

Traditions in American Concert Dance:
Gender and Autobiography
21M.670 SP.472
Spring 2007 HASS-D CI-H
3-370 TR 1:00-2:30
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www.mit.edu/21m.670/www

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, Pearl Primus 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 that 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 that 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 and CI-H: There will be no fewer than three writing assignments that will add up to a minimum of 20 pages; one of these papers will be rewritten; 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).
I See America Dancing: Selected Readings, 1685-2000 by Maureen Needham (University of Illinois Press, 2002).

Other readings to be distributed via Athena course locker. Check the website www.mit.edu/21m.670/www for information and reading materials.

REQUIRED PERFORMANCES ON THE MIT Campus

Tuesday, March 20 2007 8:00 PM Kresge Little Theater
Regina Rocke and Dawn Springer

Friday, April 6, 2007 8:00 pm Morss Hall, Walker Memorial
Paul Taylor 2 Dance Company

REQUIRED PERFORMANCE OFF CAMPUS

Attendance at one concert dance performances off campus, to be determined.

Possible performances to attend include:

March 4, 2007 7pm

BOSTON BALLET NEW WORK

Performances also Thursday, March 1 at 7pm Friday, March 2 at 8pm Saturday, March 3 at 2 8pm Sunday, March 4 at 2 & 7pm

Sunday April 15 2007 2pm

BEBE MILLER COMPANY LANDING/PLACE

Award-winning choreographer Bebe Miller and her talented collaborators have created Landing/Place, a new multimedia dance work that studies place and human connection within a global landscape. Miller's hallmark choreography—rich, luscious, sensuous—is seen through a layering of projected images that evoke past and present time.

Digitalized motion-capture, live music, video projection and exquisite dancing explore sensory, spatial and cultural dislocation. Performances also April 13 7:30, April 14 8:00

Class Requirements:

1. Approximately 50 pages of reading and 1 hour of viewing weekly. Participation in class discussions will account for 5% of the final grade.
2. We will attend at least two performances of dance concerts in the Boston area or on the MIT campus. Each student will submit a 2 page response to each of these performances. Each response will be worth 2.5% of the final grade.
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 75% of the final grade (25% each):

Paper One - Religion and Social Order

Paper Two - Cultural Mores

Paper Three - Gender and Individual Identity

4. Rewrite assignment. One of the short papers will be revised and resubmitted.
5. A web-research assignment leading to an oral presentation, defining a work of American concert dance as classical art. The oral presentation assignment will account for 15% of the final grade.

Course Organization:

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

UNIT I Introduction and Overview - 2 Sessions Feb 6, 8

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
"Introduction" America Dancing 1-15

view Dancing: The Power of Dance

UNIT II Dance as an expression of religious worship - 3 Sessions
Feb 13, 15, 20

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)
 pp 39-58

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

Paper #1 Due February 27 - 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 - 4 Sessions
Feb 27, March 1, 6, 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
 "Isadora Duncan's Vision of America Dancing" by Isadora Duncan in
 America Dancing pp 196-199
 "Declaration" by Doris Humphrey in America Dancing, pp 204-205
 "An Introduction to Choreography" from The Art of Making Dances by
 Doris Humphrey, Grove Press, New York, pp. 15-41
 "Platform for the American Dance" by Martha Graham in America Dancing
 p 203

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

UNIT IV Dance as an expression of cultural mores - 3 Sessions
March 13, 15, 20 (special event)

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
 "The Dance of the Century (1988)" in America Dancing pp 127-128
 "Dancing for Men" in American Dancing pp 200-203
 "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
 "The Twist: Brave New Whirl (1962)" by Marshall Fishwick in America
 Dancing pp 123-126
- view Dancing "Sex and Social Dance"
 Ted Shawn "Kinetic Molpai"
 Bill T. Jones "Fever Swamp"

Performance Event March 20: Regina Rocke and Dawn Springer at Kresge Little Theater, 8pm

Paper #2 Due March 20 - How does the dance "Fall River Legend" (DeMille, 1950) convey concepts of Cultural Moeres and Cultural Identity?

UNIT V Dance as the autobiographical creation of individual artists - 4 Sessions

April 3, 5, 10, 12

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
 "Re-tracing our steps: The Possibilities for Feminist Dance Histories" by Carol Brown in Dance History: An Introduction edited by Janet Adshead-Lansdale and June Layson, Routledge, 1983, 198-216
 "Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land" by Bill T. Jones and Peggy Gillespie in America Dancing pp 227 - 233

view Dancing "Individual and Tradition"
 Yvonne Rainer "Trio A" (1966)
 Twyla Tharp Catherine Wheel (1981)
 Merce Cunningham Story (1963)

Special Event April 5: Paul Taylor Master Class at T-CLub Lounge, 3-5pm

Performance Event April 6: Paul Taylor 2 at Morss Hall, 8pm

Paper Revision Due April 10. Revise and resubmit either Paper #1 or Paper #2 by this date. All students should schedule an appointment with the instructor to review the strengths and possibilities for improvement of your paper.

UNIT VI Dance as a classical art - 5 Sessions
April 12, 17, 19, 24, 26

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
 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
 "A Critic Reacts to Balanchine's Stars and Stripes (1958)" by Lillian Moore
 in America Dancing p 219

view George Balanchine Agon, Jewels, Prodigal Son
 Dancing "Classical Dance Theater"

Oral Presentations Begin April 24 – Curate a Balanchine Ballet for the Class.

UNIT VII Dance as an emblem of cultural identity and fusion - 4 Sessions
May 1, 8, 10, 15

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. 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

read "Dances of the Native Americans" in America Dancing pp 16-50

"The War of the Quadrilles: Creoles vs. Americans (1804)" by Maureen Needham in America Dancing pp 66-72

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

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

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)

Dancing "Dancing on One World"

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar Batty Moves (1995)

Paper #3 Due May 8 - How does the "gold section" of The Catherine Wheel (Tharp, 1981) describe issues of gender and individuality?

Wrap up and Review - 1 Sessions May 17