



Tribute to Broadway
Curricular Guide



ABOUT THIS PERFORMANCE

Connecticut Ballet is pleased to bring this introductory *TRIBUTE TO BROADWAY* program of American musical theatre choreography to your students. Broadway is a huge phenomenon. With this program, we hope to put the spotlight on the dance styles and choreography which have contributed so greatly to this uniquely American form of entertainment. For those of you working with students on drama presentations or the annual school musical, this program should be a great motivator.

The following is a breakdown of *TRIBUTE TO BROADWAY*:

- 1) New Orleans jazz is represented by an excerpt from *Goose Pimples* to the music of Bix Beiderbecke, a white musician who was famous for his *cornet* playing.
- 2) A Swing duet set to the music of Glenn Miller's Big Band, audience favorite in the 1940's, the Golden Age of Broadway.
- 3) A tap number celebrates dance shows such as *42nd Street*, *The Tap Dance Kid*, *Black and Blue*, and *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk*.
- 4) One of Broadway's most famous choreographers, Bob Fosse, is represented by an excerpt from his *All That Jazz*.
- 5) Artistic Director Brett Raphael will lead a question-and-answer period at the close of the performance.

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THE RISE OF MUSICAL THEATRE

The 1890's in America were years of expansion. The Industrial Revolution, which had gotten under way well before the Civil War, was now in full swing. Families such as the Morgans and Rockefellers were carving fantastic fortunes in steel, finance and oil while millions of others Americans caught the spirit of money making and dreamt of their own possible success. The whole atmosphere of the 80's and early 90's was infused with currents of change. Nothing showcases this more clearly than the songs and dances of the period.

There was a spirit of restlessness within the American society. People no longer stayed at home and sang around their pianos. It was the era of the bicycle, wealth people traveled to Europe, the less well-to-do organized parties on the trolley cars and beaches, and went to theaters. Flour, coal, and dress patterns were offered as prizes to ladies to come to the theater. Of course, the ladies were curious, and so began a new pattern of entertainment. The minstrel show which had been our earlier entertainment, now developed into *vaudeville*, a full-blown variety show.

Vaudeville, in its place, gave way to musical comedy with its sweet plots and songs. *Daisy Bell*, *Rosey O'Grady*, and other songs of that kind were sung on stages, whistled and danced to on the streets. Along with the change in America's social life, came a new type of music: *ragtime*. Nothing could be more different in spirit and mood than ragtime and the sentimental ballad. "Babies" disappeared from the vocabulary, giving way to "babes."

MUSICAL THEATRE

Musical theatre is a form of theatre combining music, songs, spoken dialogue and dance. The emotional content of the piece — humor, pathos, love, anger — as well as the story itself, is communicated through the words, music, movement and technical aspects of the entertainment as an integrated whole.

Musical theatre works, usually referred to as musicals, are performed around the world. They may be presented in large venues, such as big budget West End and Broadway theatre productions in London and New York City, or in smaller Fringe Theatre, Off-Broadway or regional productions, on tour, or by amateur groups in schools, theatres

and other performance spaces. In addition to Britain and the U.S., there are vibrant musical theatre scenes in Germany, Austria, Philippines, France, Canada, Japan, Eastern Europe, Australia, and other countries.

Some famous musicals include *Oklahoma!*, *The Sound of Music*, *The Fantasticks*, *West Side Story*, *Les Misérables*, *Cats*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Rent*, and *The Producers*.

TAP AND JAZZ

Both *Jazz* and *Tap* dancing were born right here in America in the 20th century. But both forms have their origins in much earlier times. When Africans were first forced to come this country as slaves, they brought their own music and dance with them. The American government was afraid they would rebel against the slave-owners, so a law was passed in 1739 forbidding Africans from beating their drums or blowing their horns.

But that didn't stop the dancing. Blacks used their hands and feet to clap and stamp out their music and native dances. Known as 'hamboning' or 'patting juba,' the person hits his/her own body to create a sound as if it were an instrument. The feet became another instrument for expression — stomping, stepping, and clicking all sorts of rhythms. Dance historian Sally Sommer says, 'People have probably always performed percussive dancing...any form of dance in which the body, or ground, is played as a percussive instrument.'

At about this time, Jig and Clog dances, brought over by Irish immigrants, were becoming popular. In this form of step dancing, the feet executed complicated motions but the upper body remained as stiff and unmoving as possible. The two cultural groups, the Irish and the Africans, witnesses each other's dances (on plantations, at balls, and socials) and began to borrow from each other. Historian Sommer believes that 'Tap is the melt-down of two different cultures' dance forms into a singular one...but rhythm comes most forcefully from the African heritage or percussive sensibility.'

TAP DANCE

Tap dance was developed in the United States during the nineteenth century, and is popular nowadays in many parts of the world. The name comes from the tapping sound made when the small metal plates on the dancer's shoes touch a hard floor. This lively, rhythmic tapping makes the performer not just a dancer, but also a percussive musician. Tap is a style of American theatrical dance using precise rhythmical patterns of foot movement and audible foot tapping. It is derived from the traditional clog dance of northern England, the jigs and reels of Ireland and Scotland, and possibly the rhythmic foot stamping of African dances.

Tap, as it was called, eventually became a mainstay of vaudeville performers between the early 1900's and the late 1930's. The Golden Age of Tap, as it was called, featured such greater performers as Bill Robinson ("Bojangles"), John Bubbles, Fred Astaire, and Charles "Honi" Coles, performing in movies and jazz and nightclubs in Harlem. Eventually, tap fell out of favor because of several factors: the arrival of motion pictures, the Great Depression (which caused vaudeville theaters to close), and the birth of *jazz dancing*.

As vaudeville evolved, many performers of *tap* were brought to the forefront and many different styles were created which gradually incorporated into two schools: the 'Buck and Wing' dancer who wore wooden-soled shoes as did the Irish Clog dancer and the 'Softshoe' dancer who abstained from making any loud sounds by employing soft-soled shoes. Metal taps were introduced about 1915 and eventually, the two schools merged.

JAZZ DANCE

Jazz dance originated from the African American vernacular dance of the late 1800s to the mid-1900s. Until the middle of 1950s, the term "jazz dance" often referred to tap dance, because tap dancing (set to jazz music) was the main performance dance of the era. During the later jazz age, popular forms of jazz dance were the *Cakewalk*, *Black Bottom*, *Charleston*, *Jitterbug*, *Boogie Woogie*, swing dancing and the related *Lindy Hop*.

After the 1950s, pioneers such as Katherine Dunham took the essence of Caribbean traditional dance and made it into a performing art. With the growing domination of other forms of entertainment music, jazz dance evolved on Broadway into a new, smooth style taught today and known as Modern Jazz, while tap dance continued to evolve on its own. The performance style was popularized by Bob Fosse's work, such as *Chicago*, *Cabaret*, *Damn Yankees*, and *The Pajama Game*.

Today, jazz dance is present in many different venues and different forms. Jazz dance thrives in dance schools and remains an essential part of musical theater choreography; it is sometimes interwoven with other dance styles as appropriate for the particular show. Jazz dancing can also be seen in some music videos.

Jazz dancers' strong and sharp movements are aided by ballet technique which includes stamina-building jumps and turns, good posture and alignment, and slower 'adagio' exercises which build strength. Recently, jazz dance has been influenced by *hip hop*.

SOCIAL DANCE EXPLODES ACROSS AMERICA

A whole series of 'exotic' dances (adapted from black honky-tonks or 'jook joints') became popular in white ballrooms in the early years of the new century. These were the so-called "animal dances": the *turkey trot*, the *grizzly bear*, the *chicken scratch*, the *camel walk*, the *bunny hug*, the *kangaroo dip*, and so on. By 1910, audiences were cheering the turkey trop in a hit Broadway show.

The signature dances of the 20's — the self-descriptive *shimmy*, the free-kicking *Charleston*, the butt-slapping *Black Bottom*, all had roots in the social dancing of American blacks, especially southern blacks, and in their music. Although a number of musicals that appeared on Broadway during this period were produced, directed, and written by blacks, the music and the dancers were often showcased to the white public by white performers. The dance that created the greatest license for creative improvisation was a fast and furious swing dance known as the *Lindy hop* (after Charles Lindbergh's solo 'hop' across the Atlantic in 1927).

When Benny Goodman's band played Carnegie Hall in 1936 and the press reported that teenagers were 'jitterbugging in the aisles,' the Lindy was officially launched in white America. In the decade after the Second World War, big-band swing faded and the Lindy became a staple of the dance schools — a combination of steps to be learned and repeated on the dance floor, with little or no improvisation.

BROADWAY CHOREOGRAPHY

The first major choreographer to work in a bona-fide musical comedy (an entire evening of song, dance, and dialogue organized around a single storyline) was George Balanchine. His first Broadway musical, *On Your Toes* (1936), was the first musical comedy to take dance as its central theme.

It was the work of Agnes de Mille who revolutionized the form, beginning with Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma* (1943). Her other successful shows included *One Touch of Venus*, *Carousel*, *Brigadoon*, and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Later, the ballet dancer turned choreographer Jerome Robbins transformed the Broadway musical into a drama pulsating with the beat of contemporary urban America. His shows included *On The Town* (1944), *West Side Story* (1957), *Pajama Game* (1954) and *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964).

Bob Fosse, who worked with Robbins on *Bells Are Ringing* and *The Pajama Game*, is probably most responsible for the sleek, sexy, razzle-dazzle look of ultra-professionalism which often compensates for the sentimentality and simple-mindedness of the average Broadway musical plot. Fosse's choreography for *Pippin* (1973), *Sweet Charity* (1966), and *Pippin* (1973) made it clear that the Broadway musical had broken away completely from the lilting waltz time of European operetta. Michael Bennett's *Company* (1970), *Follies* (1971) and *A Chorus Line* (1975) demonstrated a unique capacity for mocking the mindless conventions of most prior Broadway musicals, creating a serious work of musical theatre.

FAMOUS BROADWAY DANCE MUSICALS:

Brigadoon (de Mille)
On Your Toes (Balanchine)
Cabin in the Sky (Balanchine)
Carousel (de Mille)
High Button Shoes (Robbins)
The King and I (Robbins)
The Pajama Game (Fosse)
Can-Can (Kidd)
Damn Yankees (Fosse)
West Side Story (Robbins)
Carnival (Champion)
Sweet Charity (Fosse)
Cabaret (Fosse)
Pippin (Fosse)
The Wiz (Faison)
Chicago (Fosse)
Fiddler on the Roof (Robbins)
A Chorus Line (Bennett)
Dancin' (Fosse)

REFERENCE

Kislan, Robert (1987). *Hoofing on Broadway*. Prentice Hall Press.
ISBN 0-13-809484-5.

MARCIA SIEGEL ON MUSICAL THEATRE

“**Show dancing**, of course, **came largely from jazz and tap**, which are more closely rooted in ordinary modern life anyway. The **jazz hoofers and tappers were almost all men**, so perhaps it isn’t surprising that the dancing male found a role easily in movies and musicals. Most of these roles had their origins in either the comedy routines of vaudeville or the pop literature that mass audiences loved — comic books, radio scripts, the sports pages, detective novels. We can see these sources fusing into stage types in the American character ballets of the 30’s and 40’s (*Billy the Kid*, *Filling Station*, and *Fancy Free*).”

“**Fred Astaire** somehow managed to elude all these stereotypes, probably because by temperament he was neither jock, thug, nor zany. He could dance about walking a dog, getting caught in the rain — almost anything with any action in it at all. He didn’t need the excuse of a sports competition, a fight, or a practical joke to spur him into dancing.”

— Marcia Siegel, *The Shapes of Change*

STANDARDS FOR DANCE K-12

CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

- Content Standard 1:** Identify and Perform Movement Elements and Dance Skills
- Content Standard 2:** Understand Choreographic Principles, Processes and Structures
- Content Standard 3:** Understand How Dance Creates and Communicates Meaning
- Content Standard 4:** Apply Analytical and Evaluative Thinking Skills in Dance
- Content Standard 5:** Demonstrate Understanding of Dance in Various Cultures and Historical Periods
- Content Standard 6:** Make Connections Between Dance and Healthful Living
- Content Standard 7:** Make Connections Between Dance, Other Disciplines, and Daily Life

*Please note: detailed information on each content standard by grade level can be found on the Connecticut State Department of Education's website (www.sde.ct.gov/sde/site/default.asp)