

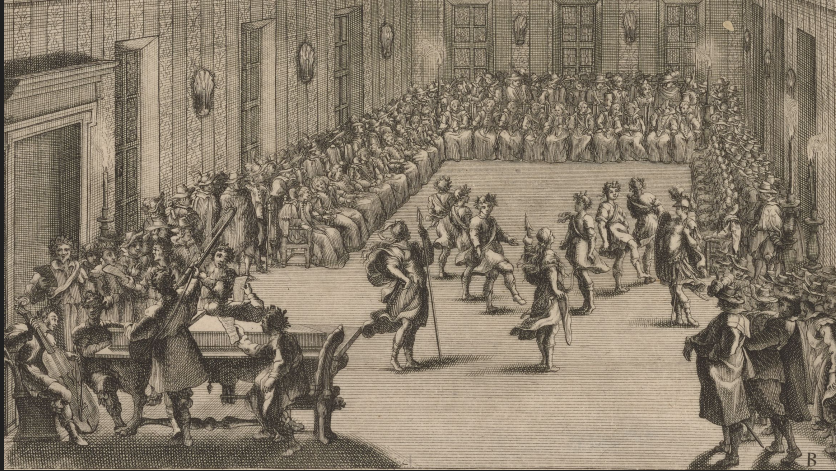
Dance History: Women in Dance

Lilly Runion



Forms of dance have existed since the dawn of recorded history. From the origin of primitive dance and ritual, dance has evolved into a plethora of styles. Today, we see branches of genres originating from the impact of court dances, ballet technique, modern dance, and jazz dance.

Women have played a significant role in the evolution of dance, despite not always receiving as much recognition as men. Female figures, such as Catherine de Medici, spread dance across Europe and the world. Without her influence, and the influence of many other prominent female dancers, we would likely have a different world dance experience and perspective.



Ballet de cour in Medici's court





The rise of the ballerina led to an explosion of ballet ideas and exploration. Mlle La Fontaine, who is considered the first professional female ballerina, performed in the long, heavy traditional garments of the time. Under the rule of The Sun King, Louis XIV, ballet in France was expanded from the courts into a profession for both men and women.

As ballet continued to evolve, so did the standards for female dancers. Ballerinas were now socialites, leaving both their bodies and their private lives open to criticism. The Russian Imperial Ballet during the late 19th and early 20th century coveted ballerinas with a strong and stocky build, exuding strength and power in their movement. The new Ballet Russes desired dancers with a long and slender physique. These ballerinas moved softly, showing off the lines of their body. This figure continues to be the most accepted in ballet today.



**Matilda Kshesinskaya,
Russian Imperial Ballet**



**Anna Pavlova,
Ballet Russes**

Ballet

Catherine de' Medici

- Born April 13, 1519 in Florence, Italy
- Married to King Henry II of France, giving her powerful influence in the French Court and society.
- Monarchs were extremely powerful at this time, and there was tension between social classes.
- Came from a powerful Italian family, and brought ballet to France when she became queen.
- Developed the ballet de cour.
- Was extremely politically active, and used ballet as a tool to show of France's wealth and prosperity at this time.

Mlle La Fontaine

- Born 1655 and died in 1738
- Known as the "Queen of Ballet" and considered the first professional ballerina.
- Danced during the Golden Age of France, as it was prominent in the arts and other aspects of European culture.
- Became popular shortly after the public outside of the French Court was allowed to attend ballets.
- Louis XIV (The Sun King) was in power during her career. His love for ballet boosted her career.
- The public French audience was considered loud and rowdy at this time, leading to Fontaine's departure from the stage to enter a life committed to religion.

Pierre Beauchamp

- Born in 1631 in Versailles, France.
- The French industrial revolution was happening while he was growing up, leading to an increase in child labor.
- The church was beginning to lose power, and monarchs used ballet to demonstrate power and prosperity.
- Became King Louis XIV's Ballet Master and Superintendent of Ballets while contributing to the development of Court Ballets.
- Helped develop the Academy Royal De La Musique.
- Clarified the five positions of the feet.
- Helped develop Court Ballet in France.

Ballet

Marie Taglioni

- Born in 1804 in Stockholm, Sweden.
- Her father was Filippo Taglioni, a prominent dancer and choreographer.
- During her life, society was driven by the Industrial Revolution, as well as a desire to develop a national identity.
- Was a symbol of the Romantic Ballet period, and well known for her ethereal qualities.
- Best known for her role in *La Sylphide*.
- Danced en pointe and became one of the first international celebrities of the era.

Francesca "Fanny" Cerrito

- Born in Italy in 1817 and lived to be 91 years old.
- Began her dancing career in Italy, but became prominent in London.
- Danced during England's Victorian Era, which was considered globally peaceful, but led to internal issues, such as prostitution and child labor.
- Was known as a strong and impressive technical dancer.
- One of the first prominent female choreographers.
- Performed across Europe, including in collaboration with Marie Taglioni.

Virginia Zucchi

- Born in Italy in 1849.
- Introduced Italian technique in Russia, where she was a prominent ballerina.
- Russia was under autocratic rule of the czar.
- Was in a golden age for the arts, despite an increase of censorship from the czar.
- Was known for her technical skills, as well as her acting.
- Contributed to the development of the St. Petersburg Ballet School in Russia as well as the World of Art.
- Danced internationally and was referred to as "The Divine Zucchi."

Ballet

Matilda Kshesinskaya

- Born in 1872 to a noble Polish family.
- The most prominent ballerina in St. Petersburg during the Russian Imperial Ballet.
- Russia at this time was experiencing political conflicts, and the Russian Orthodox Church held significant power.
- Was a grand and indulgent woman, known for both her dancing and her personal life.
- Was short and muscular, which were physical qualities of ballerinas in the Imperial Russian Ballet.
- Named a prima ballerina and was celebrated in St. Petersburg.

Anna Pavlova

- Born in Russia in 1881.
- Grew up as a peasant, which made up the majority of Russian citizens at this time.
- Was born premature and was often sick when she was young, which may explain her slender, awkward body type.
- During her training, her body type was not consistent with ballerinas at the time (ex: Matilda Kshesinskaya)
- Was prominent in the Russian Ballet Russes, which showcased dancers with long, delicate body features.
- Worked with choreographers such as Marius Petipa, Michel Fokine and Sergei Diaghilev.

Tamara Karsavina

- Born in Russia in 1885.
- Her father was a prominent Russian dancer and choreographer, but he was initially against Karsavina also studying ballet.
- Her mom was instrumental in getting her lessons at an early age.
- Danced for both the Russian Imperial Ballet and Ballet Russes.
- Left Russia and traveled to Paris to continue her dancing shortly before the Red Terror and Russian Civil War.
- Eventually traveled to England, where she helped establish both The Royal Ballet and the Royal Academy of Dance.

Many of the dancers at the forefront of Modern Dance were women, such as Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, Ruth St. Denis. These women pioneered what we know today as modern dance. While they did not develop clear modern dance techniques, they introduced the idea of expressionism and free-movement in dance. They were heavily influenced by political and social occurrences at the time and started a rebellion against ballet's strict technique and rules.



Isadora Duncan



Ruth St. Denis



Martha Graham

A second wave of female modern pioneers rose to prominence during the 20th century, determined to cultivate this new style and develop individual techniques that would outlive them. American dancers and choreographers, such as Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Katherine Dunham, all developed modern techniques that would shape modern dance. In Germany, Mary Wigman and others were beginning to explore this new dance form as well.

As modern dance continued to spread and progress, choreographers began experimenting with this open ended blueprint to expand the idea of what modern dance is. In essence, it can be whatever you want it to be. The mid to late 20th century saw the development of postmodern dance which involved abstract and avantgarde ideas being explored.



Merce Cunningham Dancers



Pearl Primus

Modern

Martha Graham

- Born in 1894 in Allegheny, Pennsylvania.
- Was prominent during the Great Depression, which inspired some of her work addressing themes that existed in American culture.
- A pioneer of modern dance, known for her contract and release techniques.
- Trained at Denishawn school before she broke off to craft her own modern technique.
- Her movement captured extreme emotion, focusing on breathing and dynamics.
- Founded the Martha Graham Dance Company in 1926.

Doris Humphrey

- Born in 1895 in Oak Park, Illinois.
- Lived through the Women's Suffrage Movement and saw the 19th Amendment passed in 1920.
- Known for her fall and recovery technique, which is still widely taught in modern dance today.
- Celebrated individuality and balance in her performances.
- Trained at Denishawn school.
- A modern dance pioneer who was influential in her theory, technique and choreography.
- Created work both with and without music, which had not been popularized before.

Pearl Primus

- Born in 1919 in Trinidad, before moving to New York City at the age of 2.
- Hoped to expose American culture to African dance and history.
- Faced a lot of prejudice and racism in America. Black artists at this time had to fight against this.
- Was both an anthropologist and choreographer, using her talents to incorporate African culture into her work.
- Choreographed original pieces, such as *Strange Fruit*, performed on Broadway, and taught at many universities.
- Staged work for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre.

Modern

Katherine Dunham

- Born in 1909 in Chicago, she was a descendant of African slaves.
- Was multi-talented and used her work and exposure to make political statements.
- Arguably her most controversial work, *Southland*, premiered at a time when criticizing American culture was seen as suspicious and a betrayal.
- 1950's- Red Scare
- Founded the Dunham company and crafted the Dunham technique.
- Traveled the world with her company, and was heavily criticized for her work exposing racism and violence in America.

Twyla Tharp

- Born in 1941 in Portland, Indiana.
- Studied dance under pioneers such as Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham, eventually dancing with the Paul Taylor Dance Company.
- Formed her own company in 1965, Twyla Tharp Dance.
- Well known for her work's crossover between modern and ballet technique.
- Uses diverse and sometimes unexpected music.
- Has choreographed for both stage and screen.

Paul Taylor

- Born in 1930 in Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania.
- Grew up during the Great Depression.
- Trained at Julliard and was a member of the Martha Graham dance company.
- Was not known for one distinct style, but instead surprised audiences with his diverse choreography.
- Elevated movements such as running, skipping, and jumping in his work.
- Founded Paul Taylor Dance Company and Paul Taylor American Modern Dance

Modern

Merce Cunningham

- Born in 1919 in Centralia, Washington.
- Born the same year the Treaty of Versailles was signed, meaning he grew up directly following World War I.
- Was experimental in his choreography, and was known for his blind collaboration with artists using different mediums.
- He collaborated with a variety of artists, including musicians, composers, stage designers, and costume designers.
- Was a member of Martha Graham Dance Company.
- Founded the Merce Cunningham Dance Company in 1953.

Yvonne Rainer

- Born in 1934 in California.
- Was heavily exposed to art at a young age due to her living in San Francisco.
- Trained at the Martha Graham School.
- Rejected the prominent styles of modern dance, which were characterized by expression and drama.
- Co-founded the Judson Dance Theatre, which focused more prominently on movement rather than specific feeling.
- Her movements are pedestrian and feature no big jumps or unnecessary technical aspects.

Elaine Summers

- Born in 1925 in Australia, but grew up in Boston, MA.
- Paid for her own dance classes when she was young.
- Eventually danced at the Juilliard School of Dance as well as the Merce Cunningham Studio.
- Was an original member of the Judson Dance Theatre, which experimented with dance movement and choreography.
- Believed in the expansion of dance, as well as its collaboration with other art mediums.
- Combined dance and film.
- Elaine Summers Dance & Film Company, the Experimental Intermedia Foundation and the Kinetic Awareness Center

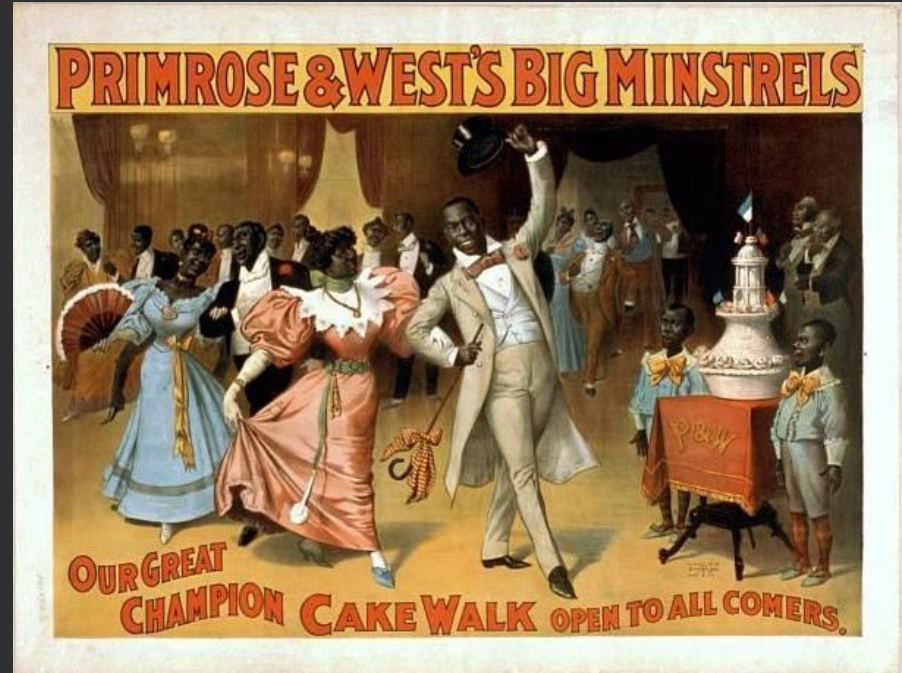


Jazz Dance has evolved into many styles today, but its roots date back to the African slave trade in America. A variety of African cultures combined to develop music and dance that reflected their heritage. Dancing to African drum beats, they stamped and clapped to the music, keeping their traditions alive. When combined with American culture, a new style was born. Today, jazz dance has multiple refined techniques and has impacted many other styles, such as hip-hop, tap dance, and modern.

Jazz dance evolved into social dance and was displayed in minstrel shows. The inspiration behind these shows came from African influence, yet the dancing was most often performed by individuals in black face. Eventually, the popularity of ragtime bands led to the development of dance moves, such as the foxtrot. The jazz shows and social dances were an important aspect of American society, serving as both a celebration of prosperity, and a distraction from hard times.



Minstrel Show Blackface





From Bob Fosse's "Rich Man Frug"



Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and Shirley Temple

As the popularity of jazz dance grew, many saw an opportunity to cultivate new techniques out of this style. Many of these figures came from modern or ballet backgrounds, using their former training to sculpt their jazz style. Jazz dance gained traction in many areas, including Broadway, television, and film. Jazz dance became a staple in American culture, and is still one of the most influential dance styles in pop culture.

Jazz

Irene and Vernon Castle

- Husband and wife dancing duo who became popular during the early 20th century.
- World War I was happening during their peak, which led to American prosperity and the embracing of jazz dance and other new ideas.
- Danced in a more refined way, making them popular in sophisticated, upper class circles.
- “Castle Walk” was a recreation of the cakewalk.
- Popularized the fox trot.
- Helped to popularize dancing in public spaces, such as restaurants and clubs.

Agnes de Mille

- Born in 1905 in New York City.
- Came from a well-connected family, granting her access in both acting and dancing.
- Chose dance over acting, despite push back from her parents as well as not fitting into the standards of ballet at the time.
- Became a choreographer, gaining popularity with *Rodeo*, which toured the United States during World War II.
- Worked on Broadway musicals and established the “triple threat.”
- Triple threat can dance, sing, and act.
- This set a new standard for performances around the world.

Bill “Bojangles” Robinson

- Born in 1878 in Richmond, Virginia.
- Was apart of the first inter-racial performance duo with Shirley Temple.
- Was popular prior to the Civil Rights movement in the United States.
- Became the highest paid African American entertainer at the time.
- Tap dancer known for dancing on his toes and creating clear and percussive sounds.
- Danced on stage as well as on film, which spread tap dancing and impacted it greatly.
- May 25th (his birthday) is National Tap Dance Day.

Jazz

Gwen Verdon

- Born in 1925 in California.
- Was diseased when she was little, leading to damage in her legs. Accredited ballet for strengthening her legs.
- Worked closely with her husband, Bob Fosse.
- Received a fraction of the recognition that Fosse did.
- Known as Fosse's collaborator, dancer, and muse. She kept his legacy alive after his death.
- Was an assistant to Jack Cole, which greatly influenced her style. This is reflected in Fosse's work as well.
- Most famous roles were in *Sweet Charity* and *Damn Yankees*.

Jack Cole

- Born in 1911 in Brunswick, New Jersey.
- Known by many as the Father of Theatrical Jazz Dance.
- Grew up with an absent father and an emotionally neglectful mother. This childhood trauma would inspire his movement style and choreography.
- Trained with Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn (Denishawn), giving him a strong background in modern technique.
- Felt ballet limited a dancer's expression.
- Used dance for both entertainment and healing.
- Influenced powerhouses, such as Bob Fosse and Gwen Verdon.

Barton Mumaw

- Born in 1912 in Pennsylvania.
- Studied at Denishawn in New York and developed a secret romantic relationship with Ted Shawn.
- Homosexuality at this time was not accepted in America, forcing Mumaw to go to great lengths to keep his relationships private.
- Danced with Jack Cole in Ted Shawn's Men Dancers and developed a friendship with him.
- Traveled the country during the Great Depression while dancing for Ted Shawn.
- Was the star of the company, giving more exposure to male dancers and making dance a more respectable profession.

Jazz

Albertina Rasch

- Born in 1891 in Austria.
- Came from Polish and Jewish decent, and moved to America shortly before World War I.
- Started performing at the age of 14, appearing in many shows across America.
- Started choreographing and training her own dancers.
- Her work in *The Black Crook* is considered to have originated musical theatre.
- Combined ballet technique with newly popular jazz dance.
- Was known for including dancing that did not necessarily support or align with the story of the play.

Lynn Simonson

- Born in Los Angeles, California in 1943.
- Born into a family of dancers and musicians, which granted her early exposure to the arts.
- Taught dance classes starting at the age of 13.
- Moved to New York City at 18 to study and perform modern and ballet technique.
- Developed the Simonson Jazz Technique, which is still widely taught today.
- Created a technique that she believed could benefit any dancer, no matter their style.
- Traveled to over 16 countries to teach her jazz technique.

Carmen De Lavallade

- Born in 1931 in Los Angeles, California.
- Parents were from New Orleans with Creole and African descent, making her very connected to her heritage. This is inspired much of her work.
- Studied multiple artforms in New York City.
- Danced and performed for both Lester Horton and Alvin Ailey, two prominent figures in modern dance.
- Used their influence to develop her signature jazz style.
- Appeared on Broadway, television, and multiple films.

By looking back at the pioneers of dance, from genres spanning from court ballet to Broadway jazz, we are able to develop a better understanding of how dance has impacted society and culture and evolved according to the world around it. So often when we look back at history, it is dominated by men and their accomplishments. Throughout this experience, I have gained a greater appreciation for the female contribution to dance throughout history. Without these women's contributions, dance would not exist as it does in the world today. They introduced dance to new cultures, rebelled to develop new genres and styles, and cultivated techniques that will never be forgotten.



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