

**RAMBERT**



**Ghost Dances** by Christopher Bruce

Study Notes

These notes were compiled and written in 2000 and have not been rewritten for the new specifications for exams in AS and A level Dance from 2017 onwards, although it is hoped that these notes will be a starting point for further work. Some of the material was adapted or reproduced from earlier resource packs.

We would like to thank Christopher Bruce CBE (choreographer) and Michele Braban (choreologist) for their help in compiling this resource.

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These Study Notes are intended as a companion to the *Ghost Dances* Teachers Notes, which include information on the work, critical responses and suggestions for practical work, and are also available.

# About *Ghost Dances*

Choreography by **Christopher Bruce**

Music **South American Folk Music**

arranged by Nicholas Mojsiejenko from recordings by Inti-Illimani  
*Ojos Azules, Huajra, Dolencias, Papel de Plata, Mis Llamitas, Sicuriadas*

Set design by **Christopher Bruce**

Costume designs by **Belinda Scarlett**

Lighting by **Nick Chelton**

Running time approximately 30 minutes

Cast: 11 dancers (5 women and 6 men)

*Ghost Dances* was created for Ballet Rambert (as Rambert Dance Company was then known) and first performed on 3rd July 1981 at the Bristol Theatre Royal (Old Vic). It remained in the Company's repertoire for four consecutive seasons and was revived by Rambert on 24th June 1999 at the Theatre Royal, Norwich. It was nominated for the 1982 Society of West End Theatre Awards as the Outstanding Achievement of the Year in Ballet. It has also been performed by Nederlands Dans Theater, Australian Dance Theatre, Cullberg Ballet, Zurich Ballet, Ballet Gulbenkian, Houston Ballet and Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève.

*Ghost Dances* is a one-act dance work in which three skeletal Ghost Dancers await a group of Dead who will re-enact moments from their lives before passing on.

***I made this ballet for the innocent people of South America, who from the time of the Spanish Conquests have been continuously devastated by political oppression. I would like to give my thanks to Joan Jara for all her help and to Inti-Illimani for the inspiration of their performances.***

CHRISTOPHER BRUCE (Programme note July 1981)

## Characters

### The Ghost Dancers

The Ghost Dancers (sometimes referred to as White Ghosts) are three skeleton-like men with skull masks and long, matted hair. They are present on stage throughout the production from the moment the curtain rises to the point at which it falls, apparently awaiting their next consignment of the Dead. Interviewed for BBC Radio 4's arts programme *Kaleidoscope* on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1981, Christopher Bruce described them as having 'hung around for millions of years, and lying on rocks, like... animals. They'd become birds and lizards as well as men. These are symbolic creatures who may be said to be spirits, guardians of the rocky, barren 'noman's land' at the mouth of the cave where the work is set, oppressors, murderers, forces of dictatorship, or death itself.

## The Dead

The Dead are five women and three men who throughout the work experience contrasting forms of death. The Dead enter as a group upstage left soon after the music begins, all remain on stage during the work, and exit together downstage right at the end. The precise relationship between characters is open to individual interpretation by the viewer but as they arrive and depart together, and are all present on stage from the point of their entry to that of their departure, there is a clear sense that they form a community. The clothes worn by the Dead suggest a variety of social backgrounds. Bruce described this group as 'on their way to Heaven or Hell', wandering 'from life to death. It is like their last remembrances, their last statements, before they go very proudly at the end, to death'

(*Kaleidoscope* 12th October 1981)

The choreographer George Balanchine once noted that there are 'no mother-in-laws in ballet'; that complex genealogical relationships cannot be conveyed through dance. In *Ghost Dances*, the audience is free to interpret any relationships between the men and women as they like; A woman may be the mother, wife, lover, daughter or friend of a man. Nevertheless most people have regarded the couple of the first duet as more mature than those in the playful second duet. Both the costumes and the nature of the choreography suggest characters without making any individuals overly specific. Interpretation by individual dancers will also affect how a role is perceived.

## Television and video recordings

*Ghost Dances* was created to be performed on stage and its fullest impact is experienced when viewing a live performance. Nevertheless those studying the production will find it convenient to refer to the recorded versions of the work. Discussion in these notes therefore focuses on Rambert's stage performances and the videos by Ballet Rambert and Houston Ballet. (Only the Houston Ballet recording was commercially available in Britain, this has since been discontinued.) *Ghost Dances* has been televised in two versions. The earlier, danced by Ballet Rambert, was for *Dance on 4* and first shown in a double bill with London Contemporary Dance Theatre in Robert North's *Troy Game* on 15th June 1983. The second, performed by Houston Ballet, was first shown in Britain (together with Bruce's *Journey*) on BBC2 *Summer Dance* on 1st August 1993. The dancers in the Rambert recording have a vibrant roughness while those in the Houston recording are lighter, neater and more controlled, partly indicative of the performers' heritage as a classical ballet company.

The Rambert recording, with the original cast, was filmed hurriedly on the stage of the old Sadler's Wells during the afternoon of 24th March 1982 in the middle of Ballet Rambert's London season, without the supervision of Christopher Bruce. The opening sequence was treated with the multiple superimposition of frames showing the passage of movement in frozen images. Wind and bird noises and echoes were added to the sound track for the Ghost Dancer's dances and the interludes between numbers which, in live performance, had been performed unaccompanied. (Wind sounds have subsequently been added to the introductory Ghost Dancers' dance on stage.) The Houston recording was filmed in Denmark by Thomas Grimm over several days. Grimm and Bruce have happily collaborated on the televising of much of Bruce's choreography. Referring to the two recordings reveals many of the changes

introduced into the work over a period of time and alerts the viewer to changes in emphasis in roles as they are performed by different dancers.

## Music recordings

The music was initially taken from the recording *Canto de Pueblos Andinos* by Inti-Illimani (Zodiac VPA 8227). Three of the numbers, *Ojos Azules*, *Huajra* and *Papel de Plata*, are of Argentinean origin and two *Mis Llamitas* and *Sicuriadis*, come from Bolivia. Four are traditional, the *Huajra* is by Atahualpa Yupanqui and *Mis Llamitas* is by Ernesto Cavour. The words added to *Dolencias* are by Victor Valencia. Apart from Rambert and Houston Ballet (and Ballet Gulbenkian when they performed in London) all productions have been accompanied by recordings by Inti-Illimani.

In 1982 the music as arranged by Nicholas Carr was recorded by the Mercury Ensemble and released privately. Some of the musicians of the Mercury Ensemble formed the group Incantation and their initial recording, *Cacharpaya* (Pan Pipes of the Andes), originally entitled *On the Wings of a Condor* (Beggars' Banquet BEG 39 or cassette BEGA 39) included four numbers from *Ghost Dances*. In 1999 Nicholas Mojsiejenko wrote a full score of the music. In 1994 the score for *Ghost Dances* was re-recorded by Incantation and released with the Sergeant Early Band playing *Sergeant Early's Dream* on CD and cassette (COOK 069).

# Background to the work

## Bruce and human rights

In *Ghost Dances*, Bruce does have an agenda in addition to entertainment. As he said in the introduction to the work when it was first televised: 'I want people to be moved and feel something for these people. They may not be able to do much, but public opinion in the end means something, and that is a way that I, as an artist, can do my bit for humanity'. *Ghost Dances* makes a powerful political statement. Although the South American context of the work is clear from the music and designs, the actual nationality of the Dead is irrelevant. Bruce, typically maintains the universality of his subject, and it has much wider resonance. The Dead could represent Asian or European communities as well as American. As he said in an interview in the *Houston Post* (22nd May 1988), 'Although it has a South American setting, it's a universal story. You could parallel it with Poland or Afghanistan: cruelty, lack of human rights, people who suffer. So in a sense, it's indirectly political, but it's very much about humanity and just about how people get caught up, suffer and die'. In his programme note Bruce mentions the repression of the native Americans since the European discovery of the New World. Although the social message is important it is not emphasised at the expense of theatricality, and the presentation is varied with contrasting sections in which the Dead are seen re-enacting moments of happiness in their lives. That Bruce put his point of view across, successfully and theatrically, is confirmed by such descriptions as that in *The Guardian* (20th March 1982) emphasising that *Ghost Dances* is 'very moving in its sincerity and simplicity'. This is confirmed by the critic James Monahan's observation (repeated by Mary Clarke in *The Dancing Times*, August 1999) that *Ghost Dances*' appeal 'lay in its absolute truth'. Not all critics have praised the work. Alastair Macaulay (rarely an admirer of Bruce's choreography), writing in *The Dancing Times* (December 1981), considered 'the work houses a tactic of sledgehammer subtlety.....Perfectly hideous ghouls.... lurk about and, when the innocent South Americans appear, take turns to creep up from behind and strike them lifeless.... I didn't count, but I'd say that each South American was taken after this fashion at least twice'.

## *Ghost Dances* in the context of Christopher Bruce's work

*Ghost Dances* was choreographed for Ballet Rambert in the period when Bruce had recently stopped dancing as a full-time member of the Company and become Associate Choreographer. This allowed him more time to choreograph and respond to requests for ballets from other companies. Of the dancers Bruce chose to create the roles in *Ghost Dances*, all but one (Hugh Craig) had already danced in his choreography at Rambert, although for six it was the first time they had created a role for him. Similarly, the team involved in the design were artists Bruce was working with at that period.

It was the music which provided the production's most novel element for *Ghost Dances*, set to a selection of folk music in a specific style. (Both began as student productions choreographed by the Ballet Rambert Academy and London Contemporary Dance School respectively, and both have subsequently been taken into the repertoire of professional

companies). Following *Ghost Dances*, he subsequently used Irish and American songs for *Sergeant Early's Dream* (1984); songs by the Rolling Stones for *Rooster* (1991); and by Bob Dylan for *Moonshine* (1993). In choreographing to a group of songs, Bruce has to find a single purpose to give unity to the production and in all these productions the structure is necessarily episodic. An individual dance is created to each song or piece of music and each section can stand alone for a complete work (some have been used in this way for gala performances). But by placing several songs and dances together the impact of the whole ballet is much stronger than that of any isolated number. Linking devices and repeated motifs provide a choreographic unity for the complete ballet.

Bruce said in an interview accompanying the first showing of *Ghost Dances* on British television that before constructing the dance he had to find a way of using the folk music. He found it haunting, but the songs, "in themselves didn't constitute a ballet". In certain other works the words of the songs have initiated some of the movements. In *Ghost Dances*, however, the words of the two songs, *Dolencias* (a complaint reflecting sorrowful pain) and *Papel de Plata* (Silver Paper) simply encapsulate the mood of the dances. The theme of the music for *Mis Llamitas* (My little Lama), which describes the walk of the llama, provides a movement motif in the fifth section.

Movement in Bruce's choreography serves a purpose beyond existence for its own sake. Even when specific stories are not being told, a mood is always created. By the time Bruce choreographed *Ghost Dances* it was already established that he was a politically aware choreographer. By as early as 1972 he had created '*for these who die as cattle...*' which revealed his feelings on the futility of war (the title taken from the poem by First World War poet, Wilfred Owen, was added to the work after the choreography was complete). But most of his more obviously humanitarian creations were choreographed following *Ghost Dances*. *Ghost Dances* has been linked with two other Bruce ballets, *Silence is the End of our Song* (1983) created for television and danced by the Royal Danish Ballet, and *Swansong* (1987) originally choreographed for London Festival Ballet. *Silence is the End of our Song* was, like *Ghost Dances*, inspired by the poetry and music of artists of the New Chilean Folk Song Movement (see p. 16). The title itself comes from one of Victor Jara's works:

.....How hard it is to sing  
When I must sing of horror  
Horror which I am living, horror which I am dying  
I see myself among so much and so many moments  
of infirmity  
In which silence and screams are the end of my song....

The choreography in *Silence is the end of our song repeats* and develops some of the folk dance patterns of *Ghost Dances*. Although the dance itself is performed in a more abstract fashion, each song is linked with documentary film as the works of the songs are translated for the viewer, tying the dance very closely to events in Chile in the 1960's and 1970's. *Swansong* is more universal in its approach. It concerns the interrogation of a victim and there is no doubt that Bruce's knowledge of the torture suffered by Chilean dissidents influenced this production.

## Creation

As with most of Bruce's productions a collage of ideas contributed to the creation of *Ghost Dances*. Bruce always thinks deeply about subjects he is portraying and reads about his subject. In choreographing *Ghost Dances* he was aware of the need to create theatrical entertainment yet maintain the balance with serious subjects such as the experience of living under the dictatorship in Chile. 'I have tried to mix a quality of fun, of trying to live and be happy, but always knowing that you constantly live with this threat of a knock on the door.'

Among the influences for *Ghost Dances* were:

1. Being asked to create a work for the Chilean Human Rights Committee, a cause with which he sympathised.
2. Meeting dancer Joan Jara, the widow of Victor Jara who was murdered during General Augusto Pinochet's coup, and learning of their experiences. Bruce read *Victor An Unfinished Song* by Joan Jara in proof form prior to its publication in 1983.
3. Hearing the music of Inti-Illimani. Bruce first listened to the group's recordings two years before choreographing the production.
4. Learning about South American culture. Bruce was particularly intrigued by one primitive native ritual at which the dead were cremated and made into soup which was ingested by the tribe members. He was fascinated by the idea of the dead living on within those who were alive. He learnt about masked dances in Bolivia which take their inspiration from fertility dances and ancestor worship.
5. Immersing himself in Hispanic culture. He had already learned much about Spanish culture when preparing his works inspired by Federico Garcia Lorca, *Ancient Voices of Children* (1975), *Cruel Garden* (1977), and *Night with Waning Moon* (1979). His preparation now included reading novels by the Columbian author, Gabriel Garcia Marquez (winner of the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature and best known for his *One Hundred Years of Solitude*), and studying paintings by Francisco de Goya. These included satirical scenes and what have been referred to as 'images of atrocity' such as his savage portrayals of the popular uprising in Madrid in 1808, including *The Second of May* and the famous image of execution by firing squad, *The Third of May*.
6. Absorbing many cultural influences from Latin America, including its traditional rituals (some of them adapted by the Catholic Church) such as the Day(s) of the Dead. In Mexico for example, at the end of October and more specifically on 1st and 2nd November (the days following the Church's feasts of All Saints and All Souls) food and flowers are left for the departed whose souls will absorb their essence, and the living feast with the dead. Images of skeletons are made and sold - edible sugar skulls, elaborate masks and papier mache sculptures – while death is celebrated.

## The 1973 military coup in Chile

On 11th September 1973 armed forces under the direction of General Augusto Pinochet overthrew the democratically elected communist government of President Salvador Allende. Allende's government of Popular Unity, which had been in office for three years, aimed to

redistribute wealth and land, improve health and education services for all, and end the domination of the economy by foreign multi-national capital. According to the Chile Solidarity Campaign, in a period of intense and brutal repression following the coup an estimated 35,000 civilians were put to death and thousands more imprisoned and tortured. The regime established by Pinochet remained in power (supported by the American and British governments). Democracy was restored in Chile in 1990: on 11th March 1990 Pinochet agreed to resign the Presidency after 17 years of dictatorship. He was appointed a life senator. On 16th October 1998 Pinochet was arrested in a West London clinic following a back operation.

## **Victor Jara**

Victor Jara was a well-known actor, theatre director, folk singer and songwriter. He was born into a peasant family in the village of Lonquen in the hills less than fifty miles from the Chilean capital, Santiago. He grew up with music as his mother often sang, and a neighbour taught him the guitar. His mother was also concerned that her children should acquire a good education and while Jara was still young the family moved to Santiago. Jara became a successful theatre director and was then involved with several folk groups and artists - writing, performing and recording his own material. He contributed to the developing interest in the traditional arts of Chile. He played an active part in investigating the folk music heritage but also adapted folk forms for his own songs.

He first worked with the folk group Cuncumen (Murmuring Water) which gave him the opportunity to make his first recording and tour abroad, and then with the vocally stronger Quilapay`n (Three Beards). Quilapay`n used traditional folk material but often updated it for more immediate impact. They learnt indigenous instruments to present the music in authentic style and unlike some commercial neo-folk groups did not prettify the songs, the words of which now put across relevant and powerful social and political messages. Jara also advised and wrote material for Inti-Illimani, which formed in 1966, one year after Quilapay`n. As the 1960s progressed Jara was recognised internationally and he became increasingly involved with dissident political groups. He was an authentic freedom fighter, using his guitar as a powerful weapon in achieving his goals. In 1965 he married British-born dancer, Joan Turner Roberts (who had previously been married to her Chilean partner in the Ballet Jooss, Patricio Bunster) who had lived in Chile since 1954.

In the unrest at the time of the 1973 elections, the Jaras were frequently threatened. On 11th September Victor Jara went to keep an appointment with the University. Because of a curfew he could not return home, he was rounded up and taken to the Chile Stadium in Santiago where on 16th September he was murdered. Having been a leading figure in the socialist era and a vociferous supporter of Allende, he and his songs became a powerful symbol of 'the Disappeared'.

## **Inti-Illimani and the New Chilean Song Movement**

Inti-Illimani was one of a number of Chilean folk groups which investigated indigenous music of the Altiplano in the 1960s, a period in which a new interest was taken in South American

folk music in Chile. Their name means 'mountain of light' (Inti is the Inca sun-god and Illimani the name of a multi-peaked mountain towering over the Bolivian capital La Paz). Inti-Illimani was formed at the end of 1966 by a group of students from the State Technical University in Santiago. It was particularly influential in popularising the haunting sound of the quena and the sparkling brilliance of the charango.

The interest in the folk music of the Andes in the 1950s and 1960s coincided with the rise of commercial folk music on an international basis and in particular with the North American protest songs performed by artists such as Joan Baez and Bob Dylan. However, the growing interest in native music was also a reaction against the formal classical repertory of 'old Europe' and the flood of imported (mostly from the United States) pop music which dominated programmes on radio and television. The South American music was played in 'penas', cafes and clubs where many of the artists were influenced by two remarkable individuals, Violeta Para and Victor Jara. Para had travelled throughout the country living with peasants and learning their music. Jara used the traditional music as a living expression, writing new songs in traditional style about everyday concerns. Thus there were two strands to the movement: for some the focus was anthropological, collecting and cataloguing traditional folk music, but for others it was an immediate expression of contemporary problems.

Artists involved with the New Chilean Song Movement campaigned actively in the late 1960s for the election of Salvador Allende and his communist government, which came to power on 2nd September 1970. Taking their music into factories, schools and community centres, they played not only at festivals but also in shanty towns and huge street rallies. Because the music was so identified with the government of Popular Unity it was completely repressed after the 1973 coup. As Joan Jara wrote in *Victor An Unfinished Song* (p.257) 'to be found with records of Victor, of the Paras, of Quilapay'n, Inti-Illimani, if the military came to search the house, meant almost certain arrest'. Traditional instruments, quenenas and charangos, and the wearing of ponchos in which groups often performed were banned. Inti-Illimani were in Italy at a youth festival at the time of the coup. They gradually found opportunities to work in exile and through their concerts and recordings found the means to keep alive an awareness of Chile's problems.

## North American Ghost Dances

When looking up *Ghost Dances* in most reference sources the information given will refer to North American *Ghost Dances* rather than the production choreographed by Christopher Bruce. These *Ghost Dances* may date back to Aztec religion but the best documented *Ghost Dances* developed from native North American world renewal religion in the 1870s and 1890s. These dances were based on the idea that the dancing would raise the spirits of the dead, restore natural resources (notably here to bring about the return of the buffalo) and drive away European settlers. These dances involved side stepping in linked circles, and slow steps performed in unison as well as frenzied twisting, turning and gazing at the sun in a trance- a characteristic of many renewal dances, such as rites of spring. Although Christopher Bruce was aware of these *Ghost Dances* they had no direct influence on his production.

# Features of the production

## Music

Christopher Bruce's starting point for *Ghost Dances* was the haunting and ebullient music of the Chilean group, Inti-Illimani, to which he was introduced in 1979. The original source of the music for *Ghost Dances* was the recording of *Canto de Pueblos Andinos* by Inti-Illimani from which he carefully selected six numbers, two songs and four other folk tunes.

From the start of the production's creation it was decided that the music accompanying the dance should be played live. As it was only available as a recording it had to be transcribed by Ballet Rambert's Music Director, Nicholas Mojsiejenko (who at the time of the premiere was working under the stage name of Nicholas Carr). He originally heard it on a mono (single track) cassette player, making it impossible, for example, to hear that two sikus (sets of panpipes) are used to complete a scale. He also had to acquire knowledge of the traditional AmerIndian instruments played on the Altiplano (the high plain of the Andes, ranging from 6,000 to 12,000 feet in altitude, mainly in Bolivia and Peru). In 1981 the instruments had to be obtained via contacts in Paris and Cologne and the talented musicians of the Mercury Ensemble (the musicians who then accompanied Rambert's performances) had to learn to play them and sing in Spanish. The musicians were particularly successful and, on the strength of playing for *Ghost Dances* and selling their privately-made cassettes of the score after performances, they went on to form the popular group Incantation.

At the start of the 1980's 'world music' was not the phenomenon it has since become for Western audiences. Shortly after the premiere of *Ghost Dances* a three-part series on the natural history of the Andes, *The Flight of the Condor*, with a soundtrack by Inti-Illimani was transmitted on BBC 2, adding to the interest in Andean folk music. Only Rambert and Houston Ballet (and Gulbenkian only when performing in London) have danced to live music. (Other companies perform to the original Inti-Illimani recordings. Rambert has also used these when performing the 1999 revival overseas.)

The instruments played in *Ghost Dances*, in addition to classical guitar, bass guitar and side drum, are:

- **Bombo** a drum made traditionally of llama skin stretched over a hollow tree trunk and used in North Chile. It makes a deep booming sound;
- **Charango** a small guitar or primitive lute, its sound-box traditionally made from the shell of an armadillo. Its construction is a rare hybrid artefact, blending pre-Columbian South American musical instrument prototypes with the construction and tuning principles of the European lute imported by sixteenth century conquistadors;
- **Guitarrone** a large Mexican guitar;
- **Quena** (kena, quena-quena or kena-kena) an endblown Indian flute (held like a recorder) made of bone, wood or bamboo with a simple U-shaped mouthpiece which makes a breathy sound;
- **Sikus** panpipes with a double row of bamboo pipes used by the native people of the Altiplano. To complete a scale you need two sets (as they cover alternate notes), played by different musicians. Some pipes are up to 24 inches in length;

- **Tiple** a steel strung guitar with twelve strings tuned to four notes, originating from Columbia.

*Ghost Dances* now begins with wind effects which fade out once the music begins. *Ojos Azules* begins very quietly as if coming from a distance. It is played on the sikus, charango, bombo and side drum. In the *Huajra* the classical Spanish guitar has a solo introduction and then accompanies the charango, and the wind instrument is the quena. The first vocal number, sung solo, is *Dolencias*. This waltz-like number is played on the quena with the guitarrone picking out the bass line accompanied by the tiple. It is followed by the second song, *Papel de Plata*, sung by the musicians, initially solo and then by the group, firstly in unison and subsequently with both the first and second verses being sung at the same time. The song is accompanied by guitar and charango. *Mis Llamitas* is introduced with a guitar solo echoed by charango. As its name suggests the *Sicuriadas* (or *Sikuriadas*) is a traditional dance tune played on the sikus repeated gradually faster and faster.

When the tune is played high and fast one musician plays a sort of penny whistle, the whole accompanied by percussion. *Ghost Dances* ends with a repeat of *Ojos Azules*.

## Design

Christopher Bruce, Belinda Scarlett and Nick Chelton, were involved in creating the visual aspects of *Ghost Dances*. Christopher Bruce originally invited Pamela Marre (with whom he had worked on several ballets) to design the complete work but she was unable to undertake the production. Bruce himself undertook this, asking set designer John Campbell to base the design on a photograph of an Andean view. When *Ghost Dances* was revived for Rambert in 1999 he asked Campbell to repeat the same image in a slightly less realistic manner.

Bruce asked Belinda Scarlett to design the costumes. He had met Scarlett when she had made costumes for several of his works including *Night with the Waning Moon* (1979) and *Preludes and Song* (1980) to Pamela Marre's designs and then, earlier in 1981, she designed the costumes for Cliff Keuter's *Figures of Wind* and *Room to Dance*. Scarlett and Marre had been contemporaries on the post-graduate theatre design course at the Slade School of Art, Scarlett having previously studied textiles at Camberwell School of Art.

Before beginning work, Scarlett watched the production in rehearsal, gaining an insight into the characters and their performance requirements. Bruce also showed her a book including South American Indian masks which inspired her designs for the *Ghost Dancers*. Scarlett is a hands-on costume designer, actually making all the original costumes herself. Pamela Marre re-made the *Ghost Dancers*' costumes to Scarlett's designs for Rambert in 1983.

The *Ghost Dancers*' skull-masks were originally made by Kate Owen but in 1983 they were made by Mark Wheeler, becoming more detailed in the remodelling and painting (and more comfortable to wear).

## Set

A single set is used for the production. This, and the constant presence of the three Ghost Dancers, gives a unity to the work. The sombre set was designed for a proscenium arch stage and consists of a skilfully painted backcloth suggesting an arid landscape with clear sky, which appears to be the view from the mouth of a cave. The dark mouth of the cave (suggesting an entry to the Underworld) looks over a barren rocky plain to mountain peaks on the horizon. Viewers have perceived the location in different terms. For the critic, John Percival, 'the distinguished decor was a stony landscape like the valley of the shadow of death, where even the rocks look like skulls or coffins'. Other viewers, perhaps basing their impressions on simply watching the video which emphasises the green wash of light over the scene, have described it as suggesting a lake in the middle distance which could be interpreted as the Styx (the river of the ancient Greek Underworld). On the stage are seven (originally just three) rock like structures at the back and sides of the stage. These provide changes of levels for the Ghost Dancers and places for the Ghost Dancers and Dead observing the action to sit or recline. Because the setting was based on a photograph it has a surprising realism for an essentially symbolic production. This realism, broken down to suit the production, is also found in the costumes for the Dead.

## Costumes

The costumes are best referred to in three groups. The Ghost Dancers' costumes are clearly very different from those of their victims but those for the Dead can be subdivided into those which suggest two racial groups - native South Americans and people of European origin. This enhances the impression that the dead come from a variety of backgrounds and have been bought together by the universal experience of death.

### The Ghost Dancers

The Ghost Dancers, represented as figures of death, are dehumanised skeletal creatures in skull-masks with matted hair, their near-naked bodies painted with waterbased make-up to outline the muscle groups and emphasise bone structure. Apart from their masks and body paint, the Ghost Dancers' costumes consist of black bands of loose rags and feathers round their waists, upper arms, wrists and just below their knees. The materials on these 'skirts' and bands show a wide variety of textures in a range of blacks. They include plumber's tow (coarse and broken hemp), strips of leather, various fabrics, unravelled dressing-gown cord and turkey and cockerel feathers, with their spines removed, and stitched to ribbons.

The skull-masks cover the full face. They were inspired by photographs of Bolivian masks with hair and feathers attached. The Ghost Dancers' masks are modelled, painted and textured to suggest the last shred of flesh might be still attached. They have large dark, hollow eyeholes. This places an emphasis on the empty sockets while enabling the dancers to see clearly through their masks. Jaws are slightly open revealing a few remaining teeth. The straggly, flowing hair is made from plumber's tow dyed black.

## The Dead

The dishevelled appearance of the Dead suggests ordinary people who have been through trauma. The idea behind their costumes was that they should embody a sense of transition, hence they are half complete and half in a state of disintegration - ragged and torn. They give the impression of being everyday clothes but are cleverly constructed to incorporate gussets under the arms and hidden pleats in bodices to allow the freedom of movement a dancer requires. These clothes, suits or shirts and trousers for the men, calf-length dresses or skirts, blouses and shawls for the women, suggest the people portrayed come from the full spectrum of South American society; from city-dwellers, possibly of European origin, to native Andeans.

One man (who dances *Dolencias* duet) wears a grey suit and open-neck white shirt, another (who performs the *Mis Llamitas* duet) grey/blue trousers, a white shirt and loose colourful tie which becomes an integral part of the choreography. (The original tie incorporated samples of all the fabrics used in the costumes for the Dead.) Three women wear dresses. The most mature is in red, the youngest (usually with loose-flowing hair) is in white, and the third is in a turquoise and brown georgette, patterned with butterflies and partly lined with turquoise to catch the light. These dresses are subtly textured, with applique layers around the areas of transition between solid and transparent, to enhance their ragged beauty. The woman in the red dress also has a black and white plaid shawl, worn over her head as she enters and wrapped around her shoulders as she watches the action, but which is discarded when she dances. The native people are one man and two women. The man could represent a peasant boy, just returned from the fields, in calf-length breeches and a loose tunic. The two dark-haired women have plaits hanging down their backs (wigs are worn if necessary). Both wear skirts made of wool crepe very fully gathered into the waist. One wears a green skirt with a blue button-up blouse while the other has a red skirt and white short sleeve blouse. They both have loosely attached wraps of orange and blue respectively.

In Bruce's choreography full skirts are often used to extend movement and in this production the numerous loose trailing elements in the costumes add to the feeling of disintegration.

The two men in trousers wear lace-up dance shoes but all the other dancers have bare feet. Originally the make-up for the Dead was stylised, emphasising their eyes. Where necessary it was used to emphasise a racial mix and some of the Dead, such as the *Dolencias* couple, looked notably wan. Given Bruce's desire for his characters to be universal, the use of stylised make-up has been discontinued.

## Lighting

Once the Dead have entered, the lighting is the one changing feature of the production. The design is by Nick Chelton, with whom Bruce had first collaborated on his productions in 1980 for Kent Opera and who had already lit Bruce's *Preludes and Song* for Rambert. He also subsequently lit Bruce's *Berlin Requiem* for Rambert in 1982. The lighting serves to enhance the action, drawing the audience's attention to specific details of the narratives. Except for the sudden changes at moments of dramatic deaths, the viewer is not necessarily aware of the alterations, or how their viewing of the work is being manipulated by light as the changes are slow, occurring over 10 to 20 seconds, rather than suddenly. The overall impression is of a shadowy place. As each number is performed the stage becomes brighter while the linking

sections, in which the Ghost Dancers are most active, are gloomier with a green wash over the backcloth, adding to the eeriness of the work.

The Ghost Dancers' opening and closing sections are largely side-lit which enhances the sculptural effect of their bodies. A green light suggestive of melodrama emphasises the deaths at the end of the first group dance, the *Huajra*, while cold blue overhead light focuses on the deaths at the ends of the duets. The only death not emphasised by lighting effects is the undramatic, almost gentle, removal of the young peasant boy at the end of the *Papel de Plata* quintet.

# The Dance

## Overall Structure

As with a number of Bruce's productions (*Sergeant Early's Dream* is another example) *Ghost Dances* takes a cyclical form with the ending echoing, and to some extent repeating the opening of the work. It begins and ends with the three Ghost Dancers facing and staring intently into the upstage left wing, just as in *Sergeant Early's Dream*, the lone woman gazes out to sea by the flagpole. In both works this device could serve to suggest that the intervening action is simply a memory of the past, or emphasise the continuity of life and the repetition of events. In *Ghost Dances* there are repeated suggestions that what we are watching are scenes from the past; like flashbacks in films.

*Ghost Dances*, although formally structured and made up of a series of individual numbers, has a very strong climax in the sixth section, the *Sicuriadas*, which involves all the Dead is the most defiant and heroic in tone. Structurally, *Ghost Dances* is a palindrome made up of seven sections which work the same forward or backwards. The three Ghost Dancers are seen onstage as the curtain rises; the Dead enter. This leads into the first group dance, followed by the first duet, a central quintet, the second duet and the second group dance. The Dead then leave the stage and the three Ghost Dancers are left alone.

Each of the dances by the Dead falls into two parts, re-enactment of life and the re-enactment of death when one or more of the Ghost Dancers intrudes to massacre, or take, an individual or group. Even after the brief entry of the Dead to *Ojos Azules* the dancers react as the Ghost Dancers walk through their ranks for the first time. When originally created, the Dead and Ghost Dancers simply mingled and found places to sit without the Dead reacting to the presence of the Ghost Dancers. Exceptionally the Ghost Dancers do not appear in the *Sicuriadas* but wait until the start of the repeat of the *Ojos Azules* to cut down all the Dead. Thus the appearance of defying death is in fact only a brief postponement. Just as each dance has its individual character, the deaths each take different forms, violent and chilling or quiet and hardly noticed. Thus there is real variety within a very formal structure.

During the course of the production the Dead literally pass diagonally across the stage. This symbolically focuses on the fact that they are in transition; on a journey or going through the process of passing from life to death.

## Choreographic Language

The movement vocabulary for *Ghost Dances* is based on folk and social dance, combined with the vocabulary derived from Bruce's own training in classical ballet, Graham-based modern dance and his experience as a dancer working in a variety of styles. In particular it should be noted that Bruce is a member of the second generation of choreographers which married classical ballet to contemporary, or modern dance. Although there is no formal mime there is a strong sense of character in his choreography and a number of movements owe their origin to natural behaviour, such as sighs, gestures of sorrow, and actions when playing games.

Bruce frequently makes use of the ideas and essence of folk dance with its simple, clear vocabulary but without drawing on or being inhibited by the traditional dances of specific countries. He creates his own folk steps based on a general understanding of the form. It could be described as a universal folk dance, one that calls on the idea of folk steps but is not tied to any specific culture. Obvious elements used include fleet, precise and often intricate footwork, the use of chain and circle dances, and the spinning turns at the end of the *Sicuriadas*. Sideways-moving line-dances (also a feature of many different national folk dances) became a characteristic feature of many of Bruce's works in the 1980's. Similar devices are used in, for example, *Intimate Pages* (1984) and *Land* (1985).

Being a folk-inspired work there is an apparent simplicity in the steps and structure of *Ghost Dances*. Phrases are repeated both in the music and the choreography, sometimes performed solo, sometimes by several dancers or musicians in unison or in layers of contrasting material. Sometimes phrases are developed with additional material. The use of distinct phrases is clear as they are often followed by a break, as with the pauses in the Ghost Dancers' opening dance or when material is picked up by another group or solo dancer. The repeats in *Ghost Dances* are a reflection of the repetitive nature of the music. They are used both within individual sections and from one dance to another, giving coherence as a whole.

*Ghost Dances* incorporates a variety of walks and runs, from light tripping steps as in *Papel de Plata* to determined heel-first strides seen in the opening of the *Sicuriadas*. This gives a naturalistic feel to much of the production. Only natural turnout is required from the dancers, their feet are essentially parallel, and a quite deliberate use is made of flexed feet. Bruce's choreography is always noted for its use of flexible torsos and spiralling movements. He follows contemporary dance style using off-balance tilts and attitudes, the pull of the body or a limb initiating subsequent movements. Much of his choreography moves in circles, flowing easily, however, more angular gestures appear in sections such as the arm movements in the *Huajra* and *Papel de Plata* and in the sharp weighty plies at the start of the *Sicuriadas*. In *Ghost Dances* the weight of the body is very prominent and at times the body seems to hang from 'broken' arms. In several sections of *Ghost Dances* (for example the Ghost Dancers' line-dance and the folk dance of *Papel de Plata*) the dancers perform in profile, giving these passages a flat, two-dimensional appearance.

## An Evolving Dance

Like many choreographers Christopher Bruce does not regard his productions as static but continues to work on them each time he revives them. Some productions, such as *Swansong*, change very little in choreographic detail. In others, including *Ghost Dances* which has been mounted on eight companies, changes are more obvious. Generally Bruce aims to produce the same effect, making an equally powerful impact with all productions of a work. Sometimes he considers how effects can be achieved more economically, sometimes they are adapted for different dancers, sometimes he is influenced by developments in his own career. It should be noted that *Ghost Dances* was originally performed on the tiny stage of the Bristol Theatre Royal (Old Vic) and is now danced on much larger stages so the movement has had to be expanded.

When the ballet was first created, the dancers had more opportunities for improvisation within the work. This was notably true of the Ghost Dancers' dances and the manner of deaths in the *Huajra*. As *Ghost Dances* has been mounted on other companies, the choreography and staging has become more 'set'. It is not always possible to document the precise point at which all the changes were introduced but the most significant changes seem to have been introduced for Houston Ballet. A few of the changes made to *Ghost Dances* during its years of performance are:

1. The opening dance for the Ghost Dancers has been re-choreographed. Bruce maintains he has repeatedly restaged the section to suit the dancers involved. The key change came when three tall dancers (Gerald Tibbs, Nacho Duato and Glen Eddy) were cast in the roles at Nederlands Dans Theater. In 1981 the impression was more of figures wrestling with one another; now there is more emphasis on bird and reptile-like movements. The dance performed by Rambert is very similar to that on the recording of Houston Ballet.

2. The arrangement of the line-up of the dancers for the *Huajra* has changed. The three women originally 'died' pinioned to the bodies of the Ghost Dancers in different ways. Now they die uniformly, lifted over the heads of the Ghost Dancers, backs to the audience, the Ghost Dancers' hands under their victims' shoulders. When lowered they no longer collapse to the floor but bend over limply and then go into the linking triplet phrase.

3. The man's focus in *Dolencias* has altered. This changes the emphasis in the narrative. In early stagings he walked backwards along a diagonal looking at the woman he was leaving. Now, although still with impulsive returns to his anguished partner, he seems to walk more courageously (and knowingly) towards his fate.

4. Just as the arrangement of dancers changed for the *Huajra* so it is also different at the end of the *Sicuriadas*. At the start of the repeat of *Ojos Azules*, as the Ghost Dancers walk down stage, the Dead no longer collapse to the ground as the Ghost Dancers pass by but bend over, leaning against one another for support, or are brutally pushed apart. The lack of bodies on the ground in both this and the *Huajra* heightens the symbolic resonance of the deaths.

## Key Movement Phrases

As with most of Bruce's productions *Ghost Dances* contains some movement phrases that recur throughout the work or stand out as particularly memorable.

1. The Ghost Dancers' line-dances. For this the Ghost Dancers form a chain, each with his outstretched arms linked by their hands placed on one another's' upper arms. With legs apart, feet firmly on the ground, they swivel into profile facing stage right. They bend so the left knee almost touches the ground then, feet demi-pointe, change the direction of their profile to look stage left, briefly kneeling on the right knee. The Ghost Dancers move forward, breaking away from the line which soon reforms. This time they perform a series of steps to the side with one leg crossing behind the other and with the foot of the extended leg always flexed.

2. A strong, defiant, proud phrase performed by various dancers. When first seen, performed by the men in the *Huajra*, it is a weighty, squatting movement followed by steps to the side. In the same dance it is repeated more strongly when the Ghost Dancers take the men's places. For the sideways movements the dancers face directly out at the audience. With their feet parallel and apart and their arms stretched out ahead of their bodies, palms facing inwards as though encompassing a space, the dancers perform a sharp plie as an arresting movement, their weight clearly dropping purposefully, with a downward thrust of energy. As the left leg crosses behind the right in a sideways movement the dancer rises, pulling up ready to repeat the movement. In the *Sicuriadas* this movement phrase is followed by an heroic step which suggests defiance. In this brusque movement the right leg is lifted in an attitude devant but with flexed foot while the bent arms with clenched hands are raised, the right over the head, the left in front of the body (see opposite).

3. A travelling, searching movement with swinging arms to express sorrow, performed as a triplet phrase. This begins with feet parallel and knees bent. As the arms swing back and forth, the body curves forward, head down following the line of the spinal curve as with a triplet run, the dancer moves across the stage. To change direction a small jump is performed, the elbow is lifted so that the hand of the raised arm skims the side of the face. This step is most clearly performed by the women at the start of *Dolencias*.

## Individual Sections

### Section 1 Opening and *Ojos Azules*

The opening dance for the three Ghost Dancers falls into two parts. The first is performed without musical accompaniment, to the recorded sound of wind. The second begins with the distant sound of *Ojos Azules* (Blue Eyes) announcing the arrival of the Dead, appearing at the mouth of the cave towards the end of this dance. Bruce has described the Ghost Dancers as being hungry to devour the next group of the Dead. He has also said they are 'birds and lizards as well as men'. The dance for the Ghost Dancers has changed considerably, reflecting changes in Bruce's choreographic style from the early 1980s to the present, and the changes have been influenced by the nature of the men cast in the roles. Nevertheless they have always been dynamically strong and powerful, acrobatic and alert with sudden moments of stillness giving the impression of listening.

As the curtain rises the three Ghost Dancers are seen in profile, looking intently into the wing stage left. Two are downstage while the third is raised on a rock upstage. The one behind the others, stage right, throws himself to the ground, and slithers between the legs of the second Ghost Dancer, moving in the direction all are gazing. After he rises, the second Ghost Dancer moves up behind him and they begin their dance. This incorporates a succession of bird-like movements - notably attitudes with the supporting leg in plie, with bold outspread wing-like arms (a gesture many will be familiar with from Bruce's *Swansong*), and bird-like scratching of the lower calf by the other foot. Bruce has repeatedly likened the Ghost Dancers to condors (huge Andean vultures, large enough to carry off llamas) with their threatening predatory actions. The Ghost Dancers also perform sinuous reptilian movements, crawling and slithering over the stage and, like wary animals, punctuate their movements by striking moments of stillness when all three stop and concentrate on distant sounds.

Within the dance there are gestures when the Ghost Dancers seem to be pulling the air towards themselves as if they are hungry or irritated. The dance nevertheless retains an acrobatic quality with a variety of jumps, including stage-leaps and barrel-turns, as well as falls and rolls.

Throughout the wind-accompanied opening section, the Ghost Dancers move largely independently or in canon, moving into unison once the music has begun. This section introduces their line-dance. The Dead enter, led by a woman in red, and walk slowly across the stage gazing blankly ahead. Three quarters of the way across they turn upstage. Originally they settled on 'rocks' though they now wander apparently aimlessly and as the Ghost Dancers walk through them they contract as though hit in the stomach. As each dance takes place the Dead not involved sit on the rocks. Their positions are not prescribed by the choreographer. The Ghost Dancers recline on the rocks as if, having begun as hungry creatures, they are sated by the deaths.

## **Section 2 *Huajra***

A 'folk lament' which begins as a light, fleet dance to guitar music. It is a sextet for the three men and three women (the two peasant women and the woman in the turquoise dress). Essentially they dance in two trios, the three women dancing in unison and the three men also performing their similar material in unison. Much is danced in lines, men and women moving in counterpoint to one another, the back line frequently moving through to the front. Periodically men and women come together as partners and the lively dance with small steps becomes weightier with larger, stronger steps. Gestures in this dance are more angular, the men introduce the characteristic bold plies/squatting movement (described above). The three Ghost Dancers intrude violently, throwing the men to the ground and taking their places. The original Benesh notation score (written by Liz Cunliffe at the time of *Ghost Dances*' creation) includes the instructions 'run terrified' and 'ad lib as if shot'. The Ghost Dancers seize the women and take the men's places to partner them. They boldly repeat the last section of dance performed by the men and then the women too are killed, lifted as if hanged above the Ghost Dancers' heads in the eerie green light.

In the silence between *Huajra* and *Dolencias* the three women are lowered and stand limply, before sketching and then dancing the triplet movement which becomes a central motif in the next dance. Meanwhile the Ghost Dancers and men clear the space. Although the original trio of women performed in their own time they now move in unison and make a formal pattern, eventually 'exiting' to stage left as the woman in red, repeating and developing the triplet phase, enters the space from stage left.

## **Section 3 *Dolencias***

*Be sad for my sorrows,  
If you have ever loved me  
And teach me to be happy  
Because I was born unhappy.*

A duet for the women in red and the man in the suit which may be said to encapsulate the experience of Victor and Joan Jara. This is a danced conversation in which the distressed woman appears to know her man is to be taken away and executed. It could be interpreted as her thoughts as she waits for the inevitable knock on the door, or she relives the terrible experience, trying to bring back his memory. It can also be taken to reflect the experience of all the partners of 'the Disappeared' in the Chilean coup of 1973.

It begins with the woman performing a sorrowful solo. Her material is developed from the searching run which is repeated in solo's throughout the whole piece. Facing the audience with arms stretched in front, she jumps back bringing her curved arm up and over her head in a series of movements that are described on the original Benesh notation score as 'reaching forward hopefully', 'heart broken sob' and 'symbolically wiping tears from face'.

Once the man joins the woman they repeatedly rush towards one another and embrace with a sense of urgency. He lifts her around his body in a variety of ways. (The lifts have become considerably higher as the work has evolved.) Together they bend over and move stealthily forward as if trying to slip away or hide. They run across the stage. He supports her weight as they turn and in a gesture she places her hand over her face. The woman continues to dance alone while the man walks slowly away as if drawn to his fate, yet eager to return to the support and comfort of the woman. There is a sense that the diagonal from upstage left to the downstage right is again the direction of progression. Both of the Dead look, aware but unseeing, in the direction of two waiting Ghost Dancers, as if sensing the danger lying in wait for them. The man again moves towards the Ghost Dancers, accepting martyrdom. He is lifted high, their arms under his shoulders. His death agony, revealed in helpless bicycling movements of the legs and the juddering of the body, is watched by the woman left alone in despair.

#### **Section 4 *Papel de Plata***

*I wish I had some silver paper  
And a pen of gold  
To write a letter  
To my favourite woman.  
Ahi, little dove,  
Ahi, my heart,  
How long must this pain endure.*

A playful, flirtatious, youthful dance for the peasant boy who, after a solo in which he introduces the movement material for the dance, is joined by four women. This number focuses on small, neat folk steps. The dance moves across the stage from side to side with a fast little heel-first walk, followed by little jumps from one foot to another and changes of direction signalled by arm gestures at shoulder level. The women's bodies are turned sideways to face the audience and weighted forwards by their drooping arms. The man first watches them and then partners them as a group, facing them with his back to the audience. After partnering three of the women individually, the man runs across to a new partner and comes face to face with one of the Ghost Dancers who takes his arm, places it on his

shoulder in the manner already used in the dance, and simply, undramatically leads him away.

### **Section 5 *Mis Llamitas***

The music for this section evokes the walk of the llama. This is a more innocent duet than the first, a lively, playful dance, danced by the man in the white shirt and colourful tie and the woman in the white dress. Apart from the opening accompanied by guitar and a brief introspective pause part way through, it is not imbued with such a sense of foreboding, making the sudden “death” at the end more shocking.

In the introduction the man and woman walk forward holding hands. The man looks at the woman and maintains his gaze at the empty space as she walks around him. (Dancers have walked clockwise or anticlockwise as reference to the two videos show. Bruce accepts this may move in either direction.) The effect suggests that this dance is a re-enactment of a memory and the man is remembering the pleasure that the woman gave him as she walks back into his focus. When she returns to her starting position she looks at him and a broad grin appears on his face. He holds out the long end of his tie to the woman who leads him off as he performs a llama-like walk (possibly a teasing game from childhood). He breaks into a series of wheeling turns, arms outspread, then into a stepping, shrugging, animal movement which the woman watches until he reaches for her hand and pulls her past him in a grand jete. He repeats some of his material watched by the woman, who runs to him, is lifted up and then they embrace. After she is given a piggyback they dance in unison, repeating the wheeling movement and ‘leading the llama’. After the woman jumps up for a second piggyback she suddenly falls backwards from the man’s back into the arms of a reclining Ghost Dancer.

Originally the Ghost Dancer covered the woman’s face with his hand. In the Rambert video the Ghost Dancer appears to crush her head into the ground as he rises triumphantly over her and then allows the man to pick up the woman’s body to carry her away.

### **Section 6 *Sicuriadas***

Throughout this dance all three Ghost Dancers lurk upstage and, although watchful, take no part in this number. This together with the heroic, defiant gestures of the dancers, particularly at the outset of the number, gives it a more positive and hopeful mood than the other dances. It is the only dance performed by all the Dead and without any doubt it provides the climax to the production.

It begins with the woman in red dancing the defiant signature phrase, followed by the heroic gesture, both of which become the basic motifs of the dance. She is joined progressively by her partner (the man in the suit) who performs the same movement material and then the other six, two by two (the native American women, peasant boy and women in turquoise, llama duet couple). Each pair performs in unison to create a cumulative canon; then the dancers fall into two lines of four whose movements are performed in similar counterpoint to the sextet in the *Huajra*, with lines passing through one another. This develops into a

farandole-like chain-dance of lighter, faster steps which breaks up into almost hysterical whirling. This element of frenzy is only found in *Sicuriadas*.

### **Section 7 *Ojos Azules***

During the *Sicuriadas* the Ghost Dancers have slipped behind the rocks at the back of the stage. As the strains of *Ojos Azules* are heard again the Ghost Dancers stealthily emerge from their hiding places behind the rocks which they mount, towering above their victims, and slowly and deliberately walk downstage. As they pass between them their standing victims crumple. At the front of the stage the Ghost Dancers again link arms and repeat the chain-dance first seen in the opening section, while the Dead re-group into their opening cluster led by the women in red, upstage left, to complete their progress off downstage right. Although their faces are again without expression, their eyes fixed ahead, this time they perform a more stylised, shuffling walk and as they advance they wheel around, first turning upstage then downstage before exiting. The Ghost Dancers then take up their opening positions gazing upstage left, apparently awaiting their next consignment of Dead.

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**Rambert**

99 Upper Ground  
London SE1 9PP

[learning@rambert.org.uk](mailto:learning@rambert.org.uk)

Tel: 020 8630 0600

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