *The Sleeping Beauty* (Petipa, 1890), the cast included a gender-fluid dancer, as well as both male and female performers in the role of Carabosse.

We explore potential meanings arising from engaging with gender in this way, and then examine a more current portrayal of gender in Annabelle Lopez Ochoa's *Broken Wings*, created for English National Ballet in 2016.

I Wear My Own Clothes: Dance and dress reform in the life of Dr. Mary Walker

By Susan de Guardiola

The career of Dr. Mary Walker (1832-1919) as a surgeon, a suffragist, and a proponent of dress reform famous for her public adoption of men's clothing is a matter of public record. Less well known is her history as a social dancer who danced with both women and men "equally well" as early as the 1870s. Of particular interest is her burst of late-in-life activism in the 1910s when, like other prominent dancers of the era, she championed dress reform in the specific context of the new dances of the 1910s, which she danced primarily with women. This paper will compare and contrast what is known of Dr. Walker's dance practices with evidence of other women dancing together socially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and her subversion of gendered dress in the context of other dance-related advocacy of dress reform in the 1910s.

Un-Covering Cunningham and Cage

By Fenella Kennedy

"Lover.... This morning all the parts of me that haven't heard that you are away got me up and out early and longing to lie down beside you." John Cage, letter to Merce Cunningham, 1943.

Merce Cunningham and John Cage are one of the most prolific romantic partnerships of dance history, and yet multiple generations of dance students have only heard them discussed as artistic collaborators. Cunningham and Cage were not closeted – their friends, colleagues, and audiences around the world knew the nature of their love for each other – but their behavior followed a pattern that Kenji Yoshino calls "covering:" visible to some eyes, but not to those who weren't specifically looking. In this presentation, I discuss some of the ways Cage and Cunningham covered their relationship, allowing it to exist in their life, philosophy, and work, while simultaneously protecting themselves from the dangers of American homophobia and the Lavender scare. I examine the conspiracy of silence maintained by past dance scholars, who protected the pair by erasing the romantic elements of their relationship, and I share my own belief: that it is vital for our community, and our history, that we end that silence now.

Laroon In Flanders: The male gaze in 18th-century dance iconography

By László Kürti

In my presentation, I seek to place studies of dance history into fluid conversation with the military conversation genre in an examination of how previous scholarship has simultaneously succeeded and failed in discussing the 'male gaze' of dance studies. Even though the conversation genre is an emblematic area of 17th-18th-century art history, few studies have explored the connections between military and dancing. There is virtually no knowledge of how dancing, especially the representation of the male and female bodies, is connected to the military way of life and the context of war. Whereas existing literature of conversation pieces describes dancing in the bourgeois and aristocratic milieu, in my presentation I explore how Marcellus Laroon's vision of dancing in different contexts imbues meanings and desires far from being one-dimensional, polychrome, and unambiguous. I reframe the study of Laroon by stressing his contribution to the subject of the heterosexual gaze, but instead of portraying him as a disembodied and passive creator and consumer of heterosexual desires, I view his painting and drawing as a theater of life where men and women in concert perform diverse places, scripts, and roles to and for themselves. I show that rather than being produced for the market of thrill-seekers and exploitation, we may view such art as a subversive mode of representation of dance that is concerned with the intimate world of war and social and gender relations.

Crossing, challenging, embodying and performing queerness and gender identities in the South Asian traditional dances

By Tiziana Leucci

My paper proposal deals with the specific practices of South Asian theatrical dances, where the artist is expected to be able to play and to interpret different roles and to portray the various male, female and transgender characters evoked in the play and in the recited and sung poems accompanying the dances, irrespective of the performer's own gender. A special attention will be devoted to the performances in which all roles (both male and female) are played only by men, some of them 'en travesti', as well as those ritualistic choreographic traditions performed in the past and in the contemporary cultural and political contexts by the transgender communities of Hijiras within the local socio-religious ceremonies.

New female figure on the Estonian modern dance stage – The case of Elmerie Parts

By Anne-Liis Maripuu

An Estonian early modern dancer Elmerice Parts (1878-1974) caused quite a scandal with her dance numbers in Estonia in the 1920s. Together with Herman Oginsky (aka Heiko Kolt, 1902-1977) she performed dances that – according to some critics – were too 'erotic' and therefore could not be considered 'art'. A close reading of the reviews from back then reveals that it was not the 'erotic' content of the dances that disturbed the critics but how the dancers presented 'eroticism'. According to the reviewers the dancers failed to transform 'eroticism' into 'art'. Elmerice Parts put on stage a new kind of female figure: she was not necessarily 'beautiful', asexual, nor passive. With that she questioned the governing ideas about gender roles in Estonia. Parts's and Oginsky's dancing had an effect both on the modern dance genre in Estonia and the dominant ideas about gender roles. In my presentation I will take a closer look at both of them.

Travesty dancers in London music hall ballets

By Jane Pritchard

Very little has been written about travesty dancers in the C19th particularly those performing outside of the Paris Opera but in this time of gender fluidity and gender-neutral casting it is a topic worthy of investigation.

This paper will place travesty dancers performing in London in the late long C19th into the context of both the British theatre scene and the international world of ballet. In Britain travesty roles were widespread not only in ballets but also burlesques and pantomimes with performers, designers and choreographers crossing between genres. In late C19th ballets in West Europe and America the hero was frequently played by a woman who excelled in mime as much as dance. Men, it will be acknowledged, were not entirely overlooked but took on character roles and, particularly when Italian dancers were available, virtuoso roles.

The presentation will identify some of the key dancers including Theodora de Gillert, Nellie Power, Malvina Cavallazzi, Francesca Zanfretta, May Paston, Julia Seale, Marie, and Carlotta Mossetti and the range of their roles. It will also discuss what the costumes the dancers wore, period dress, fantasy outfits and contemporary dress.

The changing representation of queerness on stage: Reclaiming space through queer opera.

By Andrew Sutherland

Representing queerness in opera often reflects characteristics of the society and *epistime* in which they are written but that they also do much more than that; operas have agency. Opera can therefore shape our understanding of queerness. LGBTQ+ social, cultural, and political issues have become an increasingly defining feature of twenty-first century life, and as agency for change, composers have turned to opera to underscore the lived queer experience. Operas written before the sexual revolution of the mid-twentieth century utilized a codified language both in the libretto and score, communicating with those observers open to a queer reading. More recently, the growing trend of local, small-scale, independent opera companies seen around the world towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century has emboldened queer artists to reclaim opera as a queer space. For several centuries, opera houses have been safe havens for queer composers, librettists, performers, and designers, and yet it is only relatively recently that any serious attempt at queer representation in operatic works has begun to be realized. In his book, *Queer Opera*, narratives taken from queer history in Western societies shine a light on how many historical figures who represent pivotal moments, are responsible in a variety of ways for the continued struggle for queer acceptance, be it in opera or in any concurrent performing art form.

Workshop

"Come let us – finely", or "8 more a dancing"

By Ricardo Barros

Embark on an evening of debauchery at Mother Clap's Molly House, learning one or two suggestive country dances in vogue in the 1720s.

Workshop

The Maxixe in America in 1914

By Susan de Guardiola

A workshop accompanying the above paper in which attendees will learn the basics of the maxixe, a dance performed by Dr. Mary Walker ("a glidist, a mixixist") in 1914. The maxixe of the 1910s was a Brazilian couple dance that was the immediate ancestor of the samba as well as the modern maxixe. It became a brief fad in the USA in 1914, where it was toned down somewhat so as not to offend American sensibilities. Instruction will include simple steps and figures with techniques for improvisation and will be accessible to people without previous couple dance experience.

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