

Beginning Jazz Dance from the Jazz Age, 1920s-1940s

Tuesdays, 1-3 PM

3/17-4/30

Location: Shriners Center

DESCRIPTION: This 8-week course will include one hour of dancing each session, along with one hour of video & conversation. The first hour will focus on learning elements of African-American vernacular jazz dance from the 1920-40s. The class begins with an age-appropriate warmup of all parts of the body. Then we'll learn vernacular steps such as the shim sham, Charleston, and box step, and put them together into short dances. We will dance mainly to jazz music from the 1920s-40s, along with some more contemporary jazz songs.

The last hour of class will focus on student presentations, video clips, and conversation about readings or videos. The focus will be on learning the fascinating history behind this African-American form. The instructor will provide readings for each class, either via pdfs of articles/book chapters, or links to web articles.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Overall goal of the course:

To increase appreciation for the performance and history of vernacular jazz dance.

1. Students will perform basic warmup movements at their own level of ability
2. Students will perform basic vernacular jazz steps and be able to identify them by name
3. Students will perform basic jazz movement sequences (short dances) at their own level of ability
4. Students will discuss aspects of jazz dance history found in assigned articles
5. Students will take a turn in leading the class for a 25-minute session (presentation & discussion, or all discussion)
6. Students will collaborate to create a list of course themes on the last day

FORMAT: The instructor will be responsible for leading the movement section of class each week. Students will come dressed in comfortable clothing that allows movement, along with sneakers or dance shoes. During the second part of class, students will make brief presentations based on suggested topics, including at least one video clip. Alternatively, students may choose to lead discussions on assigned readings. Students will sign up for the topic of their choice and will have about 25 minutes for their portion of class. More instruction on presentations & leading discussions will be offered in the first class.

Topics

Week 1: Jazz history overview (instructor) March 17

Readings: From *Jazz Dance: A History of the Roots and Branches* Eds. Lindsay Guarino & Wendy Oliver (PDFs) (2014)

- Introduction to History Section p. 33-34
- Chap 6 "The African Origins of an American Art Form" by Takiyah nur Amin, p. 35-44,
- Chap 7 "Jazz Dance from Emancipation to 1970" by Jill Crosby & Michele Moss, p. 45-58

Week 2: Africanist Elements; Hollywood Film- March 24

Topic 1: "Africanist Elements in American Jazz Dance," by Julie Kerr-Berry, p. 79-92

Reading from *Rooted Jazz Dance: Africanist Aesthetics and Equity in the Twenty-First Century* (2022), edited by Guarino, Jones & Oliver

Topic 2: "Vernacular Jazz Dance and Race in Hollywood Cinema" by Suzie Trenka

Reading from *Jazz Dance: A History of the Roots and Branches* (2014), Chap. 29, p.240-248

Week 3: Florence Mills; Josephine Baker-March 31

Topic 3: Florence Mills

- Reading: “Florence Mills, Queen of Happiness,” NYC Public Schools, n.d.

<https://www.schools.nyc.gov/learning/subjects/social-studies/hidden-voices/contentdetails/hidden-voices/2022/02/28/hidden-voices-florence-mills-queen-of-happiness>

Topic 4: Josephine Baker

- Reading: “the Remarkable Life of Josephine Baker,” Paris Plus, n.d.

<https://parisplusplus.com/france/dordogne/the-remarkable-life-of-josephine-baker-cabaret-star-resistance-heroine-activist-owner-of-a-dordogne-chateau/>

Week 4: The Nicholas Brothers; Katherine Dunham-April 2

Topic 5: The Nicholas Brothers

- Reading: The Official Fayard Nicholas Website, n.d.

<https://www.nicholasbrothers.com/>

Topic 6: Katherine Dunham

- Reading: “Katherine Dunham, One Woman Revolution,” by Wendy Perron (2000)

<https://wendyperron.com/katherine-dunham-one-woman-revolution/>

Week 5: Bill Bojangles Robinson; Shuffle Along-April 9

Topic 7: Bill Bojangles Robinson

- Reading: “Bill Bojangles Robinson: Richmond History Maker” by the Valentine Museum Staff

<https://thevalentine.org/explore/richmond-stories/featured-stories/bill-bojangles-robinson-richmond-history-maker>

Topic 8: *Shuffle Along: A Musical that Sparked a Black Renaissance*, by Caseen Gaines (2023)

<https://www.lincolncenter.org/feature/legacies-of-san-juan-hill/lessemgreatershuffle-alonglessemgreater-the-musical-that-sparked-a-black-renaissance>

Week 6: The Savoy Ballroom; Frankie Manning-April 16

Topic 9: The Savoy Ballroom

- Reading: “The Savoy Ballroom,” *Harlem World*, 2014

<https://www.harlemworldmagazine.com/the-savoy-ballroom-harlem-new-york-1930/>

Topic 10: Frankie Manning

- Reading: “Frankie Manning,” National Endowment for the Arts, n.d.

<https://www.arts.gov/honors/heritage/frankie-manning>

Week 7: Fred Astaire; Jeni LeGon-April 23

Topic 11: Fred Astaire

- “Fred Astaire,” in *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* by Marshall & Jean Stearns (1968) PDF

Topic 12: Jeni LeGon

- “‘The Sepia Cinderella Girl’ Jeni LeGon” by Rusty Frank (1994) Da Capo Press

Week 8: Latasha Barnes; April 30

Topic 13: Latasha Barnes

- Reading: “LaTasha Barnes: Reclaiming Black Vernacular Dances, One Performance at a Time,” by Lauren Wingenroth, *Dance Magazine*, 2022

<https://dancemagazine.com/latasha-barnes-cover-story/#qsc.tab=0>

- Wrap-up—discuss course themes

SUGGESTIONS FOR A 15- MIN. PRESENTATION WITH 10-MIN. DISCUSSION

- Find 1-3 video clips on YouTube that relate to your topic; write down the names of the clips; come to class 15 minutes early to get the clips set up
- OR create a PowerPoint and embed clips
- OR create a PowerPoint and set up clips separately
- PowerPoints should be saved to a flash drive and brought to class that way
- After each clip is played, allow for a brief discussion of it. Some possible questions: What did you notice about this video? Did you notice any movements similar to those we have learned in the dancing part of class? How is this clip different from XXX (another video we've seen). Are there any Africanist elements from our Kerr-Berry reading that you can identify in this clip?
- Please tie your presentation to some aspect of the assigned reading for your topic

SUGGESTIONS FOR A 25-MIN. ARTICLE DISCUSSION

- Give a brief summary of the article, or have the class do it
- Create a list of about 6 questions for discussion. These questions should invite more than a "yes" or "no" answer. i.e. What was the significance of...? What were the signature elements of X's style? What did you notice in the reading? What were some of the main points that the author made?
- It is always helpful to give a visual example of a dancer or choreographer's style, either with a photo or video clip. That gives everyone a common visual reference to go along with the reading.
- **CLASS SIZE LIMIT: 14**

RESOURCES / EXPENSES: Access to the internet needed to view YouTube videos.

COORDINATOR(S): Wendy Oliver