



dancers**dancing**

STUDY GUIDE

This study guide is intended to help teachers prepare students for the upcoming visit of Dancers Dancing. It provides an overview of our lecture-demonstration and looks at some of the basic concepts of contemporary dance. A prime objective of the lecture-demonstration is to provide audiences – particularly school audiences – with the opportunity to learn more about contemporary dance.

We will be performing an abbreviated warm up sequence and short excerpts from the Dancers Dancing repertory complete with explanations and context. There will also be a question and answer period.

The excerpts from pieces that are performed in the lecture-demonstration all possess some of the elements of dance discussed in this study guide. The intention of this guide is to enhance your enjoyment of our performance. Hopefully this information will assist you and your students in learning more about contemporary dance in general and specifically about our performance.

We look forward to seeing you soon.

About Dancers Dancing

Dancers Dancing is a contemporary dance repertory company known for its energy and the technical excellence of its dancers. Artistic Director, Judith Garay, a former Principal Dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company in New York, brings with her over thirty years of international experience as a dancer, choreographer and teacher.

The works of Dancers Dancing contain the lyricism and line of ballet, the emotional intensity of new love, the raw physicality of competitive sports, the magic of fantasy and the lightness of comedy. The five technically strong, emotionally charged dancers are versatile enough to perform in a variety of styles.

The programs presented by Dancers Dancing appeal to a broad audience and are appropriate for all ages.

The Company

Artistic Director: Judith Garay

Dancers: Desirée Dunbar, Christopher Duban, Vanessa Goodman, Kiri Figueiredo, Bevin Poole, Peter Starr

Guest Choreographers: Santa Aloï, Serge Bennathan, Anik Bouvrette, David Earle, Day Helesic, Rob Kitsos, Naomi Lefebvre, Anthony Morgan, Simone Orlando, Santee Smith, Wen Wei Wang.

General Manager: Joan Flood

Rehearsal Director on Tour: Anthony Morgan

Resident Stage Manager: Kimberly Plough

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Cygnus Foundation

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What is Contemporary Dance?

Dance is motion in space and time with energy. Contemporary dance is about expressing and communicating emotions and ideas, about making interesting and unusual shapes and designs, about moving with a particular energy and weight with particular rhythms.

Dance differs from other types of physical movements such as basketball or soccer in that the intent and goals are different.

The focus in dance is often on the individual choreographer or dancer and on what she or he wishes to communicate through dance. Some dances explore pure movement and focus primarily on the elements of space, time and energy with no particular story line, content or character development. This is called pure dance. Other dances are more theatrical with a narrative, a specific mood or feeling and characters.

Contemporary dance choreographers draw on many different kinds of movement to create their dances. These can include movement the choreographer makes up, movements the dancers make up, classical ballet, jazz, tap, hip hop, martial arts, sports and ordinary everyday movement such as walking, running and gestures. Contemporary dance can also integrate various other art forms including theatre, film, music and visual arts.

Much of the enjoyment in watching dance is marveling at how the dancer moves, how high someone can kick, how easily someone glides across the floor, how effortless the most difficult movement seems as well as the kinesthetic empathy – the feeling that you're doing the movement with the dancers.

Ongoing rigorous and highly specialized technical training is part of being a dancer. This training allows dancers to acquire and master a variety of movement skills as well as strength, flexibility, coordination, balance and rhythm.

There are a variety of contemporary dance techniques that focus on all of the above aspects yet are stylistically different. The dancers in the company have trained in several dance styles and related systems including modern dance techniques (Graham, Limon, Cunningham etc.), ballet, jazz, yoga and pilates among others.

Contemporary dancers often dance barefoot but may wear shoes as part of a costume for a particular dance. Costumes are sometimes designed so you can see the body move. It is not uncommon for dancers to wear street clothes or sweat pants, if the choreography requires this. Sometimes a dance may focus on a specific costuming element or a prop.

Elements of Contemporary Dance to Look For

Dance is made of bodies moving in space and time with energy.

Space

Watch how the dancers move through space. Dancers mold and shape the space on stage with their bodies the way a sculptor shapes clay with his/her hands.

Stage space

Do the dancers:

- Stay on one level or do they leap up and crouch down?
- Stay on the same plane or do they vary their distance from the audience by using the front part of the stage, the middle, back or do they use all at once?
- Make the stage seem filled or empty?
- Use the space the same way in each dance?

Shape

Shape can be used to describe how the dancers use their bodies.

Do the dancers:

- Make shapes that are horizontal or vertical or diagonal, twisted or jagged or smooth, straight or curved or irregular, angular, stretched or compacted?
- Make big or small shapes and movements?

Do the dancers contrast the shapes they make in a dance or do they all make the same shapes at the same time?

Time

Speed and rhythm are aspects of time

- Are the dancers moving slow, medium or fast?
- Do the movements come at regular or irregular speeds?
- Does the rhythm seem exact or inexact, smooth or syncopated?
- Does the movement accelerate or slow down?

Repeated movements establish rhythm in a dance. There are various kinds of rhythm, but all depend on repetition over time.

Watch how the dancers repeat movements.

- Do they do the same step more than once?
- Do they do the same series of steps more than once?

Music exists in time.

Watch and listen for the relationship between movement and music.

- Is there always sound or is there sometimes silence?
- Do you hear any sounds other than music?
- Do the dancers match the (mood)** of the music or do they move in opposition to it?

** Substitute rhythm, tempo or texture, for the word "mood".

Energy

Dynamics, movement qualities, moods and textures are all connected to energy.

Notice the energy levels of the dancers and how they change. The energy level describes how active a dancer is. A dancer's energy level may be high, lively and strong one moment and low, tired and weak the next moment.

- Is the dance energetic or lethargic, relaxed or tense, exuberant or controlled?

The kind of energy the dancer uses effects the mood created. Every dance projects some kind of mood or feeling. The mood of a dance is not how the dance makes you feel in the audience, but what the dance is trying to convey, say or project.

- Is the dance cheerful or sad, angry or calm, festive or somber, serious or mischievous, agitated or peaceful, shy or bold, eager or hesitant, friendly or aloof?
- Do the dancers leap because they are happy or because they are frightened or angry?

Texture is important visually and in the quality and force of movement.

A group of dancers moving together in a slow, lethargic fashion can give the impression of a 'heavy' texture. Visually, texture is the contrast between solo and group.

- How do the dancers move in relation to each other?
- Do they dance alone or in groups?
- Does the picture seem complete or incomplete?
- Does one person with energetic movement balance a group of dancers with slow movement?
- Do the dancers make the same moves at the same time (move in unison)?
- Do the dancers make the same moves at different times?
- Do the dancers make different moves at the same time?

The Skill and Technique in Dance

Watch the kinds of movements the dancers make. Sometimes they move the way you move everyday; sometimes they move in ways that can take a long time to learn. Some movements may even be dangerous if the dancer does not have enough skill or strength, although a skilled dancer can make the moves look very easy to do. The skill with which a dancer performs or a choreographer creates the dance is difficult for someone who knows very little about dance to evaluate. Be careful to avoid confusing whether or not you liked the choreography with how well the performance was done.

Things to look for:

- Which moves look easy to do?
- Which moves would be difficult for you to do?
- Do the dancers all have the same skills?
- Which moves look easy to do but you know are hard to do?
- Do the dancers seem graceful or clumsy?
- Do they move stiffly or loosely?
- Do they change the way they move or do they move the same way every time?

Exercises To Try With The Class (before or after the Lecture-Demonstration)**EXERCISE IN SPACE** **Straight/Curved**

- 1) Move all over the room traveling only in straight lines.
- 2) Move all over the room traveling only in curved lines.
(It is useful to do this on two groups so that the participants can observe each other. Walking is fine and moving in other ways is good too.)
- 3) Divide the floor space in the room into 2 equal parts. Designate one half as the area to travel in straight lines and the other as the area to travel in curved lines.
- 4) Discuss the group's perceptions and observations of how it felt and how it looked.

Variations

Try to move in straight floor patterns while having the body or arms in a straight shape.
 Try to move in straight floor patterns while having the body or arms in a curved shape.
 Try to move in curved floor patterns while having the body or arms in a straight shape.
 Try to move in curved floor patterns while having the body or arms in a curved shape.
 Which variations are easier or more difficult?

EXERCISE IN TIME **Slow/Fast**

Try this with music that is not well known.

- 1) Listen carefully to the music. When it is slow, dance or move slowly. When the music changes, change your speed. How can you move quickly in new and different ways?
- 2) Try moving opposite to the music. When the music is slow, move quickly. When the music is fast, move slowly.
- 3) Discuss the dancers' reactions. As dancers we do not always want to mimic the music. It is as important to learn to move against the speed/rhythm of the music as it is to learn to move to the beat.

Variation

Watch how each dancer executes each movement. Sometimes one movement can be made several different ways. Sometimes a series of movements can be repeated with variations, perhaps done facing a different direction, done with a different energy level or done at a different speed.

EXERCISE IN ENERGY **Action Words**

- 1) Make a list of action words individually or as a group (i.e.: jump, dart, jiggle, waddle.)
- 2) The leader calls out action words at intervals as all participants try to execute the action in their chosen way. If the group is too large this is not safe unless the words are not very active.
- 3) The participants take turns calling out action words as all participate.
- 4) Discuss how some action words are easier to do for a shorter or longer time and why.

Variation

This can be done in two groups with the observers calling out the action words.

Print Resources

Many exercises and ideas can be found in the following books.

Cheney, Gay. Basic Concepts in Modern Dance - A Creative Approach. c. 1989, A Dance Horizons Book Princeton Book Co. Princeton New Jersey.

Blom, Lynne Anne and L. Tarin Chaplin. The Moment of Movement – Dance Improvisation. c. 1988, University of Pittsburgh Press.

Gilbert, Anne Green. Creative Dance For All Ages. c. 1992, American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, Reston, Virginia.

Morgenroth, Joyce. Dance Improvisations. c. 1987, University of Pittsburgh Press.

The excerpts mentioned in the introduction come from the dances described below.



From *TWO*. Dancers: Christopher Duban and Natasha Lutz. Photo by David Cooper

Extra, Extra by Judith Garay

This edgy, intricate full-length work of charged images and rich textures is sourced from mass print media, both photos and captions. A reflection of our lives magnified and mirrored back to us, the physicality and gestures resonate with the fractured and fast paced energy of the world in the twenty-first century.

Trio of Duets by Judith Garay

Trio of Duets celebrates the exuberant physicality of young women. Its heady musicality sweeps you along on its tumbling journey.

TWO by Judith Garay

A cascade of overlapping duets "inspired by photographs of two people doing things that define the way we live – playing sports, laughing together...TWO means *us*...the result is rich and complete." Georgia Straight

4 WINDS: The Winter Project

"Winter-inspired dances were ravishingly beautiful" – Nanaimo News Bulletin

Anik Bouvrette (Éphémère), Santee Smith (Midwinter Dreaming) and Wen Wei Wang (Waiting) join Artistic Director Judith Garay (Ice and Frost) in exploring the dramatic, dynamic and diverse theme of winter in all its magnificence, cruelty and beauty.

Quicksilver, choreographed by Artistic Director Judith Garay for the five dancers is inspired by life, death and the ephemeral nature of this changing existence. "The dynamic movement is perfectly suited to its fantastically rich music by Patrick Pennefather... the performers undulate their bodies in soft meditative patterns one moment then blast out fiery, primal gestures the next..." (Georgia Straight)

Place of Dreams by Judith Garay for five dancers is "...quick and energetic.... That sense of fun came to a climax when dozens of multi-coloured Ping-Pong balls swooshed down from the ceiling..." (Georgia Straight) "The highlight of the evening was "Place of Dreams"...Vibrant red costumes, a whimsical theme and lots of movement kept every eye glued to the stage." (Comox Valley Record)

**"...technical excellence, sheer physical vitality, visually rich costuming and always dramatic lighting...a stunning tour de force...a very rich very satisfying performance."
Saltspring Barnacle**



From *Quicksilver*

Dancer: Desirée Dunbar

Photo: David Cooper

dancers**dancing**

236 East 26th Avenue
Vancouver, British Columbia
V5V 2H3

604-874-3416 t.

604-874-3417 f.

www.dancersdancing.com

Artistic Director: Judith Garay
General Manager: Joan Flood

judith@dancersdancing.com

joan@dancersdancing.com