

P.E. SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

DANCE



“Every ballet, whether or not successful artistically or with the public, has given me something important.”

Mikhail Baryshnikov, Russian-American dancer, choreographer, and actor

INTRODUCTION

Long before there was a written record of most cultures, there was dance. For primitive cultures, dance commemorated births, marriages, religious occasions, deaths, political victories, wars and other events.

We normally think of dance as one of the fine arts, and so it is. But dance requires athletic as well as artistic ability. Whether we choose ballet, modern dance, jazz or ethnic dance, the movements required in dancing demand stamina, strength and endurance.



HISTORY OF DANCE

TRADITIONAL DANCE

In ancient Egypt, dance was an important part of daily life. Drawings done in the fourth century B.C. suggest that Egyptians had a fairly advanced concept of dance. Some Egyptian dances were similar to our ballroom dancing; others were like modern belly dancing.

Ancient Greece also had its dances, some quite similar to those of the Egyptians. One dance in particular became famous—a ritual in which Greek women stamped on grapes and whirled about in honor of the god Dionysus. The Greek dramatist, Euripides, wrote a play about the ecstatic dimension of dance. The play was called “The



Bacchae.” In it, an overly-serious man, Pentheus, did not recognize the dangers of being caught up in wild dances, and was torn limb-from-limb by the women, who mistook him for an animal.

Rome was a little slower to incorporate dancing into daily life, using dance mainly in choral processions until about 200 B.C. Many Romans considered dancing a dangerous activity and felt that only the insane would dance by choice. Yet by the second century B.C., Romans were using pantomime dance in dramas.

During the Middle Ages, dance as an art form spread all over Europe. Italy with its many festivals and celebrations, made use of jugglers and offered instruction in social dance. During the late Middle Ages, the earliest form of ballet emerged as part of the Italian commedia del arte or in England, as part of the so-called “mystery cycles” of religious dramas that traveled from town to town with minstrels and jugglers.

The word “balletti,” originally referring to dances performed in ballrooms, was first used to refer to productions in the theatre. In 1581, the first ballet, “Circe,” was written and produced by an Italian-born Frenchman. Another Italian who was living in France, Jean Baptiste Lully, established a dance department at the Royal Academy of Music in 1661. Lully was responsible for influencing the music, scenery and movements used in classical ballet.

By the 1600s, the center for ballet moved from Italy to France where the Academie Royale de Danse was founded. With the advent of the Academie, there was now a special school for ballet. Dance was a discipline taught and administered by specialists.

By the 1700s, ballet had progressed to the point where the well-to-do felt that dance was simply part of any well-rounded general education. It was also thought to teach good manners and character. Consequently, many rich European children were taught to dance.



America brought a somewhat different attitude to the art of dance. Colonists in the south were generally more tolerant of dance than those in the Puritan-dominated North. However, there were plenty of dancing teachers in both North and South to teach the dances remembered from the Old World. African-American slaves also brought their own dances from Africa which later became an influence on dancing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



The nineteenth century saw a tremendous growth of interest in ballet. The Italian Marius Petipa left Italy to work in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1847; he choreographed such works of classical ballet as “Don Quixote,” “Swan Lake” and “The Nutcracker.” Promoter Sergei Diaghilev imported ballet from Russia to America, bringing with him such dancers as Anna Pavlova and Vaslav Nijinsky and choreographer George Balanchine. Balanchine established the New York City Ballet and eventually helped to change the face of dance in America.

MODERN DANCE

As ballet gained a foothold in America, another form of dance was created in direct opposition to the principles of ballet. Innovator Isadora Duncan had a ballet background, yet found that the strict movements of classical ballet did not allow her sufficient freedom of expression. She created her own dance form based on the spontaneous expression of feelings—what we later came to call “modern dance.” Inspired by Isadora Duncan, dancers such as Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn created a school and company to train the next generation of modern dancers, among them Martha Graham. She in turn trained Paul Taylor, Merce Cunningham and Twyla Tharp, all of whom have helped to make America the center of modern dance.



JAZZ DANCE

Jazz dancing is a form closely related to modern dance. It was originally inspired by African-American slave music which eventually developed into jazz. The syncopated rhythm of jazz music enhances the jerky, high-energy style of jazz dancing.

AEROBIC DANCE

Aerobic dance involves doing a variety of stepping, jumping, spinning and twisting motions, following the rhythms of music. It is a fairly recent addition to dance, and started simply as a form of rhythmic exercise to increase the heart rate. Yet it quickly developed into a form of its own, borrowing many of the steps and movements of ballet, jazz and modern dance.

THEATRICAL DANCE

Although dance had frequently been used as part of a drama or an opera, only with the twentieth century production of "OKLAHOMA!" did dance theater take on a new dimension. Agnes deMille choreographed the dance sequences in this musical and made them an integral part of the story. She used ballet, folk dance and modern dance to carry the story line. Similar contributions were made by Jerome Robbins, choreographer of the dance sequences in "WEST SIDE STORY."



THE LIVES OF DANCERS

Dance is an excellent form of exercise for both women and men of all ages. Dance never remains stagnant; it is always changing, always incorporating new movements and rhythms from many cultures and lifestyles. Today the well-rounded dancer studies ballet, jazz, modern, tap dance and aerobics in his or her quest to learn the language of movement.

Unfortunately, only a few highly talented professionals are able to make a living exclusively by dance. Funding in the arts is scarce and many dance companies have folded for lack of public support.

In addition, dance is a demanding career, requiring dancers to begin their training at an early age. Many talented dancers drop out of school before they have developed other skills. Professional dance in America is a young person's game and those over thirty often find it difficult to find work. Sadly, dancers may train for fifteen years to dance for only a few years. In an entire career, a talented dancer will make only one-quarter of the salary that a pro baseball player will make in one season.



HOW DANCES ARE PERFORMED

THE FIVE FOOT POSITIONS OF CLASSICAL BALLET

The five positions of the feet in classical dance are the basic moves around which all ballet and other dance movements are developed. Ballet students must first become proficient in the five positions and learn to do warm-up exercises in these positions. In all forms of dance, warmup exercises, stretches and flexes are always the first movements done before anything else is attempted:

First position: Legs are side by side with the heels of both feet touching.

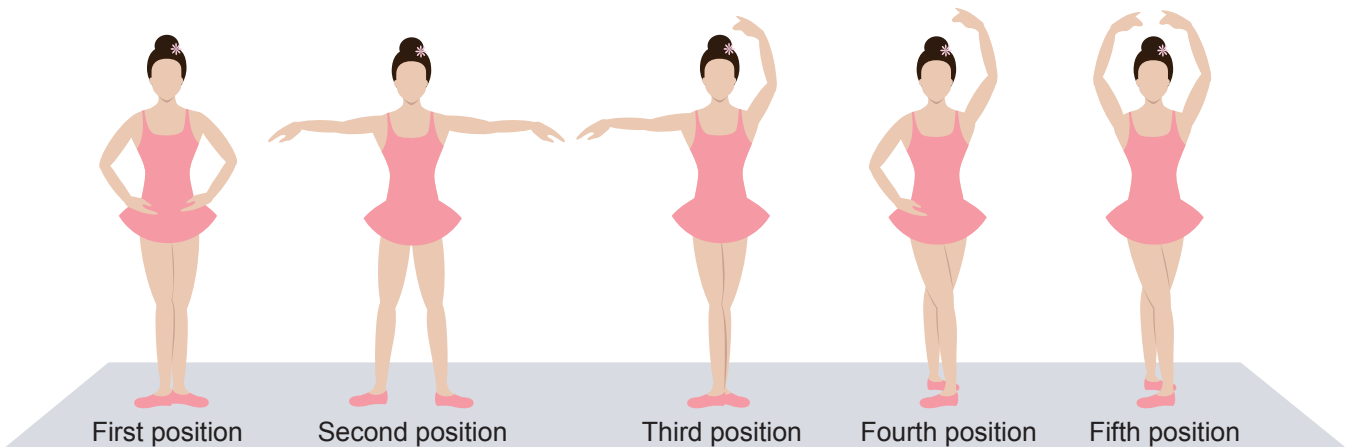
Second position: Legs are slightly apart with the feet turned outward.

Third position: The front (right) leg is partially in front of the left leg, with the heel of the right foot in front of the left arch.

Fourth position: The right leg and foot are placed in front of the left leg and slightly separated from it. The weight of the body should fall evenly over both legs.

Fifth position: The same as the fourth position except that the legs and feet are positioned tightly together.

In each position, the dancer must remain erect, maintaining good posture, with stomach muscles pulled tight, head up and knees straight.



EQUIPMENT AND CLOTHING

For practice and rehearsals, clothing ranges from grubby leotards and sweat pants to full costumes for dress rehearsals. The essential property of any dance clothing is that it provides for a full range of motion of all body parts. In short, you can't dance if you don't have freedom of movement.



DANCE NOTES

Usually, when one thinks of dance competitions, one thinks of old movies like “Saturday Night Fever,” in which John Travolta competed in disco dancing contests, or “They Shoot Horses, Don’t They,” in which Jane Fonda competed in marathon dancing, where contestants danced until they dropped. The last couple standing won the prize. More recently, Julianne Hough and Dennis Quaid starred in Footloose, a 2011 movie that was a remake of the 1984 film of the same name. The film follows a young man who moves from Boston to a small southern town and protests the town’s ban against dancing.

Reality is much more interesting. For example, every two years, the New York International Ballet Competition draws contestants from all over the world to compete, show their talents, and enhance their career opportunities. Winning dancers are awarded medals based on their cumulative scores.

On the collegiate level, International Collegiate Ballroom Dancing Competitions attract student dancers from all over the world, to compete for awards and opportunities after graduation.

In case you still think that dance is limited to the Senior Prom, the United States and Canada combined list hundreds of collegiate dance teams on the Internet. The actual number is much greater. A quick glance at College Course Guides shows the increased popularity of dance as a field of study. There are not only many dance classes you can take for college credit, but also many courses which focus on dance and movement as therapy for those with mental and/or physical problems.

Gene Kelly, one of the world’s greatest movie dancers died on February 2, 1996. Kelly was among America’s premiere performers, both as a dancer and as an actor.

Other dancers often compared Kelly with Fred Astaire. While Astaire’s dancing style was seen as restrained and sophisticated, Kelly’s was seen as flamboyant and romantic.

Line Dancing

Line dancing is a popular choreographed dance with a repeated sequence of steps in which a group of people dance in one or more lines or rows without regard for the

gender of the individuals, all facing either each other or in the same direction, and performing the step at the same time. Line dancing avoids the problem of imbalance of male/female partners. It is sometimes combined on dance programs with other forms of country western dance, such as two-step and western promenade dances, as well as western-style variants of the waltz, polka and swing. Line dancing is taught in many middle and high schools through out the country.

National Dance Week

National Dance Week captures everyone's secret desire to be a great dancer. It was formed in 1981 when a group of dance-related organizations began a strong "grass roots" movement to bring greater recognition to dance. National Dance Week Foundation was established as a non-profit institution in 2011. Over the years, the organization's dedication to its founding mission has inspired thousands of events during the ten-day annual celebration of National Dance Week in April, from gatherings in major cities to local showcases at small-town malls. Because they reflect the unique and creative abilities of the individuals who participate, an array of events, including the annual Flash Mob and annual Kick It Challenge, celebrate dance in unlimited ways throughout the year.

Dancing with the Stars

Dancing with the Stars is a reality show airing on ABC television that has peaked the interest of all dance enthusiast. Every season, celebrities and professional dancers are matched up. Celebrities have included racecar drivers, Olympic athletes, football players, supermodels, actors, singers, astronauts, and teen-heartthrobs. Each couple performs Ballroom or Latin dances and competes with the others for judges' points and audience votes. Whichever couple receives the lowest total amount of points by the judges and the TV audience is eliminated until a champion is named. Prior ballroom dancing experience is banned but other dance training is acceptable.

Many YMCAs and park districts offer dance lessons and programs. Very popular at some YMCAs are lessons on how to dance to the hip-hop by learning modern dance moves. You can also learn more traditional dances such as: tap, jazz, swing and ballet.

You can stay abreast of dance performance and competitions by checking out several sites:

www.dancescape.com

www.nationaldanceweek.org

www.abc.go.com/shows/dancing-with-the-stars