

# Rooster

Choreographer: Christopher Bruce



Section of Rooster being studied:

**'Ruby Tuesday'**: Female solo from where the girl in a red costume walks forward, until she jumps into the arms of the male dancers

Examining the dance design (relationship between expressive intention, movement vocabulary and form)

# Cultural Influences on Rooster

Choreographers often make dance depict ideas and beliefs as an expressive and spontaneous response to their world. They are motivated by emotional experiences influenced by social, cultural, political, religious and technological issues.

To understand the phenomenon that rapidly became known as "The Swinging Sixties" it is necessary to be aware of the huge change that overtook the country during the first six years of this period. These changes resulted from the following influences.

England in the 1960s Christopher Bruce was born in 1945 and thus became a "baby boomer" whose impressionable teenage years would have ended in the middle of the sixties. He would have witnessed one of the most extraordinary political, cultural and social upheavals since the Second World War. To be young and living in London in 1963-5 was, without question, to be at the centre of all that mattered and all that was desirable. A teenager in the 1960s would have the attitude "who cares?", "nothing matters" and "the world's gone crazy," leading to a firm belief that "you'd better live life to the full and do it right now before someone presses the button".

Further examples of the political climate include:

- the perceived threat of communism to the English nation
- the Cuban missile crisis (1962) threatening nuclear war
- the assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas, Texas (1963)
- the death of the much-loved Pope John XXIII, the driving force behind Vatican 2 and promised reforms of the Roman Catholic doctrine.

**Economics** The late 1950s had seen a huge increase in personal and corporate affluence. Rationing in England finished only in 1954, and the next six years saw full employment. A massive property boom and substantial immigration from India, Pakistan and the West Indies filled labour vacancies, and there was widespread introduction of television and vinyl discs. Transistor radios made their first appearance. By 1960 pop stars could be viewed on TV and their songs were enjoyed both on personal gramophones and on portable radios. Suddenly, there was a whole generation of young people who lived at home (or shared flats), had time on their hands and had plenty of money to spend.

**Socio-cultural aspects** So many features of England's cultural life and society changed so profoundly over such a short period of time that it almost deserves the cliché "cultural revolution", for example: fashion and clothing i.e long hair for men and mini skirts for women; the emergence of the London theatre scene; the introduction and wide availability of the birth control pill for women; the publication of the contentious sex novel, D.H. Lawrence's, *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, as a sign of the sexual revolution.

# Influences on Bruce's Choreography

There is evidence to suggest that the following four phenomena have acted as stimuli or sources of choreographic invention and of movement style for Bruce.

**Courtly dance** A sense of graciousness pervades much of *Rooster*, drawn from the characteristics of the dance styles of European courts of the late 1500s to the early 1700s. The Rolling Stones, Beatles and other pop groups had experimented with wearing the long, flowing velvet gowns derived from courtly dance, and a studied sartorial elegance was one of the hallmarks of sixties fashions.

**Chickens** It is obvious from the title that hens, roosters and their habits have provided Bruce with a wealth of movement material with which to experiment. It is also interesting to note that there were several dances with farmyard allusions that accompanied the slave traders' enforced migration of black Africans preceding the 1920s musicals and the *Twist* (1961) e.g. *The Turkey Trot*, *The Chicken Flutter*, *The Pigeon Wing* and *The Buzzard*. (Emery, 1988).

**The party** This could also be labelled "Boy meets girl" or "The nightclub" or "The mating game". It refers to the main movement source of *Rooster*, namely the dances and accompanying behaviours of males and females when they met in sixties clubs, pubs and at parties.

## Messages the choreographer is communicating?

To develop an interpretation of *Rooster*, pay particular attention to the following:

### Music

- the relationship between dance and the music and the way in which the dance follows, takes its cue from and mimics the music.

### Representation

- the degree to which the dance resembles actual or symbolic movement
- the many ways in which the dance refers to the readers' world e.g. use of pedestrian, functional and gestural movements that bear a direct visual resemblance to what they represent

### Sex and gender

- the roles given to both men and women
- the portrayal of feminine and masculine images
- the adherence to stereotypic norms that may have applied to both the early 1960s and 1990s (when it was premiered) and to the present day.

<http://hsc.csu.edu.au/dance/core/appreciation/choreographers/rooster/researchingrooster.html>

### A note about describing:

When describing movement vocabulary work to include as much detail as possible to show that you can discuss and describe movement vocabulary and use the VCE 'dance speak' to a sophisticated level.

**Which example of student work below gives more detail?** Which one gives you a clearer picture of what the dancer is doing? Which one links the movement vocabulary to an expressive intention?

#### Example 1

In Ruby Tuesday the dancer uses lots of gestures and she falls to the floor well.

#### Example 2

In the first phrase of Ruby Tuesday the dancer walks forward with her hands behind her back and her head/focus lowered. She lifts her leg forward, collapses back as she steps behind, lifts her leg again with her arm extended and again collapses back as she curls her torso forward and falls backwards wrapping her arms around her. She appears slightly fragile, with her focus down and her backwards steps.

<http://www.distance.vic.edu.au/samples/pdf/da03301.pdf>

### Ruby Tuesday

Lyrics: Rolling Stones

She would never say where she came from  
Yesterday don't matter if it's gone  
While the sun is bright  
Or in the darkest night  
No one knows, she comes and goes

#### Goodbye Ruby Tuesday

Who could hang a name on you?  
When you change with every new day  
Still I'm gonna miss you

Don't question why she needs to be so free  
She'll tell you it's the only way to be  
She just can't be chained  
To a life where nothings gained  
And nothings lost, at such a cost

#### Goodbye Ruby Tuesday

Who could hang a name on you?  
When you change with every new day  
Still I'm gonna miss you

"There's no time to lose", I heard her say  
Catch your dreams before they slip away  
Dying all the time  
Lose your dreams and you will lose your mind  
Ain't life unkind?

# Dance Design

## Relationship between expressive intention, movement vocabulary and form

**Formal Structure:** Theme and Variation (A1, A2, A3, A4)

**Form:** Movement theme and motifs are introduced in the first phrase, then developed and manipulated throughout subsequent phrases through the use of choreographic devices. This is one section of a larger dance production.

**Motifs:** described below

**Choreographic Devices:** abstraction (transforms a gesture into pure movement, while retaining essence of original gesture), insertion (adding movements into the phrase), varying the force/energy, varying the tempo (speed), varying the levels, addition (adding extra movement while performing a motif, e.g. jump/turn)

**Expressive intention:** A woman at a crossroads in her life. She is conflicted between a conventional lifestyle with career/family, and the freedom that a carefree, bohemian lifestyle would bring.

**How expressive intention relates to 1960s:**

Women had more choices available to them in terms of career and family. There was also the prospect of leaving conventional society behind to live a more transient lifestyle.

**How expressive intention relates to song lyrics:**

"Who could hang a name on you when you change with every new day?" – carefree, frivolous, undecided, mysterious character (dancer changing between smooth, sustained, controlled movements to faster, suspended, swinging, rising and falling, unrestrained movements)

"Don't question why she needs to be so free. She'll tell you it's the only way to be. She just can't be chained to a life where nothing's gained and nothing's lost, at such a cost" – Life should be lived in the moment. Reality of war and nuclear arms means your life could end at any moment, by someone else's choice.

## Movement Vocabulary:

- Contemporary/modern dance style (connectedness with floor, heavy energy, collapsing movements, barefeet)
- Inward focus, curved shapes

## Motifs:

- 'Swinging' energy, using momentum to turn, which gives a 'rise and fall' quality to the phrase – shows confusion, indecision
- Gesture of reaching out then drawing back in to herself – shows character as indecisive, conflicted.
- Gesture of wrapping arms around to hug herself – shows vulnerability
- Gesture of twirling hair around finger – shows thoughtfulness, indecision

## Movement Phrases

A1 The dancer walks forward with her hands behind her back and her head/focus lowered. She extends and lifts her right leg forward, then contracts her spine, flexing her leg in to step behind. She repeats the lift/extension with her left leg and mirrors the extension and flexion with her left arm. She steps outward into a lunge towards stage left, swinging her right leg and both arms forward to wrap around her, then unfolds/opens-out into a suspended half turn. She contracts her spine collapsing her chest towards her raised leg, then falls into a backward run, slowly wrapping her arms around her. She turns her head sharply toward the audience, then turns her whole body/focus toward the front, twirling her hair thoughtfully with her right hand. For most of the phrase her focus is inward and follows the direction of her leg (her focus lifts as she raises her leg).

A2-A4 Repeats movement theme but manipulates it by using choreographic devices, for example:

### A2 Choreographic device: Abstraction

Choreographer uses abstraction to transform original gesture of twirling hair into a sequence of unrestrained turns, the dancer then flicks her hair over her head upside-down. This still communicates the original idea of thoughtfulness and indecision.

### A2-A4 Choreographic device: Addition

Choreographer uses addition to transform motifs e.g. dancer repeats sweeping of her leg forward (attitude devant) but adds hops forward; dancer wraps arms around to hug herself but uses it to lead into a turn.

### A3 Choreographic device: Insertion

Choreographer inserts extra choreography into the phrase, including rolls and floor section to emphasise the character's confusion

### A2/A3 Choreographic device: Variation of tempo (time)

Although the movement vocabulary in phrase A2 is similar to that in A3. The tempo is varied. In A2, the dancer performs the movements at a fast almost frenzied tempo, then after the gesture of picking a flower (start of A3) she performs the movements at a much slower tempo – this could be highlighting the appeal of a bohemian lifestyle and 'stopping to smell the roses'.

These are just a few examples of how choreographic devices are used