

The monster mash: Frankenstein is reanimated for dance, stitched together with Greek myths

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. This article's title refers to the "monster mash". This refers to two things: a pop song and a slang term. Read about both. What do you think the Frankenstein dance will be like? Discuss.

1. The "Monster Mash" is a pop song from the 1960s by Bobby Pickett about a dancing monster. This is the chorus.

He did the monster mash.

(The monster mash) It was a graveyard smash.

(He did the mash) It caught on in a flash.

(He did the mash) He did the monster mash.

2. a **mash-up** *noun* something made from two or more other sources, such as a song, video, computer program

2 Key words

a. Write the correct words from the wordpool to complete the definitions below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

adapt choreographer contemporary creature imagination inspiration
myth pattern presence rehearsal risk structure

1. a person whose job involves designing and arranging the steps and movements in dances

2. time spent practising a play or piece of music to prepare for a performance

3. what happens when somebody sees or hears something that gives them exciting new ideas or makes them want to create something, especially in art, music or writing

4. a living thing, real or imaginary, that can move around, such as an animal

5. the ability to create pictures in your mind or the part of your mind that does this

6. a particular way something is done, is organised or happens _____

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7. belonging to the same time or to the present time _____
8. change in order to deal more successfully with a new situation _____
9. the fact that someone or something is in a place, or the feeling that someone is still in a place although they are not _____
10. the way in which the parts of a system or object are arranged or organised _____
11. an ancient story, especially one that explains early history of or about natural events and facts _____
12. the possibility of something bad happening _____

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.

1. The week before the show, there will be _____ every day.
2. Lock your car doors, so there is no _____ your car will be stolen.
3. The _____ of that film was confusing because the events did not go in order.
4. The lead actor had a strong _____ onstage.
5. _____ from the Greeks and Romans have been retold many times.
6. The _____ asked the dancers to practise the dance again.
7. Living _____ can _____ to many environmental changes.
8. Where does the artist's _____ for their paintings come from?

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- 1 Choreographer Mark Bruce is sitting in his rehearsal studio in Frome, Somerset, talking about Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the inspiration for his latest work of dance-theatre. As he speaks, I realise that he's talking not only about the creature, nor even about the novel – but about himself.
- 2 At first sight, it looks as if he was born into dance. His father is famous choreographer Christopher Bruce and his mother, Marian Bruce, is a dancer who became a visual artist and stage designer. Mark began to dance relatively late, aged 17. More importantly for him as an artist is the sense that his ideas come not from himself but visit him from elsewhere – “like in a dream” – and that he must then piece them together.
- 3 “At school, I was told I suffer from an overactive imagination,” he remembers. As a teenager, he was always writing and drawing and he dreamed of becoming a graphic novelist. Some of the stories he wrote at the time resurfaced in his 2010 short story collection, *Blackout Zones* (he has just finished writing another collection, *Fury Parades*). Another artistic obsession has been music. A guitarist and sometimes vocalist, songwriter and composer, Bruce played in a band for many years, and he continues to record with the Mute Song label as well as sometimes scoring music for his own choreography.
- 4 Dance, though, has been his main creative pursuit since he founded his company in 1991, and looking through his previous work shows some patterns. He's attracted many top-notch contemporary dancers over the years, and usually choreographs in “old-school” style by creating steps and phrases himself (“he makes the steps,” says dancer Eleanor Duval, “then I make them mine”). Indeed, Bruce swims against the current: there's no one else in dance quite like him, nor does he look quite like anyone else.
- 5 Which brings us to *Frankenstein*, a story that Shelley herself said had come to her in a dream. The idea of adapting the story had been put to Bruce several times after his award-winning *Dracula* from 2013, “but I always said no, because the idea of how to do it hadn't come to me.” It was while struggling on a different project that he decided to re-read Shelley's book. Result: “Suddenly I could see this creature, this presence in which something is not quite right, and I thought: oh, this is how you do it. Then the structure of the piece made itself quite quickly.”
- 6 Bruce's *Frankenstein* does not adapt Shelley's book completely, rather it presents a sequence of scenes. He has also used the book's subtitle – “The Modern Prometheus” – to allow himself to introduce figures from Greek myth where they seemed to match the story's spirit. “I wanted just enough for people to imagine what the story is saying to them,” says Bruce.
- 7 *Frankenstein* will tour alongside a shorter piece called *Liberation Day*, dances set to a playlist of songs Bruce has been writing. Created at the same time, *Liberation Day*, *Fury Parades* and *Frankenstein* in fact turned out to be similar. “Different approaches, similar subjects,” says Bruce.
- 8 As you get older,” says Bruce, “you realise: oh, this happened before, and it's happening again. We think we're breaking out of loops, then find ourselves repeating them. I do that as a creator as well, but I'm always also trying to both identify loops and push beyond them by risking something new.”
- 9 “*Frankenstein* is such a strange and flawed novel, and it doesn't quite piece together,” says Bruce. “But we keep coming back to it.”

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Who is Mark Bruce?
2. What were his parents' occupations?
3. When did Bruce begin to dance?
4. Where does Bruce say his ideas come from?
5. What did he dream of becoming as a teenager?
6. What instrument does Bruce play?
7. Why is his choreography style considered "old school"?
8. Why did Bruce say "no" to adapting *Frankenstein* in the past?
9. According to the article, Bruce's *Frankenstein* is not an adaptation. How is it described?
10. Which of Bruce's two other works have subjects similar to *Frankenstein*?

4 Key language

a. Complete the word families in the table with words from the article.

Noun (person)	Noun (thing)	Verb	Adjective
1.	2.	3.	choreographic
4.	design	design	design
dreamer	5.	6.	dreamy
7.	8.	dance	dance
9.	creativity	create	10.

b. Choose four of the words above and write personalised sentences using them.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “Artists take the old and make it new again.”
- “Books and art don’t care about time. They can always inspire.”
- “Adaptations are not as good as the original.”

6 In your own words

a. Do some research about books that have been made into plays, films or dances.

- What are some recent book adaptations you’ve seen?
- Did you like the book or the play / film / dance better? Why?
- In your opinion, which is usually better, the book or the play / film / dance?

b. Report your findings to the class and share your opinions. Here are some phrases to help you when you discuss facts.

According to what I read, ...

One example is ...

Some ways artists do this are ...

One article said that ...

Another thing that happens is ...

Here are some phrases to use when stating your opinion.

I prefer...

From what I have seen / read, ...

My experience is / was ...

In my understanding / opinion, ...

I (dis)agree with ...