

Traditions in American Concert Dance:
Gender and Autobiography
21M.670 SP.472
Spring 2003 HASS-D

General Course Description:

This course explores the forms, contents, and contexts of world traditions in dance that played a crucial role in shaping American concert dance. For example, we will identify dances from an African American vernacular tradition that were transferred from the social space to the concert stage. We will explore the artistic lives of such American dance artists as Katherine Dunham, and Alvin Ailey along with Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, George Balanchine, and Merce Cunningham as American dance innovators. Of particular importance to our investigation will be the construction of gender and autobiography which lie at the heart of concert dance practice, and the ways in which these qualities have been choreographed by American artists.

In the introductory arc of the class, we will ferret out the roots of classical ballet and its American presence via visiting ballerinas such as Fanny Essler and Marie Taglioni. From this we will trace a rise in performance venues; the Puritan resistance to dance as 'immoral;' and the breaking of tradition which allowed Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, and Ruth St. Denis to create a space for concert dance which was not ballet. We will uncover the streak of feminist independence which is at the root of modern dance practice. Martha Graham, Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, and Agnes de Mille fit directly into this lineage as first-generation modern dance artists. Class lectures and discussions will analyze works created by these artists, taking into consideration a variety of historical and political contexts which gave rise to their inventions. Frequent viewing assignments will help students identify visual, musical, and kinesthetic underpinnings of choreographic structure.

The requirements for this subject conform to the mechanical requirements for all HASS-D's: There will be no fewer than three writing assignments that will add up to a minimum of 20 pages; there will be a final exam which will be scheduled by the Registrar's Office and which will account for a substantial portion of the grade (no less than 15%); and no less than one hour per week will be devoted to discussion.

Readings and Materials

Core Texts

Dancing by Gerald Jonas (New York: Harry Abrams, 1992).

Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey by Julia L. Foulkes. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

Tickets to two concert dance performances, to be determined.

Class Requirements:

1. Approximately 50 pages of reading and 1 hour of viewing weekly. Participation in class discussions will account for 10% of the final grade.
2. We will attend at least two performances of dance concerts in the Boston area.
3. Three short papers, of 7-10 pages length, on the topics described below in response to a video viewing of American concert work to be determined by the instructor. All viewing assignments will be available at the Music Library, some will be available in our private course locker. Short papers account for 45% of the final grade (15% each):
Paper One - Religion and Social Order.
Paper Two - Cultural Mores and Cultural Identity
Paper Three - Cultural Fusion
4. A midterm oral project web-research assignment, defining a work of American concert dance as classical art. The midterm assignment will account for 20% of the final grade.
5. A final exam, in which students will be asked to synthesize material covered throughout the semester. The final exam will account for 25% of the final grade.

Course Organization:

The course will be divided into eight major units, as follows:

UNIT I Introduction and Overview - 2 Sessions

Session #1, #2

What is tradition? And how do we identify traditions in American dance? A sharing of family traditions and viewing of contemporary American dance including music videos and concert dances. How do traditional dance forms construct gender? How is dance from different cultures typically presented the broadest American audience? What do these presentations tell us about the culture that produced the dance? This unit will provide students with a general overview of basic concepts such as dance, performance, kinesthesia, musicality, and culture.

- read "What is Art" by Betty Redfern in Routledge Dance Studies Reader pp 125-134
"The Power of Dance" in Dancing pp 12-35
"Manifestos" Modern Bodies 8-26
- view Dancing: The Power of Dance

**Lecture Demonstration/Master Class: Rennie Harris PureMovement at Killian Hall Friday,
One Day After Session #2 at 4pm.**

Members of Rennie Harris' Puremovement Dance Company, masters of hip-hop, popping, locking, stepping, break, house and other styles from inner city America will present a lecture on the artform, followed by a dance class.

**UNIT II Dance as an expression of religious worship - 3 Sessions
 Session #3, #4, #5**

How has American concert dance been inspired by religious dances of the world? A focus on Indian dance forms, with a consideration of Ruth St. Denis' Westernized "Indian" dances. How do these dances conflate gender and spirituality?

read "Lord of the Dance" in Dancing pp 36-69
 "Christian Conversion and the Challenge of Dance" by P. Sterling Stuckey
 (Dancing Many Drums, DeFrantz, ed., U Wisconsin Press, 2002)

view Dancing "Lord of the Dance"
 Revelations by Alvin Ailey

**Paper #1 Due in Session #5 - How does the dance "Revelations" (Ailey, 1960) convey
concepts of religion and social order?**

**UNIT III Dance as an expression of social order and power - 3 Sessions
 Session #6, #7, #8**

How can concert dance express social order? A focus on the court roots of ballet; introduction to the Bennington school; and a consideration of Doris Humphrey's "With My Red Fires."

read "Dance of the Realm" in Dancing pp 70-107
 "Pioneer Women" in Modern Bodies pp 27-50
 "An Introduction to Choreography" from The Art of Making Dances by Doris
 Humphrey, Grove Press, New York, pp. 15-41

view Dancing "Dance of the Realm"
 Doris Humphrey, "New Dance"

**Special Event in Session #8: Jigna Desia, Mit Alum, will give an invited lecture titled "Watching
"Home" Movies: Hollywood Cinema in South Asian America."**

**UNIT IV Dance as an expression of cultural mores - 3 Sessions
 Session #9, #10, #11**

How does concert dance confirm gender expectations? A focus on gender-specific behavior and dance in the Middle East, with an examination of Ted Shawn's all-male dance ensemble. Also, a look at British choreographer Lloyd Newsom's DV8 physical theater.

- read "Social Dance" in Dancing pp 108-127
 "Men Must Dance" in Modern Bodies pp 79-103
 "Simmering Passivity: The Black Male Body in Concert Dance" by Thomas DeFrantz, in Moving Ideologies, Gay Morris, ed., Routledge, 1996, 106-121.
- "Dancing in the Dark: Rationalism and the Neglect of Social Dance" by Andrew H. Ward in Dance, Sex, and Gender, Helen Thomas, ed., St. Martin's Press, 1993, 16-33.
- view Dancing "Sex and Social Dance"
 Ted Shawn "Kinetic Molpai"
 Bill T. Jones "Fever Swamp"

Paper #2 Due Two Days After Session #11 - How does the dance "Fall River Legend" (DeMille, 1950) convey concepts of Cultural Mores and Cultural Identity?

Performance Event between Sessions #10 and #11: Mark Morris Group at the Shubert Theater

UNIT V Dance as an emblem of cultural identity - 2 Sessions
Session #12, #13

How does concert dance confirm identity for minority populations? A focus on African dance forms in diaspora, with an examination of popular dance forms from the United States. Are African dance forms always configured with male drummers and female dancers?

- read "New Worlds of Dance" in Dancing, pp 164-189
 "Primitive Moderns" in Modern Bodies, 51-78
 Malone, Jacqui "'Keep to the Rhythm and You'll Keep To Life': Meaning and Style in African American Vernacular Dance" in Routledge Dance Studies Reader pp 230-235
 Nash, Joe "The Mission of Black Modern Dance" American Dance Festival
 Myers, Gerald " African Americans and the Modern Dance Aesthetic" American Dance Festival
 Thompson, Robert Farris "Dance and Culture, An Aesthetic of the Cool: West Africa Dance" in African Forum 2, no. 2; Fall 1996: pp 85-102
- view Dance Black America (1983)

Special Lecture Seven Days After Session #15: Yutian Wong, Professor at Bryn Mar College, will deliver invited lecture "Upstaging Orientalism: Performing Race and Gender in (Asian) American Modern/Postmodern Dance."

UNIT VI Dance as a classical art - 4 Sessions
Session #14, #15, #16, #17

How does concert dance function as a classical art? What is classicism? Is ballet inherently misogynistic? A focus on kabuki in Japan and ballet in America, with a consideration of the choreography of George Balanchine, Jerome Robbins, and Lar Lubovitch.

read "Classical Dance Theater" in Dancing pp 128-163
 "Organizing Dance" in Modern Bodies pp 104-129
 Kealiinohomoku, Joann "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance" in Cohen & Copeland, What Is Dance?, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1983: 533-549
 Novak, Cynthia "Ballet, Gender and Cultural Politics" in Dance, Gender and Culture, Helen Thomas, ed., New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993
 Daly, Ann "The Balanchine Woman: Of Hummingbirds and Channel Swimmers" in TDR Vol 31 NO. 1, 1987

view George Balanchine Agon, Jewels, Prodigal Son
 Dancing "Classical Dance Theater"
In Class Presentations Begin Two Days After Session #16

UNIT VII Dance as a medium of Cultural Fusion - 1 Session
Session #18

How can concert dance fuse culture together? A focus on dances in the Americas, with a consideration of Martha Graham's theatrical transformations of Native American rituals, and Katherine Dunham's adaptation of Santeria ritual.

read Huenemann, Lynn "Northern Plains Dance" in Native American Dance: Ceremonies and Social Traditions edited by Charlotte Heth, Smithsonian Institution/Starwood, 1993, pp. 125-147
 "Dancing America" in Modern Bodies pp 130-156
 Dixon Gottschild, Brenda "Barefoot and Hot, Sneakered and Cool: Africanist Subtexts in Modern and Postmodern Dance" in Digging the Africanist Presence: Dance and Other Contexts Greenwood, 1996: pp 47-58

view Dancing "Dancing on One World"

Performance Event between Sessions #16 and #17: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at the Wang Center

UNIT VIII Dance as the autobiographical creation of individual artists - 2 Sessions
Session #19, #20

How can concert dance be an intimate, personal expression? A focus on contemporary dance in the United States, with an examination of the work of Yvonne Rainer, Twyla Tharp, and Merce Cunningham.

- read "Modernizing Dance" in Dancing pp 190-237
 Jowitt, Deborah "A Private View of Dance Criticism" The Dance Has Many Faces, Walter Sorell, ed., Third Revised Edition, 1992: 202-209
 Graham, Martha "I Am a Dancer" in Routledge Dance Studies Reader pp 66-71
 Dempster, Elizabeth "Women Writing The Body: Let's Watch a Little How She Dances" in Routledge Dance Studies Reader pp 223-229
 Brown, Carol "Re-tracing our steps: The Possibilities for Feminist Dance Histories" in Dance History: An Introduction edited by Janet Adshead-Lansdale and June Layson, Routledge, 1983, 198-216
- view Dancing "Individual and Tradition"
 Yvonne Rainer "Trio A" (1966)
 Twyla Tharp Catherine Wheel
 Merce Cunningham Story

Paper #3 Due Session #19 - How does the "gold section" of The Catherine Wheel(Tharp, 1981) describe issues of gender and individuality?

Wrap up and Review - 1 Session - Session #21