

Parade

Three hundred years of dance costume

John L. Paterson

This article is dedicated to the Theatre Museum, its curator Alexander Schouvaloff who insisted on a refined and simple design, and to the 'team' — Phillip Dyer, Judith Doré, Wendy Fisher, Moira Walters, David

Webster, André Tammes, Karel Kris, Jim Craig, Brian Wishart, Andrew Chisholm, Stuart Barrie and many others without whom this exhibition would not have been realised.

It had always been the intention, from the earliest discussions held between the Theatre Museum and the Edinburgh Festival Society, that an exhibition of dance costume for the 1979 Festival would be restricted to only costumes and their accessories. Exhibitions of costumes that I have seen in the past have tended to either diminish the quality of the costumes, because they were either presented in an over-elaborate setting, or else, because of conservation problems, so dimly lit that it was impossible to see them without eye-strain.

Apart from these discouraging experiences, there was also the inescapable fact that ballet costumes are meant to be danced in when seen, not draped over a dummy, frozen in a single static pose. I decided therefore to create the illusion of a 'magic box' in which the costumes would glow like jewels set against black velvet. To achieve this in the Edinburgh College of Art — the location of the exhibition — meant transforming it so that the existing interior did not distract from the original design intention. The result was an octagonal entrance hall containing the sales and ticket counters in the centre, together with a small curtained proscenium opening set within the existing main staircase displaying two of Picasso's gigantic figures from the Diaghilev ballet 'Parade'. From the entrance hall a long corridor led to the main hall. The corridor had specially designed show-cases along one side that contained memorabilia of the history of ballet in the form of ballet shoes worn by famous dancers, and many of the accessories which they had used in connection with some of the costumes which were on display. Before the entrance to the main exhibition area beyond the show-cases, and acting as a vista-stop, the whole of the end wall was a translucent screen, onto which were back-projected triple overlapping images of a silhouetted dancer performing the basic steps of the dance.

The colour scheme of the entrance lobby was dove-grey throughout, while that of the main hall was black. To provide a gradual colour transition between the two, I introduced bands of black stripes that encircled the corridor, separated by bands of grey that gradually diminished in width until, at



Long corridor leading to main exhibition with show cases on the way, and back projected moving images at the far end.

the far end of the corridor, they disappeared entirely, leaving only the black surface at the entrance to the hall.

The main hall, which should perhaps be more properly called an auditorium in the context in which we are describing it, was entirely black. The walls, the floor, the platforms on which the costumes were placed, the draped figures, even the internally lit caption boxes which were distributed around the hall, all were black. The only exceptions were two large polygonal show-cases in the centre that were faced in plate glass to which had been attached gold plastic film that provided a mirror surface. When the cases were lit by dwarf lamps set in the ceiling, the mirrors became transparent revealing their contents.

