

**A-Level Dance Course Booklet:
Gene Kelly: American Jazz Dance
1940-1975**



What are you examined on at the end of year 13?

Your written exam will assess:

- Section A: short answer questions (25 marks) and one essay question (25 marks) on the compulsory Rooster/Rambert Dance Company.
- Section B: two essay questions on the Singin' in the Rain/American Jazz Dance 1940-1975 (25 marks for each essay).

Section B

What you need to know:

For Singin' in the Rain you must know and understand:

- the significance of the character of the dance
- the subject matter (eg theme or topic) of the dance and its treatment
- the form of the dance (eg phrases, sections) and its effectiveness in communicating the subject matter
- the Constituent features of the dance and their relevance in embodying the subject matter (movement, set, lighting, costume, camera, aural setting and dancers)
- the choreographic approach (the particular technique, movement style and choreographic style) of the choreographer
- the influences affecting the development of the choreographer
- the origins of the dance
- the relationship between the dance and its context
- the importance of the dance in the development of both the choreographer and the genre
- the similarities and differences between the dance and other works by the choreographer.

It will be necessary for students to have an understanding of other works related to the choreographer to understand the development of the choreographer's style and place of the set work within the context of the area of study and the genre. These works are to be selected by the teacher and can include visual and/or written sources.

For the purpose of this booklet you will need to access clips of Singin in the Rain, Kelly version. This can be found on Sky Movies and Youtube.

QU 1: Research - Tell me about Gene Kelly's Background and Training

QU 2: Research - Who are Gene Kelly's Influences?

Influence	Connection to Kelly (context)	Example and interpretation

Background information: Kelly's Stylistic Features

- Integrated Musical (narrative-performer-camera)
- Kelly often played characters from traditional American- sailors. Costume relates to characters
- 'American' style
 - "I have tried to develop a style which is indigenous to the environment and locale in which I was reared" (Kelly: 1974)
 - down to earth personality (tap)/ soulful (ballet)
- Strong, wide, grounded athletic movement
- Strong connection with the aural setting and a range of genres
- Constantly changing front (move towards and away from camera)
- Camera techniques (Match cut- cut to face to change location)
- Interaction with set





3: Watch clips of On The Town (1949), this can be found on Youtube

(Quick Analysis Table –Complete this whilst watching the clips)

Constituent features and their relevance in embodying the subject matter

Title of Dance:

Action	Space
Dynamics	Relationships

Describe one specific movement example (a,s,d,r) with an interpretation, an explanation of how meaning is created and a link to context:

Kellys influences visible in this scene are:

Stylistic features visible in this scene are:

<p>Set and Lighting</p>	<p>Aural Setting</p>
<p>Costume</p>	<p>Camera</p>

One specific example (movement and other constituent feature) with an interpretation, an explanation of how meaning is created and a link to context:

4: Singin' in the Rain (1952)

Complete this quick Analysis Table for the following scenes: Good Morning & Singin' in the rain.

Title of Dance:

This scene is good for _____

Action	Space
Dynamics	Relationships

One specific movement example (a,s,d,r) with an interpretation, an explanation of how meaning is created and a link to context:

Influences visible in this scene are:

Stylistic features visible in this scene are:

Set and Lighting	Aural Setting
Costume	Camera

One specific example (movement and other constituent feature) with an interpretation, an explanation of how meaning is created and a link to context:

Questions on Singin' in the Rain scene

Each question should be at least half a page

5: The subject matter/theme of the dance and it's treatment The theme of the title dance is 'I'm in love', however there are other themes at play through the movie as a whole: fantasy vs reality [especially in the dream ballet], the show must go on, and the advancement of technology.

(a): What is a dream ballet?

(b): Consider how each of these themes can be seen in other dance numbers within the film.

6: How the movement is effective in communicating the subject matter

The movement in the title song is carefree, joyous, playful and cheery - perfect for communicating a man in love. The childish jumping in puddles, kicking the water, skipping up and down the kerb, all points to the notion that love makes you young and silly again.

Can you find specific actions examples to support?

- **Either screen shot the actions, or draw them. ++ Describe the ASDR alongside the image.**

7. Set, costume, lighting, music and their relevance in embodying the subject matter.

The street set is important as it allows Kelly to skip nimbly up and down the kerb, swing around a lampost without a care in the world, and most importantly dance in the rain. This is no small shower, this is a downpour and the fact that he doesn't mind getting soaking wet, without the umbrella opened at first, and under a drainpipe, is again indicative of his love struck mood. Backlighting helped to make the rain stand out. The prop is of course vital to the dance and in turn transforms him from a regular guy to tightrope walker - another playful moment. The night time sky was created by dragging a giant tarpaulin across the set, blocking out all light from above.

(a)How would you describe the style of the music?

(b) Are the costumes and hairstyles authentic to the 1920's?

8: The importance of the dance in the development of choreographer and genre.

In many ways, Singin' in the Rain formed the pinnacle of Kelly's movie career. Despite it not being an instant hit, it is widely regarded as his masterpiece and the climax of his work in cinedance. Due to the advent of television through the 1950s, the MGM Musical Movie machine started to dwindle, however Singin' in the Rain and the wide variety of visual effects that Kelly developed through it, would continue in his work on Broadway and in modernising ballet.

A good example is Pas de Dieux for Paris Opera Ballet in 1960, where he brought on stage a large traffic light to direct the movement of the clouds above. The use of its changing colours would signal the changing moods of the female lead, Aphrodite. The jazz music he loved and often worked with would also be used.

The similarities and differences between this dance and others by the choreographer.

(a) Research another dances choreographed/danced by Gene Kelly and compare the various similarities and differences of the pieces.

(b) How are they similar to Singin in the Rain and how are they different?

9: Watch the following scenes and take notes on the constituent features PLUS ASDR:

'Beautiful Girl/Beautiful Girls Montage' *Moses Supposes*'

[Beautiful Girl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E06HZ7AosrA) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E06HZ7AosrA>

[Montage](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Z0FEzE5AJs) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Z0FEzE5AJs>

***Moses Suppose* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcIT9bmCMq8>**

Booklet Evaluation:

What went well?	
What did I struggle with?	
EBI:	
Was there enough challenge for me?	
Questions I would like to ask my teacher:	

VAUDEVILLE - Kelly joined with his siblings to form a vaudeville act, and later formed a duo with his brother Fred.

BUSTER KEATON - Keaton was a comedy giant of silent movie known for his dangerous stunts and exaggerated movements. He was one of Kelly's heroes.

BILL 'BOJANGLES' ROBINSON - the African-American tap dancer, born 1878, performing in vaudeville, Broadway and Hollywood through the 1930s and 40s. He greatly influenced Kelly's love of tap dancing.

CLARENCE 'DANCING' DOTSON - known at the time as an 'eccentric dancer', Dotson's tap routine inspired many to learn to dance. Kelly saw him perform in Pittsburgh and admitted to pinching some of his steps.

BALLETS RUSSES DE MONTE CARLO - this spin off from Diaghilev's Ballets Russes was to be a life changing experience for Kelly, expanding his dance interest to ballet and in particular, expressive ballet that told stories. He saw the company perform in Pittsburgh with work by the narrative choreographer Michel Fokine among others and was hooked. From then on he wanted to study ballet.

BERENICE HOLMES - an ex dancer for Adolph Bolm, Holmes taught Kelly ballet in the virile and masculine Russian style. Here, Kelly learned to 'dance like a man', as well as introduce him to the jazz clubs of Chicago.

FRED ASTAIRE - Kelly found his precision and polish inspirational, particularly as his dances moved the plot along, unlike Busby Berkeley who choreographed just for effect.

ROBERT ALTON - choreographer native to Pittsburgh who gave Kelly his first break on Broadway in *Leave it to Me* and *One for the Money*. He also recommended him for the lead role in *Pal Joey*.

STANLEY DONEN - choreographer and movie director who became a close friend and mentor. Kelly would work with Donen on many projects, including *On the Town* and *Singin' in the Rain*. He also married Donen's ex wife.

WW2 - Kelly's role in the Photographic Department of the US Naval Service was instrumental in teaching him how to direct movies.

DORIS HUMPHREY - her book 'The Art of Making Dances' greatly influenced his choreographic work from the 1960s on.



KELLY Social Context

1912 Kelly was born just before WW1 broke out, in Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh was a working class, industrial city which provided half of the steel needed for the allied war effort and 60,000 men were sent to fight. Men were seen as masculine, providers, fighters and sportsmen - not dancers. The Pittsburgh Rebels and Kelly's team The Pittsburgh Pirates were prominent baseball teams of the day.

1920s These were the years of the silent movie, where actors such as Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton and Douglas Fairbanks Jr were busy doing their own stunts and scaling walls. Kelly admits to using Keaton's movements at times. As the decade went on 'talkies' took over silent movies, putting many out of work. This was the era that *Singin in the Rain* reflects. It was also an era where most of the music was inspired by black jazz musicians.

Socially, the 20's were the time of prohibition in America, where alcohol was illegal. However Pittsburgh had been a drinking city and now its residents just got creative with how to obtain alcohol. 2,000 speakeasies sprang up across the city and corruption was rife. It may well have been in one of these clubs that Kelly saw Clarence 'Dancing' Dotson perform and Kelly certainly frequented Bakey's speakeasy himself. The age of the gangster and the mob came to Pittsburgh with gang murders happening in the streets. *'Trapped in the middle of this lawlessness, the Post noted, were the parents of all races trying to raise families in a neighbourhood overrun by vice.'* This was the background to Kelly's childhood - no wonder he gave up dance when the neighbourhood boys ridiculed him and threw himself into sports. Perhaps this was also important for informing his *'Broadway Ballet'* for *Singin in the Rain*, in later years. It is also clear why Kelly felt the need to portray the average man in the street, rather than the upper class society that was associated with Astaire movies of the time.

1930s The Great Depression. This was a worldwide economic downturn that started in America. Income dropped significantly during this era. Kelly had enrolled in college but had to drop out to work and support his family. Prohibition was gone in 1933 and the gangsters faded away. The working class dress of the era was baggy trousers, an open necked shirt, often with rolled up sleeves, and a woollen tank top - a trademark of many a Kelly dance costume. There was a shift in the arts to show the working classes rather than socialites. *Les Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo* were touring America at this time - a life changing experience for Kelly. Chicago was the dance hub of America at this time due to Russian immigrants setting up dance schools.

1940s WW2 and patriotism was high. Many of Kelly's films at this time were war-based including *The Cross of Lorraine* which was about the French Resistance. Kelly was to enlist toward the end of the war, in the Photographic Department of the US Naval Air Service. This experience informed his movie directing in future years. His service also meant that he had a real life flavour of the sailors he showed in *Anchors Aweigh* and *On the*



1950s 1950s America was still very much a man's world and so it was still important for Kelly's on screen persona to be as masculine as possible.

'The 50s decade was known for many things: post-war affluence and increased choice of leisure time activities, conformity, the Korean War, middle-class values, the rise of modern jazz, the rise of 'fast food' restaurants and drive-ins,... a baby boom, the all electric home as the ideal, white racist terrorism in the South, the advent of television and TV dinners, abstract art, the first credit card, ...the rise of drive-in theaters to a peak number in the late 50s with over 4,000 outdoor screens (where young teenaged couples could find privacy in their hot-rods), and a youth reaction to middle-aged cinema. Older viewers were prone to stay at home and watch television (about 10.5 million US homes had a TV set in 1950).'

Tim Dirks

The advent of television impacted heavily on movies, film audiences declined rapidly and budgets were cut at MGM. After *An American in Paris* and *Singin' In the Rain*, Kelly would find more work on Broadway and ballet than in Hollywood.



KELLY

Stylistic Features

