

Tracing the choreographic innovation at Rome Opera House

Three case studies from 1990 to 2010

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Introduction

This text examines the choreographic innovation at the Rome Opera House in relation to the cultural policies in Italy from 1990 to 2010, and is part of a larger research project that has explored the programming and curation of dance within the same institution from the 1960s until nowadays. More specifically, I analyse three case studies associated with the artistic leadership of the corps de ballet at the Rome Opera House (hereafter ROH) by Elisabetta Terabust, Giuseppe Carbone and Micha van Hoecke. Paying attention to these case studies aims to contribute to a broader understanding of the artistic culture in Italy and its choreographic landscape(s) during the turn into the new millennium, which usually gets examined for the developments and issues connected with the field of contemporary dance and performance and less for the work produced within opera houses.

The choreographic work that is produced within opera institutions is often linked with a ‘museal’ (choreographic) landscape (‘paesaggio museale’)¹ that Italian dance scholar Alessandro Pontremoli has identified as

an immobile (choreographic) territory, a place of preservation and living archive of the past, to which appertain ballet and its traditions that are expressed through the philologically reconstructed repertoire, the revivals of works emerged out of modern dance techniques, and finally, the processes of reenact-

¹ «Occupano questo territorio immobile, luogo di conservazione e archiviazione vivente del passato, il tradizionale balletto classico-accademico col suo repertorio più o meno filologicamente ricostruito, tutte le riprese delle opere nate dalle tecniche del moderno e infine, i processi di repertorizzazione o di *ri-messa-in-azione* di alcuni lavori avanguardisti del Novecento, a opera, in gran parte, dei loro stessi autori e finalizzata alla trasmissione» (Pontremoli 2018, 103).

ment of certain avant-garde choreographic works of the twentieth century by their original creators. (Pontremoli 2018, 103)

If we accept that the opera environment (and the choreographic work produced and distributed in this context) is predominantly or up to a certain degree ‘museal’, given that opera institutions as places of memory preserve and transmit ballet traditions, the question that organically arises is the following: if and when does this ‘museal landscape’ become porous and in dialogue with contemporaneity? What kind of frictions or possibilities emerge when choreographers associated with a specific genre that is disconnected from the ballet tradition enter the ‘museal’ environment of an Opera House to create new works?

Brief field survey

The beginning of the period of the current research (1990-2010) coincides with the establishment of dance history courses in Italian universities as part of the transdisciplinary studies of live and performing arts (Discipline delle Arti, della Musica e dello Spettacolo - DAMS).² However, historiographic research by ‘self-trained historians’ was already being undertaken prior to the 1990s (Sparti and Veroli 1995) and dance history was taught as part of the curricula for professional training, such as the Accademia Nazionale di Danza (National Academy of Dance), approximately since the 1950s.³ Even without systematic academic support, the focus of the first dance historians was mainly on the historical period from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries in which Italy was one of the leading countries in the development of dance (Sparti and Veroli 1995). This material subsequently became an additional subject in dance history that was taught at an academic level. As observed by dance scholars Barbara Sparti and Patrizia Veroli, ‘the twentieth century is perhaps the first century in modern age during which Italy has not played a leading role in the dance, with the result it has so far engaged little scholarly attention’ (Sparti 1995, 75). Although true, the establishment of dance history courses at an

² «Il Dams di Bologna, la Sapienza di Roma, la Cattolica di Milano – dove si plasma la neo-disciplina (di studi sulla Danza) – sono fra i centri di ricerca protagonisti del processo di rifondazione che consente il riconoscimento accademico e il rinnovamento degli studi di spettacolo nel nostro Paese» (Ferraresi 2023, 7).

³ Italian dance critic Gino Tani, who also taught history of opera at the Opera Ballet School of Rome, was the first who taught the dance history course at the National Academy of Dance (Sainato 2019).

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academic level within Italian universities and the growth of dance as an academic discipline gradually placed the premises for Italian dance scholarship to also conduct research on the twentieth century dance produced in the country. This recent research focuses less on ballet and more on modern and contemporary dance, the latter already in fermentation since the 1970s (Sini in Bigé et al. 2021; Cervellati et al. 2023) and in flourishment from the 1980s and after (indicatively Senatore 2007; Pontremoli 2018).

In this frame, most scholarly dance history books written in Italian that concern the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries understandably offer only an overview of the vast field of Western theatre dance without getting into much detail regarding the institutional ballet culture in the country. A noteworthy exception is the book *Storia della Danza Italiana. Dalle origini ai giorni nostri* (Sasportes 2024 [2011]) that aims to cover the gap of the absence of a history book in Italian dance by focusing exclusively on dance in Italy from its origins until the early twenty-first century. Two short chapters written by dance critics Silvia Poletti and Francesca Pedroni provide a general overview of the ballet companies attached to Italian opera houses during the late twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, touching on themes that range from the demands of the trade unionist dancers to the choreographic production. Another example is *La Danza in Italia* (Albano et al. 2008) that is dedicated exclusively to Italian theatre dance from the eighteenth to the early twenty-first century, providing a great insight into the artistic production of dance within three Italian opera houses: Teatro alla Scala⁴ di Milano Foundation, Teatro San Carlo di Napoli Foundation and Gran Teatro La Fenice di Venezia Foundation. However, this specific study focuses on the oldest opera houses in Italy and excludes ROH, which was founded in 1880 and functioned without a resident ballet company until 1928. Roberta Santoriello's *L'avvento della danza al Teatro dell'Opera di Roma 1928-1945* (2023) addresses exactly the historical period regarding the foundation of the Opera Ballet School and the corps de ballet within ROH, thus precisely under the fascist regime. As part of the Italian dance journal *La danza italiana*, Chiara Vatteroni's essay "Dieci anni di ballo all'Opera di Roma" offers an overview of dance within ROH in the years ranging from 1970 to 1980. *Milioss. Un maestro della coreografia tra espressionismo e classicità* (1996) by Veroli offers a biographi-

⁴ In the book *Il Ballo alla Scala* (1970), Luigi Rossi traces the history of dance within Teatro alla Scala from 1778 to 1970.

cal account of Aurel Milloss's career that is inevitably interconnected with the history of ROH, since Milloss had a long-term collaboration with the institution. Starting periodically as a first dancer and an associated choreographer in the late 30s and continuing as a director of the corps de ballet of ROH from 1966 until 1969, Milloss became one of the leading figures of the Italian ballet scene and especially of modern ballet during a period in which choreographic production in this country was still weak (Veroli 1996). He also influenced the first generation of Italian dance critics whose testimonies help to trace the history of ROH.⁵

Despite the increasing number of academic scholarship, the twentieth and twenty-first ballet culture in Italy deserves greater investigation as the artform within the opera institutions has not remained a static and fixed tradition. To this end, it is interesting to unravel how these austere institutions that are dedicated to the preservation of the past gradually open to contemporaneity, becoming porous to the dynamic transformation of both ballet and its audience. For instance, only recently, ROH managed to achieve important cross-institutional collaborations in Rome through partnerships with Short Theatre Festival (STF) 2023 and Equilibrio Festival 2024. More specifically, Romeo Castellucci presented the video installation *The Third Reich* and Sofia Jernberg, the performance *Echolalias, On The Amnesia of Forgotten Sounds* in the frame of STF 2023. Equilibrio Festival 2024 included in its programme a commission to contemporary ballet choreographer Benjamin Millepied that was performed by ROH's corps de ballet at the Auditorium Parco della Musica. Furthermore, ROH also collaborated with Roma Europa Festival 2024 for a double bill evening performed by Le Ballet de l'Opéra de Lyon for pieces by contemporary choreographer Christos Papadopoulos and Merce Cunningham, and with EUR SpA for the installation titled *INSIDE* by choreographer and director Dimitris Papaioannou.

Keeping in mind the initial query about the porosity of the 'museal landscape', a reasonable question that arises is how ROH arrived at the point of establishing cross-programming, in some cases of experimental and innovative works, and how these choices have affected the dance sector within this institution. Is this tendency only a recent phenomenon

⁵ It is important to mention two additional non-academic publications regarding the history of ROH. *Cinquant'anni del teatro dell'opera. 1928 Roma 1978* (1979), edited by Jole Tognelli, includes testimonies and other precious chapters regarding the activities of the theatre while *Il Teatro dell'Opera di Roma* (2017) narrates the history of the institution in a volume edited by the former superintendent of the institution Carlo Fuortes.

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credited to its current superintendent Francesco Giambone and director of the corps de ballet Eleonora Abbagnato, who undoubtedly opened the institution to the contemporary ballet? Or does this tendency have its roots in the past and in various yet not continuous efforts within ROH to increase its audience, which are partially related to the cultural policies of the country?

Research Method & Methodology

Overview of sources

In contrast to most cases of historiographic research, for which identifying and accessing available sources for the subject matter might be an issue, the specific research did not present any problems of this kind. The Historical and Audiovisual Archive of ROH (hereafter HAA), where the majority of this research was conducted, is a well organised archive first established in 1946 under the superintendency of Agostino D'Adamo. However, it remained in a rather disorganised state until 2001, when ROH finally assigned a professional staff to collect, catalogue and preserve the archival material of the institution (Archivio Storico online). Although the archive is rich in quantity and type of materials and documents that trace the history of ROH since its establishment in the late nineteenth century, it does not include any choreographic notes or notations of the various choreographic processes – most probably because either a professional role responsible for this task is absent from the structure of the institution or for the reason that this material usually belongs to the choreographer.

At HAA, I came across various primary sources, thus sources that were created from 1960 to 2024 – as indicated by the larger historical frame of this research – and provided “the raw materials for dance study” (Layson 1994, 18). These are eye-witness accounts such as press articles and critics' reviews and non-written sources like photos and audiovisual material. The majority of the reviews are in Italian and to some extent in English (rarely in German and French), and in this respect it has been very enlightening to observe how ROH's corps de ballet has been perceived by foreign correspondents. Nevertheless, from the 1990s and after, the press reviews are predominantly in Italian. Also, after the 1990s the press cuttings (*ritagli stampa*) of the archive are not collated into volumes – in contrast to the archival material up to that date. Instead, they are placed loosely inside folders, occasionally with no page or even folder numbers available for referencing. Yet, especially for the numbered press cuttings within volumes or folders, a common characteristic is that there are missing pages

on several occasions, a fact that requires further investigation that goes beyond the purposes of this research. Reviews in PDF format are available starting from approximately 2011 onwards.

HAA also includes dance programmes⁶ usually with extensive information about each performance and the rationale of presenting it. The dance programmes also provide additional information about the choreographer and more recently their choreographic statements, the music and the music composer as well as the author when the work is based on a libretto. Although the contents of a dance programme are not consistent for all the seasons from 1960 to 2024, when available, they may provide further information about the context and the historical background of a ballet work, its style, its plot for story-based works (in Italian, English, French and German) along with biographical information of the choreographer and other key contributors to the productions, such as étoiles, composers and set designers. Where applicable, visual material of the previous presentations of a work at ROH together with videographic and discographic information are also available in the programmes under the editorial curation of HAA. The texts are mainly written by distinguished musicologists and eminent music and dance critics such as Gino Tani, Alberto Testa and Vittoria Ottolenghi. However, the programmes of ROH have not always been rich in historical and scholarly material, especially in relation to dance. As early as 1976, foreign correspondent Brendan Fitzgerald offered an interesting observation of the programme of a triple bill dance performance,⁷ claiming that the contribution of the choreographers tended to get invisible due to the absence of their photos and the prominence of the portraits of the music composers. This perspective confirms to what extent the cultural politics in the middle of the 70s were in favour of music and the music audience who was coming to the Opera to listen to music ‘with some visual distraction added’ (Fitzgerald 1976), meaning dance.

The information in the printed programme notes is mostly accurate but it usually does not include any last-minute changes in the cast of a performance or a season and as a result, there is occasionally a lack of correspondence between the physical and the online version of HAA, which

⁶ Here, I mean playbills of dance performances and I am using the British translation of *programmi di sala*.

⁷ The triple bill dance performance featured *Caleidoscopio* by Franca Bartolomei, *The Portrait of Don Chisciotte* (1947) by Aurel Milloss and restaged by Ugo Dell’Ara and for the third time in a row since the 1972-73 season George Balanchine’s *Apollon Musagete* (1928).

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often includes information that has been cross-checked in advance with the press material. Location and chronological order are the two basic points of entrance to the online archive and it is possible to access the programme outline of each season (in some occasions *il cartellone*) through the different theatrical buildings that the institution managed or performed at, e.g. Teatro Costanzi (1880-1926) renamed as Teatro Reale dell'Opera (1928-1946) and later as Teatro dell'Opera (1946-until today), the Caracalla Baths (1937-until today), Teatro Brancaccio (1985-2002), Teatro Nazionale (1998-today). Accessing basic information about every concert, opera or ballet work is also enabled by an online research system of chronological order set to provide data about every season and by extension the basic credits for every performance. In the case of a dance performance, this information that is accompanied by photographic material is about the music composer, the music conductor, the choreographer, the set and costume designer, the cast, the dates and the number of each performance being repeated. The online performance page (*scheda dello spettacolo*) makes no distinction on whether the specific piece has been performed again as a re-staging, a reconstruction or a re-making during the history of the institution, as long as the title of the work remains the same.

Last but not least, when available – mainly from the 1990s and after – research on the programmes and press material was complemented by watching the video documentation of selected dance performances, which was provided by HAA. These files were part of the audiovisual library of the HAA, where dance performances documented since the beginning of the 1990s and after and still found in a process of digitization, are available for consultation upon request.

Research Methodology or on choreographic innovation

As an artform originating in the fifteenth century but still surviving nowadays, ballet was reformed several times throughout its history, passing through aesthetic and technical transformations, corresponding to historical and social changes. Observing this process of reform, dance scholar Marion Kant notes that 'ballet has changed but never gave up its history, its link to the past' (Kant 2007, 2), which implies the transformation of ballet in relation to its own tradition. The various phases of reform and transformation of ballet from its outset until nowadays feed the understanding of innovation in relation to choreography. These phases can be summarised as expanding the moving possibilities of the dancer's trained body, taking advantage of the technologies of costume, moving the choreographic outcome – as form and sequences of steps – away from representa-

tion and towards abstraction, favouring the use of space while abandoning frontality and turning the choreographic process more participatory. All of these changes may prove to be some of the fundamental characteristics of choreographic innovation in the field of ballet.

In this frame, ballet tradition is seen as a point of reference to define innovation understood in terms of subversion or interrogation of this tradition. In this regard, the following lines extracted from the programme notes for Leonid Lavrovskij's *Giselle* (1944), which was presented at ROH thanks to Zarko Prebil during the 1967-1968 season, are particularly relevant and useful:

tradition and innovation are not antagonistic terms. Innovation does not mean breaking the tradition, suppressing or destroying it. But it means development through reform, carried out from within. An ingenious revolution is always the fruit of a daring creative evolution. (Ottolenghi 1968, 259)⁸

What seems to be crucial and informative in this specific version of Lavrovskij's *Giselle* is the interpretation of the dancers,⁹ which has been rethought psychologically, and the overall aesthetic approach that prioritised the 'disobedience' to the past through a call to be experienced as a living matter.

Keeping in mind all these points regarding the definition of innovation as understood in the field of ballet in relation to its own tradition, what kind of works that have been presented at ROH from the 1960s and after may be considered as innovative? Where does it stand the programming of dance at ROH when considering the development of the ballet tradition at a European level that saw from the middle of the twentieth century and after, among other choreographers, Maurice Béjart's eclectic choreographic approach, Jiří Kylián's opening of classical ballet technique to contemporary dance traits and William Forsythe's ways of deconstructing classical ballet and its fusion with improvisation?

To try to answer the above question, I focused my research on the moments when ROH acted as a theatre of production instead of a theatre of distribution of choreographic works that could have been seen in various

⁸ «tradizione ed innovazione non sono termini antagonistici. Innovazione non significa spezzare la tradizione, sopprimere, distruggere. Ma significa sviluppo attraverso la riforma, effettuato dal di dentro. Una rivoluzione geniale è sempre il frutto di un'audace evoluzione creativa» (Ottolenghi 1968, 259).

⁹ On this occasion, *Giselle* was performed by Ekaterina Maksimova and Elisabetta Terabust and Prince Albrecht by Vladimir Vassiliev and Alfredo Rainò.

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international stages and most of them have already been analysed and discussed in academic scholarship. Therefore, my focus here is, in most cases, on moments in which Italian but also international choreographers were invited to create *new* work with the corps de ballet of ROH. These cases, namely the evening *Giovani Coreografi Europei* (1991), the remaking of *Coppelia* (1994) by Mauro Bigonzetti and the evening called *La Danza Contemporanea* (2010), have received little academic attention so far. This choice corresponds to my additional understanding of innovation as a process of fostering a *new* choreographic or movement approach – without denying or minimizing its relation with ballet tradition.

The evening *Giovani Coreografi Europei* (1991) with works by Mauro Bigonzetti (IT), Lionel Hoche (FR), Jean-Pierre Aviotte (FR) and Kim van der Boon (NR) corresponds to Terabust's vision of internationalising the experience of the corps de ballet through catching up with the latest tendencies in the ballet of the time at a European level. This event has also been characterised by the majority of the critics of the time as 'innovative' or more precisely as a moment of 'renewal'¹⁰, 'freshness'¹¹ and 'risk'¹² credited to the new director of the corps de ballet (Terabust), who was appointed to this position in 1990. The next chosen work, the remaking of *Coppelia* (1994) by Bigonzetti, coincides with the period of re-makings and re-invention of the classics in the history of ballet and postmodern dance that started approximately in the 1980s – the period of the 'postmodern fairytale' where the well-known tales are being re-read (Banes 1994, 281). Finally, the contemporary dance evening (*La Danza Contemporanea*, 2011) with pieces by Virgilio Sieni, Michele Abbondanza and Antonella Bertoni, and Lindsay Kemp was choreographed by contemporary dance and theatre makers. This curatorial decision indicates an opening of the institution to forms of contemporary dance that are associated with the genealogies of *nuova danza italiana*¹³, *danza*

¹⁰ «È il primo vero segnale di rinnovamento della danza all'Opera impresso dalla direttrice Elisabetta Terabust, pur non dimenticando il repertorio, apre alle nuove tendenze della danza contemporanea» (Bernabini 1991).

¹¹ «... qualcosa si muove nella direzione di un'invenzione spregiudicata, di una freschezza che, se non è proprio goliardica, è fondata sull'immediatezza» (Testa 1991).

¹² «si tratta del primo caso in assoluto di genuina esplorazione del presente, tentato all'Opera di Roma da tempo immemorabile [...]. Ma si tratta anche, di professionisti in processo di un impeccabile curriculum. Il che vuol dire che si è davvero voluto, e saputo, rischiare, finalmente, ma con rigoroso senso di responsabilità» (Bertozzi 1991).

¹³ The emergence of the *nuova danza italiana* (the new Italian dance) is positioned towards the late 1970s and the early 1980s.

*d'autore*¹⁴ and *teatro-danza*¹⁵ that all of them are distant from the tradition of ballet. A corresponding move as part of the European choreographic landscape during the beginning of the third millennium may be observed in the case of Paris National Opera that commissioned the 'non danse' choreographer Jérôme Bel to create *Véronique Doisneau* (2004) or when it restaged *Glacial Decoy* in 2017 that was created by postmodern choreographer Trisha Brown in 1979. Although the restaging of *Glacial Decoy* is not the same as producing a new work, it nevertheless manifested an interest on behalf of the French institution to expand its repertoire beyond the legacy of ballet.

It is important to take into consideration that in the history of ROH from 1960 and after, few directors¹⁶ of the corps de ballet managed to hold or remain in their position for more than three years and few artists were appointed as associated choreographers – notable exemptions are Giuseppe Carbone (1994-1997); Amedeo Amodio (1997-2000) and Micha van Hoেকে (2010-2015). Italian opera houses and especially ROH deeply suffer from trade unionism that often renders difficult the creative and rehearsal process of a work, making many illuminating directors escape from these institutions¹⁷ (Poletti 2024 [2011]). This issue inevitably creates a challenge in terms of identifying a longer period characterised by continuous innovation or at least by an artistic imprint, a curatorial signature or even a distinctive aesthetic line or stylistic unity for the corps de ballet of ROH. As exemptions stand Carla Fracci with her ten-year tenure (2000-2010) and most recently Eleonora Abbagnato for the same amount of time (2015-to the present), with the former focusing on philological reconstructions and the latter opening the institution to contemporane-

¹⁴ The danza d'autore «stresses the unique imprint conferred on the dance by its author (or *autore*) and stems more or less appropriately from the notion of the 'pure artist's product' expounded by conceptual art exponent Piero Manzoni» (Poesio 2000, 106).

¹⁵ Teatro-danza (dance theatre) has its origins in the teatro di ricerca that emerged in Italy in the late 1960s and it is greatly connected with the foundation of the Sosta Palmizi dance collective in 1984 out of a group of dancers and choreographers who had previously worked together at Teatro La Fenice in Venice with Carolyn Carlson.

¹⁶ Milloss was appointed as First Dancer and Associated Choreographer from 1938-1945 and as a guest choreographer in the following seasons: 1947-1949, 1950-1951, 1955-1957, 1958-1961 and 1963-1964. He was also appointed as Director of the corps de ballet of ROH from 1966-1969.

¹⁷ «Tra gli anni Settanta e i Novanta è un susseguirsi di nomi prestigiosi che approdano sulle scene dei teatri d'opera italiani, per poi scappare via delusi e amareggiati dalle condizioni di lavoro impossibili. Tra questi a Roma ricordiamo Andre Prokovsky e Maya Plisetskaja» (Poletti 2024 [2011], 289).

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ity. Furthermore, the programming of an opera house requires keeping the classical dance repertoire alive and as a result any attempt to introduce choreographic innovation is combined with a programming that pays respect to the existing repertoire. These observations inevitably limit the communication of this research on the history of the institution to a fragmented manner rather than one of continuity.

Elisabetta Terabust and *Giovani Coreografi Europei*

In 1990, Elisabetta Terabust, who was a former étoile of ROH, the Ballet National de l'Opéra de Marseille Roland Petit and London's Festival Ballet (New English Ballet), became director of the corps de ballet of ROH after having been appointed director of its Opera Ballet School the year before. This decision was taken by the artistic director Bruno Cagli and the appointed superintendent Ferdinando Pinto as a hope to end a long troubled management of the institution.¹⁸ During this period, the artistic and cultural activities in Italy were funded by the state through the Fondo Unico dello Spettacolo-F.U.S. (1985-1996), the dedicated funding category for the performing arts.¹⁹ As observed by Vittorio Morelli, the dancers of the corps de ballet – around 70 in their totality – were not dancing enough since 1985; they were out of shape and unmotivated, and the climate of uncertainty forced many stars such as Margherita Parrilla and the étoile Raffaele Paganini to abandon the institution (Morelli 1990; Morelli 1990b). In this frame, Terabust's primary goal was to prepare especially the younger professional dancers of the Opera Ballet School with a versatile technique, which would enable them to work with any ballet or contemporary choreographer (Ottolenghi 1990). Concerning the Europe of 1992 and thus the year that the Maastricht Treaty was signed for the creation of the European Union, Terabust was supporting the idea that only the best of the best of the dance students were supposed to graduate, by claiming that

If it is true that the Opera Ballet School must first of all build up the reservoir of the corps de ballet of the Rome Opera House, the students must then be

¹⁸ «All'unisono Bruno Cagli e Ferdinando Pinto hanno sottoscritto questa scelta quasi come estremo fiore all'occhiello di una gestione travagliata» (Battisti 1990).

¹⁹ This fund was established in 1985 (Law No. 163 of April 1985) as a replacement of the Corona law (no. 800 of 1967) and it aimed to liberate the opera institutions from their dependence on bank financing (Brunetti 2000, VII).

competitive with European dancers; it is the only way to get into any corps de ballet in the world without losing precious time. (*Corriere della Sera* 1989)²⁰

Before her official nomination as director of the corps de ballet of ROH, Terabust had expressed the wish to re-establish dance as part of the institution and for this reason she had requested maximum management autonomy for the creation of a staff capable of finding rapid solutions to problems without risking suffocation by bureaucracy (Morelli 1990). Other intentions were to assign teaching positions to older dancers and hire new ones in their place (Morelli 1990), to invite acclaimed choreographers to create new works for the corps de ballet of ROH in an attempt to boost the company's lost confidence and professionalism (Terabust in Morelli 1990b) and to strengthen the reputation of the company locally, nationally and internationally (Terabust in Bertozzi 1990).

During the season 1990-1991, the curation of the evening dedicated to emerging European choreographers (*Giovani Coreografi Europei*, 4 performances) was part of Terabust's twofold mission to place new dance trends alongside the classical repertoire in the programming of dance and to give space and visibility to all the dancers in the corps de ballet (Bernabini 1991b). The evening took place at Teatro Brancaccio that was not an adequate theatrical space for dance and especially for dancers due to its small stage. Despite this technical issue, Teatro Brancaccio had turned from 1985 to 2002 into a pole for embracing contemporary thinking by significant international choreographers of that time while the main building of ROH remained dedicated to the reproduction of the ballet repertoire. For instance, in 1986, approximately two years after William Forsythe was appointed as Director of Frankfurt Ballet to originally rethink and re-propose neoclassical ballet, the company arrived at Teatro Brancaccio as part of a tour in various Italian cities.²¹ In 1989, Alvin Ailey Dance Company became the first – and still the only – American black company to perform in a dance season curated by ROH;²² for a sad coincidence that was the

²⁰ In Italian: «in vista dell'Europa del 1992, si deve puntare a diplomare solo la crema degli allievi: Se è vero che la scuola deve prima di tutto costruire il serbatoio del corpo di ballo del Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, gli allievi devono poi essere competitivi con i danzatori europei, è l'unico modo per inserirsi in qualsiasi corpo di ballo del mondo senza perdere del tempo prezioso» (*Corriere della Sera* 1989).

²¹ The alternating programme included some of Forsythe's most significant works of that time: *France / Dance*, *Steptext* (Artifact II), *Say Bye Bye*, *Skinny*, *Time Cycle*, *Love songs*, *Artifact*.

²² The programme included works such as *Night Creature* (1975), *Cry* (1971), *The Stack-Up*

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year that Alvin Ailey passed away. Although Teatro Brancaccio seemed to have acted as a space where to showcase non-classical ballet performances along with the latest tendencies in dance and introduce them to the local audience,²³ it is important to reflect on whether ROH maintained strictly distinct ballet – understood as a high art – from non-classical dance – perceived as a low art. Perhaps, the effect of this attitude was to communicate that the latter was not yet welcomed in the principal site of the Opera.

Giovani Coreografi Europei was an evening proposing current for the time and diverse choreographic approaches that were engaging different movement styles. Bigonzetti, the only Italian choreographer among the invited artists, was greatly influenced by Forsythe's aesthetics. Hoche was a dancer for Jiří Kylián at the Nederlands Dans Theater while Aviotte was dancing at the Ballet National de l'Opéra de Marseille Roland Petit. All of them were emergent at that point – more precisely experienced dancers in prestigious dance companies making their first choreographic steps – besides Van der Boon, who was a choreographer with a background in improvisation and instant composition, making work approximately since the middle of 1970s. According to Terabust, the invited choreographers were not providing a complete overview of the European choreographic landscape, but what they were proposing was quite significant (Grillo 1991).

Sei in Movimento by Bigonzetti, originally made for Aterballetto in 1990 as his choreographic debut, was an abstract modern ballet that according to the programme notes «aimed to investigate the infinite possibilities of moving bodies in space, where space was understood more as an individual medium rather than as a collective place for choreographic design» (Grillo 1991, 27). More precisely, the dancing bodies built up a complex choreography through countless possibilities of action respecting the structure of a classical ballet composition – pas de deux, single variations, the ensemble – but classical ballet was often juxtaposed or intertwined with other «modern» ideas (Grillo 1991, 27). *Assolo in Caso di Urgenza (A Solo in Case of Emergency)* was a female solo originally created by Hoche for ROH that was inspired by the monologue of *Maria Maddalena o la salvez-*

(1982), *Revelations* (1960), *Landscape* (1981), *Shards* (1988), *Treading* (1979), *Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder* (1959), *Suite Otis* (1971), *Come and Get the Beauty of It Hot* (1960).

²³ The Roman audience also had the chance to attend modern and contemporary dance performances at Teatro Olimpico, a theatre established in the 1930s that remains active until nowadays.

za and culminated in an emotional portrait of a woman in search of «an essential authenticity» (Grillo 1991, 27). *You Should Have Left the Light On*, a duet originally made in 1988 for the Nederlands Dans Theater also by Hoche, merged the physical, at times violent, dimension of dance with the baroque, the theatrical and the metaphorical (Bertozzi 1991b). In Hoche's work, «expressionist roots seem(ed) to prevail, albeit filtered through a particular sensitivity and a very personal attention to the themes of feeling and emotion» (Grillo 1991, 27). *L'Art D'Aimer* was composed of three duets that were originally made by Aviotte for ROH. Inspired by the poems of Ovidio, Aviotte's structurally complex piece was based on pure classical technique but performed in a contemporary, fluid and almost acrobatic way (Grillo 1991). *Daydreams*, was a piece made by Van der Boon for the Dans Theater Arena of Amsterdam in 1990 that introduced half nakedness. Simonetta Allder characterised the piece as «a sparkling ballet in which unexpected things happen, such as when the dancers take off their dresses and dance in panties and bras» (1991).

Overall, the evening *Giovani Coreografi Europei* received positive reviews as it was praised for the way that it valorised some of the dancers of the corps de ballet. Ottolenghi as an enthusiastic supporter of the initiative wrote: «it seems unbelievable to see Roman dancers – usually a bit clumsy, sad, crushed by styles and techniques that are too big and dusty for them – finally illuminated by inner strength and genuine feelings» (1991). However, reflecting on the curatorial operation and influenced by a hierarchical way of thinking, dance critic Lorenzo Tozzi posed a critical question: «Is it legitimate to give opportunities to young choreographers, who have not yet established themselves internationally, in an opera house? [...] Is it acceptable to present experimental works [...] in an opera house context?» (1991). Also, since most of these choreographers were relatively unknown to the local audience, only a small number of spectators were attracted to attend the evening. Undoubtedly, Terabust's curatorial and visionary proposal had many risks since the Ballet Company of ROH²⁴ was at that time a weak company that had the chance to work with anonymous and relatively inexperienced choreographers.

By observing the programming of dance during the next three years of Terabust's direction and after, this type of event was not repeated until 2010,

²⁴ During the 1990-1991 season, Terabust changed the name of the corps de ballet of Rome Opera House to the Ballet Company of Rome Opera House (Compagnia di Balletto del Teatro dell'Opera di Roma) as evidenced by the programme notes of the *Ballet Triptych (Trittico di Balletti)* (Ottolenghi 1990).

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when Hoecke as director of the corps de ballet commissioned completely new works to contemporary choreographers living in Italy. During Terabust's second season as director of the corps de ballet (1991-1992), the Ballet Company of ROH had the chance to perform Petit's works (*La Serata Roland Petit*) and ROH hosted the live musicians and opera singers from Wuppertal and the performers from Tanztheater Wuppertal for Pina Bausch's iconic dance opera *Iphigenie Auf Tauris* (1974). Besides these sporadic highlights, classical ballet prevailed during Terabust's three-year tenure (1990-1993) at ROH.

Giuseppe Carbone and the re-making of *Coppélia* by Mauro Bigonzetti

Bigonzetti's *Coppélia* (1994) was choreographed during a period that started approximately in the 1980s, when renowned choreographers began to propose their own versions of the nineteenth century ballets, such as *Giselle* (1982) and *Swan Lake* (1987) by Mats Ek and *Cinderella* (1985) by Maguy Marin. This choreographic tendency was inaugurated at ROH with the re-making of *The Sleeping Beauty* (1990-1991) by Petit, starring Zizi Jeanmaire and his Ballet National de l'Opéra de Marseille. Managed by the superintendent Giorgio Vidusso and the new director of the corps de ballet Giuseppe Carbone (in charge from 1994 until 1997), ROH entrusted Bigonzetti to revisit ballet. His *Coppélia* opened the rather troubled season of 1994-1995 that was in risk of being cancelled in case the financial support by the state had not arrived in time to provide salaries to the dancers. The dancers took the risk of not being paid in time and the premiere was rescued from being cancelled. *Coppélia* was presented for four performances at Teatro Brancaccio, a theatre with a small stage to fit and valorise all the dancers of the corps de ballet, as mentioned above, and characterised by the lack of depth and the absence of wings²⁵ that are necessary for productions with a large scale set-design as in the case of *Coppélia*.

The original version of *Coppélia* was choreographed by Arthur Saint-Léon in 1870 and was set in a small traditional village. However, the two-act version of Bigonzetti resulted in a surrealist and dark piece in black and white, as evidenced by the colours of the set design and the costumes. The expressionist and two-dimensional set design that was inspired by

²⁵ «Il Teatro Brancaccio come tutti sappiamo è assolutamente inadatto sia per l'Opera quanto per il balletto. Il palcoscenico troppo piccolo, la mancanza di profondità, la quasi totale assenza di quinte fa apparire tutto un po' compresso» (De Palma 1994).

Maurits Cornelis Escher's paintings was designed by Maurizio Varamo, who conceived for the first act a refracted Mediterranean village reminiscent of *The Balcony* and for the second act, a set of stairs that reminded of *Relativity*. In the overture, a skull in the place of the pupil of a large painted eye gave the mood of the whole work.

Although Bigonzetti retained Léo Delibes's original music score, he did not create this ballet as a fairy tale for children. Instead, his choice was to revisit the source of the nineteenth century ballet, which was the story of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*, a dark story with no happy end that concludes with Nathaniel (the protagonist) dying by committing suicide and falling from the balcony. In Bigonzetti's words, «it is Hoffmann's esotericism, rather than the intuition of psychoanalysis, that fascinated me and the possibility of expressing magical and extra-human dimensions in ballet with a new, extreme and metropolitan gestuality»²⁶ (Ottolenghi 1995, 17). His choreographic language was manifested

as a sequence of living shapes, whose *raison d'être* is movement. Far from departing from the rigor of classical ballet, his method of constructing choreography emphasises its technique, taking every shape to the extreme and then disassembling. In his dances the various phrases or parts follow one another in constant evolution and are always closely connected (Buccella 1995).

Indeed, in *Coppélia* – as the video recording available at HAA proves (Bigonzetti 1994) – the flow of movement is apparent in contrast to pauses usually emphasising balance and characterising classical ballet technique. The speed of movement is fast and combined with dynamic sequences that make the dancers look like they are cutting through the space with their energy. Angular movements and occasionally flexed feet bring to mind the robotic movement of the automata. The usually strictly held pelvis in classical ballet that allows the maximum control of the body is replaced by a circular movement that adds a playful tone to the choreography. Dynamic lifts, sharpness, extensions and kicks compose a choreography that corresponds to the rhythmicity of music alternating with vertical jumps and occasionally with floor work.

Although Bigonzetti's *Coppélia* does not address any issues contemporary with its time, its aesthetics and choreographic approach were perceived as

²⁶ «È l'esoterismo di Hoffmann, più che l'intuizione della psicoanalisi, che mi ha affascinato, ci ha detto Bigonzetti, e la possibilità di esprimere dimensioni magiche ed extraumane nella danza accademica con una nuova gestualità, estrema e metropolitana» (Ottolenghi 1995, 17).

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in evident contrast to the “original” version, with critics praising it as a triumph as well as

a real way of modernising and reinventing a classic. A coherent way, not at all vague, completely new and yet perfectly in tune with real, secret dimensions already existing in the original theme, music, choreography. (De Palma 1994)²⁷

While maintaining the original music score, Bigonzetti’s innovation consisted of the way he approached the movement as well as the story through a new dramaturgy, making set design and costumes important allies towards this goal. The success of Bigonzetti’s *Coppélia* is also evidenced by its restaging at the main stage of ROH (Teatro Costanzi, 6 performances) approximately six months after and more specifically in May-June 1995, as well as in the subsequent season (1995-1996, 6 performances), when it returned at Teatro Brancaccio for the last time. Bigonzetti’s *Coppélia* opened the way for a series of made in Italy re-makings that were presented at ROH, such as *The Nutcracker* by Fabrizio Monteverde and *Cinderella* by Luciano Cannito that were produced by ROH during the 1995-1996 season while Carbone was still director of the corps de ballet. Also, Amedeo Amodio, as a director who succeeded Carbone in 1997, reworked canonised works proposing their new versions, such as *The Nutcracker* (1997-1998), *Romeo & Juliet* (1998-1999) and *Coppélia* (2000).

The period of the made in Italy re-makings of the ballet repertoire, as mentioned above, echoed a larger cultural, intellectual and artistic interest in memory that was first observed in Western culture around the 1980s (Franco and Nordera 2010). Memory became a central aspect of dance historiography, connected not only to the various forms of preservation and archiving of the present but most importantly to a dialectic with the past, manifested in the various forms of the ‘re-’ that ranged from revival and re-construction to re-creation, re-invention and more recently to re-enactment (Franko 2017). The discourse on material and immaterial heritage that intensified with the UNESCO’s convention of the *Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003) and the renewed relationship between history and memory fuelled a theoretical rethinking of the notions of the original, the authentic, the repertoire, the body-archive and above all of Dance

²⁷ «Si tratta di un vero e proprio modo di svecchiare e reinventare un classico in chiave moderna. Un modo coerente, niente affatto velleitario, del tutto nuovo e tuttavia perfettamente in chiave con reali, segrete dimensioni già esistenti nella tematica, nella musica, nella coreografia originali» (De Palma 1994).

and its ontology. These notions have been revisited time and time again as evidenced by the latest academic discourse both internationally and in Italy.²⁸ The 2022 call of the Italian dance journal *Danza e Ricerca* on *Trasmissione del Balletto* focused on the ways that ballet as a historical form arrives in our times through transmission or reconstructions while the latest call *Danser Classique* (2025) by the French dance journal *Recherche en Danse* aims to interrogate the current meaning of the term “classical”, a polysemic notion that encompasses oriental and occidental ramifications not only in relation to classical ballet but also to any other kind of work, period or artistic movement considered as a *classic*. Last but not least, the academic symposium *Choreographing Legacies: Sustaining and Reviving Dance Repertoire*, organised by the University of Antwerp in 2024, focused on the ways that repertoire as a practice may maintain its vitality. Memory, transmission, repertoire and canon, as suggested by the above-mentioned initiatives, remain the key axes of contemporary dance historiography that embarked on a new direction since the 1980s.

Micha Van Hoecke and *Danza contemporanea*

Dancer and choreographer Hoecke was appointed director of the corps de ballet of ROH in 2010 after the ten-year tenure of Carla Fracci – a period characterised by the production of a series of works directed by her husband Beppe Menegatti, the frequent presence of Fracci in key roles made for her, and many philological reconstructions, with the most well-known and successful among them the reconstruction of works originally made by the Ballet Russes (2009). Hoecke’s tenure follows the cultural policies that were introduced in Italy in 1996, when in an effort to secure a stable financial model for the funding of all opera houses, these institutions were transformed into public foundations under private law by a series of legislative decrees that sustained the collaboration of the Italian state, the local municipalities and the regional administration offices with private companies (Brunetti 2000). This major legal turn was reinforced by a series of decrees ratified towards the end of the millennium, which placed Italian opera houses on the way towards privatisation, requiring changes at the administration level such as ‘the introduction of the values of entrepreneurship, efficiency and managerial effectiveness’ (Brunetti 2000, X-XI). The privatisation of state-

²⁸ For instance, the research project *Memory in Motion. Re-Membering Dance History* (Mnemedance, 2020-2023) hosted at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice and directed by Susanne Franco.

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owned foundations represented «an institutional solution to overcome the typical problems of public cultural institutions (bureaucracy, lack of market orientation and management efficiency, dependence on nepotism)» (De Carlo 2000, 31) that were challenging the opera houses in terms of competitiveness, managerial capacity and long-term planning.²⁹

According to the legislative decree 367/1996, the programming of a season in an opera house had to go through a collective decision-making process by a committee composed of the artistic director(s), who evaluated the works following specific artistic criteria, the superintendent, who assessed the economic aspects, and the technical director, who examined the technical features and feasibility of a production, the availability of the staff and the ways of storage of the set design and its condition in case of re-use for a restaging (De Carlo 2000). The final draft of the programme season was then submitted for approval to the administrative board to examine its overall economic feasibility. Through this process, the programming of an opera house had a double strategic role: to express the artistic identity of the institution and to produce and circulate economic capital between the market and the human resources of the institution. Furthermore, curating a programme season required consideration of the frequency with which each performing art was featured within a larger programme that included operas, ballet performances and music concerts. Curation also required selecting the works and artists to be involved as well as reflecting on the connection between past and present – and specifically the connection between new creations and the repertoire.³⁰ These tasks also needed to align with the artistic and cultural mission of an opera house and correspond to the available human resources operating within the institution. Other criteria in programming a season could include the social role of opera houses and the mission to expand audiences through development programmes designed both to maintain existing followers and to attract new ones. This focus in turn influenced the balance between

²⁹ «Competitività del posizionamento strategico attuale, ricerca dell'efficienza operativa e capacità di gestire lo sviluppo futuro rappresentano tre sfide "nuove" per i teatri lirici» (De Carlo 2000, 34).

³⁰ «In concreto progettare il cartellone significa compiere delle scelte in merito a:
– il peso relativo dei diversi tipi di produzione (opera lirica, balletto, concerto sinfonico);
– i titoli delle singole opere;
– la proposta di nuovi allestimenti o la ripresa de vecchi spettacoli;
– l'equilibrio tra il numero di titoli in programma e il numero di recite;
– gli artisti coinvolti (direttori d'orchestra, voci o solisti, scenografi e registi)» (De Carlo 2000, 37).

accessible and experimental works as well as between popular and lesser-known pieces.

According to this frame, the evening under the title *Contemporary Dance. Three creations for the corps de ballet (Danza Contemporanea. Tre creazioni per il Corpo di Ballo, 2011, 6 performances)* must have been a curatorial decision made collectively, even though initially brought up by the director of the corps de ballet, Hoecke. Sharing his curatorial approach, Hoecke mentions the notion of repertoire to introduce the idea of creating a contemporary body of work to be exported abroad (*Corriere della Sera* 2011). In his own words:

whereas when we take up a ballet repertory we know perfectly well where we are going, in this case the creation itself is about the encounter between the choreographer and the dancers, so it may be that things take a direction we did not expect [...]. The other important aspect is that, after the performance, the fruit of the work created together with the choreographer becomes a kind of dress for the dancers, something that belongs to the corps de ballet. It enters their repertoire. (Hoecke 2011, 19)³¹

Elsewhere, regarding the specific curatorial choice for the contemporary dance evening, he affirmed:

here, the dancers are performers. By participating in these works, it is them who approach them not only as dancers, but also as actors. And it is this new way of being on stage that makes the dancers intervene and participate in the creation that becomes their expression and their need to communicate and to create a bridge with the public. (Hoecke in Polidoro 2011, 48)³²

Danza Contemporanea. Tre creazioni per il Corpo di Ballo, presented at Teatro Nazionale that has been managed by ROH since 1998, was conceived as an

³¹ «... mentre quando si riprende un balletto classico o di repertorio noi sappiamo perfettamente dove andiamo, in questo caso invece la creazione stessa riguarda l'incontro tra il coreografo e le persone, per cui può darsi che le cose prendano una direzione che non ci si aspettava [...]. L'altro aspetto importante è che, dopo lo spettacolo, il frutto del lavoro creato insieme al coreografo diventa una sorta di vestito per i ballerini, una cosa che appartiene al Corpo di Ballo. Entra nel loro repertorio» (Hoecke 2011, 19).

³² «qui i ballerini sono interpreti, sono loro che partecipando a queste danze, vi entrano non solo come ballerini, ma anche come attori. Ed è questo nuovo modo di stare in scena che fa sì che i danzatori intervengano, partecipino alla creazione, che diventa una loro espressione e una loro necessità di comunicare, di creare un ponte con il pubblico» (Hoecke in Polidoro 2011, 48).

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opportunity to introduce contemporary dance made in Italy in the environment of ROH. The invited Italian choreographers Sieni, Abbondanza and Bertoni, and Kemp from Great Britain, who was residing at that time in Italy, created their works across the axes of space, love and cinema. In *The Illusionist*, that borrowed its title from the homonym film directed by Neil Burger, Kemp made an amusing and spectacular tribute to the world of cinema of the 1920s and 1930s as a flashback in which ‘an old director, who enters an empty stage, encounters the ghosts of artists, old films and loves of the past’³³ (Kemp in Pariset 2011). However, the specific work is the least relevant to the discourse on choreographic innovation given that it was purely narrative to the degree that it almost looked like a parody of ballet, pantomime and even cinema. Kemp himself uncovered the heroes from past films who were hidden like live statues under white sheets and so began a piece that inevitably ended up being nostalgically retrogressive since transferring the spirit of the 1920s and 1930s without any criticality or investigative approach is not enough to bring innovation.

Drawing from philosophy, Sieni’s *Apeiron* was inspired by the philosophical idea of the infinite. The three-part choreography was composed of two solos and a quintet, each set in a distinct light atmosphere, where the female dancers were in dialogue with the empty space. During the modular choreography, they passed through static and expansive movements and as part of the quintet they momentarily kept on aggregating to shortly rest in stillness. Sieni’s visual aspect of composing movement along with his fluid style acquired clarity thanks to the classical training of the dancers and in turn, their expressivity was liberated in space, occasionally disrupted by expressionist convulsions. The speed of the choreography inevitably contaminated the ballet technique making the geometric pauses look processual and in flow.

Acting as a bridge between Sieni’s abstract piece and Kemp’s narrative “parody”, *Addio Addio* by Abbondanza and Bertoni dealt with the most extreme form of farewell between a couple, the death. Dealing with emotions and inspired by the myth of Euripides’ *Alcestis*, *Addio Addio* was a male-female duet portraying a love affair in retrospective, from the protagonists as elders to their youth. Caricature scenes in costumes that approached with irony the naked aging body, alternated with an uncoordinated tango and a marriage scene that was performed with angular and

³³ Nel *The Illusionist* «un vecchio regista, che entra in un teatro di posa deserto e rivede i fantasmi di artisti, di vecchi film, di amore già vissuti» (Kemp in Pariset 2011).

mechanical movements for a doll-like choreography. A long kissing scene where the mouth was the only point of contact between the two performers, who passed through different positions, manifested their will for an eternal connection that was betrayed by the woman turning frozen. Despite the style of movements and the theme, *Addio Addio* was not necessarily innovative. Nevertheless, it emphasised the interpretative potential of the dancers, usually trapped in the roles of the classical repertory that are distant from the present and themselves. As observed earlier in the text by Ottolenghi on the occasion of Lavrovskij's *Giselle*, the interpretation input of the performers is an important element in relation to choreographic innovation.

In the limited newspaper material regarding the triple bill *Danza Contemporanea* that is stored at HAA³⁴, a journalist observed that the evening 'does not shine in terms of stylistic consistency but counts on the excellent performing qualities of the dancers of ROH'³⁵ (*Il Messaggero* 2011, 46). Although the dancers were indeed in good shape, as evidenced by the available video recordings (Sieni, 2011; Abbondanza/Bertoni 2011; Kemp 2011), the evening progressed in narrativity moving from Sieni's abstract to Kemp's entertaining approach. However, *The Illusionist* was not only aesthetically and thematically distant from *Apeiron* and *Addio Addio* but was above all closer to popular theater genres than to contemporary dance. The evening also revealed a friction between the association of the new with the innovative, as it made clear that not all new works, as in the case of *The Illusionist*, can be characterised as innovative, since a chronologically new work may also be outdated.

The idea of creating a repertory for ROH continued during the 2011-2012 season with Hoecke curating once more a triple bill that was introduced in the programme notes as *danza d'autore* (D'Adamo 2012, 19). The commissioned artists were once more Bertoni and Abbondanza along with Bigonzetti, Giorgio Rossi and Mariella Celia. However, Hoecke's dream of touring with pieces from both seasons was not fulfilled, leaving them as satellite and short-lived events as part of an overall attempt to introduce choreographic

³⁴ These are only nine newspaper articles, interviews or columns – none of them reviews but rather promotional or informational material – stored in PDF format, confirming once more the decreased space dance critics gradually received in newspapers and the shift in the nature of dance criticism.

³⁵ Newspaper extract: «una serata che non brilla per coerenza stilistica, ma può contare sulle ottime qualità di interpreti degli artisti della compagnia dell'Opera» (*Il Messaggero* 2011:46).

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innovation in an environment that was predominantly ‘museal’ in terms of prioritising the ballet repertoire over new productions.

As seen so far for the three specific cases, despite their significance for different reasons, they were all left in oblivion. The evening *Giovani Coreografi Europei* (1991) was curated by Terabust in light of her understanding of the concept of the European Union as framed in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, which laid the foundations for international mobility and the adoption of a single currency across the European member states. As a curatorial choice, it reflected an interest in connecting the Italian institution of ROH with the current state of the arts in other European countries. Nevertheless, the initiative was never repeated in the same form, though the practice of commissioning choreographers to create new and contemporary works with the corps de ballet of ROH resurfaced in the evening *Danza Contemporanea* and again in *Giovani Coreografi* (2024), when Abbagnato invited emerging and young Italian choreographers Adriano Bolognino, Sasha Riva and Simone Repele. Hoecke’s intention to allow contemporary dance choreographers to experiment with the academically trained dancers of ROH also came to an end the year after *Danza Contemporanea*, signaling an institutional resistance to experimenting with styles and languages distant from ballet and its tradition. Similarly, Bigonzetti’s *Coppélia*, along with other choreographic remakings and revisitings of the ballet repertoire performed at ROH, remains largely forgotten, perhaps awaiting the time when it might be revisited. Today’s programming offers a well-balanced approach, bridging reconstructions of the classical and neoclassical ballet with the restagings of the contemporary ballet repertoire, without necessarily acknowledging the cultural and historical value of the remakings and revisitations made in Italy, especially in the 1990s. Although the commissions for new works paired with an emphasis on the late twentieth and early twenty-first century ballet repertoire acknowledgedly revitalise the institution and the vigor of the dancers, the curatorial process largely stays within the safe zone of the white ballet, where Black, Asian or queer choreographers are not included in what remains a predominantly Eurocentric curatorial approach.

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