

URBANGATEWAYS

THE ROOTS OF BLACK DANCE IN AMERICA JOEL HALL DANCERS



ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

Explore the evolution of black dance in America from traditional African to concert jazz dance seen today through dynamic performances and interactive elements. Through the course of the show, audiences will discover how movement and expression can create community.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Two microphones with stands
- Sound system with auxiliary cord to connect to phone/laptop
- Minimum 20' x 12' performance space

MEET THE ARTISTS

Under the leadership of Artistic Director Jacqueline Sinclair, and Artistic Director Emeritus/Founder Joel Hall, the Joel Hall Dancers have carried their unique yet universally accessible voice to venues that span the world. In June of 2010, the Joel Hall Dancers presented "Here's to Life" which included six premiere works in addition to the re-staging of multiple works, including the critically acclaimed piece Y2Day.

In September of 2010, the Joel Hall Dancers performed at the Floral Pavilion in New Brighton, United Kingdom at the invitation of Merseyside Dance Initiative. The Joel Hall Dancers presented "In the Shadow of Nina Simone," which once again received extraordinary reviews and feedback from both the public and the dance world. Just as Nina Simone always searched for new ways to present her music, the Joel Hall Dancers mirrored this quest for novel presentation, building upon their original unique style rooted in traditional jazz dance. The Joel Hall Dancers also performed several other staples from their repertoire, including "El Gato Negro" and "Compassion of the Sorceress."

During our 2015 40th anniversary "Celebration Season," the Joel Hall Dancers electrified audiences across Chicagoland with performances on some of the region's grandest stages. From creating the world's largest kick-line at Ravinia Festival in Highland Park...to "Anja: the Unexpected," an ambitious fusion of live jazz music and dance at the University of Chicago's Logan Center in Hyde Park...to the spectacular culminating performance of the Billy Strayhorn centennial celebration: "Lush Life: The Music of Billy Strayhorn" at the Auditorium Theatre. As Chicago Tribune critic Howard Reich said of "Lush Life" in his review: "Add to this the sometimes slinky, sometimes sensuous choreography of the Joel Hall Dancers, and you had a multifaceted Strayhorn homage that captured the intrinsic elegance of the man's music."

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

“Social dance is an expression that emerges from a community” Camilla A. Brown, dancer, choreographer, educator

Social dance is an umbrella term that encompasses a range of styles including salsa, swing, tango, the bop, and countless others. At its core, social dances are movements performed by a group of people as a form of celebration, expression, and togetherness. Each social dance has its own rules and steps to follow, but the uniting element of social dance is that it is about creative expression and community. Many of the dances seen in America come from African and African-American traditions. Over time as the styles became more popular, the community in which these dances were performed to and performed by expanded.

Brief timeline of some African and Africa-American social dances:

Juba – developed in the 18th and 19th centuries by enslaved Africans working on plantations in America. The movement is based in African traditions and was used to create community among individuals living and working together that did not have a common language. It was a way to keep cultural traditions alive and a form of creative freedom for those living in captivity.

Cakewalk – a dance developed in the late 19th century by people living in captivity as a parody of how they viewed southern high-society. Slave owners and others greatly enjoyed watching the dance (not knowing it was an imitation of their culture) and started to host competitions where slaves performed. The winner of the competition won a cake, thus granting the dance its name.

Charleston – created in dance halls in Charleston, South Carolina in the 1920s. It was one of the first social dances popularized beyond the black community where it is originated.

The Twist – brought to America from the Congo during the Transatlantic Slave Trade and was made popular worldwide in the 1950s by Chubby Checker and Dick Clark. An excellent example of how through social dances the boundaries between communities can become fluid.

RESOURCES

From Juba to Jitterbug to Jookin: Black Dance in America <https://goo.gl/AYVVdH>

TED-Ed The History of African-American Social Dance (Camille A. Brown) <https://goo.gl/ykn9A8>

The Kennedy Center ArtsEdge: Jazz Music, Dance, & Poetry Lesson Plan (Grades K-4) <https://bit.ly/3geIWUq>

How to do Body Isolations Tutorial <https://goo.gl/ZLWeGR>

The History Makers: Joel Hall <https://goo.gl/6iRuya>

Chicago Guide for Teaching and Learning in the Arts: Scope and Sequence

Dance Literacy

History and Culture

(IL 27B; Nat'l 5)

- Investigate the impact of historical events or significant contributors on the development of dance.
- Describe similarities and differences in dance movements from various cultures and forms.
- Identify and explore dance genres and innovators from various historical periods.

Critical and Creative Thinking

(IL 25B; Nat'l 4, 6)

- Define the role of an audience and performer in dance.
- Observe and describe the dance elements in various dance movement studies using appropriate dance vocabulary.

Interpretation & Evaluation:

Interpretation & Communication (IL 26B, 27A; Nat'l 3)

- Discuss various dance movement experiences and express preferences.

SHOW INTRODUCTION

On the day of the performance, please have someone from the school read the following when welcoming the performers onstage: "Today we have a show from Urban Gateways. We are so excited to have Joel Hall Dancers with us today to present "The Roots of Black Dance in America." Please give the performers your full attention and welcome them to the stage."

VOCABULARY

CHOREOGRAPHY

A sequence of rhythmic movements that is practiced and rehearsed.

COMMUNITY

A group of people with a common characteristic or interest within a larger society.

DJEMBE

A native drum of West Africa made from a single piece of hardwood attached to a goatskin drumhead by a net of tuning strings.

HOUSE MUSIC

A genre of electronic dance music created by DJs in Chicago in the early 1980s. Early house music was characterized by a repetitive, minimalist beat created using drum machines and synthesized basslines.

INCLUSIVITY

Open to everyone; not limited to certain people.

ISOLATION

The movement of one part of the body separately from the rest to move one part of your body while the rest of the body stays still.

JAZZ DANCE

A classification of several types of social, performance, and concert dances made most popular in various forms of commercial entertainment.

TORSO

The main part of the human body not including the head, arms, and legs.

UNISON

When two or more people perform the same steps at the same time; the whole group moves as one.

UNITY

The quality or state of being in harmony with others; the state of those who are in agreement.

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

1. Play different types of music (classical, salsa, house, appropriate hip hop, etc.) and ask students to move how the music makes them feel. Afterwards, discuss why students chose to move the way they did. Why do certain styles of dance go with certain styles of music? How does music and dance evoke certain emotions?
2. Classroom Discussion: People from every part of the world dance. Why do you think this is? Why is dance important in society?

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

1. Ask students to share a dance move they know or make up their own. Encourage students to incorporate some of the movements seen in the performance. Remind students that it is not about being the best dancer, instead they should focus on using movement to express themselves.
2. Watch the body isolation tutorial as a class and practice the movements. What other parts of the body can be used to create isolations?