DANCE PERSPECTIVES AND APPRECIATION

SECTION IV

Jazz dance beginnings, Jazz dance pioneers, trailblazers and jazz dance styles

JAZZ DANCE BEGINNINGS

All that Jazz directed by Bob Fosse, 1979
JAZZ DANCE ORIGINS

Merriam-Webster defines **VERNACULAR** as…

*a*: using a language or dialect native to a region or country rather than a literary, cultured, or foreign language

• When one thinks about “vernacular” referencing everyday language, one can also relate “Vernacular Dance” to be the dancing of everyday people.

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JAZZ DANCE ORIGINS continued...

• **JAZZ DANCE originated from the vernacular dances of African Americans brought to America on slave ships.**

• Influenced by the changes in **social dance**, **popular music** and **ethnic dance forms**, Jazz dance has paralleled the social history of the American people.
AFRICAN INFLUENCE OF JAZZ DANCE HISTORY

- African slaves were first brought to Latin America as early as 1510.
- As the slave trade expanded, Africans were shipped onward to the...

  - West Indies
  - South and Central America
  - United States of America

- Arriving slaves were often cut off from their artistic conventions and ceremonies.
  - Isolated from families, languages and tribal traditions

AFRICAN INFLUENCE OF JAZZ DANCE HISTORY continued...

- Although crafts and ceremonies were not allowed by slave owners, music and dance were often permitted.
- The rhythms and movements of African dance included foot stamping, tapping, hand clapping and rhythmic voice sounds.
MINSTRELS SHOWS

- In the nineteenth century, American whites discovered they enjoyed the music and dance the slaves had created.
- In minstrel shows, white entertainers reenacted their conception of slaves’ lives and popularized the style of dance and music.

MINSTRELS SHOWS continued...

- The earliest minstrel shows were performed by white male minstrels (traveling musicians) who, with their faces painted black, parodied the singing and dancing of slaves.
- The form was often solo and improvised.
- The repeal of the Fugitive Slave Acts in 1864, allowed many slaves to freely move north where they replaced black-faced white minstrel performers.
THE CAKEWALK

- The Cakewalk was a dance created by African Americans.
- Couples paraded in a circle, performing intricate steps in competition for a prize of a cake.
- Minstrel shows began to also incorporate the theatrical form of the Cakewalk in their grand finale.

THE BUCK-AND-WING

1. The Buck-and-wing was influenced by the Irish jig and the English clog – with fast foot and leg work and limited arm movement.
2. The dancers stressed the musical upbeat.
3. This metrical pattern was common in African music. Instead of emphasizing one-two, the musical emphasis was one-two.
4. The popularity of the Buck-and-wing encouraged musicians to experiment with new accompaniments that employed this unusual rhythm of the time, syncopation.
VAUDEVILLE - Voix de Ville
“voices of the town”

• Vaudeville first appeared in America in the 1870’s and by the 1900’s had replaced minstrel shows.
• Vaudeville was the most popular form of entertainment in America until 1932.
• In the 1920’s there were over 20,000 vaudeville acts in the country.
  • A typical show had anywhere from nine to twenty acts.

VAUDEVILLE CONTINUED...

• Vaudeville was the training ground for many performers who later became stars on Broadway and in film.
  • Fred Astaire (1887-1987) and Bill “Bojangles” Robinson (1878-1949)
• Vaudeville also help to spread New Orleans ragtime music – the first music to be considered “jazz music”.
NEW ORLEANS RAGTIME / DIXIELAND JAZZ

• Vaudeville shows spread new innovations of music coming out of New Orleans – ragtime.

• Ragtime, also referred to as “Dixieland Jazz” uses both syncopation and polyrhythms.

• The rhythms of “Dixieland Jazz” can be traced back to African drumming.

• The changes in music popularity changed the face of both social dance and theater dance.

HARLEM RENNAISSANCE AND THE 1920’s JAZZ DANCE SCENE

• In the 1920s many African American artists and performers were drawn to New York in search of a better life and to take part in Harlem’s dynamic jazz and blues music scene.
  • Limited housing and jobs, low paying wages and overcrowding
  • Social dance was an escape from the harsh economic reality and daily drudgery of low paying jobs.
HARLEM RENNAISSANCE AND THE 1920’s JAZZ DANCE SCENE continued...

• After WWI, American’s were in search of a period of prosperity. The dances that emerged during this period reflected the public’s need for freedom and joy.
  • Charleston, Big Apple, Black Bottom
• Well known performers during this time period:
  • Josephine Baker and Bill “Bojangles” Robinson

THE SAVOY BALLROOM – “The Home of the Happy Feet”

Harlem experienced a social and artistic explosion in the years between 1920 and 1935.

• The Savoy Ballroom, the largest in Harlem, opened March 12, 1926.
• Unlike many ballrooms, the Savoy had a no-discrimination policy from the beginning.
• The main attraction at the Savoy was the dancing.
1930’s JAZZ DANCE SCENE

• The 1930’s were the years of the Depression where people looked for an escape from the lows in their lives.

• Escape was found in dance marathons and the music of big bands.

• Jazz music moved away from “Dixieland Jazz” and a new sound emerged, “symphonic jazz” - full orchestration.

Image from Northwest Public Radio: Dance Marathons could last for months at a time, and ended with contestants barely able to walk.

1930’s JAZZ DANCE SCENE continued...

• Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong gave birth to swing dance.
  • “It don’t mean a thing if it ain’t got that swing.” – Duke Ellington

• High energy dancing mirrored the intensity of the music.

• Well known dances during this time period were the jitterbug and boogie-woogie.

Duke Ellington, left, stands with his big band in Hollywood, California.
BUSBY BERKELEY (1895-1976)

- Busby Berkeley was an American motion-picture director and choreographer.
- Known for his innovative camera techniques and elaborate dancing-girl extravaganzas.
- In 1933, two films paved the way for the following 20 years of musicals (the Golden Era):
  - *42nd Street* and *Flying Down to Rio*, both of which included the cinematic choreography and direction of Busby Berkeley.

FRED ASTAIRE (1899 – 1987)

- Fred Astaire has been acknowledged as one of the most graceful dancers movies have ever known.
- When musicals came to Hollywood in 1933, Astaire was the leading man.
- Astaire created a unique dance style blending elements of ballet, jazz and tap.
- He was the first stage dancer to dance every musical note – mirroring the musical pattern in the steps of the choreography.
FRED ASTAIRE continued...

• He was the first stage dancer to dance every musical note – mirroring the musical pattern in the steps of the choreography.
• Some of his well-known dancing partners include:
  • Ginger Rogers, Leslie Caron, Cyd Charisse and Judy Garland

1940’s JAZZ DANCE SCENE

• With the demise of social jazz dancing, the growth of jazz dance as a professional dance form began.
• In the 1940’s jazz dance was influenced by ballet and modern (modern jazz dance).
• Unlike early jazz dance, which was performed by talented entertainers without formal training, modern jazz dance was performed by dance professionals trained in ballet and modern dance.
JAZZ DANCE PIONEERS and TRAILBLAZERS

JACK COLE (1914 – 1974)

Known as the “Father of Jazz Dance” Jack Cole began his dance training at the Denishawn school.

Cole studied and mastered Indian Bharatanatyam, influencing his personal jazz style.

He also studied Afro-Caribbean, Spanish, and South American dance forms.

Cole’s style included isolations, quick directional changes, and long knee slides.
JACK COLE continued...

Two of Jack Cole’s most notable Broadway productions include:

- Kismet (1953) and Man of La Mancha (1966)

Established a dance studio on the lot of Columbia pictures. It was here he trained the next generation of jazz dancers.

Image above: Gentlemen Prefer Blondes
Some of his protégés during his 40 year career include:
Gwen Verdon and Matt Mattox

KATHERINE DUNHAM (1909 – 2006)

- Katherine Dunham was from St. Louis and was a dancer, activist, anthropologist and
- She greatly contributed to the African American and Afro-Caribbean dance influences on jazz dance.
- A trained dancer, Dunham was also driven to formulate a dance style that would connect with the roots of the black experience in the Americas.
In 1935, Dunham obtained a grant from the University of Chicago to study the roots of African dance in Haiti.

While in the Caribbean, Dunham studied and filmed the dances and rituals of Voudon, an African based religion.

Based on her research of the rhythms and movements during her study, Dunham developed a groundbreaking new style of movement and technique.

In 1938, Dunham’s described her long range artistic goals to establish a well-trained ballet group that would be equally as important “to the white man as to the Negro”.

She formed the Katherine Dunham Dance Company in Chicago.

In 1940, Sol Hurok offered Dunham the opportunity to reshape her work for the popular stage.
KATHERINE DUNHAM continued...

Between 1943 and 1965 the Dunham Company toured the United States and 57 other countries.

She is best noted for her performances in *Cabin in the Sky (1940)*, which she co-choreographed with George Balanchine, and *Stormy Weather (1943)*.

In 1945, the Dunham School of Dance and Theater in New York was opened.

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GENE KELLY

Gene Kelly was an American film actor and director, who was trained in ballet and noted for his highly athletic dancing style.

In one of his most famous films, *Singin' in the Rain (1952)* Kelly sang and danced in the rain, cleverly using an umbrella as a prop.

Kelly combined dance, animation and special effects into his film choreography.

- *Anchors Aweigh and Invitation to the Dance*
MATTHEW "MATT" MATTOX (1921 – 2013)

At the age of 11, Mattox moved from Oklahoma to Los Angeles where he began studying ballet, tap and ballroom dance.

Jack Cole became a mentor to Mattox after hiring him as a dancer for “Magdalena” on Broadway.

Carrying the work on Jack Cole, Mattox also developed a codified jazz technique involving isolation of body parts, strong angular movements, sharp accents, rebounds and turns.

From the mid-1950s on, Mattox taught his art to countless students. He called his dance style “Freestyle Jazz”.

JEROME ROBBINS (1918–1998)

• He was a highly celebrated and acclaimed choreographer for both the theatrical stage and also in movies and television.

• Some of his Broadway shows include:
  • The King and I, West Side Story, Gypsy and Fiddler on the Roof

He collaborated with an up and coming composer, Lenard Bernstein, to create his first dance for a ballet company, titled Fancy Free (1944). This ballet featured three American sailors who are on shore leave during World War II.
JEROME ROBBINS continued...

• He danced, choreographed and eventually became an Associate Artistic Director of the New York City Ballet under George Balanchine.
• Robbins spent a good portion of his career between ballets and musicals.
• One of his most noted Broadway musicals was West Side Story in 1957.

BOB FOSSE (1927 – 1987)

• Bob Fosse started tap dancing at a young age.
• In high school, Fosse danced professionally in nightclubs and “sleazy” vaudeville venues.
• The sexual atmosphere of these venues, and the constant contact with venue strippers heavily influenced Fosse’s choreographic work in later years.
• In the late 1940’s, Fosse caught the attention of two leading Broadway choreographers and directors, George Abbott and Jerome Robbins in his ”big break” Kiss Me Kate (1953).
BOB FOSSE continued...

- Fosse’s trademark choreographic style: sexually suggestive forward hip-thrusts; the vaudeville humor of hunched shoulders and turned-in feet; the amazing, mime-like articulation of hands.

BOB FOSSE continued...

- Fosse’s first fully choreographed show was 1954’s, *The Pajama Game*, for which Fosse won the the first of many Tony awards for best choreography.

- *Damn Yankees* brought more awards and established his life-long creative collaboration with Gwen Verdon, who had the starring role.
• From the late 1960s to the late 1970s, Fosse created a number of ground-breaking stage musicals and films that reflected the sexual freedom that was being expressed across America.
  
  • *Sweet Charity* (1966/1969)
  • *Cabaret* and *Pippin’* (1972)
  • *Chicago and Dancin’* (1978)

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**EUGENE LOUIS “LUIGI” FACCUITO (1925-2015)**

Luigi was in a tragic car accident which left the right side of his body and the left side of his face paralyzed.

During rehabilitation, Luigi began creating a series of exercises that included stretching, balancing, and isolation of muscles to help enable him to achieve full mobility to dance once again.

The “Luigi technique” took off after his stretching regimen caught the eye of other performers.

Luigi established dance schools both in Los Angeles and New York. "The First World Jazz Centre."
GUS GIORDANO (1923 – 2008)

• Gus Giordano was a dancer, choreographer, master teacher, company founder, author and, ultimately, the person who led jazz to become a recognized and respected art form.
  • Giordano established the Gus Giordano Dance School (1953) and Gus Giordano Dance Chicago (1962).
  • Founded the Jazz Dance World Congress, a dance gathering, which includes numerous jazz master teachers and companies.
  • Wrote the “Anthology of American Jazz Dance.” (1976)

Jazz Dance Styles
of the 21st Century
JAZZ DANCE STYLES

• **Lyrical Jazz** – Strongly influenced by Ballet, Lyrical Jazz uses the entire body, extending through body lines. There is usually a flowing quality. Sometimes there is a strong pulse to emphasize dynamics.

• **Musical or Theater Jazz** – Typically a style of Jazz dance performed on Broadway. Theater jazz is characterized by movements that assist the story line of the play or musical.

• **West Coast Jazz** – West Coast Jazz is often referenced as the Los Angeles jazz dance style. West Coast Jazz is angular and disjointed. Hip isolations, shoulder shrugs and head rolls are common movement ideas.

JAZZ DANCE STYLES *continued*...

• **Contemporary / Modern Jazz** – Heavily influenced by modern dance, Modern Jazz uses body contractions, flexed feet, and off-center body shapes.

• **Latin Jazz** – Latin jazz is influence by Latin Music and Latin Social Dane. The footwork is fast and syncopated, while the upper body is looser and more controlled.

• **Afro Jazz** – stems from African movements heavily explored by Katherine Dunham in the 1940’s. The style is primitive, with major attention of the movement of the spine, neck and shoulders.