

## Jazz History

In comparison to ballet, tap, or modern, jazz is the youngest form of dance technique. Jazz is a direct reflection of American culture and as a result, it has a wide range of influences in its style. Jazz dance reflects a broad range of ethnic influences, historical events, and cultural changes that have taken place in our society. Thus, the style of jazz dance is ever-changing and will continue to reflect and mimic society.

Jazz dance was brought to the United States through both European and African influences. When African slaves were brought to America, they brought their native songs and dances with them. The songs and dances consisted of syncopated rhythms and isolated body movements. As the European settlers observed these dances they began to add new ideas and styles to the dance steps they saw. When the jazz music of the *Roaring Twenties* began to grow in popularity, social dances that used this idea of body part isolation became increasingly popular in public settings.

In the 1940s when the U.S. entered World War II, the country went to work preparing for war and the social dancing and jazz club scene diminished. The end of this style of movement influenced many modern and ballet dancers to create a jazz technique. Like modern, jazz developed as a result of experimentation with the classical ballet steps. Thus there are many jazz steps and vocabulary that overlap with ballet.

**Bob Fosse** was instrumental in introducing jazz technique to the musical shows of Broadway by choreographing many famous musicals such as *Sweet Charity*, *Cabaret*, and *Chicago*. His long-legged style and attention to detail helped him create a style all his own. Choreographer and modern dancer **Jack Cole** was the first to really define jazz technique. He is considered the “Father of Jazz Technique”. Two more choreographers, **Eugene Louis Faccinto, known as “Luigi”** and **Gus Giordano** were also very influential in the development of jazz technique. Luigi incorporated more of a lyrical quality using his whole body, which he brought from his ballet training. Giordano technique stemmed from his modern training and heavily emphasized the use of the head and torso.

Jazz music has been a big influence on jazz dance. As music changed and added new rhythms and sounds, new forms of jazz dance were created. Key people in the timeline of jazz dance include Jack Cole, Katherine Dunham, Jerome Robbins, and Gene Kelly, to name a few. Today, we see a variety of styles in Broadway Musicals, television, motion pictures, commercials, music videos, and the concert stage. Musical Theater, Hip Hop and Lyrical, among other forms, are also derivations of jazz dance.

Jazz continues to be heavily influenced by culture, music, and society as it changes. Some consistent characteristics of jazz dance include: Jazz hands, percussive movement, isolations, complex rhythmic structures, and attitude. As long as music continues to change, so will the variety of styles of jazz dance.

## **JAZZ VOCABULARY**

**BALL CHANGE:** The transfer of weight from one foot to the other, on the ball of the foot.

**JAZZ WALK:** A walk on the toes, with knees bent and shoulders back, leading with the hip.

**CHASSE:** To chase; the rear leg seems to chase after the lead leg. Can be done to the front or side.

**FAN KICK:** A battement that makes an arc in the air

**HITCH KICK:** A kick that begins with a hitch of the opposite leg.

**FLAT BACK:** Bending forward from the hips with a straight back

**JAZZ SQUARE:** A series of steps which create a square pattern. Example: stepping side, cross, back, side.

**FORCED ARCH:** Placing the foot on the floor with only the ball of the foot touching the ground.

**ISOLATION:** Moving only one part of the body while holding the rest of the body still.

**JAZZ HAND:** Flat hand with all fingers spread out.

**PASSE:** The supporting leg is straight and the other leg is bent with the toe touching the supporting knee.

**PIROUETTE:** A turn on one leg, with the supporting leg straight and the other leg in a passé position at the knee. Knee stays forward.

**PIVOT TURN:** Turning on the ball of the foot to face the opposite direction.

**SHARP:** Referring to strong, striking energy used to accent a movement or a step.

**PARALLEL:** Referring to the feet - toes pointing to the front and heels to the back.

**PAS DE BOURRE:** A step combination including a step to the back, then to the side, then a step in front.

**CHAINE TURN:** A turning step on both feet making a chain-like pattern on the floor.

**SPOTTING:** Finding a focal point for your eyes to “spot” as you do any kind of turning movement.

**TUCK JUMP:** A jump where both knees are brought up towards the chest.

**BODY ROLL:** A wavelike motion which rolls through the length of the body, focusing on the hips

**LUNGE:** A large, open fourth position in which one knee is bent (usually the front), and the other is straight.

**SPLIT:** In a right or left split, the knee of the front leg faces up toward the ceiling while the knee of the back leg faces the ground. Ideally, hips should stay squared to the front. In a middle split, both knees should face forward until flat in the splits when they may face upward.

**SPLIT LEAP:** A spring into the air from one foot to the other, with legs extended in either right or left splits.

**CENTER LEAP:** A leap done with both legs straddled at equal heights.

**DOUBLE STAG:** A leap that is done out of a chaine turn. It is executed by lifting one leg into the air in a front attitude, and then quickly jumping into the air with the back leg also in attitude, and landing in plié on the first leg.