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NEW SOUTH WALES

1995 HSC

**EXAMINATION
REPORT**

**Classical
Ballet**

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1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

CLASSICAL BALLET

In 1995 31 candidates entered for the 2/3 Unit examination in Classical Ballet. This was less than in 1994. Of these, 4 of the 2 Unit candidates chose the Related Studies Major Elective Option, 19 of the 2 Unit candidates chose the Performance Option, 3 chose the Composition Option, and 5 presented for the 3 Unit course.

WRITTEN PAPER

2/3 Unit (Common)

Related Studies : Core Paper

SECTION I

Repertory Studies and Ballet Appreciation

Question 1 (Compulsory)

This question was divided into two sections:

- (a) This asked for identification of the two ballets shown.
- (b) This part required interpretation and more general knowledge of choreographic styles.
- (a) Identification of the two photographs, which were of the two set ballets, was accurately done by everyone.
- (b) In responding accurately to this section candidates were required to answer the question as asked.

Problems arose mainly from candidates' failure to read the question carefully and to identify the key terms:

dramatic content of the ballets in Figures 1 and 2
contrast the choreographic styles

Most candidates found it difficult to balance their response across *both* ballets and tended to neglect one or the other.

There were various interpretations of *choreographic style*

- some focused on *elements* of choreography,
- some looked at the dance technique,
- some talked about staging – costumes.

The majority of candidates had studied both ballets thoroughly and knew the obvious as well as the general features. Clever selection and appropriate arrangement of this information gained the higher marks.

Question 2 (Compulsory)

A preliminary scan of candidates' papers revealed a wide divergence in their choice of a *contemporary* ballet. This also showed a selection of ballets which were on video but not *performed in the HSC year* as stipulated by the question. Clearly these videos could be viewed in the HSC year and the examiners chose to accept these as legitimate choices in order to make allowances for country students. No marks were allocated, therefore, for the term *you saw during your HSC year*. This choice then allowed interpretation of the term *contemporary ballet* to be fully focused.

The ballets selected were:

<i>Jardi Tancat</i>	Australian Ballet (AB)
<i>Boxes</i>	Sydney Dance Company (SDC)
<i>Piano</i>	(SDC)
<i>Fornicon</i>	(SDC)
<i>Divergence</i>	(AB)
<i>Sweekey Door</i>	(AB)
<i>Tent of Miracles</i>	(One Extra Dance Co.)
<i>Nutcracker</i>	(AB)
<i>Butterfly</i>	(AB)
<i>Serenade</i>	Australian Ballet Theatre
<i>Two Feet</i>	Merryl Tankard
<i>Giselle</i>	(AB)

While the logistics of these choices as *contemporary ballets* were debated, all were read and marked in an endeavour to discover the writer's interpretation of the term *contemporary ballet* and the reasons for such choice. Justification of these reasons and accuracy of information provided the basis for the acceptance or rejection of the ballet chosen and, accordingly, influenced the mark allocation.

The term *dynamic qualities* also caused some candidates concern and a wide range of options from *choreographic elements* to *set design* were accepted.

SECTION II

Anatomy for Ballet

Part A

Question 3 (Compulsory)

This question was divided into two sections:

- (a) This part was well answered. The applicants were, on the whole, conversant with anatomical terms. Variations between the muscles chosen as the most affected were accepted as long as they were obviously activated by the exercise shown in Fig. 3.

Loss of marks occurred when colloquial language was used instead of anatomical terms. It was considered obligatory that answers in this section should reveal study in anatomy and not just knowledge of dance technique or general knowledge.

- (b) While common sense can assist the answers to this part, specific reference to ballet steps using the correct name and selecting the related neuro-muscular action, correctly applied to the topic, gained higher marks.

Question 4 (Compulsory)

This question was divided into three parts.

- (a) In this part, naming the type of joint (which clarified the specific action of the joint) was required. Simply naming the bones in the joint was not accepted as being a correct answer.
- (b) The correct names of the two main bones received the maximum mark. The choice of other related bones was acknowledged.
- (c) The answer to this required some details that revealed knowledge of:
- *axial skeleton*
 - *appendicular skeleton*
 - *abduction of skeletal tissue*
 - *action of the scapula and the humerus in the port de bras described.*

Again, any evidence of knowledge of anatomical terms received higher marks.

Part B (answer Question 5 or 6)

Question 5

Twenty-five candidates answered Question 5.

All knew the facts required in answer to each part, except the last which was *D* for diagnosis/doctor. Some imaginative alternatives were given.

Question 6

Six candidates chose to answer this question.

The better answers referred directly to key terms in the topic and attempted to define:

physical effects

inadequate fluid

strenuous exercise

The fact that all answers assumed the *fluid* meant *water* caused concern. There was no discussion of any fluid other than water or of the different values of these. Some students did, however, reveal detailed knowledge of the effects on the body of an inadequate intake of water when under the stress of strenuous exercise. Correct interpretation of the term *strenuous exercise* was also an advantage in answering this question.

2 Unit (Common)

SECTION III

Related Studies : Major Elective

Part C

Ballet in Australia (Attempt 2 out of 3 questions)

Question 7

All four candidates chose part (a) – the Anna Pavlova Company – and met the marking criteria quite well.

Criteria for marking included:

- some historical context
- some of the ballets brought to Australia
- their influence on ballet in Australia
- influential people who remained to develop ballet in Australia.

Lack of easy access to resources that would help students to learn about the early visits to Australia of the Ballet Rambert and the Royal Ballet presents difficulties and may be the reason for the selection of the Anna Pavlova Company by the four candidates who attempted this question.

Question 8

Three of the four candidates chose to answer this question.

- (a) The naming of two ballets that have been created in Australia was not attempted at all by one of these three candidates.

Another student misinterpreted the term *ballet* and assumed that it meant *ballet company*, naming the Borovansky Ballet Company and the Australian Ballet.

Another claimed that *Graduation Ball* was created in Australia, showing either lack of knowledge or misinterpreting the term *created in Australia*.

- (b) The ballets chosen for this section were:
- Madam Butterfly
 - Poppy.
- (c) Candidates had some difficulty in discussing the relevance of one of these to Australian ballet. It was felt that this question revealed the more mature students who could examine this ballet in the social context and in the dance profession context which existed in Australia at the time when it was performed.

Question 9

Only one candidate attempted this option.

The Cecchetti Association was selected and the answer given was general and non-specific but, nonetheless, comprehensive enough to satisfy the marking criteria.

SECTION IV

Further Anatomy and Physics of Ballet (Attempt 2 out of 3 questions)

Question 10

This question was divided into two sections.

- (a) This was answered well and various choices were accepted.
- (b) Most candidates logically related the chosen function to ballet technique. Those who were specific and whose responses showed knowledge of anatomical details received the highest marks.

Question 11

This question used the term *debate*, which required the presentation of two sides of an argument. Those who understood the negative and positive versions of the argument met the criteria. Those who did not appear to understand these versions were acknowledged for the logic in their arguments.

Question 12

This was not attempted by anyone.

3 Unit (Additional)

Questions 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 were not attempted by any candidates.
All candidates chose Questions 3 and 7.

Question 3 : The Romantic Era

Answers to this question showed some research into the topic. Weaknesses occurred in lack of general knowledge of:

- social changes
- the industrial revolution

and the effect of these on *the art form of classical ballet*.

Awareness of features that distinguished ballet in the Romantic Era, however, compensated, as the students spoke at length of dancers and ballets in their answers.

Question 7

Most candidates struggled to meet the criteria in this topic.

Some of the features of the life of the selected artists which were expected by the examiners were:

- context
- importance/impact of work
- name of some ballets.

It was also expected that there would be some discussion of his/her influence on American dance in general, not just *classical ballet*.

All students are urged to read all questions carefully.

PRACTICAL EXAMINATION

31 candidates performed in the 1995 Higher School Certificate Classical Ballet practical examination. This is 8 less than in 1994.

This was the first year of the new Classical Ballet Syllabus and included the new Core component of Composition and the new Major Elective Options of Performance/Composition/Related Studies.

The break-up of Unit levels was as follows:

- 2 Unit : Performance Major Elective 19
- 2 Unit : Related Studies Major Elective 4
- 2 Unit : Composition Major Elective 3
- 3 Unit : Performance Option 5

No Injury or Misadventure Appeals were presented.

As in previous years, the 3 Unit standard was very high and all candidates were well prepared and capable of this level of work. The amount of performance work is exceptionally demanding, asking for 14 practical exercises, 10 of which are approximately 3 minutes in length.

Most of the 2 Unit Performance Major Elective candidates were also well prepared and considered to have selected the right unit option.

Those who were not at this level were physically unfit and gave no evidence of appropriate training in the Classical Ballet technique. The choice of the Related Studies Major Elective by four candidates was also considered to be the wise choice for these.

One candidate was obviously over-weight and this was considered to be a health hazard which would most definitely make her injury-prone because of the difficulty level of the Performance Major Elective. Landing from leaps onto one leg made the work load on the supporting leg beyond the safety limits of the human body. It has been recommended that there be a weight limit/height limit placed on the Performance Major Elective to restrict application for this elective. The examination fits the Safe Dance criteria.

The top place in the practical evaluation was achieved by a 3 Unit candidate. Her performance of all the set work was confident, poised and controlled, and showed excellent technical training as well as superb artistry. Her own Core Composition, and the performance quality of the same, were also outstanding. These combined to make her the best candidate in this practical section.

CORE STUDIES

Unseens

The unseens were representative of the Syllabus and most students performed well.

The combinations tested students' knowledge of the work as well as their ability to learn quickly, to memorise, to coordinate arms, and to follow the rhythm and pace of the music. Instructions were given first verbally, then demonstrated if needed. Candidates were asked to dance approximately two repeats.

Top marks were given to those who danced the enchaînements correctly and showed technical precision and accuracy, plus style and presentation. Those who made mistakes were allowed a second attempt.

Set Pieces

In 1995 the Core Component required the performance of each candidates' choice of only two out of the four set pieces. All students were able to complete the content of the set pieces and received the full marks allocated to this task.

The best dancers were strong, showed beautiful line, musicality and expression, and had a foundation of strong technique.

The discrimination features were the difficult sections which were simplified by the weaker dancers but performed superbly by the stronger ones.

The average students, in completing the work, gave evidence of adequate technique but lacked outstanding technical ability.

Weaker performers omitted the parts they could not do and compensated inaccurately for their inability to fully meet the demands of the pieces.

1. **Lyrical Study**

The Lyrical Study was examined on:

- sense of centre and ability to sustain it
- flow from one position to another
- physical strength
- sense of line
- musicality
- interpretation

The standard was particularly high with all of the 3 Unit and some of the 2 Unit Performance Option candidates showing a high level of expertise in this set piece.

Those who had the capability, flexibility and strength to lift the leg above 90%, whilst still correctly placed, received extra commendation. Any obvious sacrificing of technique to gain height did not, however, meet with approval.

2. **Virtuoso Piece**

All candidates completed this piece although a wide range of abilities were demonstrated.

The stronger applicants performed the more technically difficult part of this study, e.g. the *fouetté ronds de jambe étournants*, the *pirouettes en arabesque*, the *cabrioles* and the *brisés*.

The weaker dancers left out the batterie and substituted simpler versions.

Stamina and examination readiness were also discriminating elements.

On the whole, the standard of the 3 Unit students this year was high. The 2 Unit students included some exceptionally good candidates, most of whose performances were satisfactory.

3. **Grand Allegro**

This was well done this year.

The challenges of the changes of direction, the sustaining of the uplift in the air and on landing clearly identified the strong, the average and the weaker dancers.

4. The Dramatic Study

The characteristic refinement of the classical ballet dramatic interpretation of a role were the main features of this study. Technique was still an essential component but the quality of expression discriminated levels in this study.

5. Improvisation

This section was of a higher standard than that of 1994, an obvious attempt having been made to upgrade the quality of improvisation in balletic study.

Higher marks were awarded to those who were able to interpret the music and respond to changes in it in an imaginative way. Top marks were given to those who had the courage to respond in mood and to show inspiration rather than simply stringing ballet steps together. The performance of only classical ballet steps to the music received fewer marks.

2/3 Unit

Performance Major Elective

Completion of the remaining set studies were the first tasks. This was then followed by the Set Pointe and Personal Solo.

1. Set Pointe

Most candidates completed this section quite well. Priority marks were given to those whose feet were strong on pointe and placed correctly. The top marks were given to those who had mastered technique to a degree that freed them from strain and allowed expression.

2. Personal Solo

This section was considered to be an opportunity for students to select music and movements that would suit them. The more original compositions that showed in-depth thought about compositional elements were a source of enjoyment. The candidate who received top marks gave a brilliant performance, choosing music, theme and steps that highlighted her special talents. All tended to perform with more expression when allowed to select for themselves.

The less satisfactory performances included steps which were beyond the capabilities of the dancers and which identified technical inabilities, restricting performance projection.

Composition Major Elective

This was the first year of this section.

Three students brought their own videos, the presentation of which followed directions as detailed in the Syllabus.

Each candidate completed the diary and followed through well in the Viva Voce when the amount of thought and preparation they had put into their work was probed. The clarity and depth of thought behind each was commended highly.

The conclusion that there is much compositional talent amongst the young dance population was unanimous, and it was agreed that this new section in the Syllabus is a valuable addition.

3 Unit

Performance Major Elective

3 Unit candidates all performed again at a very high level this year and showed careful preparation. They were confident, well groomed and very well trained.

1. **Pointe Unseen**

Candidates in this section all responded well.

2. **3 Unit Set Study**

This was well rehearsed and content knowledge was not an issue.

3. **Set Repertory**

Marks were generated by the level of technical strength and artistry shown.

4. **Personal Study**

This, again, showed the extra qualities of expression that freedom of choice allows. Some chose to dance the optional selection of *Dawn* or *Prayer*.

It was obvious that the 3 Unit performance programme was particularly strenuous. The dancers are required to dance a minimum of 12 different pieces, all of which required skill, stamina and focus.

It is recommended that teachers ensure that the dancers are so trained as to sustain their energy for the continual flow of vitality that is required for more than one hour.

Choreography Major Elective

No 3 Unit candidates opted to do the Choreography Major Elective in 1995. As this was the first year in which this option was offered it had not yet been in process long enough. It is expected that this section will develop over the next few years. The long preparation time involved with this option means that it will be more attractive to the intake in future years who will have had more time to plan in advance.

Concluding General Comment

The attitude of the dancers and their level of performance were a delight.

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