JAZZ DANCE TODAY--ESSENTIALS

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MEET THE AUTHORS

Lorraine Kriegel is a retired professor and choreographer interested in dance techniques. She has been a high level professional performer as well as the creative director for a number of dance companies. She is currently using multimedia imaging technology to explore the 19th century ballet of the Paris Opera and the 20th century jazz of Luigi.

Dr. Kim Chandler Vaccaro is the director of the Rider University/Princeton Ballet School Dance program and is on the faculties of both institutions. She teaches ballet, creative movement, Pilates, dance history and a number of other subjects. She is also a choreographer and has written and edited several books on the various forms and functions of dance. Kimberly has a new book on modern dance and movement meditation which is now available. CoMBo (Conditioning for MindBody)—Contemplative Movement for Holistic Health is a conditioning program for mindbody that develops focus, balance, coordination, strength, flexibility, confidence and joy. CoMBo conditions both the mind and body. It begins with a contemplative movement practice that takes the focus fully inward. It is heavily illustrated and contains numerous videos in its ebook version.
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**Preface**
Jazz dance is a nonverbal art form traditionally passed from teacher to student in a physical way. In preparing a book about jazz dance—in effect making the nonverbal verbal—we have tried to integrate written information from dance theorists, historians, and kinesiologists with dance information from teachers, choreographers, producers, and dancers. Our goal was to present an accurate picture of jazz dance today in the context of its tradition supported by the latest in dance science research. Our purpose in bringing this information together was to supplement the more emotional and immediate experience of jazz dance classes with a conceptual structure that will enrich the studio experience for the students.

This past decade has seen a surge in the theoretical information written on dance. Dance as an art form is being researched, analyzed, and studied in terms of both history and creative processes, while dance kinesiology, the science of dance movement, is a rapidly expanding field. Each area offers its own insights into the dance arena, and dancers today have the advantage of applying this information to their daily training.

*Jazz Dance Today Essentials* includes the findings of current research. It is an organizational framework based on the principles of dance fitness, allowing the student and teacher to concentrate on the art. On the surface, it will appear not unlike a traditional class, yet the exercises have been ordered and conceived to provide a balance of strength and flexibility, endurance conditioning, and neuromuscular coordination. The class is broken down into elements, each defined by current information on dance kinesiology.

Consideration is given to the idea of dance as an entity in itself and as a mind-body-soul application. We believe that intention, expressiveness, motivation, performance quality, musicality, and communication within the art of dance are foremost. Our framework allows students to work on these attributes knowing they are attending to physical wellness. In an attempt to bypass some of the injuries that have plagued dancers for so long, the framework is a strategy that emphasizes student safety in a comprehensive dance experience. *Jazz Dance Today* provides a visual tool to examine a dancer’s training. It is meant as a practical guide that can free class time for dancing.

Jazz dance is a freedom-loving, movement-loving tradition. Each young jazz dancer who receives this gift of expression is free to play with it and shape it to his or her own world view. Therefore, jazz dance today is not jazz dance yesterday or jazz dance tomorrow.

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**Introduction**

*Jazz Dance Today—Essentials, by Luigi*

Before he became a teacher, Luigi was already a successful dancer. He worked for many years dancing and choreographing in nightclubs, television, films, and the theater. When he arrived on Broadway, it wasn't long before other professional dancers, recognizing the purity of his dancing style, asked him to teach. Each had a special request: "Teach me how to jump like that!" "Why are your turns so secure?" "Where is your balance coming from?" What all his students eventually learned was that his
technique was not just a combination of separate skills but a unified art that came from within and started at the very beginning. He went on to become the most influential jazz dancer in the world, with honors flowing in from United States presidents, state governors, and mayors around the world. On March 21, 1990, Luigi Day was proclaimed in New York City.

His success in itself is remarkable, but it becomes all the more inspiring when one learns that Luigi developed his technique after waking up from an extended coma, unable to walk or see, paralyzed on one side of his body—the result of a car accident when he was twenty-one. His goal as he left the hospital was not just to walk again but to dance; his method was, simply, to start dancing. He fell a lot... and he picked himself up and tried not to fall again. This was the beginning of the Luigi Technique. He learned to dance from the very beginning—from the desire—and everything developed from that. It required more than dedication and discipline, it required spiritual strength as well. As he says himself, "First I learned to love, then I learned to dance."

Through his school in New York have passed many dance greats and many leading actors and actresses. They came to learn how to feel, how to focus, how to dance, how to perform. Many have gone on to teach the "Luigi Technique" in studios all over the world. In today's professional jazz dance world, so pervasive is his influence that it is safe to say that there's a part of Luigi in every jazz dance class and in every jazz dancer. He currently teaches in New York and inspires yet another generation of jazz dance artists to learn to love... and to dance.

Luigi:

What is Jazz Dance Today? The authors of this book have asked that question and tried to answer it in what follows, and I've been asked to write an introduction. Actually, jazz dance today is no different than it was when I started teaching forty-four years ago. There have been changes in music and style perhaps, and there have been lots of fads. But jazz, the real jazz—the thing that makes jazz jazz—is no different now than it was then. Jazz, itself, is a feeling—an honest, personal feeling—inspired by soulful music. Jazz dance is moving with that feeling through a safe and effective technique. I want the students in my classes to learn to feel as they move through my exercises and choreography. I want them to look inside themselves and discover who they are. I want them to learn control, balance, extensions, and focus by finding the source inside themselves. The source of jazz is inside. This is what I have tried to teach my students since the very beginning and what I hope will be my legacy.

When I dance, I'm telling you all about myself. I don't want my students to dance like I do; I don't want them to dance what I feel—my feeling is my feeling—I want them to dance their feelings. Not all dancers do that; a lot hold back. Maybe they hold back because they don't want others to see who they are. Maybe they're afraid that a part of them—a part that they don't like—will show. If a person has no feeling, it's because he has never looked inside himself, he has not found himself. It's there, but if he hasn't found it, then he's not a jazz dancer.

As a teacher, that's my goal: to get to the feeling inside. My first bit of advice: Don't think of what you have done or will be doing; think only in the now. You are what you are right now.

Jazz dancing is also technique, skill, craft. I developed the Luigi Technique to help dancers learn about their bodies—how to control it, how to gain strength and line.
The Luigi Technique is an integration of the body into dance. I don't believe in isolations; I believe in the body becoming whole and balanced. Everything should contribute to the feeling, and everything comes from the feeling.

Part of moving from the inside means that you dance within the limits of your own body, and you do only what you feel. Jazz dance is such a personal thing that it's just not necessary to go beyond the limits of what you feel. Never force an extension or a back arch. Never lose control. Nothing should hurt. Technique is like tuning an instrument: Learn to tune your body just right, so that when you go to play it, it's beautiful. The beauty of dancing is the control of it.

Again, jazz cannot be found in a pose, or a leap, or a bump, or a grind. It's not a series of "jazz steps." Jazz must always be an honest expression of a musical soul. They say that when you die, your soul leaves your body. Don't wait for your soul to die. Look into your living soul and dance with it ... simply, honestly, truly.

So many of my students have gone on to teach, choreograph, act, dance, and create all over the world. I want to thank them for carrying on my work and for spreading the joy of jazz dance to so many people, and I want to encourage them to continue... never stop moving.

CHAPTER 1

Preparing for the Jazz Dance Class
Knowing What You Want to Achieve and How to Achieve It

The purpose of the jazz dance class today is to train the dancer in a variety of areas: performance qualities and style, dance technique, neuromuscular coordination, musicality, movement memory, and dance fitness. These goals are reached through classes that have evolved over the past forty years and include a warm-up, technique work, vocabulary development, performance, and choreography in a jazz dance style. Performance quality is the ability to communicate the meaning of movement to an audience. Technique is the method or procedure one uses to accomplish all the physical aspects of the dance. Style is the distinction given to the dance by a character, personality, or school. Exposure to a variety of techniques and styles is essential for the development of a dancer.

Jazz dance classes today are reflecting the current value put upon exceptional physical prowess and ability with an increased concentration on the development of sophisticated dance technique. Simultaneously, an expanding knowledge of biomechanics and dance kinesiology has led to the recognition that overall dance fitness may lead to a reduced incidence of the injuries that have plagued the dancer for so long. (The elements of dance fitness are coordination, flexibility, strength, and endurance.) By determining why you are taking a class then applying the information provided in this book, you will have a better chance of achieving your dance goals.

These goals however, cannot be achieved without taking personal responsibility for your own progress. Dancers must first understand their goals, then come to class mentally and physically prepared to achieve them. Preparing for a jazz dance class is the subject of this chapter.

Checklist: Goals of a Dance Class

- Develop performance qualities and style and the ability to communicate the meaning of movement.
- Develop dance technique (alignment, rotation, centering, and transference of weight).
- Develop neuromuscular coordination (precise control of placement and movement of all body parts in relation to the choreography).
- Enhance rhythm and musicality (how the movement relates to the music).
- Improve movement memory (the ability to pick up movements faster, remember them longer, and move in unison with others in the class).
- Improve dance fitness (strength, flexibility, coordination, and endurance).

Develop the stamina and concentration to match the requirements of daily rehearsals and performances.

What to Wear and Why

Dance apparel in the eighties became fashionable as everyday attire. Leg warmers, leotards, and other accoutrements of the dance aesthetic were visible in the general population's clothing. In the nineties, jazz dance wear and sportswear include an array of brightly colored, skintight tops and shorts. Lycra, cotton, and spandex materials are abundant. In choosing clothes for class, however, let reason instead of fashion dictate what you wear and remember simple is often best. Being properly outfitted will enable you to concentrate on the important aspects of class, relieve your mind of unnecessary worries, and ensure your comfort and your safety in some instances.

Close-fitting yet flexible clothes are really a necessity of serious dance training. In dance, every motion is a communication to the audience and the dancer needs to be acutely aware of how every inch of his or her body appears. Conforming clothes allow the dancer to see his or her entire body and allow the teacher to observe and make the appropriate technical corrections. Every curve of the back and bend of the leg is a part of the expressiveness of the art form, and every movement a part of the technique. For these reasons, simple leotards and tights are best. Cotton or cotton blends are the choice fabrics as they allow your skin to breathe and absorb moisture from perspiration. It is especially important for women who dance intensely and often to wear articles that have crotches with cotton linings. This will reduce the incidence of yeast and urinary infections due to moisture.

The past two decades have seen an increase in the athleticism and acrobatics of jazz dancing. This makes it important to cover the legs completely to the ankle. Though shorts may afford more comfort in warm weather, they leave the knees and shins unprotected and possibly exposed to floor burns and bruises. Bearing weight on body parts other than the feet is not uncommon, and this should be taken into consideration before dressing. The back should also be covered, with zippers only on the parts of clothing that are not going to bear weight.

Many dancers avow the practice of wearing leg warmers to keep the ankles warm, soft and pliable. To do much good the material needs to cover the large muscles of the lower leg as well as the ankles. Bulky, extra material surrounding the ankle may impede the instructor's ability to monitor the dancer's technique, however, so it is best to ask each individual teacher his or her preference.

There are many styles of jazz shoes and boots on the market. Though also made of soft leather, the jazz shoe differs from a ballet slipper. The shoe usually laces up the front and sports a small, flat heel. The soles of the shoe are the most important part. They need to be appropriate to the surface of the dance floor. For instance, a slippery wooden floor may accommodate rubber soles, while a floor of marley (a rubberized dance floor) needs leather soles only. Check the floor surface of the studio or studios before you buy shoes if you do not have the luxury of affording two pairs. Wearing footed tights or socks will lengthen the life of your shoes and reduce the chance of
athlete's foot by absorbing perspiration. Character shoes (those made of stiffer leather, with larger heels and buckles for women) should be reserved for intermediate and advanced dancers who need to wear them for performances. Beginning dancers should try to master alignment and centering before venturing into shoes that dramatically alter balance and technique.

**Understanding the Necessity of Training**

There is a contradiction today between the high level of technical training received in class and the apparent abandonment of technique in some current choreography. For example, hip-hop is a recently emerged, popular style of dancing in the music-video medium. It is repetitive and very aerobic but not technical in the historical dance sense. Consequently, the rigorous and specialized training of the traditional jazz dance class may seem unnecessary and irrelevant to the young dancer who is used to seeing "street dancing" in so many music videos. Don't be fooled. The flexibility needed for professional dance can only be developed systematically and thoughtfully; stamina and the ability to bear weight on many body parts take intensive strength training, and sufficient coordination is needed for the complexities of choreography. Though it's not evident in every step, conscientious and directed training is necessary to safely achieve the physical prowess, athleticism, and precision necessary for jazz dance.

**Terminology**

As an art form, ballet has a long, continuous, defined history spanning most of the past four centuries. Jazz dance, on the other hand, with its inception in this century, is relatively new and constantly changing form, steps, and style. Jazz is a more personal art form, based on a unique relationship between the current cultural trends, the performer, choreographer, and the music. This constant, restless inventiveness accounts for both the variety of steps seen in jazz dance classes and the difficulty in attempting to define the exact steps of jazz dance. As much as it uses traditional jazz steps (vernacular jazz dance), jazz also borrows much of the codified French ballet terminology and many of the exercises for its training. Exercises such as tendu (tahn-doo'), degage (day-ga-jay'), pile (plee-yay'), developpe (dev-el-o-pay'), and grand battement (graahm bot-mahn') have been adapted to the jazz idioms and form part of the basis of jazz dance training. (These exercises are detailed in chapter 3.)

Some familiar, uniquely jazzy moves have survived, however, through the century and have become part of a generally accepted jazz vocabulary. Among them are the jazz contraction, hinge, and kick-ball-change.

Because the stylistic preference of the teacher/choreographer is the main determinant of specific exercises and steps, this vocabulary may or may not appear in your dance class. Over the years, however, the work of some master teachers has greatly influenced what goes on in a jazz class. Teachers such as Luigi, Matt Mattox, and Gus Giordano have designed techniques that perfectly embody their individual jazz styles, and these exercises have found their way into classes across the country and, indeed, the
world. It is the integration of current cultural, vernacular dance trends with modern and ballet dance forms that makes jazz, jazz. (Please see chapter 8.)

"Specific dance steps appear and reappear with surprising regularity over a span of years. Philosophically speaking, American stage dance enjoys both a linear tradition ... and a tradition of vertical integration in which varied and often irreconcilable forms coexist simultaneously—ballet, modern, concert dance, ballroom, tap, and jazz.
Jazz contraction (See Chapter 2)

Kick-ball-change is a common jazz and tap step.

The American show dance embraces them all, often with several types of dance appearing in one show."8

"It doesn't matter if you are a classical dancer, a tap dancer, or a modern dancer, the more versatile you can be by knowing all forms of technique, the greater you will be as a specialist." Matt Mattox9

What survives from the original dances performed on street corners and in gin joints where jazz dance was born is the tradition of vernacular dancing, and it remains the standard by which we instantly recognize jazz dancing from other dance forms.

"The vernacular tradition, or the invention of movement, can never be scrapped."10

Jazz, with its constant change and inventiveness, as we will continue to investigate throughout this book, is a living art form.

Listening to Music in Class

Part of the fun and energy of a jazz class comes from the relationship between the dance and the music. Though some argue that jazz dance must be done exclusively to jazz music, frequently the accompaniment is the most popular and upbeat of the current time.11 Danceable music with great rhythm contributes much to the atmosphere of the jazz class.

Whatever music is used, it must be treated as an important part of the class. It is not merely background noise nor a catchy metronome but a springboard for inspiration and motivation. All the music's synchronizations and rhythmic qualities should be understood and appreciated. Its melody and drive need to be physically experienced. Constant attention to the music adds greater depth to the student's training. The dance/music relationship is very important. For more on the relationship of music and dance, see chapter 8.
Getting Prepared Mentally

To be mentally ready for class means to have the mind prepared to work with the body at the maximum level of proficiency. Taking a few moments to relax, focus, and coach the mind before class will enable the dancer to be mentally ready to dance and perform. Dancers can profit from recent research done in sports kinesiology to understand the importance of mental preparedness. According to Jean M. Williams in *Applied Sports Psychology*, for peak performance an athlete must be both relaxed and highly focused. In dance, we often speak of this optimum condition as that of being "centered."

"Centered" is a dance term with multiple meanings. Most simply, center refers to the center of the body, or the center of weight. To be centered can mean to have achieved a sense of balance, both physically and emotionally, or may simply imply a good working alignment of the bones and muscles. Dance as an art engages the mind, body, and spirit. In this sense, "to be centered" means to be in a state of appropriate focus and concentration; to be connected to the muscles and bones in a knowing and secure way that results in a free and
easy balance; to be aware of the communicative powers of movement; and to be able to express oneself through the dance medium.

Following are two techniques that can help center the dancer and optimize learning.

**Psycho-neuromuscular Theory**

Psychoneuromuscular is the name of the theory that explains how electrical and chemical impulses, similar to those sent from the brain to the muscles during movement, also occur when one merely *imagines* the movement. This means that one can actually practice a movement by imagining it, though the muscle contraction will not be as intense. This activity, also called imaging, allows the dancer to mentally and physically rehearse a movement or combination. Since the development of coordination depends on the ability of the brain to send impulses through neural pathways, any rehearsal, physically acted or imaged, will help in the training of the dancer.

There are two types of imaging; internal visualization and external visualization. Internal visualization is imagining the muscles and bones moving from the inside, imagining how they feel in action. External visualization is most like watching television and seeing oneself do a movement.

During the warm-up, visualizing the muscles as being relaxed, soft, and pliable will help one to achieve physical readiness. Imagining the feeling of being concentrated and alert helps the dancer achieve the proper frame of mind for class. Both types of imaging are beneficial in training and help the muscles and mind warmup in the desired fashion. It is very important to imagine yourself doing the movements correctly to ensure a good rehearsal.

As a learning tool, the technique of imaging may be applied to every aspect of your dance training.
Relaxation

There seems to be no end to the research done on the benefits of relaxation in the domains of sports and dance. Relaxation is a pleasurable experience for the central nervous system and very important for the dancer in developing flexibility and balance. (Certain muscles need to be relaxed so that others are able to stretch.) Relaxation is a prerequisite for optimal learning and is profoundly different from fatigue. It can be understood as a feeling of fearlessness, confidence, energy, focus, and calm. By taking a few moments to clear one's mind of unnecessary thoughts, reducing interferences, taking deep and continuous breaths, and consciously telling oneself to relax, the dancer will approach the ideal state for applying the psycho-neuromuscular theory. This is something the student can do for himself before the class begins.

In order to be "centered" and ready to get the most out of a dance class, one should be mentally and physically relaxed, focused, and energized. By doing a few simple breathing and imaging exercises, the dancer may be able to achieve this state more rapidly.

Example: Done in Silence

Lying on the back with the knees bent and the feet flat on the floor close to the buttocks, feel the shoulders, the back of the neck, and spine falling gently into the floor. Imagine the sections of the body touching the floor as relaxed and soft. Inhale and exhale fully. Continue to breathe deeply while suggesting to yourself that you are ready to dance. With every breath, tell yourself that you have all the energy and confidence you need to accomplish your goals during class. Imagine your abdominals as strong and able to support your torso. Contract the abdominals and feel the strength in the lower torso and back. Imagine the range of motion in the hips as being full and easy, the length of hamstrings long and loose. Breathe and tell yourself you are operating with the mind, body and emotions in accord. Take a few minutes to set some goals such as keeping the shoulders in line throughout class or listening more intently to the accompaniment. Roll to the side, onto the knees, tuck the toes under the feet, rock back onto the heels and slowly roll up through the spine, visualizing one vertebra at a time unfolding. Keep breathing and engaging the abdominals. Take another deep breath as you come to an energized, well-aligned standing position.

Because we think with our entire being, every change in our emotional and mental state produces a change in our physical state. As we saw in the psychoneuromuscular theory, every thought produces a simultaneous chemical or physical impulse. Any kind of stress or tension can use up energy stored in the body, thus reducing one's strength. It is important to be able to relax in between exercises, rehearsals, and performances.

The mind and body are equal partners in the field of dance; they must be used harmoniously to achieve optimum results. It behooves all dancers to understand the value of imaging and relaxation in their training.

Checklist for Mental Preparation

- Inhale and exhale fully, prompting yourself to be relaxed.
- Free yourself of tension, eliminate any stressful thoughts, and concentrate fully on the class to come.
- Watch the teacher carefully during the demonstrations.
- Use external visualization to imagine yourself doing the exercises as if on TV.
- Imagine how the muscles would feel if they were doing the exercise.
- Focus and prepare for a great class!!!
Getting Prepared Physically

"Warm-up" is another dance term with multiple connotations. It implies both a physical and mental readiness for dance, which includes being emotionally and bodily "centered."

In the strict physical application, "warm-up" is the term used to describe the motions that serve to elevate body temperature and improve the circulation of joint and muscular fluids in preparation for the more strenuous exercises that follow. These movements may target a specific area of the body or a muscle group, or they may correspond directly to choreography that will be done full-out later in class. In chapter 3, the "warm-up" includes the first six elements of the class.

The point of the warm-up is to raise the heart rate slowly and increase blood circulation to the muscles so that they become more pliable and responsive. Warm-up exercises should always include full, circular breathing: a conscious, continuous execution of inhalations and exhalations. Breathing should be natural and unexaggerated. An adequate warm-up will increase: the amount of oxygen you are taking in; the aerobic metabolism of the muscles (their ability to use oxygen); and the blood flow in the lungs while diverting some blood flow from the organs and skin to the muscles. Simultaneously, it will increase the nervous system's ability to transmit impulses to contract muscle fibers.

During this time you will check the body to see which muscles are sore or stiff and need attention. You will improve the range of motion of the joints to help prevent subsequent soreness and possibly reduce the frequency of soft-tissue injuries. All this will heighten your ability to become centered or your physical and mental readiness for dance.

Your Personal Warm-up

Since each dancer's body is different, it is important for the dancer to be keenly aware of his or her own physical capabilities and limitations. Being ready to dance full-out is an individual feeling. Therefore, dancers have the responsibility to do any additional necessary movements before class, between exercises, and during any class breaks to ensure a proper warm-up. A good warm-up routine would include several minutes of slow, smooth movements, reaching to the extreme positions. During this time, the dancer can check the body to see which muscles are sore, which need extra care, and what feels good. When this is executed with conscientious mental preparation, the dancer will become more and more in tune to his or her individual needs—a necessary step toward the mastery of the body.

Checklist for Warm-up

- Increases the amount of oxygen you are taking in and increases the aerobic metabolism of the muscles.
- Increases the blood flow in the lungs and diverts some blood flow from the organs and skin to the muscles.
• Increases the nervous system's ability to transmit impulses and to contract muscle fibers.
• Increases the range of motion in the joints and helps prevent muscle soreness.
• Possibly reduces the frequency of soft-tissue injuries.
• Improves "centering" ability by preparing one mentally and physically to dance.

Example:
Imagine yourself standing on the six of a giant clock with the twelve directly above your head. Close your eyes, take two or three deep, full breaths while lengthening the spine gently. Open your eyes. In a slow, meditative fashion, reach with the right arm across the body to the 11:00 position of the clock, then with the left to the 2:00. Next with the right to the 9:00 position, then with the left to the 3:00; again with the right to the 7:00, and with the left to the 4:00. Keep reaching with opposite arms across the body or reach to the same side. Go up to the twelve with both and down to the six. Reach to the extreme points gently, really trying to imagine which muscles are moving and feeling how each does the movement. Clear all other thoughts away. Keep breathing. Visualize relaxed yet energized muscles. Note any quirks or irregularities in the body. Do movements to stretch or contract any area necessary. Keep breathing; tell yourself you have the energy you need and the skill to accomplish what is coming next. Be sure to pay attention to any sore body parts, perhaps massaging them or doing extra movements for them.

What's Missing from a Jazz Dance Class

Because of the sheer amount and depth of technique training required by today's jazz dancer, not all dance fitness goals can be completely met within the time limits of the traditional jazz dance class. Again, the elements of dance fitness are strength, flexibility, coordination, and endurance. Dance classes involve strength exercises (plies, developpes, abdominal work, push-ups, etc.); flexibility work (stretches, rond de jambe, isolations, arches, contractions, etc.); and coordination practice (skill development and vocabulary practice). Yet often classes must be supplemented with additional weight or flexibility training and perhaps individualized body therapies to ensure that the dancer is developing in each of the fitness areas adequately. What is most often missing from class is an endurance element, or a complete aerobic workout, which helps prepare the dancer for the high energy demands of the profession. Simply, an aerobic workout uses oxygen and is a cardiovascular conditioner. To achieve aerobic conditioning, there must be twelve to thirty minutes of continuous, low-intensity activity. Dedication of this amount of time is often prohibitive in a 1.5 hour jazz dance class. The repetition of the longer combinations (forty-five to sixty seconds in length) may be the only aerobic-like activity done during class. In which case, additional cardiovascular or aerobic workouts may be necessary.

Fit dancers are better dancers and better performers. They have a lower risk of injury and are more likely to enjoy longer and more rewarding careers. Be sure to examine your training for all the fitness elements and supplement where necessary. The elements of the dance class that correspond to those of dance fitness are discussed in chapter 3.

Summary
To fully prepare for the jazz dance class, dancers must take personal responsibility for themselves. They must first understand the purpose and goals of the dance class and come mentally and physically prepared to achieve them. The goals are: to develop a level of performance quality, style, dance technique, and neuromuscular coordination; to enhance musicality; and to improve movement memory and overall dance fitness.

To optimize learning, to be centered, and get the most out of class, the dancer needs to be mentally and physically ready. Mental readiness includes relaxing the body and the mind and being able to visualize yourself performing the warm-up correctly and comfortably. The psycho-neuromuscular theory is a technique to help the dancer get mentally prepared.

Physical readiness is when the body is prepared to move full-out. Remember to check the body often to ensure that it is properly warmed-up. Pay attention to what feels good and what doesn't as you move slowly and breathe fully.

An adequate warm-up will increase the amount of oxygen you are taking in, the aerobic metabolism of the muscles, and the blood flow in the lungs. It will divert some blood flow from the organs and skin to the muscles. It will raise the heart rate slowly and increase blood circulation to the muscles so that they become more pliable and responsive, increase the nervous system's ability to transmit impulses to contract muscle fibers, and possibly reduce the frequency of soft-tissue injuries. Most importantly, a good warm-up will improve your ability to be centered: physically and mentally ready to dance.

End Notes
1. Dance is a performing art, and the ultimate goal is the communication of the meaning of the movement to an audience. This performance quality needs to be kept in mind throughout the dancer's training. For more on the meaning of movement, see chapters 9 and 10 on choreography and performance.
2. Dance technique is discussed further in chapter 2.
4. See chapter 2 for a history of the evolution of jazz dance classes.
5. Joseph Mazo, a contributing editor of Dance Magazine, has said that jazz dance has "a number of techniques with a wide range of styles.
6. Dance kinesiology is the science of movement pertaining in particular to dance.
11. If you are using any copyrighted music in a classroom or performance situation, it is important to check with ASCAP (American Society of Composers and


15. Many great teachers of dance included breathing in their techniques as a means for expression, emphasis, and fullness of movement.

16. It is generally believed that soreness of the muscles occurs when untrained muscles work too hard, or differently. There are several possible causes, including lactic acid (waste products of exercise fuel) buildup, which stimulates nerve endings and registers as pain, or torn muscle or connective tissue. Warming up before and stretching after class may reduce the soreness from either cause.


18. Please see part 2 of this book.

19. Please see chapter 7. Suggested body therapies and reeducating and exercise systems include the Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais, Bartinieff Fundamentals, Massage, the Nicklaus Technique, and the Pilates Method. See also: Daniel Nagrin, *How to Dance Forever: Surviving Against the Odds* (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1988) 119-64.

20. Please see chapter 4.

21. For further discussion on what should be included in a warm-up see: Berardi, Dance Horizons/Princeton Book Company, 1991 *Finding Balance: Fitness and Training for a Lifetime in Dance*, 58-60.

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How Today's Jazz Class Developed and Why

In the late 1930s and 1940s, jazz dancing left the street corners and moved into the dance studios. "Street" dancing became a performing art and was beginning to be taken seriously as a profession.

To work in musical comedies, nightclubs, or movies, dancers could no longer celebrate the individuality that characterized the early roots of jazz dance. With professionalism came standardization. In shows, "precision dancing" was popular, and to get jobs, dancers had to learn the "routines" quickly. To learn the routines quickly, they had to speak the same language and dance the same "vocabulary." They had to develop marketable dance skills.

Skills for the chorus included the ability to move in unison, and to pick up routines fast and bring them quickly to a performance level. All dancers had to develop stamina and levels of concentration equal to the requirements of daily rehearsals and performances.

To progress beyond the chorus, dancers needed theatrical artistry, the ability to "sell" themselves, and musicality. But, even more important for the dancers, and indeed for dance itself, dancers needed self-respect and respect for their work.

To provide the skills and qualities required and to help "show dancers" earn respect, some outstanding teachers in the 1940s and 1950s revised the standard, classical dance class to create a new dance discipline: jazz dance. Teachers such as Jack Cole, Matt Mattox, Luigi, and Gus Giordano wanted to elevate the looked-down-upon chorus members to new levels of artistry. They worked hard to develop exercise progressions and dance combinations that would effectively train dancers' bodies while nurturing the uniquely theatrical style that would help their students succeed professionally.

Being selected from an audition was the goal of most of the students at the time, and jazz classes were designed as training grounds for potential professionals. Dancers needed to learn to concentrate, pick up routines quickly, perform the combinations with energy, and to sell their routines with more than a little exhibitionism. They also needed to take themselves and their dance very seriously to satisfy these teachers. The early classes set the style for jazz classes today. As a result, even recreational jazz classes have an intensity about them not found in other styles of dance classes.

These early classes were and continue to be very style dependent. For instance, one can easily tell a Cole-trained dancer from a Luigi-trained dancer. Cole's style was athletic, "into-the-floor," and heavily influenced by dances of India. In contrast, Luigi's style was pulled-up and lyrical. Their exercises reflected their dance values. Today, jazz-teaching techniques are more kinesiologically standardized, but, true to their roots, most teachers still design their classes to meet their own stylistic preferences.

Jazz is a living art form, influenced by current cultural trends and personalities. It is constantly being redefined and reinvented. As a result of this aptitude for variation, the particular bent of a given class depends upon the individual affinities of the teacher. The teacher may place emphasis on the preservation of an existing style (Siegenfeld), on gentle, correct technique (Simons), on the relationship to the music (Luigi), on athleticism (Chandler), or on reconstructions of dances from Broadway and Hollywood (Lee Theodore of the American Dance Machine.)
Though it borrows much of its terminology from its classical counterpart, jazz dance classes do not have the universally standard exercises of ballet classes. A jazz student, for example, cannot travel from country to country switching teachers from day to day as ballet dancers sometimes do. Each jazz teacher's warm-up is different, each exercise is performed with a different emphasis, and movements are individually stylized. It sometimes takes several weeks for a new student to learn a teacher's warm-up series of exercises thoroughly enough to perform it comfortably.

This chapter reviews basic dance technique, the foundation of the modern, ballet, and jazz dance forms. It also contains a partial list of jazz moves and positions. In chapter 1 we saw that much of the terminology used in class is often from classical ballet. Particular movements, exercises, and positions may also borrow the ballet terminology, but the vocabulary is definitely stylized and recognizable as jazz. Though the teacher's style and personality remain the dominant factors in determining the exact ingredients of the class, the following movements have commonly been seen throughout the past few decades.

**Basic Dance Technique**

As noted in Chapter 1, technique is the method one uses to accomplish the moves of dance. Today an increasing number of dancers, teachers, and choreographers understand that a knowledge of kinesiology and biomechanics can help improve the safety of the art form for the participant. Though science is not more important than art, there needs to be a well-thought-out balance of aesthetics and body mechanics to ensure proper training. The educated dancer has a basic knowledge of anatomy, physiology, and dance kinesiology.¹

The study of dance technique is an ongoing process that the dancer never finishes nor tires of. Dancers must love to work hard and continually learn about themselves and the art form. Once good technique is achieved, the dancer strives to move even better with increasingly more ease and efficiency. Proper technique is fluid, appears effortless, and does not injure the body.

Let's begin with a review of basic dance technique.

**Alignment**
Alignment

Legs in parallel—first position    Leg outward rotated—second position

While in a vertical, resting position, in good alignment, the head is centered over the shoulders, the shoulders over the hips, the ribcage and pelvis are in neutral positions (neither pushed forward or back), and the abdominals engaged. The body weight is centered over the knees, which pour the weight evenly through the feet. The skeleton holds the body up, and the muscles are relaxed. Alignment should be balanced and effortless, with the abdominals working to support the torso.

Proper alignment is not merely achieved, held, then disregarded. It is also the proper placement of the body during all dance activities. It is referred to continuously as the dancer shifts through space and returned to at the end of the sequence. As the dancer moves through varying positions and actions, the knowledge of proper alignment aids in the efficiency and safety of movement. It liberates the body to move naturally and assuredly. Proper alignment is also necessary for the dancer to achieve a sense of "center." 2,3

Checklist on Alignment

• The head is centered over the shoulders, the shoulders over the hips, and the ribcage and pelvis in neutral positions.
• The abdominals are working to support the torso.
• The body weight is centered over the knees and the weight pours evenly through the feet.
• Alignment is not static, but rather a state of balance and effortlessness which is attended to continuously.
• The knowledge of proper alignment aids in the efficiency and safety of movement.
• Proper alignment is necessary to be "centered."
**Turnout or Outward Rotation**

Turnout is the common name given to the outward rotation of the legs at the hips. Outward rotation is a personal accomplishment. Every dancer's turnout will be slightly different in degree and appearance, determined by bone structure and the length of ligaments, tendons, and muscles in the area. The legs are outwardly rotated by engaging the muscles connecting the pelvic girdle to the femurs: the six deep rotators, the adductors, the iliopsoas, sartorius, the biceps femoris, pectineus, piriformis, and the gluteus medius. Turnout should be thought of as a continuous spiraling action of the *upper thighs, not the feet*. The alignment of the pelvis will not be affected by rotation if the abdominals are engaged and are supporting the lower spine. Rather than being static, the relationship of the top of the legs to the pelvis should be constantly monitored.

**First position**

**Second Position**

**Third position**

**Fourth position**

**Fifth position**

**On one foot**

**Turned out positions of feet**

**Parallel and Turned-In Positions**

In parallel, the legs drop from the pelvis naturally, usually about the width of the hip bones. Again the alignment of the pelvis is not affected, and the body's weight should be distributed evenly through the soles of the feet, with all the toes on the floor.
First position    Second position    Third position    Inward rotated thigh
                  In demi-plie

When the legs are turned-in, the femurs are rotated toward the center of the body. When executing any movement in a turned-in position, all the rules of proper alignment apply. Remember to align the knees over the toes when supporting weight.

**Plié**

Plié means to bend and should be thought of as a verb or action rather than a position. Plié is the softening of the knees that carries the pelvis and the body through level changes. It is basic to most dance forms. The pelvis must remain in the neutral position, and the knees aligned to bend out and over the toes. The feet should contact the floor evenly and the muscles of the ankle should be relaxed.

**Demi plié** (half bend) is one of the most important dance skills because it is the preparation and ending for all jumps, most turns, and other movements. The demi pile should be taken very seriously from the outset of dance training and executed each time properly and thoughtfully.
When executing a grand plie (full bend), it is extremely important that the dancer carries her weight well by supporting her center with the abdominals. As the pelvis girdle is lowered with a full bend of the knees, it should remain in a neutral position, neither tilting forward or backward. Grand plie helps to strengthen and stretch the legs while the dancer learns to move the pelvis through level changes with proper alignments. In the second position, the heels remain on the floor and pelvic girdle is only lowered to be even with the knees. In the other positions, the heels reach toward the floor as soon as possible on the ascent.

Demi and grand plie may be done in all the outwardly rotated and parallel positions of the feet.

Relevé
Port de bras means to carry the arms. There are several standard positions originally borrowed from ballet and now used in modern and jazz dance. Though many techniques stress that the arms are attached to the spine and should move from the torso, the alignment of the shoulders or ribcage should not be affected unless specified.

Arms in 2nd position  Arms in high 5th position (en haut)

Arms in low 5th  Arms in preparatory position for turning or 4th position
Bras bas (arms down)

Transference of Weight

The abdominals and psoas muscle groups control the dancer's center of weight and are responsible for stabilizing the torso and pelvic area during the shift of the body weight from one foot to another. The pelvis in most cases should remain neutral, with the torso carried above it. The pelvis should move to align itself over the feet with each step. In jazz, the hips are often pushed off center. Knowing where the pelvis is and knowing how
the muscles of this area work together makes controlling the transference of weight more efficient. To master this, the dancer must have an acute awareness of the muscles at the top of the legs, knowledge of alignment, and sufficient abdominal strength. Carrying the weight through space is one of the dancer's most basic and important skills.

Jazz walking in releve

Moving forward from plié in fourth to a lunge

**Vocabulary**

Now let's take a look at some common moves or the vocabulary of jazz dance. Many are ballet steps that have been stylized over the past decades and adopted into the jazz idiom. Because of the ever-changing vocabulary and inventiveness of jazz dance, a definitive list could never be assembled. For a more complete listing of ballet terms, however, please refer to a classical ballet dictionary.⁵

**Jazz Walks**

There are as many types of jazz walks as there are personalities. They are traveling steps, simple walking, with any stylized use of the shoulders, accentuated hip motion or position of the torso.

Jazz walks with the shoulders in opposition.
High level on releve.

Medium level

Low level

**Jazz Turns**

Many jazz turns are stylized versions of those found in ballet, such as a pencil (soutenu) turn, an outside (en dehors) turn, or a chain (chaine) turn. All of these examples begin and turn on the left foot, though note the direction of each turn.

*Jazz turns*
Pencil turn: the right leg sweeps behind the left, turning to the right
Click for video of pencil turns.

Outside turns
Outside turn: the right toe meets the left ankle also turning to the right

![Images of pencil turn and outside turns]

**Inside turn**
Inside (en dedans) turn: the right toe touches the left ankle but turns to the left

![Images of inside turn]

Chains (chaines) Chain turn: the feet meet in parallel first position, turning to the left

![Images of chains]

**Elevations**

Leaps begin on one foot and land on the other foot. Hops begin and land on the same foot, and jumps begin and land on both feet. Remember correct placement of the pelvis and use of the abdominals will help in the height and landings of any elevation.

![Images of elevations]
Extensions

Often called kicks or battements. Battement is the French ballet term for beat. Grand battement is a large beat, or the exercise in which the leg is raised from the hip into the air, with the knee straight. They can be done to the front, side, or back, usually without distortion to the alignment of the pelvis.

a. Battement to the front       b. Battement to the side       c. Layout

Elevations

a. Forward leap       b. Side leap       c. Squat jump

Pas de bourree

Pas de bourree: a three-step movement with many variations (twenty-two variations are listed in Gail Grant's *Technical Manual and Dictionary of Classical Ballet*). One commonly used in jazz is to step to the side with the right foot, cross the left foot behind the right, then step side with the right foot again. Pas de bourree may be done traveling to the side, front or back, turning, or covering a great deal or minimal amount of space. It is used as a connecting step in many combinations.

For a demonstration click the video.
Contractions

A contraction is a very strong contraction of the abdominals that hollows out the front of the body. It should be thought of as lengthening of the back rather than a shortening of the front.

The contraction lengthens the lumbar region of the spine, improving flexibility, and develops strength in the abdominals. Strength in this area is necessary to master control over the center of weight and control over moving the body through space. Though other abdominal work will be done in class (sit-ups, roll-ups, etc.), the contraction offers a way to build strength in this area while standing. A full contraction and release aids in the forward and backward tilt of the pelvis, a move used often in jazz dance. Contractions also help the dancer in establishing balance and equilibrium to gain control over his or her center. Mastery of the contraction will aid the dancer.

Summary

Once jazz dancing left the street corners and moved into dance studios, "street" dancing became a performing art. To become a professional in musical comedies, nightclubs, or movies, dancers had to develop marketable dance skills. Jazz dance classes were designed as training grounds for potential professionals.

Outstanding teachers such as Jack Cole, Matt Mattox, Luigi, and Gus Giordano revised the classical dance class to create a new discipline called jazz dance. The early classes set the style for jazz classes today by developing exercise progressions that would effectively train dancers’ bodies while nurturing the uniquely theatrical style that would help students succeed professionally. Though more standardized today, jazz teaching techniques are designed by individual teachers to meet their own stylistic preferences.

Each jazz teacher's warm-up is different, and it may take several weeks to learn a teacher's warm-up thoroughly. Yet there are some common elements and vocabulary that have survived the continuous changes over time. The basics of dance technique, however, are the same in the forms of modern, ballet, and jazz.

Endnotes

1. For additional information on the science of human motion, please refer to the suggested reading in the bibliography.
2. For more on alignment please see:

3. For more on "center," please see chapter 1.

4. An excellent guide to the muscles of the hip can be found in: Fitt, *Dance Kinesiology*, 137-68.

5. The necessity (beyond tradition) of the grand pile has been a topic of debate for many years. Grand plie must be done cautiously as hyperflexion of a weight-bearing knee puts stress on the knee joint. There are alternate methods to safely strengthen the thighs. Some are listed in chapter 5.


7. Please see What is Jazz Dance, chapter 8.

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14. Please see What is Jazz Dance, chapter 8.