TEACHING THE MUSICAL THEATRE DANCE REPERTORY: A
STUDY IN STYLE

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DEDICATION

To the teachers who instilled in me a love of dance and challenged me to realize my full potential: Lyndell Higgins, Pat Oplotnik, Tiffany van der Merwe, Alana Martin, Kelli Stevens, Jeremy Kiesman, Jay Fagan, Mary Price Boday, Kay Sandel, Veronica Wilcox, Khamla Somphanh.

To Jo Rowan, who—among many things, taught me that “life is short, so let’s do it right…and then left.”
[T]here is no division between artist and intellectual. Those who achieve greatness in either area, are, ultimately, both.

--Joshua Legg

_The Musical: A Look at the American Musical Theater_
This paper combines dance technique, history, and science to explore practical pedagogical approaches to teaching musical theatre dance styles. An effective approach to teaching musical theatre dance styles requires an understanding of the theatrical functions of dance, the application of dance science principles to increase style assimilation, knowledge of historical context, and an ability to use qualitative criteria to analyze and communicate the distinctions between choreographic styles.

Specifically devised physical preparation is a requirement for the highly athletic nature of musical theatre dance. This project report guides educators in building a musical theatre dance warm-up that is not only anatomically-sound, but also an invaluable tool in enhancing stylistic assimilation.

In addition to the physical and mental preparation necessary for performance, students must build a strong understanding of style. The qualitative criteria delineated in this text are effective tools for evaluating and differentiating between choreographic styles. Among these kinetic design elements are: spatial design, rhythmic shape, movement qualities, and compositional structures. The arrangement of these aspects determines the stylistic fingerprint of the choreographer.

An in-depth historical knowledge adds dimension and context to the study of choreographic styles, separating the amateur from the performer-scholar. In order to understand the impact of choreographers George Balanchine, Agnes de Mille, Jack Cole, and Jerome Robbins, one must trace the origin and development of dance in early America.

Agnes de Mille legitimized narrative dance as an accepted convention of the book musical; her highly influential and recognizable ballet-modern fusion made a case for the theatrical integration of dance.

Jack Cole eclipsed de Mille, creating a revolutionary mode of corporeal expression that incorporated modern dance, ethnic styles, and ballet. As the father of jazz dance technique, Cole sent shockwaves from Broadway to Hollywood, forever altering the theatre dance vocabulary. His demanding, animalistic, and depersonalized style forwent de Mille’s emphasis on character and story.

Jerome Robbins’ rise to prominence as a director-choreographer synthesized de Mille’s narrative approach and Cole’s jazz dance technique. He used movement to integrate the once separate singing and dancing choruses, facilitating a seamless theatrical expression. Robbins’ deep concern with character and motivation is reflected in the numerous dancers and choreographers he inspired. Bob Fosse, Gower Champion, Michael Bennett, and others
forged distinctive styles in accordance with the sophisticated, psychologically-motivated model set by their predecessors.

The approaches outlined in this text represent a convergence of scholarly inquiry and practical performance pedagogy. The integration of scholarly studies with embodied performance fosters well-rounded, intelligent, lifelong theatre practitioners capable of furthering the art form both creatively and pedagogically.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In Fall 2011, I designed and taught THEA 355 – Movement for Theatre I at San Diego State University. This project report is a result of my process in developing and teaching this undergraduate musical theatre dance course. The teaching methodologies developed in this process immersed students in a visually, textually, aurally, and kinesthetically integrated study of musical theatre dance styles. These undergraduate theatre students demonstrated the distinctive motor vocabulary of musical theatre styles by performing pieces created by Agnes de Mille, Jerome Robbins, Bob Fosse, Andy Blankenbuehler, and other significant choreographers. Students honed their ability to observe and analyze musical theatre dances, in addition to creating original choreography in the style of iconic choreographers. Through multimedia presentations and class discussions, students delved into the historical background, and artistic significance of each choreographer, applying this knowledge towards a final performance of contrasting pieces. This reinforcement of kinetic skills with history, analysis, and composition greatly enhanced learning outcomes and elicited positive student feedback.

Also in Fall 2011, I choreographed *The Boy Friend* at SDSU. I utilized a strong focus on 1920s dance crazes such as The Charleston, The Black Bottom, The Varsity Drag, and The Big Apple. My studies as a graduate student in THEA 650 Musical Theatre Dance History Seminar greatly supported this work. This period of intensive study led me to explore more effective methodologies for teaching musical theatre dance styles.

An effective approach to teaching theatre dance styles requires an understanding of the theatrical functions of dance, the application of dance science principles to increase stylistic assimilation, knowledge of historical context, and an ability to use qualitative criteria to analyze and communicate the distinctions between choreographic styles.

The wide scope of this project reflects a holistic exploration of historical perspective, anatomy, physiology, and choreographic style. Practical movement experiences are provided in each chapter, which support an integration of theory and practical performance pedagogy.
This scholarly examination of the broad spectrum of musical theatre dance styles is intended to guide dance educators toward the creation of successful musical theatre dance courses. The extensive bibliography provided at the end of this project provides valuable resources to accomplish this aim.

Chapter Two investigates the importance of a conscientiously devised warm-up and its positive effect on stylistic assimilation. Tactics for enhancing the relationship between an effective warm-up and style pedagogy will be introduced and explored. This chapter also addresses physiological aspects of the warm-up: core stabilization, strength, and flexibility training.

The study of multiple dance styles is a fundamental element of musical theatre training. In Chapter Three, qualitative criteria for describing choreographic style will be established by delineating the elements of dance composition and their application from a musical theatre perspective. Space, rhythm, and movement qualities will be defined and explored in the context of determining a choreographer’s stylistic fingerprint. The aspects contributing to the development of choreographic style will be examined: cultural viewpoints, large-scale aesthetic trends, codified dance idioms, and personal movement preferences.

Chapter Four provides historical context through the exploration of the disparate cultural influences contributing to the development of musical theatre dance into a sophisticated, integrated, and narrative art form. Major movements and key figures that influenced musical theatre dance pioneers will be highlighted within a broad context.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, characterize the definitive styles of pioneers Agnes de Mille, Jack Cole, and Jerome Robbins. Chapter Five delves into de Mille’s narrative and gestural style. Chapter Six introduces Jack Cole’s genre-bending contributions to the theatre dance vocabulary; his incorporation of ethnic dance influences into vernacular jazz expanded the possibilities of musical theatre dance. Special focus will be given to the revolutionary modes of corporeal expression introduced by this jazz dance pioneer. In Chapter Seven, Jerome Robbins’ synthesis of both Jack Cole and Agnes de Mille’s styles will be examined. Robbins’ style combines de Mille’s narrative use of ballet and modern dance with Jack Cole’s ethnic-infused modern-jazz style. Each chapter will explore the choreographer’s
compositional process and distinct stylistic fingerprint in addition to providing practical tactics for teaching these styles.

Chapter Eight reinstates the significance of theatre dance style pedagogy, summarizes the key elements of this project report, provides conclusions based on my research, and postulates areas for further exploration.

In this text, I will use the terms “theatre dance” and “musical theatre dance” interchangeably to refer to the dance styles used in choreography for the Broadway stage. The sources for this text include biographies, autobiographies, reviews, feature films, documentaries, and journals. Strong focus is placed on my analysis of video footage and practical experiences teaching musical theatre dance styles to undergraduate theatre performance students.
CHAPTER 2

ENHANCING STYLE ASSIMILATION THROUGH EFFECTIVE WARM-UP TECHNIQUES

[L]earn to tune your body just right, so that when you go to play it, it’s beautiful. --Luigi

*Luigi’s Jazz Warm Up: An Introduction to Jazz Style and Technique*

Style assimilation refers to the ability to adapt to the unique style of the choreographer in spite of the dancer’s inherent and habitual movement tendencies. An effective musical theatre dance warm-up not only builds technical skills and prepares the body for movement, but also enhances style assimilation.

Despite the grace and poise often associated with the art form, dance is an intensely athletic activity. A proper warm-up not only conditions the body to perform the virtuosic feats required by theatre dance styles, but also expands the dancer’s expressive capabilities. Jazz dance legend and pedagogue Luigi likens dance technique to the tuning of an instrument, this focused, technical study increases students ability to embody the emotional life of the movement in future combinations.

Musical theatre dance vocabulary ranges from extreme knee flexion in a layout position to full hip abduction in a switch-leap. The force absorbed by the body when landing on one leg from a *grand jeté* ranges from three to six times one’s body weight. Dance movements often “exceed normal ranges of motion and tax bone and soft tissues to the extremes of their ability to withstand such stress” (Allan 25). Seemingly minute technical errors can place undue strain on muscles and joints, leading to disastrous results. Technique increases the body’s resilience to the extreme physical rigors of dance; even the dancer with a so-called “ideal” body and flawless technique is vulnerable to injury (Erkert 4). Thus, in the interest of minimalizing injury risk and promoting career longevity; it is essential that musical theatre performers be trained in the proper execution of choreographed movement. A strong basis for this technical training exists in the warm-up.
A 1993 survey of injuries among 313 performers in 23 Broadway and Equity National Tour companies reported a 55% injury rate. The most common injuries reported were the lower extremities (52%), back (22%), and neck (12%). The knee (29%), ankle (25%), foot (20%), hip (12%) and calf (6%) were the most common lower extremity injuries. 62% of the performers surveyed believed that their injuries were preventable. (Evans, et al., “Survey of Injuries Among Broadway Performers” 77). A similar study was conducted in 1996, which surveyed 269 performers in twenty West End productions. (Evans et al., “Survey of Injuries Among West-End Performers” 585) These two studies produced an injury rate, location, frequency, and type consistent with previous studies of professional ballet and modern dancers in the United States and the United Kingdom. The majority of injuries sustained by Broadway and West End performers in the studies cited were muscular strains and sprains. These injuries are preventable, in fact, “strains, or pulled muscles, are generally the result of inadequate warm-up and/or flexibility” (Weiker 155). Contributing factors to heightened injury occurrence in musical theatre performers include: dancing on poorly constructed floors, extreme temperatures, wearing high-heeled shoes, the use of costumes that throw off alignment, severity of stage rake, poor dance technique, and insufficient warm-up.

The development of injuries during the run of a production has physical, financial, and psychological ramifications to the performer. Proper dance conditioning helps fortify the body against the inherently dangerous occupational conditions of commercial theatre dance. In fact, “the best treatment for dance injuries is prevention” (Ende 101).

The musical theatre dance class is traditionally divided into two distinct, yet interrelated components: first, the warm-up; second, the center section, which may also include locomotor exercises. An effective warm-up allows the performer to safely experience freedom and spontaneity while embracing the stylistic elements of choreographed movement.

The term “warm-up” does not fully describe its purpose. Although the elevation of body temperature is a byproduct of an effective warm-up, the focus should be on developing safe movement practices satisfying the stylistic demands of musical theatre dance; well-devised warm-up exercises will promote the transference of technical skills to musical theatre choreography. “Because control and alignment are essential factors in the prevention of dance injuries, it seems prudent that the major portion of dance classes, even at the advanced
levels, be devoted to developing biomechanically correct movement techniques (Chatfield and Burns 102). The warm-up should function as a preparatory movement progression that taxes the musculoskeletal, respiratory, cardiovascular, and nervous systems through increasingly challenging, repetitive, and conscientiously designed exercises. After all, “[t]he transformation of movement into art requires a well-trained body” (Clarkson 31).

Students often benefit from a warm-up comprised of consistent exercises. This establishes a ritual, allowing students to focus their energy on technical concepts without getting lost in the sequence. “[E]xercises, when not done right, are wrong for the body” (Luigi xi). Even the most well-intended exercises could have disastrous effects on the misaligned body, “If you keep doing things right long enough, they’ll get better, right. But if you keep doing things wrong long enough, they’ll feel right, wrong” (Luigi xix). In short, practice makes permanent. Technical concepts such as core stabilization and body alignment are reinforced as students develop a strong sense of body awareness. The instructor can add variety to the choreographed progression by changing the music, tempo, energy dynamic, or spatial pathway. At the more advanced levels, instructors can challenge students with longer, more complex movement patterns requiring multiple points of concentration.

 Appropriately designed warm-ups prepare the body and mind for both rapid and sustained movement requiring complex neuromuscular coordination (Nunn). The effective warm up will result in a 1.5° to 2° Fahrenheit increase in body temperature, causing perspiration. Raising body temperature increases blood flow, metabolic rate, enzyme production, and oxygen exchange within the muscles. The flow of synovial fluid within joints is also increased, which lubricates and protects the joint capsules. Warm muscles are more flexible and respond to nerve impulses with greater strength and speed than cold ones. Jack Cole’s style is noted for its rapid reversals and level changes requiring finely tuned neuromuscular coordination, or the ability of the brain and body to work effectively in tandem. Enhancing neuromuscular coordination from the beginning of the warm-up is essential; theatre dance styles frequently use reciprocal motion, in which the inability of a muscle to relax quickly enough can result in muscle tears. For example, when the speed of quadriceps contraction in a grand battement outpaces the rate of relaxation in the hamstrings, an acute injury to the hamstrings may occur. The well-designed warm-up prepares the brain to coordinate the joints and muscles to work most efficiently, which greatly reduces injury.
risk. These physiological benefits are best achieved through continuous movement that emphasizes varied types of active muscle contraction followed by a release.

The warm-up period should last a minimum of 15 minutes, but ideally will continue for a total of 20-30 minutes. Each joint and muscle group must be systematically warmed up, beginning with a restricted range of motion and intensity. Any early stretches should focus on stimulating muscles and not on increasing flexibility. Begin with slow, simple movements, and progress to more complex, dance-specific movement as body temperature rises (Franklin, *Conditioning for Dance* 10). The first stages should focus on increasing blood flow to the large, superficial muscles (quadriceps, hamstrings, abdominal muscles, extensors, deltoids, and gastrocnemius) and then progress to coordinating these superficial muscles with the more intrinsic iliopsoas and deep rotators. Some schools of thought advocate a proximal to distal approach, in which focus is placed on warming up the spine, then moving out to the extremities. Special attention should be paid to articulating and increasing the pliability of the spine in multiple planes of motion. Establishing a strong connection between breath and movement is an important step in encouraging efficient movement habits, which will carry over to style work. Following the conditioning principle of specificity, the warm-up will grow in intensity to reflect the large range of motion and force production demanded by future combinations. “A true warm-up done right will give you strength—not wear you out” (Luigi xi). The progression of warm-up exercises should incrementally overload the neurological, cardiovascular, and musculoskeletal systems without over-fatiguing the student.

Somatic movement practices such as Bartenieff Movement, Feldenkrais, and Body-Mind Centering advise the precise sequencing of exercises. These systems are based upon developmental sequencing and are modeled after the natural process of infant motor learning. These practices advocate beginning with simultaneous, symmetrical movement of upper and lower limbs, or homologous exercises. These pathways may involve flexion and extension on the sagittal plane (spinal roll downs, relevés, pliés, and temps lies). Next, students explore homolateral pathways emphasizing abduction and adduction on the lateral plane, such as side-stretches. This movement required coordination of one side of the body with the same side. The third type of exercise to be incorporated is contralateral, which explores the use of opposition between arms and legs, in tandem with rotational movement on the transverse
plane. Torso swings, body rolls, and ragdolls are exercises which emphasize this motional path- 
way. The instructor may use these types of exercise in combination, so long as the tempo is 
omoderate and the joints are articulated with gentle force in all planes of motion (Erkert 86). 
This exercise progression achieves both the physiological and neuromuscular goals of the warm-up.

Isolations entail the movement of one part of the body independently of the whole; for example, tilting the head to the right on the lateral plane. These finely controlled motor skills are prevalent in the styles of Jack Cole and Bob Fosse. In addition to their place as stylistic earmarks, isolations are effective in warming up joints and increasing mobility; however, the interconnectivity of the musculoskeletal system makes the true isolation of body parts anatomically impossible. Luigi developed a technique notable for its emphasis on fluidity and musicality; he stresses the importance of full body coordination, “Dance isn’t about isolating. It’s about using everything inside of you to make a sound. I don’t separate the body; I keep the body connected” (Luigi 7). Although, to the eye it appears that the hip moves autonomously in a Cole hip isolation; in reality, the ribs and shoulder girdle must be actively stabilized in order to facilitate a clean isolation of the hips. One way to apply Luigi’s concept of body connectivity is to incorporate locomotor movement with isolations. For example, traveling with step-touches to the right as the hips move in an alternating lateral pattern.

Another application is the use of body-part-intiation or polycentric isolations, where the movement of one body part immediately leads into the movement of another as in a body roll. For example, a head roll leads into a shoulder roll, which leads into rotation of the rib cage, which leads to the rotation of the pelvis. Additionally, choreographers exhibit differing preferences in movement impulse. An arm reach initiated by the pelvis has a much different design and meaning than an arm reach initiated by the elbow. Incorporating impulse work in the warm-up helps students develop a deeper understanding of the subtleties of corporeal expression.

Luigi, Jack Cole, and Gus Giordano all integrated traditional ballet exercises into their unique jazz dance training systems. Incorporating a center barre honors the major influence of classical ballet on theatre dance. A well-devised center barre emphasizes balance, teaching students to isometrically stabilize themselves by pressing the shoulders and
armpits down, contracting the abdominals toward the spine, using the entire back to move the arms, and stretching the spine from the base of the skull to the tailbone, without the aid of a physical barre. The center barre promotes balance, spatial awareness, musicality, and sophisticated motor control through sustained, repeated movement. The center barre should not be attempted until the body is sufficiently warm.

Traditional ballet exercises such as: demi-plié, battement tendu, battement degagé, rond de jambe, fondu, développé, and relevé can be easily incorporated into the theatre dance warm-up. The reinforcement of toe-ball-heel landing mechanics should be emphasized when working through the foot, especially when focusing on ballet-based choreographic styles that feature elevations such as Michael Kidd and Jerome Robbins. Incorporating flexed foot exercises helps create muscular balance between dorsiflexion and plantar flexion, which dramatically reduces the occurrence of foot and ankle injuries (Nagrin 101).

The center barre should represent the dichotomy of parallel and turned-out positions employed in theatre dance styles. “A turn-out should be developed, not forced” (Luigi 17). Teaching cues should lead students to initiate turn-out from the neck of the femur and not from the knees or feet, “the angle of turnout of the feet must be determined by the outward rotations of the thighs and not one jot more” (Nagrin 97). The center barre helps students develop kinesthetic awareness of proper placement, a necessity when exploring styles that employ unconventional body lines.

The use of grand-plié is controversial due to the increased external knee rotation and large compression forces at work at the depth of the grand-plié. This extreme degree of knee flexion places the joint at risk, especially in beginning dancers who lack the muscle tone to dynamically stabilize the knees, pelvis, and torso. Grand-plié should be used sparingly or substituted with supine, non-weight bearing exercises that condition the target muscle groups.

In addition to catalyzing the physiological processes that prepare the body for vigorous movement, the warm-up should condition the body to surmount the rigors of musical theatre choreography. Some would argue that the majority of time spent in a musical theatre dance class should be devoted to learning steps, especially with actor-singers. The learning of steps is merely a means to an end, “being consistent in movement patterns, rather than learning dance steps, is the ultimate goal” (Skrinar 273). The increased body awareness
promoted by this approach improves students’ ability to assimilate style with a sensitivity to movement qualities, dynamics, level, and shape. The effective teacher empowers students by succinctly communicating what technical or stylistic concept is being applied in each exercise. “When students have a clear understanding of their final goal, skill acquisition is more efficient and effective” (Skrinar 273).

A focus on anatomically-sound movement techniques is an essential tool in teaching performers to juggle the antagonistic breathing demands of singing, dancing, and acting. The full thoracic expansion demanded by proper breath support for singing is directly at odds with the dancer’s belly-button-into-spine technique of core stabilization. As dance students progress in their training, they gain more efficient neurological control of their bodies, meaning that less effort can be expended in dancing and more attention can be devoted to acting and singing (Erkert 57). “[W]hen muscles are balanced and the pelvis is hanging in correct alignment, the abdominal muscles can relax in their postural duties and lavish more attention on diaphragmatic breathing” (Erkert 60). A well-devised approach to dance conditioning will address the distinct breathing demands for an integrated performance.

The major components of dance conditioning are cardiovascular endurance, strength, muscular endurance, and flexibility. All of these conditioning elements emphasize efficient and well-coordinated movement. Due to time constraints within a dance class, total body conditioning is impractical in the warm-up. Instead, one or two conditioning principles should be given focus as needed. The serious musical theatre performer will also need to devote time outside of class for total body conditioning.

“Cardiorespiratory endurance is the ability to continue aerobic activity over a period of time” (Fitt 395). In order to condition the cardiovascular system, the target heart rate must be maintained through sustained exercise of a moderate level for a minimum of 20-30 minutes. Due to the start and stop nature of traditional dance classes in which important corrections are given after each exercise, the cardiovascular system is often insufficiently challenged. Dance classes tend to require short bursts of activity at high intensity, or anaerobic exercise, which requires a different kind of energy metabolism. Many performers are unprepared for the extended bouts of muscular activity required during a production. During performance, many dancers sustain injuries due to poor cardiovascular endurance (Erkert 67). It is important that the exercises move in rapid succession with little chance for
rest between exercises. This allows the dancer to develop both muscular and cardiorespiratory endurance. When the instructor must stop the flow of the warm-up to answer questions or make corrections, students should be encouraged to do leg swings and other slow, non-disruptive movement to facilitate the removal of lactic acid from the blood, “Complete rest, such as sitting down, delays removal of lactic acid and prolongs recovery time” (Clarkson 39).

Strength is “the ability to exert tension against resistance” (Fitt 392). Sufficient strength is not only important in achieving the aesthetic demands of musical theatre choreography, but an essential factor in injury prevention. “The repetitive use of body mechanics that strengthen compensatory muscles and thereby produce musculoskeletal balance tends to reduce injuries, while the repetition of mechanics that create muscle imbalance encourages them” (Nagrin 101). Strength training in a musical theatre dance class should be focused on promoting muscular balance within the joints and muscles on both sides of the body and between agonist and antagonist pairs, as well as increasing the ability of muscle groups to work in tandem. Pilates and Yoga offer excellent exercises that build full-body strength. For example, the arm supported plank exercise. In a plank, the weight is equally balanced between the arms and legs, using the core to stabilize the body. The plank not only strengthens the arms, but also develops the shoulder girdle, abdominal wall, and intrinsic musculature of the torso. The position of the arms and legs can be modified to target specific muscle groups and add increased resistance. The use of yoga blocks and Thera-Bands are excellent ways to increase resistance and achieve greater strength gains. The instructor should tailor strength conditioning to the abilities and needs of the class (Higgins). The instructor can show discretion by choosing exercises that employ a full range of motion, avoiding any sacrifice of flexibility for strength.

The proper sequencing of exercises is crucial in maximizing strength and minimizing excessive fatigue. The larger muscles of the torso, hip, and thigh should be exercised first, followed by the smaller muscles. Sequential exercises should focus on different muscle groups, allowing sufficient recovery of previously exercised muscles. For example, a strenuous side plank exercise that builds the obliques may be followed by a rond de jambe en l’air exercise that strengthens the lower extremities.
“A muscle’s strength is particular to how it has been strengthened” (Erkert 58), otherwise known as the Principle of Specificity. In order to condition the body to perform a leap with a quality of burst-like expansion, a grand battement is a more appropriate exercise than a sustained enveloppé. Optimal strength gains require movement similar to the goal movement and may include variations on elements used in future combinations. Musical theatre choreography requires a combination of muscle contraction types across a wide range of motion; therefore, it is important to incorporate exercises that strengthen each type of contraction.

Isometric contractions are contractions that do not involve movement, but instead require the muscle to maintain a static position as in a pose or balance. The ability to hit and maintain a strong “button” at the end of a large production number requires this type of contraction. The ability of the muscles to maintain an isometric contraction is crucial in the execution of piroettes, hinges, battements, and other dance movements that are dependent on the static placement of the trunk and extremities. Conversely, in a sit-up, the abdominals work in an isotonic contraction against gravity. Isotonic contractions are muscle actions which involve movement. Concentric and eccentric contractions are both types of isotonic contractions. The up-phase of a grand battement is called a concentric contraction because the quadriceps shortens as it lifts the leg to the desired height. Eccentric contractions are essentially braking actions. The quadriceps are said to be working eccentrically on the down-phase of the grand battement as the dancer resists the pull of gravity by slowly lowering the leg to the floor. In this example, the quadriceps contract and lengthen simultaneously. Isometric and isotonic contractions can easily be combined in a single exercise. For example, take eight counts to slowly rise to a plank from a prone position (concentric isotonic), hold the plank position for eight counts (isometric) then slowly bend the arms for 16 counts to lower the body to a prone position (eccentric isotonic).

It is important to gradually increase the difficulty of the exercise in order to gradually overload the muscles, ensuring progress and avoiding training plateaus. Over the course of a semester, the instructor can increase the number of repetitions of each exercise and vary the speed of contraction so that the body develops strength through consistent challenge. As the student gains strength in the superficial muscles of the quadriceps, hamstrings, abdominals, gluteus maximus, etc., the instructor can incorporate a greater focus on the deeper, more
intrinsic muscles, such as the deep internal rotators. Some schools of thought advocate the reverse—focusing on the spine and muscles closest to the bones first, and then moving on to the superficial muscles.

Strength and flexibility have a “yin and yang” relationship in dance conditioning for musical theatre. Balance between the aspects of strength and flexibility promotes efficient movement patterns, which prevent injury. In musical theatre, the body is required to attain extreme ranges of motion with strength and ease. For the musical theatre performer, flexibility is not only an aesthetic ideal, but a crucial component of long-term injury prevention. Flexibility is defined as “the range of motion achievable without injury at a joint or group of joints” (Knudson 24). Lack of flexibility can lead to technical compensations resulting in injury. For instance, a dancer with a tight calf muscle may compensate by pronating the foot in grand-plié, placing the lower body out of alignment and at risk for injury. Proper stretching aligns the body and discourages muscular asymmetry, which has a devastating long-term effect on the body. The instructor should be aware of the various anatomical, physiological, and psychological factors that influence flexibility, including the ability of the dancer to relax mentally, the extensibility of ligaments and tendons, as well as the constriction of bones within joint capsules. Stretches should focus on developing the range of motion required in the specific muscles called upon in musical theatre choreography, otherwise known as functional flexibility. Functional flexibility involves the practical application of flexibility across the gamut of muscle contraction types. It is one thing for a dancer to be able sit in a 180° split on the floor and quite another to be able to attain this same degree of hip abduction in a sauté de chat. This underscores the importance of developing strength in tandem with flexibility.

Flexibility may be acquired through anatomically-sound stretching techniques. The muscles of the body are wrapped in an intricate web of nerves, which send signals to the brain when the muscle is being stretched beyond its limit. In an effort to prevent trauma to the muscle, the body responds with a contraction known as a stretch reflex. Stretching techniques are designed to override this reflex.

Static stretching is the most effective technique for increasing long-term flexibility. Static stretches are sustained stretches which must maintained for a minimum of 20-30 seconds, allowing the time necessary to override the muscle’s natural instinct to contract;
however, in order to attain dramatic, long-term increases in range of motion, the stretch must be maintained for at least one minute. A major flaw in dance classes is that stretches are not held long enough to be truly effective. Human muscle is viscoelastic and responds best to slow, consistently applied force of moderate intensity. When stretched, muscle behaves much like Silly Putty, in which slow, sustained force stretches the putty permanently. Conversely, the application of rapid force results in greater stiffness and increased likelihood of breakage (Knudson 25).

Because static stretching has a weakening effect on muscle, the bulk of static stretching should occur during the cool-down portion of class after the body is sufficiently warm. Excessive deep stretching “can have a negative influence on strength and power performance” (Faigenbaum and McFarland 25). Because warm-ups are designed to ready the body for the burst-like, anaerobic, and high intensity nature of musical theatre dance, prolonged deep-stretching should be reserved for the cool-down portion of class.

Dr. Herman Kabat originally developed Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation (PNF) as a rehabilitative physical therapy technique. PNF uses the power of the contraction to facilitate a deep stretch. For example, the dancer stands in parallel second position, allowing the pull of gravity to extend the torso towards the floor while isometrically contracting the quadriceps. By actively contracting the agonist muscles in this position, the hamstrings and gluteus maximus are extended past the limits of a gravity-dependent passive stretch. PNF takes advantage of the reciprocal relationship between muscles. The muscles of the body work in synergistic pairs; when the quadriceps contract, the brain commands the hamstrings to lengthen. The stronger the power of the contraction, the greater the relaxation of the corresponding muscle. Alternating between PNF and passive static stretch techniques is a valuable tool in attaining long-term range of motion gains (Erkert 64).

The use of ballistic stretch techniques to increase range of motion is counterintuitive and potentially damaging to muscle tissue. Ballistic stretching is characterized by bouncing or pulsating movements; these percussive motions tighten muscles by activating protective reflex contractions within the muscle, placing the dancer at great risk for muscle damage and over-fatigue. “Ballistic stretching of muscle is much more likely to result in injury to the muscle than slower stretching techniques like static stretching or proprioceptive
neuromuscular facilitation” (Knudson 25). Ballistic stretching has also been shown to increase muscle soreness.

Although ballistic stretching is a dangerous and ineffective technique for increasing flexibility, it must be understood that ballistic elements exist in the theatre dance vocabulary. Musical theatre performers are required to dance with a wide range of energy qualities, from slow, sustained, balletic leg extension to the rapid and precise footwork of tap dance. It is important to understand that ballistic techniques should never be used to increase flexibility; however, pulsating movements can help enhance the natural coiling action of the muscles, resulting in better rebound from jumps and sharper dynamic attack. “A stretch preceding a contraction creates a more powerful contraction” (Erkert 63). Ballistic stretching applies this principle and results in greater peak forces in the muscle contraction. If implemented, ballistic stretch techniques should only be performed when the body is fully warm and at a moderate tempo within a very limited range of motion (Higgins).

Among the myriad benefits associated with stretching come some risks. Because misalignment is a major factor in the development of dance injuries, stretching should reinforce proper body alignment. “The most critical skill developed in flexibility training is alignment” (Erkert 62). Great care must be taken to ensure that undue stress is not placed on the tendons or ligaments during a stretch, especially those of the structurally precarious knee joint. “[T]he joint needs to be securely fastened in order to stretch the muscle and keep the joint tissue from being torn” (Erkert 62). Ligaments and tendons are inelastic, and once extended beyond their limits, they cannot regain their shape, which undermines joint stability. One must avoid weight-bearing stretches that place stress on tendons and ligaments (Nagrin 88). The successful stretch is accompanied by a feeling of extension and release within the belly of the muscle, not a feeling of locking or strain at the joint. Allowing a slight bend at the joint can help facilitate muscle elongation, while discouraging traumatic hyperextension of the joint capsule.

Although flexibility is a major factor in long-term injury prevention, deep stretches may not be the most effective tool in preparing the body to dance full-out. Recent findings suggest that short-term range of motion gains are best achieved through low-intensity stretching in tandem with temperature-raising activity (Franklin, *Conditioning for Dance* 10).
Stretches should focus on developing functional flexibility, or the “ability of the muscle to function within the tasks to be performed” (Erkert 65). Dynamic stretches are active and recruit the entire body, elevate core body temperature and require high levels of neuromuscular coordination. The main goal is to activate, not necessarily relax muscle. Planks, lunges, chassés, arm circles, downward dog stretches, and leg swings all incorporate a dance-specific range of motion and energy dynamic while reinforcing proper body alignment (Vogel 54). It is important to differentiate dynamic stretching from ballistic stretching. Dynamic stretching is characterized by a controlled elongation of muscles and does not entail pulsating movements (Faigenbaum and McFarland 26).

Spine stabilization exercises develop the muscular strength and endurance necessary to maintain safe spinal alignment regardless of body position. Theatre dance styles require a wide range of corporeal shapes; however, in the interest of spinal health, the student must maintain a relatively consistent spinal orientation. Core stabilization exercises should be used in lieu of traditional sit-ups. Sit-ups have not been shown to positively influence back health; in fact they decrease core stability and expose the lumbar spine to dangerous compression levels, setting the dancer at increased risk for injury (Berardi 124). Stabilization exercises activate all three layers of the abdominal wall (external oblique, internal oblique, and transversus abdominus) while maintaining a neutral spine. Hollowing or pushing the abdominals out should be avoided. The goal is to strengthen the core so that it works autonomously from lung ventilation (Berardi 125). This is a crucial tool in training musical theatre performers who must sing and dance simultaneously because it enables them to take breaths diaphragmatically without sacrificing safe spinal alignment. Lunges and cat/camel stretches can be used to prepare the spine for core-stabilization exercises. Coccyx balances, curl ups, side bridges, Pilates teaser, Pilates hundreds, and birddog progressions are all effective means of challenging the intrinsic musculature, resulting in core strength and endurance gains. Crosstraining in Yoga, Pilates, and Gyrokinesis focus on core-stabilization and emphasize neuromuscular coordination, strength, and endurance in tandem with the flow and flexibility of dance. Modern dance disciplines such as Graham and Horton techniques include floor exercises which may be adapted for use in theatre dance courses.

Extensive research has shown that injuries common to musical theatre performers are avoidable through preventative exercise and the reinforcement of proper technique (Micheli
Applying principles of dance science to help students meet the aesthetic demands of musical theatre dance, while minimizing the risk of injury is the moral responsibility of each instructor. At the end of the warm-up, the dancer should be breathing deeply, perspiring, and experiencing a feeling of warmth all the way down to the bones.

In addition to these physiological benefits, the warm-up has a pivotal role in enhancing style assimilation. Denying the student an excellent warm-up results in a dancer who is afraid to take risks, and with good reason. From the expressive gesture of de Mille to the athletic, multi-directional style of Cole and Robbins, the warm-up is the key to expanding the creative freedom of the dancer, increasing the likelihood of success when attempting future combinations.
CHAPTER 3

QUALITATIVE CRITERIA FOR DELINEATING
CHOREOGRAPHIC STYLE

By becoming adept at as many types of movement as possible, you are creating an instrument whose extra hand flourish, rapid footwork sequence, or unusual improvisation might just be what distinguishes you from the other dancers in the room.

--Debra McWaters

*Musical Theatre Training: The Broadway Theatre Project Handbook*

A comprehensive study of style is a fundamental component in the development of versatile musical theatre performers. “Style” refers to a distinctive manner of physical expression and may be described as “a recurrent or qualitatively patterned way of moving” (Blom and Chaplin 136).

“The education of a painter traditionally includes learning the techniques of the masters—Rembrandt, Monet, Van Gogh—not of one, but of several. This training encourages historical perspective; it provides exposure to, and actual experience in, widely differentiated yet highly formed styles, ones that have influenced the state of the art in its development to the present day” (Blom and Chaplin 144). Similarly, students of musical theatre can benefit from studying the masterworks of Agnes de Mille, Jack Cole, and Jerome Robbins. These innovators left an indelible imprint on musical theatre choreography, setting the aesthetic precedent for all choreographers who followed them. An in-depth study of a variety of dance idioms and styles helps to expand the expressive capabilities of the body; this exposes students to movement that lies outside of their habitual tendencies. The ability to easily morph between disparate styles is a necessity for the musical theatre performer. As such, pedagogical goals should not be limited to a superficial familiarity with multiple styles, but should help students develop a thorough understanding of specific elements contributing to choreographic style. Mastery of observational skills will allow students to exhibit stylistic integrity through the performance of iconic musical theatre dances.
Through viewing a wide sampling of choreographic works, recognizable stylizations may be ascertained. Before delving into a successful exploration of style, appropriate qualitative criteria must be established. This investigation will analyze the stylistic distinctions between iconic musical theatre choreographers by considering each choreographer’s signature arrangement of kinetic design elements—spatial design, rhythmic shape, movement qualities, and compositional structures.

The choreographer’s medium is the human body and its ever-changing relationship to time and space. Doris Humphrey’s seminal text, *The Art of Making Dances* and *The Intimate Act of Choreography* by Lynne Anne Blom and L. Tarin Chaplin delineate several kinetic design elements. These building blocks of dance composition are: spatial design, rhythmic shape, movement qualities, and compositional structures. By developing an understanding of the tools available to choreographers, one may hone an appreciation for the diverse styles generated using the same tools.

The dancing body exists in and interacts with theatrical space. Spatial design is the “where” of choreography. Choreographers carve three-dimensional pathways using direction, level, and shape.

Level refers to the body’s vertical relationship to the earth; Rudolph Laban’s movement theory delineates three primary gradations: low, middle, and high. Choreographers tend to have a predilection towards one of the three levels across this spectrum. Low level is characterized by a surrender of the body weight into the earth, primitive and ethnic dances fall into this category. The dancer experiences a sensation of being rooted into the ground. Knee slides, crouches, and deep knee hinges are examples of movements that exhibit low level. Middle level ranges from *demi plié* to *relevé* and is accompanied by a feeling of “standing on the ground rather than of or into it” (Blom and Chaplin 32). Middle level allows the greatest range of mobility, facilitating an efficient transition between the two extremes of low and high. High level is typified by seemingly effortless, bounding elevations in rebellion against gravity’s pull. Vertical space can also be emphasized through the use of *pointe* shoes, raised scenic structures such as staircases, ladders, and ramps, acrobatics, or through assisted lifts.

Direction refers to the trajectory of the motional body along a given horizontal pathway. The body may traverse upstage, downstage, stage right, stage left, and diagonally in
an endless array of linear and curved patterns. Due to the unique architecture of theatres, whether proscenium, arena, thrust, or otherwise, movement in a specified direction across the stage has its own connotation. “It seems obvious, with even the most superficial thought on the subject, that the stage, a place for communication, has some very special attributes spatially, which can be made to help choreography or injure it, according to the understanding of the composer” (Humphrey 73). Dean Carra’s classic text on play direction identifies several tonal qualities or characteristic moods of the stage, “we find that each area not only has its own value in terms of strength and weakness, but also seems to have a definite feeling or mood value” (Dean and Carra 135). For example, the downstage area is associated with intimacy, familiarity, and vulnerability, while the upstage half of the stage carries a feeling of judgment, imperviousness, and estrangement. Crosses upstage are perceived by the audience as a form of retreat, whereas a charge downstage denotes confrontation. Humphrey likens theatrical space to a sensitive instrument in which each stage area has a unique visual timbre. “In fact, all the areas seem to have a sensitive waxing and waning rhythm” (Humphrey 76). Some choreographers work within this traditional sense of stage direction, while others, in the school of Merce Cunningham, employ a more democratic approach in which all areas of the stage hold equal power. The unique ways in which choreographers utilize stage space distinguishes choreographic style.

Shape is a crucial element in determining the mood, meaning, and emotional intention of a piece. Comprised of a combination of lines and curves, shape can be used to describe the silhouette, or form of the body against the spatial canvas. Shape can be used to describe the form of individual dancers or the collective arrangement of groups of dancers in space. There are two primary categories of shape: symmetrical and asymmetrical. The perfect proportions of symmetry create a sense of stasis and security, alternatively, asymmetrical groupings and body shapes create visual excitement and conflict. Similarly, circular shapes exude a sense of succession, naturalness, and sustained flow, while straight lines and angles create a more mechanical, oppositional, or jagged appearance. Through the juxtaposition of symmetry and asymmetry, curves and straight lines, choreographers manipulate shape to establish and create character, mood, and environment. The relationship, or pattern of shapes created by a mass of bodies is one of the choreographer’s strongest tools. These complementary and contrasting shapes formed by multiple dancers is known as group design.
Spatial design is strongly influenced by posture. While shape refers to the form of the body or bodies in space, posture refers to the neutral orientation of anatomical structures, especially the spine and pelvis. Choreographic styles, such as George Balanchine’s, employ the idealized posture of classical ballet with its emphasis on anatomically advantageous alignment and the maximization of corporal mobility—achieved through the use of turnout and the elongation of the spine. In contrast, Bob Fosse’s pelvic-centric style features turned-in feet and a slouched spinal orientation, this emphasizes the posterior curve of the cervical spine. These postural differences in body alignment singularize these opposing styles.

Choreographers craft designs in space as well as in time, if spatial design is the “where” of choreography, then rhythm is the “when.” Rhythm is one of the most vital rudiments of dance composition; it infuses every aspect of the human experience, from the metronomic beat of the heart to the consistently timed change of weight in walking. Rhythm organizes spatial design into logical phrases of time to be processed by an audience. Jazz, tap, and other dances of vernacular origin place high value on rhythm, while other dance forms such as ballet and modern dance emphasize other factors such as technique, choreographic concept, and aesthetic purity.

A beat is the smallest unit of rhythmic measurement. The speed, or rate of this pulse, is known as the tempo. Choreographers often exhibit an affinity toward certain tempi. Some intentionally work against the tempo of the music. Tempi may be described as very fast, fast, moderate, slow, or very slow. A dancer moving at a rapid tempo may be perceived as robust, youthful, or anxious while a dancer moving at a slow tempo may appear deliberate, lethargic, or powerful. The normal rate of walking is often used as the basis for tempo; however, the speed of the average walk varies depending on extrinsic influences such as: geographical location, social class, and time period. Consequently, tempo is relative depending upon the audience’s intrinsic sense of tempo.

Closely related to tempo is accent, which denotes emphasis or stress. Accentuation may be used to highlight important spatial designs by aligning or contrasting movement with musical accents. In a 3/4 waltz, beat one typically receives emphasis: 1 2 3, 1 2 3.

Syncopated movement works against conventional accents by changing emphasis in unexpected ways. Choreographers vary in their predilections for rhythmic complexity through accentuation; some show a preference towards syncopation and irregular
accentuation, while others employ a more straightforward musical approach. Syncopation reflects an interruption of rhythmical flow, this kinetic and aural disruption serves various compositional purposes. Additionally, the juxtaposition of stasis versus movement highlights important choreographic moments. A strong, still pose after a full minute of continuous movement emphasizes the pose, creating visual interest.

The elements explored thus far: spatial design, and rhythmical shape, encompass the tools used by choreographers to establish the “where” and “when” of dance composition. The third element is perhaps the most nebulous.

Movement qualities describe how movement is initiated, taking into account the nature and amount of force, speed, flow, and resistance used to create a specific movement. Energy is to movement quality as time is to rhythmical shape. The choreographer sculptures energy in order to manifest kinetic ideas. Energy, dynamics, and force are interchangeably and imprecisely used terms, carrying a variety of subjective meanings. These terms attempt to describe the intensity, texture, or “how” of movement. In order to help students perceive and apply movement qualities with accuracy, precise terminology must be established. In this work, the term “movement quality” will be used to describe, “the distinctly observable attributes or characteristics produced by dynamics and made manifest in movement” (Blom and Chaplin 73).

The human body is in perpetual contention with gravity, which the body exerts consistent force against merely to maintain a standing position. Doris Humphrey’s concept of Fall and Recovery explores this relationship. Force (known as weight in Laban Movement Analysis) describes the intensity of the energy expended in executing movement, all of which falls along a continuum between strong and gentle. Of the eight basic effort actions delineated by Laban Movement Analysis, four involve strong force: pressing, wringing, slashing, and punching (thrusting). With beginning students, there often exists a disparity between the dancer’s kinesthetic sense and the audience’s perceived measurement of force. Gentle force is typically much easier to produce; the instructor’s charge is to help develop students’ versatility in choreographic styles requiring both gentle and strong force.

The independent elements of speed and force converge to create resistance. Strong, sustained movements involve higher degrees of resistance, resulting in higher amounts of muscular tension as in pulling a large piece of taffy. Slow, gentle movements have a gliding,
soothing quality. Fast, strong movements may be perceived as assaultive or cutting. Multiple gradations exist on the combined continuums of speed and force.

Flow describes the spatial journey of a movement and may be either sustained or percussive. “Sustained movement has a range of duration” (Blom and Chaplin 79). Pressing, wringing, and floating are sustained movements according to Laban Movement Analysis. Sustained movement is expended in a continuous, uninterrupted stream over a given interval, while “percussive movement occurs within a single instant” (Blom and Chaplin 79), and is characterized by jerky stops and starts. Percussive movement manifests in sudden, staccato, flicking, dabbing, slashing, and thrusting bursts of energy. It is important to distinguish these categories as independent of metronomic elements such as speed and tempo. For example, water can move as quickly as whitewater rapids, or as slowly as a tranquil stream, regardless of speed, both are examples of sustained flow.

Movement idiosyncrasies may also be defined in terms movement initiation. Does a step begin with a lead of the hip, a flick of the wrist, or a tight contraction at the center? The impetus for movement falls into two categories: proximal and distal, these anatomical terms describe corporeal directionality. Distal movement is often gestural, originating away from the center of the body, utilizing the extremities—the fingers, hands, and arms. Conversely, proximal movement initiation involves core, spine, and pelvis-dominated movement. A focus on the impetus for movement helps the dancer surpass mere imitation of a choreographer’s style in favor of a deep kinesthetic understanding.

Form refers to the overall organization of compositional elements. How are spatial design, rhythmical shape, and movement qualities arranged? When working on a musical with an existing score, compositional structures are often dictated by the existing music. When working on an original musical, the choreographer frequently collaborates with a dance arranger to structure dance sequences based on the composer’s themes. The ability to build a number to a theatrically satisfying conclusion helps distinguish the master choreographer from the amateur.

Activist artist Ben Shahn describes style as “that peculiar personal rapport which has developed between an artist and his medium” (Shahn 51). Aspects contributing to choreographic style include: one, cultural viewpoints—a choreographer’s kinetic reaction to extrinsic socioeconomic, ideological, and political forces at work in his or her historical
moment; two, aesthetic trends—alignment with or rejection of major movements in the fine and performing arts; three, codified dance idioms— the theatrical recontextualization of established movement vocabularies; four, personal movement preferences—intrinsic attributes dictated by the choreographer’s body composition, level of technical facility, personality, emotional life, and personal background.

The range of a choreographer’s movement language is largely determined by the nature of their dance training. American musical theatre dance has evolved to incorporate an increasingly diverse fusion of dance idioms. The term “dance idiom” refers to the movement language or vocabulary used within a given work. Choreography on the Broadway stage draws influence from an international array of classical, contemporary, vernacular, and pre-classic dance forms. Throughout its evolution, theatre dance has absorbed elements of ballroom, classical ballet, jazz, tap, hip-hop, modern, and ethnic forms such as classical East Indian, and African dance. For example, the movement vocabulary of de Mille’s “June is Bustin’ Out All Over” includes temps levé arabesques, frappés, and soutenus borrowed from classical ballet. These elements distinguish Agnes de Mille’s style from the earthbound jazz runs and intricate, East Indian influenced hand articulation exhibited in Jack Cole’s “Not Since Ninevah.” The inclusion of codified dance techniques has a role in determining the range and content of the dance vocabulary used within a choreographer’s work.

Choreographers, like all artists react to extrinsic aesthetic influences. Large-scale cultural movements, philosophies, and genres such as Expressionism, Cubism, Realism, Surrealism, Neo-classicism, Naturalism, Post-Modernism, and others are either rejected or reflected in the work of theatre dance choreographers. Musical theatre is inherently multidisciplinary and fosters cross-pollination between otherwise disparate branches of the fine arts. The techniques, methods, and degree of abstraction embodied by choreographers are often tied to specific aesthetic movements and philosophies.

An examination of the ways choreographers interact with time, space, and energy forms the basis for determining choreographic style. An in-depth study of theatre dance styles is an essential element of a well-rounded musical theatre education. George Balanchine, Agnes de Mille, Jack Cole, and Jerome Robbins set the precedent for psychologically-motivated, sophisticated choreographic styles in musical theatre. The influence of these choreographers is so far-reaching that the work of all subsequent musical
theatre choreographers is derivative of these originators. In order to understand the future of musical theatre choreography, one must delve into the past. A study of theatre dance styles will reveal the convergence of disparate cultural influences over hundreds of years. The following chapter explores the growing importance of theatre dance and its role in defining and synthesizing the integrated musical.
CHAPTER 4

FROM BASSE TO BALANCHINE: DANCE IN
EARLY AMERICA AND THE RISE OF THE
CHOREOGRAPHER

Mastering choreographic styles requires a detailed knowledge of historical context. In America, George Balanchine, Agnes de Mille, and Jack Cole forged the basis for sophisticated, psychologically motivated choreography in commercial musical theatre. The innovations set forth by these pioneers were synthesized by director-choreographer Jerome Robbins, who in turn inspired a new generation of director-choreographers, including Michael Bennett, Bob Fosse, and Gower Champion. Prior to the 1940s, individuals known as dance directors created spectacular routines that contributed little to the plot of the show. As choreographers usurped the reign of the dance directors, choreographed movement transcended divertissement, evolving into a crucial, unifying force in the integrated American Musical.

The history of dance in American musical theatre involves a transmogrification of imported cultural influences including, but not limited to, European folk dance and classical ballet, dances of the African diaspora, American minstrelsy, vaudeville, burlesque, variety shows, and the rise of modern dance. Musical theatre choreographers distill these pluralistic influences to create individual styles.

European-style entertainments were popular in Colonial America and maintained their popularity throughout the American Revolution and through the Civil War. Elegant European ballets and social dances such as the waltz coexisted alongside reels and English country dances. Touring European ballet companies began to influence the American cultural aesthetic creating a demand for classical ballet in America. Rousing step dances such as the Sailor’s Hornpipe, made famous by John Durang (1768-1822), and comic dances such as the Drunken Peasant were also prominent sources of entertainment. These diversions were often performed as afterpieces to Shakespeare or between acts of a play. Dance was further integrated in comic operas such as John Gay’s The Beggar’s Opera, in the form of
pantomime ballets such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1767), and most famously in *The Black Crook* (1866), which featured a loosely structured, spectacular, and melodramatic plot with dances interspersed. Incrementally, the use of movement to establish plot, character, theme, and other narrative elements invigorated the role of dance in America.

The use of classical mythology as source material in 18th century popular entertainments gave way to a renewed interest in the passion, power, and originality embodied by the patriotic American spirit of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The introduction of American themes, current events, and popular culture into traditionally European entertainment forms represented a gradual rejection of European domination in favor of a burgeoning uniquely American cultural identity.

The African slave trade beginning in the 17th century marked one of the darkest periods in American history. Slaves abducted from Africa and sold as chattel in the United States struggled to maintain their cultural heritage in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. Individuals originating from disparate countries throughout the African continent each possessed distinct traditions and cultural identities; these cultural distinctions intermingled, forming a highly influential dance tradition. Elements of African culture were gradually absorbed into mainstream, popular entertainment. Unique elements of African dance have been traced to specific regions of Africa; many popular dances of the 20th and 21st century from Bojangles to Beyoncé trace their origins to indigenous African dance forms.

Elements of African dance were appropriated and popularized in the form of minstrel shows. Minstrel shows satirized politics through folk songs and dances. These entertainments featured white men in blackface and presented a sentimental vision of plantation life in the antebellum American south. Although these diversions served an essential social function, their main function was to entertain. In minstrel shows, dance emerged as the focal point of an evening’s entertainment as opposed to mere accompaniment. These *divertissements* dominated the American stage until vaudeville, burlesque, and extravaganza ushered in a new phase in theatre dance.

African dance elements precipitated the development of jazz and tap dance with its emphasis on full-body expression, quick and intricate foot articulation, pelvis and hip-centric movements, gravity-defying leaps, falls and turns, and the centrality of percussive musical elements. Black minstrel performers such as William Henry Lane, “Master Juba,” were
instrumental in creating the foundation for tap dance, popularizing significant dances such as, the Cake Walk, African Jig, and the Buck-and-Wing.

Due in part to its family-friendly nature and affordability, vaudeville ascended as the most popular form of American entertainment from the 1890s to the 1920s, eclipsing the once indomitable minstrel and burlesque genres. The highly competitive nature of vaudeville demanded constant innovation from its performers, leading to the popularization of dance specialty acts such as, eccentric dance, acrobatic dance, “legomania,” tap dance, and pointe. Vaudeville served as a training ground for future musical comedy stars such as tap dance legend Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, singer Ethel Merman, class act Fred Astaire, comedian Eddie Cantor, and eccentric dancer Ray Bolger. In addition to spawning numerous imitators on the vaudeville circuit, the popularity of Loie Fuller’s skirt dances sparked a new form of kinetic rebellion, American modern dance.

Modern dance pioneers Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Ted Shawn broke the traditional boundaries of ballet and rejected the overt commercialism of popular entertainment. These individuals developed choreographic approaches, which explored a myriad of approaches drawing from nature, ancient history, and ethnic dance. A new, more rebellious generation of modern dancers led by Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman developed a uniquely American artistic voice independent of the traditions and aesthetic ideals of Europe. These pioneers delved deep into the American psyche, expanding the possibilities of choreographic innovation, and elevating dance to a position of increased cultural relevance.

In the early 20th century, dance directors such as Robert Alton, Busby Berkeley, Albertina Rasch, Bobby Connolly, Ned Wayburn, and Seymour Felix dominated Broadway and Hollywood with their elaborate, extravagant production numbers. These individuals generally lacked strong backgrounds in dance technique, instead they were known for their ability to organize exhilarating precision dances consisting of simple steps in an ever-changing array of geometric patterns. Dances functioned as flashy specialty routines; these sideshows had no relevance to the plot, characters, or themes of the musical.

Ballerina Anna Pavlova catalyzed a renaissance of American ballet, her signature dance, “The Dying Swan,” catapulted her to stardom as an international ambassador of ballet. Her popularity and commercial appeal helped solidify an American audience for classical
ballet. Russian choreographer George Balanchine further established ballet in America as a ballet master and choreographer. His training began under the auspices of the Russian Imperial Ballet School in 1914. Following the Russian Revolution, the young prodigy left Russia to dance in Germany, he subsequently joined Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in 1924. In addition to dancing with the company, Balanchine restaged and choreographed numerous ballets, most notably, Apollo (1928), which utilized an abstract, neoclassic style. Apollo also marked his first in a series of collaborations with avant-garde composer Igor Stravinsky. As a strong musician, Balanchine’s understanding of the complexities of music theory made him an ideal collaborator for Stravinsky.

Following the dissolution of The Ballets Russes upon Diaghilev’s death in 1929, Balanchine continued to hone his choreographic prowess through freelance work. In 1933, he created Les Ballets, a short-lived dance company for which he created six new ballets, including The Seven Deadly Sins, in collaboration with Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill.

Through a connection with Lincoln Kirstein, an American arts patron, Balanchine was invited to the United States to serve as director of the newly established School of American Ballet, which was modeled after his alma mater, the Imperial Ballet School in St. Petersburg. He also served as founding director of the American Ballet Company where his first American ballet, Serenade (1935) received its premiere. In addition to his work at the Metropolitan Opera, he choreographed dances for film and for the famed Ziegfeld Follies.

Balanchine was billed as “choreographer” as opposed to “dance director” for his work in On Your Toes (1936), further distinguishing him from the precision dance tradition. The production featured “Slaughter on Tenth Avenue,” a groundbreaking, narrative ballet, which utilized dance as an integral means of plot and character development. In it, the lead character is told that if he stops dancing, villains sitting in the upper box of the theatre will shoot him. Through dance, the character expresses his increasing desperation, until his enemies are finally subdued. This use of dance as motivated action in support of a character’s superobjective was unprecedented in commercial musicals at this time. On Your Toes represented a growing trend toward the integrated use of dance within a musical.

Although Balanchine is credited with introducing the title, “choreographer” into the musical theatre lexicon, he spent the majority of his life expanding the possibilities of
contemporary ballet through his work at the New York City Ballet, where he served as artistic director from 1948 until his death in 1984.

Even when creating pieces for commercial musicals, Balanchine regarded dance as a serious art. His evocative and story-driven choreography reinforced the viability of musical theatre dance as a narrative and expressive medium. The popularity of Balanchine’s choreography accelerated a trend, which deemphasized jazz and tap styles, and emphasized classical ballet. Balanchine paved the way for choreographers such as Agnes de Mille, who brought character, gesture, and motivation to the forefront of musical theatre dance.

The instructor can incorporate this crucial historical information in the form of multimedia presentations, discussions, and handouts. A detailed knowledge of historical context improves students’ ability to assimilate musical theatre styles.
CHAPTER 5

CHOREOGRAPHING AMERICA: THE NARRATIVE STYLE OF AGNES DE MILLE

What sets dance apart is the universality in movement and gesture … dance humanizes expression in a way that music cannot.

--Richard Kislan

The Musical: A Look at the American Musical Theater

One of the most recognizable and influential musical theatre dance styles is that of Agnes de Mille. A pioneer of musical theatre dance, de Mille’s choreographic style legitimized narrative dance as an accepted convention of the book musical. De Mille’s character-based choreographic style redefined the role of dance in musical theatre. Her technically and emotionally demanding choreography elevated the standards for Broadway dancers, usurping the mindless showgirl and introducing the dancer-actor. Her far-reaching influence fostered new approaches to developing dances for the musical stage. She is the first individual credited as both director and choreographer of a single Broadway production with her work on Rodgers & Hammerstein’s Allegro. In addition to her pioneer work in musical theatre, de Mille is a founder of the burgeoning genre of American ballet. Her introduction of American styles and concepts into traditional European ballet revolutionized the art form, inciting shock and awe in audiences and critics alike. Her work as an arts advocate, labor organizer, dance historian, and prolific author greatly enriched the American cultural landscape.

Agnes de Mille was born on September 18, 1905 in the neighborhood of Harlem in New York City. Her father, William de Mille was a famous Broadway playwright and screenwriter in the early days of silent film. Her mother Anna George was the daughter of single tax advocate, Henry George. When Agnes was nine, the family moved to Hollywood to join William’s brother Cecil B. de Mille, the legendary film director. As a child, de Mille found creative outlets by studying piano and staging amateur dramatic performances in which she also performed. At age 10, Agnes had a rare opportunity to perform on film in The
Ragamuffin, directed by her father. Not a classic beauty, her early aspirations as an actress were squelched after being told she wasn’t “pretty enough.”

De Mille’s fervent passion for dance ignited at an early age, much to her parents’ dismay. After seeing Anna Pavlova perform in 1918, de Mille’s longing to be a dancer intensified. Her parents tried to dissuade her from what they perceived as an unsuitable activity for a young lady. De Mille finally received permission to dance when an orthopedic doctor prescribed ballet lessons to her sister Margaret to correct her fallen arches. De Mille experienced difficulty in her early ballet training, for she did not possess the lean, supple sylph-like physique of a classical dancer. De Mille worked tirelessly to overcome her physical challenges in addition to her late start as a dancer.

Responding to pressure from her father, de Mille gave up dancing and attended the University of California, Los Angeles as an English major, graduating with honors in 1926. During this period, her father and mother divorced. De Mille then moved to New York with her mother and sister. Unable to find employment opportunities as a dancer, de Mille performed in a series of solo recitals, which she choreographed and self-produced—also arranging the music and designing the costumes with the help of her mother. In 1932, de Mille was hired to choreograph Flying Colors, a Howard Dietz and Arthur Schwartz revue, as a novice choreographer. De Mille made many errors that led to her eventual termination from the project.

Disheartened by the failure of Flying Colors, de Mille retreated to London. Financial security eluded her as she struggled to make a living as a dancer and choreographer in the darkest days of The Great Depression. Throughout the 1930s, de Mille devoted herself to strengthening her dance technique and choreographic abilities. During her training with Marie Rambert at the Ballet Club, she met emerging choreographers Frederick Ashton and Anthony Tudor. In 1933, she choreographed the dances for Charles B. Cochran’s production of Nymph Errant starring Gertrude Lawrence.

De Mille returned from London in 1938, on the brink of World War II. At age 32, de Mille was penniless and unemployed without a major artistic success. A change of fortune occurred when de Mille was offered a position as a charter member of Ballet Theatre (now American Ballet Theatre) in 1940. Her groundbreaking ballet Black Ritual (1940) was not a commercial success; however, it marked the first appearance of black dancers in a major
ballet company. Further establishing herself on the American concert stage, de Mille restaged her 1934 ballet entitled, *Three Virgins and a Devil* at Ballet Theatre. De Mille solidified her reputation as a burgeoning American choreographer with *Rodeo* (1942) produced by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and boasting a score by composer Aaron Copeland. At age 37, de Mille danced the leading role in the original production at the Metropolitan Opera House, receiving over twenty curtain calls.

The prodigious success of *Rodeo* led to an invitation to collaborate with Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II on *Oklahoma!* (1943). De Mille adapted her Americana-style to create a movement vocabulary inextricably linked to the given circumstances of this landmark musical. With the creation of dances that integrated plot, character, and theme, de Mille elevated the role of dance in the American musical. The dream ballet, “Laurie Makes Up Her Mind,” is one such example, holding a preeminent position in the musical theatre dance canon.

Following the monumental successes of *Rodeo* and *Oklahoma!*, de Mille reigned as the best-known Broadway choreographer of the 1940s and 1950s. She went on to create narrative, integrated dances in hit musicals, such as Kurt Weill’s *One Touch of Venus* (1943), *Bloomer Girl* (1944) in which her moving “Civil War Ballet” garnered great acclaim, *Carousel* (1945), and *Brigadoon* (1947). De Mille became the first individual credited as a director-choreographer with an ambitious production of Rodgers & Hammerstein’s *Allegro* (1947). The creative team considered the production a bitter disappointment, running for only 315 performances.

Working consistently throughout the 1950s with Lerner & Loewe’s *Paint Your Wagon*, *The Girl in Pink Tights* (1954), *Goldilocks* (1958), and *Juno* (1959), de Mille continued to hone her narrative-based choreographic approach. In 1954, Agnes de Mille choreographed the film version of *Oklahoma!*. Several musicals originally choreographed by de Mille were adapted into films; however, *Oklahoma!* marks the sole occurrence in which de Mille choreographed the film adaptation of a musical she originally choreographed for the Broadway stage.

De Mille’s work, both scholarly and creative, helped enhance her presence as a well-rounded theatre practitioner. In addition to her accomplishments as a dancer, choreographer, and director on the Broadway stage, de Mille was an eloquent speaker and accomplished
writer. Her interest in preserving American dance heritage and her desire to work with young people led to the establishment of the Heritage Dance Theatre at the North Carolina School of the Arts. Her numerous awards include the New York City Handel Medallion (1976) and the Kennedy Center Honor (1980).

In 1975 she suffered a stroke, but continued to write and publish books. She restaged Oklahoma! on Broadway in 1979 and her lecture series, Conversations about the Dance, aired on PBS. She remained active as an arts advocate throughout her life, continuing her role as an influential cultural leader up until the time of her death in October 1993.

Teaching transcriptions of de Mille’s choreography presents challenges. Despite de Mille’s large body of work, wholly authentic video examples of her choreography are few. Six of the musicals originally choreographed by de Mille were adapted into major motion pictures; however, de Mille was only hired as a choreographer for one of them: Oklahoma!, which was released in 1955. Prior to the establishment of a union for professional choreographers, there existed few legal protections. “I had to accept whatever terms were offered for restaging purposes because the dances themselves were not my legal property and could be turned over to anyone for reproduction, as was in fact done without recompense to me of any kind when Carousel was filmed” (de Mille 254). Due to the lack of intellectual property laws governing choreography, de Mille’s work has been plagiarized or mimicked in numerous stock, tour, and motion picture productions. In the interest of defining de Mille’s authentic style, this analysis will refine its scope to choreographic examples that were personally choreographed, supervised, or otherwise approved by Agnes de Mille.

De Mille’s emergence as a choreographer came out of necessity. In her early career as a dancer, de Mille struggled to find employment due to her non-classical physique and lack of a virtuosic technique. As a solo performer, she emphasized her comedic and acting abilities. Eventually she began to choreograph for others, which helped to expand her choreographic style. De Mille forewent her personal movement tendencies as a charter member of Ballet Theatre (now American Ballet Theatre). “I had to get outside of myself and see what a really well trained body could do and what somebody who didn’t have my particular knacks—I’m a good comedian for instance—I had to work with somebody who wasn’t such a good comedian and put it into the gesture” (Day at Night).
De Mille’s choreographic style is characterized by: one, research and dramaturgy as a strong choreographic basis; two, historical American settings; three, an expansive use of theatrical space; four, character-driven movement; five, the fusion of ballet, modern, and American folk influences; six, a well-developed, highly specified gestural language; seven, an exploration of the emotional complexities of male-female relationships.

De Mille cites research and dramaturgy as a strong basis in her approach to creating dances. Her extensive research delves into the subtleties of period dress, music, folk dances, and manners. This springboard to character discovery helps determine the basic natural gesture and stance of each character. From this distinctive stance, signature movements are discovered and then sculpted into patterns that develop character and propel the narrative arc. These dance patterns are strongly related to musical elements established by the composer. This musically, textually, and kinesthetically integrated approach yields the unified theatricality that made *Oklahoma!* world-renown.

The great majority of de Mille’s choreography is set in historically significant periods of America’s past. From *Rodeo* to *110 in the Shade*, de Mille incorporates her version of American folk dances in the creation of naturalistic, character-driven movement. By melding folk, ballet, and modern dance, de Mille forges regional movement dialects. *Oklahoma!* and *Rodeo* borrow extensively from the western square dance vocabulary, while *Carousel* features maritime dances such as the Sailor’s Hornpipe. In *Oklahoma!, Carousel*, and *Rodeo*, de Mille’s expansive use of theatrical space expresses the territorial spirit of the American pioneer.

Beyond incorporating movement vocabularies from modern dance, classical ballet, and folk dance, de Mille uses folk and pre-classic forms as a means of structuring dances for the musical stage. “All I know about dance composition I learned from folk dances. These are trustworthy models because they are the residuum of what has worked; there is no folk dance extant that did not work” (de Mille 311). De Mille’s recontextualization of folk and pre-classic structures reinforces tradition and allows the audience to subconsciously celebrate historic social dances within a contemporary context. De Mille’s ballet and modern dance colleagues looked upon both commercial musicals and folk forms with an elitist disdain. De Mille approached folk forms with reverence, while embracing the inventive, modernist
perspective of her peers, bravely forging intersections between high and low art, the past and present.

De Mille’s greatest contribution to the genre of musical theatre dance is the emphasis placed on character development through movement. “Laurey Makes Up Her Mind,” otherwise known as the *Oklahoma!* Dream Ballet, is the most well known example of this approach. In it, de Mille extracts from the given circumstances of the libretto, presenting a subtextual exploration of Laurey’s secret desires. Laurey’s superficial struggle over the choice of which boy to go with to the dance conceals a darker dilemma. Despite her fear of Jud, she experiences a hidden curiosity surrounding Jud’s brute sexuality and the tawdry Postcard Girls lining the walls of his abode. “De Mille presents Laurey as a complex, fully realized woman, contradictory in her sexual curiosity and chaste modesty” (Gennaro 5). In 1943, direct address of Laurey’s sexual fascinations through dialogue would have been deemed indecent, in this case, movement served as an effective means of exploring subtext.

On the subject of gesture, Humphrey states that, “a movement without a motivation is unthinkable” (Humphrey 110). De Mille aligns with this philosophy, defining gesture as “the life behind the movement” (de Mille 307). Her style features an extensive gestural vocabulary rooted in motivation and environment. She also emphasizes the importance of “feeling” with the hands when performing gestures. The properly executed de Mille gesture is motivated intrinsically and realized externally.

The movement vocabulary of *Rodeo* exemplifies de Mille’s signature Americana style, built upon the riding and roping techniques of cowboys of the Old West. The movement impulse and posture of the cowboy upon the horse is strongly differentiated from when he is walking. In order to create the illusion of the dancer being conveyed by an outside force, de Mille employs diaphragmatic movement initiation. “Now how could we give the impression that the man was being carried and propelled by a fourteen hundred pound brute and that all the action initiated in the animal’s body and not in his own? Well, I thought possibly by using the involuntary muscles—the spasm of the diaphragm as in coughing, and the pelvis, and by putting this impulse, this driving impact behind every gesture” (*Dance in America*). Although gesture is a prominent feature of her choreographic style, it must be noted that the de Mille gesture always originates from the center of the body. This emphasis
on core initiation is also reflected in “June is Bustin’ Out All Over” from Carousel, in which de Mille emphasizes breath as the source of movement initiation.

The musical theatre student can benefit from studying and performing transcriptions of de Mille’s work. “June is Bustin’ Out All Over,” “The Farmer and the Cowman,” and “Many a New Day” are excellent sources from which to pull choreographic transcriptions of de Mille’s work. These dances exhibit the signature choreographic elements employed by de Mille and will challenge, but not overwhelm the intermediate dancer. Special attention must be paid to the motivation behind the movement and executing the “de Mille gestures” with specificity.

De Mille’s gestures and movement vocabulary are strongly tied to external factors such as time period, living conditions, economic environment, physical environment, and cultural values. When teaching transcriptions of de Mille’s work, it is crucial that students have a strong understanding of the given circumstances of the musical. Encourage students to research the time period of the dances. Have students visualize in detail the clothes they are wearing. Discuss how petticoats, cowboy boots, or corsets affect movement. Invite students to discern correlations between gesture, action, subtext, and the given circumstances of the musical. What does each gesture reveal about the character?

Although her choreography is strongly influenced by the character’s external circumstances, it is important to explore the role of movement as embodied subtext when teaching de Mille’s style. This concept can be investigated through short locomotor combinations in which the instructor teaches an eight-count locomotor phrase, which students then perform. Subsequently, the instructor puts folded slips of paper in a bowl with different subtexts written on each one. Before going across the floor the second time, each student chooses a slip of paper at random and is instructed to perform the combination while committing to that subtext. The instructor then leads a discussion based on students’ observations. Similar exercises can be used to explore motivation. Using one combination with the motivation to escape a pursuer versus approaching a lover will produce different qualities. These exercises help students discover movement as behavior generated in response to specific psychological stimuli.
Breath is an essential element in embodying de Mille’s organic, expressive choreographic style. The instructor can develop exercises to help students discover the motivated use of breath as the catalyst for movement (see Tables 1, 2, and 3).

**Table 1. Breath Flow Exploration**

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Direct students to perform a two eight-count movement pattern while holding their breath.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Discuss students’ observations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Direct students to intake and release breath freely while dancing the phrase.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Lead a discussion based on students’ observations of these differing uses of breath.</td>
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**Table 2. Directing Breath Flow**

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Direct students to lie in a supine position on the floor with the knees bent and the lower back in contact with the floor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Prompt students to direct the inhalation of breath to specific areas of the body, the abdomen, the back, the arms, the legs, and the fingertips.</td>
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**Table 3. Breath Initiation**

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<td>1</td>
<td>Direct students to visualize moving specific parts of the body using breath alone.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Invite students to apply this concept when performing combinations.</td>
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When leading a warm-up prior to teaching a de Mille combination, the educator should incorporate center barre exercises emphasizing the technical fundamentals of classical ballet, while exploring concepts of early modern dance such as contraction and release and fall and recovery.
De Mille’s expansive choreographic style requires the dancer to travel large distances with vigor and aplomb. “Louise’s Ballet” from Carousel opens with a series of grand jetés in which the dancer takes off like a jet plane across the stage (The Dances of Carousel). Working toward more efficient breath coordination can improve the quality of a dancer’s elevations and ability to travel. Encourage students to experiment with different uses of breath in the preparatory, soaring, and landing phases of the jump. Most often, inhaling while initiating the jump and exhaling on the landing of the jump is most effective. Exhaling on the landing phase offers the dancer greater stability because this action brings the organs closer to the spine, engaging the core. “Breath awareness also heightens awareness of the moment-to-moment state of the jump, giving you increased control over every instant of the movement and a more aesthetic ride through the air” (Franklin, Dance Imagery 182).

De Mille prided herself on her keen ability to tell a story through gesture. As a kinetic playwright, de Mille developed an approach to choreography that had the dramaturgical sensitivity necessary for the true integration of words, music, and movement. Despite her contributions to musical theatre, her style failed to evolve past the ballet-modern fusion so successful in Oklahoma! and Carousel. Unable to expand her movement vocabulary to include new forms such as jazz dance, de Mille was soon surpassed by ambitious young choreographers such as Jack Cole.
CHAPTER 6

JACK COLE: BROADWAY MEETS JAZZ

Jack Cole is the prime innovator of our theatrical jazz dance heritage, and his work should be valued not only by jazz dancers, but by anyone seriously interested in dance as an art form.

--Bob Boross

Although de Mille’s fusion of folk, classical ballet, and modern legitimized the narrative use of dance with a musical, her style failed to absorb rising trends. Jack Cole created a lasting impact on theatre dance style and technique with his revolutionary ethnic jazz style.

Considered by many to be “the father of jazz dance technique.” Cole ushered in a new genre of American dance through the fusion of modern dance, ballet, and ethnic forms. A key figure in the progression of jazz dance from a social dance idiom to a commercial dance form, Cole is responsible for unifying and disseminating jazz dance technique. As a preeminent film choreographer, Cole shaped public perception of jazz dance. A teacher and mentor, Cole inspired countless dancers, among them, Gwen Verdon, Rod Alexander, Carol Haney, and Matt Mattox. His jazz vocabulary can be found in the work of later choreographers such as Jerome Robbins, Bob Fosse, Michael Kidd, Gower Champion, and Peter Gennaro.

Jack Cole was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey on April 27, 1911. An introverted child, Cole attended a Catholic boarding school and later a military academy. After high school, Cole matriculated at Columbia University but dropped out to study with Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn at the Denishawn School in California.

As a Denishawn dancer, Cole was exposed to St. Denis’ pseudo-oriental dance, he later performed with Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers. In the true spirit of modern dance, Cole was outspoken and rebellious, questioning the authenticity of St. Denis’ ethnic dances and the restrictive policies of Denishawn. He eventually left the company to join Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman in New York City. His desire to study authentic ethnic dances led him to master teachers La Meri and Uday Shankar. He also exposed himself to
vernacular dance trends such as the Lindy through excursions to Harlem dance halls. An early intersection with theatrical dance occurred while performing with the Humphrey-Weidman Company in the Theatre Guild’s production of *The School for Husbands*. He continued to hone his fusion of Indian dance and jazz music through performances at nightclubs such as the Palais-Royale, The Rainbow Room, and the Roxy in New York City.

Concurrent to his work in commercial theatre, Cole was one of the major forces in the golden age of the movie musical. As resident choreographer at Columbia Pictures, Cole required the studio to put under contract the “Cole Studio Dancers,” which granted him time and rehearsal space for training dancers steeped in Cole Technique. Films featuring Cole choreography include: *Kismet, The Thrill of Brazil, The Jolson Story,* and *Designing Woman*. He is strongly identified with helping to create the femme fatale persona of numerous Hollywood stars including, Betty Grable, Rita Hayworth, and most notably Marilyn Monroe in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* produced by Twentieth Century Fox.

Although Cole’s film work enjoyed a higher degree commercial success and visibility, Cole’s Broadway choreography also received high acclaim. He choreographed shows such as *Magdalena, Carnival in Flanders, Jamaica, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Man of La Mancha,* and *Kismet*. Over the course of his life, Cole developed a massive collection of dance material, which was subsequently auctioned off by his heir after his death in 1974.

Since Cole personally oversaw the cinematography and setup of most of his dances, filmed footage truly captures the dynamic excellence of Cole’s choreography. The educator has many options to choose from when considering transcription sources. “Not Since Ninevah” from the 1955 film version of *Kismet* is an excellent example of Cole’s signature style, incorporating intricate East Indian isolations and an ambitious use of the full spectrum of kinetic design elements.

Primary distinctions of Cole’s style include: one, the juxtaposition of authentic ethnic dance forms against big band jazz; two, polycentric and polyrhythmic isolations; three, sudden, extreme reversals and direction changes; four, an ambitious use of level—floor work, deep knee bends, and slides; five, fierce, animalistic, depersonalized movement qualities.
Cole’s style reflects a deep reverence for ritualistic, traditional ethnic dances, and a devotion to serious study. “Cole understood the significance of a lifetime spent perfecting and performing traditional dances and rituals in India, Siam, Java, China, and Japan. He was offended, occasionally enraged, by students who were halfhearted in their efforts, or by those who, although vital and full of enthusiasm for mastering techniques, had no intellectual curiosity about the historical or religious roots of the ethnic dances they were learning” (Loney 113). The authenticity of traditional dance forms combined with big band jazz formed a fascinating juxtaposition, creating an unprecedented sensation in dance.

Studying the technique, history, and cultural significance of Traditional East Indian Dance is an important aspect in preparing to teach Cole’s style. It is crucial that students develop an understanding of the cultural underpinnings surrounding each movement. The use of the upper-body is central to many Eastern dance practices in which subtle changes of hand gesture and body posture convey a unique symbology. Cole’s style utilized the hands as a primary narrative and expressive tool. José Limón writes, “the hand can be said to breathe like the lungs. It expands and contracts. It can project movements seemingly to infinity, or gather them back to their source within the body. It is a mouthpiece, a moderator” (Limón 97). Mastering this intricate control requires repetition and a deep understanding of the meaning behind the gesture.

In addition to the focus on upper-body expression, the influence of East Indian, Native American, African, Caribbean, and South American dance traditions on Cole’s style is evident in its polycentric and polyrhythmic isolations. Polycentric isolations simultaneously utilize multiple areas of the body—for example, a side-to-side head motion accompanied by intricate finger articulations. Polyrhythmic isolations occur when different parts of the body are isolated in distinct rhythmic patterns—for example, a quick triplet rhythm of the feet against a sustained ripple of the hands. According to dancer Florence Lessing, Cole’s style demands “the tremendous isolation of the quick head action, above, and the separate sinuous action of the arms and hands and fingers. All of this in a matter of seconds. To me, it’s one of the most intricate forms of dance” (Loney 117). Mastering this degree of fine motor control is a major challenge in performing Cole’s choreography with stylistic integrity. The instructor can incorporate East Indian hand gestures as port de bras for pliés, tendus, relevés, and other technical exercises in the warm-up.
Cole’s style may be described as “animalistic,” “athletic,” and “acrobatic” as evidenced by the rapid changes of direction, level, rhythm, and movement qualities required. In “Not Since Ninevah” from *Kismet*, the dancers execute a series of jazz runs that change direction in an unpredictable manner, leaving the audience on the edge of its seat. “In those sudden, rapid changes of direction—shooting forward and then jumping suddenly upward for instance—you could see Cole’s tremendous sense of dynamics, so interestingly juxtaposed” (Loney 117). This strong contrast between deep *plié* and rapid elevation presents technical challenges to the dancer. The key to executing these rapid reversals lies in the dancers ability to anticipate upcoming movements with strong attack, while maintaining a sense of groundedness. Cole contrasts these frenetic, kinetically dense passages with carefully chosen moments of stillness. Cole’s dichotomous approach to shape, level, rhythm, and movement qualities makes full use of the kinetic design spectrum. Locomotor exercises can be used to explore drastic changes in level and direction with application to future combinations.

Although Cole’s style exemplifies highly exaggerated lines and feats of technical virtuosity, the cleanliness of execution must be emphasized, “[t]his exaggeration of movement, plus a steely control, are the hallmarks of his way of dance” (Loney 113). The emotional life of the choreography is communicated through these tightly controlled movements and not necessarily through facial expression. The Cole dancer is a depersonalized being; instead, the shape and pattern of movement takes on a character of its own. This differentiates Cole from the community-based narrative indicative of de Mille’s style.

Due to the highly strenuous nature of Cole’s style, a thorough and specifically tailored warm-up must be devised. Core strength, coordination, and dynamic alignment are crucial when approaching this style. Because Cole’s style entails deep knee flexion and potentially injurious weight-bearing movements, it is especially important to thoroughly warm-up the knees, hamstrings, and quadriceps. Non weight-bearing floor *barre* exercises offer an excellent starting place for this kind of warm-up. Because intricate spinal articulation is demanded by Cole’s style, it is important to articulate through the spine in all planes of motion, increasing mobility and encouraging efficient movement patterns.

Cole’s dances utilize rapid knee slides, drops, spins, and falls. This predilection towards deep knee flexion and weight-bearing movements can place much strain on the
sensitive knee joint. An effective training program will focus on proper falling techniques, core, and pelvic strength training. “Misalignment of the pelvis hinders balance, turns, and leaps, whereas a strong pelvic base can rescue you from near-loss situations” (Franklin, *Dance Imagery* 78).

Encourage students to use breath to facilitate the fall. Holding one’s breath simply makes the body more rigid, increasing the impact with the floor. The abdominals must be contracted isometrically to prevent stress to the lower back. Encourage students to use counterbalance to soften the fall; for example, when falling towards the floor, imagine a strong magnet pulling the body towards the ceiling. Avoid direct impact to the joints, land on the soft parts of the body, and use the muscles of the arms and shoulders to decrease the impact. When attempting floorwork, kneepads should always be used. Students should be given sufficient time to master isolated falls and slides as an axial or locomotor exercise before attempting them within the context of a combination. Some training practices differentiate between resistance and abandonment falls. The coordinated use of breath and muscular control to stabilize joints and strategically direct impact must be emphasized in all types of falls.

Influential dance critic John Martin encapsulates Cole’s enigmatic influence and undeniable legacy quite eloquently:

Cole fits into no easy category. He is not of the ballet, yet the technique he has established is probably the strictest and the most spectacular anywhere to be found. He is not an orthodox “modern” dancer, for, though his movement is extremely individual, it employs a great deal of objective material – from the Orient, from the Caribbean, from Harlem. Certainly, however, he is not an eclectic, for the influences that he has evoked have been completely absorbed into his own motor idiom. His art is strictly high tension; it is nervous, gaunt, flagellant, yet with an opulent sensuous beauty that sets up a violent cross-current of conflict at its very source. The dancer, whether it is Cole himself or a particular member of his company, is a depersonalized being, an intense kinetic entity, rather than an individual. In this state of technical preparedness, which amounts almost to possession, he performs incredible movement, with a dynamism that transfers itself to the spectators as sheer motor enkindlement. (Loney 14)

Jack Cole created a unique movement language that is simultaneously classic, ethnic, contemporary, theatrical, and religious. Along with Agnes de Mille, his contributions to the genre of theatre dance are remarkable. Although these pioneers inspired countless dancers
and choreographers, the distinctive work of these two choreographers was not successfully synthesized until Jerome Robbins rose to prominence.
CHAPTER 7

JEROME ROBBINS: SEAMLESS SOPHISTICATION

Talent is really a gift from nowhere alighting on some poor slob in spite of himself, but if you’ve got it, it doesn’t mean it will come out and be clear, that takes work and technique, and in my case a hell of a lot of agony, but the older I grow, the more I appreciate what I manage to do and that gives me great happiness in this world.

--Jerome Robbins

*Jerome Robbins: Something to Dance About*

Jerome Robbins synthesized the narrative ballet-modern fusion developed by Agnes de Mille with the ethnically influenced jazz dance style established by Jack Cole. The consummate director-choreographer, his Broadway shows include: *West Side Story, On the Town, The King and I, Gypsy, Peter Pan,* and *Fiddler on the Roof.* His final Broadway production, *Jerome Robbins’ Broadway,* a retrospective on his career won six Tony Awards, including Best Musical and Best Director.

Robbins is one of the few musical theatre choreographers to maintain successful, high profile, simultaneous careers in ballet and musical theatre. In addition to his prolific and groundbreaking work in musical theatre, Robbins created over 60 ballets including *Fancy Free, Afternoon of a Faun, The Concert, Dances At a Gathering, In the Night,* and *Glass Pieces,* all of which are in the repertoire of the New York City Ballet and numerous international companies.

The son of Polish immigrants, Jerome Robbins was born Jerome Rabinowitz on October 11, 1918 in New York City. He displayed early musical ability, in addition to studying violin and piano. His musical ability strongly influenced his subsequent work as a choreographer. His extensive study at The Actors Studio helped him develop a strong understanding of character and story, which transferred to his choreographic work. He trained in a variety of dance disciplines, including, ballet, Spanish, and modern dance. With aspirations of becoming a chemist or journalist, he began attending New York University in
1935. With the onset of the Great Depression, financing an education became impossible and he dropped out of school, seeking employment in the performing arts.

Before transitioning into choreography, Robbins’ worked as a dancer in *Great Lady*, *Stars in Your Eyes*, and *The Straw Hat Revue* on Broadway. In 1940, Robbins was accepted into Ballet Theatre, America’s first large-scale ballet company. During his tenure at Ballet Theatre, Robbins’ skill expanded by performing the classic Russian repertory and contemporary works by Agnes de Mille, Michel Fokine, and Antony Tudor. Inspired by these giants’ attention to character, psychology, and story through dance, Robbins began to develop his signature choreographic style.

On April 18, 1944, Robbins’ first full-length ballet, *Fancy Free* opened at the Metropolitan Opera House. This ballet chronicles the adventures of three young servicemen on shore leave. The utilization of a European art form to frame American stories, characters, and subject matter represented a growing aesthetic trend in response to WWII and a renewed sense of American patriotism. *Fancy Free* elicited strong critical reactions and was successfully adapted into the musical comedy *On The Town* (1944) with music by Leonard Bernstein and a libretto by Betty Comden and Adolph Greene. With *On The Town*, Robbins integrated song, dance, and story for a unified dramatic purpose. The success of *On The Town* catapulted Robbins as the most sought after choreographer in New York.

Subsequent productions included *Billion Dollar Baby*, *High Button Shoes*, *Call Me Madam*, starring Ethel Merman, and Rodgers and Hammerstein II’s *The King and I*.

In 1949, Robbins left Ballet Theatre and the following year he joined New York City Ballet as a dancer and choreographer, rising to the position of associate artistic director under the legendary George Balanchine.

In 1953, Robbins appeared before the House Un-American Activities committee where he admitted to membership in the Communist Party during the 1930s and named eight individuals who he claimed to have also been members. This controversial move alienated him from many of his theatrical colleagues. Nonetheless, Robbins went on to collaborate with George Abbott as co-director of *The Pajama Game* (1954). He also, conceived, directed, and choreographed *Peter Pan* (1954) starring Mary Martin; directed and co-choreographed *Bells Are Ringing* (1956); and choreographed the film version of *The King and I* (1956).
In 1957, *West Side Story* opened on Broadway. Robbins’ approach to character-driven choreography furthered the work pioneered by Agnes de Mille. *West Side Story* marked the first successful Broadway production directed and choreographed by a single individual, ushering in a new era of the director-choreographer.

In 1964, Robbins again used movement to unify *Fiddler on The Roof*, this time repurposing authentic dances of the Russian *shtetl* to dramatize the loss and rebuilding of tradition. This production went on to break records as the longest running Broadway show of its time.

A major patron of the arts, Robbins supplied funding which enabled the Jerome Robbins Film Archives at the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center to be built. This archive is the largest and most comprehensive dance archive in the world. Following the success of *Fiddler on the Roof*, Robbins devoted the rest of his life to The New York City Ballet where he continued to choreograph groundbreaking ballets. Prior to his death in 1998, Robbins reemerged with *Jerome Robbins’ Broadway*, which encapsulated his iconic and groundbreaking Broadway choreography.

Delineating the characteristics of Jerome Robbins’ style presents challenges because his choreographic approach is determined entirely by the specific needs of each production. Its most striking characteristic is in its seamlessness of execution. Jerome Robbins stated, “I don’t care about the choreography as long as the story is clearly told.” Unlike later choreographers such as Bob Fosse, Robbins was less focused on imposing his signature style upon the musical. The most consistent characteristics of his work include: one, a strong focus on character; two, the fusion of jazz, ballet, modern, and ethnic styles; three, an expansive use of space; four, a bold use of level.

Robbins’ assistant Gerald Freeman emphasizes Robbins’ strong focus on character and story, “Other choreographers make dances, Jerry expressed character through dance” (*Jerome Robbins*). Above all, Robbins’ style aims to tell the story. His meticulous attention to character placed great demands on his dancers. Legendary dancer Chita Rivera strongly responded to Robbins’ insistence on creating a detailed backstory. “Be a person, that’s what Jerry gave, this inward look at myself to make sure I was real” (*Jerome Robbins*). His choice of movement vocabulary is strongly tied to the themes and given circumstances of the play.
A deep understanding of gesture and motivation plays a key role in the successful execution of the Robbins’ style.

Robbins’ training at The Actors Studio changed the way he approached the process of human expression through dance. Acting exercises can be adapted for use in the dance studio when exploring Robbins’ style. Encourage students to research the given circumstances of the musical and develop a strong understanding of their character’s given circumstances, motivations, objectives, and actions. Guide students to think of each dance as a scene and not merely a string of choreographed movement. Each movement should be fleshed out with highly specified subtext and internal monologue. Work with students to divide movement phrases into acting beats with specific actions for each beat. The educator can incorporate Stanislavski’s method of physical actions through carefully devised exercises (see Table 4).

Table 4. Playing Action with a Choreographed Phrase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teach a 16-bar movement phrase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Have students draw action verbs out of a bowl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Have students perform the choreography committing to the given action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Lead a discussion based on students’ observations. What movement qualities were created by specific actions?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast to de Mille’s creation of homogenous communities, Robbins employed a greater commitment to character idiosyncrasies and individuality. In Oklahoma!, the collective movement of dancers possessed unified regional distinctions; furthermore, singing and dancing were used as separate modes of expression. In West Side Story, Robbins dissolved traditional barriers between the singing and dancing choruses, instead creating unique movement profiles for characters that sang and danced simultaneously. Robbins’ choreography serves as an extension of the characters’ blocking in non-musical sequences, creating a seamless theatrical experience. Grab-bag exercises can be used to explore Robbins’ insistence on specific character traits (see Table 5).
Table 5. Character Attributes Grab-Bag

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teach a 16-bar movement phrase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Have students draw physical and/or mental character attributes out of a bowl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Have students perform the choreography committing to the given attribute.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Lead a discussion based on student’s observations. What postures and movement qualities were generated by specific character attributes?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to his emphasis on character, Robbins’ style draws on his modern dance background with its ambitious use of level, including falls, slides, and floorwork. It is crucial to prepare students to attain this level of athleticism without injury. Weight transfer exercises can help train students to maintain proper alignment while falling off of their center of gravity (see Table 6). This exercise has many variations. At the advanced levels, the torso becomes more involved in displacing the weight and the supporting leg leaves the floor as the weight is transferred forward. The exercise described in Table 6 can be repeated in all directions.

Table 6. Exploring Dynamic Weight Transfers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counts</th>
<th>Movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[1-2]</td>
<td><em>Dégagé</em> the R foot front from fifth position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[3]</td>
<td><em>Plié</em> the R leg as the R foot lands, fully committing the weight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[4]</td>
<td>Stabilize the core and push off the R foot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[5-8]</td>
<td>Close the R foot back to fifth position with control.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students must master basic jazz rolls, falls, and slides before attempting more difficult feats. The instructor can isolate specific technical challenges present in Robbins’ choreography for use in across-the-floor exercises (see Table 7).

Table 7. Exploring Level with Jazz Slides, Turns, and Balances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counts</th>
<th>Movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[1-2]</td>
<td>Take two jazz runs right and left with the arms swinging in opposition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[3-4]</td>
<td>Jazz slide forward, swinging the arms above the head as the pelvis hinges forward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[5-6]</td>
<td>Land in a tuck sit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[8]</td>
<td>Dévelope L leg to second, maintaining balance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The exercise described in Table 7 requires students to isometrically stabilize the torso and use breath to facilitate the movement. Inhaling on the jazz slide and exhaling on the tuck phase usually works best. A warm-up preceding the Robbins combination can also prepare students for rapid level changes in combinations by exploring fall and recovery with body swings and inversion work.

Inversion work can help increase students’ ability to rapidly change level by requiring them to work within unconventional relationships to gravity (see Table 8). Inversions move the body upside down in space while bearing weight on the arms, hands, shoulders, or head. Inversions can also be used as transitions between floor stretches (see Table 9), this approach combines both static and dynamic stretch techniques. In addition, inversion work promotes the efficient transfer of weight while maintaining spinal relationships, regardless of the body’s direction in space. These exercises build core strength and enhance neuromuscular communication, both crucial elements in stylistic assimilation.
Table 8. Swedish Fall (1st Variation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counts</th>
<th>Movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[3-4]</td>
<td>Penché forward with control, quickly bringing the R leg to a high arabesque. As the torso falls toward the floor, use the hands to brace the fall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[5-6]</td>
<td>Plié the R leg, adjust through plank to bring the R knee into the chest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[7-8]</td>
<td>Adjust to downward facing dog as the R leg straightens and extends to arabesque.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[1-8]</td>
<td>Keep the R leg extended in arabesque as the torso slowly lowers through plank to a prone position.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Swedish Fall (2nd Variation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counts</th>
<th>Movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[1-4]</td>
<td>Dévelopé the L leg to arabesque.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[5-8]</td>
<td>Penché forward with control, keeping the L leg in a high arabesque. As the torso falls toward the floor, use the hands to brace the fall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[1-4]</td>
<td>Rond de jambe the L leg en de hors. Allow the torso to fall to the right, towards the leg. Land in a deep side lunge on the L foot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[5-6]</td>
<td>Adjust to a half straddle position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[7-8]</td>
<td>Extend the L leg to a full straddle position.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A successful method towards the assimilation of Robbins’ style will encapsulate a character-based approach in addition to the reinforcement of efficient anatomical principles. Jerome Robbins fully realized the use of dance as a unifying element in American musicals. By synthesizing ballet, modern, and jazz with ethnic dance, he greatly expanded the theatre dance vocabulary. As a director-choreographer, Robbins ushered in the new-era in musical theatre history, inspiring the next generation of theatre artists including Bob Fosse, Michael Kidd, Michael Bennett, and beyond.
CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

Dance is an indelible and unifying element of the Broadway musical. Currently, sixteen of the nineteen musicals running on Broadway prominently feature dance. The choreography presented in all of these musicals is strongly influenced by the work of pioneers Agnes de Mille, Jack Cole, and Jerome Robbins. For these reasons, it is crucial that musical theatre students are trained in these iconic styles. A strong foundation in the work of these innovators will enhance students’ ability to perform in styles inspired by these originators.

An effective approach to teaching musical theatre dance styles requires an understanding of the theatrical functions of dance, the application of dance science principles to increase style assimilation, knowledge of historical context, and an ability to use qualitative criteria to analyze and communicate the distinctions between choreographic styles. Specifically devised physical preparation is a requirement for the highly athletic nature of musical theatre dance. This project report has explored the process of building a musical theatre dance warm-up that is not only anatomically-sound, but also an invaluable tool in enhancing stylistic assimilation.

In addition to the physical preparation necessary for performance, students must build a strong understanding of style. The qualitative criteria delineated in this project report are effective tools for evaluating and differentiating between choreographic styles. Among these kinetic design elements are spatial design, rhythmic shape, movement qualities, and compositional structures. The arrangement of these aspects determines the stylistic fingerprint of the choreographer. An instructor can isolate these elements through group movement experiences to guide students towards a deeper understanding of style.

An in-depth historical knowledge adds dimension and context to the study of choreographic styles, separating the amateur from the performer-scholar. The close relationship between musical theatre dance and overarching sociopolitical movements is a strong rationale in support of an academic study of musical theatre dance. By tracing the
origin and development of dance in early America, the emergence of groundbreaking choreographers such as George Balanchine, Agnes de Mille, Jack Cole, and Jerome Robbins can be fully appreciated.

Agnes de Mille legitimized narrative dance as an accepted convention of the book musical; her highly influential and recognizable ballet-modern fusion made a case for the theatrical integration of dance in musical theatre. Jack Cole eclipsed de Mille by fusing modern dance, ethnic styles, and ballet. As the father of jazz dance technique, Cole sent shockwaves from Broadway to Hollywood, forever altering the theatre dance vocabulary. His demanding, animalistic, and depersonalized style forwent de Mille’s emphasis on character and story. Jerome Robbins’ rise to prominence as a director-choreographer synthesized de Mille’s narrative approach and Cole’s jazz dance technique. He used movement to integrate the once separate singing and dancing choruses, facilitating a seamless theatrical expression. Robbins’ deep concern with character and motivation is reflected in the numerous dancers and choreographers he inspired. Bob Fosse, Gower Champion, Michael Bennett, and others went on to create distinctive styles in accordance with the sophisticated, psychologically-motivated model set by their predecessors. See Appendix A for a condensed qualitative analysis of the choreographic styles discussed in this text.

Developing a semester-long study of musical theatre dance styles has its challenges due the wide breadth of material to be covered. In the interest of enhancing learning outcomes for students with diverse learning styles, educators can incorporate discussions, group assignments, lectures, discussions, and video footage, in addition to traditional studio-based methods. See Appendix B for a sample handout, which encapsulates biographical context and stylistic criteria. Effective organizational and time management skills are a necessity when incorporating various modules of instruction for teaching dance styles. See Appendix C for a sample Musical Theatre Dance Styles syllabus.

The approaches outlined in this text support a convergence of scholarly inquiry and practical performance pedagogy. The integration of scholarly studies with embodied performance fosters well-rounded, intelligent, lifelong theatre practitioners capable of furthering the art form both creatively and pedagogically. This inclusive approach can also enhance learning outcomes in technologically oriented students with diverse learning styles. The further integration of technology and kinetic experience as a tool for enhancing stylistic
assimilation is an area for further exploration with great potential of revolutionizing the pedagogy of style.


Higgins, Lyndell. Personal interview. 9 Nov. 2010.


Nunn, Melissa. Personal interview. 8 Nov. 2010.


WORKS CONSULTED


*Dancing for Mr. B - Six Balanchine Ballerinas.* Perf. Mary Ellen Moylan, Maria Tallchief, Melissa Hayden, Allegra Kent, Merrill Ashley, Darci Kistler. Kultur Video, 2008. DVD.


APPENDIX A

CHOREOGRAPHIC STYLES QUICK REFERENCE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choreographic Style</th>
<th>#1</th>
<th>#2</th>
<th>#3</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Sailors’ Hornpipe</td>
<td>Brisk</td>
<td>Intricate</td>
<td>Lifted</td>
<td>Durang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Robinson</td>
<td>Light</td>
<td>Upright</td>
<td>Playful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby Keeler</td>
<td>Heavy</td>
<td>Hoofing</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Early female tapper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Castles</td>
<td>Elegant</td>
<td>Gliding</td>
<td>Popular</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘20s Dance Crazes</td>
<td>Abandon</td>
<td>Wacky</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Fad-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>Earthbound</td>
<td>Rebellious</td>
<td>Amorphous</td>
<td>Spatially ambitious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision Dance</td>
<td>Mechanical</td>
<td>Pattern</td>
<td>Ensemble</td>
<td>Spectacle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Balanchine</td>
<td>Neoclassical</td>
<td>Elongated</td>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>Glorification of the female form; pas de deux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnes de Mille</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Colloquial</td>
<td>Expansive</td>
<td>Gestural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Cole</td>
<td>Jazz</td>
<td>Ethnic</td>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Impersonal; “Father” of jazz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerome Robbins</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Explosive</td>
<td>Ballet, Jazz, Modern fusion</td>
<td>Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Kidd</td>
<td>Athletic</td>
<td>Energetic</td>
<td>Character-driven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gower Champion</td>
<td>Presentational</td>
<td>Stage Pictures</td>
<td>Classy</td>
<td>Showy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob Fosse</td>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>Distorted</td>
<td>Isolations</td>
<td>Muses: Haney, Verdon, Reinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Bennett</td>
<td>Cinematic</td>
<td>Intense</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Concept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

SAMPLE SYLLABUS FOR MUSICAL THEATRE
DANCE STYLES
THEA 355
Musical Theatre Dance Styles

Overview
Students will be immersed in a visually, textually, aurally, and kinesthetically integrated study of musical theatre dance. Students will demonstrate the diverse styles used in musical theatre by performing pieces choreographed by Agnes de Mille, Jerome Robbins, Bob Posse, Andy Blankenbuehler, and other individuals who made significant contributions to the field. Through multimedia presentations and class discussions, students will become familiar with the historical background and artistic significance of each choreographer, applying this knowledge towards a final performance of contrasting pieces.

Goals
At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify the fundamental elements of musical theatre dance
- Exhibit a working knowledge of theatre dance terminology
- Identify and discuss the stylistic attributes of major choreographers
- Exhibit stylistic integrity through the performance of selections from the theatre dance repertory
- Work collaboratively with other students in ensemble-based choreography
- Analyze and critique professional musical theatre dance performances

Prerequisites / Instructor Recommendations
Students should be in good health, with no prior injuries, or any other ailments that could hinder full physical participation in class. It is recommended that the student inform the instructor, prior to registration, of any medical concerns and/or physician's ongoing care that may affect the student's ability to participate in class.

It is also recommended that students enhance overall fitness by combining this class with participation in aerobic activity or other body conditioning such as yoga, pilates, swimming, or weight-training.

Class Materials
No required text.
All students must wear clothes that allow for freedom of movement and show the line of the body. Large jewelry must be removed before class.
All: form fitting dance top (e.g leotard, tank top, or t-shirt), form fitting dance pants, supportive underwear, split sole jazz shoes, knee pads, water, three ring binder, and notebook paper.
Women: rehearsal skirt, character heels (minimum 2.5" heel preferred), character tap shoes (oxford style flats permitted), leather or canvas ballet shoes.
Men: dance belts, oxford style tap shoes, leather or canvas ballet shoes (Black or white)

Important Dates
9/12
Last day to drop classes
9/14
Last day to add classes
9/14
Ballet terminology quiz
10/5
Jazz terminology quiz
10/26
Tap terminology quiz
11/21
Choreography Response Assignment
12/14
8:10am Final Performance Studio 5B
STUDENT EXPECTATIONS
Students are required to participate in class regularly and to be attentive, cooperative, and respectful to the instructor and fellow students. Class material is to be assimilated and maintained. Missed material is the student’s responsibility.

METHOD OF INSTRUCTION
Instruction will consist of:
- Multimedia presentations
- Practical application of skills and techniques
- Class discussions
- Handouts

METHODS OF EVALUATION
- Instructors’ observation of individual improvement
- Participation in movement experiences and class discussions
- Written dance terminology assessments
- Written dance critique

Point Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Improvement</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballet Terms Quiz</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tap Terms Quiz</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazz Terms Quiz</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choreography Critique</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Performance</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Points</strong></td>
<td><strong>1000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grade Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>63-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ATTENDANCE POLICY
Each student is allotted 3 unexcused absences over the course of the semester; each absence in excess of this limit will result in a one-half letter grade drop. Class begins on time. Students are expected to be ready to dance at the scheduled start time. Two tardies count as one unexcused absence. Students arriving more than 10 minutes late will be considered absent. Please plan to arrive 5 minutes before class begins.

A student absent from the final examination is graded “F.”

Missed Classes Due to Auditions
Absences will be excused on a case-by-case basis for seniors auditioning for employment. The student must inform the instructor of the audition 48 hours prior to the missed class; additionally, the student must complete a short written exercise.

Missed Classes Due to Illness or Injury
Absences due to illness or injury are excusable with a valid doctor’s note. It is recommended that students notify the instructor of the absence via email prior to the missed class. Sick or injured students who wish to observe class may complete a short in-class written exercise to receive participation credit.

Any complaints or questions regarding grades or attendance problems should be presented to the instructor immediately. Please make an appointment for this purpose.

AWARENESS IN DANCE CLASS
Some of the work we do will involve human contact, which may raise issues for some people. In dance class, teachers often use kinesthetic feedback, using touch to help with spinal alignment or to adjust arm positions. Students may be asked to make safe physical contact with each other during the semester. Feel free to step out of any exercise that is significantly discomforting to you. If you have problems with touch or individuals in class, please discuss the issue with the instructor outside of class.

If you need an accommodation due to a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact SDSU Student Disabilities Services immediately at (619) 594-6473
## THEA 355 – MUSICAL THEATRE DANCE STYLES
## COURSE SCHEDULE

### WEEK 1
- **Mon 8/29**
  - Course Introduction/Syllabus
  - Lecture/Discussion: *Origins of Dance in Musical Theatre*

### UNIT ONE: THE EUROPEAN INFLUENCE - BALLET BASICS
- **Wed 8/31**
  - Lecture: *George Balanchine: Father of American Ballet*
  - Ballet terminology
  - Barre/Alignment Principles

### WEEK 2
- **Mon 9/5**
  - NO SCHOOL: Labor Day

- **Wed 9/7**
  - *Barre/Center Work*

### WEEK 3
- **Mon 9/12**
  - Lecture/Discussion: *Agnes de Mille*
  - Choreography: “June is Bustin’ Out All Over”

- **Wed 9/14**
  - Ballet terminology quiz
  - Choreography: “June is Bustin’ Out All Over”

### UNIT TWO: JAZZ DANCE PIONEERS

### WEEK 4
- **Mon 9/19**
  - Lecture/Discussion: *Jack Cole*
  - Jazz technique

- **Wed 9/21**
  - Jazz technique

### WEEK 5
- **Mon 9/26**
  - Lecture/Discussion: *Jerome Robbins*
  - Jazz technique (falls, slides, rolls)

- **Wed 9/28**
  - Choreography: “Cool”

### WEEK 6
- **Mon 10/3**
  - Lecture/Discussion: *Peter Gennaro*
  - Technique (dancing in heels, “skirtography”)
  - Choreography: “America”

- **Wed 10/5**
  - Jazz terminology quiz
  - Deep Stretch/Body Conditioning

### WEEK 7
- **Mon 10/10**
  - Lecture/Discussion: *Michael Kidd*
  - Choreography: *Guys and Dolls*

- **Wed 10/12**
  - Choreography: *Guys and Dolls*
| **UNIT THREE:**  
**TAP TECHNIQUE** |
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| **Mon 10/17** | ▪ Lecture/Discussion: *Gower Champion*  
▪ Tap terminology |
| **Wed 10/19** | ▪ Tap progressions |
| **WEEK 9** |
| **Mon 10/24** | ▪ Choreography: “Audition” 42<sup>nd</sup> Street |
| **Wed 10/26** | ▪ Choreography: “Audition” 42<sup>nd</sup> Street  
▪ Tap terminology quiz |
| **UNIT FOUR:**  
**VOICES OF INNOVATION IN JAZZ DANCE** |
| **WEEK 10** |
| **Mon 10/31** | ▪ Lecture/Discussion: *Bob Fosse*  
▪ Choreography: “All That Jazz” |
| **Wed 11/2** | ▪ Choreography: “Tea for Two” |
| **WEEK 11** |
| **Mon 11/7** | ▪ Lecture/Discussion: *Michael Bennett*  
▪ Choreography: *A Chorus Line* “God I Hope I Get It” |
| **Wed 11/9** | ▪ Choreography: *A Chorus Line* “God I Hope I Get It” |
| **UNIT FIVE:**  
**THE NEXT GENERATION** |
| **WEEK 12** |
| **Mon 11/14** | ▪ Lecture: *Contemporary Musical Theatre Choreographers*  
▪ Choreography: *Wicked* “Dancing Through Life” |
| **Wed 11/16** | ▪ Choreography: *Legally Blonde* “Bend and Snap” |
| **WEEK 13** |
| **Mon 11/21** | ▪ Choreography: *In the Heights* |
| **Wed 11/23** | ▪ Choreography: *In the Heights* |
| **WEEK 14** |
| **Mon 11/28** | ▪ Choreography Response Assignment |
| **Wed 11/30** | ▪ Review for final |
| **WEEK 15** |
| **Mon 12/5** | ▪ Review for final |
| **Wed 12/7** | ▪ **Final Performance** |
APPENDIX C

SAMPLE BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT AND STYLISTIC CRITERIA HANDOUT
Jerome Robbins (1918–1998)

Compiled by: Roger Ellis

Jerome Robbins is celebrated as one of the greatest choreographers of the American musical theatre. Robbins synthesized the narrative ballet-modern fusion developed by Agnes de Mille with the ethically influenced jazz dance style established by Jack Cole.

Robbins is one of the few musical theatre choreographers to maintain successful, high-profile, simultaneous careers in ballet and musical theatre. In addition to his prolific and groundbreaking work in musical theatre, Robbins created over 60 ballets including _Fancy Free, Afternoon of a Faun, The Concert, Dances At a Gathering, In the Night_, and _Glass Pieces_, all of which are in the repertoire of the New York City Ballet and numerous international companies.

The son of Polish immigrants, Jerome Robbins was born Jerome Robinowitz on October 11, 1918 in New York City. He displayed early musical ability, in addition to studying violin and piano. His musical ability strongly influenced his subsequent work as a choreographer. His extensive study at The Actors Studio helped him develop a strong understanding of character and story, which transferred to his choreographic work. He trained in a variety of dance disciplines, including ballet, Spanish, and modern dance. With aspirations of becoming a chemist or journalist, he began attending New York University in 1935. With the onset of the Great Depression, financing an education became impossible and he dropped out of school, seeking employment in the performing arts.

Robbins' worked as a dancer in _Great Lady, Stars in Your Eyes_, and _The Straw Hat Revue_ on Broadway. In 1940, Robbins was accepted into Ballet Theatre, America's first large-scale ballet company. During his tenure at Ballet Theatre, Robbins' skill expanded by performing the classic Russian repertoire and contemporary works by Agnes de Mille, Michel Fokine, and Antony Tudor. Inspired by these giants' attention to character, psychology, and story through dance, Robbins began to develop his signature choreographic style.

On April 18, 1944, Robbins' first full-length ballet, _Fancy Free_ opened at the Metropolitan Opera House. This ballet chronicles the adventures of three young servicemen on shore leave. The utilization of a European art form to frame American stories, characters, and subject matter represented a growing aesthetic trend in response to WWII, and a renewed sense of American patriotism. _Fancy Free_ elicited strong critical reactions and was successfully adapted into the musical comedy _On the Town_ (1944) with music by Leonard Bernstein, and a libretto by Betty Comden and Adolph Green. With _On the Town_, Robbins integrated song, dance, and story for a unified dramatic purpose. The success of _On the Town_ catapulted Robbins as the "it" choreographer in New York.

Subsequent productions included _Billion Dollar Baby, High Button Shoes, Call Me Madam_, starring Ethel Merman, and Rodgers & Hammerstein's _The King and I_. In 1949, Robbins left Ballet Theatre, the following year he joined New York City Ballet as a dancer and choreographer, rising to the position of associate artistic director under the legendary George Balanchine.

In 1953, Robbins appeared before the House Un-American Activities committee, where he admitted to membership in the Communist Party during the 1930s and named eight individuals whom he claimed to have also been members. This controversial move alienated him from many of his theatrical colleagues. Nonetheless, Robbins went on to collaborate with George Abbott as co-director of _The Pajama Game_ (1954). He also, conceived, directed, and choreographed _Peter Pan_ (1954) starring Mary Martin, directed and co-choreographed _Bells Are Ringing_ (1956), and choreographed the film version of _The King and I_ (1956).

In 1957, _West Side Story_ opened on Broadway. Robbins’ approach to character-driven choreography furthered the work pioneered by Agnes de Mille. _West Side Story_ marked the first successful Broadway production directed, and choreographed by a single individual, ushering in a new era of the director-choreographer.

In 1964, Robbins again used movement to unify _Fiddler on the Roof_, this time repurposing authentic dances of the Russian shtetl to dramatize the loss and rebuilding of tradition. This production went on to break records as the longest running Broadway show of its time.

A major patron of the arts, Robbins supplied funding which enabled the Jerome Robbins Film Archives at the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center to be built. This archive is the largest and most comprehensive dance archive in the world. Following the success of _Fiddler on the Roof_, Robbins devoted the rest of his life to The New York City Ballet where he continued to choreograph groundbreaking ballets. Prior to his death in 1998, Robbins reemerged with _Jerome Robbins' Broadway_, which encapsulated his iconic and groundbreaking Broadway choreography, winning six Tony Awards.
Jerome Robbins (cont.)

Compiled by: Roger Ellis

Choreographic Style

- Character-driven
- Fusion of jazz, ballet, modern
- Expansive use of theatrical space
- Bold use of level
  - Falls, slides, rolls
- Movement vs. stillness
- Angular, asymmetrical spatial groupings
- Extensions and elevations connected to turns

Selected Credits:

Broadway
1938 Great Lady (P)
1939 Stars in Your Eyes (P)
1939 The Straw Hat Revue (P)
1944 On The Town (C)
1945 Billion Dollar Baby (C)
1947 High Button Shoes (C)
1948 Look, Ma, I'm Dancin' (D, C, I)
1949 Miss Liberty (C)
1950 Call Me Madam (C)
1951 The King and I (C)
1954 The Pajama Game (Co-D)
1954 Peter Pan (D, C)
1956 Bells Are Ringing (D, C)
1957 West Side Story (D, C, I)
1959 Gypsy (D, C)
1962 ...Forum (U)
1964 Funny Girl (U)
1964 Fiddler on the Roof (D, C)
1989 Jerome Robbins' Broadway (D, C)

Key:
(P): Performer
(D): Director
(Co-D): Co-director
(I): Idea conceived by
(U): Uncredited

Awards

- 5 Tony Awards including: Best Choreography
  - 1948 High Button Shoes
  - 1958 West Side Story
  - 1964 Fiddler on the Roof
- Best Direction of a Musical:
  - 1989 Jerome Robbins' Broadway
  - 1964 Fiddler on the Roof
- 1981 Kennedy Center Honor
- 1961 Academy Award (West Side Story)

Selected Bibliography


