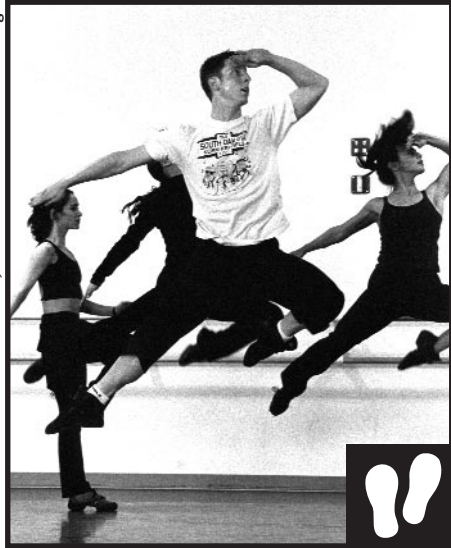


# PROGRAM 8: MODERN DANCE

## ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN DANCE

Photo Credit: Michael Slobodian, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago



### Program Objective

To explore the origins and development of modern dance and its ever-evolving approach to dance expression.

### Program Description

Modern Dance grew out of the American spirit of **innovation**. Though **modern dance** is similar to ballet in some ways, much of its initial purpose was to break away from the restrictions of ballet and experience more freedom of movement and ideas. In less than 100 years, modern dance sprouted from merely an idea to an art form that is uniquely American. At the same time, it has become an international art form with many talented and innovative choreographers lending their ideas to its evolution. By the 1990s distinctions between modern dance and ballet were not as rigid as they once were. Ballet technique and choreography remain more formal than those of modern dance, but their themes and stage effects are often similar. The two program segments explore the history and development of the style as well as its characteristics.

- Modern Dance History—This segment traces the development of modern dance through its pioneers, beginning with Michael Fokine who began the move toward a more realistic style (as compared to ballet). Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis are considered the founders of modern dance. Their revolutionary ideas about dance reflected other ideas about the status of women at the turn of the 20th century. Their dances were based on new techniques developed as vehicles for the expression of human passions and universal social themes. And, in moving toward a new dance form, they also looked to the past—Duncan to ancient Greece, St. Denis to exotic historical periods. Other pioneers include Martha Graham, who developed her own technique of body movement known as Graham technique, and Alvin Ailey, who created a multi-racial company that performs dances about universal human experience but rooted in his African American heritage.
- Modern Dance Style—There is not one language or vocabulary of modern dance movement, but it is traditionally and most often performed in bare feet. Several modern dancers and choreographers discuss the different styles and techniques that have developed and how modern dancers continue to explore new ways of moving, drawing on the influence of many other dance styles. Rather than focusing so much on arms and legs, as in ballet, modern dance makes use of the whole **torso**, and dancers not only leap through the air, but also roll on the floor. Modern dance is performed in many different settings as well. It is not limited to a formal theater setting.

### Before You Watch

Ask students what they think of when they hear the term modern dance. What dances do they think of as “modern”? Why do they think a dance form might be called Modern Dance? Research U.S. History at the turn of the century through the 1920s. What other ideas were “modern” at that time? What other forms of “rebellion” or changes from the norm were occurring? [Women’s suffrage, fashion, jazz music, automobile] Discuss how dance and the arts in general are a reflection of what is going on within the culture. In what ways can you see this in today’s culture? What does today’s music and dance say about the world we live in?

What about feet? Most modern dancers dance barefoot. What other dance forms use bare feet? [African, East Indian] What dance forms require shoes and what types of shoes? What purposes do the shoes serve (e.g., tap shoes, jazz shoes, ballet pointe shoes, sneakers for hip hop dancers or break dancers, flamenco dance shoes)? What would be the purpose of dancing barefoot? What kinds of surfaces would be most comfortable to dance on with bare feet?

## After You Watch

After watching this program, discuss the similarities and differences between ballet and modern dance. Review with students what they learned in previous programs about the elements of dance (space, time, force) in order to help them with this. Are there ways that modern dancers use space or time differently than ballet dancers? (Refer to Chart of Elements in the chapter on “Elements of Dance.”) What about force? Are there certain qualities of movement energy that we see a great deal of in ballet? Soft or hard, smooth or sharp? Using the Chart of Elements, which of the characteristics listed under each of the elements would you connect more with ballet? with modern dance? Or do you feel some of them are seen equally in both?

Research a famous modern dancer/choreographer, e.g. Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Martha Graham, Alvin Ailey, Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, Twyla Tharpe. What unique contributions did they make? Who or what were their major influences? What other artists, if any, did they collaborate with? Could you create a family tree tracing their influences? Review Program 6—Making Dance: What kinds of forms did these choreographers work with? E.g. narrative—did they tell stories with their dances? Do the choreographers use improvisation in the process of making their dances? Do they use improvisation as a part of their performances? From where do these choreographers draw their inspiration for making dances? Give some examples.

## Move It

Many modern dance styles imitate earlier dance forms or movement in nature. Have students create their own movement ideas and dance phrases that resemble images they’ve seen in other dance forms. For example, think back to the Senegalese or Shaker dances from Program 1 or the dances from various cultures in Program 2. Create a dance phrase based on movements from nature, e.g. ocean waves, clouds, trees in the wind, or based on animals, e.g. snake, elephant, monkey. Teach these to one another. Combine some of them and build a dance.

Some choreographers say they get ideas for dances from people watching. Give students the homework assignment of watching people move in a public setting of some kind (e.g., on the playground, at the grocery store, in a park, at a sporting event, etc.). Ask them to study a particular person’s movement and create a dance phrase based on that movement. Ask them to alter it in some way. They may make it bigger or smaller, faster or slower, or change it from non-locomotor to locomotor, etc.

## For more information

Visit the **DanceSense** web site at [www.ket.org/dancesense](http://www.ket.org/dancesense)

### KEY TERMS (see Glossary for definitions)

innovation  
modern dance  
torso



### Key Kentucky Core Content Addressed

(See Kentucky Core Content for Arts & Humanities: Dance in Appendix)

<b>AH-E-2.1.31</b>	<b>AH-H-2.1.25</b>
<b>AH-E-2.1.32</b>	<b>AH-H-2.1.31</b>
<b>AH-E-2.1.35</b>	<b>AH-H-2.1.36</b>
<b>AH-M-2.1.24</b>	<b>AH-H-2.2.31</b>
<b>AH-E-2.1.36</b>	<b>AH-H-2.2.32</b>
<b>AH-E-2.2.31</b>	<b>AH-H-2.2.33</b>
<b>AH-E-2.2.32</b>	<b>AH-H-2.3.31</b>
	<b>AH-H-2.3.310</b>
<b>AH-M-2.1.25</b>	<b>AH-H-2.3.311</b>
<b>AH-M-2.1.31</b>	
<b>AH-M-2.2.31</b>	
<b>AH-M-2.2.32</b>	

### Key National Standards for Arts Education: Dance Addressed

Content standards addressed in video and teacher’s guide:

**CS1: Identifying and demonstrating movement elements and skills in performing dance**

**CS2: Understanding choreographic principles, processes and structures**

**CS3: Understanding dance as a way to create and communicate meaning**

**CS4: Applying and demonstrating critical and creative thinking skills in dance**

**CS5: Demonstrating and understanding dance in various cultures and historical periods**

**CS7: Making connections between dance and other disciplines**

