Public access description
The Pas de Quatre in 1845 brought together the four greatest ballerinas of the 1840s, Marie Taglioni, Carlotta Grisi, Lucile Grahn and Fanny Cerrito. There were no men in the ballet - the ballerina was now the public's favourite and the male dancer's role was reduced to lifting and supporting her. In the coming years, his position declined even further, until he was all but banished from the stage and male roles were performed by girls in men's clothing.
By this time a recognisable 'ballet' costume had evolved, which still forms the basis of many ballet costumes today. It was originally based on fashionable dress of the period, but gradually crystallised into a low-cut pointed bodice and a bell-shaped, knee-length skirt formed of tiers of tarlatan with a diaphanous top layer.

Descriptive line
The Pas de Quatre; Carlotta Grisi, Marie Taglioni, Lucile Grahn and Fanny Cerrito. Lithograph by T H Maguire after a drawing by A E Chalon, 1845

Physical description
Group of four ballerinas wearing Romantic ballet dress, three with bold floral wreaths, the figure on the right with a flower at the back of her head. The central figure stands on point, arms raised above her head, looking down to left; behind her to the right, a ballerina leans forward, her left behind the standing figure, touching hands with the ballerina kneeling to left of the central figure; to the right, a second kneeling ballerina, her hands linked to the other two.

Dimensions
Height: 530 mm at centre, Width: 403 mm at centre

Museum number
E.5033-1968

Object history note
The Pas de Quatre brought together the four greatest ballerinas of the 1840s, Marie Taglioni, Carlotta Grisi, Lucile Grahn and Fanny Cerrito. It was first performed on 12 July 1845 at Her Majesty's Theatre and given six times.
The print is part of the collection of dance prints amassed by Marie Rambert and her husband, Ashley Dukes in the first half of the 20th century. Eventually numbering 145 items, some of which had belonged to the ballerina Anna Pavlova, it was one of the first and most important specialist collections in private hands.
Rambert bought the first print as a wedding present but could not bear to give it away. As the collection grew, it was displayed in the bar of the Mercury Theatre, the headquarters of Ballet Rambert, but in 1968, Rambert gave the collection to the Victoria and Albert Museum; seven duplicates were returned to Rambert, but these are catalogued in Ivor Guest's A Gallery of Romantic Ballet, which was published before the collection came to the V&A. Although often referred to as a collection of Romantic Ballet prints, there are also important engravings of 17th and 18th century performers, as well as lithographs from the later 19th century, by which time the great days of the ballet in London and Paris were over.

Historical significance: In using only four ballerinas, the print hints at the radical changes that had come over ballet in the early 19th century. From being the star in the 18th century, men were now relegated to the position of partner (although they were usually still the choreographers and ballet masters); in the following decades, they were virtually banished from the ballet stage in Paris and London, their roles being taken by girls en travesti.

Historical context note
The large souvenir prints of the Romantic ballet, issued in the 1830s and 1840s, are among the most evocative images of dance in the 19th century. Lithography, with its soft quality, enhanced by the delicate yet rich hand-colouring, was ideally suited to the subject - the ballerinas who dominated ballet in the mid-century and the romanticised settings in which they performed; style and subject were perfectly matched. The lithographs produced in London are notable for capturing the personality and style of individual performers in a theatrical setting. They are a fitting tribute to one of ballet's richest periods.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O105944/the-celebrated-pas-de-quatre-print-chalon-alfred-edward/