

## THE CLASSICAL GREEK DANCE ASSOCIATION FACULTY

Established in 1904 the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) is one of the world's oldest and most influential dance examination boards. Ever since its inception the ISTD has developed new styles and dance genres, and today with 12 faculties, no other dance examination board has the breadth of genres that the ISTD offers.

Our mission is to educate the public in the art of dancing in all its forms, to promote the knowledge of dance, to provide up-to-date techniques, and to maintain and improve teaching standards across the globe. The ISTD is always moving with the times to keep pace with the latest developments in dance. We regularly update our syllabi and introduce new faculties to respond to changes in the world of dance.

Classical Greek Dance is a dance technique that was developed by Ruby Ginner MBE (1886–1978). It is based mainly on the heritage of 5th century Greece and its relevance to the modern world. Ginner's theatrical career encouraged her to develop her own form of dance movement, one that could be adapted according to contemporary and artistic needs. She formed her own band of Grecian Dancers but turned to teaching at the onset of the First World War. Through teaching she met Irene Mawer (1893–1962) who became a mime expert, and in 1920 they established the Ginner Mawer School of Dance and Drama. The School continued until 1954 when Ginner retired from full-time teaching. Although she always emphasised that Greek Dance was born in the theatre, for the theatre, it was also taught in other contexts and for other functions. For example, during the Second World War Classical Greek Dance was taught in the Forces, in Japanese concentration camps and in hospitals. The Ginner Mawer dancers also appeared on television in 1936.

Ruby Ginner wrote two books, *The Revived Greek Dance* (1933) and *Gateway to the Dance* (1960) in which she presented her technique and its rationale. She always paid tribute to Effie Stewart Williams (1887–1995) for her anatomical expertise; Irene Mawer for her knowledge of drama and mime and Nancy Sherwood (1908–1995) because of her understanding of Greek Art and her outstanding ability in the creation and execution of technical movements.



*Above: Ruby Ginner and Victor Silvester signing the agreement by which the Greek Dance Association became embodied in the ISTD. This important occasion was witnessed by members of Council and personalities from the Greek Dance Association and the Greek Dance Branch*



*Left: Ruby Ginner in a Classical Greek dance pose*

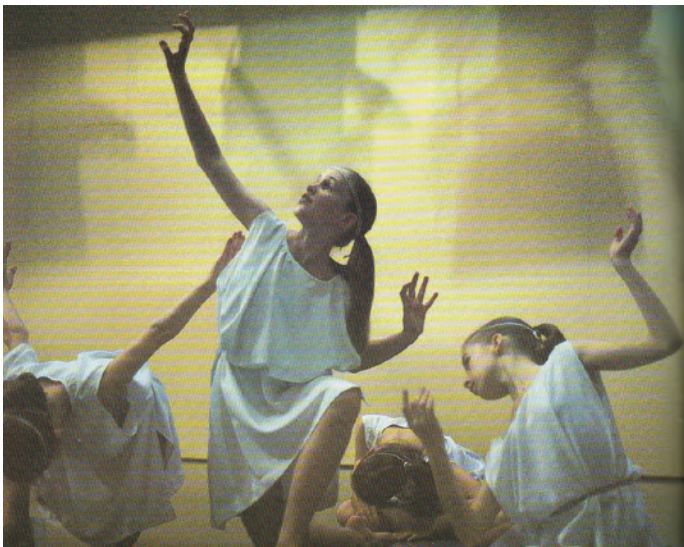
### The development and activities of the Faculty

The present ISTD Classical Greek Dance Association Faculty (Ruby Ginner method) arose from the amalgamation of the Association of Teachers of the Revived Greek Dance (ATRGD), which was formed in 1923 and the ISTD Greek Dance Branch, created in 1924. The official Agreement was signed in 1951 and Ginner retained her position as Chairman of the ISTD Greek Dance Branch until 1964.

The ATRGD was formed at the instigation of Philip Richardson (1875–1963), then editor of the *Dancing Times*, who felt that an association should be formed to standardise Ruby Ginner’s work. By June 1924 there were 22 members and the first public examinations for teachers took place in May that year. In 1928 the Association gave the first stage performance at the Rudolf Steiner Hall which became an annual event until 1933. Examinations set by the ATRGD were developed for students and then for children, the latter being administered by the Association of Teachers of Operatic Dancing (later Royal Academy of Dance) until 1951. The ATRGD became the Greek Dance Association in 1937 and in 1986, the Classical Greek Dance Association (CGDA).

Many of Ginner’s early activities have spanned history through the work of dedicated practitioners, teachers and artists. For example, in 1930 Ginner was invited to take a company to Athens; in 1991, this city hosted a Lecture Demonstration by Rona Hart. This performance was repeated at the ISTD Congress in 1992 and won great acclaim. In the summer of 1933 a company of 500 was gathered from various schools and two outdoor performances were given in Hyde Park to some 8,000 people. Some of this was filmed and has been recorded into accessible format by the National Resource Centre for Dance at the University of Surrey. Classical Greek Dance was again seen in Hyde Park when Mary Eyre provided two items at a performance given by the Royal Ballet School in 1984. This was also the year when Dame Merle Park DBE, former Director of the Royal Ballet School, became patron of the CGDA Faculty. Another large demonstration was in 1936 when 400 performers were amassed from all over England to give two performances in the Albert Hall, filling the vast auditorium both times. In 1999 Classical Greek Dance was part of the Physical Education Millennium Spectacular in the same venue. 1948 saw the first Festival of Youth which continues as the Classical Greek Dance Festival and is held every alternate year. It commemorates some of the many people who have supported this form of dance by the award of an artefact in their name. Regular Summer Schools were begun in 1918, and re-established in 1986, after a break of several years.

From 1971 an Easter holiday course was held which provided the opportunity for students, teachers and examiners to learn from each other. Nowadays the Faculty runs courses where and when required. A Greek Dance Theatre Group, instigated by Rona Hart, was created in 1974 and several members went on to become teachers, committee members and examiners. In 1986 the Greek Dance Associate Group was formed.



Top: Classical Greek Dance at The Royal Ballet School

Centre: The Ginner-Mawer Company, Hyde Park, 1933

Above: Tragic gestures



The Ruby Ginner Awards were established after her death in 1978 and take place each year. They take the form of a class for each age group followed by a performance of one of the set sequences applicable to the candidate's grade. A video (and later a DVD) of the majority of the set examination sequences was organised by Cynthia Carr in 2002 and is currently being updated. Daphne Hawkesworth (1921–2003), an examiner and long-serving committee member who had trained at the Cone-Ripman school and had also taken Greek classes with Ginner, presented a cup to the Association. First awarded in 1987 and then annually it celebrates 'outstanding services to the Classical Greek Dance Association Faculty.'

### **The Classical Greek Dance technique**

Ginner's original technique, with adaptations, is still being taught today and includes a study from nature in every examination. Traditionally the syllabus work has used a piano accompaniment. Special gramophone records were made before the advent of tapes and CDs but a pianist was always required for examinations and preferred for class work. However, it has become accepted that Classical Greek Dance can be accompanied not only by all types of music but also by words, by the sounds of nature, or even by silence. For examinations the Classical Greek dancer performs with bare feet and in a classic style tunic which has undergone slight changes over the years. For example, currently the male dancer's costume is simply a T-shirt with shorts or footless tights or an all-in-one leotard.

In today's world Classical Greek Dance, Ruby Ginner method, can be of benefit in so many different ways. Its basic technique has simple exercises for the whole body and therefore is accessible to most people from infants to senior citizens and from the amateur participant to the professional. It can underpin all forms of dance training as it nurtures dramatic expression, develops musicality and encourages creativity. Its link with the natural world is relevant to today's interest in the subject and knowledge of Ancient Greek civilization can foster connections with its literature, art and philosophy. As Ginner (1933 p. 662) herself said, Greek Dance offers "that *participation* in an art which the Greeks made the root idea of all their education."<sup>1</sup>

*Susan Mitchell-Smith*



### **REFERENCE**

<sup>1</sup> Ginner, R. (1933) 'The Art and Technique of the Revived Greek Dance', *Dancing Times*, March, p.662

*Above: Reetaleena Rauhala and Charlie Dunne, CoLab at Trinity Laban*

*Left: Ruby Ginner*