

Dancing *in* America

by Barbara Diamond



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Introduction

Dance is an age-old form of human expression. It is natural for people to want to express their emotions through movement, and to tell stories through movement, music, and words. Passing these movements, as well as music and words, to future generations is natural, too.

This book covers the development of dance in America. Its chapters explore where our different types of dance came from and who the pioneers in American dance were. These were the people with the dreams, energy, and determination to explore dance, change dance, and bring dance to the public.

The fact that America is made up of so many different cultures has had a big impact on dance here. Americans experience such a wide variety of dance expressions, from Native American hoop dances, to tap dancing that resulted from a mingling of African American and Irish folk dances, to dance crazes like the lindy hop and the hustle.

Each group that immigrated to America brought its own dances, music, and stories. As people met and shared, new dances were born that are particularly American. Such dances include tap dancing, the **swing**, and the twist.

American dance is rich, varied, and always changing, whether it's ballet, modern dance, or social and ballroom dancing. It reflects the values of our country that honor hard work and ingenuity, individual initiative and perseverance, and sharing and **collaboration**.

This book will also show how the pursuit of dance, whether as a beginner or a star, brings many benefits to those who pursue it.

As dancer and choreographer Agnes de Mille said, "Girl or boy, gifted or clumsy, learn then, if you can, to dance. You will stand up straighter and walk prouder the rest of your life. And you will be kinder and more polite in all physical matters, and less afraid."

Chapter 1: Ballet

The dance form known as ballet began in the 1500s in the royal courts of Italy and France. At that time in Europe, the royalty hired poets, artists, dancing masters, and musicians for their courts. Nobles studied dancing and fencing and were instructed in how to move and behave. Ballet today can be traced to these nobles who stood very straight and tall. Their posture also involved turning their legs out and rounding their arms.

France's King Louis XIV enjoyed dancing and had lavish court events. He trained every day with his dancing instructor. When he was twelve, he took part in his first ballet. Some of the parts he played were as Apollo the Roman god, and the Rising Sun. Because of the latter role, he was known as the Sun King. Sometimes nobles and military officials performed in his productions. These were usually based on ancient Greek and Roman myths. There were fancy sets, costumes, and music.

King Louis XIV established the first ballet school in 1661. Many of today's ballet movements and positions can be traced to this time. This is why they have French names.

Opera houses began to open in the late 1600s. Often ballet was part of the performances. By this time, professional dancers performed in the ballets. By the middle of the 1700s, ballet had separated from opera. Movements took the place of the songs and words.

In the early 1800s, Romantic ballet began. The costumes were lighter so that dancers could move around more easily. The goal of Romantic ballets was to arouse people's feelings. Its purpose was not just to show people the technical skills of the dancers. Female dancers began to dance on their toes, or on pointe. They often performed roles that were fairylike. Many of the themes of these ballets were fantastical so that people in the audience could forget the reality of daily life.

In the fantasy scenes of these ballets, the dancers jumped high, and male dance partners lifted the females to increase the floating effect. Group dances became more important. They were performed by the corps de ballet, many dancers who move as one. The music for ballet changed during this time, also. Musical themes for the main characters helped develop the ballet's stories.

Ballet changed again in the late 1800s due to the influence of Russian ballets. Some of these were *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*. Ballet teachers developed methods to strengthen dancers and to increase their technical skills. Choreographers, people who create dances, became more important.

By the 1900s, some choreographers were making changes in ballet. They began to use less elaborate costumes and more modern sets and stories. Displays of dancing skills became less important than creating a convincing atmosphere. They combined dance, music, and set design in more equal amounts.

One of the famous companies at this time was the Ballets Russes, which toured Europe and the United States. The director,



Dancer putting on her toe shoes

These repeated exercises are required of ballet training even though they may seem boring and difficult. They have been developed over hundreds of years to enable the dancers to train their bodies in ways that will give them feelings of accomplishment and pride. Other benefits from studying ballet can be increased confidence, greater strength and flexibility, and the pleasure of working with others in a group effort.



Students who want to continue in ballet beyond taking classes might try out for a ballet company. They audition for places in these companies and may eventually **tour** with one of them. They may even dance on stages all over the world. And some, like Maria Tallchief, may become a prima ballerina, the star of their company.

Dancer in
The Nutcracker

Famous Ballet Stories

In *Coppélia*, a toymaker makes a doll he names Coppélia. He sets her up on his balcony. Franz, who is passing by, falls in love with her. His fiancée Swanilda watches and then creeps into the toymaker's shop. She discovers that Coppélia is just a doll. Meanwhile, Franz breaks into the shop. The doctor drugs Franz, who falls asleep. The doctor plans to transfer Franz's life force to his doll so she can come alive. Swanilda is the one who saves Franz from the toymaker's plot.

In *The Nutcracker*, a strange man gives a nutcracker doll to a little girl named Clara. At night, Clara creeps downstairs to look at her doll. She watches the Nutcracker lead toy soldiers in a fight against rats. Because she helps the Nutcracker win the battle, she is treated to a magical journey. She travels to a land of snow, where snowflakes dance. And she goes to a Kingdom of Sweets where she watches dancing sweets, including the Sugar Plum Fairy.

In *The Sleeping Beauty*, Princess Aurora pricks her finger on a spinning wheel spindle, a curse from a wicked fairy called Carabosse. She falls asleep for 100 years but does not die, thanks to the help of the Lilac Fairy. After the

hundred years, the Lilac Fairy shows a prince a vision of the sleeping princess. He finds his way to her, but has to fight off Carabosse before he can awaken the princess with a kiss. At their wedding, characters from other fairy tales appear, such as Little Red Riding Hood.

In *Swan Lake*, Prince Siegfried's mother, the Queen, tells him he must choose a bride. He is more interested, however, in using his new bow, which he has just been given for his birthday. He goes swan hunting. In the moonlight, he sees a swan change into a beautiful maiden. She is Princess Odette, who is under the spell of a wicked magician. She and her companions live as swans by day and as humans at night. The spell can only be broken when someone swears to love and marry her. Siegfried believes she is his true love. The ballet becomes complicated when the Queen gives a ball so the prince can pick a woman to marry. The wicked magician comes with his daughter, whom he has disguised to look like Princess Odette. The prince is tricked into asking the magician's daughter to marry him. The ballet ends with Prince Siegfried and Princess Odette plunging into the lake together.

Both had reached the dream their mother had for them—of becoming professional ballerinas.

In 1947, there was a breakthrough performance for both Tallchief and Balanchine with a piece called *Orpheus*. The music was by a famous composer, Igor Stravinsky. Tallchief's performance won the Annual Dance Magazine's award. One of their strengths was that both Tallchief, and Balanchine understood the importance of music in dance. They also understood the dancer's job of interpreting the music for the audience. Both had strong backgrounds in music as well as dance. They brought this experience and knowledge to their dance and **choreography**.

Balanchine's dance company was still struggling financially despite the success of *Orpheus*. Then in 1949, the three—Stravinsky, Tallchief, and Balanchine—worked together again on the ballet *The Firebird*, which is based on a story from Russian folklore. The story takes place in a magical garden where a prince discovers and captures the beautiful and rare firebird. In exchange for her freedom, the firebird gives the prince one of her feathers. If the prince is ever in need of her, he may use the feather to call for aide. Soon after this encounter, the prince's beloved princess falls under an evil magician's spell. The prince calls on the firebird, and she saves the princess.

As opening night for *The Firebird* came near, Tallchief felt sick. When she swallowed, her throat burned. Balanchine took her to the doctor, who insisted she have an operation to remove her tonsils. After surgery, the doctor ordered Tallchief to rest. Worried about the upcoming performance, however, she returned to rehearsals after only two days.

To make matters worse, her new costume did not arrive until the day of the performance. Tallchief was concerned about how the headdress of feathers would affect her balance and dancing. There wasn't even time to rehearse with the new costume.

Maria Tallchief in
The Firebird

Due to all the mishaps before *The Firebird*, neither Tallchief nor Balanchine thought the performance would go well enough to expect **curtain calls** from the audience. Balanchine wore his ordinary clothes instead of a suit to the performance, and Tallchief did not practice for a curtain call.

During the performance, Balanchine heard the amazed and appreciative gasps of the audience as Tallchief fluttered and flew through the air. At the end of the ballet, people rose to their feet and chanted her name repeatedly. "Tallchief! Tallchief! Tallchief!" There were curtain calls after all!

That night, Tallchief's performance as the magical bird brought her fame in the dance world. *The Firebird* gave Balanchine's company, the New York City Ballet, its greatest success up until that time.

Only a couple of years after *The Firebird*, Tallchief and Balanchine's marriage ended. She later said, "I realize now I was just too young to be married to a genius." They continued to work





Arthur Mitchell (1935-) and the Dance Theatre of Harlem

together for over ten years. Tallchief went on to perform all over the United States and the world. She appeared on television many times.

One fan said that Tallchief “thrills the spirit, moves the heart, and brings to the eyes tears that cannot be withheld, not only for the Swan Queen, but from the knowledge that this is a lovely and perfect thing.”

In 1953, Tallchief went back to Oklahoma for a ceremony in her honor. Her parents and grandmother joined her. The Osage Tribal Council named her Princess of Two Worlds, Princess Wa-Xthe-Thonba, and made her an honorary leader. She was crowned with a headdress of feathers, and ate fry bread and beef cooked with dried corn. She watched dances performed in her honor. At this time, she was the most famous ballerina in the world.

In 1956, Tallchief married Henry Paschen, who was involved in his family’s construction business. He was also a lover of opera and ballet and was a great admirer of Tallchief’s talent. Tallchief left New York City to join him in Chicago. She continued to dance even after she had a baby, Elise Maria, in 1959. She retired from dancing in 1966 and concentrated on teaching dance and supporting the arts in Chicago. She taught her students what she had learned that had made her a star. “Training is everything,” she told a reporter. “It’s all work and muscle memory.”

When Tallchief was 71 years old, the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., named her “one of the outstanding artists of the twentieth century.”

Arthur Mitchell grew up in a poor family in Harlem, New York. He worked very hard to become the first African American accepted into the New York City Ballet. He went on to form the first successful all-African American ballet company, the Dance Theatre of Harlem. Mitchell did not shy away from challenges but welcomed them. He is one dancer who succeeded in achieving his dreams. His dreams were not just personal ones. They involved helping young people in the neighborhood where he grew up. In addition, he created a model for other inner-city communities.

When he was a boy living in Harlem, Mitchell loved to dance. A junior high school teacher happened to see him dance and encouraged him to apply to the public High School of the Performing Arts in New York City. This high school was the inspiration for the movie *Fame*. Mitchell did a tap dance routine for his audition. He only had one routine, which was based on dances he had seen the famous Fred Astaire perform in movies. Mitchell was accepted into the school. He studied tap, ballet, and modern dance there. He became more interested in ballet than anything else, because he found it to be the most challenging dance form.

Mitchell did so well in this school that he won scholarships to continue studying dance. People warned him to stay away from ballet. They told him it was very difficult for an African American man to be in ballet. Despite these warnings, Mitchell chose to go to the School of American Ballet, the school of the New York City Ballet.

At the School of American Ballet, he did experience the **racism** people had warned him about. White parents complained about

It wasn't until Katherine was six years old that her father rescued her and Albert. He brought them to live with him and his new wife, Annette, in Joliet, Illinois. Annette was a good mother to the two children. Albert, though, had changed. He was only concerned with his business, a dry-cleaning store. He put pressure on everyone in the family to help out with the work.

Katherine was not terribly fond of school, but she did excel in sports. She also showed her leadership skills and original ideas early on in elementary school. In high school, she played hockey and basketball, and was a member of the dance club. She managed to convince her parents to let her take dance lessons. This was something that not many African American children of her time could afford to do.

When she was 14, Dunham came up with an idea to help her church raise money for a new parish house. She organized a cabaret. People would pay admission to be entertained and to enjoy food and drink.



Katherine Dunham

Her Blue Moon Café was a big success, and her dancing was the highlight. Once again, Dunham showed the talent and initiative that would accompany her for the rest of her life. The beginnings of her passion for what would become her lifelong dream and career was evident, too—to be a professional dancer.

By this time, Albert Jr. had left home to study at the University of Chicago on a scholarship. Dunham really missed her brother. As soon as she graduated high school, she followed him to the University of Chicago. She made sure to find time to study tap and ballet there. She also worked in a library to support herself.

In 1930, when she was only 20 years old, Dunham thought of another way to earn money. She decided to start a dance school. Two friends helped her. A choreographer named Ruth Page gave her money to rent a studio. A ballet dancer named Mark Turbyfill taught classes for free. Her dream was to form an African American dance troupe, which was a new concept at the time. She had to close the school due to financial problems, but she never forgot her dream.

Then a couple of things happened that helped Dunham along her life's path. One was at the University of Chicago, where she heard an anthropology professor speak. He talked about dance and culture and how they were linked. He said that much of African American culture had begun in Africa. He pointed out how this culture had been handed down from one generation to another even after the slaves were taken from Africa. Dunham learned that some of the steps in popular dances, such as the lindy hop and the cakewalk, were based on steps in tribal dances in Africa. This was new information for Dunham.

She decided to study anthropology and the origins of African American dance. She wanted young African American dancers to realize the connections between dance and their heritage.

drummer could move his hands. Tap dancing went north with the many African Americans who traveled to the big cities to find better jobs and opportunities.

African American children learned tap dancing on the street. They watched the best dancers challenge each other. They watched how they moved and imitated them. Many of these children were from poor families and did not have any shoes to wear. They improvised by putting bottle caps between their bare toes. In this way, they could make clicking sounds on the city sidewalks.

After the Civil War, African Americans began to perform in minstrel shows. Minstrels were entertainers who traveled from town to town in America and performed. Minstrel shows would sometimes be the only live entertainment people in these small towns saw. Because of these traveling minstrels, dance styles traveled, too. Entertainers saw and learned new things on the road.

One of these African American minstrels was Master Juba. He developed a way to slap his body that produced complicated rhythmic sound patterns. This slapping was like the sound of a drum. When a performer uses her body as an instrument in this way, it is called patting juba. This kind of rhythmic tapping is still occasionally performed today.

Some people believe that tap dancing came about in America when African stomp dancing combined with Irish step dancing. The Irish came to America in the late 1800s to escape from the potato famine. They also had a kind of rhythm dance called step dancing. Just like the slaves whose drums had been banned by their slave masters, the Irish were not allowed to play their traditional music or dance because the British banned it. In America, sometimes people from these two groups would compete, one with tap dancing, the other with step dancing.

Step dancing is different from tap, but it also involves fast footwork. One difference in the styles is that Irish step dancers keep

Gregory Hines

their upper bodies stiff. African American tap dancers keep their upper bodies loose. When an African American performer tries the Irish jig, it is easy to see how he changes it and uses the steps in new ways. Master Juba was one of the first performers to use Irish jig steps with African dance.

The famous tap dancer Gregory Hines said, “There’s always been an argument as to who invented tap dancing. . . . Gene Kelly . . . felt that it had come from the Irish clog dances. I have always felt that African American tap dancers took tap dancing and tried to express themselves in a spontaneous and improvisational way. And because our experience is so intertwined with jazz music, which is an American art form, there was a **fusion** between tap dancers and jazz musicians that kicked tap dancing to another level in terms of growth. So, as an African American tap dancer, I’m very proud of our contribution.”



Gregory Hines was an actor and dancer in Broadway shows and movies and on television. One of the finest tap dancers in his generation, Gregory almost single-handedly brought tap dancing back into popularity.

Gregory Oliver Hines was born in New York City on February 14, 1946, to a family with a history in show business. His grandmother had been a dancer at the popular Cotton Club during the 1920s. Hines's neighborhood was not far from the famous Apollo Theater in Harlem. Some of the African American tap dancing greats like Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and the Nicholas Brothers still performed there.

Hines's mother, Alma, signed his older brother Maurice up for tap dancing lessons when he was four years old. Hines was only two-and-a-half years old at the time and too young for lessons. He cried so much, though, when his brother had his lesson that the teacher let Hines in, too. His mother said that when she looked inside, Hines was holding onto his brother's hand doing the steps. At the same time, he was sucking the thumb of his other hand.

Hines and Maurice had many chances to watch the performers at the Audubon Theater and Ballroom because their father worked there. They went on to have tap dance lessons with one of the best tap teachers, Henry LeTang. When Maurice was eight years old and Hines six, they began to perform as the Hines Kids. Hines later said, "I grew up surrounded by great black tap dancers."

When they got older, they changed their name to The Hines Brothers and began performing in nightclubs on summer vacations and weekends. Their mother chaperoned them. In 1963, their father,

who could play drums, joined the act and the name was changed again to Hines, Hines, and Dad.

Tap dancing became less popular in the 1960s as rock 'n' roll became the rage. Hines, Hines, and Dad adapted and added comedy and jazz to their act. In 1968, Hines married Patricia Panella and they had a daughter, Daria, in 1971. A couple of years later, though, Hines went through many changes. He didn't want to work with his brother and father anymore. His marriage was also breaking up. He wanted to become a rock musician. With no money, no job, and no plans, he moved to Venice, California, in 1973. He formed a jazz-rock band called Severance. He played and sang, wrote songs, and worked as a busboy. He earned a black belt in karate. During this time, he didn't even own a pair of tap shoes. He met Pamela Koslow there and she became his second wife.

After five years of living in California, Hines and his wife moved back to New York City. He wanted to be closer to his daughter Daria. As luck would have it, his brother Maurice told him about an audition for a show called *The Last Minstrel Show*.

Hines said, "I hadn't had my tap shoes on for eight years. . . . From the time I started back tapping, because of the experience in Venice, I was a different person. It was the first time I felt I had something I wanted to say."

Hines had to buy a pair of tap shoes for the audition. Though he hadn't practiced for years, he got the part. The show never made it to Broadway, but Hines was tap dancing again!

Soon after this, Hines and his brother Maurice starred in a show called *Eubie*, a musical review based on the songs of composer and pianist Eubie Blake.

The choreographer was their old tap teacher Henry LeTang. Hines performed in other Broadway musicals, including *Sophisticated Ladies* in 1981, a popular revue showcasing the jazz

ever seen Chaney and Chuck do their thing. And I watched them and I was like, Wow! They had different rhythms going than I had ever heard before. And it was with their feet! They were just really laying down their rhythms. And I was totally fascinated.”

Glover soaked up the dance lessons. He got to learn about tap from the greats, like Jimmy Slyde and Henry LeTang. In 1983, the producers of the Broadway show *The Tap Dance Kid* created a workshop for young tap dancers. They wanted this workshop to give them a group of talented dancers to draw from for the musical. In 1984, Glover auditioned for the workshop.

The show’s general manager said, “We were, all of us, struck dumb. Though he was not the strongest singer in the school or the strongest actor, we knew we were in the presence of, if not genius, then something akin to it.”

Glover became the third Tap Dance Kid in 1984 and performed in about 300 performances. He played Willie, the son of a New York African American lawyer who held tap dancing in low esteem.



Savion Glover

Willie, like Glover, however, was a boy born to dance. Glover gained experience dancing before audiences and with experienced tap dancers. He mastered all the steps, the paddle and roll, the shuffle, the buck and wing.

In 1988, Glover had the wonderful opportunity of traveling to Paris to perform in a revue called *Black and Blue*. It featured three generations of tap dancers and blues singers like Ruth Brown. He was also in the Broadway version of this revue. Glover earned a Tony Award nomination for this performance.

This revue gave Glover a chance to watch the older, experienced tap dancers. He took advantage of the chance to ask them questions and watch their moves.

“We started calling him the sponge,” said tap dancer Jimmy Slyde about Glover.

It was in Paris that Glover grew to know the tap dancer Gregory Hines. They became very close. Hines had come to see the show and then offered Glover a part in the movie *Tap*. Glover played a young boy who wanted to be a tap dancer and looked up to his elders. Hines played a tap dancer who turned to crime and then wanted to stay out of trouble and dance.

Glover described his relationship with Hines in this way: “For me, knowing Gregory is like knowing you have a pops but not meeting him until you’re 20 years old, and it turns out he’s been very cool all this time.”

Soon after *Tap* came out, *Sesame Street* producers asked Glover to appear on the children’s show. He was a regular by 1991. He played a teacher at Celina’s Dance Studio, where he made friends with Elmo and Big Bird, the other Muppets, and the television audience.

When Glover was eighteen years old, he performed in the musical *Jelly’s Last Jam*. He played Jelly Roll Morton as a youth. Gregory Hines played Jelly Roll’s adult part.

By the 1960s and 1970s, rock music and the teenage culture influenced musical shows, such as *Hair* in 1968 and *Jesus Christ Superstar* in 1971. **Revivals** of older styles of musical shows were also popular at this time, such as *The King and I*. Theme musicals made their appearance in the 1970s with shows like *A Chorus Line*. In the 1980s, tap dancing made its way back on stage. Even dancers in roller skates appeared in *Starlight Express*. There have been so many successful, popular musical shows in Broadway's history.

The 1980s saw the birth of the megahit. Shows that have run for more than a decade include *The Phantom of the Opera* and Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King*.

Another dancer and choreographer who made the leap from concert dance to Broadway to film is Twyla Tharp. Unlike Jerome Robbins, who came from the ballet world, Twyla came from modern dance to Broadway musicals. She said about her dreams and goals, "I thought I had to make an impact on history. It was quite simple. I had to become the greatest choreographer of my time. That was my mission and that's what I set out to do."

Twyla Tharp's dance *Deuce Coupe*, mentioned in the chapter on modern dance, was a first. It combined ballet, modern dance, and 1960s social dance. She also choreographed the dances of Gregory Hines and Mikhail Baryshnikov in the movie *White Nights*. She did the choreography for the film *Hair*. Tharp was eager to learn more about film directing and to star in a film. *Hair* was based on an earlier Broadway show about the troubled lives of American youth at the time of the Vietnam War.

More recently, she choreographed *Movin' Out*, which premiered on Broadway in 2002. Tharp conceived of the idea for the show, directed, and choreographed it. She used only dance and the songs of Billy Joel to tell the story. There was no dialog. The show was about high school friends and how they dealt with issues of love and war. Like *Hair*, it was set in the 1960s. The show was a big success.



A scene from *West Side Story*

Dancers in Broadway shows today need to train in many dance styles. Bob Fosse's *Chicago* uses jazz style, while *42nd Street* uses tap dancing. When they are not in shows, dancers find work in music videos, television commercials, and other forms of work.

Dancers are called a "triple threat" when they can sing, dance, and also act. If performers can do all three, they have a better chance of finding work on Broadway. The competition is very stiff. After much training and practicing, the dancer auditions for a part. Dancers go on many auditions and must be able to face rejection during their careers. Having a goal, however, helps them through the process. Dreaming of dancing in a Broadway show keeps these dancers going.

Folk and National Dances

Of this time of the American pioneers of dance, de Mille said, “We risked everything. Every one of us had thrown overboard all our traditions . . . and were out to remodel our entire craft. No one helped us and there were no rules. We worked alone. We struck sparks from one another. I am glad I participated in the period of the originators. There is a force and wonder in first revelation that has no duplicate.”

In October 1993, de Mille died of another stroke. From the time she was a child until her death at 88 years old, de Mille was passionate about dance. Through her dreams and creative ideas, she was able to influence American musical theater. She was also able to make ballet more popular in America. In these ways, she had an enormous influence over American dance and American culture.

America is made up of many different cultures, and many have preserved their dances and still perform them. Sometimes dancers from different cultures meet and share, and a new dance style is born. This happened when African Americans and Irish immigrants met, and tap dance was born.

Folk dances are learned and passed along by ordinary people, and come from their lives and culture. Folk dance is traditional and old. It is also evolving and current. The folk dances or national dances that people brought with them when they came to America also form the basis for popular dances. Then, of course, there are the dances of peoples who did not immigrate here but who are indigenous to America, the Native Americans. In many of these national and folk dances, there is a special meaning for the steps and the dances.

For hundreds of years, small groups of Native Americans came together to visit, share news, tell stories, and dance. These gatherings are called powwows. They are still happening in America. At all powwows, people dance to the sound of the drum. Some dances are prayers. Others honor warriors. Still others honor the women who gave birth to the new generation. There are rain dances, eagle dances, buffalo dances, and deer hunt dances.

Powwows today bring Native Americans from different tribes together. There are dance contests and the opportunity to learn new dances. Dances are usually performed inside a circle with drummers providing the beat. There is a different song for each dance. Some songs have words and others have sounds that are repeated, such as “weyaheyeh.” Some dances have both. People come in traditional native dress. Some of the dances are performed by men only, some by women only, and others by everyone.

John Travolta in
*Saturday Night
Fever*

live musicians supplying the music. The first one opened in 1961 in Los Angeles. It was called the Whisky a Go Go. Another famous discotheque was the Peppermint Lounge in New York City.

In the 1970s, disco dancing was very popular. The dance the hustle came from discos. In this dance, people danced with a partner, but could also do individual moves.

Disco fashions were glamorous, with glitter, sparkle, sequins, and frills. Ultraviolet light made white clothes glow in the dark. Clingy one-piece jumpsuits were popular for both males and females. The 1977 movie *Saturday Night Fever*, starring John Travolta, was about a man who loved disco dancing. The movie helped make disco dancing even more popular. The music for the movie was mostly by the Bee Gees. Other disco dances include the bump, and the moves to “Y.M.C.A.” by the Village People.



In the 1970s, when Latin dance music was not that popular, a small American record company named Fania Records wanted to increase the popularity of Latin dance. They gave it the new name of salsa, which means “sauce.” Salsa dancing is a mixture of steps from many Latin, African American, and African Caribbean dances. These dances include the mambo, the rumba, the cha-cha, and the meringue. These are all partner dances, not like the twist. Salsa dancers keep the top half of their bodies still. It’s the way they move their hips, legs, and arms that makes the dances appealing. The basic steps are simple. Then experienced dancers add more complicated steps.

Fania Records was successful in creating a new interest in Latin American music. Salsa grew in popularity in the 1980s and continues to be danced widely all across America. Latin American singers like Gloria Estefan and Ricky Martin added energy to this revival.

Glossary

beat: the regular rhythm of movement or music

Broadway: New York City's major theater district, where plays and musicals are performed

choreography: the art of arranging step combinations in a dance performance

collaboration: working together on a musical piece, dance, etc.

critic: a professional writer who describes, analyzes, and evaluates works of art such as dance performances, plays, books, etc.

curtain calls: when performers take their bows in response to audience applause at the end of a dance, theatrical, or musical production

fusion: the merging of different elements into a union

graffiti: drawings or messages spray-painted on a wall or other surface so as to be seen by the public

Great Depression: the worldwide economic slump of the 1930s, in which there was high unemployment, low business activity, and the closing of banks, stores, and factories

gringos: a Latin American term for foreigners, especially American or English people

improvised: danced, sung, or composed without preparation or rehearsal

integrate: to open to people of all races or ethnic groups without restriction

mentor: a wise and trusted teacher

musical theater: a kind of theatrical production that uses dancing, acting, and singing to tell a story

ovation: enthusiastic and prolonged applause

pantomime: communication through gesture and facial expressions

post-modern: a phrase that covers experimental dance from the time of Merce Cunningham to the present. This type of dance often uses abstract elements, the intellectual over the emotional, and represents many techniques.

premiere: the first public performance of a piece, whether a dance or a play

racism: discrimination or prejudice based on race

repertory: a group of works that a dance company knows and performs. *Repertoire* is the French term.

revivals: new productions of plays, dances, or other performances, that were originally staged sometime in the past

rhythms: regular patterns formed by a series of musical notes or beats of differing stress and length

riffs: a rhythmic phrase that is repeated and changed with improvisation

solos: performances by a single individual

suite: a musical work made up of sections, usually for a dance

swing: a style of jazz dancing that has a steady, lively rhythm and employs improvisation

syncopated: modified by a shifting of accent in a musical piece that happens when a normally weak beat is stressed

synthesizer: an electronic instrument, often played with a keyboard, that controls and produces sound

technique: in dance, a particular way of using time, space, the body, and its movements to create a dance style

Tony Award: an annual award for outstanding achievement in theater

torsos: the middle of people's bodies, not including the head, neck, arms, and legs

tour: to perform in various places

transistor radios: small portable radios