

Welcome
to the
Arts

ADMIT ALL

Dance

Curated by Sir Alistair Spalding
and Jason Raish



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“Dancers are
the messengers
of the gods.”

Martha Graham

Born in 1894 in Pennsylvania, Martha Graham showed an early interest in dance, but her parents did not approve of her becoming a dancer. It was only after her father's death in 1914 that Graham, then aged 20, was able to pursue her dream and enrolled at the Denishawn school in Los Angeles. The eventual pioneer and creator of modern dance, Graham allowed and encouraged women to be at the forefront of artistic achievement.

Graham created a dance technique that allowed the performers to become aware of, and use, their gravity, as opposed to ballet where the emphasis was on the dancers appearing weightless. Graham also worked on the principle of 'contracting and release'. In her choreography, movement comes from the tension of pulling in, or 'contracting', the pelvic muscles and curving the spine. The flow of energy is then 'released' from the body when it straightens. When repeated, this gives a rhythmic flow to the movement, a cycle similar to breathing in and out, but with more exaggerated movements. It was used in many of Graham's greatest choreographies, including the solo dance *Lamentation* and larger group works such as *Chronicle* (1936). It is still practised as a daily class in many dance companies and schools today.

The main themes of Graham's work include Greek mythology and American history. While her early works featured only female dancers, men joined Graham's company in 1938, prompting her to explore new themes. For example, the staged work *Appalachian Spring* (1944) explores the experiences of early American pioneers, but also the act of falling in love.

By presenting ideas and images that were unfamiliar, Graham introduced a new era in dance. She collaborated with composers such as Louis Horst and the fashion designers Calvin Klein and Donna Karan. She taught actors including Liza Minnelli and Gregory Peck and inspired future dance greats such as Merce Cunningham (see page 39) and Twyla Tharp.

Now Showing

Martha Graham stars in *Lamentation*, premiered 8 January 1930 at Maxine Elliott's Theatre,
New York City | Choreographed by Martha Graham | Music by Zoltan Kodaly

Lamentation, sometimes referred to as the Dance of Sorrow, is a four-minute solo piece first performed by Graham herself. The costume was deliberately designed to restrict her movements and to enhance the expression of grief, but also to highlight its boundaries.

Morris Dancing

A uniquely English pastime, this lively and jovial folk dance is still performed in rural settings across England today, often as part of a festival or on special occasions, and particularly during the month of May. Historically, Morris dancing events coincided with the equinoxes and solstices marking important events in the Anglo-Saxon agricultural calendar – for example, the end of harvesting or the start of the ploughing season.

It is hard to pinpoint the true origins of Morris dancing, but it was recorded as far back as the 1400s and by the end of the 16th century it had become widely established as a form of entertainment. There are different styles of Morris dance associated with the specific area of England where they originated, including the Cotswolds region and the North West.

A Morris troupe is usually referred to as a side (or a team), but Morris dancing is nearly always an amateur affair and non-competitive. Morris dances are similar to many country dances, with performances made up of sequences of set patterns. These patterns normally involve dancers weaving in, out and around a partner. The difference with Morris dancing is that the dancers also wield wooden sticks. Integral to the dance is the clashing of these sticks while held high up in the air. A less aggressive form swaps sticks with handkerchiefs, which are waved and spun above the dancers' heads. The dancers also wear bells around their shins, and a variety of traditional instruments are used depending on the region.

While Morris dancing is traditionally thought of as a male-only past-time, pre-20th century this wasn't the case. The revival in Morris dancing around this time saw the exclusion of women from official groups, but today it is thought that there are just as many female as male Morris dancers. There is even a female-only competitive form of the dance known as 'carnival' or 'fluffy' Morris.

Now Showing

Two Morris dancers perform at the Westminster Day of Dance | Trafalgar Square, London, 2018

It is impossible to miss a Morris dancing event as the costumes are always striking – ranging from fairly simple white shirts and trousers paired with coloured waistcoats and decorated hats, through to the more elaborate. The latter dress similarly to other ancient English folk traditions, including mummers (a troupe of amateur performers), and wear layers of torn material covering their whole bodies, often with painted faces.



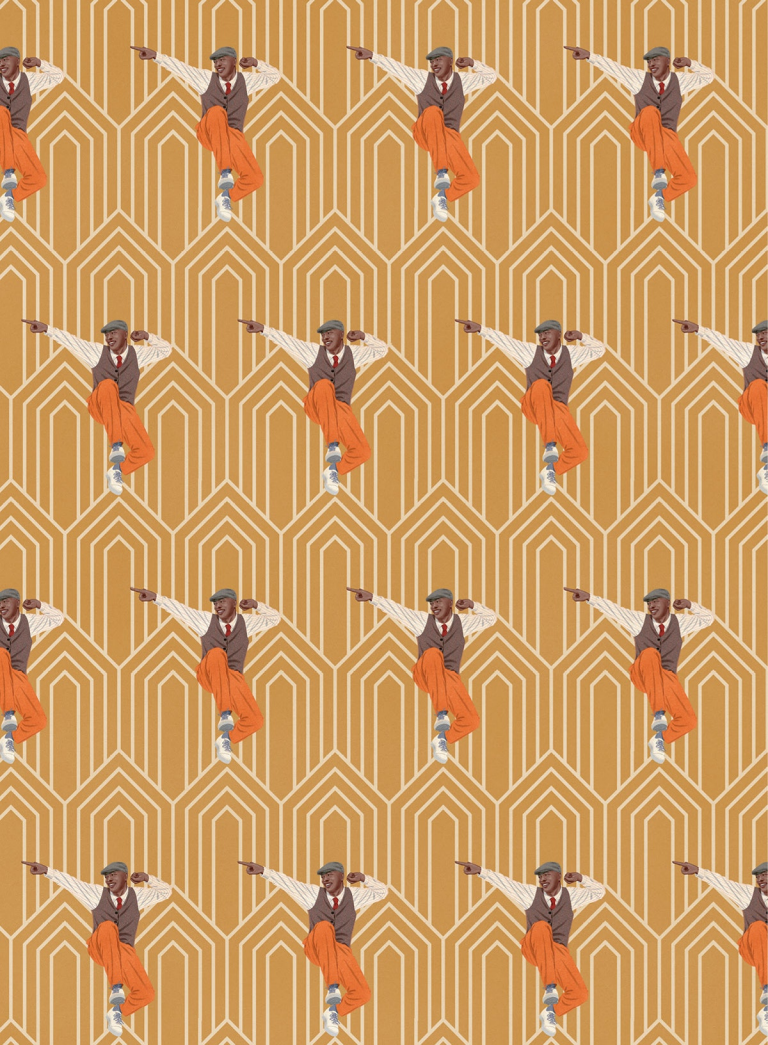


STAGE 4

DANCE-DRAMA



Dance-Drama • Khon
Indian Classical Dance • Kabuki



STAGE 6

SOCIAL



Social Dance • Ballroom • Viennese Waltz
Salsa • Tango • Disco • Hip Hop