The Art of Choreography (ARTS-UG 1209)

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Thurs 3:30-6:10
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Gallatin School of Individualized Study
Rm 430, One Washington Place
Fall 2013  Office Hours by Appointment

It was the great modern dance choreographer Martha Graham who said, “We are all born with genius. It’s just that most people just lose it in the first five minutes.” This class attempts to help the student get back his or her original choreographic ability.

We will study the basic elements of dance --time, space and energy—and, each week explore a different aspect of the choreographic process. The students, through improvisations, problem solving and short movement studies, will discover their movement vocabulary. Each dancemaker will find their own philosophy of dance and their own individual choreographic voice while being introduced to some of the major twentieth century choreographers and their work. By nature we are all dancers, with or without years of training. Choreographic process, whether one wishes to be a choreographer or not, is a superb model for thinking, assembling and creating. These skills are transferable to other modes of artistic creation and other fields.

Class will begin with a short discussion of selected readings and viewing of video of some of the masters: from Martha Graham’s heroines, to the blazing use of the kinesphere by William Forsythe, to Gospel songs by Alvin Ailey, Twyla Tharp’s complex aerobics, or the gay-oriented Swan Lake of Matthew Bourne. Every class will include a short warm up based on the theme for the day, using Pilates, modern dance or a ballet barre. Dancers will work in class on solo assignments, then in duets and small groups. Work is shown, and teacher and class respond in a useful and reinforcing way. A space will be made available for choreographer/students to work on their assignments. Mid-term and final showings will complete the process.


Course Objectives/learning goals: One goal is to help the student understand structure and craft in choreography and be able to critically see work, as well as make their own work. Another goal is the mastery of a vocabulary of dance, as well as an understanding of space, time and energy in dance. The student becomes aware of intention, content, and
their own personal style of dance making. Ultimately the student grows more secure in their ability to analyze, understand and create a work of choreography.

**Grade determinants:** class participation in discussion and warm-up exercises are 30% of the grade, written assignments are 20% of the grade, the studies shown weekly and growth and improvement therein are 20 % of the grade, and the final project in performance is 30% of the grade. More than two absences will lower the grade. The most important determinant of grade is the quality of the choreography and progress of the individual student in this area.

Academic and artistic integrity is expected of all students. No plagiarized work is acceptable. Wear clothes you can dance in to class

**Week One:** Sept 5, What is movement? Dance? Choreography?


View: The Kirov Ballet’s *Swan Lake*, Matthew Bourne’s *Swan Lake*

**Week Two:** Sept 12, Intention and Theme

Read: Approach and Essentials from *The Intimate Act of Choreography*, Blom and Chaplin, chapters 1-4 from *The Art of Making Dances* by Doris Humphrey

View: Doris Humphrey’s *Passacaglia and Fugue*

**Week Three:** Sept 19, Building a Phrase


View: Anthony Tudor, *Dark Elegies*

**Week Four:** Sept 26, Theme and Variations, Motif and Development

Read: First Rules of Composition from *Modern Dance Forms* by Louis Horst, Theme and Variation vs. Motif and Development from the *Intimate Act of Choreography* by Blom and Chaplin.

View: George Balanchine *Theme and Variations*

**Week Five:** Oct 3, Rhythm, Time, Tempo and Meter

Read: Rhythm from *The Art of Making Dances* by Doris Humphrey, Duration or Timing in Music from *Ear Training for the Body*, by Katherine Teck

View: Jiri Kylian, *Symphonietta*
Week Six: Oct 10, Rehearsal Day Read: Choreography from *To A Young Dancer* by Agnes de Mille and from Appendix

Week Seven: Oct 17, Showings and commentary,

Week Eight: Oct 24, Energy and The Basic Efforts

Read: Dynamics through the Basic Effort Actions from *Modern Educational Dance*, Valerie Preston Dunlop, Inner Impulses to Move from *Body Movement – Coping with the Environment* by Irmgard Bartenieff with Dori Lewis

View: Twyla Tharp *Push Comes to Shove*

Week Nine: Oct 3, Space and the Kinesphere

Read: *Space Harmony* by Cecily Dell, Carving Shapes in Space from *Body Movement – Coping with the Environment* by Irmgard Bartenieff with Dori Lewis

View: William Forsythe and Deconstruction in Architecture and Dance

Week Ten: Nov 7, Story and Character

Read: Martha Graham’s Journey by Eric Bentley from *What is Dance?* Copeland and Cohen, eds., The Heroines Within from *Time and the Dancing Image* by Deborah Jowitt

View: Martha Graham, *Night Journey*

Week Eleven: Nov 14, Genre and Style

Read: Problems of Definitions from *Next Week, Swan Lake* by Selma Jeanne Cohen from *What is Dance?* Three Sides of Agon by Edwin Denby from *What is Dance?*, Cerebralism, Jazz and Americana from *Modern Dance Form*, Louis Horst

View: George Balanchine, *Agon*

Week Twelve: Nov 21, Finding Roots

Read: Alvin Ailey from *Black Dance* by Lynne Fauley Emery, from *Alvin Ailey, A Life in Dance* by Jennifer Dunning

View: Alvin Ailey, *Revelation*

November 28 Thanksgiving, no class

Week Thirteen: Dec 5, Musical Form


Week Fourteen: Dec 12 Final showing of choreographic works
Course pack can be purchased at Advanced Copy Shop, 552 La Guardia Place between 3rd and Bleeker.