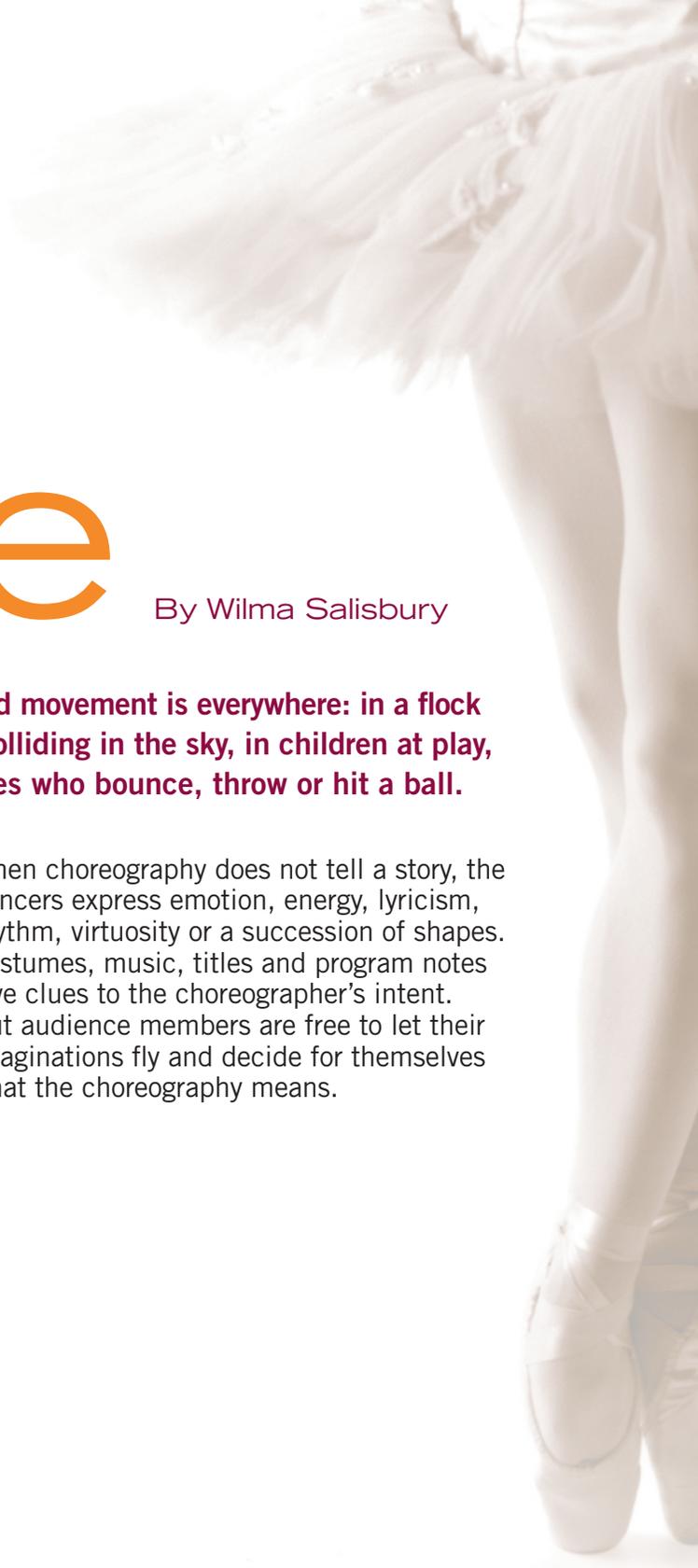


appreciating dance



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & EDUCATION

 PlayhouseSquare®



introduction to dance

By Wilma Salisbury

Dance is movement through time and space, and movement is everywhere: in a flock of geese flying in perfect formation, in clouds colliding in the sky, in children at play, in pedestrians crossing a busy street, in athletes who bounce, throw or hit a ball.

Choreographers transform movement into concert dance by setting it to music, organizing it into steps and phrases and putting it onstage with costumes, lights and sets. Their ideas come from nature, people, animals, books, music, poetry, machines. Their choreography tells stories, evokes emotions, visualizes music, paints living pictures, showcases technical skill. The dancers' bodies are highly trained instruments of expression that communicate the choreographer's intent.

When choreography tells a story, the dancers play characters. The soloist is a principal character who commands attention even when the stage is filled with other dancers. When two people dance together, they become partners spelling out their relationship through movement. When several dancers form a group, they mesh into an ensemble representing a community or concept.

When choreography does not tell a story, the dancers express emotion, energy, lyricism, rhythm, virtuosity or a succession of shapes. Costumes, music, titles and program notes give clues to the choreographer's intent. But audience members are free to let their imaginations fly and decide for themselves what the choreography means.



styles

Russian choreographer George Balanchine developed an American style that streamlines classical ballet with faster tempos, challenging new techniques, sleeker costumes and original music. Ballet companies today continue to perform the classics along with new works.

Classical ballet originated in the royal courts of Europe. Costumed in elegant clothes, soft slippers and elaborate headdresses, the dancers moved with regal posture, stylized gestures, intricate little steps and buoyant jumps performed to the accompaniment of chamber music. Their movements dramatized stories from mythology or expressed romantic feelings. The ballerina took center stage after the invention of the Pointe shoe, which allowed her to dance on her toes, move quickly through space and give the illusion of floating in a gauzy tutu. The male dancer was a noble porter who lifted and supported the ethereal-looking ballerina. As male dancers became stronger, they emerged as brilliant performers who wowed audiences with soaring leaps, rapid spins and sensational turns in the air. When ballet dancers execute bravura steps, the audience often bursts into applause.

The classical story ballet reached its zenith with lavish Russian productions of “Swan Lake,” “Sleeping Beauty” and “The Nutcracker,” masterpieces choreographed by Petipa to symphonic music by Tchaikovsky. Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev brought together leading Russian and European artists to create the Ballets Russes, which premiered daring 20th-century ballets such as “The Rite of Spring” to explosive music by Stravinsky.



Ballet dancers are trained from childhood in a rigorous technique that teaches precise positions of feet and arms, turnout of the legs and an extensive vocabulary of movements with French names. The dancers take daily class to maintain their technique. To meet the demands of today’s diverse repertory; they also learn elements of many other styles.



While ballet follows a strict structure of steps and strives for a feeling of lightness, **modern dance** nurtures a freer style and responds to the pull of the earth. Projecting a feeling of weight, modern dancers fall to the floor, move close to the ground, then overcome gravity by rising up and regaining balance. Rejecting the formality of tutu and toe shoes, they dance in bare feet and simple costumes. Rather than portraying idealized fairy-tale creatures, they retain their own personalities.

Martha Graham, the mother of modern dance in America, created a technique based on the twisting of the torso and the powerful contractions and releases of the pelvis. Other distinctive styles were developed by inventive choreographers such as Doris Humphrey, Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor and Twyla Tharp. Pilobolus, an ensemble founded by four male non-dancers at Dartmouth College, pioneered a form of organic partnering that turns supple bodies into fantastic and often humorous shapes. Post-modern choreographers focus on everyday movements performed in gym clothes and tennis shoes.

Contemporary companies present eclectic programs that mix modern dance with elements of ballet, jazz, martial arts and national traditions. The audience need not identify the style to enjoy the show. But it's fun to try to pick out influences that inspired the choreographer.

World dance – also known as national dance, folk dance or ethnic dance – is threaded through the fabric of cultures around the globe. People dance in temples to honor their gods. They dance in fields to make their work go faster. They dance at festivals to greet guests, initiate adolescents into adulthood, celebrate weddings and memorialize the dead. Choreographers within a culture theatricalize their heritage and bring it to the public. Choreographers of concert dance blend national traditions with ballet and modern dance styles.



Irish step dancers perform rapid rhythmic patterns in hard-soled shoes or soft slippers. Soloists compete to achieve precision, clarity, speed and elevation. While their feet and legs move swiftly, their arms are held rigidly at their sides. Lines of dancers do unison steps to the rhythms of jigs and reels played by fiddles, pipes, whistles and drums. Female dancers, their hair curled into bouncy ringlets; wear modest dresses with long sleeves. Men are costumed in shirt, tie, vest and kilts or trousers. Irish dance extravaganzas such as “Riverdance” preserve traditional steps and rhythms. But the dancers move their arms, wear glamorous costumes and perform to music that combines traditional and electronic sounds.



The meticulously preserved **classical dance styles of India** date back centuries to rituals in ancient Hindu temples. The barefoot dancers wear exotic makeup, sparkling jewelry, vivid silk costumes and tinkling ankle bells. With stylized gestures, codified facial expressions, intricate movements of the hands and pounding footwork, they tell stories from mythology, convey emotions and perform pure movement to the rhythmic accompaniment of small hand drums and spoken syllables. In the modern era, classical traditions are fused with belly dance and Western pop styles to form the Bollywood film dance genre.



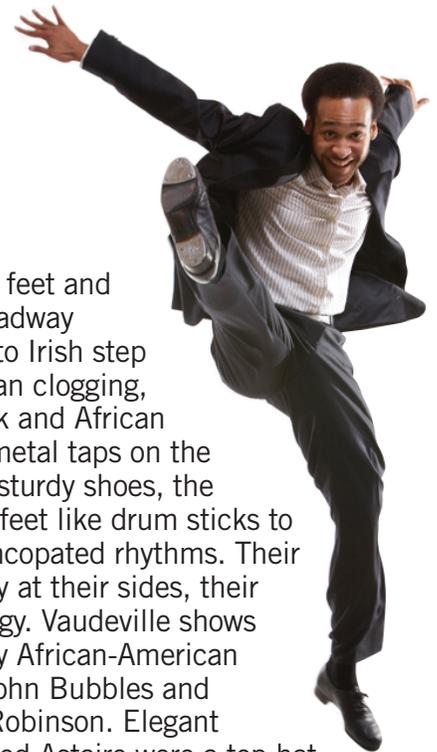
African dance is inseparable from African drumming. Responding to the pulsing rhythms of hand drums, barefoot dancers in tribal costumes stomp the earth with muscular movements. Their bodies bend forward, their arms fly, their hips sway, their voices break into exuberant call-and-response chants. African tribal traditions preserved by cultural companies strongly influence the work of today’s African-American choreographers.



Flamenco, the music and dance of the Gypsies, is rooted in the culture of southern Spain. Flamenco singers pour out their souls in wailing tones. Their mournful songs are punctuated by the rhythmic clapping of hands, beating of wooden boxes and stomping of dancers' heels. Flamenco guitars provide throbbing accompaniments and play passionate solos. The female flamenco dancer wears a tight ruffled dress topped with a fringed shawl. She arches her back, moves her arms sinuously and pounds the earth with low-heeled shoes. The male soloist wears tight pants, boots and a wide-brimmed hat. He carries himself proudly and burns up the floor with fiery heelwork. When a man and a woman dance together, they make eye contact but rarely touch. At the end of a flamenco show, each member of the ensemble takes a solo turn.

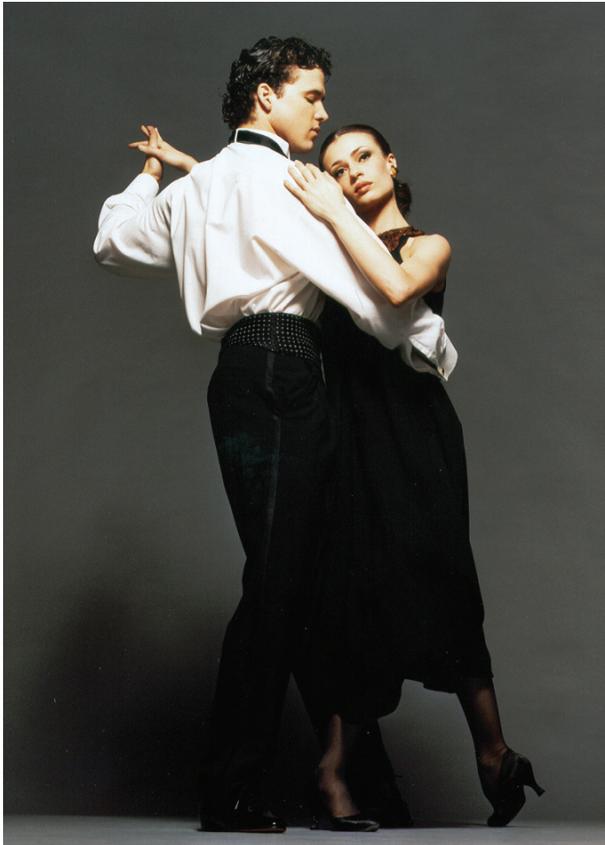


Tap, a feat for the feet and a mainstay of Broadway musicals, relates to Irish step dance, Appalachian clogging, flamenco heelwork and African drumming. With metal taps on the heels and toes of sturdy shoes, the dancers use their feet like drum sticks to produce sharp syncopated rhythms. Their arms swing loosely at their sides, their faces radiate energy. Vaudeville shows featured legendary African-American soloists such as John Bubbles and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson. Elegant Hollywood icon Fred Astaire wore a top hat and tails to project a debonair aura. Savion Glover, the reigning king of tap, makes the art form his own with phenomenal rhythmic invention and bravura technique.



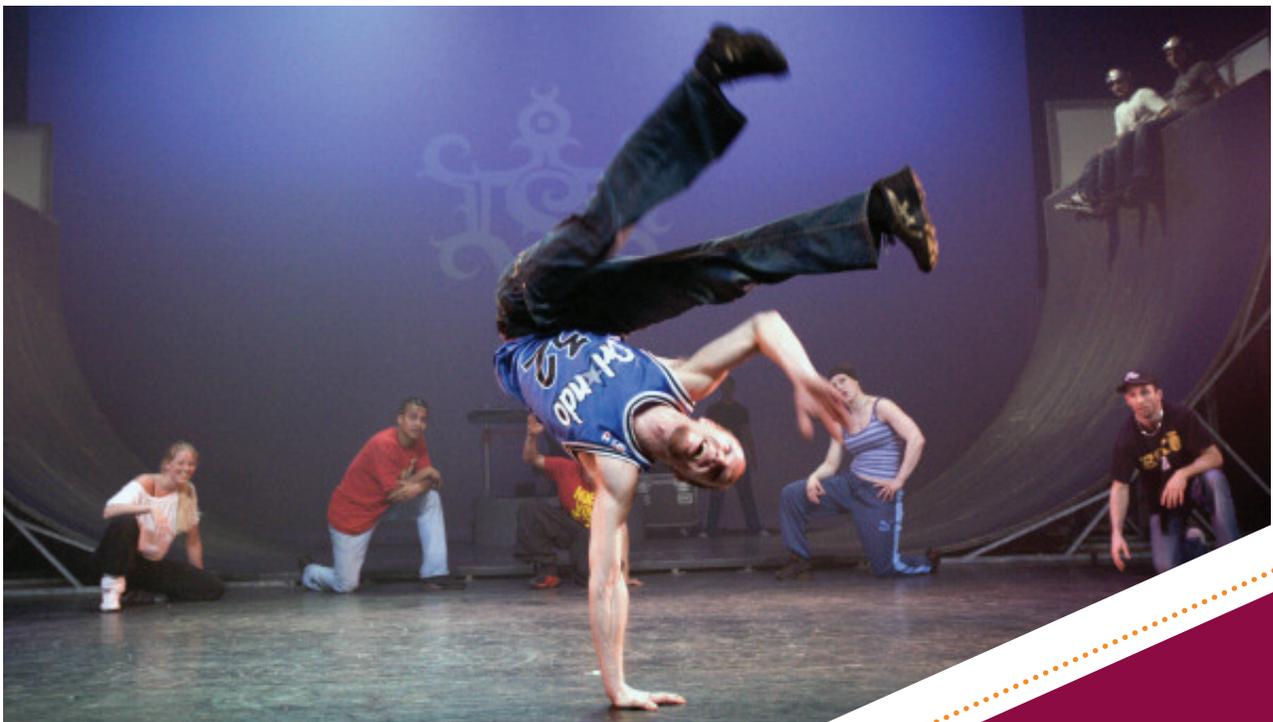
In the ancient dynasties of China, groups of dancers costumed in silk pajamas and embroidered slippers performed with swords, fans, bamboo sticks and long ribbons. Men executed powerful sequences relating to martial arts. Women did graceful movements evoking elements of nature. **Traditional Chinese dance** plays a major role in Beijing Opera, which tells stories of the Monkey King and other mythical characters. Contemporary Chinese dance blends traditional movement and music with classical ballet, modern dance and Western music.





Ballroom dance is performed for pleasure by couples who wear formal attire and move in close embrace to the accompaniment of popular music. Each of many different styles is tied to a specific rhythm, such as waltz, foxtrot, tango, rumba, samba and cha-cha. Although ballroom is still the province of amateurs who may take lessons in commercial studios, it is also an international competitive sport popularized on TV, and it is woven into numerous forms of concert dance.

Break dance erupted on city streets where energetic young men with no formal dance training showed off their athleticism by spinning on their heads, hopping on their hands, belly-flopping to the ground, inventing a variety of daredevil tricks and forming crews to compete in “battles.” Part of hip hop culture, breakers known as b-boys created a new language of earthy moves with an urban vibe. Rennie Harris formed a hip hop company called Puremovement, and he has created groundbreaking narrative dances performed with hip hop music and rap poetry.



Dance has the power to take us to places we have never been. It lifts our spirits, lets us dream and makes us laugh or cry. To enjoy concert dance, audience members need not know dance history or understand French ballet terminology.

The more people learn about dance, the deeper their appreciation will be. But even the novice can get the choreographer's message simply by watching the dancers move through time and space. A universal language as old as mankind and as new as a premiere performance, dance is a wordless art form that speaks for itself.

conclusion

wilma salisbury



Wilma Salisbury came to Cleveland in 1967 as an apprentice in the Rockefeller Project for the Training of Music Critics. The following year, she joined *The Plain Dealer* as a music critic. In 1972, she was named the

paper's dance critic, a position she held until her retirement in 2006. To prepare for her new responsibilities, she obtained a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship to attend a dance critics training program at the American Dance Festival at Connecticut College.

In the 1980s, Ms. Salisbury studied architecture at Cornell University and the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Subsequently, she served as the *Plain Dealer's* architecture writer until 1991, when she shifted her attention to food and became one of the paper's restaurant reviewers.

A native of Minnesota, Ms. Salisbury earned a B.A. in music at St. Olaf College and an M.M. in music theory from the University of

Michigan. She wrote her master's thesis while spending a year teaching high school music in Sitka, Alaska. Before accepting a fellowship to the Rockefeller Project, she taught music theory at Arizona Western College in Yuma.

Ms. Salisbury has written articles for *Dance Magazine*, *Ballet News*, the Cleveland Arts Prize Archives and numerous music and architecture journals. She has led seminars in dance criticism at Case Western Reserve University, served as a panelist for the Ohio Arts Council and worked as a consultant for the National Endowment for the Arts.





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