

Modern/Contemporary Dance

Brief History:

Modern dance is still fairly young as compared to other dance forms as it began in the 1900s; Isadora Duncan's mentality in breaking away from traditional ballet was brought on by her key concept: motion is motivated by emotion and must be expressed with instruments of the entire human body. She inspired other key modern dancers such as Merce Cunningham, Ruth St. Denis, Alvin Ailey, and Martha Graham to continue to create a new style of artistic dance where the strict rules of ballet technique did not apply.

While ballet sought to free the dancer from gravity and is classical in nature, modern dance pulled the dancer back to earth to express the psychological turmoil and issues of the era- a time of change and artistic vitality. Today, choreographers such as Mia Michaels and Sonya have blended modern with lyrical to create contemporary dance that is quite popular on the competition circuit as well on shows such as SYTYCD.

Famous pioneers of this genre:

Isadora Duncan:

- Born in 1878; died in her 20's in a freak accident
- One of the first founders of modern dance
- Used simple, "airy", light movements
- Key concept: motion is motivated by emotion and must be expressed with instruments of the entire body

Martha Graham:

- 1894-1991
- Most famous, controversial, and longest-lasting of all modern dancers
- Developed her own, unique technique of which the contraction and release was a major principle
- Belief in the emotional challenge and inner feeling that accompanies the outward look of modern dance

Alvin Ailey:

- Key dancer/choreographer in the growth of current modern/contemporary dance
- Founded Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater which is still popular today
- Explored the black experience and went beyond, finding universal human truths; very soul based * most famous work is Revelations

Key terms:

1. **Modern dance:** a clear and distinctive alternative to ballet which pulls the dancer back to earth to express the psychological turmoil and issues of the era; creates movement to rediscover what the body can do- expands limits and boundaries
2. **Improvisation:** spontaneous movement that is not choreographed
3. **Contraction:** inverted rounding of the body; “bones over bones”(shoulders over hips) rounded back with derriere tucked in; looks like being punched in the stomach; abdominals are engaged; most fundamental principle in Graham technique
4. **Percussive:** refers to the drumbeat meaning a sharp, concise, static movement; can be a stiffness, punching, or whipping motion- the “umphness” to a movement
5. **Sustained movement:** a feeling of being held, posed or lifted in a position. A breath or suspension containing an elevated quality
6. **Fall and recover:** change of weight and play on gravity, where the body loses control because of momentum and then regains control
7. **Free movement (unbounded):** the concept of not having any spatial boundaries or limitations of the body; improvisation contains a lot of this; an unbounded internal feeling

Skills to master that will be practiced in daily warmups:

Contract/release

Knee spins

Tilt kick (“Alvin Ailey kick”)

Modern fall

Turns around the back

