Chapter 8

Imported Influences: 1900–1929

# Overview

At the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, dancers were searching for new dance forms with which to express themselves. The era of imported influences on early 20th-century American dance was a rich and complex period. Each artist and company brought eye-opening artistry in dance to a virtually untouched country. They encountered many trials and obstacles in their tours, but their contributions were enormous and laid the groundwork for the emergence of American ballet.

Emerging from the development of physical education for women at the turn of the century and blending Delsartian philosophy, a new form of dance emerged. Early dance artists and teachers were seeking a contemporary, natural movement to communicate contemporary thoughts and themes and aesthetics.

Several innovators presented their personal points of view through their dancing and the dances they created. Each of these people inspired other dancers and attracted audiences for dance. The dance innovators and their contributions planted the first seeds for an emerging American dance form.

# Activities and Assignments

The activities and assignments are in three parts: social dance, ballet, and new dance.

## Social Dance

### Activity 1. Early 20th-Century Dances

Using the Web Links later in this document, learn some of the early 20th-century social and fad dances up until World War I. Ask a member of the class to introduce this retro view of social dance from this time period (fox-trot, turkey trot, and so on). Create a video recording of a rendition of each dance, then write a paragraph about the dance, its style, and how it relates to this time period.

### Activity 2. Won’t You Charleston With Me?

Using the Web Links, explore the jazz age. Learn the Charleston, the black bottom, the shimmy, and other dances. (Or, read the book *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance,* by Marshall Winslow Stearns; see the appendixes in Stearns’ book for the Labanotation for specific dances and steps.) Create a video recording of the re-creations of these dances. Write a paragraph about the dance you have selected. Describe its style and how it relates to this time period.

## Ballet

### Activity 1. The Magic of Pavlova

This section contains three activities related to Pavlova:

* Read a biography, scholarly research articles, and Internet sources about Pavlova, and develop a time line for her career. Then write a two- to three-page paper that identifies the milestones in her career and significant works as a dancer and choreographer, her dance innovations, and her contributions.
* Discover where Pavlova toured in the United States and throughout the world; indicate these places on a world atlas. Present a three- to five-minute oral report to the class about her tours and their time frames. Focus on her U.S. tour and where she performed, her dance innovations, and her contributions to dance.
* For intermediate-level ballet students: View a videorecorded performance of *The Dying Swan.* Learn the dance, perform it in class, and record video of your performance. Before you perform it for the class, present a brief introduction about the dancer, the choreographer, and the significance of the dance to Pavlova. Or, after you prepare your report, ask another student to interview you in the role of Pavlova so you can explain the meaning of the dance to your audience. You could have someone record video of your interview.

### Activity 2. Diaghilev

This section has three activities related to Diaghilev:

* Framing Diaghilev and his life: Using sources such as his biography and other resources, write a three- to five-page report or create an infographic about Diaghilev’s life. Who were some of the dancers, choreographers, and other artists associated with the company?
* Audience reaction: Discover how the avant-garde ballets Diaghilev produced affected Paris and audiences in other cities beginning in 1909 and subsequent selected seasons. Or write an editorial to your local newspaper about your reaction to a specific ballet from the point of view of a person who attended a Ballets Russes performance.
* Diaghilev tours America: Using Internet sites and books, research the two U.S. tours of Diaghilev’s company and share this information with the class. Focus on who danced, how things were billed for the audience, the management of the tour, and the importance of the Bolshevik Revolution to the dancers and the company.

### Activity 3. The Diaghilev Ballets Russes Repertoire

Create a chart (spreadsheet, infographic, or time line) showing the major dancers, choreographers, ballets, and designers during the various eras of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes.

Indicate which ballets that were created during each era survived. What is their significance today?

Write a summary paragraph about each of the following based on your findings. Cite your sources.

* What was American ballet before Diaghilev toured?
* What was the significance of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes visiting America?
* What changes occurred in American ballet after Diaghilev’s two tours?

### Activity 4. Significant Ballet From the Diaghilev Era

Choose a significant ballet from one of the major choreographers of Diaghilev’s company. In the role of the choreographer, show a video or reconstruct an excerpt of the work and tell the audience about the choreography.

## New Dance

### Activity 1. New Dance Artists and Educators and Their Styles

Research each of the following personalities using the Internet, books, and dance videos. If you work in a group, select a name or share one of the names with a classmate.

* Sargent and Gilbert
* Isadora Duncan
* Loie Fuller
* Ruth St. Denis
* Ted Shawn

Identify the *who, what, when,* and *where* about the person, the role, and contributions to the exploration of a new dance form, and answer the following questions.

* What influenced them as they searched for a new dance?
* What type of dances did they create?
* How were these dances significant in the formation of a new dance form?
* What contributions did these personalities make to 20th-century American dance?

In pairs or small groups, develop an oral and written report for the class about the dancer or personality you have chosen. The oral report includes a reconstruction of one of the dances from video footage or is based on your readings and video clips of the artists. In other words, it is a re-creation in the style of the artist.

### Activity 2. Exploring Dance Styles

Divide into groups. Choose a dance style from the following list. Search the Library of Congress Dance Instruction Manuals website (<https://www.loc.gov/collections/dance-instruction-manuals-from-1490-to-1920/?q=&fa=Subject%3ADance+Instruction+and+Technical+Manuals>) or your library for books by these dance innovators:

* Greek dance (Ruby Ginner or Emil Rath)
* Aesthetic dance (Melvin Gilbert)
* Folk dance (Elizabeth Burchenal)
* Ballet and theatrical folk dance (Louis Chalif)

Then, using the instructions on steps and poses, select and re-create a dance in the style your group has selected. Practice and present to the class. Write a one-page summary of the processes you used to re-create a historical version of the dance. What did you learn from this experience (process)? How would you evaluate your dance work (product)? What would you have done differently if you were to stage the work again?

### Activity 3. Early 20th-Century Dance Artists

View a video of two of these dance artists: Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, Ruth St. Denis, and Ted Shawn. Using the information in Report of a Live or Recorded Performance (see WebQuests and Research Projects) as a guide, select two artists and write a one-page summary about each choreographer and his or her choreographic work and style.

Write a one-page comparison paper of the two choreographers and the video performance work you have selected.

### Activity 4. The Denishawn Company

The Denishawn Company traveled the United States and the world. Create a time line outlining when and where they performed and, if possible, what they performed. You might wish to indicate these places on a world atlas.

Present a three- to five-minute oral and PowerPoint report to the class about the company’s tours. Focus on the Denishawn U.S. tours and where they performed, their dance innovations, and contributions to dance in the United States.

### Activity 5. The Denishawn Repertory

Create a chart (spreadsheet and time line) showing the major dancers, choreographers, works, and designers that were contributors to this company. Write a summary paragraph about each of the following based on your findings. Cite your sources.

* What was American dance before Denishawn toured?
* Describe the significance of the Denishawn tours in the United States.
* What was the status of American dance after Denishawn and its tours?

# Web Links

20th-century dance  
[www.loc.gov/rr/perform/guide/dance.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/perform/guide/dance.html)

1920s and 1930s music  
<http://dismuke.org/Electric/index.html>  
<http://dismuke.org/Acoustic/index.html>

Vernon and Irene Castle  
<http://new.danceheritage.org/html/castle.html>  
Use “Vernon and Irene Castle” as a search term for a YouTube video.

Fox-trot  
[www.ballroomdancers.com/Dances/dance\_overview.asp?Dance=AFX](http://www.ballroomdancers.com/Dances/dance_overview.asp?Dance=AFX)

Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes  
<https://library.harvard.edu/onlineexhibits/diaghilev/index.html>

Classical composers  
[www.classical-composers.org/page/time](http://www.classical-composers.org/page/time)

Ruth St. Denis materials  
[www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf687007gx/](http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf687007gx/)

# Review Questions

1. What was society like during this time?
2. Who were the dancers and other contributors to ballet and new dance during this period?
3. What were the dances, music, and other arts that supported dance during this period?
4. What were the significant dances, ballets, new choreography, and literature of the period?

# Vocabulary

## Ballet

abstract ballet

*Après-midi d’un faune, L*’ (*Afternoon of a Faun*)

ballet blanc

Diaghilev, Serge

*Dying Swan, The*

Fokine, Michel

Fokine’s principles

Massine, Léonide

Nijinska, Bronislava

Nijinsky, Vaslav

*Noces, Les*

*Parade*

Pavlova, Anna

*Petrouchka*

*Sacre du Printemps, Le (The Rite of Spring)*

story ballet

Stravinsky, Igor

*Sylphides, Les*

## New Dance

aesthetic dance

Colby, Gertrude

Delsarte, François

Denishawn School and Company

Duncan, Isadora

*Fire Dance*

Fuller, Loie

Gilbert, Melvin

Jacob’s Pillow

Larson, Bird

*Prometheus Bound*

*Radha*

Shawn, Ted

St. Denis, Ruth