

Dance in Popular Culture
D357, 5 credit hours
Class Meeting TuTh 12:30–2:18
with recitation sections 1 hour Fridays

The Ohio State University
Department of Dance
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Dance in Popular Culture:
Embodying American Identities, Ideas and Cultures

I: Course Description

On stage, in film and video, and in community settings, Dance in Popular Culture includes both performance and participation styles. Ranging from ballroom to hip hop, from kicklines to Broadway jazz, and from national dances to tap, the course will focus on popular dance in the United States today, and the background of some of our current dance styles over the last 50–75 years. Along with the historical overview of each of the various styles, we will look at who dances, how they move, and how movement constructs identity. Identification of movement vocabulary and choreographic staging will lead to discussion of how popular dance reflects and influences our perceptions of gender, age, ethnicity, economic status and national origins.

II: GEC Statement

The goals of the General Education Course (GEC) requirements for the undergraduate curriculum include “a broad understanding of the nature of the world, of the human heritage, and the ways in which the individual is part of the larger human community.” Arts and Humanities, part of the GEC Intellectual Core, are “aimed at a close analysis of texts and works of art.” By closely examining selected popular dance forms in the United States as cultural representations, responding and contributing to societal assumptions and beliefs, Dance in Popular Culture fulfills the third Arts and Humanities requirement in “Cultures and Ideas.”

Additionally, this course fulfills one of the three Diversity requirements (crosslisted). By examining representations and constructions of identity through popular dance, this course will foster an understanding of the pluralistic nature and values of communities in the United States.

III: Course Objectives

At the successful completion of the course, students will:

- have a broad knowledge of various popular dance styles and their history within the U.S.
- be aware of the larger social and political context of popular dances
- gain basic tools for analyzing dance
- understand issues related to diversity, as they are embodied through dance
- understand how movement reflects community and identity

- gain conceptual tools to link these studies to other coursework and situations

IV: Course Content and Procedures

Dance in popular culture appears to be readily accessible, not only in the sense that it is widely present in entertainment and social venues, but also in that most people easily understand its meaning or intention. It usually has a close connection to popular music and to dances in which people participate in their communities. Dance in entertainment often is embedded in a larger context, such as a musical play or video, that relies on other media to help impart a message. In addition, there is widespread appreciation for physical skills and virtuosity in a culture that values athleticism.

Although popular dance may be accessible in terms of pleasure and understanding, it is seldom examined for the larger cultural understandings it may convey and reinforce. This course will use visual media, texts, movement analysis and discussion to explore the background of each of the styles and to examine what various dance styles demonstrate in terms of physicality, gender presentation, ethnicity or community markers. We will consider how a dance style becomes part of popular culture as well as its political, social and economic times. We will discuss the role of popular dance in creating a sense of community and how dance may lead, reflect or follow the times to maintain the status quo or contribute to social change.

Sample topics will include:

- From Kicklines to *A Chorus Line*, The Choreography of Spectacle: We will examine the use of unison movement, geometrical patterning and symmetry in such pre-WWII productions as the Ziegfeld Follies, Busby Berkeley films, the Rockettes, and the more contemporary musical *A Chorus Line*. Discussion will center on massed bodies as an element of spectacle, the relationship of individual to the group, as well as implications of the traditionally female makeup of these groups.
- Jazz Dance and the Broadway Stage: We will consider the influence of African American and Latin social dance on the work of 1950s-'70s choreographers such as Jerome Robbins and Bob Fosse. Discussion will focus on the blend of influences in movement style and the polarized gender images of male athleticism and female "vamp." We will also reflect on issues of "high art" versus "low art" in relation to choreographers who worked on both concert and musical theater stages, such as Robbins, Agnes de Mille, Hanya Holm, Helen Tamiris and Twyla Tharp.
- "Cheek to Cheek," Couple Dancing: We will investigate ballroom and couple dancing in the films of Fred Astaire, contemporary tango worldwide, ice dancing, Dance Sport, and The Ohio Star Ball. Discussion will focus on the choreography of togetherness, leading and

following, and Europeanist influences on movement vocabulary.

- Tap Dance, Historical Roots and Contemporary Styles: We will look at early “flash acts” such as the Nicholas Brothers and “class acts” such as Coles and Atkins, as well as more contemporary artists such as The Jazz Tap Ensemble, Stomp and Savion Glover. We will discuss rhythmic virtuosity as an element of popular dance and consider the predominantly male performers of this style.
- Staging National Identity, the Large Scale Production of Folk Dances: We will examine the production of cultural dances and the choreography of large group movement in examples such as Riverdance, Ballet Folklorico and the staging of native American Indian Pow Wows. Discussion will include issues of participatory versus presentational dance, commodification of traditions, and connecting with diaspora populations.
- Dance Films (You can be a Star!): We will look at films about dancing as a profession, such as *Save the Last Dance*, *Billy Elliot*, *Flash Dance* and *Fame*, with their metaphor of overcoming the odds to dance/for success. We will discuss issues of expression and gender presentation and consider the movement style of Lyrical Jazz.
- Hip Hop and Rave in Contemporary Culture: We will look at dance in music videos and club dancing to consider issues such as presentation of self and how moving as part of a group creates a sense of connection and community. We will examine the movement vocabulary of Hip Hop as it derives from a variety of sources, including African dance and the martial arts, for its sense of strength and empowerment. We will also look at its development through Break Dancing, Vogueing, Electric Boogie and other related forms.
- Swing and the Lindy Hop, Then and Now: We will examine the roots of the Lindy in the Savoy Ballroom and Harlem Renaissance, as well as the 1990s Swing revival. We will also look back at Disco and Rock and Roll dancing for varieties and changes in couple dancing.
- The Dances We Dance, Styles and Venues: To conclude, we will investigate the local dance scene for its variety of social dance styles and places to dance, including Salsa, Swing, Western Line, Ballroom, Hip Hop and Folk, and the various clubs and community centers that support dancing. We will also consider the populations that participate in these styles and at various venues.

The course will be based on guided viewing of slides, films and videos with lecture and discussion regarding movement vocabulary, choreographic devices and demographics of participants or performers, with an overview of the larger political and social issues of the times. The course will have an active on-line component via Web-CT. Daily lectures and some of the visual resources will be posted on line.

- In addition to participation in classroom discussions, students will be required to post at least one response to discussion questions relating to each day's topic and at least one response to another student's posting.
- Four observation papers, two pages in length, will be required during the quarter. At least two must be from live events (performance or participation) and two may be from video or film. Students will be expected to cite movement evidence for their interpretations in relation to issues of identity and community. Guidelines will be issued prior to the each assignment.
- Students will complete three quizzes about the movement characteristics, performers, times, and background of the various movement styles considered during the course.
- Students will complete a comprehensive final examination during the regular, university-scheduled examination period.

V. Requirements and Evaluation

Class attendance, viewing of movement examples and discussion are an essential aspect of the course. For every absence after 3, your grade will be dropped by one half letter grade, i.e., from an A- to a B+.

- 20% discussion responses online and class participation
- 40% observation papers (4, 10% each)
- 30% quizzes (3, 10% each)
- 10% final exam

Letter grades will be based on the following formula: A = 100%-95%, A- = 94%-90%; B+ = 89%-87%, B = 86%-83%, B- = 82%-80%; C+ = 79%-77%, C = 76%-73%, C- = 72%-70%; D+ = 69%-63%, D = 62%-56%, D- = 55%-50%; E = below 50%.

VI. Required texts

There is no one source that covers all of the styles and topics for discussion that we will consider in the course. Class readings will be drawn from a variety of sources (please see bibliography) and students will be required to purchase a course packet, or to use materials placed on reserve in the Music and Dance Library in Sullivant Hall. Course packets will be available for purchase at SBX on High Street (opposite Sullivant Hall).

Recommended: Driver, Ian. *A Century of Dance: A Hundred Years of Musical Movement, from Waltz to Hip Hop*. London: Octopus Publishing, 2000. This book gives an excellent visual overview of popular dance styles through the twentieth century, showing characteristic movement postures and costumes/attire.

Recommended: Gottschild, Brenda Dixon. *Waltzing in the Dark: African American Vaudeville and Race Politics in the Swing Era*. New York: Palgrave, 2000.

Recommended: Stearns, Marshall and Jean. *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance*(1968). New York : Da Capo Press, 1994.

Recommended: Gibaldi, Joseph and Walter S. Achtert. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 5th ed. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1999.

Recommended: Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well*, 5th ed. New York: Harper Collins, 1994.

VII. For Your Consideration

Academic Misconduct (rule 3335-31-02) is defined as “any activity which tends to compromise the academic integrity of the institution, or subvert the educational process.” Please refer to rule 3335-31-02 in the student code of conduct for examples of academic misconduct.

To register a documented disability, please call the Office of Disability Services (located in 150 Pomerene Hall) at 292-3307; or 292-0901 TDD, and notify the professor.

Escort service phone number for evening courses 292-3322

VIII. Topical Outline

Week 1: Introduction to the Course, discussion “What is Popular Dance,” topic:
From Kicklines to *A Chorus Line*, The Choreography of Spectacle: massed bodies as an element of spectacle, the relationship of individual to the group, and the implications of the traditionally female makeup of these groups.

Readings due:

Hammer, Rhonda and Anthony Wilden. “Women in Production: The Chorus Line,” in Wilden, Anthony, *The Rules Are No Game*. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987, pgs. 283–300.

Parker, Derek and Julia. “America,” in *The Natural History of the Chorus Girl*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975, 81–97.

Rubin, Martin. “Broadway Before Berkeley,” in *Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, pgs. 60–76.

Teusnik, Laura. “National Treasures,” and “I Was a Rockette,” in *Dance Spirit*, Dec. 2000, pgs. 40–47.

Week 2: topic: Jazz Dance and the Broadway Stage: the influence of African American and Latin social dance and the polarized gender images of male athleticism and female “vamp.”

First Observation Due.

Readings due:

Gottschild, Brenda Dixon. “Whose Paradigm?” and “It Don’t Mean a Thing . . .” in *Waltzing in the Dark: African American Vaudeville and Race Politics in the Swing Era*. New York: Palgrave, 2000, pgs. 11–21.

Gottfried, Martin. *All His Jazz: The Life and Death of Bob Fosse*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1998, pgs. 72–83. (Fosse’s movement style and first musical *Pajama Game*)

Lawrence, Greg. *Dance With Demons: The Life of Jerome Robbins*. New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2001, pgs. 245–261, 286–294. (The Broadway show and filming of *West Side Story*)

Loney, Glenn. “The Legacy of Jack Cole, Part One,” in *Dance Magazine*, Jan. 1983, pgs 40–46.

MacLeod, Marry. “Forever Fosse: Steam Heat,” in *Dance Spirit*, Feb. 2000, pgs 63–64.

Teachout, Terry. "A 'Made in the U.S.A.' Genius: Jerome Robbins, master choreographer," in *Time*, Aug. 10, 1998, pg. 82.

Week 3: topic: "Cheek to Cheek," Couple Dancing: the choreography of togetherness, leading and following, and Europeanist influences on movement vocabulary.

First Quiz

Readings due:

Dyer, Richard. "'I Seem to Find the Happiness I Seek': Heterosexuality and Dance in the Musical," in *Dance, Gender and Culture*, ed. Helen Thomas. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993, pgs. 49-65.

Dyer, Richard and John Mueller. "Two Analyses of 'Dancing in the Dark' (The Band Wagon, 1953)," in *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, ed. Alexandra Carter. New York: Routledge, 1998, pgs. 288-293.

Siegel, Marcia B. "Siegel's Notebook," in *Eddy: About Dance*, Winter Solstice, 1974, pgs 43-45.

Siegel, Marcia B. and Beth Lessard. "Olympian Romance," in *Society of Dance History Scholars Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Conference*, June 1997, pgs. 255-261.

Zuck, Barbara. "World-Class Dance Couple Add a Touch of Grace to Columbus," in *Columbus (OH) Dispatch*, Jan. 26, 2003, pg. D1-2

Week 4: topic: Tap Dance, Historical Roots and Contemporary Styles: African American influence, predominantly male performers, and rhythmic virtuosity as an element of popular dance.

Second Observation Due

Readings due:

Brantley, Ben. "The Story of Tap as the Story of Blacks," in *The New York Times*, Nov. 16, 1995, pgs. B1 & 6.

Goldberg, Jane. "Savion Brings Back 'Da Noise,'" in *Dance Magazine*, Dec. 2002, pgs. 50-55.

Sommer, Sally R. "Hearing Dance, Watching Film," in *Dance Scope*, Vol. 14, no. 3, pgs. 52–62.

Sommer, Sally R. "Tap Dance," in *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, Vol. 6, ed. Selma Jeanne Cohen. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, pgs. 95–104.

Tu, Jeni. "The Lady is a Champ," in *Dance Teacher*, Jan. 2003, pgs. 44–48.

Week 5: topic: discussions, observations, and issues: High Art versus Low Art, Presentational versus Participatory Dance: issues of class, economic status and and community.

Readings due:

Desmond, Jane C. "Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies," in *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, ed. Alexandra Carter. New York: Routledge, 1998, pgs. 154–162.

McNeill, William H. "Muscular Bonding," in *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995, pgs. 1–11.

Week 6: topic: Staging National Identity, The Large Scale Production of Folk Dances: production of cultural dances and the choreography of large group movement, commodification of traditions, and connecting with diaspora populations.

Second Quiz

Readings due:

Gottschild, Brenda Dixon. "Cultural Exchange—or Rip-off?" in *Waltzing in the Dark: African American Vaudeville and Race Politics in the Swing Era*. New York: Palgrave, 2000, pgs. 96–106.

Shay, Anthony. "Parallel Traditions: State Folk Dance Ensembles and Folk Dance in the Field," in *Choreographic Politics: State Folk Dance Companies, Representation and Power*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002, pgs. 13–37.

Week 7: topic: Dance Films (You can be a Star!): expression and gender presentation.

Third Observation Due

Readings due:

Grubb, Kevin Boyd. "Dance Films Break Out at the Box Office," in *Dance Magazine*, Oct. 1983,

pgs. 80–83.

McRobbie, Angela. "Dance and Social Fantasy," in *Gender and Generation*, ed. Angela McRobbie & Mica Nava. London: Macmillan, 1984, pgs. 130–161.

Wisner, Heather. "Lights, Camera, Dancing!: Movie Makers Put Motion Back In Pictures," in *Dance Magazine*, Dec. 2000, pgs. 60–63, 108–109.

Week 8: topic: Hip Hop and Rave in Contemporary Culture: presentation of self, creating community, sources in African dance and the martial arts.

Readings due:

Banes, Sally. "Breakdancing: A Reporter's Story," in *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994, pgs. 126–132.

Eichenbaum, Rose. "It's Hip Hop Time: Master Choreographer and Performer Rennie Harris on the Culture and Technique of Hip Hop," in *Dance Teacher*, May/June 1999, pgs. 90–93.

Gore, Georgiana. "The Beat Goes On: Trance, Dance and Tribalism in Rave Culture," in *Dance in the City*, ed. Helen Thomas. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997, pgs. 50–67.

Klein, Gabriele. "Dance as Space Shuttle: Techno—the Pop Culture of the Nineties," in *Ballett International/Tanz Aktuell*, Aug. 9, 1996, pgs 54–59.

Novack, Cynthia J. Social Dance in the '60s," in *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990, pgs. 33–42.

Pini, Maria. "Raving Women," and "From Cyborgs, Nomads and the Raving Feminine," in *Dance in the City*, ed. Helen Thomas. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997, pgs. 118–124.

Sommer, Sally. "Check Your Body at the Door," in *Dance Ink*, Winter 1994/95, pgs. 6–11.

Thompson, Robert Farris: "Hip Hop 101," in *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996, pgs. 211–233.

Week 9: topic: Swing and the Lindy Hop, Then and Now: roots in the Savoy Ballroom and Harlem Renaissance, varieties and changes in couple dancing.

Third Quiz

Readings due:

Banes, Sally and John F. Szwed. "From 'Messing Around' to 'Funky Western Civilization': The Rise and Fall of Dance Instruction Songs," in *Dancing Many Drums: Excavations in African American Dance*, ed. Thomas F. DeFrantz. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002, pgs. 169–203.

Gottschild, Brenda Dixon. "The Savoy: Home of the Lindy," in *Waltzing in the Dark: African American Vaudeville and Race Politics in the Swing Era*. New York: Palgrave, 2000, pgs. 71–75.

Mattingly, Kate. "The Sultan of Swing: Lindy Hop Pioneer Frankie Manning," and Angie Whitworth, "Charleston Variations," in *Dance Teacher*, Mar. 2003, pgs. 34–41.

McMains, Juliet and Danielle Robinson. "Swingin' Out: Southern California's Lindy Revival (2000)," in *I See America Dancing: Selected Readings 1685–2000*, ed. Maureen Needham. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002, pgs. 84–91.

Miller, Norma and Evette Jensen. "A Man Called Whitey," in *Swingin' at the Savoy: The Memoir of a Jazz Dancer*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996, pgs. 58–64.

Smith, Ernie. Portrait of the Swing Era, in *Swingin' at the Savoy: The Memoir of a Jazz Dancer*, by Norma Miller and Evette Jensen. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996, pgs. xix–xxvii.

Stewart, Doug. "This Joint is Jumping," in *Smithsonian*, Mar. 1999, pgs. 60–74.

Week 10: topic: The Dances We Dance, Styles and Venues; discussion and conclusion: the variety of social dance styles and places to dance, and the populations that participate in these styles and at various venues.

Fourth Observation Due

Readings due:

Columbus area newspapers and magazines, for listings of dances and venues

Finals Week

Comprehensive Final Examination, during the regular, University-scheduled examination period.