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MODERN DANCE VOCABULARY STUDY GUIDE

PAC 145 MODERN 1_ Winter 2019_Sarah Shouse

Modern Dance:

A free, expressive, and experimental style of dancing that started in the early 20th century as a reaction or rebellion against classical ballet. It is a broad genre often thought of as concert or theatrical dance. One of the first dance artists to be associated with the term “Modern Dance” was Isadora Duncan (1877- 1927), who insisted on dance as self-expression. Duncan believed movement should be free and natural emanating from the solar plexus.

Abstraction:

When applied to dance refers to choreography that does not have a narrative character. An abstract dance does not tell a story; movement for movements sake.

Alignment:

An arrangement in a straight line, or in a correct position. Body placement or stance. Correct body placement is the optimum alignment of the human skeletal structure in which the body is perfectly balanced.

Bounce: or double bounce, modern dance action that originates from a curve or contracted position.

Contraction:

Graham Technique: The spine is curved deeply backward with the movement originating from the pelvis muscles. The spine must grow longer, not shorter, in a contraction. The cycle of contraction and release was developed as a stylized representation of breathing.

Dynamics:

Expresses the way in which a shape of movement is executed/ a change in volume. Example: A movement could be accented by a sharp action followed by a movement that is executed softly.

Effort:

A mental impulse from which movement originates. Space (Direct, indirect), Weight (strong or light), Time (sudden or sustained), and Flow (bound and free).

Inversion: a movement that places the body upside down.

Kinesthesia:

Sensation of motion. The perception of the movement of one’s own body, its limbs and muscles etc. It is the “the sixth sense” it is the ability to perceive or be aware of one’s self position, movement and body (including muscles, bones, skin) in a sensitive way.

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Kinesphere:

Imaginary space that surrounds the human body. It has a spherical shape and its size is determined by the maximum space reached by limbs in every possible direction.

Motif:

A word commonly used in compositional work. It refers to a small choreographic unit (a gesture, movement or phrase) that is the main reference from which a bigger choreography (dance piece) is built and composed.

Opposition:

Opposing movement. The movement for example moves upward and downward at the same time.

Phrase: A short choreographic fragment that has an intention and feeling of a beginning and an end.

Plié: Bent, bending. A bending of the knee or knees. This is an exercise to render the joints and muscles soft and pliable, to melt.

Quality of movement:

A particular way of executing the shape of a movement, concerning its dynamic, affective or expressive content. Ex. Collapse: sinking, Percussive: sharp, and Suspended: defy gravity, linger.

Release:

The dancer emphasizes the releasing of muscular tension in order to achieve an efficient expense of energy.

Rotation: Movement around a central axis.

Inward: rotation of a limb toward the front of the body. *Outward:* rotation of a limb away from the front of the body. *Spiral:* (right/Left): rotation of the spinal column along its vertical axis.

Sustained: an effort quality. Time duration... lengthening time. Suspended time.

Swing:

Limbs move away from the body and return. A move or cause to move back and forth or from side to side while suspended or on an axis.

Triplet: Name given to a way of walking that is executed in three counts; similar to a waltz in Ballet

Important People of Modern Dance:

Martha Graham: (1894-1991)

Known as the Mother of Modern Dance. Her choreography stems from an emotional personal place. Her work connects to inner feelings.

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Concepts of Graham technique: the contraction, the release, and the spiral. The Graham contraction is a C-curve of the spine. The release is the response to the contraction which returns the spine to a neutral position or opens the breastbone to the sky. The spiral is a twisting of the torso that starts at the pelvis and then moves up the body.

“There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique...”

Merce Cunningham: (1919-2009)

American dancer and choreographer who developed new forms of abstract dance movement.

Studied under Martha Graham. His movement emphasizes clarity, control, dynamic range and multidirectional use of space.

Concepts of the torso: Upright, Arch, Twist, Tilt, and Curve. In a Cunningham class, your upper body and lower body will often be doing different actions. Legs work separately from the torso. Leg movement’s look classical but then the torso moves in opposition to the legs in a non-classical way.

“The only way to do it is to do it.”

Doris Humphrey: (1895-1958)

Dancer and choreographer of the early 20th century exploring the use of breath and movement abstraction. Pieces often included nature themes.

Concepts: Fall and Recovery: the place between standing and prone, motionless and unbalance. Fall: the recovery from a fall and the body’s arc between were for Humphrey an expression of the fundamental tension and precarious balance between failure and triumph.

“Dance form is logical, but it is all in the realm of feeling, sensitivity, and imagination.”

“There are times when the simple dignity of movement can fulfill the function of a volume of words.”

Jose Limon: (1908-1972)

Mexican-born dancer and choreographer; Modern dance pioneer known for a humanistic approach to movement and theater. Studied modern dance under Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman. His approach is based on the natural movements of the human body and the rhythms of breathing. Limon developed a distinctive style but his technique is not codified. “For Jose it was about the infinite possibilities of dance”

Concepts: A Limon class emphasizes breathing through the body and expanding your range of motion. Emphasis is on bouncing, swinging and percussive movement. Time, shape, and energy are important factors as well.

“Dancers aren’t pompous; they’re too tired”

“We are never more truly and profoundly human than when we dance.”