

doris humphrey the art of making dances

Doris Humphrey: The Art of Making Dances

Doris Humphrey stands as a titan in the pantheon of modern dance, her legacy inextricably linked to her groundbreaking exploration of choreography as a deliberate and structured art form. Her seminal work, "The Art of Making Dances," published in 1959, remains an indispensable text for dancers, choreographers, and scholars alike, offering profound insights into the creative process and the fundamental principles of dance composition. This comprehensive article delves into the profound impact of Doris Humphrey's "The Art of Making Dances," examining her core theories, her influence on subsequent generations of choreographers, and the enduring relevance of her pedagogical approach in contemporary dance. We will explore her concepts of fall and recovery, opposition, succession, and the intricate relationship between movement and music, all of which are meticulously detailed within her influential book.

- Introduction to Doris Humphrey and "The Art of Making Dances"
- The Core Principles of Doris Humphrey's Choreographic Philosophy
 - The Concept of Fall and Recovery
 - The Principle of Opposition
 - The Idea of Succession
 - The Relationship Between Movement and Music
- Analyzing the Structure of a Dance Piece
 - Theme and Variation
 - Balance and Counterbalance
 - Rhythm and Phrasing
- Doris Humphrey's Pedagogical Impact and Legacy
 - Teaching "The Art of Making Dances"

- Influence on American Modern Dance
 - Enduring Relevance in Contemporary Choreography
-
- Key Takeaways from "The Art of Making Dances"
 - Conclusion: The Enduring Art of Making Dances

Understanding Doris Humphrey: The Art of Making Dances

Doris Humphrey's profound contributions to the field of modern dance are nowhere more eloquently expressed than in her seminal publication, "The Art of Making Dances." This seminal work, published posthumously, crystallizes decades of her experience as a choreographer, dancer, and teacher. It serves as a foundational text, demystifying the often-elusive process of dance creation and providing a rigorous framework for understanding choreography. Humphrey's approach was revolutionary in its time, moving beyond intuitive or purely expressive methods to establish a systematic and intellectual discipline for making dances. Her insights into movement, space, and theatricality have shaped generations of dancers and continue to resonate within the contemporary dance landscape. Exploring "The Art of Making Dances" is an essential journey for anyone seeking to understand the craft of choreography.

The Core Principles of Doris Humphrey's Choreographic Philosophy

At the heart of Doris Humphrey's "The Art of Making Dances" lies a meticulously articulated philosophy of choreography, rooted in a deep understanding of human movement and its potential for artistic expression. She sought to elevate the act of making dances from a mysterious process to a disciplined art form, accessible through study and practice. Her theories are not merely abstract concepts but are grounded in observable physical principles and the experiential reality of the dancer's body. These principles provide a vocabulary and a set of tools that allow choreographers to construct coherent, meaningful, and aesthetically compelling works.

The Concept of Fall and Recovery

Perhaps the most widely recognized principle from Doris Humphrey's "The Art of Making Dances" is the concept of "fall and recovery." This fundamental idea posits that all movement originates from a point of equilibrium, followed by a deliberate yielding to gravity (the fall), and then a recovery to a new point of balance. Humphrey saw this dynamic interplay as intrinsic to human experience and a powerful engine for generating movement. The fall represents a surrender, a moment of vulnerability or exploration, while the recovery signifies a reclamation of control, adaptation, and forward momentum. This constant negotiation with gravity and the search for balance provides a rich source of kinetic energy and dramatic tension in her choreography.

Humphrey's exploration of fall and recovery is not simply about falling down; it's about the journey of yielding to and resisting gravity. It's the subtle shift in weight, the suspension in space, and the controlled descent that defines the arc of a movement. This principle is evident in the way her dancers moved through space, often appearing to be propelled by unseen forces or gracefully yielding to the floor before rising again. The concept offers a way to understand the body's natural relationship with the earth, transforming it into a dynamic choreographic tool.

The Principle of Opposition

Another cornerstone of Doris Humphrey's choreographic method, as detailed in "The Art of Making Dances," is the principle of opposition. This refers to the use of contrasting movements and spatial relationships to create visual interest and dynamic tension. Opposition can manifest in various ways, such as the use of opposing limbs in a gesture, the contrast between sharp and sustained movements, or the juxtaposition of different spatial pathways. By employing opposition, choreographers can create a sense of dialogue within the movement itself, highlighting the relationships between different body parts or between individual dancers.

This principle is crucial for building complexity and depth in choreography. Humphrey understood that stillness and motion, expansion and contraction, or forward and backward momentum, when placed in deliberate contrast, amplify each other. This creates a richer visual experience and allows for a more nuanced emotional expression. The careful balancing of opposing forces within a dance piece is a testament to Humphrey's keen eye for visual dynamics and her ability to imbue movement with meaning through contrast.

The Idea of Succession

The principle of succession, also a vital component of "The Art of Making Dances," describes the sequential unfolding of movement. It's about how one movement flows into the next, creating a seamless and logical progression.

This can involve the ripple effect of a movement originating from one part of the body and traveling through the rest, or the way a sequence of gestures builds upon itself. Humphrey emphasized the importance of clarity and intention in this succession, ensuring that each movement serves a purpose and contributes to the overall development of the dance.

Succession in Humphrey's work is not about random transitions but about a deliberate chain reaction of movement. It's the way a reaching gesture naturally leads to a turn, or how a grounded movement prepares for an ascent. This principle contributes to the sense of narrative and structure within a dance, guiding the audience's eye and understanding through the unfolding choreography. It's about creating a flow that feels organic yet meticulously crafted.

The Relationship Between Movement and Music

Doris Humphrey's "The Art of Making Dances" also dedicates significant attention to the intricate and often complex relationship between movement and music. While she appreciated the power of music to inspire and shape choreography, she also advocated for an independent choreographic structure. She believed that dance should not merely be a visual representation of the music but should possess its own internal logic and integrity. This led to her exploration of various approaches to marrying movement and music, including literal interpretation, thematic correlation, and even intentional counterpoint.

Humphrey's perspective on the dancer-music relationship was nuanced. She recognized that while music can provide a powerful framework, the choreographer's primary allegiance is to the dance itself. This allows for a more dynamic interplay, where the movement can sometimes lead, sometimes follow, and sometimes diverge from the musical score. This approach gives the choreography a greater autonomy and allows for richer artistic dialogue between the auditory and visual elements of a performance.

Analyzing the Structure of a Dance Piece

Beyond her foundational principles, Doris Humphrey's "The Art of Making Dances" provides a comprehensive guide to structuring a choreographic work. She understood that the most impactful dances possess a clear architectural quality, with elements that are carefully organized to create a cohesive and engaging experience for the audience. Her approach to structure emphasizes clarity, development, and a satisfying resolution.

Theme and Variation

A key structural device discussed in "The Art of Making Dances" is the concept of theme and variation. This involves introducing a central movement idea or motif, which is then explored and developed through a series of variations. These variations can alter the tempo, rhythm, spatial design, or dynamic quality of the original theme, offering different perspectives and interpretations. This method allows choreographers to delve deeply into a specific movement idea, showcasing its versatility and complexity.

The use of theme and variation provides a clear through-line for the audience, making the choreography easier to follow and appreciate. It allows for both repetition, which aids in recognition, and innovation, which sustains interest. Humphrey's masterful application of this principle in her own works created pieces that were both memorable and intellectually stimulating, demonstrating the power of a strong central idea to anchor a complex choreographic structure.

Balance and Counterbalance

In "The Art of Making Dances," Doris Humphrey emphasizes the crucial role of balance and counterbalance in creating visually compelling choreography. This extends beyond the physical balance of the dancer's body to the arrangement of dancers in space, the distribution of weight and energy, and the overall compositional design of the stage picture. Achieving a sense of equilibrium, or deliberately disrupting it, is fundamental to the aesthetic impact of a dance.

Humphrey's understanding of balance was deeply intuitive, informed by her own experiences as a performer. She recognized that the visual weight of a dancer, the lines they created, and their placement on stage all contribute to a sense of order or dynamism. Counterbalance, in this context, refers to the deliberate use of opposing forces or shapes to create a sense of tension or to lead the eye through the composition. It's about creating a visual dialogue that keeps the audience engaged.

Rhythm and Phrasing

The manipulation of rhythm and phrasing is central to the art of making dances, and Doris Humphrey's teachings in "The Art of Making Dances" highlight its significance. Rhythm refers to the pattern of durations of movements, while phrasing refers to the grouping of these rhythmic units into meaningful sequences. Humphrey advocated for a sophisticated understanding of rhythmic possibilities, encouraging choreographers to explore both conventional and unconventional rhythmic structures.

Effective phrasing in dance is akin to phrasing in music or language; it

creates breath and meaning within the movement. Humphrey's choreography often featured intricate rhythmic patterns and complex phrasing, which contributed to the intellectual and emotional depth of her work. Her ability to manipulate time and create intricate rhythmic tapestries within her dances is a testament to her mastery of this fundamental choreographic element.

Doris Humphrey's Pedagogical Impact and Legacy

The enduring legacy of Doris Humphrey is not confined to her own choreographic creations but extends significantly to her profound impact on dance education and the development of modern dance as an art form. "The Art of Making Dances" serves as a cornerstone of this legacy, providing a tangible and accessible framework for teaching and learning choreography. Her influence is felt through the generations of choreographers who have studied her work and incorporated her principles into their own creative practices.

Teaching "The Art of Making Dances"

Doris Humphrey's approach to teaching was as rigorous and systematic as her choreographic method. "The Art of Making Dances" itself was conceived as a pedagogical tool, intended to guide aspiring choreographers through the essential elements of dance composition. Her classes were known for their intellectual rigor and their focus on developing an analytical understanding of movement. She encouraged students to deconstruct existing dances, to experiment with her principles, and to develop their own unique choreographic voices.

The book's clear explanations, illustrative examples, and the inherent logic of its principles made it an ideal text for classroom study. It provided a common language and a shared understanding of choreographic concepts, fostering a sense of community among dancers and choreographers. Many esteemed dancers and choreographers, including José Limón, who became the artistic director of the Doris Humphrey Dance Company and further disseminated her techniques, were deeply influenced by her direct instruction and her written testament.

Influence on American Modern Dance

Doris Humphrey was a pivotal figure in the development of American modern dance. Alongside pioneers like Martha Graham and Charles Weidman, she helped to establish a distinctly American vocabulary for dance, moving away from European classical ballet. Her emphasis on natural movement, psychological depth, and social commentary resonated with the artistic spirit of the early 20th century. "The Art of Making Dances" provided a theoretical underpinning for this emerging art form, offering a framework for innovation and self-

discovery.

Her choreography often explored themes of community, conflict, and the human condition, reflecting the social and political currents of her time. By articulating a clear method for creating dances, she empowered a new generation of artists to continue this tradition of exploration and innovation. The principles outlined in her book became a vital part of the modern dance curriculum, shaping the way choreography was taught and understood across the United States.

Enduring Relevance in Contemporary Choreography

Decades after its publication, Doris Humphrey's "The Art of Making Dances" continues to be remarkably relevant to contemporary choreographers. While dance styles and technologies have evolved, the fundamental principles of movement, structure, and intention remain constant. Humphrey's insights into the body's relationship with gravity, the power of contrasting movements, and the importance of clear compositional design are timeless.

Modern choreographers still grapple with the challenges of creating original work, finding inspiration, and structuring their creations effectively. Humphrey's book offers a valuable resource for navigating these challenges, providing a solid foundation upon which new ideas can be built. Her emphasis on intellectual rigor and a deep understanding of movement ensures that her teachings remain a vital part of the choreographer's toolkit, fostering a continuity of artistic inquiry and practice within the dynamic field of dance.

Key Takeaways from "The Art of Making Dances"

The wisdom contained within Doris Humphrey's "The Art of Making Dances" offers a rich tapestry of insights for anyone interested in the craft of choreography. The book serves not only as a historical document of modern dance but as a living guide for creative exploration. Its core tenets provide a framework for understanding the fundamental building blocks of dance composition, emphasizing clarity, intention, and the inherent expressive potential of the human body.

- Choreography is a deliberate art form that can be learned and mastered through systematic study.
- The dynamic interplay of gravity, the body's weight, and the search for balance (fall and recovery) is a primary source of movement.
- Contrast and opposition are essential tools for creating visual

interest, tension, and meaning in dance.

- Movement should unfold logically and intentionally through clear succession.
- Dance and music can have a complex, symbiotic relationship, with dance possessing its own inherent structure.
- Effective choreography requires careful attention to structure, including theme and variation, balance, and rhythmic phrasing.
- The choreographer's intention and the clarity of the message are paramount.

Conclusion: The Enduring Art of Making Dances

Doris Humphrey's "The Art of Making Dances" stands as a monumental achievement in dance literature, offering an unparalleled exploration of choreographic principles and practices. Her systematic approach, grounded in the fundamental mechanics of the body and the principles of composition, revolutionized the way dances were conceived and created. From the elegant exploration of fall and recovery to the intricate logic of succession and opposition, Humphrey provided a clear and accessible vocabulary for understanding the creative process. Her insights into structuring a dance, the relationship between movement and music, and the importance of pedagogical development have left an indelible mark on the field of modern dance.

The enduring relevance of "The Art of Making Dances" is a testament to the timeless nature of its teachings. Generations of dancers and choreographers have benefited from Humphrey's meticulous articulation of what it means to make dances with intention, clarity, and artistic integrity. Her legacy continues to inspire, educate, and challenge artists to explore the boundless possibilities of movement, ensuring that the art of making dances remains a vibrant and evolving discipline. Doris Humphrey's contribution is not just a historical artifact but a living guide for the future of choreography.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Doris Humphrey's primary contribution to dance as outlined in 'The Art of Making Dances'?

Doris Humphrey's primary contribution in 'The Art of Making Dances' is her articulation and systematization of the choreographic process, providing a

foundational framework for dance creation beyond intuitive or purely expressive methods.

What are the key principles of choreography emphasized by Doris Humphrey in her book?

Humphrey emphasizes principles such as design, rhythm, dynamics, spatial relationships, the use of the body's weight and balance, and the concept of 'fall and recovery' as fundamental elements in constructing a dance.

How does 'The Art of Making Dances' address the relationship between music and choreography?

Humphrey explores the complex relationship between dance and music, advocating for choreographers to have a deep understanding of musical structure and to create movement that is in dialogue with, rather than merely subservient to, the music.

What role does emotion and intention play in Humphrey's choreographic process?

While emphasizing structure and technique, Humphrey strongly believes that authentic emotion and clear intention are vital drivers for creating meaningful choreography, advocating for the connection between inner feeling and outward movement.

What is the 'fall and recovery' technique, and why is it significant in Humphrey's choreography?

'Fall and recovery' is a core concept describing the body's natural response to gravity. It involves a controlled yielding to gravity (fall) followed by a resilient rebound or recovery, creating a dynamic tension and expressive potential central to her choreographic vocabulary.

How did Doris Humphrey's book influence subsequent generations of choreographers?

Her book provided a pedagogical structure and a theoretical language for choreography, influencing generations of dancers and choreographers by offering a systematic approach to the craft and emphasizing choreographic authorship.

What advice does Humphrey offer regarding the use of space in choreography?

Humphrey stresses the importance of conscious spatial design, advising choreographers to consider the relationship between dancers and their

environment, the pathways of movement, and the creation of dynamic stage pictures.

What does Humphrey mean by 'gesture' and 'motif' in the context of choreographic creation?

Gesture, for Humphrey, refers to meaningful bodily action, while motif is a specific, recurring movement phrase or idea. She discusses how these building blocks are developed, varied, and combined to form the larger structure of a dance.

Beyond technical advice, what philosophical or artistic values are embedded in 'The Art of Making Dances'?

The book embodies values of clarity, intention, responsibility, and the pursuit of authentic artistic expression. Humphrey encourages choreographers to be thoughtful artists who understand the power and potential of their medium.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to Doris Humphrey: The Art of Making Dances:

1. The Dance Has Many Faces by Walter Terry

This seminal work explores the diverse landscape of modern dance, offering insights into the philosophies and techniques that shaped the art form. It delves into the contributions of pioneers like Doris Humphrey, discussing their approaches to choreography and performance. The book provides a broad understanding of the artistic currents Humphrey navigated and influenced.

2. The Art of Ballet by Eleanor King

While focused on ballet, this book provides a crucial comparative lens for understanding Humphrey's contributions to modern dance. It examines the historical development of dance as a theatrical art, including the foundational principles and evolving aesthetics. By understanding ballet's traditions, readers can better appreciate the innovations and departures of modern dancers like Humphrey.

3. Choreography and the Process of Making Dance by Flora Grajales

This book directly addresses the practical and theoretical aspects of creating dance, a core concern of Doris Humphrey. It explores various choreographic methods, from improvisation to structured composition, offering frameworks for understanding how dances are conceived and developed. Readers will find connections to Humphrey's own methodical approach to building movement sequences.

4. Isadora Duncan: Her Life, Her Art, Her Legacy by Mary F. Daniels

This biography offers a look at another key figure in the evolution of modern dance, providing context for Humphrey's own artistic journey. It highlights the groundbreaking innovations of Isadora Duncan and the broader societal shifts that influenced early modern dance. Comparing their philosophies and approaches illuminates the rich tapestry of early 20th-century dance innovation.

5. Techniques of Dance by Iris Bentley

This book provides a technical grounding in various dance forms, essential for understanding the physical language Humphrey utilized. It breaks down the mechanics of movement, alignment, and spatial awareness crucial for both dancers and choreographers. Recognizing the technical underpinnings allows for a deeper appreciation of Humphrey's sophisticated movement vocabulary.

6. The Modern Dance: An Anthology of Readings edited by Selma Jeanne Cohen

This collection offers a vital overview of modern dance, featuring essays and writings from influential figures, including those who worked with or were inspired by Humphrey. It presents primary source material that sheds light on the intellectual and artistic debates of the era. The anthology provides a direct connection to the ideas and dialogues that shaped Humphrey's choreographic philosophy.

7. A History of American Dance by Richard Long

This comprehensive history situates Doris Humphrey within the broader narrative of American dance development. It traces the evolution of dance in the United States, from its early forms to the emergence of modern and post-modern styles. Understanding this historical context is crucial for appreciating Humphrey's pioneering role and enduring impact.

8. Body and Shadow: The Anatomy of a Dancer by Kathleen Kelly

This book explores the intimate relationship between the dancer's body and the expressive potential of movement. It delves into the physical intelligence and anatomical understanding required for performance and choreography. The insights into the body's capabilities and limitations are directly relevant to Humphrey's emphasis on organic and expressive movement.

9. The Art of the Dancer by R.W. Gregory

This title suggests an exploration of the dancer's role as an interpreter and creator of movement, a concept central to Humphrey's pedagogy. It likely discusses the qualities that define exceptional dancers and their contributions to the choreographic process. The book can help illuminate how Humphrey viewed the partnership between choreographer and performer.

Doris Humphrey The Art Of Making Dances

Doris Humphrey The Art Of Making Dances

Related Articles

- [douxury backup camera manual](#)
- [devil in a blue dress walter mosley](#)
- [doobie brothers tour history](#)

[Back to Home](#)