

CHAPTER 10

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SOCIAL DANCE

Most of the discussion up to this point has focused on professional concert dance. But just as folk dances provided entertainment for people in the sixteenth century, every era possesses styles of dancing that are performed purely for pleasure and entertainment. These dances are reflective of the cultures in which they exist.

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BALLROOM AND POPULAR DANCE

Nearly every society has social dances that are a part of the culture. Each society has its own viewpoint about different aspects of social dance. For example, in some societies, social dance is a group activity meant to be enjoyed by an individual in conjunction with other people. In other societies, social dancing is meant to be enjoyed by two people—a couple (see Figure 10.1). Sometimes, social dance is seen as a completely individual activity. In some societies, strict rules apply to social dance with regard to males and females dancing together, appropriate physical contact and dancing in public. In other societies, dance is an accepted means of expression, and people of all ages and genders are encouraged to participate. Today in America, there are many different types of social dances (specifically ballroom, see Figure 10.2, and popular dances) and many different opinions regarding these dances.

Many social dances that were done in the past and are still done today in America came directly from the African-American communities and were adopted (and sometimes modified) by the white communities. For example, one of the most popular social dances ever developed was the Lindy-Hop. The Lindy-Hop was created in the Harlem nightclubs of the 1930s. Performed to swing music, it is a fast-paced, athletic dance done with a partner. When performed by the white community, this dance was usually done at a slower tempo and employed less of the daring lifts and tricks that were part of the original style. The Lindy-Hop paved the way for other couple dances, including the Jitterbug of the 1940s and even the

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hustle of the late 1970s. It is interesting to note that untrained dancers almost always created these dance forms.

Although each decade has seen the development of specific dances, the focus of this chapter is on the period between the 1950s and the present in America, a span of time in which a number of social dance styles emerged. For example, in the conservative 1950s, ballroom dancing, which included dances such as the waltz, foxtrot and rumba, was a popular pastime for many Americans. Many of these styles of dance have their roots in European, African and South American movements. For example, the waltz was created in the nineteenth century and danced by the elite in England and Germany and eventually all across Europe, before it reached the United States. Other dances, such as the rumba, samba and tango, have their roots in movements created in the early 1900s in Africa and South America. In their original forms, these dances were considered to be too wild and sensual for the conservative communities (see Figure 10.3). Therefore, some of the movements (especially hip movements) were changed and instead, balletic lifts and turns were added. These “refined” ballroom dances were performed almost exclusively by white dancers.



FIGURE 10.2

Professional ballroom dancers.
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With the advent of rock and roll in the 1950s, the younger generation abandoned the prevailing conservative attitude. This attitude change, as well as the popularity of rock and roll music, resulted in the development of many new dances. Many African-American singers began to gain popularity, such as Little Richard and Chuck Berry, and white youths began to listen to the music of these singers, as well as mimic their dance movements. The most popular artist of that time, Elvis Presley, was a white singer who had a “soulful” quality to both his singing and his dancing. His hip-swaying movements were considered so offensive that he was only shown from the chest up on the popular “Ed Sullivan Show.”

In 1960, Chubby Checker recorded “The Twist,” and a new dance craze emerged. Other dances such as the Monkey, Mashed Potato and the Frug became popular with both black and white teenagers. The mid-1960s introduced performers such as Mick Jagger (of the Rolling Stones) and James Brown, both of whom had a unique dance style that their fans adored. In the late-1960s, a great change in dance styles occurred, which was a direct reflection of the attitudes of that time. The Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement and an increased interest in illegal drugs created the era sometimes referred to as “radical.” Partner dancing, once the norm, was no longer the “in” thing to do, and people danced alone or in groups. This type of dancing was known as “free-style” dancing. People wanted to “do their own thing,” and this form reflected that feeling. A prime example of free-style dancing was captured in the film footage of Woodstock, a three-day rock music event held on a farm in upstate New York in the late 1960s. Here, people danced with ultimate abandonment, due largely in part to the overwhelming feeling of freedom, as well as an abundant supply of drugs.

In the 1970s, rock music was still going strong. A new style of music emerged in the late 1970s, however, that would again change the course of social dance. Disco music became the craze and popularized such dances as the Hustle and the Bus Stop. Partner dancing was also popularized during this period, largely due to the 1977 movie *Saturday Night Fever*, which starred John Travolta. This movie set the trend for what was to occur in popular dance for most of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Nightclubs, glamour and romance were the norm and looking fabulous was required of all who wanted to fit in.

Rap music was developed in the 1970s, but became most popular in the 1980s as a voice for inner-city minority groups. This style of music helped to popularize a form of dance known as hip-hop, although hip-hop had begun long before the development of rap music. Hip-hop, also known as “street dancing,” combines several movements from African and jazz dance vocabularies with newly created movements. It was developed by



FIGURE 10.3

Tango, created and popularized in South America, was considered wild and sensual when created in the early 1900s. The “Tango Dip” is shown here.

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FIGURE 10.4

Dancer performing a movement in a modern dance that comes from breakdance vocabulary.

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dancers who continue to create new steps and combinations today. Although this discussion is not about professional or concert dance, it is interesting to note how popular dances (which begin at a raw level) are taken into the professional dance world and incorporated into videos, musical theatre productions and concert dance (see Figure 10.4). For example, there are many music videos that have incorporated hip-hop dancing and even popularized certain steps, such as the Running Man, the Roger Rabbit, the Jackie Chan, the Robocop and the Spongebob.

Another example of the fusion between popular dance and concert dance can be found in the work of dancer and choreographer Rennie Harris (b. 1964). He is the artistic director of Rennie Harris Puremovement, a company based in Philadelphia that is dedicated to bringing hip-hop culture to the concert stage, as well as presenting workshops and classes for the public. One of the company's most critically acclaimed works is *Rome and Jewels* (2000), a hip-hop version of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. This evening-length work uses actual Shakespearean text, as well as text developed by the cast, which is performed by a hip-hop poet. In this piece, Harris uses hip-hop to depict this tragic love story. *Rome and Jewels* has

been wildly successful and has been performed across the United States and abroad.

The fast-paced 1980s brought breakdancing to the mainstream and to the dance world. Breakdancing actually became popular in the inner cities during the 1970s, but did not receive widespread public attention until 1983, when the movie *Flashdance* featured a short breakdance section. Before going into the mainstream, gangs had been using breakdancing as a form of competition. Emphasis was placed on virtuosity; the one who could do the most interesting and difficult movements was the best.

The dancers who performed this highly physical and acrobatic form were and are known as B-Boys and B-Girls. Some believe that the "B" stands for breakdancing or breakin', while others believe that it stands for the Bronx, where it is said that breakdancing (see Figure 10.5) first developed. The B-Boys from the East Coast perfected this dance style, while West Coast Funk dancers created movements such as "popping" and "locking."

A typical breakdance session would be one where a circle is formed and each dancer enters the middle of the circle one at a time. Once inside



FIGURE 10.5

Breakdancing became popular in the inner-cities during the 1970s and is still popular today.

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the circle, the dancer demonstrates his or her best breakdance moves (obviously, B-Boys are males, but there are also B-Girls, see Figure 10.6). Each dancer would do a short demonstration, sometimes lasting only a few seconds. Those few seconds, however, would be packed with fast and intricate footwork and amazing spins and flips.

Hip-hop dancing comes from and continues to inspire a contemporary culture. This culture has at its roots B-boying, graffiti writing, and the importance placed on the DJ/emcee, whose job it was (is) to provide the rhythms, mixes, scratching and verbal “commands.” This culture also inspired the development of rap music, a specific fashion trend, and a specific style of language/slang. Hip-hop dancing had an overall effect on the development of dance in the mainstream, particularly in music videos and in performances by pop and rap artists. Taking all this influence into consideration, hip-hop can be seen as more than a social dance form, but as an entire culture, with its own history, language and major figures coming from both the East and West Coasts.

Another dance craze that was popularized in the early 1980s was slam dancing, in which the participants literally slammed into each other. Slam dancing was typically found in nightclubs that catered to the punk-rock crowd. This dance



FIGURE 10.6

B-Boy battle at a dance competition.

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MICHAEL JACKSON . . .
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fad also began in the late 1970s (in England), but did not become popular with the mainstream in the United States until the 1980s (some feel as a direct revolt against the disco era). Later, there developed a small but dedicated crowd that took slam dancing one step further (by actually making it more violent). This dance craze, referred to as mosh dancing, was performed to heavy metal music. The participants referred to themselves as moshers, and religiously took part in this violent dance fad.

The early 1980s brought us music-television, and Michael Jackson (1958–2009) was the first artist to present dance in a way that people had never previously witnessed. Jackson's *Thriller* video (1984, choreographed by musical theatre choreographer Michael Peters [1948–1994]) was a sophisticated dance video that set a precedent for all other videos to follow. In order for a video to be popular, it had to contain unique, exciting and creative dance sequences. Since then, there have been many artists who regularly present dance in their videos, including Janet Jackson, Madonna, Britney Spears, Jennifer Lopez, Ricky Martin, Beyonce, Lady Gaga, and the list goes on and on. Many of the movements seen in these videos come from social dance forms, particularly hip-hop. At the time, there were also television stations that devoted their entire programming to music videos and were extremely popular, two of which were MTV and VH-1.

Throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, breakdancing and hip-hop have survived, and some would say, are still going strong. Today, there are many active B-Boy groups and B-Girl groups. Also, since the media has kept these styles in the forefront—in television commercials, on YouTube, etc.—it is easy to see how it has remained so popular not only with the B-Boys/Girls but also in the mainstream (see Figure 10.7).

Another dance craze to come into the twenty-first century is rave dancing, or raving. Danced to techno/electronic music, raving was for many years an underground dance style that began in the 1980s. Rave dancing is improvisational, with the participants strongly persuaded by the regular and hypnotic rhythm of the music. Many of the dance movements done at raves come directly from the hip-hop vocabulary, as does the use of the circle formation where the dancers “show their stuff.” Also similar to hip-hop, there is a distinct style of dress that ravers wear, such as “phat pantz.”

Raves have been held in a number of places, such as nightclubs. However, what some consider to be the “real” raves are the one-night, occa-



FIGURE 10.7

A B-Girl in motion.
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sional parties set up in a warehouse or other space large enough to accommodate hundreds or even thousands of people. Although the mantra of most ravers is peace, freedom and friendliness, there is a dark side to many rave parties. The use of drugs, particularly Ecstasy, has led to a number of overdoses at these events. Measures have been taken to make sure these events remain safe, such as promoters throwing drug-free raves and putting more of an emphasis on the music and the dancing, rather than the drug taking. The music and dancing, after all, are at the center of the raves and the main reasons why rave parties exist.

Social dance has once again been catapulted into the mainstream, largely due to the development of two reality television shows—*Dancing With the Stars* and *So You Think You Can Dance*. Although *So You Think You Can Dance* also focuses on genres such as modern, jazz and hip-hop, both shows include a focus on ballroom dancing. Due to the popularity of these shows, ballroom dance studios report an increase in class attendance. Also, medical professionals have been reporting research findings that show that ballroom and other types of dancing can have both physical and mental benefits, such as lowering blood pressure, improving circulatory problems, fighting obesity, releasing stress and providing a social outlet, particularly for older adults (see Figure 10.8). Given all of these factors, the number of people wanting to participate in some form of social dance has dramatically increased.



FIGURE 10.8

Older adults and their teacher in a jazz dance class.

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It is pleasantly surprising to see how these two reality shows have taken off and the interest they have brought to dance in general. *Dancing With the Stars* reportedly has had up to twenty million viewers per episode,



FIGURE 10.9

Krumping is an aggressive, nonviolent street dance.
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with *So You Think You Can Dance* following close behind. The nation-wide tours that have come after the season finales of both shows have been sold-out in every city. Although reality television is seen by some as banal entertainment, no one can deny the power and appeal of the dancing on these two programs.

Similar to hip-hop and breakdancing, krump dance, or krumping, is another dance form developed in the streets and taken into the mainstream. Krumping began as a street dance in South Central Los Angeles. With origins in the African-American community, this dance form was created to release anger and aggression, but in a nonviolent way. Although the movements are highly charged and aggressive, and the dancers even make contact with one another, all physical interactions are highly stylized (see Figure 10.9). In other words, the movements may look violent, but that is part of the aesthetic. Just as there are choreographers who took hip-hop out of the social dance setting and presented it as part of dance performances or concert dance, the same holds true for krumping. Television programs such as *So You Think You Can Dance* present krumping as a dance “category” and the contestants perform krumping routines. Therefore, krumping is another example of an urban social form

whose status has been elevated in both commercial and artistic arenas.

Also similar to hip-hop and its inclusion of B-Boys and B-Girls and their crews, krumping has a social structure that includes groups known as “families” or “fams.” The families have a leader (who is an advanced krump dancer) known as the “Big Homie,” with additional members known as “Lil’ Homies.” There are also competitions among the respective families, and each dancer and family participates in order to achieve status and respect. In 2005, a documentary called *Rize* was a box office success that featured clowning and krumping. Clowning is different from krumping in that there is an element of comedy (joke telling or “dissing”) included in the form, whereas krumping focuses on the aggressive and emotionally charged movements. *Rize* brought clowning and krumping into the mainstream, and they have been gaining popularity ever since.

Another social dance phenomenon that is seen worldwide is the increasingly popular flash mob. A flash mob occurs when a group of people begin to dance in a place where there are unsuspecting people going about their daily lives—at a train station, a shopping mall, or a museum, for example. The dances performed are usually pre-planned, and begin with one person or a small number of people and then gradually grow to include a large group. Although trained dancers perform some flash mobs, many incorporate people who love to dance and wish to be part of the

flash mob experience. Flash mobs have been seen on nearly every continent, and a search on YouTube will result in hundreds of examples of these social dance events (see Figure 10.11). Over the years, flash mobs have gained so much popularity that they have been used for wedding proposals, to announce an upcoming birth, as a way to ask someone to a prom, and the list goes on and on. One popular occurrence is to get as many people as possible involved in specific flash mobs. In 2012, more than 50,000 people in 300 cities across North America engage in a song and dance routine at the exact same time, setting the world record for the largest simultaneous flash mob.¹ There are even professional groups and companies that focus on creating flash mobs. For example, there is a group based in New York City called Improv Everywhere, whose mission it is to “cause scenes of chaos and joy in public places.”² And, there are also flash mob companies that can be hired to perform a flash mob for a specific event.

Summary

Many people today, as in years past, enjoy social dancing. For example, there is now a tremendous interest in hip-hop and breakdancing. How long will this craze last? No one can know



FIGURE 10.10

Rumba is a ballroom dance of African and Cuban origin.

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FIGURE 10.11

Flash mob at Palais Royal square in Paris, France.

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for sure. But one thing is certain: there will always be people who enjoy many aspects of social dancing and for a variety of reasons. Some feel that it is good exercise, while others say it makes them feel good on an emotional level. Many people dance to release their frustrations and negative energies and many people dance for the sheer fun of it. Whatever the reason people dance, the culture and society of the time to which they belong will certainly be reflected in the movements, style and music that make up the dance. Table 10.1 outlines some events in social dance.

TABLE 10.1

Outline of Social Dance Events

1920s	Beginning of the Harlem Renaissance. Dances such as the Charleston and the Black Bottom became popular (as discussed in Chapter 9).
1930s	The Lindy Hop began in the black communities and was then adopted by the white communities.
1950s	Ballroom dancing came to the forefront. Dances such as the Waltz, Fox Trot and Rumba became very popular (see Figure 10.10).
1950s	This decade saw the advent of rock and roll music. A new way of dancing was discovered.
1960s	Dances such as the Twist, Monkey and Mashed Potato emerged.
Late 1960s	Dance styles emerged that reflected turbulent times. Free-style dancing became the popular form of social dance.
1970	Disco music brought about such dances as the Hustle and the Bus Stop. Partner dancing once again became popular.
1980s	Breakdancing (see Figure 10.12), developed in the 1970s, became popular in the mainstream. Rap music gave rise to hip-hop culture. Slam dancing and mosh dancing were also seen in certain punk rock and heavy metal circles.
1980s	Music television (MTV, VH-1) popularizes the music video. Many social dance styles appeared in the videos of the music industry's most popular performers.
1990s–2000s	Rap music, hip-hop and breakdancing remain popular. Rave dancing, which began in the 1980s as an underground dance craze, became the popular dance form leading into the twenty-first century. In 1995, David LaChapelle created the documentary <i>Rize</i> , which featured clowning and krumping, dance forms created in the African-American community of South Central Los Angeles.
2000–Present	Concert dance and social dance forms continue to be fused and create an exciting and unique aesthetic for many dance companies, including Rennie Harris Puremovement (founded in 1992), which focuses on hip-hop. Dance is brought to the mainstream by reality television shows such as <i>Dancing With the Stars</i> and <i>So You Think You Can Dance</i> . The medical profession reports on the significant health benefits of doing ballroom dance.
2010	Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton introduces a National Dance Day resolution to promote dance and dance education. Celebrated on the last Saturday in July, this unofficial holiday was further introduced to the public by <i>So You Think You Can Dance</i> co-creator and <i>Dizzy Feet Foundation</i> co-president Nigel Lythgoe.
2011	National Dance Week Foundation was established as a non-profit institution. Originally formed in 1981 to bring greater awareness and recognition to dance, the organization has inspired thousands of events during the ten-day annual celebration, which occurs every April.
Today	<i>Dancing With the Stars</i> and <i>So You Think You Can Dance</i> are still wildly popular television shows. Well-known dance styles and genres are featured, but unfamiliar dance styles, such as the New Orleans Bounce, are also introduced to the mainstream via these popular television shows. Choreographers such as Napoleon and Tabitha D'umo, who developed lyrical hip-hop, and Lil' C, also known as the King of Krump, are popular on the social dance as well as commercial and concert dance scenes. Interest in dance and taking dance lessons is still going strong.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Discuss in class or provide written answers.

1. What do you think were the most important issues during the 1980s and 1990s that might have had an impact on the social dances of those decades? How did these issues affect society?
2. What are some of the popular dances done today? What issues to date have had an impact on these dances? Make a prediction—what will social dances be like within the next few years? Why?



FIGURE 10.12

Breakdancers perform highly physical and acrobatic movements.

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