

Course Rationale

On the evening of 29 May 1913, the Parisian upper class gathered at the Theatre des Champs-Élysées for the premiere of *Le Sacre du Printemps* (The Rite of Spring) performed by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. The events of that night forever changed the history of ballet and left a lasting impression on the history of twentieth-century European culture. The audience loudly expressed both their admiration and disgust during the performance and their shouting, whistling and fighting drowned out the huge orchestra. The following year the world was displaced by the onset of the First World War. People turned to art to describe the death and destruction: artist Jacques-Émile Blanche likened the sound of bombs falling on Paris to the sound of *The Rite of Spring*.

In the century since its premiere, *The Rite of Spring*'s influence on dance, music and European culture has been reviewed, debated and mythologised. Often described as a symbol of the end of the long nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the premiere is regarded as one of the most important cultural moments of the last century. And yet the ballet was only performed seven times before the original choreography was forgotten. *The Rite* that caused the scandal and – culturally at least – predicted the first 'total war' is lost forever.

This interdisciplinary course examines the events that led up to and took place on the evening of the premiere of *The Rite of Spring* to examine the ballet in its historical and cultural context. The course asks students to consider the ballet itself alongside its wider cultural context: 'What drove the audience to riot?' 'Why was *The Rite of Spring* controversial?' and 'What can the ballet tell us about a society on the brink of war?'

Building on arts and humanities curricula, the course encourages students to think of visual and aesthetic sources as 'objects' for analysis. It builds on skills such as critical reading and persuasive writing which are taught in KS4 and KS5 humanities subjects, and introduces concepts taught at university level including interdisciplinary source analysis and critical engagement with historiography. Students are encouraged to read around the subject, beginning with the sources provided.