The Art of Choreography

The Art of Choreography (ARTS-UG1209)

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6:10
Thurs 3:30-6:10
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Gallatin School of Individualized Study
430, One Washington Place
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Rm
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.


Wear clothes you can dance in to class

Week One: Sept 4, What is movement? Dance? Choreography?

Read: from What is Dance, Copeland and Cohen, eds., John Martin from The Dance, and The Modern Dance, Susanne K. Langer from Feeling and Form, Paul Valery, Philosophy of the Dance (Since students haven’t gotten book yet, this reading postponed)

View: The Kirov Ballet’s Swan Lake, Matthew Bourne’s Swan Lake
**Week Two:** Sept 11, 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 18, Building a Phrase

Read: The Phrase from *The Art of making Dances* by Doris Humphrey, Phrase from *The Intimate Act of Choreography*, Blom and Chaplin.

View: Anthony Tudor, *Dark Elegies*

**Week Four:** Sept 25, 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 2, 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 9, Rehearsal Day

Read: Choreography from *To A Young Dancer* by Agnes de Mille and from Appendix

**Week Seven:** Oct 16, Showings and commentary

**Week Eight:** Oct 23, 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 30, 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 6, 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 13, 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 20, 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 27 Thanksgiving, no class

**Week Thirteen**: Dec 4, Musical Form


View: George Balanchine, *Serenade*

**Week Fourteen**: Dec 11 Final showing of choreographic works

Class participation in warm-ups, discussion, written assignments, working and showing of work each determine 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 student in this area.

Academic and artistic integrity is expected of all students. No plagiarized work is acceptable.

Course pack can be purchased at Advanced Copy Shop, 552 La Guardia Place between 3rd and Bleeker.