

# LOGICA

# CHOREO

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of European Association of Dance Historians



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# Multi-talented Men

## Part I

By Kathrine Sorley Walker

There has never been a time when the British performing arts have more closely networked than in the 1920s and 1930s. It was a period when creative artists in drama, music, dance and design moved freely and frequently between their various disciplines, setting up fruitful personal relationships and constantly nourished by new ideas and developments. Whatever their individual differences of background and education, they eventually became part of the social and professional circles that mainly existed in or near London. Their careers depended on shared patrons or managements, and work was often obtained by word of mouth recommendations and contacts.

Both in Britain and abroad it was a much smaller and more manageable art world than that of today. Far fewer people were involved and in fact almost everyone knew everyone, even internationally. Young aspirants in the theatre worked in a variety of ways, according to what opportunities arose – dancing, acting, singing, arranging dances and group movements, designing sets, costumes and masks. They became completely versatile in their ability to cope with anything connected with the theatre, understanding and cooperating with drama directors, musicians and conductors, scene painters, stage staff and wardrobe artists; soon, too, they were eagerly embracing the possibilities of cin-

ema and television, learning to deal with film directors and camera men. All this applied – and is well documented – to Frederick Ashton and Antony Tudor; but it is interestingly reflected in other, less well-remembered, artists. Two of these can serve as examples: Hedley Briggs and William Chappell, both of importance during their lives. Both men were dancers, designers and later directors. Briggs, additionally, was a character actor of repute.

### Hedley Briggs, 1907-1968

Briggs (according to *Who's Who in the Theatre, 1947* his full surname was Gawthorne-Briggs) was born on March 29, 1907, at King's Norton near Birmingham, the son of Joseph Ward Gawthorne-Briggs and his wife Lucy (Lane). He had a brother (who was killed in World War I) and sisters. Although he had no theatrical family background he must have been determined to act, and when he was fourteen he left school when he had the chance of joining Barry Jackson's admirable Birmingham Repertory Theatre as fledgling actor and (from August 1923) assistant stage manager. He made his acting debut as Juanillo in G. Martinez Sierra's *The Two Shepherds* (a tragic story of a half-civilised Spanish village) on October 29, 1921. During 1922 he acted small roles - in March he was the Fiancé in a Leighton Lucas adaptation of Scarlatti's *The Shepherds and the Chimney Sweep*. Lucas (according to Grove's *Dictionary of Music*) 'had come to music through dance and drama'. A student of Astafieva and Cecchetti, he was a member of the Diaghilev Ballet from 1918 to 1921, when he left to join Birmingham Rep; he stayed with them until 1923, and it seems probable that he was Briggs' first ballet teacher; he studied later with Anton Dolin and Phyllis Bedells. In June 1922 Birmingham Rep gave three plays (Shaw's *Getting Married*, Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and Harold Chapin's *The New Mortality*) at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon during the Summer Festival; and the Ginner-Mawer School of Dance and Drama contributed two matinees of ballet and mime. Irene Mawer was famously connected with Carré's 3-act

mime play, *L'Enfant prodigue*, and apparently Briggs was added to the cast to play the Baron. In December 1922, when the Birmingham Rep company appeared in London at the Regent Theatre in Pentonville Road near King's Cross, the lively and attractive teenager doubled as Colonel MacMashit and Harlequin in Jackson's own comedy *The Christmas Party*. This was a delightful children's entertainment. *The Times* (December 21) was enthusiastic: 'Barry Jackson has become a child again himself. It has no real story, it is just a series of nursery episodes loosely knit together'. Two siblings, Christopher and Evangeline, had measles, and amused themselves by having an imaginary party to which they invited characters like Santa Claus, the Fine Lady from Banbury Cross with her horse, Bo-Peep, Red Riding Hood, Cinderella and Harlequin. The actors 'in a very large cast, are exactly as they should be'. During the season he was also in the notably successful revival of Rutland Boughton's opera *The Immortal Hour*, this time directed and conducted by Leighton Lucas, which starred Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies; it reached its 300<sup>th</sup> performance in March 1924.

Jackson had been having financial and theatre attendance problems in Birmingham and at this point he also went into management to stage performances in London, some revived from Birmingham. Apart from the Regent, these were later at the Court (Royal Court) Theatre in Sloane Square and the Kingsway Theatre. In May 1923 Briggs was in the cast of *The Insect Play* (in which John Gielgud was Felix). It was a play that *The Times* (May 23) did not like - 'entomology is...to the average playgoer a somewhat sleepy subject' - and in November he acted *The Gentleman in White* in Georg Kaiser's expressionist play *Gas*. All in all, during his time with Birmingham Rep in its home and London activities, he was involved in some capacity in an extraordinary variety of plays (including controversial 'modern dress' productions of *Cymbeline* and *Hamlet*).

The first performance of Shaw's five-part *Back to Methusaleh* was staged in Birmingham from October 9 to 27, 1923, when Briggs was one of the youths in Part V (*As Far as Thought can Reach*), in which

Cedric Hardwicke and Caroline Keith played the Elders. The series was put on at the Court Theatre in London in February 1924, the month that the Birmingham theatre was scheduled to be closed for good and was only saved by a determined public campaign. *The Times* gave a great deal of space to all five evenings, detailing the action and praising the actors. At the Regent Theatre in May Briggs was Another Page in a production of *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by H. K. Ayliff, that starred Ffrangçon-Davies and Gielgud – this linked with a much publicised Shakespeare Festival that had begun in April at Stratford-on-Avon. Ayliff, who was born in South Africa, had joined Birmingham Rep as stage director and producer in 1922. The company was active again on its home ground in autumn 1924, with a programme of *The Master Builder* (Ibsen), *Devonshire Cream* (Eden Philpotts), *The Passion Flower* (Jacinto Benevente) and *Seal Woman* (a Celtic folk opera by Granville Bantock and Marjorie Kennedy Fraser), which was conducted by Adrian Boult. Very probably Briggs had some connection with these plays, especially as at some point he played the title role in *The Pierrot of the Minute*, which had music by Bantock and was what Irene Mawer termed in her book *The Art of Mime* ‘an exquisite little poem-play’ by Ernest Dowson.

The Birmingham autumn season in 1925 included Shaw’s *The Philanderer* and Ibsen’s *Rosmersholm* in which Briggs also mentioned having appeared. Jackson put on various plays at the Kingsway Theatre in 1925 and 1926, and Briggs was assistant stage manager for Shaw’s *Caesar and Cleopatra* and Chapin’s *The New Morality*. He was A Messenger (of the War Office in the capital city of Paphlagonia) in Cicely Hamilton’s *The Old Adam*, and Envy in *The Marvellous History of Saint Bernard* (in this, incidentally, the young Laurence Olivier played The Minstrel), which was adapted by Barry Jackson from a miracle play he had seen in the grounds of the Château de Menthon. Briggs staged some dances in another version of *The Immortal Hour* in January 1926 and played Antonio in Adela Maddison’s *The Song* at the Court Theatre in April. By now he had added dancing and design to his acting experience.

In 1926 his contract with Birmingham Rep presumably came up for renewal, but instead of continuing with Jackson he joined a new and exciting venture at the Festival Theatre, Cambridge. In the next three years he built up a loyal audience-following there as actor, dancer and designer. This theatre had been opened in 1808 by William Wilkins on the site of an 18<sup>th</sup> century playhouse known as the Theatre Royal, Barnwell (just outside the city and the jurisdiction of the university), and rebuilt by Wilkins’ son in 1818 as a delightfully compact horseshoe-styled proscenium house with a forestage and entrances from the audience side of the curtain. Its first life ended in 1878, when the management went bankrupt. It was then used as a mission hall until 1914, after which it was dark until it was taken over by two young men in their thirties, Terence Gray and Harold Ridge, in April 1926. Gray was related to Ninette de Valois (Edris Stannus) – his mother and her father were cousins. He had been schooled at Eton and Cambridge, and was an archaeologist and Egyptologist. He met Ridge in Egypt, where Ridge was working as a metallurgist. They discovered a mutual passion for the theatre and especially for the stimulating ideas about staging and lighting that were arising on the continent of Europe. Ridge, who had been an amateur actor with Sheffield Repertory Company, was a specialist in theatre lighting and the author of a book, *Stage Lighting for Little Theatres*. Gray and Ridge left the Cambridge auditorium untouched in its pure early 19<sup>th</sup> century beauty but introduced novelties where the stage was concerned. They broadened the forestage and linked it with the stalls by a fan-shaped flight of steps. There was a central revolve, a raised and sliding backstage, in front of a 40-foot-high cyclorama constructed of a double thickness of hollow tiles which were excellent acoustically. Two gangways were made through the stalls for entrances and exits. A vital feature was a splendidly advanced lighting system pioneered in Dresden.

Where repertoire was concerned, Gray, like Barry Jackson and Peter Godfrey (the director of the Gate Theatre Studio in London), trawled deeply and internationally for contemporary, as well as classic, plays and playwrights. As they were geographically separated, they

sometimes even presented different productions of the same play. From Ancient Greek dramatists to modern American writers, from Shakespeare to W.B. Yeats and J.M. Synge, both performers and audience at the Festival Theatre were expected to open up their minds and hearts to all theatrical possibilities. Actors had to adapt to an immensely wide range of theatrical styles and ideas. They had to become adept at wearing masks and conveying emotion through voice and physical movement rather than facial expression – masks and mask-making played an important part in many theatre productions of the time. Partly because of his friendship with de Valois, Gray's production policy extended drama to include the use of dance, choreographed movement and mime; and the actors' vocal range had to include chorus speaking, chanting and intoning. In his 1980 book *Terence Gray and the Cambridge Festival Theatre*, Richard Cave wrote: 'They were expected to be vocally as well as physically acrobatic'.

De Valois became a key associate as dancer and choreographer, as well as supplying dancers from her recently founded London school, the Academy of Choreographic (sic) Art. In those days there was always a shortage of British male dancers, and she was happy to make use of Hedley Briggs' talent and training. Before the theatre was ready, Gray put on two or three plays at the small ADC (Amateur Dramatic Company) Theatre in Cambridge, and Briggs was in the cast of Maeterlinck's *Monna Vanna*. The opening production at the Festival Theatre, postponed to November 15 because of 'the coal strike' and finally making it on November 22, 1926, was *The Oresteia of Aeschylus*, with music by Donald Tovey and Gordon Jacob, and directed by Herbert Prentice. Prentice was well known to Harold Ridge – he had been a forward-looking director of Sheffield Repertory Theatre from 1919. The play contained three spoken choruses – of the Argive Elders, the Trojan Bondswomen, and the Furies – and speech was supplemented by movement arranged by de Valois for a masked group of six of her girl pupils; Briggs had an important responsibility as Chorus Leader and spokesman. This worked extremely well. Norman Marshall later wrote in his invaluable book *The Other Theatre* (1947): 'Both the opportuni-

ties and the difficulties for the choreographer were immense. What Ninette de Valois achieved reduced one's memories of all other Greek choruses one had ever seen to a series of pretty posturings by comparison.' *The Times* (November 23) commented: 'The choreography of the choruses... must be warmly praised. Miss de Valois uses concerted arm movements to suggest emotions with really original skill. The dignity of the elders, the mourning of the libation-bearers and the restless stirrings of the Furies, like disordered thoughts, all stamp themselves clearly on the memory, and 'Expressionism' here quite wins its battle'. *The Cambridge Daily News* (November 23) found that the masks 'were wonderful specimens of their kind' and that where the chorus was concerned 'every action was perfect, every gesture just sufficient and well-timed and the many pictures they formed were artistically conceived and splendidly carried out – we loved the fiendish snarl of Mr Hedley Briggs as the leader of the furies!'.

On January 31, 1927, Yeats' play *On Baile's Strand* was directed by a 26-year-old Scotsman, Norman Marshall, and de Valois staged the rituals demanded by the text and choreographed the roles of the symbolic figures of The Fool and the Blindman, casting Briggs as The Fool. He also designed the essential stylised masks. De Valois who, in spite of her training and experience as a classical ballet dancer, was deeply interested in contemporary dance developments, took the cue for her choreography from these masks, echoing the angularity of their features and their subtle asymmetrical patterning in jagged physical lines for the players' bodies, all of which subtly complemented Yeats' conception of the roles. About the characters Richard Cave wrote: '[They] are at once grotesque, frightening in their impassivity, which deepens in the case of the Blindman to a gratuitous cruelty towards Cuchulainn when he realises he has slain his son, yet throughout compelling as embodiments of basic human energies.' The reviewer of the Cambridge University magazine *Granta* (February 22) commented that 'Hedley Briggs as the Fool was absolutely delightful to listen to, and his movements were no less pleasurable. It was almost a superb performance'. Norman Marshall was then very much an unknown quanti-

ty. A passion for watching and reading plays had been consolidated when, up at Oxford as an Arts undergraduate in 1923, he had come into contact with J. B. Fagan who had that year founded the Playhouse Theatre; and he joined Gray in 1926, first as press agent, then as stage manager, and later as a play director. In *The Other Theatre* he claims to have been 'peculiarly unfitted to the job', but he found his metier when allowed to direct *On Baile's Strand*. He would also prove to be an ongoing colleague and friend to Briggs over many years.

The work pattern of Gray's company was ferociously comprehensive. Each production was fresh and novel. To quote Marshall: 'Rehearsals were far longer than those in normal repertory theatres, beginning at ten in the morning and seldom ending before six in the evening. Even on Sunday the company did not rest, as the first dress rehearsal of each play used to begin late on Sunday afternoon.' Briggs, who had youth, energy and an appetite for work and challenges, must have been delighted to be acting in most of the Festival's productions of the time, and his roles included a fascinating diversity of styles - Foresight in Congreve's *Love for Love*; Androcles in Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion*; Mr Two in Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine*; a triple of Felix, Mr Cricket and An Inventor in *The Insect Play*; Titus Dudgeon in Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple*; Aminadab Lupin in George Dibdin Pitt's *Sweeney Todd the Barber*; Catesby in Shakespeare's *Richard III* for which de Valois was particularly successful with the scene of Richard's nightmares before Bosworth Field, when the ominous purple shadows of his victims covered the whole of the cyclorama. By now Briggs was capable of taking part in the small dance programmes de Valois staged in Cambridge and in London. There was a light-hearted pas de trois, *Nautical Nonsense* (to J. S. Bach) with Mary Tree and Sheila Littlewood in May 1927, about which *Granta* commented that Briggs 'knocked 'em all with his airy impudence'. This was frequently repeated in other theatres, and Briggs also danced in *The Legend of the Aspen Tree*, which was based on a tradition that the aspen leaves shiver because Christ's cross was made of aspen wood. The ballet was set to an arrangement of Hebridean songs and at one

point the dancers sang, wordlessly, to the music. They wore masks, which they found easy and lightweight, and the dancers' arm and body movements depicted the swaying of the branches and quivering of its leaves. Briggs also designed the costumes for the play of that evening, Yeats' *The Player Queen*, as well as acting *The Prime Minister*; and he had an acting role in the other play of the evening, *Red Nights of the Tcheka* (by de Lorde and Bauché). His flair for comedy was given full rein in March 1928 as Ralph in Beaumont & Fletcher's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.

The Festival Theatre play programmes in those years were unusual. The tone was a beguiling mixture of Gray's own comments and explanations and the chatty undergraduate wit of some contributors, as well as new ideas such as printing the cast details on thin transparent paper (white on black) so that it could be read in the dark if held up to the lighted stage. Gray had from the beginning given thought to his regular audiences; as he wrote, 'The supreme desire of the Management is to see you enjoying yourselves'. Programmes also usually included mouth-watering details of the restaurant menus - another of Gray's passions. There was a roof garden bar and a celebrated grill-room with black tablecloths, serving gourmet food and wine. Marshall recalled 'a magnificent Richebourg' and 'a delicious red Graves from Leognan', but the wine he mentioned 'with particular affection was an Anjou Saviennières, a beautiful fresh invigorating wine which can seldom be drunk in this country because there is a superstition that it does not travel'. In one programme there was a vivid pencil portrait sketch of Briggs by Michael Hampton, depicting a sensitive, high-cheek-boned young face with alertly expressive eyes, to accompany a report of an interview with him. 'His list of parts is truly surprising', it reads, 'both in number and variety, and many of them include dance parts, for he is more fond of dancing than of straight acting.' It went on to describe his years with Birmingham Rep, instancing some of the roles he took and saying 'he was trained in ballet by Dolin'. The interview was tail-ended with a joke: 'The great tragedy of Mr Briggs' life is that he does not have the time to make a thorough practical study of the important subject of Food.'



Over the years Gray included many plays by American playwrights, and in May 1928 O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* was staged, in which Briggs played (and danced) the Witch Doctor. June 1928 saw a production by Gray of *The Birds of Aristophanes* as a modern musical comedy, taken from a Paris adaptation by Bernard Zimmer with music by Auric, and in this de Valois reflected each bird's character in cleverly satirical style – Briggs characterised the Peacock and the Business Man. An extra-mural event for Marshall as director and Briggs as designer of costumes and masks happened in Leeds in September 1928. For a John Bunyan Tercentenary, they were involved in a massive production of *The Pilgrim's Progress* arranged by Leeds Civic Playhouse. The *Manchester Guardian* (September 11) commented: They [Marshall and Briggs] 'have done more justice to their own undoubted ability than honour to Bunyan...the result is a charming inconsequent spectacle, a delightful but incoherent medley of colour and movement. Mr Briggs has a fine sense of colour...and his masks are notable exercises in a non-sexual, semi-robot style. They are most successful when intentionally grotesque, those of the angels being too near the modern milliner's model to be quite happy'.

In London, when de Valois and her pupils put on an evening performance at the Court Theatre on November 26, Briggs performed and costumed a clever solo by her, *Nobody's Jigge*, set to music by Richard Farnaby from the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, which *The Times* (November 27) thought 'showed that there is an English as well as a Russian and a classical style of dancing'. He also danced the Minstrel in her *Scène Venétienne* (music Respighi). This, which de Valois had created in Dublin, was based on different styles of *demi-caractère* dance, showing the different reactions of a Romantic Lady, a Sophisticated Lady, and two Unsophisticated Ladies to identical love letters sent as a joke by the Minstrel. The Court Theatre programme included a substantial de Valois ballet (later in the Vic-Wells Ballet repertoire), *The Scorpions of Ysit*. Based on a 'dance comedy' written by Terence Gray, with music by Elsie Hamilton, this was an extraordinary story about how the Ancient Egyptian goddess Ysit, with seven attendant

Scorpions, visited a marsh woman's house in the Nile Delta. The woman refused Ysit hospitality; in revenge the scorpions stung the woman's baby to death, but it was restored to life by the goddess. Gray's original text gave de Valois a number of clues as to choreographic style – the scorpions' grotesque, circling movements contained much of what would nowadays be termed 'floorwork'; the whole piece was in fact couched in very modern-dance terms, and Briggs created the leading scorpion, Tefen. *The Times* commented that 'the dignity of the goddess and impudence of the scorpions were beautifully balanced'. In December, at the Old Vic, de Valois choreographed *Les Petits Riens* (Mozart) as a curtain-raiser to the opera *Hansel and Gretel* – it was the first time that a ballet was staged at that theatre. De Valois composed her own story to the music, about a flirtatious young woman, Rosalind (her own role). A total contrast to the scorpion ballet, this was a classically light, stylish, Watteau-esque comedy, in which Briggs danced Tircis, one of Rosalind's cavaliers, and designed charmingly simple costumes and decor.

Also in November 1928, another interesting assignment came his way. The year before, the former Diaghilev prima ballerina Lydia Lopokova (the wife of John Maynard Keynes), who had ambitions to become a spoken actress, had made plans to appear in Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du soldat* which had never been performed in Britain. A suggestion that it might be heard on radio had come to nothing. The score, apparently, was written with the idea that Lopokova might perform the three dances, tango, waltz and ragtime, that Stravinsky allotted to the role of the Princess. She set about choreographing these dances and the work was staged at the Arts Theatre Club in London in July 1927 - this was a completely new venue, which had only opened the previous April. The cast then included Frank Cochran as the Devil, Ivan Firth as the Soldier and Harcourt Williams as the Reader. In November 1928 it was decided to repeat it at the ADC Theatre in Cambridge. A new cast was recruited for what was titled *A Soldier's Tale*. Briggs was borrowed from the Festival Theatre to play the Devil; a student from Magdalene College who had already acted with the Marlowe

Society, Michael Redgrave (in age a contemporary of Briggs), was the Soldier, and the musician Dennis Arundell, who had made his professional acting debut at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith in 1926, was the Reader. The staging was very similar to the brilliant one I saw at the Edinburgh Festival in 1954 when it was directed for Glyndebourne Opera by Günther Rennert. *The Times* (November 9, 1928) describes how 'the presentation was unusual, as the action for the most part took place on a smaller stage while the orchestra and the Reader were accommodated on the stage proper...Mr Hedley Briggs as the Devil and Mr Michael Redgrave as the Soldier acted with distinction'. The *Cambridge Daily Telegraph* commented: 'The two actors were so good that when Mme Lopokova danced...there was no feeling that here was a great dancer graciously consenting to appear with others far below her form – only that we had seen a remarkable performance.'

The triple bill included a dramatisation of Shakespeare's early (and distinctly boring!) poem *A Lover's Complaint*, described as 'an illustrated poem with music by Dennis Arundell'; and a set of three dances. In two of these, *A Tschouvachian Wedding*, in which Lopokova dealt with 'a truculent bridegroom', and *Soldier and Grisette*, described as having 'charming impudence and rollicking zest' (*Manchester Guardian*, November 10), Lopokova was obviously partnered by Briggs. *A Lover's Complaint* had Lopokova in a speaking part as The Afflicted Maid, Redgrave as the Lover and Arundell as The Poet (and composer of the music). In his essay (in *Lydia Lopokova*, edited by Milo Keynes), Arundell wrote: 'a young professional from the Festival Theatre, Cambridge, just beginning to make his mark as actor, mime-dancer and designer, Hedley Briggs, took the non-speaking part of the blustering "reverend" man' (the character who listened to the heroine's account of her wrongs). The evening was a success, and in November 1929 Briggs was again associated with Lopokova at the ADC Theatre in *Life's A Dream* (a play by Calderón translated by J. B. Trend and Frank Birch, who also directed). V.C. Clinton-Baddeley and Barry K. Barnes had leading roles and Briggs played two parts and 'directed' the stylised costumes and scenery with Arthur B. Woods. In December

1930 Arnold Haskell presented, at the Arts Theatre Club in London, an entertainment called *A Masque of Poetry and Music* subtitled *Beauty, Truth and Rarity*, which featured Lopokova. It was directed by George Rylands, and included a repeat of *A Lover's Complaint*. This time it was described as a series of tableaux with miming and recitation, and George Rylands was The Poet. It does not seem as if Briggs appeared as the 'reverend man'.

In these between-wars years dancers were often involved in charity events for good causes, and in December 1928 Briggs and de Valois appeared at Grosvenor House, London, in an Old Vienna Cabaret Ball in aid of Queen Charlotte's Hospital National Mother-saving Campaign. No particular duet was mentioned. In January 1929 he found a new outlet as an actor for radio, appearing in the cast of a BBC broadcast of Compton Mackenzie's novel *Carnival*; it was followed in February by a role in a broadcast play by A. J. Talbot titled *Incorrigible*. Much later he had many assignments as a BBC radio producer. Although designs in Cambridge were often 'realised' by Doria Paston from ideas by Terence Gray, Briggs was now increasingly in demand as a designer of costumes, masks and often sets. There is no record of his having any formal art training, but at the Festival Theatre he must have imbibed much from Gray and the various play directors about European ideas for settings, costumes and lighting. Edward Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia were among Gray's strongest influences. Briggs continued to improve as a dancer, and in February 1929 he was again both designer and dancer for a de Valois divertissement. The *Cambridge Review* (February 6) decided that 'The best [items] were the dances in which Miss Ninette de Valois and Hedley Briggs had the stage to themselves'. They had danced a lively *Polka pas de deux* (to Johann Strauss music) which was an immediate hit; and a masked *pas de deux*, *Danse profane* (Debussy), which de Valois enlarged for the Camargo Society in 1930. For the 1930 version Briggs designed 'scenery, theatre curtains, costumes and masks', using pale pink and black to great effect. The sacred ladies wore draped pink skirts with parti-coloured sleeveless bodices and Hellenic pink and silver headdresses; the profane ladies, in

black long-sleeved, short-skirted tunics, were half masked in silver. The choreographic concept included crescent-shaped symmetrical groupings, with head-above-head structural patterns. The Sitter Out in *The Dancing Times* found the designs 'entirely suitable to their purpose, being equally lovely at rest or in action'.

In April 1929 at Cambridge he did the 'masks, costumes and decorations' for *Beggar on Horseback* by George Kaufman and Marc Connelly, a production in which de Valois staged the trial scene as a ballet which Briggs led with Ursula Moreton; and in May, at the Old Vic, he did the designs for de Valois' ballet *The Picnic* (a work to Vaughan Williams' music that was disturbingly varied in its title, appearing occasionally as *The Faun* or *The Satyr*: confusion was worse confounded by the fact that there had been a different de Valois ballet also called *The Faun!*). When he saw *The Picnic* later, Mark Edward Perugini (in *A Pageant of the Dance and Ballet*) liked it very much, calling it 'a humorous little ballet... original in conception, clear-cut and sound in its choreography and danced with purity of technique, joyous verve and sense of classic style by a well-balanced and brilliant cast headed by Hedley Briggs, Miss Ursula Moreton, Miss Iris James and Stanley Judson; and a special word of appreciation is due to Hedley Briggs for the originality, freshness and charm of his designs for the costumes and decor'. Briggs took over the leading role of the Satyr, both at the Old Vic and at a special performance in July 1930 to mark the opening of the folk-dance centre, Cecil Sharp House. The story was a simple one, about a villagers' midnight party. Their quarrels disturbed the woodland folk and their leader, the Satyr, took revenge by terrifying the mortals. In Cambridge in May 1929 Briggs acted Christy Mahon in *The Playboy of the Western World*. The *Manchester Guardian* (May 12), wrote of the difficulty of Synge's dialogue – 'it is lyrical before it is dramatic and its very elaboration is a hindrance to the ear...' and felt that 'Hedley Briggs...struggled with this honeyed ranting and gave the impression of an urchin 'talking big' rather than of an unquenchable romantic'. At the end of May there was a production of Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* in which he acted and danced the delightful lead-

ing role of Firk – the dance was set to music by a solo oboe. This was a great success, and repeated in later productions; he was even greatly praised in the editorial notes (by Robert Smallwood and Stanley Wells) of a 1999 edition of the play. *The Cambridge Review* (June 2), found him an ideal interpreter, saying 'His characteristic virtue was partly an exact feeling for the moment to stop, having done enough to leave the audience wanting much more, the art of creating the impression that you have a lot more tricks in the bag'. By now he was sufficiently expert in dance that he could take over the choreography and movement training at Cambridge when de Valois' other schedules became more demanding.

As far back as 1927 Gray had hoped to stage Wilde's play *Salome* but could not get the theatre censor's permission for a public presentation. In June 1929, however, he decided to stage one private performance. His production was memorable, using the stage's different levels and an imaginative lighting plan to great effect. De Valois choreographed Salome's dance for Vivienne Bennett (the seven veils were not discarded by Salome but descended from the flies as the dance progressed); but Briggs created the rest of the dance movements and took the part of the Young Syrian, the captain of the guard who killed himself for unrequited love. The play was repeated at the Gate Theatre in May 1931 when Margaret Rawlings was Salome, and although Briggs was not in the acting cast he danced that night in *Nautical Nonsense* with Ursula Moreton and Marie Nielson in a short divertissement arranged by de Valois. At the request of Yeats she had now added the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, to her workload of the Old Vic and Cambridge Festival Theatre, and also opened a ballet school in Dublin associated with the theatre. She was in Ireland in August 1929 for an important assignment as choreographer and dancer in Yeats' ballet-play *Fighting the Waves*, whose theme was the struggle for Cuchullain's life between his wife Emer and the goddess Fand. Directed by Lennox Robinson, this had an avant-garde musical score by George Antheil (which was not to everyone's taste). De Valois danced the role of Fand, and Briggs was imported from England for the part of the Ghost of Cuchullain.

Masks which enclosed the whole head were by Hildo Krop, and Yeats was delighted with it all – he wrote to a friend that it has ‘been my greatest success on the stage since *Kathleen ni Houlihan*...everyone here is as convinced as I am that I have discovered a new form by this combination of dance, speech and music.’ In a short divertissement in the same programme by the Abbey School of Ballet, Briggs partnered de Valois again in their *Polka pas de deux* and also danced a Tyrolese *pas de trois* with de Valois and Sara Patrick. This came from a de Valois’ ballet, *Hommage aux belles viennoises*, set to Schubert, which she had created, at the request of Adeline Genee, for a special performance by the Association of Operatic Dancing at the Gaiety Theatre in July. An attractive divertissement, this opened with the Tyrolese *Schuhplattl pas de trois* and went on to a *pas de quatre*, a *pas de huit*, and a mazurka duet.

Briggs benefited in many ways from his close association with deValois in Cambridge, Dublin and London. On her side, she greatly appreciated his ability. In 1989 (twenty years after his death), his niece, Hilary Proctor, sent de Valois a photograph of him that she had found, and de Valois replied: ‘He certainly was a very prominent young member of my students’ group...he did all of his work with me in the late 1920s at the Old Vic and the Festival Theatre Cambridge, and at my studio in South Kensington. At the same time he was, of course, a professional actor. He never really had time to develop his talent for dancing because of the many other things he took on, but he certainly did a lot of work with me in those very early days.’ In 1929, however, Briggs left the Festival Theatre and embarked on a freelance career as actor/dancer/designer/director, in which he would become very much linked with another unusual, forceful and attractive woman, Penelope Spencer. He had already taken part with her in a programme at the Arts Theatre in December 1928. Spencer was highly thought of as a dance recitalist with a special style of her own. Arnold Haskell, in a small book (*Penelope Spencer*, 1930), called her ‘a ballet company in miniature in one person’ because she was equally good as ‘choreographer, a conceiver of dances’ and as a dancer. She was a student of the freestyle

Margaret Morris and of the drama teacher Italia Conti, and had worked in dance since 1919. She had been associated with the Glastonbury Players, and arranged dances for the British National Opera Company, for productions of *The Cenci*, *Medea* and *Henry VIII* by Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson, and for *Where Crummles Played* and *The Way of the World*, produced by Sir Nigel Playfair at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith. For the Royal College of Music, where she taught dance and movement, she choreographed for Vaughan Williams’ *Hugh the Drover* and Holst’s *Savitri*. Her own solos included *Funeral March on the Death of a Rich Aunt*, *Laidurette*, and *Elegiac Blues in Memory of Florence Mills*.

In July 1929 Briggs again appeared with her in a dance recital at the Arts Theatre. *The Times* (July 3) wrote that he ‘shares her power of making a gesture or a look comic, merely by giving to it slightest emphasis...The dances, which were unerringly fitted to the phrasing of the music, all embodied a single amusing idea. The music often has some violence done to its character, but this does not matter so long as the idea is not falsified...and so long as the physical movement and the musical rhythms correspond. This they always do, even in the very modern music which Miss Spencer uses so cleverly’. Briggs also performed Firk’s dance from *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (and Leon Goossens played the oboe for it), but the critic dismissed this as being ‘a less successful experiment’. In November he and Spencer contributed to an all-star cabaret at the Gateway to Empire Ball at Grosvenor House, and there was another recital at the Arts Theatre in early December, when they appeared with Anton Dolin and Anna Ludmila in a programme that was advertised as being ‘dances to Handel, Rimsky-Korsakov, Ravel, Albeniz, Satie, Berners and Gavin Gordon’. The last-named, a young Scottish composer, was still often being described by his full name of Gavin Gordon-Brown, and he wrote the music for a solo by Briggs titled *HMS Pursuer*. The substance of the evening was the contrast of choreographic styles between Dolin and Spencer. *The Times* (December 7) summed this up, saying that Spencer’s ‘method is realistic and ironical, proceeding by under-state-

ments; Dolin's is symbolical and proceeds by an exaggeration of natural movement. Each pair of dancers [Spencer and Briggs, Dolin and Ludmila] enhanced the merits and deficiencies of the other', Spencer was 'much richer...she included dances as diverse as an *Elegy* in conventionalised Greek poses'. Briggs was mentioned as also having 'a happy knack of designing masks'. The two couples were only once united, in a quartet *Tennis Then and Now* – which 'embodied a pretty idea but did not really hold together'. H.H. in *The Observer* (December 8) reported that 'eighteen divertissements ranged from an *Elegy* in Greek Minor to *Tennis* in Wimbledon Major, and were excellent in style and of a fascinating versatility. The effective costumes and occasional masks made by Hedley Briggs combined the pseudo-archaic with the true grotesque...The programme had abundant good humour...a delightful entertainment full of matter for the entrepreneur to speculate upon and the amateur to enjoy.'

By now Briggs was Spencer's recognised professional partner and associate. As dancer and designer, he helped to create her programmes. Haskell wrote of him: 'Hedley Briggs is an admirable partner, perhaps more of an actor/mime than a dancer though his technique is improving rapidly. As an artist who is also a performer he has much that is important to give, and his costumes are an essential part of each particular dance'. He cited two items in particular: *Parisian Dolls* (for which Briggs also designed costumes and masks), in which the grotesque and rather terrifying puppets which were given away on gala nights in restaurants imitated the movements of their owners; and *Baedeker*, a satirical comedy caricaturing American tourists in Europe. At the end of December 1929 the London Opera Festival presented a mixed programme at the Scala Theatre that included James Shirley's masque, *Cupid and Death*, with music by Matthew Locke and Christopher Gibbons. This had been created in March 1653 as an entertainment for the Portuguese ambassador – surprisingly, as this was during Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate when theatrical activity was limited. At that time, however, Cromwell was eager to have good relations with Portugal over the port of Tangier. The masque was composed of five entries,

and would now be termed a 'multi-media' production – it consisted of spoken dialogue, recitative, formal songs and choruses, and an important ballet. The story was adapted from an Aesop fable. Cupid and Death set up an archery contest when they met in an inn in bad weather. Cupid's arrows unintentionally murdered many young lovers; Death's, on the other hand, rejuvenated the old and infirm. One struck the Chamberlain, who immediately made love to his pair of trained apes (danced by Spencer and Briggs). The masque ended with a scene in which the slain lovers were seen in Elysium. Spencer composed the choreography, and Briggs also danced *Madness*, one of four Hectors, and one of the six Slain Lovers (as did Antony Tudor). The evening included a production by Dennis Arundell of the Nahum Tate/Purcell opera *Dido and Aeneas*. Spencer again did the choreography and she and Briggs were the leading dancers, supported by pupils of Spencer's. Spencer and Briggs did not appear only in London, of course. On December 20, 1930, the *Manchester Guardian* wrote of them as contributing to a variety bill at Manchester Hippodrome: '[they] really have youth and something of novelty. Not that Penelope Spencer and Hedley Briggs do not owe much to all those ideas that have in recent years been stirring in the world of dancing. We are all perhaps a little tired of dying swans and falling leaves, and grateful for the importation of modern instances and gay costumes. These two dancers have chosen charming themes, charmingly set, and danced with rare understanding.'

Briggs was not, however, limited to his work with Spencer. In 1925 Peter Godfrey founded London's Gate Theatre Studio, which was located first (and known as the Gate Theatre Salon) in Floral Street and then in 1927 moved, with its new name, to Villiers Street ('underneath the arches') where the opening play was Simon Gantillon's *Maya* starring Ffrangcon-Davies – a play about a prostitute in the dock area of Marseilles. Godfrey had a solid reputation as an experimental manager/director, and in 1928 he directed four plays for Cambridge Festival Theatre – in 1932, in fact, Gray set up a cartel between the Gate and Festival Theatres but for a number of reasons this lasted only two seasons. In October 1929, however, Briggs acted *Albert* and *A Painter* at

the Gate Theatre in a revival of *Maya*, and later on would frequently work for the Gate, especially from 1934 when Norman Marshall took over from Godfrey, who left for the USA. In March 1930 Briggs acted what *The Times* (March 18) described as 'poor tired old Lord Summerhayes' in Shaw's *Misalliance* – an old man played convincingly by a 23-year-old actor - at the Court Theatre. He had the role of Erwin at the Gate Theatre in a German play, *Revolt in a Reformatory*, and in October took part in incidental dances arranged by Ashton, and led by him and Alicia Markova, in a Nigel Playfair production of *Marriage à la Mode* at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith. Sadler's Wells Theatre, refurbished under Lilian Baylis' directorship, was due to open in 1931, but a pilot group, called the Vic-Sadler's Wells Opera Ballet, fulfilled a brief engagement in December 1930 at Bournemouth Pavilion. Included in their performance was *The Faun (The Picnic)*, with Briggs as the Faun/Satyr, and he also danced with de Valois in the *Polka de deux* and the *Gigue* in her *Suite de danses* (J. S. Bach). The *Bournemouth Echo* reporter enjoyed it all very much, commenting: 'The Faun, with Hedley Briggs as a sprightly Faun and Ursula Moreton as a charming sylph, was delightful, and a polka by Miss de Valois and Hedley Briggs was warmly applauded'.

In London an important new venture was under way. The Camargo Society was set up in 1929 as a performing ballet association. It was not a regular company. Its aim was production. A programme of 'original and classic ballets' was to be given four times a year at a West End theatre on Sunday evenings and Monday afternoons to subscription audiences. The governing committees organised each programme, drawing on talents from various sources. It lasted until 1934 and was of immense value to the development of ballet in Britain. De Valois was closely connected with it – her work at the Old Vic was shortly to expand to a newly re-opened Sadler's Wells Theatre, when she could begin to build up what would become the Vic-Wells (later Sadler's Wells and later still Royal) Ballet. The first Camargo Society performance was given on October 19, 1930 at the Cambridge Theatre, London and included both de Valois' *Danse sacrée et danse profane* and a comedy by Penelope Spencer, *A Toothsome Morsel: Scenes from a*

*Dentist's Waiting Room*, which had been worked up by her from a solo staged for the Royal College of Music in 1926. This was set to music by Gavin Gordon, and Briggs danced the Dentist. *The Times* (October 20) described the work as 'robust fun – better if the joke had been more briefly treated and some of the humour less naive'. De Valois' ballet *Rout* was given by the Camargo in an enlarged version in January 1931. This very experimental, and much admired, work, set to music by Bliss, was influenced by expressionist theatre, building up architectural groups to reflect a range of moods. It had started life as an ensemble work for de Valois and five of her girl students, but now the cast was increased by five men: Frederick Ashton, William Chappell, Ivor Beddoes, Jack Spurgeon and Briggs. Briggs also spoke the introductory poem by Ernst Toller (translated by Ashley Dukes) about revolutionary youth. Julia Chatterton (in the *Musical Standard*) wrote that it was 'like an unexpectedly big sea wave which knocks us over and leaves us gasping on the beach'. Briggs was also one of the attendants on Cephalus in de Valois' *Cephalus and Procris*. This ballet, to music by Grétry, was a complete contrast to *Rout*, and was warmly described by H. B. Sibthorp (in private memoirs now in the Theatre Museum London) as 'a choreography sophisticated yet strictly classical that exactly suited the half-mocking, half-serious telling of the story'.

An immensely important event came in July, when de Valois staged her 'masque for dancing', *Job*, to music by Vaughan Williams. Dolin created the role of Satan. Briggs appeared as one of the sons of Job, as one of the Comforters (a marvellous, ironic *pas de trois* for doleful men miming crocodile tears), and in the trio War, Pestilence and Famine. In every way *Job* was (and remains) a masterpiece. In June 1932 the Camargo Society had a four week season at the Savoy Theatre, and on June 6, as well as being one of the huntsmen in *Le Lac des cygnes Act II*, Briggs had a good deal of fun in *High Yellow*, a jazz ballet set in a tropical island with music by Spike Hughes, choreographed by Buddy Bradley 'with assistance by Ashton' who had danced in Cochran shows choreographed by Bradley. For *High Yellow* Bradley invented the steps and movements, while Ashton planned the choreography, so Briggs

had a chance to add jazz dance to his already very varied knowledge of dance techniques. He created the role of Pappy (with Ursula Moreton as Mammy), the Caribbean father of four lively daughters and one son. On June 13 he danced the Cabin Boy in a production of Ashton's *Regatta*. This lighthearted comedy to music by Gavin Gordon was about flirtations on a yacht called *Old Vic*, anchored off Cowes, and de Valois played what *The Times* (June 8) described as 'an orchidaceous foreign visitor'. The same night he was a Friend in de Valois' strictly classical *The Origin of Design*, a ballet that misfired – Sibthorp was not alone in finding it 'very dull with a complex plot', although some of the dances 'had the almost invariable de Valois wit and elegance'. On June 20 in a memorable production of *Giselle* which starred Olga Spessiva, Briggs had the role of Albrecht's squire Wilfred; and *Giselle* was in the final programme of the season on July 2.

It was not however the end of the Camargo Society. The following December brought an interesting Spencer ballet, when Briggs was impressive as the Dwarf in *The Infanta's Birthday*, set to music by Elisabeth Lutyens and with designs by the young Rex Whistler after Velasquez. This was a revision of a ballet created by Spencer the previous March for her Royal College of Music students. The theme, taken from Wilde's story, was about a birthday entertainment for a young princess, and the series of dances included a toreador and a bull, a trio of Moors, and a tightrope walker. The music was the first important creation by Lutyens, who had immense problems and disagreements with the Camargo Society when it came to their staging of the ballet – so much so that she later withdrew the score from her official list of compositions. In the early staging Spencer herself had danced the key role of the Dwarf but she re-choreographed it for the Camargo, creating an effective solo for Briggs, for which he was rewarded by the gift of a rose from the princess as she made her exit. The Dwarf then repeated the solo with delight until he saw a grinning monster imitating him – it was of course his own reflection in a mirror. Humiliated, he collapsed and died of a broken heart. After watching the ballet, the great composer Ethel Smyth wrote of her reactions. She thought the entry of

the Dwarf and his dance was 'supremely good', and that 'from the moment he reappears to the end I was enthralled, and thought that he played his part supremely well'. The Camargo Society gave its final performances at Covent Garden on June 27 and 29, 1933, when the Vic-Wells Ballet performed the two-act *Coppelia* it had staged the previous March, with Briggs as Dr Coppélius.

Spencer had married Lewis Barman in 1930 and was gradually becoming less interested in dancing and choreography. However, in November 1930 she once more joined up with Briggs, Dolin and Ludmila for appearances at the Coliseum which was run by Sir Oswald Stoll; and at this point, probably because Norman Marshall was currently resident producer for Stoll, Briggs was offered an unusual dancing engagement in connection with the music hall series, Variétés en fête, which were put on at the Coliseum and the Alhambra Theatre. For this season Stoll engaged the young George Balanchine as choreographer – the billing was sometimes 'Balanchine's Girls'. Balanchine had left Russia with three other dancers, opted to stay in the West, and worked with the Diaghilev Ballet until Diaghilev's death in 1929. The Stoll season began at the Coliseum on February 16 with a spectacular ensemble, *Liebestraum* (Liszt), in which (according to *Choreography by Balanchine*, Eakins Press 1983) Balanchine 'used the [revolving] stage as a giant phonograph record, with a small dog in the center as His Master's Voice, and the women as needles'. For this Briggs simply designed the 'needle' costumes. There were costumes to design for other Balanchine arrangements such as *Waltz Fantasy in Blue* (Glinka), *A Skit on Marlene Dietrich in the film The Blue Angel* and *Papillons*. Later, however, at the Alhambra Theatre, Briggs became the only male dancer in an otherwise female group. In April he was interviewed for *The Era*, who reported that he 'had appeared with Penelope Spencer at the Coliseum. Stoll then engaged him for the Alhambra where he is working with Balanchine, whose dance is to be the permanent feature of Variétés en fête'. The article sketched in his past career with the usual number of inaccuracies. His first appearance at the Alhambra was in April in an item called *Statues* (Mendelssohn) with Dorothy Jackson and Anna Roth. In May he danced the leading *pas de deux* with Jack-

son in an arrangement set to the overture to *Die Fledermaus* about which a critic in *The Era* (May 20) wrote that 'the picturesque gyrations of the ballet and the beauty of the dancing of Doris Sonne [she was the Bat], Hedley Briggs and Dorothy Jackson roused intense admiration'. There was also a Tango with Doris Sonne, and a *pas de deux* with Betty Scorer (later known as Elisabeth Suvorova) to Berners' *Scottish Rhapsody*. In March, at the London Pavilion, sandwiched between these other Balanchine engagements, Briggs was a dancer in *Cochran's 1931 Revue* (which had music by Noël Coward and choreography by Buddy Bradley, Billy Pierce and Balanchine), partnering Doris Sonne, Natasha Gregorova and Marie Gay. Terence Gray had returned to the Festival Theatre Cambridge, and de Valois was again contributing to productions. It is possible that, if free dates from the Coliseum allowed, Briggs may have appeared as a dancer in some of these plays.

The life of a freelance is always full of variety and in the 1930s this is reflected in Briggs' multiple activities. In September 1931 he acted in Louis Goodrich's play *Pharaoh's Ring* at the Grafton Theatre, and in November he was once more a part of the Cambridge Festival Theatre company during a Norman Marshall season. He designed the setting and choreographed the movement for Terence's play *The Eunuch* (acting Parmeno), and Euripides' *The Alcestis* (acting Death), and also danced with Anny Boalth in *Studies in Rhythm*. He had met Boalth when she appeared as a soloist in the first programme of the Camargo Society. Nowadays largely forgotten, she played an important part in the emergence of Central European Modern Dance. A pupil of Rudolf von Laban in Hamburg in 1929, she danced in many productions before becoming a well-known teacher in Germany and Czechoslovakia. She came to London primarily to teach Laban's principles. Her dances for the Camargo evening, set to music by Christian Darnton, were for many a first introduction to Central European Dance. A.N. Wilson in *The Star* (October 20, 1930) described one dance 'in which its performer wriggled during a long silence that seemed to me to represent nothing more than an inebriated young lady trying to catch a mosquito'. However, H.H. in *The Observer* (October 26), more sym-

pathetic, described Darnton's music 'as a tour de force of cymbal-edged eurythmics and cerebral hiccups' and praised 'the skill with which Anny Boalth traced its triple mazes and maintained its vertiginous suspense'. Briggs, already initiated into all manner of dance styles beyond classical ballet, would have been the ideal partner for her appearance in Cambridge. Their programme there was a divertissement, including solos for Boalth (*Salut* and *Night Impressions*); solos for Briggs (*Solo* and *Panic!*); and duets, *Swinging Circles* and a waltz to music by Walter Leigh. Leigh was Gray's musical director at the Festival Theatre, but was also a witty and ingenious composer of operettas and incidental music. Sadly, his career ended in World War II – he was a casualty at Tobruk in 1942.

Then in January 1932 Briggs played a vital part in the production in Cambridge of a 'revue in two editions', *This World of Ours*. This had written contributions from Diana Morgan and Robert MacDermot with lyrics and music by Ronald Hill, and was directed by Marshall. *The Times* (January 12) spoke of an 'enthusiastic reception...The revue is in a higher class than any before presented at this theatre. Chief honours belong to Miss Penelope Spencer and Mr Hedley Briggs, whose dancing scenes are a real delight'. Briggs designed the costumes and arranged the ensemble dances, as well as choreographing a ballet, *An American in Paris*, set to Gershwin's music, for himself and Penelope Spencer, wearing clever, brightly coloured, contemporary casual clothes. The Gershwin music, which comprised five sections (*allegretto grazioso*, *subito con brio*, *andante ma con ritmo deciso*, *allegro* and *moderato con grazia*) had been premiered in America on December 13, 1928, and an abridged version was used for a dance scene choreographed by Albertina Rasch for the New York musical *Show Girl* in July 1929. Books on Gershwin, however, seem unaware of Briggs' 1932 ballet. In this he and Spencer (as an American and his wife) were supported by a large cast that included an English couple and their son, a German couple and their daughter, a gendarme, a cocotte and three Parisiennes. The dancers were led by Charlotte Leigh, George Benson, Anna Duse, Iris Henry, Sylvia Willins and Rosalind Patrick (Iden).



Rosalind Iden and her sister Sara were the daughters of a well-known theatre director, Ben Iden Payne, but disguised their identities under a number of different surnames – Patrick, Iden, Idène, or Payne. Rosalind married Donald Wolfitt and had a solid drama career as Rosalind Iden. The Festival Theatre programme had a note (by J.L.B.) about Briggs and Spencer:

They are more than dancers. They combine in their work the techniques of acting and miming as well as dance. Both of them have been through the rigorous training of the ordinary ballet dancer but both have used their knowledge of conventional technique to develop an entirely individual style of their own, a style which is so perfectly assimilated that it is entirely devoid of any showy or obvious feats of technique and has, to the inexperienced eye, a disarming and misleading air of ease and simplicity of not being 'real dancing'.

In February 1932, also in Cambridge, Briggs 'acted soundly as the fussy Chief of Police' (*The Times*, February 2) in *Bastos the Bold*, a translation of a modern comedy by Léon Régis and Francois de Veynes; and on February 8 he designed and starred in O'Neill's *Marco Millions*, when the *Cambridge Review* wrote that 'The setting and costumes, with the use of pale blues, greens and yellows giving the actors an earthenware appearance against which the blustering red of Marco's scarlet dress clashed very suitably, were the best that I can remember at the theatre'. The setting used what was termed 'a new method of projecting scenery on the cyclorama'. *The Times* (February 9) wrote of Marco Polo 'being shown as a Babbitt in Eastern dress' and commented that Briggs 'gives the young Marco Polo a pleasing assurance, and makes an outstanding success of the part'. He designed the costumes for Susan Glaspell's play, *Alison's House*, produced by Rupert Harvey, and acted in *Will You Play With Me?*, a circus fantasy for five players by Marcel Achard - *The Times* (February 16) wrote 'there was a feeling that these people can invest their lives with something deeper than mere mimicry for the pleasure of their patron'. He praised the close

cooperation of the actors, their smoothness and finish, and commented that 'Mr Hedley Briggs scored a success as the poet Augustus'. This was followed by *In a Glass Darkly*, a play by Hugh Ross [Williamson], the editor of the journal *The Bookman*. This was based on *Hamlet*, and *The Times* (March 1) declared that 'the versatility of Mr Hedley Briggs once more calls for praise'. He designed and danced in another revue, *Twice Nightly*, in Cambridge on April 14 and also in April he was in the cast of a 'Revel' at the Arts Theatre, London, which included Arne's *Thomas & Sally*, a sketch titled *Discovery*, and a selection of early 19<sup>th</sup> century songs. May 22 saw him acting in *Love for Love* at the Faculty of Arts in London, and sometime that summer he arranged the choreography for a Cambridge Footlights revue, *No More Women!* produced by John Chaplin. On October 11, he designed de Valois' ballet *Douanes* at Sadler's Wells, a witty, *demi-caractère* piece set in 'a French customs house at St Maritime, France, in 1859'. The central situation was the fleeting flirtation between the Man from Thomas Cook (Dolin) and a celebrated tightrope walker (de Valois) whose elderly husband eventually had to pay up for smuggled cigars, but there was animated choreography for gendarmes, porters, passengers and a passport officer, all ending in an English country dance. Sibthorp wrote that Briggs 'caught exactly the right mood of fantastic improvisation' and *The Dancing Times* (November) thought that 'one of the reasons for [the ballet's] success was undoubtedly Hedley Briggs' very clever decor and costumes'. Ashton did the choreography and Briggs the designs for *A Kiss in Spring*, an elaborate but unsuccessful operetta directed by Norman Marshall at the Alhambra, on November 28.

On March 1, 1933 he was choreographer for *Jolly Roger or The Admiral's Daughter*, a comic opera composed by Walter Leigh to a book by V.C. Clinton-Baddeley and Scobie Mackenzie at the Savoy, which starred George Robey; this was immensely popular and ran for three months at the Savoy before transferring to the Lyceum. Briggs and William Chappell designed the costumes for a musical fantasy, *He Wanted Adventure* (based on the book *Ambrose Applejohn's Adventure* and starring Bobby Howes) at the Saville on March 28, On March 21,

at Sadler's Wells, he had a notable mime success playing Dr Coppelius (another old man!) when the Vic-Wells Ballet first staged the two-act version of *Coppelia* with Lopokova as Swanilda. *The Times* (March 22) declared 'Mr Stanley [sic] Briggs gave a performance which reminded one in its grotesqueness and precision in gesture of M. Cecchetti in his later days'. This ballet was repeated by the Camargo Society in June during their season at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and the Sitter Out wrote in *The Dancing Times* (August): 'As Dr Coppelius, Hedley Briggs gave a very fine performance. His make-up, his acting and his miming were excellent'. Reviewing a later performance, *The Times* (October 31) wrote: 'Mr Hedley Briggs focussed attention on old Dr Coppelius by a fascinating mixture of sinister antiquity and learned incompetence'. In April there were masks to be created for O'Neill's play *All God's Chillun Got Wings* at the Piccadilly, and a BBC TV appearance as a dancer in 'cabaret-style dances' with Penelope Spencer.

After a good many vicissitudes, the activities of the Festival Theatre Cambridge came to an end in June 1933, and Gilson McCormack, in an article 'Farewell to the Festival' (*The Dancing Times*, August) commented: 'Only a few weeks ago Hedley Briggs made a triumphal return both as actor and dancer in *The Birds* and *The Shoemaker's Holiday*; and those who have never seen his Firk in the latter play have missed as amusing a piece of comic acting as one could wish to see anywhere in England'. The *Manchester Guardian* (May 11) was delighted. 'Mr Hedley Briggs, who has been spending the last few weeks at the scene of his early triumphs, gives a magnificent performance of Firk who, although only the shoemaker's apprentice, is always the centre of attention. Much of the success of the play should be attributed to his untiring energy.' The following October an attempt was made to start performances again at the Festival Theatre under the direction of Joseph Gordon Macleod, and Briggs designed, choreographed, and appeared in the opening revue, *By Degrees*. Parts he took were The Scout in *I wrote a letter to my love*; The Son in *Tree of Knowledge* (written by Alastair Cooke, who had been from the first a supporter of the Festival

Theatre); Sir James Haymarket in *Drawing Room Comedy*; A Speciality Dance (with Sylvia Willins) in *Musical Comedy*. He was paired, as Mrs Fishbother with Hermione Gingold as Mrs Pullpleasure in *Conversation Piece*, about which *The Times* wrote (October 5): '[it was] a diversified entertainment in which singing and dancing alternated with brightly written sketches – Miss Hermione Gingold gave a glimpse of Mrs Pullpleasure and a few intimate details of the procedure at Broadcasting House'. To music by Geoffrey Wright, Briggs set two ballets, *Susannah and the Elders* and *White Negro*. The first was an amusing take on the Apocrypha tale with Rosalind Iden as Susannah, three maids and two elders and an ensemble of Israelite men and women. *White Negro* was set in Harlem. Scene 1 was in a dressing room, Scene 2 was the cabaret, and it was danced by Briggs with Iden, Willins, Hilary Gabriel and Mari Scott – the last three were all students of Karsavina. A short biography of Briggs in the programme described him as 'deservedly popular in Cambridge' and mentioned his ballet *An American in Paris*. He had recently done 'superb costumes for Julian Wylie's production of *Gay Hussar* in Manchester'. This was a musical play in a prologue, two acts and an epilogue by Holt Marvell with music by George Posford for which Ashton did the choreography – but it never made it to London.

The Vic-Wells Ballet put on *Casse-Noisette* (*The Nutcracker*) for the first time on January 30, 1934. It was a large and ambitious production for a small company – over a hundred costumes were needed – and in his designs Briggs had to try and compensate for a very low budget. However, *The Dancing Times* (March) felt that 'his work played a big part in the success of the evening – in fact, if one bears in mind the very limited amount of money at his disposal, the results he achieved were somewhat remarkable'. Photographs show that the last act was danced against a central tower flanked by variably sized pillars twisted like the sugar sticks of the mirlitons, no doubt brightly coloured. *The Times* (February 1) wrote: 'A great part of the credit for a most beautiful spectacle must go to Mr Hedley Briggs, whose costumes and scenery are uniformly good, both in colour and design. It was a pity that these were not better lighted'. Also in January he designed a revue, *Yours Sincere-*

ly, at Daly's. About this the *Manchester Guardian* (January 10) commented: '[they] were fortunate in having a designer, Mr Hedley Briggs, who is equal to any transformation of scene. He squanders colour in rich profusion over a spread of canvas at one moment, and at the next presents a bare stage hung only with curtains of subdued simplicity. The final success is his, for having met the varying moods of writers and composers with such equanimity'. In February he designed masks for the exquisite and elaborate musical play, *The Golden Toy*, based on the classic Indian story of Vasantasena and staged at the Coliseum, for which de Valois composed the dances and movement. She wrote (in one of her essays in my book *Ninette de Valois: Idealist without Illusions*) that she 'had a wonderful time under the direction of the German producer (Ludwig Berger)'. There were three turning stages – 'in one big scene I had to produce three different crowd ensembles on these three separate stages – all three were turning at the same time...' There was a suggestion that Briggs was to create the role of The Stranger Player in de Valois' April ballet, *The Haunted Ballroom*, which gave Robert Helpmann his first created leading role for the Vic-Wells Ballet; but in the end this was famously done by William Chappell. Briggs was by now sufficiently known by Vic-Wells Ballet patrons that when de Valois' comedy ballet *The Jar* was staged in November *The Dancing Times* critic wrote that 'Walter Gore's character study [of the Potter] was not strong enough – I would like to see Hedley Briggs in the part'.

In April Briggs acted Friedrich in *Gambit*, by Raoul Myer, a drama set in a German holiday camp in the Black Forest starring Margaret Rawlings, presented by the Modern Players at the Playhouse; and in June he was associated as dancer, actor, choreographer and mask maker with an experimental and controversial production, *Genesis II*, by Aubrey Menon with incidental music by Walter Leigh, at the Fortune. This opened in an antechamber of Heaven, described by *The Times* (June 12) as 'a saddish place' and moved 'by way of the Garden of Eden, Egypt, Sinai, Babylon, Kent and 19<sup>th</sup> century China to the British Museum Reading Room and to a German prison in the present year'. Briggs had the multiple role of 'a versatile Deity' who 'starts as a painter, becomes an animated statue with a turn for lecturing, forces

himself on Moses in the guise of a military footslogger, comes to Babylon as Confucius and will end up as Karl Marx'. Some scenes were ballets, set to music by Leigh, which Briggs choreographed and danced with Diana Gould. This role gained Briggs a mention in *The Observer's* 'At Random' column (June 24): 'Is there any year before the thirties of the twentieth century in which we could have read in a theatre criticism in a daily paper "Mr Hedley Briggs was a versatile deity"?' The same month, at the Globe, he acted Henry Cox in Margery Sharp's play *Meeting at Night*, which starred Leonora Corbett and Roger Livesey, and was 'about people whose business is to keep themselves in the news'; and in September he danced in *Streamline*, a revue at the Palace.

Norman Marshall had in 1934 bought the lease of the Gate Theatre Studio from Peter Godfrey, so Briggs' ongoing association with experimental theatre productions continued there, both as actor and designer – he was the resident designer of the company. The first play of the season was *Miracle in America* by Toller, which was about Mary Baker Eddy, and in this Briggs acted as Asa Gilbert Eddy, Mary's weak-willed first husband who died tragically early because she did not call a doctor to him in time. He was credited in the programme in large type, not only for the play's settings but for 'the decorations of the theatre and the foyer'. There were settings in October for *The Sulky Fire*, a play by Jean-Jacques Bernard about a French soldier (Donald Wolfitt) returning home after World War I from a German prisoner-of-war camp. In November came a dramatisation of Sarah Salt's novel *Strange Combat*, a raw and sordid story of an out-of-work boxer and a woman journalist, in which Briggs was Dave, a learner-boxer, who, with Reginald Beckwith, made up for an unpalatable (and short running) play. *The Times* (November 15) declared that the boxers sparring was 'hardly worth watching, for Mr Hedley Briggs and Mr Reginald Beckwith, good actors as they are, seem to have neglected the nobler art of self-defence'. However, H.H. (*The Observer* November 14) wrote 'As the well-plucked bantams of a school of boxing, [they] had only to spar and giggle and grin to shame the halting dialogue and run away with our sympathies'. Beckwith's *Times* obituary, when he died in 1965, spoke of him as 'a great clown in the highest sense of the word' and

also recalled that he had written plays and been a drama critic for both *Time and Tide* and *The Spectator*'; during World War II, in fact, he was a BBC war correspondent.

After *Strange Combat* came off Briggs acted in *Nichevo* by V.C. Clinton-Baddeley and Scobie Mackenzie, a comedy about a Russian theatre company in which he played a comedian called Trigorin. December 1934, however, brought the first of the Gate Theatre revues – *This Year, Next Year*. There had been a long traditional line of 'intimate revues', produced by André Charlot and Archie de Bear, but the format for the Gate revues was entirely different. They could not provide constant scene changes and a large chorus nor engage 'star' performers. Marshall wrote: 'What we could do – or at least try to do – was to be topical, witty and satirical'. This they achieved. *The Times* (December 22) wrote that 'it contrives to have the air of a brisk conversation in select company...With their wits quickened... the audience can be offered much more ingenious satire than that of the usual revue so that even the present state of English literature will make a possible subject for a quartet'. Marshall used the creative team of writers and composers that he had put together in Cambridge for *This World of Ours*. This included Ronnie Hill for the lyrics and music, Diana Marshall, Robert MacDermot as sketch writers; music was also contributed by Geoffrey Wright and Walter Leigh. Ronnie Hill, London born in 1911, was a student of Christ's College, Cambridge, and had a steady career as a light music composer. He remained a close friend of Briggs for the rest of his life. *The Times* found that in *This Year, Next Year*, 'Mr Hedley Briggs' costumes and decorations throughout the entertainment have most attractive inventions'. He also acted in various numbers. He was Mr X in a male threesome, *Proper Pride*; in *All the Fun of the Show* and *The Best of Everything* with Hermione Gingold, Catherine Edridge and Ian Jarvis; in *A Plea for Free Trade* (in which Gingold was Paulette the Pride of the Plage); in *Hollywood Funeral*, written by Gingold and staged by Briggs, in which he was A Film Producer; in a Diana Morgan piece called *Young Hayrick* he played Hayrick; in *Seductio ad absurdum* by Mark Langley he was The Father. *The Times* mentioned 'two admirable ballets by Mr Hedley

Briggs'. These were a repeat of *White Negro*, which was praised for its choreography; and *Création à la mode*, whose theme was a fashion designer inspired by line and colour, and then by measurements and calculations. Briggs danced the designer, with Rosalind Iden as the Model, Mari Scott as Line and Sylvia Willins as Colour. Ivor Brown in *The Observer* (November 18) summed it all up: 'Miss Hermione Gingold and Mr Hedley Briggs head a team which somehow manages to change make-up and attire every five minutes and yet to preserve its freshness in its many and brilliant raids upon the ridiculous.'

The revue was followed in February 1935 by a successful production commissioned by Marshall to give Briggs a substantial leading role, Hugh Ross Williamson's *Seven Deadly Virtues*. *The Times* (February 14) described the play as being based on Madame Roland's words that 'the wickedness of the earth is done in the name of honour, duty, justice and the rest of the seven deadly virtues'. The principal character, Francis Meldreth, was seen in a suburban train as an old man dreaming of the various stages of a long life, unmasking seven of the current ideals and eventually confronted by 'a vast depressing nothingness'. The action began with Obedience in an 1882 nursery, and continued with Honour (a school dormitory in 1906); Chastity (an undergraduate in Cambridge); Patriotism (a soldier in France in 1915); Justice (a magistrate's court); Truth (a doctor's consulting room in 1950); and Duty (a bedroom in 1964). Ivor Brown wrote at length about it in *The Observer* (February 19), describing 'a bewildered gentleman' remembering an 'unkind childhood, an embarrassed and misled undergraduate, a soldier having to execute a friend, a magistrate perverting the course of justice':

Mr Hedley Briggs shrewdly combines the puzzled pathos of the youngster trying to be good with the worldly wisdom of the senior who has learnt to smile and shrug a shoulder. He ably sustains a play whose episodic course combines good sharp dialogue and several incidents of genuine comic force. The scene with the lady doctor is grand fun and also perfectly truthful.

*The Times* had said that there were 'one or two scenes of delightful comedy, and it lost nothing by the suavely humorous performance of Mr Hedley Briggs as the melancholy dreamer'. George Bishop (*Daily Telegraph*, February 14) wrote 'Hedley Briggs, who is known chiefly as a dancer and designer, gave a remarkable performance, portraying not only the young schoolboy but also the dying man of eighty with felicity and truth'. Hubert Griffiths, in *The Observer* (February 10), wrote 'Mr Hedley Briggs has been a dancer and a scene designer, but I think he is really best of all as an actor. The present play takes him through an entire lifetime from the cradle to the grave. I think he is one of the few actors who can play a boy and an old man convincingly'.

In March Briggs designed *Chicago* at the Gate and in June was back in mainstream theatre as a dancer, designer and co-producer (with André Charlot and Robert Nesbitt) of the second edition of *Charlot's Char-a-Banc!* at the Vaudeville. *The Manchester Guardian* (March 28) found that he 'acted with the same air of precise brilliance with which he (too rarely) danced... [there was] an amusing variation on the "younger generation" theme spoken and sung with fine point by Miss Iris March and Mr Briggs; and [there was] a pretty dance number "Coloured Clown", devised and performed by Mr Briggs, who directed the dancing and ensembles in general'. Productions at the Gate for which he did designs were *A Comedy of Good and Evil* (in April); Laurence Housman's *Victoria Regina* (May); *Karl and Anna* (September); *Anatol* – *The Observer* (October 13) found that 'the settings by Mr Hedley Briggs had a casual humour which the action might with advantage have borrowed); *National 6* (October); *No Longer Mourn* (November). Then designs for the recently launched Markova-Dolin Ballet came his way. Their opening season was in November 1935 at the Theatre Royal, Newcastle, and he designed the decor for *Hungaria*, a folk ballet to traditional Hungarian music with choreography by Derra de Moroda, and the costumes for *Swan Lake*. This was a two-act version made up of the lakeside act (termed Act I) and the ballroom scene (termed Act II), which included the Spanish Dance, the Czardas and the Mazurka, and was followed by a brief apotheosis. Choreogra-

phy was credited to Petipa reproduced by Nicholas Sergeyev. The company came into the Duke of York's Theatre, London, in December. Also in December 1935 there was a revival of *This World of Ours* at the Gate, with Briggs and Penelope Spencer dancing in *An American in Paris*. *The Times* (December 21) wrote 'this swift, ingenious entertainment is full of lessons to the manufacturers of ordinary revues that lumber across the stage like an elephant hopefully winking...How rarely does an audience genuinely listen in order that it may laugh, and clip its laughter that it may more quickly listen again?'. Briggs was in a number of items: *Special Correspondent* (Freddie); *By Any Other Name* (His Film Editor); *Facing the Facts* (The Inspector); *Lament for a Bridegroom* (The Bridegroom); a repeat of *Unwillingly to School* (A Pupil); *Another Drink for the Sailor*; *Baker Street Blues*; *Balletomanes* (in which he was paired with Peter Barrett). *The Times* singled out one piece for special praise - 'Mr Hedley Briggs' best song, O, for the Wings of a Dove' – which he did as a choirboy'.

In February 1936 Briggs acted Francis Meldreth again, giving a good sketch of a man having serious arguments with a priest, in another play by Hugh Ross Williamson, *Various Heavens*, at the Gate. *The Times* (February 12) found the play fascinating: 'The argument, based as it is upon a group of characters clearly and intelligently drawn, is a refreshment in the theatre...an attempt to present and discuss...a subject with which men and women outside the theatre are reasonably concerned.' The 'argument' sounds unlikely to be entertaining – it was about whether the leading woman (Beatrix Lehmann) should enter a nunnery or enter into an adulterous relationship with her lover, and took place between a priest and Briggs' well-sketched character of 'an elderly and sceptical dilettante'. His next role was that of a gigolo called Alex in *The Last of the Ladies* by William Freshman at the Apollo in February 1936. This was a total flop. *The Times* (March 1) dismissed it wittily: 'No-one wants to be unkind to good actors struggling with adversity... [but] the paper boat will not sail, the soufflé will not rise...' Later in March, at the Gate, Briggs created settings and costumes for *Lysistrata* in a striking pattern of black, white and blue, and

some of his designs were included in an exhibition of Modern Scenic Design organised by the British Drama League in April. The critic of *Time & Tide* commented 'The austere setting and costumes designed by Hedley Briggs call for special praise for, being attractive in themselves, they interpret the tone of this revival as being an estimable one'. Briggs danced in a Green Room Rag, *The Rag Bag*, produced by Robert Nesbitt that month at the Palace Theatre. *The Times* (April 27) mentioned a 'variety of talent...June and Mr Hedley Briggs dancing, the one with ingenuous, and the other with macabre, grace'. A unique connection with the Old Vic came in December, when he acted Dog and The Devil in *The Witch of Edmonton*, a production by Michel Saint-Denis in which Edith Evans had the leading role.

These busy years of the 1930s continued in February and March 1937 with designs for a Norman Marshall production of *Because We Must* (a play by Ingaret Gifford in which Vivien Leigh acted) and *Mr Gladstone* (Hugh Ross Williamson) which transferred to Wyndhams from the Gate; for *Invitation to a Voyage*, and for a prison-life play, *Out of Sight*. Also in February was a double bill at the Arts Theatre in Cambridge planned by J. M. Keynes for Lopokova. Ashton created, as a curtain raiser, a short ballet, *Harlequin in the Street*. Set in a French market square, with music by Couperin and delightful costumes by André Derain, it was planned merely to set the lively atmosphere for Molière's *Le Misanthrope*, which starred Lopokova – of this the *Manchester Guardian*, February 10) found that 'Francis James in the heavy part of the Misanthrope and Hedley Briggs, with his delicate handling of the small part of Oronte, are perhaps the only two who really successfully overcome [the difficulty of speaking rhyme]'. His danced role in the ballet was as the Bread Man. *Harlequin in the Street* was enlarged for Sadler's Wells Ballet in 1938 but Briggs had no connection with this revival.

He designed *The Taming of the Shrew*, directed by Claud Gurney at the New Theatre in March 1937, which starred Edith Evans and Leslie Banks. J. C. Trewin (*Edith Evans*) wrote that Evans was not a great

success – 'she raised a tornado that exhausted itself too soon'; but he commented that the set had pleasant, twisted, sugar-stick pillars (shades, perhaps, of the Vic-Wells *Nutcracker* of 1934!), and commented on the horse – 'a pantomime beast' that the magazine *Horse & Hound* described as 'troubled with the lampass, infected with the fashions, stark spoil'd with staggers'. In April Briggs acted the Rev John Andrews in Lord Dunsany's fantasy play about men and monkey glands, *Lord Adrian*, at the Gate, and followed this with Jester Lester in Jack Kirkland's play *Tobacco Road*, based on the novel by Erskine Caldwell, at the Gate in May. This drama about the last phase decay of a family of poor whites in America was reviewed in *The Times* (May 21): 'Mr Hedley Briggs as the broken-down father of the family, simian, cunning, hypocritical, yet with surviving glimmers of what must once have been sanity, achieves a remarkable tour de force.' H. H. in *The Observer* wrote: 'Mr Hedley Briggs, artistically dishevelled, enunciates the farmer's lines with neat precision'. He was on BBC TV in September acting in *Behind the Beyond* by Stephen Leacock, and choreographed *The Laughing Cavalier*, a musical play by Reginald Arkell and Trafford Byrne at the Adelphi in October. *The Times* (October 20) described this as being 'a bit like *La Kermesse Héroïque*...flirtatious wives and licentious mercenaries frisk and march and sing and dance' – and Briggs danced with Nini Theilade as a Gypsy. At the same theatre in December he designed costumes for *The Trojan Women* starring Sybil Thorndike. In December there was a lavish pageant-style Royal Matinee, in aid of King George's Pension Fund for Actors and Actresses, *From Queen Elizabeth to Elizabeth the Queen*, at the Winter Garden. This was written by Seymour Hicks and Edward Knoblock, and Briggs played Harlequin.

The year 1938 opened up the Little Revues. At this point Herbert Farjeon (who was also a critic) was the dominant creative imagination, and the shows were made up of marvellously witty sketches, songs and dances – music was often composed by Walter Leigh. Briggs produced and designed the first of these, *Nine Sharp*, at the Little Theatre, in January, gaining praise from *The Times* (January 27) – 'Mr Herbert Farjeon has gathered about him a cooperative company...[which] may

therefore be counted upon to develop and renew the entertainment continually. And he has in Mr Hedley Briggs a designer whose wit and invention do more for the piece than wealth'. One of the 'little revue' performers, Hermione Baddeley, said in later life, 'I adored sending everything and everyone up' and this could probably have been echoed by everyone connected with them. In March 1938 Briggs designed *The Painted Smile*, a play about circus people by William P. Templeton at the New Theatre, and a new de Valois ballet, *Le Roi Nu*, at Sadler's Wells in April. Of this *The Stage* wrote (April 14): 'It has been treated in the Chinese manner, almost in the *Turandot* style; and Hedley Briggs takes advantage of this to design some attractive costumes and scenic backgrounds'. *The Times* (April 8) wrote that 'the ballet is dressed in the 'Chinese taste' of 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe with the Emperor more like *Le Roi Soleil* than anybody else...the scenery and costumes by Mr Hedley Briggs are brilliant in colour and delightful in design'. *The Observer* (H.H., April 10) wrote that 'the delightful talent of Mr Hedley Briggs, who has designed the scenery and costumes, is at once displayed...the decoration is better than its choreographic foundation...it is Mr Briggs's success.' *The Manchester Guardian* (April 8) was also pleased with the designs: 'The haphazard daintiness of the scenery and the splendid garb of king and courtiers are the best support that Miss Ninette de Valois could have wished.'

In August Briggs was in the cast of a BBC radio production by Peter Cresswell of *As You Like It* – was he perhaps cast as Touchstone?. He acted Sir Everard Pyncheon in S. N. Behrman's *Serena Blandish* at the Gate in September (Vivien Leigh had the leading role) and designed 'the decor and ladies' costumes', and once more took up his great role as Firk in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, as well as doing the choreography 'to 16<sup>th</sup> century tunes; two songs are those used by Dekker', in a production by Nancy Price at the Playhouse in October. *The Times* (November 5) commented: 'But the whole [of the production] is held together by the rich Cockney impishness of Mr Hedley Briggs as Firk the journeyman. This is a clown in the great tradition, cousin to Touchstone and Autolycus, collateral ancestor to Sam Weller but, like all that distinguished and thoroughly national line, a unique individual'. Also

in October, for BBC TV, he started as producer for a series, *The Table under the Tree* by Wilfrid Rooke Ley. In November came a leading acting role in *Funeral Flowers for the Bride*, a one-act play by Beverley du Bose Hamer in a triple bill at the Duchess Theatre. This was, according to *The Times* (November 28):

a curious study of rustic morals in a remote corner of America, an amusing piece of anthropology and an ingenious sketch of the matter-of-fact eccentricities that can exist today in isolated communities. Mr Hedley Briggs and Miss Vera Lennox succeeded in convincing us that their characters were genuine specimens from a distant and primitive country.'

In December Briggs directed and designed *The Annual Revue* for members of the Gate. This was revised and re-staged as *The Gate Revue* at the Ambassadors, where it was open to the general public, in March 1939. *The Times* (March 10) found it 'greatly improved...it is more intelligent than anatomical, a show of wit rather than legs'. In January Briggs had produced for radio a romantic play with music, *Mazurka*, by Mabel and Denis Constanduros (Mabel Constanduros had been with Briggs in the cast of *The Shoemaker's Holiday* in 1938), as well as a programme, *Ghosts of London: a new series of musical memories*, by Wilfrid Rooke Ley. In February he directed and composed dialogue for a radio programme, *England Dances*. Again for radio, he co-directed Ivor Novello's *Glamorous Night*, starring Novello and Mary Ellis, in March. Also in March, for a matinee at the Holborn Empire by the Italia Conti stage school, he designed costumes 'most of which were pretty and some elegantly simple' (*The Times*, March 27) for the closing pantomime. In April came *The Little Revue*, a Herbert Farjeon revue, directed and designed by Briggs – *The Times* (April 22) compared it to its predecessor, *Nine Sharp*, by saying that 'it is now a little gentler...the general level is high, a slight softening of the satire having compensation in Mr Hedley Briggs' decorative skill'. In June the Royal Academy of Dancing held a ball at Grosvenor House which included a *Grande Fête de Ballet* arranged by de Valois, a pageant of

dancing from the time of Louis XIV to the Romantic Ballet, and Briggs had the role of Beauchamps as Master of Ceremonies. This was repeated at the Westminster Theatre in July. That month he produced a radio comedy with music, *Week-end Return*.

In December there was another first when he produced and designed *Die Fledermaus* for Sadler's Wells Opera. On this particular occasion, as Dennis Arundell wrote (*The Story of Sadler's Wells*) 'at one performance the sprinkler-release – to be used in the event of fire – was pulled and water cascaded onto singers and orchestra'. *The Times* (December 21) found that 'the production by Mr Hedley Briggs differed in dramatic dynamics from the conventional in that it rushed rather hard at the first act, eased up the tempo of the second where the musical climax occurs, and toned down the force of the third.' The critic had problems with the designs: 'The scenery of the second act was unfortunately more suggestive of a restaurant than a rococo palace and at the end the backcloth of the prison was frankly hauled up to permit a vaudeville finale.' However, he conceded that these were criticisms of 'an otherwise excellent production'.

World War II had broken out in September 1939. In April 1940, the revue *New Faces*, which Briggs designed and directed, opened at the Comedy. *The Times* (April 12) wrote: 'This gay and lively revue is delightfully decorated by Mr Hedley Briggs, to whose producing, it owes some, but by no means all, of its liveliness'. Ivor Brown (*The Observer*, April 14) found that 'Mr Eric Maschwitz mixes the ingredients of a familiar recipe with skill, and Mr Hedley Briggs serves it up with delightful dexterity. The material has wit, humour and a blameless audacity'. *Swinging the Gate*, another famous revue in which he also acted and danced, reached the Ambassadors in May and Ivor Brown again wrote (May 26) 'The new Gate revue swings along with brevity, alacrity and genial self-confidence. Mr Hedley Briggs is briskly serviceable in any and all of the seven ages of man – and woman.' His own roles in the show were *Let's Do an Intimate Revue* with Guy Vernet and Ronald Millar; *Unwillingly to School*; Willy in *The Conquering Hero*; Salome's Friend in *Salome Wouldn't Dance*; *We Knew Father* with Roberta Huby and Ann Wheatly; *Sur le Pont d'Avignon*; and *Ori-*

*ent Express*, written by Orford St John and performed by Hermione Gingold and Briggs (as Mrs Merger). He revised his ballet, *White Negro*, for inclusion in the film *Contraband* which starred Conrad Veidt; and in January 1941 he directed the revue, *Rise Above It*, at the Q Theatre (when this reached the Comedy in June, direction was credited to Henry Kendall).

By that time Briggs had been called up to the Forces. He served in the Royal Navy, first in the ranks and then commissioned in 1942. He was overseas a good deal, and not demobbed until 1945. At one point he produced a very successful Royal Navy revue titled *Pacific Showboat*, in which (according to his obituary by Ronald Hill in *The Stage* (February 15, 1968) 'he moulded amateur talent into an impressive near-professionalism'. This toured in Belgium and Germany. Like many theatre artists returning from war service, Briggs had problems about finding a place in the postwar world. He designed the play *A Soldier for Christmas*, staged at Wyndham's in February 1944. In October 1945, he was in the casts of a double bill directed by Norman Marshall at the Arts Theatre Cambridge of *The Bookshop* (by Jean Jacques Bernard) and Wilde's *Salome*; and he acted George Solway in *Tomorrow's Child* by John Coates, directed by Norman Marshall, in a Bristol Old Vic production at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith. This was a glimpse into the world of the 1960s – *The Times* (March 13) wrote: 'After 1965 life, it would seem, will not be worth living...Mr Hedley Briggs [as an older man] endures with amiable geniality the rigours of an age which is beyond his comprehension'. In December he directed and designed a revue, *Between Ourselves*, at the Playhouse. In 1947 he did the setting for a play, *Boys in Brown* by Reginald Beckwith, at the Arts Theatre in May, and in July acted A Sidi in a Norman Marshall production of *Maya*, also at the Arts. This was nostalgic, as he had been associated with the play in the early 1930s at Peter Godfrey's Gate. In August, again at the Arts, he played Benny in *Trapeze in the Vatican*, a translation by Ashley Dukes of a play by Kurt Johannes Braun, in which he played 'an acrobat with a heart of gold'. There was a new production of *Die Fledermaus* at Sadler's Wells in December, with Valetta Jacopi and Howell Glynne. Dennis Arundell wrote of Glynne



'superb as the drunken gaoler, hanging up his hat on the bare wall, a meticulous but apparently spontaneous performance in the real tradition of the mute comic as presented at the Wells in the past'. He is obviously referring to Grimaldi; but it is impossible not to feel that this was choreographed and taught to Glynne by the remarkable comedy actor Hedley Briggs. *The Times* (December 18) felt that Briggs 'gratified the eye with a charming interior of mid-Franz-Joseph period'; he also 'made Frosch a triumph of absurdity and instability upon the feet. Often this farcical element in the last act overturns the giddy balance of the comedy, but last night improbability, nonsense, and the ridiculous were so mixed as to be easily soluble in the music.'

Briggs was interviewed about this production by Eric Johns in *Theatre World* (January 1948). Johns introduced him by writing 'Few artists can claim greater versatility than this young man' – he had worked in every type of play from Elizabethan drama to Farjeon revue, he had partnered ballerinas, he had produced intimate revues and designed 'enchanted decor and costumes, including those for his present production of *Die Fledermaus*, which sets out to capture the gaiety of Vienna of the bustle period'. Briggs himself stressed how differently a producer must regard plays, revues and operas. With opera, 'the music and the voice must be the major consideration... the constant introduction of arias plays havoc with the action and makes it difficult to maintain concentrated interest in the plot'. Singers, he maintained, lived in a different world from actors and a producer had often to show them how to make gestures which gave life to their characters. Some of them 'had to be taught that opera is a form of theatrical entertainment and not simply a concert in costume'. Where the introduction of a ballet was concerned, as in the Blue Danube ballet in *Die Fledermaus*, there had to be close collaboration between producer and choreographer. Although he could have himself created the ballet, he had insufficient time for this and it was done by Anthony Burke of Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet. 'We worked in close collaboration from the beginning. I showed him my costume designs. I explained how the ballet would be introduced into Orlovsky's ballroom, making it clear that the dancers would perform the waltz for Orlovsky's guests rather than

the audience out in front. I then gave him scale plans of the stage, showing him where some thirty singers would be grouped before any of the dancers made an entrance.' He also discussed translations of libretti, emphasising that new ones should be done to replace some absurd existing ones, especially perhaps where Offenbach's operas were concerned:

Herbert Farjeon wanted to stage an up-to-date version of *Orpheus in the Underworld*, retitled *Orpheus in the Underground*. It would have been a sensation. I am convinced that there are new and as yet undiscovered writers capable of making a witty translation of these Offenbach works and proving once and for all that operatic humour is not confined to baritones falling over gilt chairs. A wealth of melody is waiting to be released by an author with the right gift.'

Much of what he advocated in 1948 has later been achieved.

In January 1948 Briggs directed a play, *Mountain Air* by Ronald Wilkinson, at the Comedy, and later that year he created and produced a show that was a tribute by him to a wartime posting which he had greatly enjoyed in Trinidad. *Calypso* opened at Wimbledon Theatre and came into the Playhouse in May. It was the first musical based on a West Indian subject with a predominantly West Indian cast, and combined local songs and dances with a conventional story of lovers' misunderstandings. The dances were performed with great dash and verve, and the date was significant – it was just a month before the *Windrush* brought the first West Indian immigrants to Britain. Sadly, it failed. In *The London Musical Theatre*, Kurt Gänzl wrote of it as 'a potpourri of musical comedy, revue, ballet and West Indian music' which 'featured a lot of calypso music and very little in the way of coherence'. Also in May he produced a play, *The Paragon*, at the Fortune and acted in *Trespass* at the Apollo. There was film work in 1948, acting a small part in a Sydney Box movie, *My Brother's Keeper*. In April 1949 Norman Marshall was backed by the British Council to form a small drama company, the London Gate Theatre Company, which toured British,

French and American zones in Germany with two plays, *Hamlet* and *Man and Superman*. Marshall continued, for the British Council, to tour a 'dramatic recital' of scenes from Shakespeare which was in France in February 1950 and went to India and Pakistan in November. Briggs may have been associated as an actor with these tours. He is next traceable in 1951, when from January to March he was associated with a fringe club venture, the New Lindsey Theatre in London. This small venue was reconstituted in 1946 by Frederick Piffard and Peter Cotes with the aim of producing stimulating new works and translations. On January 8, 1951 the production was *Frou-Frou*, a revival of a 19<sup>th</sup> century French play by Meilhac and Halévy in a new translation by Jeanne de Casalis. The leading role, of a young woman spoilt by her father, sister, husband and lover, was taken by the film actress Jean Kent, and Briggs had the part of Brigard, her father. On March 12, he directed a production of another French play, *Husbands don't Count* (*Le Mari ne compte pas*) by Roger Ferdinand, translated by Patricia Hollender. The cast included Gabrielle Brune, Edwin Styles, Winifred Shotton and Charles Hawtrey, and it was reasonably successful – *The Times* (March 12) found 'the lines entertaining without being particularly novel, and the general brisk performance saved the evening'. Briggs last association with the theatre seems to have been on March 21, when he played Xavier de Lauterey in *Between Five and Seven* by Andrée Méry, translated by Minnie Richard. In its life the New Lindsey presented young actors, including Dirk Bogarde, Ron Moody and Fenella Fielding, but its main claim to memory came in 1956 when it launched Flanders and Swann in *At the Drop of a Hat*. What happened to Briggs after 1951 is a mystery. Marshall was usually either away from London (he was associated with the Edinburgh Festival in 1952 and 1954) or working with the British Theatre Association, Associated Rediffusion or on the British Council's advisory committee. Had *Calypso* been a success, it might have led to a positive career for Briggs in stage musicals but sadly there was to be no worthwhile postwar work for him. All the strong contacts that before the war had given him the wide-ranging chances which he had taken with such immense flair had largely dispersed or died. Peter Godfrey was settled in America;

Terence Gray was living a non-theatre life in Monte Carlo; the Vic-Wells Ballet, although still directed by de Valois, was now the great Sadler's Wells/Royal Ballet based at Covent Garden; Penelope Spencer, although she retained contact with the Royal Academy of Dancing, devoted her later life to her husband and three sons; Hugh Ross Williamson had largely deserted the theatre to become a respected Roman Catholic historian. Masks, the craft of which Briggs had been a great master, were rarely used in the contemporary theatre. Even the vogue for the 'little revue' came to an end.

Hedley Briggs took his own life when he was living at Parkstone in Dorset, on February 11, 1968. The event had little coverage apart from Ronald Hill's obituary in *The Stage*. The announcement in the Deaths column of *The Times* (February 13) was appallingly bleak – it merely read 'BRIGGS, Hedley. On 11<sup>th</sup> February 1968, suddenly. Cremation private. R.I.P'. In *The Stage* obituary he was described as 'a versatile and often inspired man of the theatre. There seemed to be no end to his talents... He had an instinct, a flair, and he brought style to anything he tackled'. Hill referred to the fact that in the postwar period 'his star waned', although his interest in the theatre remained. Watching a performance by the Noh Theatre at the Aldwych Theatre (during a World Theatre season) 'he missed not an inflection or gesture'. Unfortunately he 'seemed to doubt his contributions in the past'. Noone managed to convince him of the fact that a study of his enormously busy, varied and successful years before World War II proves beyond doubt that he was an important part of British theatre, especially throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

## Hedley Briggs

### Chronology

cr = created; des = designed; costs = costumes; sc = scenery; blt = ballet; B'ham = Birmingham; Rep = Repertory; FTC = Festival Theatre Cambridge; Ldn = London; Th = Theatre; VWB = Vic-Wells Ballet; OV = Old Vic; SW = Sadler's Wells; arr = arranged; chor = choreographed; dir = directed; divt = divertissement; asm = assistant stage manager; de V = Dame Ninette de Valois

- 1907 Mar 29 – born at King's Norton, near B'ham (UK), parents Joseph Ward Gawthorne-Briggs and his wife Lucy (Lane).
- 1921 Oct – joined B'ham Rep Th as student actor  
29 (acting debut) – Juanillo, *The Two Shepherds* (G. Martinez Sierra), B'ham
- 1922 Mar 18 – *The Fiancé, The Shepherds & the Chimney Sweep* (Scarlati/Leighton Lucas), B'ham  
June 20 – *The Baron, L'Enfant prodigue* (Carré), possibly with Ginner-Mawer School at Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Summer Festival  
Oct 13 – extra, *The Immortal Hour* (Rutland Boughton), B'ham  
Dec 20 – Colonel MacMashit/Harlequin, *The Christmas Party* (Barry Jackson), Regent Th  
Ldn/B'ham Rep. Until Jan 11, 1923
- 1923 Aug – listed as an asm, B'ham Rep Th  
Oct 9/27 – *Back to Methusaleh, Pts I/IV* (Shaw), B'ham. HB was probably A Youth (one of 6) in Pt V (*As Far As Thought Can Reach*) (Oct 27)  
Nov 24 – *The Gentleman in White, Gas* (Kaiser), B'ham
- 1924 Feb 22 – A Youth (one of 6), *Back to Methusaleh Part V* (Shaw), Court Th Ldn/B'ham Rep  
The series was repeated at the Court Th from Aug 25-Sep 10  
Mar 11 – actor, *The Farmer's Wife* (Eden Philpotts), Court Th/B'ham Rep  
May 22 – *Another Page, Romeo & Juliet* (Shakespeare), Regent Th/B'ham Rep

In B'ham Rep, autumn season in B'ham, the plays were: *The Master Builder* (Ibsen); *Devonshire Cream* (Philpotts); *The Passion Flower* (Benevente); *The Seal Woman* (Granville Bantock & Marjorie Kennedy Fraser, a Celtic folk opera). HB may have been actor or asm for all or any of these. It seems likely that at some point the rep included *The Pierrot of the Minute* (poem-play by Bantock based on an Ernest Dowson poem), in which HB played Pierrot.

- 1925 Apr 21 – asm, *Caesar & Cleopatra* (Shaw), Kingsway Th/B'ham Rep  
June 29 – asm, *The New Morality* (Chapin), Kingsway Th/B'ham Rep  
The company had a season in B'ham from September 14. Rep was: *The Cassilis Engagement* (St John Hankin); *The Round Table* (Lennox Robinson); *He Who Gets Slapped* (Andreyev); *Harold* (Tennyson); *A Trip to Scarborough* (Sheridan); *Iphigenia in Aulis* (Euripides)  
Nov 17 – A Messenger at the War Office, *The Old Adam* (Cicely Hamilton) Kingsway Th/B'ham Rep  
date unknown – actor, *The Ephesian* (Dibdin), Court Th/B'ham Rep
- 1926 Apr 7 – Envy, *The Marvellous History of Saint Bernard* (Barry Jackson), Kingsway Th/B'ham Rep (title given wrongly in *The London Stage as Rebellious History*)  
date unknown – Antonio, *The Song* (Adela Maddison), Court Th/B'ham Rp  
June – joined Terence Gray's Festival Theatre Cambridge (FTC)  
Oct 25 – actor, *Monna Vanna* (Maeterlinck), FTC at Amateur Dramatic Company Th  
Nov 22 – Chorus Leader, *The Oresteia of Aesychlus*, FTC (opening night)
- 1927 Jan 17 – Theophanes the Lord Abbot, *Heraclius* (T. E. Ellis), FTC  
24 – A Student, *The Pleasure Garden* (Beatrice Mayor), FTC  
31 – The Fool, *On Baile's Strand* (Yeats), des masks, FTC

- Feb 14 – La Rubia, *The Rumour* (C. K. Munro), FTC  
 28 – Foresight, *Love for Love* (Congreve), FTC  
 Mar 7 – A Clown, *The Invisible Duke* (F Sladen Smith); also Aminadab Lupin, *Sweeney Todd the Barber* (George Dibdin Pitt), FTC  
 Apr 20 – Androcles, *Androcles & the Lion* (Shaw), FTC  
 May 2 – Mr Two/Joe, *The Adding Machine* (Elmer Rice), FTC  
 9 – Bill/A Blackleg, *Don Juan* (Elroy Flecker), FTC  
 16 – The Prime Minister, *The Player Queen* (Yeats), des costs; also in dance divt, *Nautical Nonsense pas de trois* and *The Legend of the Aspen Tree* both chor de V; also Alexis (acted), *Red Nights of the Tcheka* (de Lorde & Bauche), FTC  
 23 – Felix/Mr Cricket/An Inventor, *The Insect Play* (Capek), FTC  
 Sep 12 – dancer, *The Taming of the Shrew* (Shakespeare), OV Drama/ Lyric Th H'smith  
 1928 Oct 10 – Chorus Leader, *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Sophocles), FTC  
 Jan 16 – Sentinel/Musician, *Caesar & Cleopatra* (Shaw), FTC  
 23 – Felix Fejevary the 1<sup>st</sup>, *The Inheritors* (Glaspell), FTC  
 Feb 6 – Bank Cashier, *From Morn to Midnight* (Kaiser), FTC  
 20 – Sir William Catesby, *Richard III* (Shakespeare), FTC  
 27 – Norbert, *The Passion Flower* (Benevente), FTC  
 Mar 5 – Ralph, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (Beaumont & Fletcher), FTC  
 Apr 30 – Titus Dudgeon, *The Devil's Disciple* (Shaw), FTC  
 May 14 – The Witch Doctor/dancer, *The Emperor Jones* (O'Neill), FTC  
 June 4 – The Peacock/The Business Man, *The Birds of Aristophanes*, FTC  
 Sep 10 - *The Pilgrim's Progress*, des costs/masks, Leeds Civic Th production at Trinity Congregational Church, Leeds  
 Nov 9 – Triple Bill with Lydia Lopokova at ADC Th Cambridge. The Devil, *A Soldier's Tale* (Stravinsky) and dance; The Reverend Man, *A Lover's Complaint* (Shakespeare); and dance divt (*A Tschouvachian Wedding* and *Soldier & Grisette*)

- 21 – Shorty, *All God's Chillun got Wings*, ?Gate Th Ldn  
 26 – Programme by de V's Academy of Choreographic Art, Court Th: *Les Bouffons*; *Nobody's Jigg (solo)* and des costume; *Nautical Nonsense*; Tefen, *The Scorpions of Ysit* (blt); The Minstrel, *Scène Vénitienne* (all chor de V)  
 Dec 10 – dancer, recital with Penelope Spencer and Beatrice de Holthoir, Arts Th Ldn  
 12 – Old Vienna Cabaret Ball, Grosvenor House, Ldn, danced with de V.  
 13 – Tircis, *Les Petits Riens* (blt by de V). First complete ballet given at OV as curtain raiser to opera *Hansel & Gretel*  
 1929 Jan 8 – actor, *Carnival* (radio play from Compton Mackenzie novel), from Daventry  
 Feb 4 – actor, *Prometheus* (Aeschylus); dancer in divt: *Danse profane pas de deux* with de V, des masks and costs; *Polka pas de deux* with de V, des costs; *Les Buffons* (sic), FTC  
 19 – actor, *Incorrigible* (radio play by A. J. Talbot), from Daventry  
 Apr 19 – The Prince/dancer in ballet, *Beggar on Horseback* (Kaufman & Connelly), also music, des costs & decorations, FTC  
 May 6 – Christopher Mahon, *The Playboy of the Western World* (Synge), FTC  
 9 – des costs, *The Picnic* (blt by de V, sometimes called *The Faun* or *The Satyr*), OV, as curtain raiser to opera *Rigoletto*  
 20 – des, *Masses and Men* (Toller); also Tircis, *Les Petits Riens*, FTC  
 27 - The Dancer (acted), *Periphery* (Frantiske Langer), FTC  
 June 3 – Firk and dance, *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (Dekker), des costs, FTC  
 9 – The Young Syrian, *Salome* (Wilde), ensemble chor. FTC  
 July 2 - Dance Recital with Penelope Spencer, Arts Th Ldn, inc Firk's Dance. There are few traceable dates for appearances with Spencer, but they danced regularly together. Items included *Baedeker*, *Parisian Dolls*. He also had solos, inc *Panic!*, and des costs

Aug 13 – The Ghost of Cuchullain, *Fighting the Waves* (Yeats); also *Tyrolean pas de trois* from *Hommage aux belles viennoises* (blt by de V) and *Polka*, all chor de V. Abbey Th Dublin

Oct ? – Albert, *Maya* (Gantillon), Gate Th Ldn

3 – The Satyr, *The Picnic* (blt), OV. Also Oct 5

Nov 4 – with Lopokova. acted two parts, *Life's A Dream* (Calderón), also 'directed' costs & sc with Alfred B Woods. ADC Th Cambridge

27 – in speciality dances with Spencer in cabaret, Gateway of Empire Ball, Grosvenor House, Park Lane Ldn

Dec 4 – recital with Spencer, Anton Dolin and Anna Ludmila, Arts Th Ldn, 18 items, including a quartet, *Tennis Then & Now*, des costs/masks

31 – Madness/An Ape (*pas de deux* with Spencer)/A Hector (one of 4)/A Slain Lover (one of 6), *Cupid & Death* (masque by James Shirley, music Matthew Locke & Christopher Gibbon), chor Spencer, Ldn Opera Festival, Scala Th Ldn

1930 Jan 2 – Actaeon/A Fury (one of 3)/A Sailor (one of 4), *Dido & Aeneas* (Purcell & Nahum Tate) chor Spencer, Ldn Opera Festival, Scala Th

Feb 17 – dance divt, *Polka pas de deux* with de V, FCT

Mar 17 – (Lord) Bentley Summerhayes, *Misalliance* (Shaw), Court Th

28 – Academy of Choregraphic Art programme, The Satyr, *The Picnic*; Tircis, *Les Petits Riens*. All chor by de V, Lyric Th H'smith

May ('Whitsun evening') – opening of Cecil Sharp House, The Satyr, *The Picnic* (blt)

June 2 – Erwin, *Revolt in a Reformatory* (Lampel), Gate Th

July 8 – Sunshine Matinee, The Satyr, *The Picnic* (blt), Scala Th

Oct 9 – dancer, *Marriage à la mode* (Dryden), Lyric Th H'smith; transferred to Royalty Th Ldn, Nov 10

19 - des, curtain & masks, *Danse sacrée et danse profane* (blt, chor de V); The Dentist, *A Toothsome Morsel* (blt, chor Spencer) Camargo Society, Cambridge Th Ldn

Nov c 24 – recital with Spencer, Dolin, Ludmila, Coliseum Th Ldn

Dec 23 – with Spencer in the variety bill of Manchester Hippodrome

29 – The Satyr, *The Picnic*; *Nautical Nonsense*; *Polka pas de deux* with de V; Gigue, *Suite de danses* chor de V. Vic-Sadler's Wells Opera Ballet, Bournemouth Pavilion

1931 Jan 23 – Attendant on Cephalus, *Cephalus & Procris* (chor de V); also speaker and dancer, *Rout* (chor de V), Camargo Society, Apollo Th Ldn

Feb 4 – dancer, *Nautical Nonsense*, OV

16 – des costs, *Liebestraum* (chor Balanchine), Coliseum Th

Mar 19 – dancer, *Cochran's 1931 Revue* (Coward/Balanchine), Ldn Pavilion

Apr ? - dancer, *Statues* (chor Balanchine), Alhambra Th Ldn

May 18 – dancer, *Die Fledermaus* (short ballet), Alhambra Th; also *Tango pas de deux*; *Scotch Rhapsody pas de deux* (all chor Balanchine), des costs

27 – ensemble chor, *Salome* (Wilde), Gate Th; dancer, *Nautical Nonsense*

July 5 – A Son, a Comforter, War-Pestilence-Famine, *Job* (chor de V); des masks & wigs, Camargo Society, Cambridge Th Ldn

Sep 20 – actor, *Pharaoh's Ring* (Louis Goodrich), Grafton Th Ldn

22 – Gigue, *Suite of Dances*; also A Son, poss the other roles, *Job* (both chor de V), VWB, OV

Nov 2 – Parmeno, *The Eunuch* (Terence), chor & des, FTC

7 – Dr Parpalaid, *Dr Knock* (Romain), FTC

14 – Death, *The Alcestis of Euripides*; chor. *Studies in Rhythm*, with Anny Boalth: HB danced *Panic!* (solo), *Swinging Circles pas de deux*, *Waltz pas de deux*

23 – The Young Syrian, *Salome* (Wilde), ensemble chor. Also Ilaos, *The Sentimental Centaur* (Toyne), FTC

30 – Corporal Stiff (a stiff 'un), *The Red Rover* (Edward Fitzball), FTC

- 1932 Jan 11 – dancer/actor, *This World of Ours* (revue in 2 editions), chor & ballet des. Items: *I only want to sing*; *What's all this talk about love?* (A P Herbert) (with Spencer; *The Tree of Knowledge* (Alastair Cooke); Mr Hughes, *The Rehearsal*, *Globe Th 1595*; An American, *An American in Paris* (m Gershwin, chor HB) (with Spencer); Sailor, *An English Summer*; *Parisian Dolls* (with Spencer); *Valse Gracieuse* (with Spencer) FTC
- 25 – Foresight, *Love for Love* (Congreve), des. FTC
- Feb 1 – Pschutti, Chief of Police, *Bastos the Bold* (Régis & de Veynes), des FTC
- 8 – Marco Polo, *Marco Millions* (O'Neill), des. FTC
- 15 – Augustus, a poet, *Will You Play With Me* (Achard), des sc, FTC
- 22 - *Alison's House* (Glaspell), des, FTC
- 29 - Francis Meldreth/A Yokel, *In a Glass Darkly* (H Ross Williamson), FTC
- Mar 7 – Ralph, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (Beaumont & Fletcher), FTC
- Apr 10 – 9<sup>th</sup> ‘Revel’ at the Arts Th Ldn, HB in cast – programme: *Thomas & Sally* (Arne); *Discovery* (sketch by Mary Dunn); selection of early 19<sup>th</sup> c songs
- 14 – dancer, *Twice Nightly* (Vaudeville Entertainment), also des. FTC
- May 22 – Foresight, *Love for Love* (Congreve), Faculty of Arts Th Ldn
- Season 1932/33 (prob May) – chor *No More Women!* (revue) Cambridge Footlights
- June 6 - A Huntsman, *Le Lac des cygnes, Act II*; Pappy, *High Yellow* (blt by Ashton/Bradley), Camargo Society, Savoy Th Ldn
- 11 – An Attendant, *The Origin of Design* (blt by de V); Cabin Boy, *Regatta* (blt by Ashton), Camargo Society, Savoy Th
- 20 – Wilfred/A Huntsman, *Giselle*, Camargo Society, Savoy Th
- Oct 11 – *Douanes* (blt by de V), des, VWB, SW

- Nov 28 – *A Kiss in Spring* (romantic comedy with music), des, Alhambra Th
- Dec 4 – The Dwarf, *The Infanta's Birthday* (blt by Spencer), Camargo Society, Adelphi Th
- 28 – *Peter's Parade* (Godfrey). HB & Spencer danced *Chap 3, The Fountain*. also des costumes & masks. Gate Th
- 1933 Mar 1 – chor, *Jolly Roger or The Admiral's Daughter* (Mackenzie/Clinton-Baddeley), Savoy Th
- 21 – Dr Coppelius, *Coppelia* (blt, 2 acts, 1<sup>st</sup> company performance), VWB, SW; also probably Nov 21, Dec 12, and Jan 30, 1934
- 28 – *He Wanted Adventure* (musical fantasy, Weston/Lee), des costs, Saville Th Ldn
- Apr 3 – *All God's Chillun Got Wings* (O'Neill), des masks, Piccadilly Th Ldn
- 25 – Dances, HB & Spencer, Ldn National TV by the Baird Process
- May 12 – dancer, *Peter's Parade* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Gate Th
- 29 – Firk, *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (Dekker) & dance, FTC
- Sep 30 – *Gay Hussar* (musical play, Holt Marcell), des, Palace Th Manchester
- Oct 10 – dancer/actor, *By Degrees* (revue), chor/des. Items included two ballets by HB, with music by Geoffrey Wright, *Susannah and the Elders*, and *White Negro*
- 1934 Jan 30 – *Casse-Noisette* (blt), des, VWB, SW
- Feb 19 – *Yours Sincerely* (revue by Herbert Farjeon), des costs & some chor, Daly's Th
- 28 – *The Golden Toy* (Carl Zuckmayer), des masks, Coliseum
- Apr 8 - Friedrich, *Gambit* (Raoul Myer), Modern Players, Playhouse Th
- June 10 (17?) – a multiple role as a ‘man-made deity’, *Genesis II* (Aubrey Menon), Experimental Th, Fortune Th, also chor danced by HB and Diana Gould
- 14 – Henry Cox, *Meeting at Night* (Margery Sharp), Globe Th
- Sep 28 - dancer, *Streamline* (A. P. Herbert & Ronald Jeans), Palace Th

Oct 1 - Asa Gilbert Eddy/Dr Foster, *Miracle in America* (Ernst Toller), Gate Th, also designed 'setting for the play and the decoration of the theatre and foyer'

22 - *The Sulky Fire* (Jean-Jacques Bernard), des, Gate Th

Nov 14 - A Customer/Dave, *Strange Combat* (Sarah Salt), Gate Th

29 - Trigorin, a comedian, *Nichevo* (Clinton-Baddeley & Scobie Mackenzie) des, Gate Th

Dec 21 - in cast, *This Year, Next Year* (Ronnie Hill) Gate Th, des/arr dances & ensembles. Items: 3, *Proper Pride* (Mr X); 4, *All the Fun of the Show* (HB with Gingold, Catherine Edridge, Ian Jarvis); 5, *A Plea for Free Trade* (HB & company); Blt, *White Negro*, m Geoffrey Wright, chor/des masks. HB danced it with Rosalind Idène, Mari Scott, Sylvia Willins; *Hollywood Funeral* (A Film Producer, also staging); *Young Hayrick* (Hayrick)

26, Blt, *Création à la mode* m G Wright, devised/prod HB, HB (The Designer), R Idène (The Model), M Scott (Line), S Willins (Colour); 18, *Seductio ad absurdum* (The Father); 22, *The Best of Everything* (HB, Gingold, Edridge Jarvis)

In 1934 there was a film, *The Painted Veil*, with Greta Garbo, for which HB chor 'a Chinese ballet'

In 1934/5 HB appeared in various productions and designed all the settings at the Gate Th during Norman Marshall's directorship.

1935 Jan ? repeat of *This World of Ours*, Gate Th.

Feb 13 - Francis Meldreth, *Seven Deadly Virtues* (Hugh Ross Williamson), des, Gate Th

Mar 13 - *Chicago* (Maurice Watkins), des., Gate Th

Apr 11 - *A Comedy of Good and Evil* (Richard Hughes), des, Gate Th

May 2 - *Victoria Regina* (Laurence Housman), des, Gate Th

June 10 (Apr 10?) - actor, dancer, *Charlot's Char-a-bang*, also co-producer/chor, one item solo, *Coloured Clown*, Vaudeville Th

Sep 8 - *Karl and Anna* (Leonhard Frank), des, Gate Th

Oct 9 - *Anatol* (Schnitzler), des, Gate Th

29 - *National 6* (J-J Bernard), des, Gate Th

Nov 12 - *Hungaria* (blt), des sc, Markova-Dolin Blt, Th Royal, Newcastle. Duke of York's Th Ldn, Dec 26

13 - *Le Lac des cygnes*, (blt), 2 act version with apotheosis, des costs, Markova-Dolin Blt, Th Royal, Newcastle. D of Y Th Ldn, Dec 23

27 - *No Longer Mourn* (Sarah Gertrude Millin), des, Gate Th  
Dec 20 - *This World of Ours* (possibly titled *On With The Show*), des/arr dances & ensembles. Also in cast: Items: *Special Correspondent* (Freddie); *By Any Other Name* (His Film Editor); *O for the Wings of a Dove* (solo song as a choirboy); *Facing the Facts* (Inspector); *Lament for a Bridegroom* (The Bridegroom); *Unwillingly to School* (A Pupil); *Another Drink for the Sailor* (HB with R Iden, Bettina ?, Mari Scott); *Balletomanes* (HB with Peter Barrett?); *Baker Street Blues* (HB, Gingold and company), Gate Th

1936 Feb 12 - Francis Meldreth, *Various Heavens* (H Ross Williamson), des, Gate Th

Mar 12 - *Lysistrata* (new version by Reginald Beckwith & Andrew Cruickshank), des, Gate Th

24 - Alex, *The Last of the Ladies* (William Freshman), Apollo Th

Apr 21 - *Parnell* (Elsie T Schauffler), des, Gate Th, transferred to New Th Nov 4

23 - Report in *The Times* re an exhibition, Modern Scenic Design, organised by the British Drama League, at Derry & Toms department store, HB included (mention of *Lysistrata*)

27 - dancer, *The Rag Bag*, Palace Th

June 11 - *No More Peace!* (Ernst Toller), des, Gate Th

Nov 12 - *The Children's Hour* (Lillian Hellman), des, Gate Th

Dec 8 - Dog, the Familiar/The Devil, *The Witch of Edmonton* (Thomas Rowley etc), and chor, OV. HB in OV company list 1936/7

1937 Feb 3 - *Invitation to a Voyage*, des, Gate Th

5 - *Because We Must* (Ingaret Giffard) and *Mr Gladstone* (H Ross Williamson), des, Wyndham's Th - originally at Gate Th

- 8 - Bread Man, *Harlequin in the Street* (blt by Ashton); also Oronte. *Le Misanthrope* (Molière), Arts Th Cambridge. Transferred to Ambassadors Th, Feb 23
- Mar 4 - *Out of Sight* (Leslie & Sewell Stokes), des, Gate Th
- 23 - *The Taming of the Shrew* (Shakespeare), des, New Th Ldn
- Apr 15 - The Rev John Andrewes, *Lord Adrian* (Dunsany), des, Gate Th
- May 21 - Jester Lester (the father), *Tobacco Road* (Jack Kirkland), des, Gate Th; also a Diana Morgan sketch, Hayrick in *Young Hayrick*
- Sep 10 - Ldn TV, Jack Harding, *Behind the Beyond* (Stephen Leacock)
- Oct 19 - *The Laughing Cavalier* (Reginald Arkell/Stafford Byrne), chor, Adelphi Th
- Dec 7 - *The Trojan Women* (Euripides), des, Adelphi Th
- 19 - Harlequin, *From Queen Elizabeth to Elizabeth the Queen* (pageant), Winter Garden Th Ldn
- 1938 Jan 26 - *Nine Sharp* (revue by Herbert Farjeon), dir/des, Little Th Ldn
- Mar 21 - *The Painted Smile* (William P Templeton), des, New Th Ldn
- Apr 7 - *Le Roi Nu* (blt by de V), des, VWB, SW
- Aug 6 - B'cast National, in cast, *As You Like It* (Shakespeare)
- Sep 13 - Sir Everard Pyncheon, *Serena Blandish* (Behrman), decor & ladies' costs, Gate Th
- Oct 12 - *Private History* (James Courage), des, Gate Th
- 29 - B'cast National, *The Table under the Tree* series (William Rooke Ley), prod HB
- Nov 4 - Firk, and dance, *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (Dekker), arr dances to 16<sup>th</sup> c tunes & two songs that were included by Dekker, Playhouse Th Ldn
- 27 - a lead, *Funeral Flowers for the Bride* (Beverley du Bose), dir, Duchess Th Ldn, in a triple bill of one-act plays
- Dec 19 - *The Gate Revue*, dir/des, Gate Th. Transferred to Ambassadors Th, closed at outbreak of WWII, reopened Mar 9, 1939

- 1939 Jan 2 - Broadcast, National, *Mazurka* (romantic play by Mabel & Denis Constanduros, m Mark Lubbock), dir
- 28 - Broadcast, National, *Ghosts of London*, new series of musical memories by Wilfrid Rooke Ley, dir
- Feb 9 - Broadcast, *England Dances*, dir
- 11 - Broadcast, National, *The Table under the Trees*, dir
- Mar 7 - Broadcast, Regional, *Glamorous Night*, adapted by V.C.Clinton-Baddeley, dir in collab with Mark H. Lubbock & George Lestrangle. Starring Ivor Novello and Mary Ellis
- 22 - *Nine Sharp* (revue), new edition. des
- 25 - Italia Conti matinee (pantomime), des costs, Holborn Empire
- Apr 21 - *The Little Revue* (by Herbert Farjeon), dir/des, Little Th. closed at outbreak of WWII, reopened Sep 2
- May 13 - Broadcast, Regional, *The Table under the Trees*, dir
- June 8 - Beauchamps (MC), *Grande Fete de Ballet*, arr de Valois for RAD's first Ball at Grosvenor House, repeated Westminster Th, July 18
- July 11 - Broadcast, National, *Week-end Return* (comedy with music by C Dennis Freeman & Mark H.Lubbock), dir
- Dec 21 - *Die Fledermaus*, SWOpera, dir, New Th Ldn
- 1940 Feb 20 - Broadcast, Home Service, excerpt from *The Little Revue*
- Apr 11 - acted. *New Faces* (revue by Eric Maschwitz), dir/des Comedy Th, transferred to Apollo Th Mar 14, 1941
- May 22 - in cast, *Swinging the Gate* (revue), also dir/des. Ambassadors Th, HB in items: *Let's do an Intimate Revue*, with Guy Verney & Ronald Millar; *Unwillingly to School* (Timothy); *The Conquering Hero* (Willy); *Salome wouldn't Dance* (Salome's friend); *He Knew Father*, with Roberta Huby and Ann Wheatly; *Sur le pont d'Avignon*; *Orient Express* (HB in drag as Mrs Merger & Gingold)
- date unknown - Broadcast, a musical with Anne Ziegler and Webster Booth, dir in collab with Mark Lubbock and George Lestrangle



- film, *Contraband*, starring Conrad Veidt, included cabaret scene with HB blt, *White Negro*
- 1941 Jan 6 – *Rise Above It* (revue), dir/des, Q Th Ldn; later Comedy Th June 5, dir then credited to Henry Kendall.  
Feb 20 – *Die Fledermaus*, SWOpera, des costs, New Th Called up, and service in Royal Navy
- 1942 Commissioned in RN, service included a spell in Trinidad
- 1943-44 season, Bristol Old Vic records credit him with des for *The Lady from the Sea*
- 1944 Feb 3 - *A Soldier for Christmas* (Reginald Beckwith), des sc, Wyndhams Th transferred to Playhouse Th Oct 6
- 1945 dates unknown, *Pacific Showboat* (RN revue), dir/des/appeared in, toured to Belgium, Germany etc. Then demobbed  
Oct 15 – actor, *The Bookshop* (J J Bernard) and *Salome*, Arts Th Cambridge
- 1946 Mar 12 – George Solway, *Tomorrow's Child* (John Coates), Lyric H'smith, Bristol OV Co,  
Dec 16 – *Between Ourselves* (revue, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed), dir/des, Playhouse Th Ldn
- 1947 Jan ? - *Happy as Kings*, dir/lighting  
Apr -? - *Mountain Air* (Ronald Wilkinson), dir. transferred to Comedy Th Jan 22, 1948  
May 28 – *Boys in Brown* (R Beckwith), des. sc, Arts Th Ldn. Was this originally staged, dir N Marshall, in 1940?  
July 2 – A Sidi, *Maya*, Arts Th Ldn  
Aug 7 - Benny, *Trapeze in the Vatican* (Ashley Dukes, from Kurt Johannes Braun) Arts Th Ldn  
Sep 20 - *Tritsch-Tratsch Polka* (chor John Cranko) des costs. S Wells Th Blt, SW  
Dec 17 - *Die Fledermaus*, dir/des, SWOpera, SW
- 1948 Jan – *Producing an Opera*, interview by Eric Johns for *Theatre World*  
May 10 - *The Paragon* (Walter Fitzgerald), dir, Fortune Th Ldn  
24 – *Calypso* (musical comedy revue), m Ronald Hill, chor/des/dir, bk Rodney Hobson, Playhouse Th (earlier in May at Wimbledon Th)

- Oct 2 - *Die Fledermaus*, dir/des, SWOpera, SW  
film, 2<sup>nd</sup> Barber, *My Brother's Keeper*, prod Sydney Box, Antony Darnborough
- 1949 Sep 30 – *Die Fledermaus*, dir (with John Donaldson)/des, SWOpera, SW
- 1951 Jan 8 - Brigard, the father, *Frou-Frou* (Meilhac/Halevy, trans Jeanne de Casalis, New Lindsey Th, Ldn.  
Mar 16 – *Husbands don't Count* (*Le Mari ne compte pas* by Roger Ferdinand, trans Patricia Hollender), dir, New Lindsey Th  
Mar 21 – Xavier de Lauroy, *Between Five and Seven* (Andrée Méri, trans Minnie Richard), New Lindsey Th
- 1952 Dec 11 – *Die Fledermaus*, dir/des, SWOpera. SW
- 1953 Nov 7 – *Die Fledermaus*, dir/des, SWOpera, SW
- 1954 Sep 8 – *Die Fledermaus*, dir/des, SWOpera, SW
- 1968 Feb 11 – HB died, Parkstone, Dorset (suicide).  
15 - Obituary in *The Stage* by Ronald Hill.

# Evenings on Olympus

## Part II

By Mike Dixon

On Friday 22 December 1972 I made a brief visit to Marlborough Street for a pre-Christmas drink with Ashton on my way to a performance at The Place Theatre. Nearing his house, I saw a silver snuffbox in an antique dealer's window and bought it on impulse thinking that it would make a modest addition to Ashton's collection. After the first drinks were poured I retrieved the box from my pocket and expressed the hope that he would like it. As he un-wrapped the tissue paper he cried out in surprise but then, to my astonishment, became tearful and flustered. "I don't give Christmas presents...I never send Christmas cards...to anybody..." He ended lamely: "I didn't get you anything." Pointing out that my own offering had been entirely spontaneous and not even gift-wrapped, I begged him to relax and think no more about the matter. Instead he hurried upstairs and returned with new shirts still boxed in cellophane and urged me to take them as a present. I refused them and tried to change the subject by commenting on a miniature cloisonné clock newly arrived on the mantelpiece. "Oh it's a Christmas present from Margot," he said, almost dismissively. When I extolled its beauty he replied "Margot doesn't buy Christmas presents either. She doesn't need to. Wherever she goes people give her things: silk scarves, jewellery, handbags. She has drawers full of these items neatly labelled with the name of the giver. She probably recycles them at Christmas so she probably didn't buy the clock."

In retrospect, Freddie's cynicism about someone he adored seemed to mask deeper, more painful feelings about Christmas, family and loved ones, since it highlighted the absence of a satisfactory emotional relationship in his life. His unexpected tears appeared to be a deeply romantic response to an object offered devoid of any emotional significance but which he wished to charge with a greater personal value. After placing the snuffbox on the low table with the rest of his collection he would pick it up from time to time, examine it with pleasure and replace it with a satisfied smile. He said: "I once asked Bobby Helpmann if he had bought any Christmas presents and he said 'I've bought something wonderful for Larry Olivier and some exquisite jewellery for Vivien Leigh and a first edition for Tyrone Guthrie...' I said Bobby, those aren't presents. They're investments!"

Ashton had many celebrity friends of his own but he did not actively seek the company of the famous, based on the evidence of the conversations I had with him. The royal family was another matter. The Queen Mother and Princess Margaret were both huge fans and he clearly felt more comfortable with the former. He once complained to me: "I've had a terrible day. Princess Margaret wishes to observe my creative process and wants me 'to create some original choreography' tomorrow when she comes into the studio. I have spent the whole day rehearsing the dancers for what I am going to 'spontaneously create' tomorrow." When I suggested that it would have been easier to let the Princess observe the real thing, he fixed me with a withering look: "I find the creative process traumatic enough without having the sister of the Queen sitting behind me while I'm doing it!"

He revelled in the close and confidential relationship he had with Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother because her approval of his wit and charm put the seal on his social status. He was not invited to Clarence House merely as a prominent figure in the Arts but as a friend. In 1971 he was at the height of his popularity as a member of the inner circle. Confidentiality is a sine qua non among friends of royalty but Ashton developed indiscretion into an art form since he was intrinsically honest and had an instinct to amuse his friends with the doings of the Windsors. "When one is invited for dinner at Clarence House one joins the other guests in the drawing room and a footman brings round a tray with champagne cocktails. The Queen Mother always says: 'Have as

many cocktails as you want, I will only have one.' She will then be presented with a huge glass – a small vase, really - of gin and Dubonnet or gin and tonic. As the pre-dinner drinks circulate and people get a bit squiffy on the conveyor belt of cocktails the Queen Mother will hand her empty glass to the servant and say: 'That was so nice, I think I'll have another.' She is then presented with another huge glass of booze. It's awfully clever really. No one can count the number of drinks she has because she only ever has two and never shows any sign of inebriation. One balmy summer evening the French doors onto the garden were opened. One could hear the distant traffic in The Mall and one could see the tops of the trees of St James Park over the garden wall. I was sitting with the Queen Mother on a chaise longue and she turned to me, looked into my eyes, and said: 'Sir Frederick, I feel quite delightful this evening and I don't know whether it's *this* (indicating the huge glass she was holding) or *you*.' I replied: 'I really think it's *this* Ma'am!' She giggled for minutes afterwards. Her charm is totally natural and she always puts one at ease. There are, however, certain no-go areas of conversation: Mrs Simpson, obviously, and the Germans. I once said something about how dutiful Princess Alexandra was, always opening factories and so on, when the Queen Mother said, somewhat beadily: 'There are too many Germans in this family and as you know I can't stand the Germans.' It isn't wise to mention Prince Philip, for instance, unless she brings him up first."

The royals had attended in force for Ashton's farewell gala at Covent Garden in July 1970. Many people still say that it was probably the greatest event of its kind ever staged: a complete retrospective of a choreographer's career, with examples of ballets which had not been seen for decades, many danced by the original cast. The public queued for days to get tickets, bickered, bartered and offered personal favours to get a place in the theatre that night. The BBC filmed it live and balletomanes, unable to get into the Royal Opera House, begged the recording technicians to be allowed to watch the monitors in their vehicles parked outside in Floral Steet and Bow Street, and many were allowed to do so. I was fortunate: through a friendly contact I had secured a wonderful seat that night which allowed me a clear view of the stage and also Ashton himself sitting in the auditorium; he seemed a god-like figure, dignified and gracious. No programmes were avail-

able for sale: the running order was a mystery. The audience was told that there would be one interval and that the programme of events would be given to us as we left, to ensure that no-one, including Sir Frederick, would know what surprises were coming. At this point I had never met Ashton but I did overhear parts of his interval conversation with Martyn Thomas in the Crush Bar, had a memorable encounter with Princess Margaret and met many friends. What made the evening so exciting was the sight of a transcendent Fonteyn in many roles, displaying a fabulous soft back in an extract from *Apparitions* and emitting radiant joy, dancing as if she were half her age; Alexander Grant dancing a virile solo from *Rio Grande*; my first viewing of part of *Dante Sonata*, and many other works. In the final danced sequence Fonteyn and Michael Somes led the final scene from *Daphnis and Chloe* and as they rushed onto the stage, Fonteyn held high, her dress obscured the face of her partner. The collective gasp, and subsequent cheers, when the audience realised the 53 year old Somes was paying his own special tribute to Ashton was intensely moving and Somes literally danced himself to an exhausted standstill. At the end, as Ashton stepped forward to accept the plaudits of the Royal Ballet and the audience, the flowers thrown from every part of the house momentarily obliterated the view of the stage and the full-throated roar that greeted the choreographer was the greatest ovation I have heard in any theatre. Ashton was too choked with emotion to say much but what he did say in a small voice was: "I feel like a character in a 'Twenties musical ...because I'm dancing with tears in my eyes."

How true this statement was I did not appreciate until a year later when I was chatting to him over drinks at his home. I had raised the subject of that wonderful night and initially he was delighted that I had been there to experience the event. At one point I said that it must have been wonderful for him to have experienced the feeling of love coming like a tidal wave from the audience. "Yes, it was, but when it was all over I went home alone... Alone." The BBC did not broadcast the farewell gala. "I begged them not to broadcast it until after I died. They have asked me a number of times if I would like to go and see it but I said that I would find it emotionally draining and it would dredge up all kinds of feelings and regrets." I don't know whether Ashton ever saw the recording and, as every dance historian now knows, the tapes

mouldered away after being left on top of a radiator in a BBC store-room, most of the footage now un-viewable. I just thank God that I was present in the theatre to witness that once in a lifetime performance.

He became very sad and spoke of his intermittent relationship with Martyn Thomas, an attractive but untrustworthy character who currently rented a flat in Mayfair from Jack Hulbert and Dame Cicely Courtneidge. He described Thomas and his flatmate Patric Walker as 'ladies of the town'. He had spoken of Thomas before and clearly loved him but this time the resentment and bitterness opened like a floodgate and the level of personal revelation startled me. Ashton clearly had a need to be loved and this relationship was causing him a great deal of pain. Curiously, although he frequently talked openly about previous relationships and what they meant to him, he never once mentioned the name of Dick Beard, who some people suppose to be the great love of Ashton's life. Talking about Somes, who organised the gala, he proudly said: "If Michael Somes ever heard you say anything bad about me, he would throw you across the room." Alexander Grant was the other stalwart of his life and he constantly spoke of him in the most affectionate terms and their ritual of spending Sunday lunch together either at Grant's house in Rosenau Road, Battersea or at Chandos Lodge. It was during this conversation that I realised for the first time that great men can be pitifully vulnerable and need close friends who are loyal.

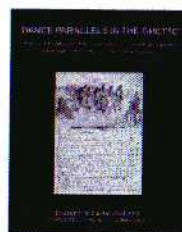
The important people in Ashton's life made repeated appearances in his conversation. Alice Astor was always 'Alice Astor', even though her name changed many times through marriage. Her fine portrait head by Tchelichev featured prominently in his drawing room. "Alice used to lend me her Rolls Royce when she went away and insisted that I get the chauffeur to drive me around to do my shopping but I always made him stop around the corner so the shop-keepers couldn't see me arriving in a chauffeur driven car. They would have put their prices up immediately!" Fred's parsimony was evident in some things but not in others. He would happily spend money on good quality booze but always walked or took the bus in preference to a taxi. He proudly claimed never to have spent money in an expensive hair salon. "I send the factotum to the barber round the corner to see if there is anybody in the chair. If the chair is empty I go and get a haircut." The paradox in sending a paid employee to facilitate a cheap haircut seemed to elude

him totally. Once, when we were dining in Le Carrosse I expressed my desire to have one of their desserts, Poire Belle Helene, which I had never tasted. "It's nothing special. Why do you want a dessert? I never eat dessert? Have you seen the price?" The litany went on for a minute and then he just stopped himself and said: "Oh have it." The fact that he was paying for an expensive meal with quantities of good wine didn't faze him at all but he stalled at a single dessert. It was compulsive behaviour but it made him endearing. The owner of the restaurant sometimes sent huge jars of olives to Ashton's house, which would be eaten directly from the jar during our conversations.

One bitterly cold October evening I announced that I wanted him to come to the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party of my friend Gordon Thomson, a student at the Rambert School, who idolised Ashton. He was horrified by the idea. "Do you realise what you are asking? When they see my old white head it will kill the atmosphere. The party will be a total failure, with young attractive people trying to have a good time with the ancient mariner in the corner." He continued in this vein until I asked him to consider the wonderful pleasure that his surprise appearance would bring to his admirer. Since it was snowing outside I declared my intention of getting a taxi on the corner to whisk us off to Baron's Court. "A taxi?" gasped Ashton, appalled. "But we can walk there." And walk we did, with him draped in an elegant coat with a dark blue velvet collar which appeared to be at least twenty years old. When the host/birthday boy opened the door of his house Ashton was standing just out of view. "I've brought you a present!" I declared and drew the great man from the shadows like a conjuror producing a rabbit. The party guests, all dancers, took a collective intake of breath when Ashton walked into the room but thereafter took turns to sit at his feet in star-struck adoration. Ashton declined to dance but insisted that I did so whilst he answered endless questions. It would be an understatement to say that he had a wonderful time. When we left, the snow was thick underfoot and turning to ice. I raised my arm to hail a cab and was immediately admonished for wasting money. "If you walk me home I'll teach you to dance the Charleston when we get in." This was an offer I couldn't refuse. We walked unsteadily back to Chelsea with Ashton clinging happily onto my arm, his fast Mrs Tiggy-Winkle feet skipping over the snow. The Charleston lesson commenced with Ashton saying: "You are a very musical dancer, so this should be easy for

you. The secret to dancing the Charleston is total physical relaxation...." I went home in a state of euphoria that night after being described as a musical dancer by Ashton. My feet barely touched the pavement as I rehearsed my Charleston steps.

© Mike Dixon



**Dance Parallels in the Ghetto: Parallels Between an Eighteenth Century London Black Minority and a Twenty-first Century London Black Minority.** By Rodriguez King-Dorset. Bardolph Books HB ISBN-13 978-0-9563816-0-6. 116 pp, colour and b&w illustrations. £25.00.

*By Madeleine Inglehearn*

Following his interesting and comprehensively researched book *Black Dance in London 1730-1850*. Rodriguez King-Dorset has here extended his research to drawing parallels between the dancing of the black minority in eighteenth century London with that of a similar black minority in the London of the twenty-first century. King-Dorset approaches dance history from a new and previously unexplored angle; that of black dance in Europe and its Colonies. He shows how dance and music form an integral part of the black character, and inspires all their actions. In the eighteenth century, following their brutal transportation to America or the Caribbean, they absorbed the western forms of dance and music and integrated them in to their culture. This produced a black dance style which has influenced dance development up to the twenty-first century.

King Dorset discusses the different approaches to dance between African and European dancers, suggesting that the African responds to rhythms while the European responds to melodies. He makes the point that understanding the dance of another culture is as hard as understanding their language, and in both cases, the final result is something new and original.

It is particularly interesting to see that, whilst in the eighteenth century the black population in London was learning from and mimicking the dancing of their white masters, in the London of today it is the black dancers who are educating and energising their white contemporaries in dances such as Hip Hop.

King-Dorset has shown himself to be a dance historian of great merit and I am pleased to see him developing his research interests in this book.

### CALL FORM PAPERS EADH CONFERENCE: *FUSION AND CONFUSION*

**Dance history conference to be held in Seville, Spain on Thursday 23 and Friday 24 September 2010** (in collaboration with the Biennial Festival of Flamenco, 15 September – 9 October)

In Seville, the home of Flamenco, the EADH Conference will address distinctive aspects – both regional and global – of this dance through history:

**Song and Dance:** Song and Dance are united in Flamenco, and have been combined in many art forms from pop-music, musical theatre, movies, right back to medieval carole circle dancing.

**Cultural Exoticism:** The exotic world of Spanish gypsies and Arab cultures are still made evident in today's performances. How have specific cultural trends, styles and modes of performances been transformed into new dance forms? How is the exotic created through dance?

**Fusion and Confusion:** New exciting performances are created by fusing flamenco with other dance styles. These can be very original and absorbing but what is the place of traditional flamenco in these dances. Now that Flamenco has merged with other performance styles such as Jazz and Tango, papers may also consider whether this has produced fusion or confusion.

**Practical Workshops:** Events will include practical demonstrations and workshops based on dance research of 17th century Spanish Dance, Baroque Dance, Musical Theatre and the Spanish traditional song and dance of Flamenco.

**Proposals for 20 minute presentations must include:**

- (a) an anonymous abstract of no more than 500 words
- (b) an indicative bibliography
- (c) a covering letter stating name of presenter, contact details and technical requirements

**Deadline: Monday 26th April 2010.** Applicants will be notified by Monday 17th May 2010. **Please send abstracts to:** either eadh.queries@googlemail.com or to Mrs. Penelope Boff, Buzon 75, Urbanisation Torrepalma, 136 Calle Leon Felipe, Carmona 41410, Sevilla, Spain.

### PHILADELPHIA

**Philodanco.** 22nd Annual International Association of Blacks in Dance Conference & Festival "BACK to BASICS"- Strengthening our Institutions for a New Generation **January 13-17, 2010** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Hosted by PHILADANCO in collaboration with The University of the Arts Registration forms are available to download from the IABD website [www.howard.edu/iabdassociation.org](http://www.howard.edu/iabdassociation.org) or The Philadelphia Dance Company website [www.philadanco.org](http://www.philadanco.org)

### NEW YORK

**Dance Films Association.** DFA's 38th annual, internationally touring Dance on Camera Festival Co-sponsored by the Film Society of Lincoln Center since 1996). **January 28 - February 2, 2010 at various venues in Manhattan, New York, USA**

DOCF celebrates the immediacy, energy, and mystery of dance as combined with the intimacy of film. DFA's Festival is the oldest dance film festival in the world that sparked a global explosion of activity. Festival 2010 will include a tribute to choreographer/composer/designer Alwin Nikolais as part of his year-long Centennial Celebration.

[www.dancefilmsassn.org/DanceOnCamerMain.html](http://www.dancefilmsassn.org/DanceOnCamerMain.html)

### LEITRING BEI LEIBNITZ

**International Conference "Performing Arts Training Today"**  
**April 28-May 1, 2010 Leitring bei Leibnitz, Austria**

**Organized by International University "Global Theatre Experience" (IUGTE) in collaboration with "Art Universe" and "Ostrenko Centre"** The conference is open to performers from all over the world interested in the research of topical questions and processes in contemporary performing arts education and training. This is a wonderful opportunity for performers, performing arts educators and teachers to demonstrate their methods and techniques.

[www.iugte.com/projects/Conference.php](http://www.iugte.com/projects/Conference.php)

**GUILDFORD**

**Society of Dance History Scholars Annual Conference: London Dance & Spectacle.** The University of Surrey, Guildford and The Place **July 8-11, 2010**

The conference marks a collaboration between the University of Surrey, Guildford and The Place, London. This international event will bring together some of the leading scholars across dance and performance studies and will host a series of events by leading British artists engaged in explorations of vertical, aerial and site-specific dance on campus, in Guildford town centre and around the capital.

[www.surrey.ac.uk/Dance/seminars/dance-and-spectacle-2010/index.htm](http://www.surrey.ac.uk/Dance/seminars/dance-and-spectacle-2010/index.htm)

**ODENSE**

**Spacing Dance(s) - Dancing Space(s) 10th International NOFOD Conference.** University of Southern Denmark in Odense, Campusvej 55, 5230 Odense M, **Denmark. January 27-30, 2011**

For its 10th international conference the NOFOD Board welcomes proposals on any topic related to the theme of dance and space. It is our wish to display the broad range of interest of our members as well as non-members; however the presenters might consider any of the following questions: How do different kinds of spaces interfere and interact with the dance as danced? How can dance come to confirm, challenge or change the space in which it takes place? What does it mean to the movers/dancers that space is created in movement? How is the discursive practice of dance influenced by the context – for example, the institutionalization of teaching situations, different kinds of cultural heritages, gender, subgroups of youth culture and so on? How can we use dance and dance research to study spatial aspects of movement and the mobile culture?

The call for papers will be announced on [www.nofod.org/conferences/index.asp](http://www.nofod.org/conferences/index.asp) in February 2010. The deadline for proposal submission is May 30th 2010.

**SEATTLE**

**The Congress on Research in Dance (CORD) annual 2010 conference Embodying Power: Work Over Time 18-21 November 2010 at the Renaissance Hotel in Seattle, Washington, USA**

Held in conjunction with the Annual Conference of the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR) and the Theatre Library Association (TLA). A call for papers and working groups will be published later. [www.cordance.org](http://www.cordance.org)

**COLUMBUS**

**Conference 2012: The Ohio State University. November 2012.** Joint conference with Congress on Research in Dance (CORD). [www.cordance.org](http://www.cordance.org)

**TRONDHEIM**

**Conference 2013: The University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway, June.** - Joint conference with Nordic Forum of Dance Research (NOFOD). [www.cordance.org](http://www.cordance.org)

## STOCKHOLM

**Ballets Russes in Paris 1909 – 2009. Costumes from Diaghilev's Ballets Russes Anniversary Exhibition. Dansmuseet, until January 31, 2010, Tuesday-Friday 11.00-16.00, Saturday-Sunday 12.00-16.00, closed on Mondays.**

The Dansmuseet celebrates the centenary of the Ballets Russes with a colourful exhibition of costumes from its world famous collection from this epoch. All the major pictorial artists of its time flocked around the Diaghilev ballet, and the exhibition includes costume treasures created by a number of them, Léon Bakst, Alexandre Benois, Natalia Gontcharova, Mikhail Larionov, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso... and through them the story will be told how it all started with a season in Paris with Russian dancers on a summer vacation, and grew into an enterprise with Diaghilev at its creative helm which influenced the whole western hemisphere. These Russian costumes compose a firework of colour and form which today still has an astonishing freshness, beauty and effect.

The exhibition is accompanied by the publication of a new book: *Ballets Russes the Stockholm Collection* published by Dansmuseet and Langenskiöld. You available in the museum shop, price 450 sek.  
[www.dansmuseet.nu](http://www.dansmuseet.nu)

## AMSTERDAM

**Pionier van de dans Sonia Gaskell.** Joods Historisch Museum (in association with the Theater Instituut Nederland) until January 31, 2010, 11-17.

Sonia Gaskell (1904-1974) was born in Lithuania to Russian-Jewish parents and grew up in the Ukraine. She lived in Palestine and Paris before settling in Amsterdam in 1939, a time when The Netherlands did not have a tradition of academic classical dance, no subsidised dance companies or official training courses for dancers, and few opportunities for professional dancers and choreographers. The importance of Gaskell's work cannot be overstated as she almost single-handedly developed a small concert group formed in 1945 with pupils

from the school she established in Amsterdam in 1939, into Het Nationale Ballet (Dutch National Ballet). (She was also inadvertently responsible for the foundation of Nederland Dans Theater, formed by a group of dancers who became exasperated by her autocratic manner of direction). The exhibition gives a picture of this remarkable woman and the development of dance in The Netherlands until 1969 using photographs, costumes and video clips.

A fascinating documentary about Gaskell *Mevrouw (Madam)* directed by Jellie Dekker, shown at exhibition from be purchased on DVD from the Museum shop.  
[www.jhm.nl](http://www.jhm.nl)

## PARIS

**Exposition Ballet Russes.** La Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra in association with La Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Palais Garnier, **from 24 November 2009 until 23 May 2010, 10.00-17.00. The exhibition is also open on performance evenings until the end of the first act.** In 1909, the Ballet Russes, founded by Serge Diaghilev in St. Petersburg in 1907, gave its first season in Paris. To mark this centenary, an exhibition in the Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra will showcase the fabulous artistic heritage of the Ballets Russes, while the Ballet de l'Opéra will perform a mixed bill of four ballets from the repertoire of the Ballets Russes at Palais Garnier from December 13-31.  
[www.operadeparis.fr](http://www.operadeparis.fr)

## LONDON

**Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballets Russes.** Victoria and Albert Museum, 25 September 2010 to 11 January 2011. This exhibition will showcase the glamour and magic of Serge Diaghilev's Ballet Russes, exploring its origin and legacy 100 years after its first performance. Diaghilev himself was a larger than life creative personality and his artists included such luminaries as George Balanchine, Coco Chanel, Robert Delaunay, Natalia Goncharova,



Vaslav Nijinsky and Pablo Picasso. The V&A's significant holdings of costumes, designs, images, programmes and related material will illustrate the creative process of dance and the Ballet's impact on design, music and artistic sensibility.

[www.vam.ac.uk/exhibitions](http://www.vam.ac.uk/exhibitions)

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# CHOREOLOGICA

The refereed journal of the European Association of Dance Historians aims to provide a forum for historical and theoretical explorations of dance histories and practices. These may include analyses of individual works or investigations, whether they be monographic, contextual or interdisciplinary. Submissions may address topics ranging from past dance practices to contemporary themes. More in particular, the editorial board welcomes essays rethinking current approaches and theoretical understanding of dance practice, history or crossovers into other disciplines.

For guidelines of submission please see the publications section on [www.eadh.com](http://www.eadh.com)

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