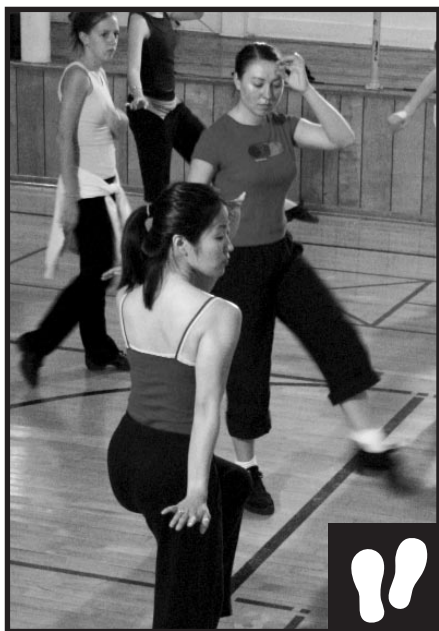


PROGRAM 9: JAZZ DANCE

ROOTS, CHARACTERISTICS AND EVOLUTION



Program Objective

To explore the origin and characteristics of jazz dance and consider its unique evolution.

Program Description

The art of **jazz** is perhaps America's most unique contribution to dance and music. Jazz traditions are rooted in the **interaction** and inter-connectedness of music and dance...the musician responding to the dancer, the dancer responding to the musician. Jazz dance grew out of this relationship and communicates both the rhythmic complexity and emotional dynamics inherent in jazz music.

The program is divided into three segments that examine the uniqueness of the dance form and its evolution.

- ✦ **Jazz History** – This segment explores the origin of jazz dance, its connection to the social fabric of the U.S. as it evolved and its intimate relationship to jazz music. It traces its shift from social/**vernacular** dance to performance art, with specific attention given to the Charleston.
- ✦ **Jazz Technique** – This segment looks at three main aspects of classic jazz dance technique: physical—including **isolations** and **coordination**; musical—including a discussion of **syncopation**; and improvisational—understanding the importance of **structure**.
- ✦ **Jazz Styles** – This segment points out some of the characteristics of jazz dance, including the concept of “**swing**,” as well as some of the specific styles that have evolved over the years and differentiated themselves from classic and vernacular jazz dance.

Before You Watch

Create a “Jazz Age” bulletin board. Research and bring in as many images as you can find that represent the 1920s and '30s, e.g. flappers, Model-Ts, swing bands, dancers doing the **Charleston**, **Big Apple** or the **Lindy Hop**, prohibition, suffrage movement. Discuss the changes that were taking place in this country during those years and how that might have been reflected in the music and dances.



Ask the students what they know about jazz music. Have they heard of **swing** music, the **blues**, **ragtime**? Bring in some examples of these types of music (Duke Ellington, Bessie Smith, Scott Joplin) and listen to them. Is there someone in the class or in the school who plays jazz and could demonstrate? How does the music make them feel? How does it make them want to move? In what ways is it similar or different from contemporary **rap** and **hip hop**?

After You Watch

The video points out both the connection that jazz dance has to jazz music as well as its evolution from a social/vernacular dance form to a performance art. Ask students if this is similar to hip hop or break dancing. What do they call the dancing they see in today’s music videos? In what ways are the dances in music videos related to the dances they do socially? Do they think this is another example of a social dance becoming performance dance? As we learned in Program 1, there are three main categories of dance—artistic, ceremonial, and recreational. Ask the students which of these categories are being discussed here and notice how one changes into the other or can be both at once.

Watch a video that includes jazz dancing, e.g. *Stormy Weather*, *West Side Story*. Ask the students to write down places in the film when they feel the music and dance are strongly connected. Review the information from Program 5 on locomotor and non-locomotor movement. As you watch the film, make a list of as many examples as you can find of both. Find examples of basic locomotor movements being combined to create more complex steps, e.g. step-hop, run-leap, **grapevine** step, slide-jump.

Move It

From a video, book or local dancer, help the students learn the Charleston and/or the Lindy Hop. There might even be a teacher or staff member in your school who knows one of these dances. In what ways are these dances similar and different? Compare them as well to the dances that are done today.

Jazz dance technique works a great deal with isolations and coordination. Have students practice isolating specific body parts, e.g. head side to side or down and up, shoulders up and down, ribcage forward and back, hips side to side. Use jazz music and do this to the beat of the music. In this way students are working with the element of time, as well as defining space by the shapes their bodies make. Try moving two parts independently, but at the same time, e.g. shoulders and hips. Try walking in time to the music while isolating and moving one body part in time to the music.

Explore syncopation and swing. Have students count in 4s while stepping in place. First step only on the 1 and 3, then only on the 2 and 4. Next step on the 1 and 3 while clapping on the 2 and 4. Listen to jazz music and see if you can hear beats 2 and 4 being accentuated in any way. This syncopated accenting of the music creates a feeling of “swing” in the music.

For more information

Visit the **DanceSense** web site at www.ket.org/dancesense

KEY TERMS		
Big Apple	interaction	structure
blues	isolations	swing
Charleston	jazz	swing dance
coordination	Lindy Hop	syncopation
grapevine	ragtime	vernacular
hip-hop	rap	

(see Glossary for definitions)

Key Kentucky Core Content Addressed

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

- AH-E-2.1.31
- AH-E-2.1.32
- AH-E-2.1.35
- AH-E-2.1.36
- AH-E-2.2.31
- AH-E-2.2.32
- AH-M-2.1.24
- AH-M-2.1.25
- AH-M-2.1.31
- AH-M-2.1.32
- AH-M-2.1.36
- AH-M-2.2.32
- AH-H-2.1.25
- AH-H-2.1.31
- AH-H-2.1.36
- AH-H-2.2.32
- AH-H-2.2.33
- AH-H-2.3.31

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

