What are stylistic features? With evidence examples from Matthew Bourne.

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The term 'stylistic feature' refers to an aspect of a choreographers typical movement and/or choreographic style. When considering a choreographers movement style (or dance style), you should ask yourself what genre(s) of dance they typically choreograph in, e.g. ballet, contemporary, jazz etc... and what are the key characteristics (or recognisable traits) of that genre of dance? E.g. the use of turn-out in ballet, or the transfer of weight in contemporary. Choreographic style refers to the other constituent features required to make a dance: themes or starting points, number and gender of dancers, structure of the dance, choreographic and other structuring devices, aural accompaniment, and physical set design.

To be considered a key part of a specific choreographers style, the feature must be recognisable across many of their professional works. In the case of Matthew Bourne, his works are always of a narrative nature which are highly focused on character development. He takes classical stories and provides a modern twist to engage contemporary audiences, such as in Swan Lake (2012) and Sleeping Beauty (2012). He uses large, lavish and movable set designs to immerse audiences into the story, best seen in The Car Man (2000), and his dance style typically involves a blend of ballet and contemporary characteristics, alongside social dance styles chosen specifically for the scene at hand - typically a party. Furthermore, Bourne is inspired by music and often edits original scores by Tchaikovsky, allowing it to dictate structure of the dance. Once a choreographers style has been discovered, evidence should come from at least one of their professional works, though providing examples from more than one work helps to strengthen the notion that the feature is in fact typical of their style.

A key feature of Matthew Bourne's style is **to take a traditional or classic story and add a modern twist,** which we can clearly evidence in *Swan Lake* (1995; 2012). The story of the original Swan Lake ballet is as follows:

> Based on a German legend, the beautiful Princess Odette has been enchanted by an evil genie in a spell that leaves her a woman by night and a swan by day.

> When Prince Siegfried discovers the lake, he falls in love with Odette and there is at last hope that the spell will be broken. But all hope vanishes when Siegfried is tricked into pledging his love to the Evil Genie's daughter, Odile, disguised by magic as Odette. With no other option, Siegfried and Odette throw themselves into the lake and are united for eternity in the afterlife.
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> Petipa Society (n.d)

Bourne's version focuses on a Prince, bringing in features of the British Royal family through the navy guard uniform with red and gold trimmings, the standard British colours. However, he makes the story much more relatable by incorporating the contemporary issue of mental health, as the Prince suffers with rejection from his mother, loss of a normal life due to his Royal status, and questions his sexuality and by default, his whole identity. This all leads to the Prince writing a suicide note and attempting to throw himself into the lake at the start of act 2, only to be rescued by the lead male swan who jumps out from the water and stops him. By changing the gender of the swans he is able to include more complexity to the characters development. A pivotal moment is when the male swan effortlessly glides through second position and the Prince walks up behind him to hold the swans left thigh as he lifts it into an attitude position. He places his other arm on the swans bare waist, and after a moment of eye contact they both break into a mirrored sequence of extended leans, turns, pivots and jumps which change their direction towards and away from each other. When comparing this to the original storyline, the audiences natural interpretation is that of love and attraction between the two men, which was most certainly a modern twist in 1995, and still just as important in the years it has been revamped (2012, 2018). However, the use of mirroring and later lead-and-follow devices also strongly links to the idea of the Prince seeing the swan as a male role model, someone who is strong, confident and clear on who they are, the kind of man the Prince has been longing to be throughout the whole of act 1. This moment therefore reveals how Bourne has twisted the storyline of the original ballet to allow for more complex character developments whilst still nodding to its key features. Furthermore, the personal and psychological themes of identity and mental health makes the work much more relatable to a modern day audience, who can make connections to the likes of Prince Harry in real life and may even relate to the Prince's emotions themselves. Overall, Bourne tends to create works which are already known to audiences to help them understand the story, then include modern day twists to engage their interest and connect with the characters further.

Another key feature of Bourne's style is his use of large, immersive set designs which are often transformable to allow the narrative to fluidly continue. This is evident in Sleeping Beauty (2012), The Car Man (2000) and Swan Lake (2012). In act 1 of Sleeping Beauty the whole stage is designed to be baby Aurora's room, with floor to ceiling gold panelled windows in front of an oversized moon and dark, starry sky upstage. There are thick, heavy, maroon curtains in the corners and sides, with a mediaeval style crib downstage left where baby Aurora is placed. The design is intricately detailed and fills the whole stage, immersing the audience into the room. The fairies enter from the window upstage using a travelator, which is disguised by thick white fog, as they hold arabesque positions and candlesticks. This enhances the magic feel as the characters appear to be gently flying in from the window. (Bourne's was inspired by Frederick Ashton's ballets which were full of detailed sets and costumes, as well as the 1950's movie Easter Parade, which inspired the use of the travelator.) In The Car Man, he utilises levels to increase the tension for the audience as we watch the manager of the garage suspiciously sneak into his downstairs office and steal money from the company safe, whilst his workers are directly above him in the shower room.

As an audience, we can see both scenes happening at once, and as the workers start to run down the stairs to the locker rooms we are encouraged to sit on the end of our seats to find out whether the manager will be caught or not. This allows the story to build in drama, closer to a cinematic film than a dance on stage. Lastly, the movable set design in Swan Lake allows for large pieces of set to be reused in different scenes without the need for a full black out to change the design. The oversized white and gold bed, adorned with satin sheets, large fluffy pillows and a gold crown on the headboard, is used as a key feature of the young Prince's bedroom at the start of the dance and takes up a lot of space on stage. As the story progresses into the royal duties scene, the bed is swiftly rotated and pushed back to slot into a fake wall upstage, where the headboard is now facing the audience and is being used as a balcony. The Queen and Prince stand behind it and wave down at the ensemble, once again using set in a clever way to create levels and to allow the narrative to continue with ease.

Although Bourne's idiosyncratic style is a blend of ballet and contemporary, he typically includes social dance styles within specific sections that require a change of style to set the tone or place. Act 4 of Sleeping Beauty portrays Caradoc's wedding, designed like a masquerade to add secrecy as later it is revealed to be a staged sacrifice of Aurora. The ensemble dance in pairs and the male dancers use 50-60's social styles, which derive from jazz. They invert their elbows with the outside of the wrist pressed into their waists and 'flap' their arms front and back like wings. At one point, the males tuck their elbows by their sides and open their forearms with splayed hands, as they rock their hips back and forth, with clear references to jazz. In scene 5 of Swan Lake, The Swank Bar, the ensemble perform characteristics of lindy hop and jive such as loose ballroom holds with frenzied kicks, quirky side steps and rowing of the arms alongside isolated head juts and slow shimmying wrists which resemble Fosse styles of jazz. The same characteristics of lindy hop and jive are also present in the Engagement Party scene in The Car Man, as the ensemble row their arms in a circle as the step towards their partners, performing small stepping patterns with the hands on the hips, and holding onto each others hands as they kick their legs out to the side rhythmically. In all three examples, Bourne chooses to use social styles to set the scene of being at a wedding, party or club/bar, where it would be more likely to see upbeat, looser movements than ballet. Bourne's style is inspired by the countless musicals, dances and films he watches so he understands how to accurately tell a story, therefore the use of social styles makes the scenes more realistic and adds interest for the audience, setting the mood and place.

The way that Bourne uses the aural accompaniment to structure the narrative or pace of a scene is another key aspect of his choreographic style, which is most clearly evident in the Royal Duties scene of Swan Lake. The classical Tchaikovsky score starts with a singular violin repeating a moderately paced melody as the young Prince and Queen wave from the royal balcony to the 'public'. They open ceremonies and champagne bottles and greet the public as the music gradually builds in other instruments such as trumpets and string instruments. As the music reaches a climax, the young prince and Queen disappear and the public perform a contemporary ballet ensemble. The music then transitions back to the singular classical violin and repeats the whole section again. The prince reappears, now as an adult, with the Queen to wave on the balcony, again performing duties such as presenting statues and placing medals on soldiers as the music builds. The repetition of the musical score set the structure of the section, allowing Bourne to seamlessly switch the young and adult dancers to show how he has been doing the same same royal duties throughout his childhood, setting a timeline for the narrative to progress quicker. Similarly, in The Car Man, Bourne uses the natural repetition of Shchedrin's Carmen Suite: VIII. Bolero Finale to enhance the dramatic storyline happening during the Engagement Party scene. The music

begins with an upbeat and light repetitive melody, with a steady layering of instruments to increase the vibrancy of the party scene. However, when the lights change to dark blue, the music is broken momentarily by a deep, menacing, drawn-out sound which decreases in pitch, before abruptly returning to the upbeat, rhythmic melody to bring our attention back to the party. This happens 6 times throughout the scene, and each time highlights a sly violent or jealous moment between Dino, his wife, and the traveller before the scene unravels and the party is ruined by a domestic fight. By allowing the structure of the music to structure the narrative in this scene, the audience are able to focus their attention to the smaller gestures that would otherwise be missed in the busy party scene, but that are crucial in understanding the reasons why the story progresses in the dramatic way that it does.

In conclusion, Bourne's key stylistic features are evident across his most popular works, making him highly recognisable as a practitioner. His works focus on classical narratives with more relevant and sometimes darker themes, portrayed by large ensembles, specific characters, immersive sets and clever choices of dance styles. He targets a more contemporary audience, making works relevant and accessible, and his clear and consistent style allows for a returning audience.