

1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

DANCE

In 1995, 201 candidates presented for the 2 Unit Higher School Certificate Examination in Dance.

GENERAL COMMENTS

In the three years since 2 Unit Dance was first offered as a subject for the Higher School Certificate Examination significant positive developments have been noted, not only in the way in which candidates have been prepared but also in the way in which they have presented themselves for their practical examinations and the accompanying viva voce.

The following general points which were raised during the 1995 practical examinations should serve as a useful guide for both teachers and future candidates:

- Students generally conducted themselves well and managed to establish a rapport with the examiners. Candidates should be aware, however, that the examiners, while being supportive, must remain pleasantly neutral.
- Candidates who are faced with an examining panel for more than one examination should not assume that the examiners remember any knowledge that the candidate may have earlier shown or verbally related.

Each examination is discrete and marked according to different criteria.

Costumes

- The guidelines for the use of costumes are published in the appropriate Subject Manual (Subject Manual No 7 - Creative Arts) and Board Bulletins. Candidates should be aware that the guidelines are clear on this point.

1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

- Candidates should consider that performances for the Higher School Certificate are *performances* within a special context, that of the Higher School Certificate Examination, and, consequently, not all the usual *theatricality* associated with costumes and make-up is appropriate.
- Whilst costumes are permitted, with some options included, in Major Study Performance and Composition, many more candidates opted, when appropriate, to use plain form-fitting dance wear, which enhanced their line and body shape and also clarified the style and intent of the performed work.

Grooming

- Generally this was much better than in previous years; students should be aware, however, of the inappropriateness of wearing jewellery during a performance. Make-up should be minimal and, in this context, not the usual theatre make-up.

Audio Tapes

- When audio tapes were used to provide the accompaniment for dances, some candidates appeared unaware of the guidelines for their use. These are as follows:
 - There must be nothing other than the "work" on the tape.
 - The tape itself should be of good quality.
 - *Silence*, when used, must be *recorded* on the tape.
 - Tapes should be *cued*, which means not fully rewound, but ready to play within approximately three seconds of pressing the *play* button.
 - Each candidate should have his/her own copy of the tape for security purposes and because frequent playing might diminish the quality of the recording. Each candidate is, therefore, strongly advised to bring two tapes to the examination.
 - Music editing, when used, was generally of poor quality.

Time Limits

- Some candidates seemed unaware both of the time limits set for each component of the practical examinations, and of the fact that failure to comply with them might incur a marking penalty.

1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

- The best candidates took the option of using the full time limit and were able to sustain the energy this required. Poorer candidates who used the maximum allocated time were unable to sustain the energy, style and performance quality.

Safe Dance

- Candidates should be aware that the course components are not treated in isolation. Hence *safe dance practices* need to be applied equally to Core and Major Study Composition as well as Performance.
- Safe dance should not be considered solely as a course component in the viva voce section of Core Performance. *Safety* is a primary concern in the teaching program for all practical course components, the results of which should be observable in the candidates' work in general and not as a token *theoretical* component.

Viva Voce (the questions used in 1995 are printed as appendix 1)

- The best candidates took time to consider what was being asked in the question, planned an answer which was specific and well illustrated in movement. They considered both parts of the question (where appropriate) and successfully used correct terminology. Poorer responses included expressions such as *and things like that, and so on, and you know*.
- Candidates should be aware that they may be required to demonstrate in response to some viva voce questions.
- Poorer responses were often given as *form answers*. In this category some candidates appeared to believe that if they spoke about *everything* they would eventually answer the question.
- It should not be assumed that the terms needed to answer the question successfully can be read into the answers submitted. Candidates must be explicit in their use of terminology as indicated in the Syllabus.

CORE PERFORMANCE

At all centres improvement in the standard of presentation was obvious. The following areas still remain the cause for concern:

- lack of understanding of Modern (Contemporary) Dance;
- lack of understanding of higher order steps/sequences relevant to the students' skeletal structure and ability.

1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

While the standard of Modern (Contemporary) Dance has improved generally (i.e. the practical realisation in a stylistic sense which follows an understanding of its philosophical viewpoint), the following anomalies still appeared:

- Modern *expressiveness* which suggested *emotion* (largely melodramatic or demi-character).
- Performing movements/sequences originating mainly from classical ballet but with some *token* modification which enabled them to be referred to as "Modern (Contemporary) Dance (*I performed this movement in parallel and this one with a flexed foot, and I did a 'Martha Graham contraction' here and a 'fall and recovery' there*).

In the context of the Dance Syllabus, Modern (Contemporary) Dance is NOT synonymous with free form dance, social dances of the day, modern expressive and/or *modern jazz* dance. (For further information refer to the 1993/94 Examination Reports).

There appeared to be fewer instances of candidates apparently being left to devise their own work in Core Performance. The dance presented in this component should have been devised as part of class work. It is seen here as less of a *work* in the choreographic sense and more as the means of displaying the elements of the Syllabus. It is also, however, not intended to be a series of *tricks* or single *steps* of a high order of difficulty. In the practical examination a variety of sequences of complex construction, performed safely within the candidate's range of movement, are being sought.

It is again emphasised that candidates may be disadvantaged if they do not adhere to examination guidelines regarding suitable attire, presentation and footwear for the Core Performance examination. These guidelines have been sent to schools and are brought to the attention of all candidates at the time of the practical examination (see General Comments from the 1993 Examination Report).

CORE PERFORMANCE VIVA VOCE

It appears that, in some circumstances, Safe Dance Practice is being treated as a *unit* in isolation without being considered as integral to all practical components.

In general many candidates rushed their responses to this section, failing to make full use of the time available to them.

Those who presented outstanding responses to this section showed:

- a comprehensive understanding of Safe Dance Practice which included: warm up, cool down, alignment, maintenance, nutrition, fluid replacement, injury prevention/care, and preparation;

1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

- a clear and precise use of correct terminology and related the dance to their anatomical structure.

Poorer candidates:

- limited the explanation of Safe Dance Practice to warm up, cool down, and injury prevention/maintenance;
- did not relate SDP to their dance and were not able to demonstrate either appropriately or correctly.

MAJOR STUDY PERFORMANCE

Many of the comments relevant to this section were dealt with in the 1993 and 1994 Examination Reports.

The majority of candidates understood that the Method of Presentation referred to the dance as *High Art* or *Theatrical Dance* (see Syllabus pp 33-34). High order candidates were aware that, within the framework of the Syllabus, Classical Ballet and Modern (Contemporary) Dance are the two styles of dance that are most appropriately termed *high art*. Some poorer candidates saw *high art* as being *movement for its own sake*. It is defined in the Syllabus as *the highest expression of dance skills* for their own sake.

When Classical Ballet and Modern (Contemporary Dance) are influenced by a thematic idea (which may also result in the use of a simple costume or prop), the intent of the presentation is *THEATRICAL DANCE*.

The best candidates also understood that some dance styles, such as Jazz Dance, Tap, Musical Theatre and styles derived from cultural influences such as Afro-Caribbean, Highland, Spanish, etc, are inherently theatrical and consequently the *method of presentation* is *theatrical dance*.

It is imperative that candidates understand this section of the Syllabus.

If candidates use music from well known Musical Theatre works such as *Oklahoma*, and they are obviously intending to use its storyline/context as their stimulus, then the *style of dance* is *Musical Theatre* and the *method of presentation* is *Theatrical Dance*.

It is essential that candidates accurately nominate their *selected style and method of presentation* and not rely on the examiners to interpret any mislabelling. Such mislabelling may place the work at risk of being assessed in accordance with other criteria, which may result in a lower award. The selected style and method of presentation must be marked according to criteria based on the designations provided for them by the candidate. Thus the responsibility for correct information rests with the candidate.

1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

MAJOR STUDY PERFORMANCE VIVA VOCE

The best candidates had carefully researched the features of their selected style. They showed an understanding of the historical perspective of that style, how this was apparent in the physical characteristics of the style and then related these to their own performance.

When speaking of their method of presentation, these candidates used appropriate terminology and their understanding and demonstration were obvious.

CORE COMPOSITION

The information presented in paragraphs 1 to 5 (page 5) of the 1994 Examination Report remains highly relevant to candidates' work in the 1995 Higher School Certificate Dance Examination and should be carefully studied.

Some candidates appeared to have taken material from sources such as Dance camps/workshops, etc, which, at the time, might have been a valuable learning experience but were not conducive to original movement/personal style at the Higher School Certificate Examination. Students are advised to consider improvisation/experimentation/problem-solving as factors in devising movements of their own which may later be manipulated in the forming process.

Often identifiable movements such as *the splits*, *shoulder rolls* and *jetés* were ascribed a number of thematic interpretations which were, at best, inappropriate and could not, in any way, show originality or personal style.

The best candidates understood that the main tasks were *to devise and manipulate phrases* and *to demonstrate forming* which created a sense of unity relevant to the whole work.

Some candidates used *music segments* as a method of forming rather than using the elements of construction.

A number appeared to have spent time in devising movements but not equal time in the forming process (see pp 16 and 17 of the Syllabus).

The candidates' *works* were well presented by their dancers who showed a clear commitment and concern for performing the works to the best of their ability.

CORE COMPOSITION VIVA VOCE

Candidates used their time well and demonstrated effectively.

Some of the poorer candidates described their processes but did not address the specifics of the question.

1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

The Viva Voce responses appeared to confirm impressions from the performance of the works that, while the poorer candidates had learned the relevant terminology, their knowledge and application was, at best, superficial.

MAJOR STUDY COMPOSITION

The best candidates grouped well, used the stage space effectively, understood and demonstrated the use of Repetition (and Canon).

The main difficulty with poorer candidates appeared to be in constructing or devising movements.

Costumes, when used, were often overstated, irrelevant and an impediment to the work. It is the demonstration of personal style/originality of movement and the development and manipulation of phrases that are being assessed, therefore costumes which obscure the movement may disadvantage the candidate.

Dynamics, contrast and unity need to be considered in students' works.

The 2 Unit Dance Syllabus pp 37-38, and the comments on page 7 of the 1994 Dance Examination Report, are also relevant here.

MAJOR STUDY COMPOSITION VIVA VOCE

Students should be aware that the Viva Voce questions in this course component are related to the works they are presenting.

Poorer responses to the viva voce questions were often convoluted and lacked correct/appropriate terminology related to the work being presented. Such works were poorly constructed and did not reflect the expected Syllabus Outcomes.

The better candidates understood and showed a motif as shaping the movement sequence which was then manipulated according to the chosen number of dancers within the context of the work as a whole. In their work they showed abstraction, personal style, awareness of space, and were innovative with temporal patterning. They were also aware that aesthetic considerations should be applied to the work as a whole.

CORE APPRECIATION

Here candidates in general showed sound knowledge, appeared better prepared, and presented a higher quality of response than in previous years.

1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

The better candidates were able to synthesise information and gave personal opinion supported by research. Many poorer candidates, however, appeared unable to apply knowledge to the specifics of the questions and frequently resorted to *prepared* answers. Others in this category failed to answer all aspects of the questions.

In mediocre answers most candidates showed their understanding of the artists and their works.

WRITTEN PAPER

SECTION I : CORE APPRECIATION

Part A

Question 1

(a) *This part is COMPULSORY.*

- (i) *Discuss the key aspects of any dance work that should be addressed when writing a review.*
- (ii) *Select TWO 'aspects' from your answer to part (a)(i). Review **Software Dragon** (Chrissie Parrott Dance Company) in relation to these aspects.*

(i) Many candidates interpreted this question as relating solely to a newspaper review and ignored the fact that the review could be applied more widely, e.g. historical journal, dance analysis or other scholarly purposes.

In poor answers candidates listed points in broad categories without linking them to the purposes of review writing/analysis.

(ii) Most candidates showed an understanding of **Software Dragon** which they were able to select and apply to part (a). The key aspects of *movement* and *forming* as components of a dance work, however, were frequently omitted. The quality of answers to **Boxes** was alarmingly poor.

Attempt EITHER PART (b) OR part (c)

- (b) and (c) (b)(i) *'Poppy is a ballet rich in theatrical elements and characterisation'.
What part does movement play in this work?*
- (c)(i) *'Boxes is a ballet rich in theatrical elements and characterisation'.
What part does movement play in this work?*

1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

- (b)(i) The majority of candidates appeared to have only limited understanding of the role *movement* plays in *Poppy* and *Boxes*. Poorer candidates were not able to relate movement to individual dancers or groups. The better candidates, however, were able to assess and express opinions about the movements. They made clear statements explaining the role of movement in the work.
- (c)(i) *What are the distinguishing features of Graeme Murphy's work and how are they shown in Poppy?*
- (c)(ii) *What are the distinguishing features of Graeme Murphy's work and how are they shown in Boxes?*
- (b)(ii) Many candidates appeared unaware that several of the distinguishing characteristics identified by them were not specific to Graeme Murphy but applied to contemporary choreographers in general.
- (c)(ii)

The best responses contained more than three characteristics and referred to the selected work and synthesised information/knowledge to support personal judgment. They were able to see collaboration as a whole and did not break it down into component parts, e.g. lighting, music, costumes and stage design.

Poorer candidates missed the point of the question and simply narrated the story of each ballet.

The main points which should have been considered concerned the *dance movements and forming* in *Boxes* and *Poppy*.

Part B : Major Study Appreciation

Question 2

Here candidates were shown three stills of the Nederlands Dans Theatre performing *Forgotten Land* and *Soldier's Mass*.

'Kylian transformed the Nederlands Dans Theatre through a synthesis of classical dance, modern dance, and patterns of folk-dance'.

How does Jiri Kylian's transformation of the Nederlands Dans Theatre follow the historical development of modern contemporary dance?

Only a few candidates attempted this question. In the best responses candidates linked the historical developments of Modern (Contemporary) Dance with Kylian's developing work with the Nederlands Dans Theatre.

The majority of candidates showed poor knowledge of Kylian's works and were unable to link his background to the historical developments in Modern (Contemporary) Dance.

1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

Question 3

The following are seminal artists:

- *Bob Fosse*
- *Anna Sokolow*
- *Ruth St Denis and Ted Shawn (consider them together).*

Select ONE of the above artists and answer the following questions.

- (a) *What were the factors that shaped their approach to dance?*
 - (b) *How are these factors embodied in their major works?*
 - (c) *How did they advance the field of dance in which they worked?*
- (i) Bob Fosse

On the whole this question was well answered. The best candidates chose Bob Fosse, pinpointed many of Fosse's characteristics and successfully assessed these in relation to his works.

In part (b) the majority showed a sound knowledge of at least two of Fosse's works.

Part (c) was also quite well answered, with some candidates linking film production, dramatic filming, dance on film and the influence of their chosen seminal artist on a range of dancers, actors and producers.

- (ii) Anna Sokolow

No candidates elected to answer the question in relation to this seminal artist.

- (iii) Ruth St Denis/Ted Shawn

The best responses to this question treated Ruth St Denis and Ted Shawn as one entity and addressed the specifics of the question with understanding.

In part (b), where the candidates were asked to show how the factors that shaped the couple's approach to dance are embodied in their works, they either were unable to do so or presented generalised responses. In very few responses did candidates base their assessment of the artists' major works on real knowledge and conviction; here candidates often described the dance rather than synthesising information and presenting informed judgments.

1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

Part C

Question 4

This question is COMPULSORY.

Doris Humphrey's contribution to the development of Modern Dance is significant.

- (a) *Discuss how Humphrey has influenced dance in the twentieth century.*
- (b) *Refer to TWO of Humphrey's major works and discuss how they reflect the distinctive choreographic features of her work.*

Many candidates failed to answer this question adequately, apparently expecting the examiners to search for the information required.

- (b) This part was poorly answered by the majority of candidates. Their responses included what could, at best, be described as superficial knowledge as well as a failure to show an in-depth understanding of the works of Doris Humphreys and her contribution to Modern Dance in the twentieth century.

The best candidates established clear links between Doris Humphreys' background and her works, and showed clearly the intent of those works, their choreographic features and the technique she applied to them.

Lower order responses simply reiterated the story/events which occurred in the dance being described.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The number of candidates electing to present 2 Unit Dance for the Higher School Certificate is steadily increasing. Whilst candidates appear to come from a wide range of dance backgrounds and obviously from a range of teaching/learning experiences, there is a clearly discernible improvement in their awareness of the nature of the course and its expected outcomes. The course is about the study of dance as a performing art. Assessment here is measured in terms of the Syllabus in a demonstration of the candidate's dance technique and performance ability, as well as his/her skill in dance composition and ability to analyse critically and evaluate their own dance works.

In the three years since Dance was first examined it has been noted that some comments keep recurring in each of the three component areas.

1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

In CORE PERFORMANCE the candidates are assessed according to the two published criteria:

Dance technique - incorporating safe dance practice applied to Modern (Contemporary) Dance, and

Performance quality applied to Modern (Contemporary) Dance.

The candidate is expected to demonstrate a standard of dance technique and performance quality relevant to a 2 Unit course of study.

The best candidates show sustained complex movement sequences (not single steps) which require strength, control, balance, stamina, alignment, musicality, etc. There is a focus on the execution of technique (dance skills) in relation to anatomical structure. For example, the best candidates show clearly and consistently control of the placement of the supporting leg in relation to the height and placement of the working leg relative to their skeletal structure. Poorer candidates are unable to demonstrate or sustain this control of placement.

In terms of presenting the candidate to best advantage, a balance must be considered between:

high execution of complex sequences,

poor execution of complex sequences,

competent execution of sequences relative to the capabilities of the student.

In considering performance quality relevant to Modern Contemporary Dance, the best candidates are able to show clearly the characteristics of the style based on a clear understanding of how its philosophical premise is realised in movement terms. Their interpretation, focus, control/variation of dynamics (energy) and a consistent quality of line relevant to the dance being presented are clearly evident.

When considering MAJOR STUDY PERFORMANCE candidates must be aware that there is the expectation of a higher order of technique as well as a greater complexity of dance sequences and sustained performance quality in relation to the CORE. In some circumstances, with outstanding candidates, it may not be possible to demonstrate greater skills/complexity than those presented in the CORE. There is also an expectation that the same level of excellence will be noted in the context of the candidate's intent and selected style.

1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

In some cases it has been reported that some candidates perform much better in the Core than in the Major Study. Such candidates appear to be aware of a greater potential for originality in Modern (Contemporary) Dance which they apply to their Core Performance dance. Then, when electing to perform a more favoured or popular dance style for their Major Study, they succumb to the temptation of using the familiar, often clichéd, lower order movements, sequences and patterns which are not the best vehicle to show high order technique and performance quality.

Whilst, from 1996 onwards (BOS 123/95), there have been some changes to the wording of the descriptors used in Core Composition and the inclusion of another option for candidates electing Major Study Composition to make it more accessible, the main concern in these course components remains the same. For Core and Major Study Composition, a clear motif, personal style, the development of the motif into a phrase, the manipulation of phrases, a clear forming of the work to enhance the communication of the intent and to establish a sense of unity are all being sought.