Chapter 11

Chance and Change: 1960–1979

# Overview

In New York, emerging ballet companies joined the established companies of the New York City Ballet (NYCB) and American Ballet Theatre (ABT). Meanwhile a larger decentralization of ballet in American metropolitan areas that had begun earlier began to gain recognition. No longer was New York the only dance scene.

In the 1970s, several factors expanded dance and dance audiences. The National Endowment for the Arts committed to presenting dance performance in major cities. Civic and regional ballet companies joined to form a grassroots network for nonprofessional dance. In addition, some university dance departments began adjunct ballet companies.

The 1950s brought the maturation of modern dance to a point of solidification by the end of the decade. The choreographers who were considered avant-garde in their modern dance choreography at the beginning of the 1960s were considered mainstream by the end of the decade.

Many artists collaborated with modern dancers and choreographers of the period, as well as influencing their work. The social, economic, and political times supported experimentation and even rebellion in the arts. They were searching for art that would connect with the common man and everyday surroundings. Postmodern dance emerged that was stripped to its essence. It used everyday tasks and authentic and minimal movement, was presented in new structures, and involved intermediacy, multimedia, and sometimes raw, ritualistic experimentation.

# Activities and Assignments

The activities and assignments are in two parts: ballet and modern dance.

## Ballet

### Activity 1. Comparing Companies

Dance Theatre of Harlem and Joffrey Ballet emerged as players in the American ballet scene in the 1960s. What characterized each company’s development? What were the forces behind their development? What was the focus of each company’s repertory at its inception and at the end of this era (1979)? Does each ballet company have an associated school?

Depending on your teacher’s instruction, you will present your characterizations and comparisons as a PowerPoint presentation, WebQuest, oral report, or written report.

### Activity 2. All-Star Dancers

For this activity, choose either international stars in America or American dancers.

* International stars in America: Several dancers sought asylum in the United States. Research and write a brief biography of one of the dancers. Indicate milestones in his or her career and how his or her dance artistry or choreography or other dance contributions went in different directions after arriving in the United States.
* American dancers: Research and write a brief biography of either a male or female ballet star associated with this era. Indicate milestones in the career and information about his or her dance artistry, choreography, or other dance contributions.

### Activity 3. Decentralization of Ballet

Find a *Dance Magazine* from 1970 and another one from 1980. From the yellow pages at the back of the magazine, make a list of the civic, regional, and professional ballet companies outside of New York City. On a U.S. map, indicate the location of these companies. Write a summary about each company, director, and repertory. Find a picture from the company website and post it on the map.

## Modern Dance

### Activity 1. The Next Generation

Begin or continue to develop a modern dance family tree. Start with the four pioneers. Research the second generation of modern dancers, and answer these questions: With whom did they study? What direction did their choreography take? What contributions did they make to American modern dance? Then continue to the next generation—the avant-garde modern dancers and their work in the post-Cunningham era, or what was to establish the postmodern dance era.

### Activity 2. Comparing Second-Generation and Postmodern Choreographers

View a video of a significant work from a second-generation choreographer. Using Report of a Live or Recorded Performance (see web resource, WebQuests and Research Projects), analyze the choreographer’s work. Then view a video performance of a significant work of a postmodern choreographer, and analyze the choreographer’s works. Compare and contrast the work of a postmodern choreographer with a significant work of his or her mentor.

### Activity 3. Second-Generation Modern Dance Choreographers

Choose a choreographer from the following list, and use information in chapter 11 to capsulize his or her work. Select and view a video of one of his or her works. Do a WebQuest on the person, prepare an information sheet on the choreographer, and present it to the class.

* Paul Taylor
* Alwin Nikolais
* Alvin Ailey
* Merce Cunningham
* Yvonne Rainer
* Laura Dean

### Activity 4. Modern Dance Versus the Avant-Garde

Divide into two or three groups. One group researches modern dances of the 1950s and the other group researches either modern dance of the 1960s or modern dance of the 1970s. If you have a third group, then divide the three eras equally.

Compare and contrast modern dance in the 1950s with the 1960s; 1970s should focus on dancers, choreographers, and works. Show how the avant-garde, the Judson Dance Theater, and the post-Cunningham era had its roots in modern dance and the themes and ideas that became the avenues of departure for exploring dance during the 1960s and then the 1970s.

One person from each group becomes the commentator for each era. Create a time travelogue in the form of a PowerPoint presentation for each decade, and title it “You Were There”. Develop a media collage of pictures and music that represent the personalities and events of each decade, and share your presentation with the class.

**Extensions**

Movie time: Watch *West Side Story* or *Hair.* How did the social dances of the 1960s and 1970s mirror the times? What were the fashions of the 1960s? How do they contrast with those of the 1970s? Create a scene or happening from each of these decades showing the dances, the fashions, the music, and the songs from each decade.

Compare and contrast the Grand Union to the Judson Dance Theater as organizations. List the choreographers, their works, and defining moments.

### Activity 5. Merce Cunningham

Trace the choreographic innovations of Merce Cunningham from the 1940s through the present. As a PowerPoint presentation or infographic, create a biographical time line or list the milestones in his career that influenced his direction, his aesthetics, and his works.

# Web Links

Joffrey Ballet  
[www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/joffrey-history-of-the-joffrey-ballet/2392](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/joffrey-history-of-the-joffrey-ballet/2392)

The 1970s  
[www.thepeoplehistory.com/1970s.html](http://www.thepeoplehistory.com/1970s.html)

The 1960s and 1970s  
[www.1960sflashback.com/1960/Economy.asp](http://www.1960sflashback.com/1960/Economy.asp)

Fad dances of the 1960s  
<http://the60sofficialsite.com/Dance-Crazes-of-the-Sixties.html>  
[www.libraryofdance.org/dances/1960s-fad-dances](http://www.libraryofdance.org/dances/1960s-fad-dances)

Fad dances of the 1970s  
[www.classic70s.com/70s-dances.html](http://www.classic70s.com/70s-dances.html)

Dance Theatre of Harlem  
[www.dancetheatreofharlem.org/dth-company](http://www.dancetheatreofharlem.org/dth-company)  
<https://www.dancetheatreofharlem.org/our-history/>

American Ballet Theatre ballet descriptions  
<https://www.abt.org/explore/learn/>

Anna Halprin  
<https://annahalprindigitalarchive.omeka.net/biography>  
<https://annahalprindigitalarchive.omeka.net/about>

Yvonne Rainer  
[www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions\_events/exhibitions/rainer](http://www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions_events/exhibitions/rainer)

Twyla Tharp  
[www.twylatharp.org](http://www.twylatharp.org)  
<http://www.twylatharp.org/index.php/works>

Alvin Ailey  
[www.alvinailey.org](http://www.alvinailey.org)  
[www.alvinailey.org/about/history](http://www.alvinailey.org/about/history)

Judith Jamison  
[www.makers.com/judith-jamison](http://www.makers.com/judith-jamison)  
[www.alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/judith-jamison](http://www.alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/judith-jamison)

Paul Taylor Dance Company  
<http://www.ptamd.org/>  
Click on “What Is PTAMD” in the top selection bar.

Merce Cunningham   
<https://www.mercecunningham.org/>  
<https://www.mercecunningham.org/the-work/choreography/>

# Review Questions

1. What was society like during the era of chance and change?
2. Who were the dancers and other contributors to ballet and modern 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, modern dance works, and dance literature of the period?

# Vocabulary

## Ballet

Arpino, Gerald

*Astarte*

Baryshnikov, Mikhail

Dance Theatre of Harlem

*Dances at a Gathering*

*Episodes*

Farrell, Suzanne

Harkness Ballet

*Jewels*

Joffrey Ballet

Joffrey, Robert

*John Henry*

Kirkland, Gelsey

Makarova, Natalia

Mitchell, Arthur

Nureyev, Rudolf

regional ballet movement

*Trinity*

## Modern Dance

Ailey, Alvin

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

*Aureole*

*Big Bertha*

Cage, John

*Canfield*

contact improvisation

*Cry*

Cunningham, Merce

Dean, Laura

*Deuce Coupe*

Dunn, Robert and Judith

*Eight Jelly Rolls*

*Feast of Ashes*

*Fugue, The*

Grand Union

Halprin, Anna

*Imago*

Judson Dance Theater

*Light*

Monk, Meredith

Nikolais, Alwin

*Orbs*

Paul Taylor Dance Company

Paxton, Steve

postmodern dance

*Push Comes to Shove*

Rainer, Yvonne

*Revelations*

Takei, Kei

Taylor, Paul

Tharp, Twyla

*Tower*

*Trio A*

*Variations V*

*Winterbranch*