

doris humphrey the art of making dances

Doris Humphrey: The Art of Making Dances

doris humphrey the art of making dances is more than just a phrase; it encapsulates the pioneering spirit and innovative approach of one of modern dance's most influential figures. Doris Humphrey's contributions to dance were not merely about movement but about an entire philosophy and method of choreography that transformed how dances were created and perceived. To understand the depth of her legacy, one must dive into her artistic vision, her groundbreaking techniques, and the enduring impact she left on contemporary dance.

The Legacy of Doris Humphrey in Modern Dance

Doris Humphrey is often celebrated as a foundational figure in modern dance, a field that blossomed in the early 20th century as a rebellion against the rigid structures of classical ballet. Her approach was deeply rooted in human emotion, natural movement, and the exploration of space and rhythm. What makes "doris humphrey the art of making dances" so significant is her ability to fuse theory with practice, creating works that were both intellectually rich and viscerally compelling.

Her philosophy emphasized the body's natural rhythms and the dynamic interplay between movement and stillness. This was revolutionary at the time, as many choreographers focused primarily on decorative patterns and virtuosic displays. Humphrey's work invited audiences to engage with dance as a language of expression, capable of conveying complex emotional narratives.

The Principles Behind Humphrey's Choreography

Central to Humphrey's art was the concept of "fall and recovery," a technique she developed that explores the body's relationship with gravity. Instead of fighting gravity, as seen in ballet's emphasis on defying weight, Humphrey embraced it. This gave her choreography a unique fluidity and emotional depth.

Another core principle was the use of group dynamics and spatial relationships. Humphrey believed that dancers in a group could create narratives not only through individual expression but also through their interactions and formations. This approach paved the way for ensemble pieces that felt organic and alive, rather than simply a collection of solo performances.

Exploring "The Art of Making Dances" by Doris Humphrey

One of Doris Humphrey's most enduring contributions to the dance world is her

book, "The Art of Making Dances," published in 1959. This work serves as both a practical guide and a philosophical treatise on choreography. It offers valuable insights into her creative process, making it a foundational text for dancers and choreographers alike.

Understanding Choreographic Structure

In "The Art of Making Dances," Humphrey breaks down choreography into fundamental elements, such as rhythm, space, and movement quality. She advocates for a thoughtful balance between these components, encouraging choreographers to consider how each choice affects the overall impact of a dance.

Humphrey emphasizes that choreography is not simply about assembling steps but about crafting a cohesive, expressive narrative. She stresses the importance of intention behind every movement, inviting creators to think deeply about the emotional and thematic content they wish to communicate.

Techniques and Exercises for Dancers

Beyond theoretical discussions, Humphrey's book includes practical exercises designed to develop a dancer's sensitivity to movement and space. These exercises encourage exploration of weight shifts, timing, and the use of breath to enhance expression. For contemporary dancers and choreographers, these tools remain invaluable for developing a nuanced understanding of movement.

Why Doris Humphrey's Approach Still Resonates Today

Decades after her most active years, the principles Doris Humphrey laid down continue to influence dance education and choreography worldwide. Her commitment to authenticity and emotional depth resonates particularly in an era where dance constantly evolves but often risks losing connection with its expressive roots.

Her emphasis on collaboration and group dynamics also mirrors modern trends in dance companies and improvisational work. The balance she advocated between structure and freedom allows for innovation while maintaining artistic coherence.

Incorporating Humphrey's Ideas in Contemporary Dance

For dancers and choreographers today, studying "doris humphrey the art of making dances" offers a pathway to enrich their creative vocabulary. Here are some ways her legacy can be integrated into modern practice:

- **Exploring Fall and Recovery:** Using gravity as a partner rather than an obstacle can open new dimensions of movement quality.

- **Focus on Group Interactions:** Designing choreography that highlights relational dynamics among dancers enhances narrative depth.
- **Intentional Movement Choices:** Encouraging dancers to understand the emotional or thematic motivation behind each step fosters deeper engagement.
- **Rhythmic Awareness:** Playing with timing and rhythm as expressive tools adds layers to a performance's texture.

Doris Humphrey's Impact Beyond Dance Technique

Humphrey's influence transcended choreography alone. As an educator and mentor, she shaped generations of dancers with her holistic approach to movement and creativity. Her work challenged artists to think critically about the purpose of dance and its potential as a form of storytelling.

Moreover, she was a key figure in establishing modern dance as a respected art form in the United States, helping to build institutions and communities that nurtured innovation and collaboration. Her legacy is not only visible in the dances she created but also in the way dance is taught and valued today.

The Artistic Philosophy Behind the Art

At its core, "doris humphrey the art of making dances" reflects a belief that dance is an essential human expression. Humphrey saw choreography as a dialogue between the body and the world, where movement could reveal truths about the human experience.

This philosophy invites artists to view their work not just as entertainment but as a meaningful exploration of life's complexities. It encourages embracing vulnerability, authenticity, and the courage to experiment – qualities that remain vital in any creative endeavor.

Engaging with Doris Humphrey's work and her seminal book offers a profound insight into the craft of choreography. Her pioneering ideas continue to inspire dancers and choreographers to create dances that are not only visually stunning but emotionally resonant and intellectually engaging. The art of making dances, as she envisioned it, is a timeless journey of discovery – one that every artist in the field can learn from and build upon.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who was Doris Humphrey and why is she significant in dance history?

Doris Humphrey was an influential American modern dancer and choreographer known for her pioneering work in modern dance. She is significant for

developing new techniques and theories that shaped the art of making dances.

What is 'The Art of Making Dances' by Doris Humphrey?

'The Art of Making Dances' is a seminal book written by Doris Humphrey in which she outlines her philosophy, techniques, and approach to choreography and dance composition.

What are the main concepts discussed in 'The Art of Making Dances'?

The main concepts include the principles of choreography, the use of movement dynamics, fall and recovery, rhythm, space, and the emotional expression in dance.

How did Doris Humphrey influence modern dance choreography?

Doris Humphrey influenced modern dance by emphasizing the importance of breath, the natural rhythms of the body, and the balance between tension and release, which she articulated in 'The Art of Making Dances.'

What role does 'fall and recovery' play in Doris Humphrey's dance technique?

'Fall and recovery' is a fundamental principle in Humphrey's technique, representing the body's natural movement between balance and imbalance, which she used to express emotion and narrative in dance.

How does Doris Humphrey describe the creative process of making dances in her book?

Humphrey describes the creative process as a balance between inspiration and discipline, where the choreographer must structure movements thoughtfully while staying open to experimentation and emotional expression.

Why is 'The Art of Making Dances' still relevant to dancers and choreographers today?

The book remains relevant because it offers timeless insights into choreography, emphasizing the relationship between movement and emotion, and providing foundational techniques that continue to inform contemporary dance.

Can you explain Doris Humphrey's view on rhythm in dance?

Humphrey viewed rhythm as essential to dance composition, not just as musical timing but as an intrinsic energy and flow within the body's movements that drive the choreography.

How did Doris Humphrey's work differ from her contemporaries like Martha Graham?

While Martha Graham focused on contraction and release as expressive tools, Doris Humphrey emphasized fall and recovery and the interplay of tension and relaxation, offering a different approach to modern dance movement.

What impact did Doris Humphrey's teachings have on dance education?

Humphrey's teachings established structured techniques and theoretical frameworks that became integral to modern dance curricula, influencing generations of dancers and choreographers worldwide.

Additional Resources

Doris Humphrey: The Art of Making Dances

doris humphrey the art of making dances stands as a seminal work in the evolution of modern dance and choreography. This influential book not only captures the innovative spirit of Doris Humphrey's creative genius but also serves as a foundational text for dancers, choreographers, and scholars seeking to understand the principles behind the construction of dance as an expressive art form. As a pioneer in American modern dance, Humphrey's approach transcended mere movement, embedding emotional depth, formal structure, and communal expression into her choreography. This article explores her artistic philosophy, the key concepts introduced in "The Art of Making Dances," and the lasting impact of her work on dance theory and practice.

The Legacy of Doris Humphrey in Modern Dance

Doris Humphrey (1895-1958) was a trailblazer whose influence shaped the trajectory of modern dance in the 20th century. Before delving into the specifics of "The Art of Making Dances," it is crucial to recognize the context in which Humphrey worked. At a time when ballet dominated the dance scene with its rigid technique and classical narratives, Humphrey sought to explore new avenues that emphasized natural human movement and emotional expression. Alongside contemporaries like Martha Graham and Charles Weidman, she helped define a distinctly American modern dance idiom.

Her choreography was marked by an investigation of balance, gravity, and fall-and-recovery-concepts that would become central to her teaching and theoretical writings. "The Art of Making Dances," published in 1958, encapsulates these ideas, offering both practical guidance and philosophical insights into the choreographic process.

In-depth Analysis of "The Art of Making Dances"

At its core, "The Art of Making Dances" is both a manual and a meditation on choreography. Humphrey's writing is methodical yet poetic, reflecting her

dual commitment to technique and artistic expression. The book is divided into sections that explore various dimensions of dance creation, from the initial conception of movement ideas to the shaping of entire works.

One of the most significant contributions of this text is Humphrey's articulation of choreography as an organic, evolving process rather than a fixed sequence of steps. She challenges choreographers to think beyond mere technical execution and consider rhythm, dynamics, phrasing, and spatial relationships as integral to storytelling through movement.

Core Principles: Fall and Recovery

A defining theme throughout the book is Humphrey's concept of fall and recovery. This principle is not just a physical technique but a metaphor for human experience—loss and regaining of balance, tension and release, vulnerability and strength. Humphrey believed that the natural ebb and flow of the body could convey emotional narratives without relying on theatrical embellishments.

Fall and recovery became a foundational technique taught in dance institutions worldwide, illustrating how Humphrey's theories have transcended their original context to influence generations of performers and choreographers.

Choreographic Structure and Form

Humphrey emphasized the importance of structure in choreography. She advocated for clear intentions and deliberate choices about form, rhythm, and space. Unlike improvisational or purely abstract approaches to dance, Humphrey's method encouraged the choreographer to consider how sequences of movement relate to one another and contribute to a cohesive whole.

In "The Art of Making Dances," she discusses the use of motif development, variation, and contrast to create dynamic interest and emotional resonance. This analytical approach to form helped demystify choreography, positioning it as a craft that could be studied and refined systematically.

Collaboration and Ensemble Work

Another critical aspect of Humphrey's philosophy highlighted in the book is the role of collaboration. She viewed dance not as a solitary endeavor but as a communal art form involving dancers, musicians, designers, and directors. Her own work with the Humphrey-Weidman Company exemplified this ethos, producing pieces that integrated music and visual design seamlessly.

Humphrey's attention to ensemble dynamics and group movement expanded the possibilities of choreography, allowing for intricate patterns and dialogues between performers that enriched the narrative texture of dance works.

Comparisons with Contemporary Choreographic Theories

When compared to other seminal choreographic texts, such as Martha Graham's focus on contraction and release or Rudolf Laban's movement analysis, Doris Humphrey's "The Art of Making Dances" offers a unique blend of technical rigor and philosophical depth. While Laban provided a comprehensive system for understanding movement qualities, Humphrey's work delves into the emotional and structural dimensions of choreography with a more personal and intuitive lens.

Her emphasis on fall and recovery contrasts with Graham's dramatic intensity, offering choreographers an alternative vocabulary and methodology. Together, these approaches have enriched modern dance, providing multiple pathways for creative exploration.

Relevance in Contemporary Dance Education

Today, "The Art of Making Dances" remains a staple in dance curricula worldwide. Its detailed examination of choreographic principles serves as an essential resource for students and professionals alike. The book's insights into timing, spatial awareness, and emotional communication continue to inform contemporary works, bridging the gap between traditional modern dance and current experimental forms.

Moreover, Humphrey's advocacy for the choreographer as both artist and craftsman resonates strongly in an era where interdisciplinary and multimedia dance productions demand a comprehensive understanding of movement construction.

Practical Features and Exercises in "The Art of Making Dances"

Beyond theoretical discourse, Humphrey's book includes practical exercises and examples designed to stimulate creativity and technical skill. These exercises encourage choreographers to experiment with movement possibilities and to develop an acute sensitivity to musicality and rhythm.

- **Movement Exploration:** Encourages improvisation within structural limits to discover new patterns.
- **Phrase Development:** Focuses on extending and varying short movement motifs.
- **Group Coordination:** Exercises to enhance synchronization and spatial design among dancers.

These methodological tools reinforce the book's premise that choreography is both an art and a disciplined practice requiring continual refinement.

Strengths and Limitations

The strengths of "The Art of Making Dances" lie in its clarity, depth, and accessibility. Humphrey's prose is engaging yet precise, making complex ideas approachable without sacrificing intellectual rigor. Her balanced integration of theory and practice provides a comprehensive framework for understanding dance creation.

However, some critics argue that the book reflects a mid-20th-century perspective that may not fully encompass the diversity of contemporary dance forms, especially those incorporating non-Western influences or technology-driven media. While Humphrey's principles are foundational, modern choreographers often build upon or diverge from her ideas to address new artistic challenges.

Nonetheless, the book's enduring relevance underscores its role as a cornerstone in dance literature.

Continuing Influence of Doris Humphrey's Choreographic Philosophy

The art of making dances, as articulated by Doris Humphrey, continues to inspire choreographers who seek balance between structure and freedom, emotion and form. Her exploration of human movement as a reflection of life's rhythms resonates in works that emphasize authenticity and connection.

Institutions such as The Juilliard School, The Ailey School, and various university dance programs incorporate her methodologies, ensuring that her insights remain integral to the education of the next generation of dance-makers. Furthermore, contemporary choreographers often cite Humphrey as a pivotal influence, attesting to the lasting power of her artistic vision.

In an evolving dance landscape, "doris humphrey the art of making dances" remains a vital reference point—an invitation to explore the endless possibilities of movement with both discipline and imagination.

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Chazin-Bennahum, 2016-04-22 Teaching Dance Studies is a practical guide, written by college professors and dancers/choreographers active in the field, introducing key issues in dance pedagogy. Many young people graduating from universities with degrees – either PhDs or MFAs – desire to teach dance, either in college settings or at local dance schools. This collection covers all areas of dance education, including improvisation/choreography; movement analysis; anthropology; theory; music for dance; dance on film; kinesiology/injury prevention; notation; history; archiving; and criticism. Among the contributors included in the volume are: Bill Evans, writing on movement analysis; Susan Foster on dance theory; Ilene Fox on notation; Linda Tomko addresses new approaches to teaching the history of all types of dance; and Elizabeth Aldrich writing on archiving.

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Douglas Rosenberg, 2016-06-03 The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies offers a full overview of the histories, practices, and critical and theoretical foundations of the rapidly changing landscape of screendance. Drawing on their practices, technologies, theories, and philosophies, scholars from the fields of dance, performance, visual art, cinema and media arts articulate the practice of screendance as an interdisciplinary, hybrid form that has yet to be correctly sited as an academic field worthy of critical investigation. Each chapter discusses and reframes current issues, as a means of promoting and enriching dialogue within the wider community of dance and the moving image. Topics addressed embrace politics of the body; agency, race, and gender in screendance; the relationship of choreography to image; constructs of space and time; representation and effacement; production and curatorial practice; and other areas of intersecting disciplines. The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies features newly-commissioned and original scholarship that will be essential reading for all those interested in the intersection of dance and the moving image, including film and video-makers, dance artists, screendance artists, academics and writers, producers, composers, as well as the wider interested public. It will become an invaluable resource for researchers and professionals in the field.

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This fresh, inspirational approach shows how to frame the art of dance within the context of life and how to gain the tools to appreciate, discuss and write about dance as a fine art. It also helps develop creative thinking and self-expression.

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2009-08-20 From the ashes of war rose beauty, eroticism, and the promise of utopia. Ana Carden-Coyne investigates the cultures of resilience and the institutions of reconstruction in Britain, Australia, and the United States.

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Ray Miller, 2023-05-17 Dance on the American Musical Theatre Stage: A History chronicles the development of dance, with an emphasis on musicals and the Broadway stage, in the United States from its colonial beginnings to performances of the present day. This book explores the fascinating tug-and-pull between the European classical, folk, and social dance imports and America's indigenous dance forms as they met and collided on the popular musical theatre stage. This historical background influenced a specific musical theatre movement vocabulary and a unique choreographic approach that is recognizable today as Broadway-style dancing. Throughout the book, a cultural context is woven into the history to reveal how the competing values within American culture, and its attempts as a nation to define and redefine itself, played out through developments in dance on the musical theatre stage. This book is central to the conversation on how dance influences and reflects society, and will be of interest to students and scholars of Musical Theatre, Theatre Studies, Dance, and Cultural History.

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Ludden, 2011-09-07 The detailed outline for the curriculum of The Margot Fonteyn Academy of Ballet. Ken Ludden, artistic director, publishes the entire educational method, with detailed course descriptions, standards and traditions, audition requirements, requirements for matriculation, and

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