



HAL
open science

The 1946 production of *The Fairy Queen* in Covent Garden: 'A Triumph of British music and Stagecraft'?

Aymes-Stokes Sophie

► To cite this version:

Aymes-Stokes Sophie. The 1946 production of *The Fairy Queen* in Covent Garden: 'A Triumph of British music and Stagecraft'?. *Revue française de civilisation britannique*, 2013, vol. XVII (n° 4), pp.51-71. hal-00789832

HAL Id: hal-00789832

<https://u-bourgogne.hal.science/hal-00789832>

Submitted on 4 Jun 2021

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

The 1946 Production of The Fairy Queen in Covent Garden: 'A Triumph of British Music and Stagecraft'?

Sophie AYMES-STOKES

Centre Interlangues Texte, Image, Langage, Université de Bourgogne

*As, when a tree's cut down the secret root
Lives underground and thence new branches shoot;
So from old Shakespeare's honoured dust this day
Springs up and buds a new reviving play.¹*

At the end of the Second World War a number of reviewers and music critics hail the beginning of a new musical era. The trials undergone during the war years have confirmed the vitality of English music and critic Rollo H. Myers asserts confidently that '[m]usically, Britain has won her spurs and can now face the future with confidence. Gone are the days when it was possible for foreign nations to refer to her as "the land without music". It was never true, and never less so than today'.² The 1945 premiere of Benjamin Britten's opera *Peter Grimes* in Sadler's Wells and the 1946 production of Purcell's *Fairy Queen* in Covent Garden—celebrating the reopening of the Royal Opera House³—are emblematic events marking the English artistic revival in the early years of the country's reconstruction. They illustrate the will to create a national opera as successful as ballet already was, as well as the need to develop state patronage and to educate the audience.

This essay explores how the production of *The Fairy Queen* reflects the aesthetic agenda of the 'Romantic Moderns'—to borrow Alexandra Harris's label referring to the generation that came to the fore in the 1930s and 1940s—and is informed by Modernist cross-fertilisation as well as by the more insular Neo-Romantic outlook. Constant Lambert's musical direction, Frederick Ashton's choreography and Michael Ayrton's designs of the sets and costumes variously asserted international experimentation and the native tradition. This paper seeks to determine how the revival of English music was staged in the immediate post-war period by those who

¹ John Dryden's prologue to *The Tempest, or The Enchanted Island* (1667).

² Rollo M. MYERS, *Music Since 1939*, (1947), pp. 97-144, in *Since 1939. Ballet, Films, Music, Painting*, London: Phoenix House, 1948, p. 139. *Since 1939* is a collection of booklets commissioned by the British Council, published separately in 1946/1947 and in two volumes in 1948 (ballet, films, music, and painting) and 1949 (drama, the novel, poetry and prose literature). The aim stated on the jacket was to explore 'how far the Arts in Britain [had] travelled since the pre-war years'.

³ During the war Covent Garden was used as a dance-hall and the Glyndebourne festival was suspended. Opera was performed by the Sadler's Wells and Carl Rosa Companies.

served it in a crucial way—the designers and choreographers—and how it was adapted to a new audience whose taste had been shaped by wartime state intervention. Although the performance of Purcell’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream* at the Royal Opera House by its new company and by the Royal Ballet was designed to be a ‘triumph of British music and stagecraft’,⁴ it revealed contradictory claims that belied the professed unity.

Great expectations

The perusal of a number of publications from the early to the late 1940s shows how critics and observers took stock of the recent history of ballet and music whilst probing the future and providing the basis for the cultural reconstruction of the country. The interwar period had witnessed a flood of publications discussing the English character and Peter Mandler has shown that ‘*other forms of Englishness were already in circulation*’, such as celebrations of the landscape and the traditions of ‘Old England’⁵—to which can be added the revival of English music from the end of the 19th century. Mandler has argued that after the First World War there was ‘*no longer a clear and simple correspondence between English values and institutions on the one hand, and the imperial mission on the other, and in this gap an independent English consciousness found plenty of room to flourish*’. ‘[F]it[s] of self-inspection’ were also triggered by destabilising events such as the crisis of 1929-31, but with the outbreak of the Second World War the national character provided ‘*the means of war fighting—its principal weapon—and the ends, setting the aim of war—“the people’s war”*’.⁶

The unifying social role of culture came to the fore in the interwar period, as Becky Conekin has shown, and in wartime it was typically presented as the cement binding the community. Artists, Kenneth Morgan notes, ‘*conveyed an uncomplicated sense of national celebration*’.⁷ Musicians, wrote Rollo Myers, ‘*were in the front line all through the war*’⁸ and played music to a socially and geographically widening audience thanks to the tours and events organised by CEMA (the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts created in 1939), ENSA (Entertainments National Service Association) or by orchestras such as the London Philharmonic and the BBC Symphony Orchestra. The aim of CEMA, explained John Maynard Keynes, its chairman from 1942, was ‘*to carry music, drama and pictures to places which otherwise would be cut off from all contact with*

⁴ Edward MANDINIAN (ed.), *Purcell’s The Fairy Queen as Presented by The Sadler’s Wells Ballet and The Covent Garden Opera*, London: John Lehmann, 1948, book jacket.

⁵ Peter MANDLER, *The English National Character. The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair*, New Haven & London: Yale UP, 2006, p.148.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 147, 176 and 187.

⁷ Kenneth O. MORGAN, ‘The Second World War and British Culture’, in Brian BRIVATI & Harriet JONES (eds.), *From Reconstruction to Integration: Britain and Europe since 1945*, Leicester: Leicester UP, 1993, p. 35.

⁸ Rollo MYERS, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

the masterpieces of happier days and times’, an enterprise which had revealed the ‘*unsatisfied demand*’ of an ‘*enormous public*’.⁹

Publications about music and dance formed part of the anatomy of English culture and also bore witness to the semantic confusion underlined by Mandler between ‘British’ and ‘English’ as national unity became part of wartime culture.¹⁰ Revised histories of English music and the first histories of English modern dance were embedded in a larger historiographical movement that retraced the origins and development of native art and stated the need to reassess the canon. Alexandra Harris has pointed out that the ‘*English Musical Renaissance [...] came of age between the wars as a movement both historicizing and contemporary*’¹¹ and the same applies to modern dance. Compilations such as anthologies of literature and revaluations of the literary canon were also one of its by-products,¹² as well as critical appreciations of music and dance sanctioned by the establishment of a repertory. Michael Ayrton for his part contributed to the reassessment of native art and to an alternative history that aimed to retrieve its Celtic, Gothic and Romantic roots.¹³ He extolled neo-romanticism as the latest form of a periodically resurfacing native tradition whose continuity had to be maintained, a line he followed in *British Drawings* (1946), one of the publications in the series *Britain in Pictures*.¹⁴ The poet and critic Walter James Redfern Turner, the general editor of the series, wrote the volumes about English music and English ballet. In *English Music* (1941, rev. 1947) he describes the early history of the development of opera in England as a series of missed opportunities that follows the same narrative pattern as Ayrton’s *British Drawings*: Stuart masques, for instance, were ‘*primitive examples of the new operatic form*’ but failed to lead ‘*to the establishment of an English opera rivalling that of Italy*’. Likewise, with Purcell’s *King Arthur* and *Fairy Queen*, ‘*there was the beginning of a new operatic form had the social conditions been propitious to the artists*’.¹⁵

Music and dance are described as forms of ‘*natural*’ expression in both of Turner’s books: there is a ‘*close connection between the life of the people and the music they make*’.¹⁶ Carols, for instance, are ‘*truly popular in origin and testify to*

⁹ John Maynard KEYNES, ‘The Arts Council: Its Policy and Hopes’, in ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN, *Annual report and accounts*, London: Arts council of Great Britain, 1945-1946, p. 20.

¹⁰ Peter MANDLER, *op. cit.*, p. 148. See also Siân NICHOLAS, ‘Being British: Creeds and Culture’, pp. 103-135, in Keith ROBBINS (ed.), *The British Isles: 1901-1951*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002.

¹¹ Alexandra HARRIS, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2010, p. 142.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 139-144.

¹³ See David MELLOR (ed.), *A Paradise Lost: The Neo-Romantic Imagination in Britain, 1935-1955*, London: Lund Humphries & The Barbican Art Gallery, 1987, pp. 36-37.

¹⁴ See Michael CARNEY, *Britain in Pictures: A History and Bibliography*, London, Werner Shaw, 1995.

¹⁵ Walter James Redfern TURNER, *English Music*, London: William Collins (Britain in Pictures) [1941] 1947, pp. 25, 30.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

the definitely democratic character of English music'.¹⁷ However Turner's history of the development of music underlines a growing separation between the ruling classes and the 'mass' especially from the Restoration. The development of music and dance was also hindered until the end of the 19th century by a variety of factors such as the civil war, the growing influence of foreign musicians—typically described as a form of invasion—and the Industrial Revolution smothering '*the vitality of a whole nation*'.¹⁸ Turner records how the native gift for music managed to survive the musical decline of the 18th and 19th centuries: '*there was a flicker of musical life [in the mass of people] in spite of the nation having lost its homogeneity*',¹⁹ which manifested itself in the ballad opera, amateur choirs or sailors' folk music. The interwar period is a watershed: '*[n]ot only was London the principal centre of musical activity in Europe, but English composers began to wrest the musical leadership from their continental colleagues*',²⁰ and he cites Delius, Holst, Bliss, Britten, Williams, Walton and Warlock, in the wake of Parry, Stanford and Elgar.

One of Turner's sources in *The English Ballet* is one of the most influential music critics of the time and supporters of ballet, the co-founder of the Camargo Society, Arnold Haskell, who contributed to the collection of essays *Since 1939* which complement Turner's assessment. In *Ballet since 1939* (1946) Haskell gives a precise account of the modern development of the ballet and with a somewhat different chronology relies in the same fashion on the idea of a resurfacing native tradition: '*the desire and ability to dance [...] revealed themselves in the Masque, an English art form that [...] survives today only in the words of Milton's Comus, the cartoons of Inigo Jones and the scores of Purcell, Arne and others*'.²¹ He also stresses the role played by Serge Diaghilev's Russian Ballet that brought back to Western Europe a preserved tradition, '*in the direct line of tradition that can easily be traced to the source*', that of the Franco-Russian classics *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* or *Giselle*.²² Diaghilev's ballet provided the dominant model for collaboration between artists, musicians and choreographers, as well as for the modernisation of a living tradition.²³

In 1939 both English music and ballet had a promising future, and the war was seen as an interlude that would open up to a national revival that had perforce been delayed: before the war broke out, recalls Myers, '*the musical horizon in Britain*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²¹ Arnold L. HASKELL, *Ballet Since 1939* (1946), in *Since 1939. Ballet, Films, Music, Painting*, London: Phoenix House, 1948, p. 15.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 15. About the new tradition of revived classics, see Beth GENNÉ, 'Creating a Canon, Creating the "Classics" in Twentieth-Century British Ballet', *Dance Research*, 18.2, winter 2000, pp. 137-138.

²³ See Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS, *National Music*, London: Oxford UP, 1959, pp. 100-101. He contrasted the lack of a true national opera to the '*well-planted roots*' of the Russian and Czech operas linked to their national movements. About Russia's living tradition, see also ANON. 'English Ballet Finds a Patron,' *Penguin New Writing*, n° 17, April-June 1943, p. 130.

was clear, and the barometer pointed unmistakably to a long period of “set fair”²⁴ Myers completed his *Music Since 1939* before the creation of the *Fairy Queen*, which he does not mention, but his view reveals the high expectations set on Sadler’s Wells Opera before Covent Garden was reopened: although it was still ‘a modest concern, most of us look forward to its growing into [a national institution] after the war’ at the moment when the 1945 creation of Peter Grimes heralded ‘the foundation for the first time in British musical history of a genuinely “National” Opera’.²⁵ This would be an opportunity to restore what was perceived as the broken historical continuity of English music while the collective effort on the Home Front had confirmed the ‘natural’ gift and taste of the ‘people’ for music and dance. Therefore *The Fairy Queen* would be the occasion to live up to this democratic ideal of social unity.

A national classic

‘[T]he last hope of our native Opera died in Henry Purcell’²⁶ wrote Turner: so if a revival was going to take place with Covent Garden’s new opera season, it made sense to start where everything had been brought to a stop so as to reinstate the sense of cultural continuity already fostered by the assessments of native arts cited above. First produced in 1692, *The Fairy Queen* was only revived in the early 20th century when the score that had been lost after Purcell’s death was rediscovered in 1901.²⁷ This first revival of the complete work was performed by Gustav Holst in 1911. The score and the libretto were revised by Edward J. Dent and performed in Cambridge in 1920, and further revised by Dennis Arundell in 1931. The revival of Purcell’s music had been under way since the last decades of the 19th century and in the early decades of the 20th century Ralph Vaughan Williams advocated the need to ‘strike roots down into [English music’s] native soil’, turn it into a ‘national possession’ and ‘take up the thread’ of the operatic tradition from the time of Purcell.²⁸ This process of recovery was pursued in the after-war period when Dent wrote: ‘[w]e stand, I hope, on the threshold of a new era in the history of English Opera and opera in English, and we seem to have accepted Mozart as the foundation of our foreign repertory, and to be gradually learning to think of Purcell as that of our native musical drama’.²⁹

²⁴ Rollo M. MYERS, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

²⁶ Walter James Redfern TURNER, *The English Ballet*, London: William Collins (Britain in Pictures), 1944, p. 7.

²⁷ For a complete history of the score and a genetic analysis of the revisions, see Bruce WOOD & Andrew PINNOCK, ‘*The Fairy Queen*: a Fresh Look at the Issues’, *Early music*, vol. XXI, n° 1, February 1993, pp. 44–62.

²⁸ David MANNING (ed.), *Vaughan Williams on Music*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008, pp. 47, 56, 61.

²⁹ Preface to the second edition of Dent’s *Mozart’s Opera: A Critical Study* (1913), Chatto & Windus 1947. Quoted in Eric W. WHITE, *A History of English Opera*, London: Faber & Faber, 1983, p. 390. White’s works on English opera owe a lot to Dent’s *Foundations of English Opera* (1928).

A detailed record of the 1946 production of *The Fairy Queen* was published by John Lehmann in 1948 and can be seen in the light of his new publishing ventures such as the short-lived *Orpheus*, conceived as ‘*the equivalent in a magazine of what the ballet had achieved under Diaghileff: the marriage of several arts in one coherent creation*’.³⁰ Purcell’s *The Fairy Queen as Presented by The Sadler’s Wells Ballet and the Covent Garden Opera* consists of a ‘photographic record’ by Edward Mandinian, the 1692 preface to the original playbook, an introduction by Edward J. Dent and essays by Constant Lambert and Michael Ayrton [figure 1].³¹ On the jacket of this ‘memorial volume’ designed by Ayrton the show is presented as ‘*one of the most adventurous and lavish productions that have been attempted at Covent Garden since the historic Royal Opera House was reopened at the end of the war*’ and ‘*the result [...] a triumph of British music and stagecraft*’. It is also the implied answer to the plea set out in the original preface for the creation of a national opera in London with a reputation to match that of the foreign opera houses, and for the proper funding necessary to an ambitious stage production. Edward Dent extends his praise to the whole team:

*The performance of a national classic was indeed the appropriate symbol of the new enterprise, a proclamation of our faith in the greatest of English musicians. Under the direction of Constant Lambert, Frederick Ashton and Michael Ayrton, it was in the safest possible hands, for the presentation of it on the modern stage, to a Covent Garden audience soaked in Puccini and Strauss, needed all the resources of scholarship, imagination and humanity.*³²

What differentiated the Covent Garden production from the earlier stage revival at Cambridge was the will to target and educate the general public, to make *The Fairy Queen* accessible to the uninitiated, and therefore to put the stress on dramatic, balletic and visual features rather than on faithfulness to the original work: ‘*the best approach was through the ballet, with as sumptuous a background of scenery as could be devised*’, explains Dent.³³ The performance was designed to be a crowd-pleasing event that even proved to appeal to children: ‘*The Fairy Queen was just the right entertainment for them, and they received it with rapturous delight, clowns and all*’.³⁴ On the other hand what characterized the scholarly production he contributed to establish, says Dent, was the restoration of the score and of the original text of Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream* in the spoken dialogues—a text that had been considerably altered by the anonymous author of the original libretto—as well as modest scenic resources. Lambert chose to mix and reduce the spoken text of Dent’s libretto and of Arundell’s version to a minimum and ended up with a libretto

³⁰ John LEHMANN, *The Ample Proposition. Autobiography II*, London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1966, p. 37.

³¹ The book is catalogued under the name of Edward Mandinian at the British Library, which is how it is referenced here. See also Michael BURDEN, ‘Gallimaufry at Covent Garden’, *Early Music*, vol. 23, n° 2, May, 1995, pp. 268-28. He mentions a recently discovered set of colour photographs of the performance.

³² Edward MANDINIAN (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 17.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

containing three instead of five acts and a performance of about two hours as against the original putative four hours (seven hours according to Lambert). However Dent was in charge of the orchestration of eight pieces as his expertise was needed for the unscored passages. The final score was an adaptation but Lambert assumed that ‘*anyone not a technical expert on the period would accept the score as Purcell’s original*’ and would not enjoy it as a mere ‘*period piece*’ but as ‘*a masterpiece of English theatrical art enjoying at last its rightly popular and spiritual due*’.³⁵



Figure 1

Lambert exposes the nature of his revisions in this memorial volume. He explains that *The Fairy Queen*, a hybrid form of entertainment deriving from the masque, was a particularly fitting choice for the reopening of Covent Garden ‘*because they were going through a transitional period from ballet to opera*’,³⁶ which is not quite accurate. Yet it reflects the fact that English ballet had already established its reputation, especially with the Sadler’s Wells company reaching the status of national ballet whilst a repertoire of English opera still had to be defined and a new

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 26.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20. A detailed discussion of the alterations is provided by Roger SAVAGE, ‘The Shakespeare-Purcell “Fairy Queen”: A Defence and Recommendation’, *Early Music*, vol. 1, n° 4, October 1973, pp. 201-221, and by Michael BURDEN, *op. cit.*

company had to be recruited. The newly created Arts Council had set up the Covent Garden Trust to manage Covent Garden as Royal Opera House along with a resident Royal Ballet, which Kenneth Clark thought was Keynes's 'greatest coup'.³⁷ The Sadler's Wells Ballet moved to Covent Garden as resident company effectively turned Royal Ballet under the aegis of Ninette de Valois in 1946. The first ballet premiered in February 1946 for the opening gala of the Royal Opera House was *The Sleeping Beauty* choreographed by Oliver Messel, which went on to become their 'signature ballet'.³⁸

Contrary to what may be inferred from the record published by Lehmann, in fact, neither *The Fairy Queen* nor Lambert were initial choices for Covent Garden's first opera season. The Trust's proceedings examined by Michael Burden reveal that the trustees—amongst which Kenneth Clark, Edward Dent and William Walton—successively considered staging Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, Purcell's *King Arthur* and a reorchestration of *The Fairy Queen* by Benjamin Britten.³⁹ Burden suggests that from the outset the venture was marred with difficulties due to the lack of a clearly-defined agenda, contrary to the official version put forward in the memorial volume published by Lehmann: 'Rather than appoint a musical director and then build up the house on identifiable strengths, though, the board simultaneously (and impracticably) discussed the appointment of a new conductor, the selection of repertory, an opening work and an ideal of English opera'.⁴⁰ Finally Lambert was 'invited to prepare the variation on the *Fairy Queen*'⁴¹ on Dent's suggestion and the trustees decided to commission an original work by Britten for the next season. They did not opt for a new English opera but for a pageant described in the Arts Council's second report as a "'Christmas entertainment" [...] using singers, chorus and the ballet'.⁴² The 'opera season proper' opened in January 1947 with a production of *Carmen* followed by *Manon* and *The Magic Flute* in March.

The eclectic Lambert already had a solid reputation as composer, arranger and conductor of ballet scores, having collaborated as a young man with leading figures such as Diaghilev for *Romeo and Juliet* (1924), or Frederick Ashton for *Horoscope* (1937). His adaptation of *The Fairy Queen* differed from the scholarly approach aiming at historical accuracy and authenticity. It was a form of intertextual reprise

³⁷ Kenneth CLARK, *The Other Half. A Self-Portrait*, London: John Murray, 1977, p. 133. Keynes died in 1946 before *The Fairy Queen* was performed. He had been a long-time supporter of the ballet and wanted the Royal Opera House to reach international standards and to give performances all year round. About Keynes's vision of state patronage, see Anna UPCHURCH, 'John Meynard Keynes, the Bloomsbury Group and the Origins of the Arts Council Movement', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 10, n° 2, 2004, pp. 203-217.

³⁸ Beth GENNÉ, *op. cit.*, p. 137. For a nuanced assessment of the Royal Ballet's achievement at that time see William CHAPPELL, *Studies in Ballet*, London: John Lehmann, 1948. A dancer and designer, Chappell found that the male dancers still needed to improve their technique, and he explained that ballet was not yet an acceptable career for men because associated with effeminacy (pp. 58-72).

³⁹ Michael BURDEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 271-273.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁴¹ Minutes of the board, *Ibid.*, p. 273.

⁴² ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN, *op. cit.*, p. 16 (2nd report, 1946-1947).

which was invited by the nature of the original work and had already been sanctioned by former balletic performances—as shall be discussed further down. He concentrated on the world of Oberon and Titania and dispensed with Theseus, the lovers and the drunken poet—these being the major changes relevant to this discussion—in order to produce a shorter performance and obtain a greater sense of dramatic unity. He was arguably devising a form of accessible theatrical drama for the citizens of post-war England that would appeal to a large and united audience. Lambert wanted to combine ‘*drama, opera and ballet—all on equal terms and demanding three companies of equal calibre*’.⁴³ But no real unity resulted, and Burden observes that the ‘*balance was tipped in favour of dance*’.⁴⁴ Indeed only occasional references are made to the singers and musicians in the memorial volume published by Lehmann who are conspicuously absent from the photographic record but from one picture showing the chorus. And yet in many ways the cultural legitimacy of the whole project stemmed from its association with Diaghilev’s practice, a legacy claimed by Lambert: ‘*the secret of Diaghileff’s productions was that all concerned were in constant collaboration*’.⁴⁵ Therefore Lambert’s collaborators must now be presented.

The cast

Contrary to English music, the history of English ballet was recent: in or about 1910 everything changed... when Anna Pavlova first visited England, followed by Diaghilev’s Russian Ballet in 1911, ‘*the greatest artistic sensation of our time*’.⁴⁶ His influence proved to be seminal and it is considered by Turner to be the starting point of the English school of modern dance and the reason for its success, leading him to write in the early 1940s: ‘*England and Russia lead the world in the creative renaissance of this delightful art*’.⁴⁷

When Diaghilev died in 1939, modern dance in England was represented by leading choreographers and dancers such as Frederick Ashton, Antony Tudor, Robert Helpmann, Margot Fonteyn and Alicia Markova, one of the ‘Anglo-Russians’ trained by Diaghilev. Still under the ‘*Russian spell*’,⁴⁸ they sought to create a school of modern English dance and to establish a national repertoire that included modern pieces as well as classics. Instrumental figures were Ninette de Valois and Marie Rambert, two former dancers in the Diaghilev ballet. From 1926 Ninette de Valois built the company that was to become the Royal Ballet and a repertoire of international standards that included contemporary pieces and the classics which had now become the foundation stone of the newly-defined canon.⁴⁹

⁴³ Edward MANDINIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁴⁴ Michael BURDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

⁴⁵ Edward MANDINIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁴⁶ Walter James Redfern TURNER, *The English Ballet, op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁸ William CHAPPELL, *op. cit.* p. 69. For an account of Diaghilev’s legacy by a writer still under his spell, see Janet LEEPER, *English Ballet*, London & New York: Penguin, 1945.

⁴⁹ Beth Genné has shown that the term ‘classics’ referring to ballets such as *Swan Lake* took on its modern meaning in the course of the 1930s with the juxtaposition of old and new pieces in the repertory, ‘*one understood as the foundation of the other*’ (Beth GENNÉ, *op. cit.*, p.

In 1931 her company was relaunched as the Vic-Wells Ballet, soon renamed The Sadler's Wells Ballet, in association with Lilian Bayliss, the owner of the two theatres. She chose Frederick Ashton as Principal Choreographer—the only English choreographer to have worked for Diaghilev—and Constant Lambert as Musical Director from the mid-thirties. The other pioneering company was the groundbreaking Ballet Rambert, founded by Marie Rambert in 1926 and hosted by the Camargo Society. This short-lived management society for the promotion of ballet was founded by Haskell and P.J.S. Richardson, the editor of *The Dancing Times*, with Keynes as treasurer, and it produced some of the earliest modern English ballets set to the music of English composers and conducted by Lambert: *Job* created by de Valois in 1931 (set to music by Ralph Vaughan Williams orchestrated by Lambert and with designs by Gwen Raverat based on William Blake), and *Façade* (produced by Ashton in 1931, to a score composed by William Walton in 1926).⁵⁰

That leading composers such as Vaughan Williams wrote music for the cinema during the war is seen as a sign of 'cultural inclusiveness'⁵¹ by Siân Nicholas and the same can be said of Lambert who, prior to *The Fairy Queen*, had already gained a reputation as the composer of the acclaimed jazz-inspired *Rio Grande* (1927, revised as a ballet in 1935) and as the inventive musical director of Sadler's Wells. He had 'built a repertoire of brilliant musical arrangements' that broke with the Russian Ballet's tradition of danced symphonies and that had become a rule when 'specially commissioned music' was an exception.⁵² Lambert came to resent the fact that his more demanding work was overshadowed by *Rio Grande*.⁵³ It certainly defined him as a cosmopolitan composer of urban, popular music, far removed from the insular pastoral world of *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*. He had however a keen interest in the music of Purcell which had already provided stage music for a number of choreographies, such as de Valois's *King Oberon's Birthday* produced at Sadler's Wells in 1933 and based on *The Fairy Queen's* Masque of the Seasons. But it is Ashton himself who first choreographed to his music for the modern ballet when he produced *Dances for The Fairy Queen* for Ballet Rambert in 1927. Ballet Rambert later created *Tudor's Suite of Airs* (1937) and Robert Helpmann produced *Comus* for the Sadler's Wells Ballet (1942), an adaptation of John Milton's masque, with sets and costumes designed by Oliver Messel. Lambert provided arrangements of

135). De Valois was assisted by Haskell, P.J.S. Richardson and Cyril Beaumont in the conceptualisation of the canon and the legitimisation of ballet as a high form of art in Britain, as expounded in their writings of the 1930s (pp. 141-147).

⁵⁰ For a thorough description of the trends and influences of English ballet, see Fernau HALL, *Modern English Ballet: an Interpretation*, London: A. Melrose, 1948. Hall contends that there was no real English school of ballet music (p. 197).

⁵¹ Siân NICHOLAS, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

⁵² Arnold HASKELL, *op. cit.*, p. 22. Commissioned music remained 'unadventurous', according to Fernau HALL, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁵³ Richard SHEAD, *Constant Lambert. With a Memoir by Anthony Powell*, London: Simon, 1973, pp. 71-75. See also Hubert FOSS, in A.L. BACHARACH (ed.), *British Music of our Time*, Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1946, p. 169. Lambert told him that *Rio Grande* was 'mere Hollywood' to the rest of his work (Hubert FOSS, 'Constant Lambert', obituary, *Musical Times*, October 1951: 449-450).

Purcell's music and subsequently built on the same technique for *The Fairy Queen*.⁵⁴ The masque came to be seen as the root of modern ballet along with the newly canonised classics, *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*, just as Purcell was seen as one of the roots of English opera. This was reasserted by Janet Leeper who wrote that modern English ballets were creations 'emerging for the first time since the days of Inigo Jones and the masques given at King Charles I's Court', adding: '[t]heir roots lie deep in the past'.⁵⁵

The cast of the Covent Garden *Fairy Queen* reflected the modernity of the national ballet: Robert Helpmann, Margaret Rawlings and Michael Hordern respectively danced the roles of Oberon, Titania and Bottom. Margot Fonteyn and Michael Somes were cast as the spirits of the air, and Moira Shearer as a nymph, all of them leading dancers who achieved international fame. The success of Sadler's Wells explains why the trustees of Covent Garden opted for Lambert, for he played an instrumental role in the development of a 'very vigorous school of English ballet dancing'.⁵⁶ He and Ashton probably seemed to be a safe choice: Ashton was able to arrange dances for West End music halls as well as create ballets that catered for audiences with radical, cosmopolitan or more conservative sensibilities, as Ramsay Burt has shown. But by the 1940s his style had lost its edge, according to Hall, and turned repetitively neo-classical and 'innocuous'.⁵⁷ With Lambert as arranger of Purcell's music, and Ashton as choreographer instead of the more experimental Antony Tudor (the creator of *Dark Elegies* in 1937), neither high and nor low brow would be alienated, and the 'disappearing Middlebrow'⁵⁸ would be recaptured. Moreover the potentially more radical edge of modern dance would be attenuated by the choice of a masque and by the pastoral setting of Shakespeare's play reflected in Ayrton's designs of the sets and costumes.

The designer

Constant Lambert first started working in duo with his close friend Michael Ayrton before the team was enlarged to the architect Malcolm Baker-Smith as co-producer, to Ashton and finally to Dent. Ayrton was probably Lambert's choice after the Covent Garden board initially considered commissioning Oliver Messel.⁵⁹ He was a precocious and versatile young artist of twenty-four and an art critic when he

⁵⁴ Edward MANDINIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁵⁵ Janet LEEPER, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Walter James Redfern TURNER, *English Music, op. cit.*, p. 47. His entourage also accounts for it: Keynes, chairman of CEMA and future chairman of the Arts Council (1942-46), was an early supporter of ballet, and was married to Lydia Lopokova, one of the 'Anglo-Russian dancers'. Lambert was also a close friend of Ayrton whose mother, Labour M.P. Barbara Ayrton Gould, was appointed on the board of the Arts Council in 1945.

⁵⁷ Fernau HALL, *op. cit.*, p. 98. This is how he describes the dances in *The Fairy Queen*.

⁵⁸ Constant LAMBERT, *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, (1934) 1948, p. 198. This is similar to the way Modernist versions of Shakespeare served to unify the public sphere without erasing the social and cultural divisions that mass culture was held to threaten, as shown by Richard HALPERN, *Shakespeare Among the Moderns*, Ithaca (N.Y.) & London: Cornell UP, 1997, chapter 2.

⁵⁹ Michael BURDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

embarked on the project. A ‘*maverick and multi-talented*’⁶⁰ artist, according to Kenneth Clark, he had developed a painting style that was notable for its fluid and chameleon quality. He had already worked for Gielgud’s *Macbeth* (1941-42) and—thanks to Lambert—for Andrée Howard’s ballet *Le Festin de l’araignée* (1944), which Haskell cites as a successful collaboration and another ‘*fine example of the Diaghileff method*’.⁶¹ Fernau Hall judged that designers—who were often confirmed artists—reached high standards and worked professionally from the start.⁶²

In the commemorative volume published by Lehmann, Ayrton explains that the main source for his drawings was Inigo Jones’s designs for the stage—a decision motivated by the scholarly work of Allardyce Nicoll, the author of *Stuart masques on the Renaissance stage* (1937), and by the preceding ballet productions cited above—combined with borrowings from a number of other sources such as 17th-century Italian stage designs by Alfonso Parigi and Bernardo Buontalenti:

*Jones and Purcell are some fifty years apart in time and could not possible have collaborated in the flesh, but since they were both of the seventeenth century, I conceived it as only fitting that the greatest English designer and composer, who complement each other so exactly in style, should, if I were capable of the metamorphosis, collaborate in spirit.*⁶³

His designs, he explains in his essay, ‘*required some departure from accuracy of period*’ and involved a ‘*combination*’ of sources, including a number of period elements ‘*coupled with tentative invention on [his] own part*’.⁶⁴ He underlines the fact that his designs reflect ‘*the confusion of idioms*’, that is to say the hybrid nature of *The Fairy Queen* in which foreign elements such as Chinese dancers and Greek gods ‘*make their appearance in the English fairy land*’,⁶⁵ and that the naturalisation of exotic elements also characterised masques such as Ben Jonson’s *Oberon, the Fairy Prince*. Significantly ‘*the confusion of idioms*’ also applied to his paintings. In spite of his vocal but perceptive criticism of contemporary art, Ayrton never developed a truly personal style. On the contrary his paintings often border on pastiche and he produced an art that was strained and derivative. His sinuous, distorted line is easily recognisable, however Malcolm Yorke has shown that he failed to distance himself from his numerous models—Picasso and Tchelitchev before the war, and later on Graham Sutherland, Bosch, and Dali to name a few. Ironically Ayrton’s provocative attack on Picasso as a ‘*Master of Pastiche*’⁶⁶ could have applied to himself.

⁶⁰ Kenneth CLARK, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁶¹ Arnold HASKELL, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁶² Fernau HALL, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

⁶³ Edward MANDINIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 31.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁶ The title of a 1944 article reprinted in Michael AYRTON, *Golden Sections*. London: Methuen, 1957, and later qualified in ‘A Reply to Myself’ (1956).

Ayrton's recreation of England's cultural past may smack of post-war kitsch to today's audiences but retrospective views must not ignore the fact that he was building on modern adaptations of the masque, as seen previously. Having said this, Hall writing in 1948 thought that Oliver Messel and Leslie Hurry had developed a mannerism characterised by contorted, violent and erotic shapes, a mixture of magnificence and kitsch that '*fitted well in the atmosphere of Covent Garden at this period*'.⁶⁷ Indeed the five drops Ayrton created for *The Fairy Queen* were flowing figurative designs that had become typical of this type of neo-romantic design [figure 2] and were also reminiscent of the balletic adaptations of *Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream*, such as Tyrone Guthrie's 1937 production choreographed by de Valois to Mendelssohn's incidental music, a romantic ballet that harked back to 19th century productions of the play. But any careful assessment of the designs produced at the time must take into account their perceived modernity. Haskell, for instance, considered the '*modern romantic painter*' Leslie Hurry as the future '*British Bakst*'.⁶⁸ And he saw Graham Sutherland—who designed the set and costumes of Ashton's 1941 ballet *The Wanderer*—as the most radical stage designer as an abstract artist, and he implicitly compared abstraction to '*non-programme music*'. He made the point that *The Wanderer* '*has no plot*'.⁶⁹

The ballet was seen as a narrative, literary form of art in the same way as illustration and figurative painting. But a modernist critic such as Haskell warned against what he called the '*literary pitfall*' and gave his preference to Ashton who was '*furthest removed from literature*', '*a Braque who reaches emotion through form and colour*'⁷⁰ whereas Hall underlined his neo-classicism. Such remarks bear witness to the ongoing aesthetic debate between formalism and naturalist art which cut across all forms of art. If John Piper exemplified the compromise between modernist and insular, cosmopolitan and vernacular trends in the changing climate of the 1930s during which attitudes to Roger Fry's formalism began to shift, Ayrton took a stauncher, more nationalistic stance against '*the "Significant Form" contingent*'.⁷¹ The sinuous linearity of his designs was an aesthetic statement, an instance of the '*lyrical, linear freedom*' and '*a symbol of the continuity of tradition*' asserted in his essay *British Drawings*.⁷² Both John Piper in *British Romantic Artists* (1942) and Ayrton positioned themselves as the heirs to native Romantic artists—such as Blake, Turner and Palmer—and traced the continuity of British—or rather English—art in their writings.⁷³

⁶⁷ Fernau HALL, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

⁶⁸ Arnold HASKELL, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48, 28.

⁷¹ *The Spectator*, 5 March 1946, quoted in Malcolm YORKE, *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and Their Times*, London: Constable, (1988) 2000, p. 206. About changing attitudes to Fry, see Alexandra HARRIS, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-114.

⁷² Michael AYRTON, *British Drawings*, London: Collins, 1946, p. 46.

⁷³ Piper's essay was also published in the series *Britain in Pictures*. For a discussion of Piper, Ayrton and Robin Ironside's essays, see Sophie AYMES, 'The line: An English Trait?' pp. 55-67, in Floriane REVIRON-PIEGAY (ed.), *Englishness Revisited*, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars P, 2009.



Figure 2

Ballet had cosmopolitan roots and although an English repertoire was being built, Haskell insisted that it was ‘*never deliberately national in outlook*’ in spite of ‘*the obstinate chauvinism of a certain section of the public*’.⁷⁴ In a similar vein Chappell called the world of ballet ‘*a country without frontiers*’.⁷⁵ Haskell was wary of ‘*excessive insularity*’ and he claimed that ‘*more than ever in war-time, when there is no foreign competition, it is essential to maintain the highest critical standards*’.⁷⁶ Piper had collaborated with the experimental Group Theatre in the early 1930s, but ‘*that great modern romantic*’⁷⁷ also designed the sets for Ashton’s *The Quest* (1943)—William Walton’s first score for the ballet—based on the legend of St George from Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, which was the occasion for Haskell to reiterate his qualification: ‘*the national theme must never be forced for an occasion in a national ballet*’.⁷⁸ Writing at the same time, Geoffrey Grigson was more severe in his critical assessment of pictorial ‘New Romanticism’ as self-indulgent, sterile and insular, the product of a ‘*literally closed society*’ which belied the reopening of the country after the war.⁷⁹

A discordant reception

Until recently, *The Fairy Queen* suffered from a reputation of being unperformable because of its lack of unity. Roger North, a contemporary of Purcell, thought that semi-operas were ‘*ambiguous entertainments: they break unity and distract the audience. Some come for the play and hate the musick, others come only*

⁷⁴ Arnold HASKELL, *op. cit.*, pp. 18, 21.

⁷⁵ William CHAPPELL, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

⁷⁶ Arnold HASKELL, *op. cit.*, pp. 49, 25.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷⁹ Geoffrey GRIGSON, ‘Authentic and False in the New “Romanticism”’, *Horizon*, vol. 17, n° 99, March 1948, p. 212.

for the music, and the drama is pennance to them, and scarce any are well reconciled to both'.⁸⁰ The 1946 production met very similar discordant reactions. If Charles Stuart in *The Musical Times* dismissed it as 'a ballet-opera-drama hybrid which does not truly come within the scope of these notes',⁸¹ W.H. Haddon Squire in *Tempo* was more particular in his criticism: the production fell 'between two style, between the 17th and the 20th centuries'. He thought that the music had an 'over-smooth, ironed-out harmonic texture' and missed the use of original instruments, and that the visual aspect had taken over but failed to convince: music was 'merely a side-dish in a feast for the eye', and yet Ayrton's designs were too 'representational' and 'literary'. 'As a whole', he concluded, 'the production lacks unity and style', as it had been 'rehearsed in isolated sections'.⁸² This had already been articulated in *The Musical Times* in the earliest review of the three quoted here, although overall the reviewer seemed to have had a more pleasant experience: 'What resulted, very oddly, from the addition of [ballet, opera and drama] was a curious phenomenon—something less not only than the sum of its parts, but less than each part would have been by itself'.⁸³ The reviewers also underlined the static nature of the performance which stemmed from the fact that the production favoured the ballet and relegated the choruses in stage boxes on either side of the stage. Although solo singing was generally poor, Stuart from *The Musical Times* praised the chorus but regretted that the singers were 'inserted like sardines into superimposed boxes'.⁸⁴ The failure to produce a unified show and to appeal to three different publics was partly caused by the lack of a 'firm directorial hand in control of the production', argues Burden, and by the 'self-conscious historicism'⁸⁵ of what Haskell called 'national works'.⁸⁶

However staging such a demanding work in the immediate post-war period was a feat, which partly explains why Britten devised chamber operas for his new English Opera Group as limitations in scale proved imperative.⁸⁷ The ballet was a fully-fledged company but it was too early for the opera company to be able to put up a substantive show, which led Stuart to reflect that 'the tendency has been to put the cart before the operatic horse: it is not to be wondered at that the poor beast should whinny'.⁸⁸ Ayrton acknowledged that the production was a downgrade from a more

⁸⁰ Quoted in Roger SAVAGE, *op. cit.*, p. 202. Savage argues against the 'orthodoxy of distaste for *The Fairy Queen*' (p. 203) in favour of integrity and consistency in its production.

⁸¹ Charles STUART, 'The English Season at Covent Garden,' *The Musical Times*, vol. 88, n° 1251, May 1947, p. 169.

⁸² W.H. Haddon SQUIRE, 'At the Ballet', *Tempo*, New Series, n° 3, March 1947, p. 20.

⁸³ E.B. 'Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*', *The Musical Times*, vol. 88, n° 1247, January 1947, p. 34.

⁸⁴ Charles STUART, *op. cit.*, p. 169. Conversely Eric White (in *The Rise of English Opera*, London: John Lehmann, 1951) explains that the audiences were used to static performances and did not adapt easily to greater fluency. The problem seems to lie with hybridity.

⁸⁵ Michael BURDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

⁸⁶ Arnold HASKELL, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁸⁷ Michael KENNEDY, *Britten*. Oxford: Oxford UP, [1983] 1993, pp. 45-47.

⁸⁸ Charles STUART, *op. cit.*, p. 168. Kenneth Clark thought that Covent Garden only became a truly great opera house under the Arts Council chairmanship of John Anderson (Kenneth CLARK, *op. cit.*, p. 134). He found that the administrator David Webster was able but not as talented as Rudolph Bing (connected to Glyndebourne and its founder John Christie, whom

lavish production involving the use of elaborate machinery implied in the stage directions of the original libretto. He listed a number of constraints such as post-war austerity, union restrictions, and, interestingly, the need to cater for an audience that was accustomed to the ‘*illusory techniques of the cinema*’ and that had grown ‘*impatient with any contraption which fails to work smoothly and rapidly*’.⁸⁹ The only modern device, he added, was a penumbra scope, whose effect was undermined by the lack of proper material, but the lighting contributed to the more successful effects of the production and derived from Baker-Smith’s work as art director for such filmmakers as René Clair, although it was sometimes marred by electric cuts.⁹⁰

Ultimately it proved difficult to reconcile conflicting ideals and to live up to the trope of a ‘*united front*’⁹¹ inherited from Diaghilev and naturalised by English artists in the interwar period, a trope that had found new currency with the experience of the Home Front. More than ever the ballet and the opera were seen as modes of social integration and harmony. Critical appreciations of the ballet in particular often relied on criteria of artistic unity fostered by the ‘*harmonious blending of the three elements—music, painting and plastic art*’.⁹² Staging a masque meant producing a unified show that would mirror wartime inclusiveness and post-war national unity. ‘*On what foundation does our musical edifice stand?*’ asked Vaughan Williams in 1914 as he presented a revived tradition as ‘*houses fit to live in*’.⁹³ Thirty odd years later, music and dance—the corps de ballet as a team, the orchestra as an organic whole—provided a significant form of imagery for the tropes of national unity that blended into the discourse of reconstruction. Keynes recorded the collective experience of ‘*being one of a great audience all moved together by the surge and glory of an orchestra*’ but also the need to rebuild bombed theatres, the ‘*necessary bricks and mortar*’ becoming the foundation of ‘*the rebuilding of the community and of our common life*’.⁹⁴ Likewise, Haskell stated that ‘*Sadler’s Wells ballet today is like a well-trained symphony orchestra*’ and rejoiced that ‘*[t]ruly the British are once more a dancing nation*’.⁹⁵

If music and dance had been part of the war effort, support had to be consolidated so that opera ceased being what Britten called the ‘*Cinderella of the arts*’.⁹⁶ Turner had advocated the creation of a subsidised national opera on the model of Sadler’s

Keynes disliked) and that the musical director Karl Rankl only gave ‘*mediocre to bad performances*’ (pp. 131-132).

⁸⁹ Edward MANDINIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁹⁰ Michael BURDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

⁹¹ This was Piper’s expression: John PIPER, ‘Designing for Britten’, in David HERBERT (ed.), *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: The Complete Libretto Illustrated With Designs of the First Productions*, London, The Herbert Press, 1979, p. 7. See Sophie AYMES, ‘Benjamin Britten et John Piper : le renouveau de l’opéra anglais et ses décors’, in Gilles COUDERC (dir.), *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal*, vol. IV, n°2, 2006, <http://lisa.revues.org/2254>, accessed on 31 July 2011.

⁹² Walter James Redfern TURNER, *The English Ballet, op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁹³ Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS, ‘British Music’ (1914), in David MANNING, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁹⁴ John Maynard KEYNES, *op. cit.*, pp. 21, 22.

⁹⁵ Arnold HASKELL, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁹⁶ Benjamin Britten’s introduction to Eric Walter WHITE, *The Rise of English Opera, op. cit.*

Wells rather than the recently created Glyndebourne festival, unaffordable to most people.⁹⁷ The role of CEMA and subsequently of the Arts Council in funding the arts and educating the general public was crucial. ‘*At the start*’, wrote Keynes who chaired both organisations in turn and was the leading advocate of state support, ‘*our aim was to replace what war had taken away; but we soon found that we were providing what had never existed even in peace time*’.⁹⁸ With CEMA, state patronage was introduced and its policy was to provide for the ‘people’, an ideal of mass education for which the BBC had paved the way before the war, and to build on ‘*the mood of wartime collectivism and social citizenship*’.⁹⁹ To that effect artists played a key role, Keynes believed, in safeguarding the unity of civilisation.

By the late 1940s however the wartime myth of national unity started breaking up, as shown by Conekin for instance. *The Fairy Queen* offered one of the ‘*fractured*’¹⁰⁰ images that heralded this moment of unravelling, while reasserting the need for national consensus and the continuity of tradition. The resulting lack of unity and blurring of social divisions seemed to have been equally resented, which revealed anxieties about mass culture shared by Modernists and by New Elizabethans. Purcell’s work was performed one last time in 1951 during the Festival of Britain, on a choreography by John Cranko, ‘*more one suspects out of piety than affection*’, wrote Vaughan Williams who recorded the mood of ‘*complete apathy*’ that greeted it.¹⁰¹ For the next grand national occasion, the Coronation in 1953, it is Britten’s opera *Gloriana* which was performed.

Conclusion

The photographs taken by Mandinian favour a lingering association of the 1946 production of *The Fairy Queen* with the elegiac undertones of a dark pastoral set in a nocturnal world at the expense of the sense of renewal provided by the Masque of the Seasons and the idyll played out in the Masque of Love. *The Fairy Queen* failed to engage spectators in the same way as *Peter Grimes* did and a number of reviewers noted the gloomy, mournful aspect of the set, an ironic counterpart to what should have been the collective greeting of a new dawn in the history of music and of the nation. The retreat into a mythical Arden forest along with what appeared to some as sterile visual pastiche¹⁰² precluded a renewed, expansive vision of national identity in the line of the New Elizabethans, and expressed implicitly by Hubert Foss when he stated that the ‘*discovery of Purcell’s works offers an interesting new task for a*

⁹⁷ Walter James Redfern TURNER, *English Music, op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁹⁸ John Maynard KEYNES, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁹⁹ Kenneth O. MORGAN, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁰ Peter MANDLER, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

¹⁰¹ Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS, foreword to *Eight Concerts of Henry Purcell’s Music*, London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1951, in David MANNING, *op. cit.*

¹⁰² Geoffrey GRIGSON, *op. cit.*, p. 205: he saw neo-romantic nostalgia and melancholy as ‘*destructive and not affirmative of life*’, the product of the sterile union of Palmer and Picasso (pp. 204-205). Ayrton implicitly replied to accusations of pastiche in his introduction to K. E. MAISON, *Themes and Variations. Five Centuries of Master Copies and Interpretations*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1960.

sea-faring nation of Empire-builders'.¹⁰³ In many ways, the '*multiple and contradictory demands made on Gloriana*'¹⁰⁴ stemmed from the growing disunion already at work in the immediate post-war period. *The Fairy Queen* failed to meet expectations for a variety of reasons which had to do with the Covent Garden Trustees' lack of focus on early objectives for English opera, the complexity of a hybrid work targeting different audiences and the aesthetic and social discordance reflecting this transitional period.

Bibliography

Primary sources

- ANON. 'English Ballet Finds a Patron', *Penguin New Writing*, n° 17, April-June 1943, pp. 128-138.
- ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN. *Annual report and accounts*. London: Arts council of Great Britain, 1946-1994.
- AYRTON, Michael. *British Drawings*. London: Collins, 1946.
- . *Golden Sections*. London: Methuen, 1957.
- BLOM, Eric. *Music in England* (1942). West Drayton: Penguin (Pelican Books), 1947.
- CHAPPELL, William. *Studies in Ballet*. London: John Lehmann, 1948.
- CLARK, Kenneth. *The Other Half. A Self-Portrait*. London: John Murray, 1977.
- E.B. 'Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*', *The Musical Times*, vol. 88, n° 1247, January 1947, p. 34.
- FOSS, Hubert. 'Constant Lambert', pp. 168-174, in A.L. BACHARACH (ed.). *British Music of our Time*. Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1946.
- . 'Constant Lambert', obituary, *Musical Times*, October 1951, pp. 449-450.
- GRIGSON, Geoffrey. 'Authentic and False in the New "Romanticism"', *Horizon*, vol. 17, n° 99, March 1948, pp. 203-213.
- HALL, Fernau. *Modern English Ballet: an Interpretation*. London: A. Melrose, 1948.
- HASKELL, Arnold L. *Ballet Since 1939* (Longmans, Green & Co, 1946), pp. 9-55 in *Since 1939. Ballet, Films, Music, Painting*. London: Phoenix House, 1948.
- IRONSIDE, Robin. *Painting Since 1939* (Longmans, Green & Co, 1947), pp. 145-184 in *Since 1939. Ballet, Films, Music, Painting*. London: Phoenix House, 1948.

¹⁰³ Hubert FOSS, in A.L. BACHARACH (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 168. About the domestic, pastoral vision of Englishness as opposed to an imperial, expansive vision, see Heather WIEBE, "'Now and England": Britten's *Gloriana* and the "New Elizabethans"', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 17, n° 2, July 2005, pp. 145-153.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153. See also Gilles COUDERC, '*Gloriana* de Britten et le rêve de l'opéra anglais', in Gilles COUDERC (dir.), *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal*, vol. IV, n°2, 2006, <http://lisa.revues.org/2273>, accessed on 31 July 2011.

- KEYNES, John Maynard. 'The Arts Council: Its Policy and Hopes' (*The Listener*, July 12, 1945), pp. 20-23 in ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN. *Annual report and accounts*. London: Arts council of Great Britain, 1945-1946.
- LAMBERT, Constant. *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline* (1934). Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1948.
- LEEPER, Janet. *English Ballet*. London & New York: Penguin (King Penguin books), 1945.
- LEHMANN, John. *The Ample Proposition. Autobiography II*. London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1966.
- MAISON, K. E. *Themes and Variations. Five Centuries of Master Copies and Interpretations*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1960. With an introduction by Michael Ayrton.
- MANDINIAN, Edward (ed.). *Purcell's The Fairy Queen as Presented by The Sadler's Wells Ballet and The Covent Garden Opera: A Photographic Record by Edward Mandinian with the Preface to the Original Text, a Preface by Prof. E.J. Dent, and Articles by Constant Lambert and Michael Ayrton*. London: John Lehmann, 1948.
- MYERS, Rollo M. *Music Since 1939* (Longmans, Green & Co, 1947), pp. 97-144, in *Since 1939. Ballet, Films, Music, Painting*. London: Phoenix House, 1948.
- SQUIRE W. H. Haddon. 'At the Ballet', *Tempo*, New Series, n° 3, March 1947, pp. 20-23.
- . 'At the Ballet', *Tempo*, n° 17, December 1946, pp. 24-26.
- STUART Charles. 'The English Season at Covent Garden', *The Musical Times*, vol. 88, n° 1251, May 1947, pp. 168-169.
- TURNER, Walter James Redfern. *The English Ballet*. London: William Collins (Britain in Pictures), 1944.
- . *English Music* (1941). London: William Collins (Britain in Pictures), 1947.
- VAUGHAN WILLIAMS, Ralph. *National Music*. London: Oxford UP, 1959.
- WHITE, Eric W. *A History of English Opera*. London: Faber & Faber, 1983.
- . *The Rise of English Opera*. London: John Lehmann, 1951. With an introduction by Benjamin Britten.

Secondary sources

- AYMES, Sophie. 'Benjamin Britten et John Piper : le renouveau de l'opéra anglais et ses décors', *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal*, vol. IV, n°2, 2006, online since 26 October 2009, accessed on 31 July 2011. URL : <http://lisa.revues.org/2254>.
- . 'The line: An English Trait?' pp. 55-67, in Floriane REVIRON-PIEGAY (ed.). *Englishness Revisited*. Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars P, 2009.
- BURDEN, Michael. 'Gallimaufry at Covent Garden', *Early Music*, vol. 23, n° 2, May 1995, pp. 268-28.
- BURT, Ramsay. 'Ideologies of Englishness and Internationalism in Modernist Ballet', pp. 323-345 in David Peters CORBETT, Ysanne HOLT & Fiona RUSSELL (eds.), *The Geographies of Englishness. Landscape and the National Past 1880-1940*, New Haven & London: Yale UP, 2002.
- CONEKIN, Becky. *'The autobiography of a nation': the 1951 Festival of Britain*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003.

- COUDERC, Gilles. 'Gloriana de Britten et le rêve de l'opéra anglais', *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal*, vol. IV, n°2, 2006, online since 26 October 2009, accessed on 31 July 2011. URL : <http://lisa.revues.org/2273>.
- GENNÉ, Beth. 'Creating a Canon, Creating the "Classics" in Twentieth-Century British Ballet', *Dance Research*, 18.2, Winter 2000, pp. 132-162.
- HALPERN, Richard. *Shakespeare Among the Moderns*. Ithaca (N.Y.) & London: Cornell UP, 1997.
- HARRIS, Alexandra. *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2010.
- HOLDEN, Amanda (ed.). *The New Penguin Opera Guide*. London: Penguin, 2001.
- KENNEDY, Michael. *Britten (1983)*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993.
- LATHAM, Alison (ed.). *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 2002.
- MANDLER, Peter. *The English National Character. The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair*. New Haven & London: Yale UP, 2006.
- MANNING, David (ed.). *Vaughan Williams on Music*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.
- MELLOR, David (ed.). *A Paradise Lost: The Neo-Romantic Imagination in Britain, 1935-1955*. London: Lund Humphries & The Barbican Art Gallery, 1987.
- MORGAN, Kenneth O. 'The Second World War and British Culture', pp. 32-46 in Brian BRIVATI & Harriet JONES (eds.), *From Reconstruction to Integration: Britain and Europe since 1945*, Leicester: Leicester UP, 1993.
- NICHOLAS, Siân. 'Being British: Creeds and Culture', pp. 103-135 in Keith ROBBINS (ed.). *The British Isles: 1901-1951*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002.
- SAVAGE, Roger. 'The Shakespeare-Purcell "Fairy Queen": A Defence and Recommendation', *Early Music*, vol. 1, n° 4, October 1973, pp. 201-221.
- SHEAD, Richard. *Constant Lambert. With a Memoir by Anthony Powell*. London: Simon, 1973.
- UPCHURCH, Anna. 'John Meynard Keynes, the Bloomsbury Group and the Origins of the Arts Council Movement', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 10, n° 2, 2004, pp. 203-217.
- WIEBE, Heather. "'Now and England": Britten's *Gloriana* and the "New Elizabethans"', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 17, n° 2, July 2005, pp. 141-172.
- WOOD Bruce & PINNOCK Andrew. 'The Fairy Queen: a Fresh Look at the Issues', *Early music*, vol. XXI, n° 1, February 1993, pp. 44-62.
- YORKE, Malcolm. *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and Their Times (1988)*. London: Constable, 2000.

List of illustrations: these illustrations are extracted from MANDINIAN, Edward (ed.). *Purcell's The Fairy Queen as Presented by The Sadler's Wells Ballet and The Covent Garden Opera*. London: John Lehmann, 1948.

Figure 1: book jacket designed by Michael Ayrton, title page.

Photo Edward Mandinian / © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

I am most grateful to Justine Hopkins, one of the holders of the Michael Ayrton Estate and copyright, who gave me kind permission for the reproduction of Michael Ayrton's artwork.

Figure 2: plate XLVIII, 'The Apotheosis'

Photo Edward Mandinian / © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.