

GCSE Dance Essay Question  
**Ghost Dances**

Choreographer: Christopher Bruce

Music: South American folk

In my essay I am going to discuss the six headings for Ghost Dancers. These include: dancers, video effects, set design, dance quality, costume and lighting effects.

Ghost Dances is choreographed by Christopher Bruce. It was created in 1981 and it is about the innocent people who suffered in Chile. It gives the message across that it doesn't matter how much you knock someone down if they have the ability to get up again, they still remain with dignity.

Dancers: Altogether there are eleven dancers. There are three ghosts who are male dancers, one female soloist, four "innocent" women and four "innocent" men. The innocent men are people of society their costumes show that they are in classes (first, second, third and fourth). The dancers have equality in their roles the male always lifts the female when the people of society are dancing together. In the first section when the ghosts are dancing, they dance in succession, unison and canon. There is a lot of contact, repetition and partner work whilst the other ghost is dancing in a solo. When the people of society begin to dance the four males are dancing in unison the women are in the background also dancing in unison. The ghosts come and take over and knock the men down and hold the women up so they look like hanging bodies. In the third section the woman soloist dances and then a man comes and they support each other there is a lot of partner work and the man always lifts the woman. The next section is when a soloist male is dancing he always keeps his hands behind his back and there is the four innocent women dancing in a group in unison in the background. He partners each woman in turn and stops to watch them dance. Next, the middle-class man dances with the woman as if they are drunk. He lifts her and gives her a piggyback they are teasing each other.

Video Effects: The camera mainly focuses on the majority of dancers but when the three ghosts are dancing it is in pan shot and concentrates on all three at one time. The camera shots are effective in the overall dance because the use of them create the general mood. For example a close-up portrays maybe a main character or important section of the dance.

Set Design: When we are first introduced to the three ghosts the set design is just a backdrop and a small raised platform for one ghost to start on. The backdrop is a volcano and sea scene. It is very dingy, dank and dark to create an atmosphere of the ghosts and death. It plays a major part in the dance because it is very realistic and we know from a first look at it the dance is not going to be a happy one. I think the backdrop and set design are very effective for the dance.

Dance Quality: The ghosts dance in a very playful way. Their movements are slow and fluid but sharp and strong at the same time. The ghosts have little personal space mainly because they are either working in unison or partnering each other. The ghosts dance in a teasing way as if when they are dancing around the people of society they are torturing them by not knocking them down or killing them straight away. The ghosts dance with a lot of contact, using rolls, turns and floor work. When the people

of society enter the scene the music changes so there is a lot of music visualisation. The music becomes faster and less death-like and more folk influenced. The people of society use light, bouncy movements. They repeat phrases a lot and they do a lot of ball-changes and side-to-side movements. When the soloist woman begins to dance her movements are light and more flowing but still faster than the three ghosts. She uses the general space well and repeats a certain movement a lot, which is holding her two arms out parallel in front of her body. The lady also contracts her body a lot. There is a solo male dancer who is probably third or fourth class. He uses his personal space to dance in circles and then goes on to partner each woman of society in turn. The dancer keeps his hands behind his back and dances freely and happily. When the middle-class man partners the woman they are dancing very childlike as if they are drunk. Their movements are soft and bouncy they use the general space. They twist, skip and repeat movements. The man nods his head a lot as if he is her little puppy following her around. Maybe they are flirting.

Costume: The three ghosts are wearing rags, skeleton masks, bare feet and white and green body paint, which emphasizes the torso, muscles and bones. They have long straggly hair, which is of greenish tinge and bands and material tied around their wrists and ankles. I think their costume is brilliant because it creates the character really well. They look dead like skeletons. The men of society are wearing costumes to show their working class. These include: suit, shirt and trousers, worn trousers and ragged shirt. The women are in bright coloured dresses. The costumes create character because they show the working classes and life which the innocent people seem to be enjoying. The solo woman is wearing a red flowing dress and the middle class man is wearing a suit and tie.

Lighting Effects: In the first scene the lights are low and a greeny-blue tinge to create the eeriness of the ghosts. Sometimes three spotlights are used-one for each ghost. In section two when the people of society are dancing there is a general red colour wash and the lights are positioned at the sides and above the dancers. The colours of the lights help us to tell the difference between the different scenes and they create the general mood eg: happy, sad, eerie etc.

Musical Accompaniment: Throughout the whole of Ghost Dances the music suits the dancing. This is called musical visualisation. When the ghosts are dancing the music sounds like water dripping and then builds up to eerie but slow music. It sounds like windpipes. When the people of society are dancing the music is livelier and creates the mood of everyday life and as soon as the ghosts enter to knock them down, it slows down and everything freezes. Then, the water drops begin again.

I have come to the conclusion that every little detail is essential to make Ghost Dances effective, but although the lighting effects and sound visualisation do count, the quality of the dance is the most important aspect. I feel that all of the lighting and musical accompaniment contribute excellently to this piece.

