



Philadanco!



Welcome to the State Theatre’s school-day performance of Philadanco—the Philadelphia Dance Company. Founded in 1970, the company has become celebrated for its innovation, creativity, and preservation of African-American traditions in dance.

These *Keynotes* will help you prepare for the show and guide pre- and post-performance discussion and activities. You’ll find information about Philadanco, the works they’ll be performing, and about dance in general. We encourage you to use the guide with your students to enhance their understanding and appreciation of the performance.

Enjoy the show!

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Bank of America



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*State*TheatreNJ.org
Keynotes

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The State Theatre, a premier nonprofit venue for the performing arts and entertainment.

MID ATLANTIC ARTS FOUNDATION



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Continental Airlines is the official airline of the State Theatre.



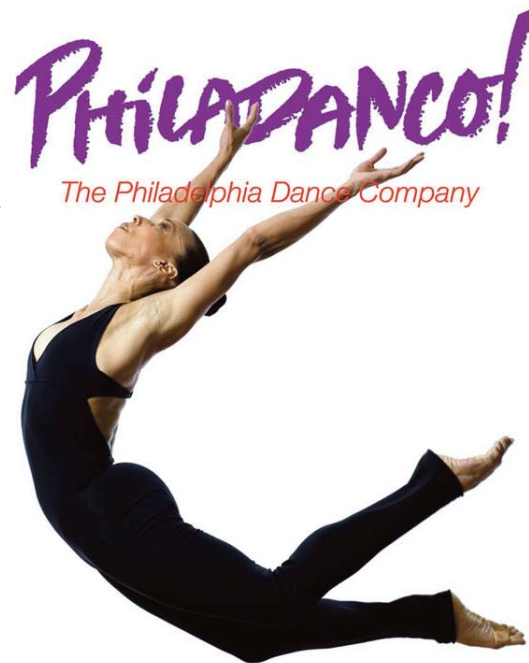
The Heldrich is the official hotel of the State Theatre.

Meet the Company

Philadanco—the Philadelphia Dance Company—presents modern contemporary dance focused on the African American experience. Their repertory emphasizes works by black choreographers, including Talley Beatty, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Ronald K. Brown, Carmen de Lavallade, and Christopher Huggins. From their home base at Philadelphia’s Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, the company tours both nationally and internationally.

Philadanco was founded in 1970 by Joan Myers Brown to provide opportunities for young African American dance students to develop and work as professional artists. Over the past 40 years, the company has trained over 4,500 dancers. Education and outreach continue to be a major part of their mission. Philadanco’s education initiatives encompass an apprentice company, instruction and training programs, and about 45 residencies each year.

In 1988 Joan Myers Brown, Philadanco’s founder and director, founded the International Association of Blacks in Dance. Along with her Philadanco staff, she launched the 1st International Conference of Blacks in Dance. Today, the conference draws an average of 600 participants from across the U.S., Europe, South America, Africa, Australia, and the Caribbean.



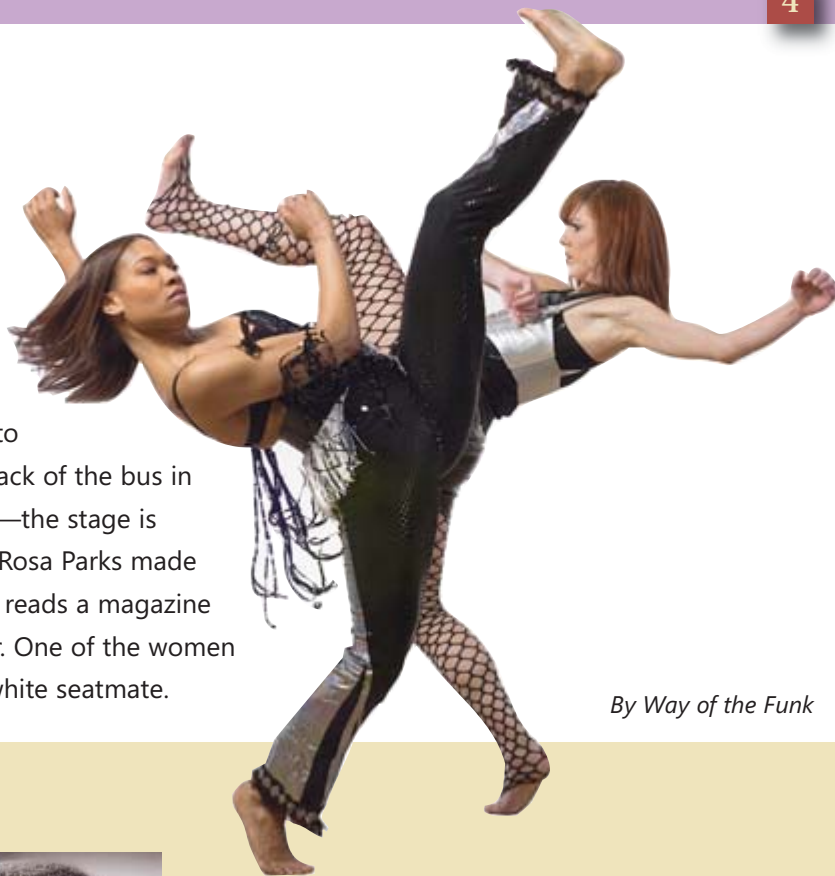
The Program

Rosa

Choreographer: Billy Wilson

Music: Roberta Flack

Danced by six women, this modern ballet is a tribute to civil rights activist Rosa Parks, who refused to sit in the back of the bus in segregated Montgomery, Alabama. The setting is simple—the stage is empty except for two chairs representing the bus where Rosa Parks made her stand. One chair is occupied by a white woman, who reads a magazine while a group of black women dances angrily around her. One of the women finally sits in the empty chair, much to the shock of her white seatmate.



By Way of the Funk

Suite Otis (excerpts)

Choreographer: George Faison

Music: Otis Redding

Suite Otis: A Tribute to the Late Otis Redding, was created by George Faison in 1971 to honor the memory of the 1960s soul singer, who died in a plane crash in 1967 at age 26. The title of the ballet is a play on the word "suite," which is a set of dances; it also sounds like "Sweet Otis." This performance features several of the six dances in the full suite. The dances are set to [the songs of Otis Redding](#), and each one tells a little story, mostly about couples falling in and out of love.



SOUL MUSIC is a style of African American music that emerged in the late 1950s. It combines earlier styles, such as gospel and R&B. Soul has had a huge influence on musicians as diverse as the Beatles and Rolling Stones to Amy Winehouse.

By Way of the Funk

Choreographer: Jawole Willa Jo Zollar

Music: Parliament, Funkadelic

Created by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, the Artistic Director of Urban Bush Women, *By Way of the Funk* is a four-part work that harnesses the spirit and energy of funk music. It is set to the music of [Funkadelic and Parliament](#),



FUNK MUSIC developed in the late 1960s, blending elements of soul, R&B, and jazz. Funk is all about "the groove": a swinging rhythm that drives the music forward and makes you want to get up and dance!

Well-known funk artists include [James Brown](#), [George Clinton](#), [Bootsy Collins](#), [Rufus & Chaka Khan](#), and [Sly and the Family Stone](#).

George Clinton founded the legendary funk bands Parliament and Funkadelic. He grew up in Plainfield, NJ, where he put together his first music group.



What Is Dance?

When we dance, we perform a series of movements that have a pattern and are set to some kind of sound accompaniment—usually music. Sometimes we dance alone, sometimes with a partner, and other times in groups. Our dances can be **CHOREOGRAPHED**, or they can be **IMPROVISED**. They can tell a story, express an idea, or be about nothing in particular. Sometimes we all dance together. Other times, we sit in the audience and watch the dancers, but do not join in the dancing.

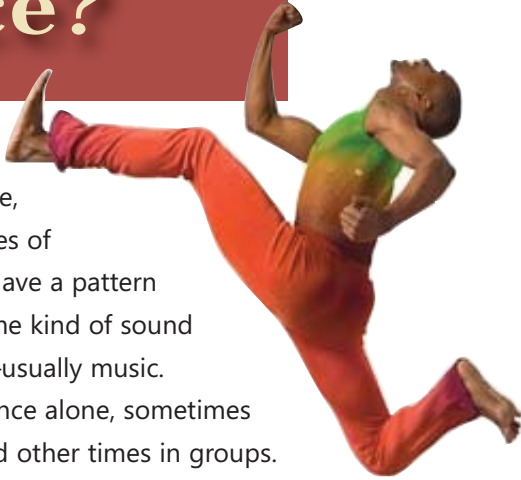
Dance is found in every society around the world, and throughout human history. People have used dance to express themselves, to pass on their history and traditions, and to come together as a community. Dance can be a celebration—of a birth, a wedding, a good harvest—or a preparation for battle.

Modern dance, like jazz music, is an art form that developed in the United States. Both of these art forms are relatively young, tracing their beginnings to the turn of the 20th century. Modern dance was created as a reaction to classical dance (ballet), which some artists thought was too restrictive and too closely tied to aristocratic traditions of the past. To the basic steps and movements of ballet, modern dancers added gestures from folk and street dance, creating a new art form.

Modern dancers do not usually dance in ballet shoes or toe shoes, as classical dancers do. Some modern dancers perform in bare feet.

Do you ever dance? When and where? What kinds of dances do you like to do? Do you ever watch dance on TV? What kinds of dance have you seen?

While you're watching the performance of Philadanco, observe how the choreographers used different levels, symmetry, asymmetry, locomotor and non-locomotor movement, and unison and non-unison movement. Do the three choreographers use these elements in the same ways? How are they different?



Dance Vocabulary

CHOREOGRAPHER - create a dance. A person who creates dances is called a **CHOREOGRAPHER**, while the movements that are created are called **CHOREOGRAPHY**.

IMPROVISE - make up something on the spot, rather than planning and rehearsing it ahead of time.

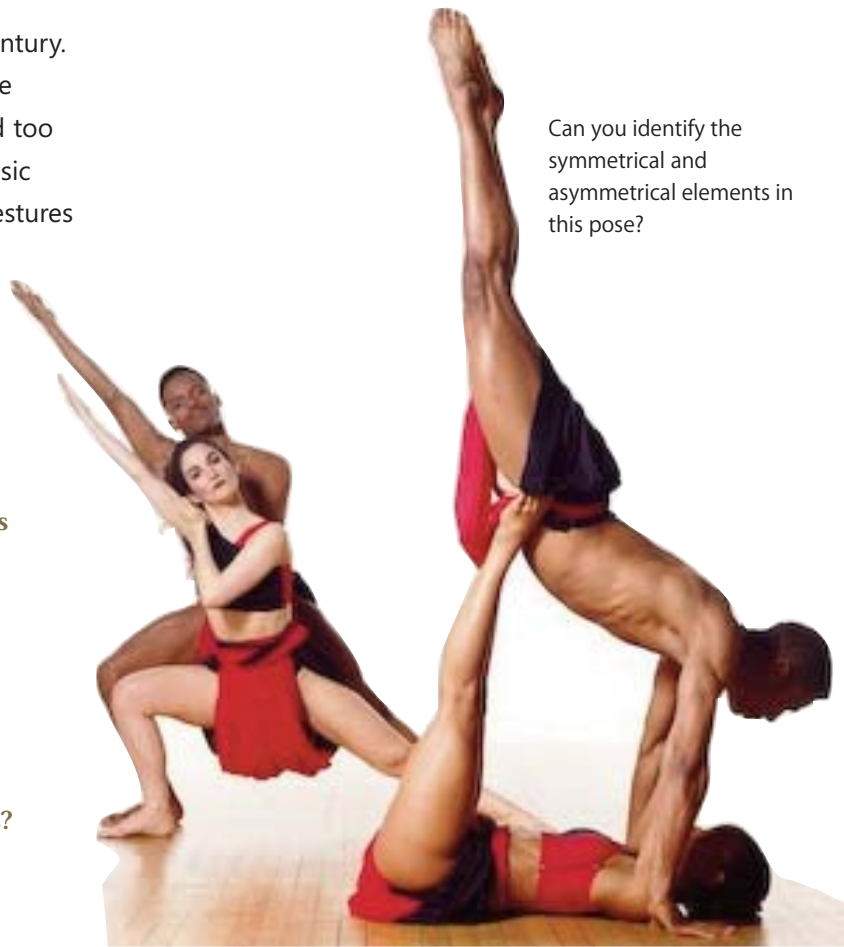
LEVEL - how high or low the dancer's body is positioned.

LOCOMOTOR MOVEMENT - a movement (for example: leaping, skipping, rolling, or sliding) that moves the body from one place to another.

NON-LOCOMOTOR MOVEMENT - a movement (for example: twisting, bending, or stretching) where the body does not move from its original spot.

SYMMETRY - balance. In dance, it means that a leg or arm that is extended in one direction is balanced by an arm or leg extended in the opposite position.

UNISON - when everyone in a dance is doing the same movements at the same time.



Can you identify the symmetrical and asymmetrical elements in this pose?



Being a dancer has a lot in common with being a professional athlete. It requires a commitment to learning a set of special skills and techniques as well as keeping the body in top physical condition. As a matter of fact, many athletes take dance classes to improve their balance, coordination, and flexibility.

Depending on the type of dance, children can begin studying as early as four or five years of age. Even after they have become professionals, dancers continue to take class every day, just as they did when they were children. They never stop learning and practicing.

Dance classes usually take place in a studio—a large room with a special floor that is built of wood suspended about a half-inch above a concrete slab. This gives the floor “spring” and protects the dancers’ muscles and bones from injury. The walls of the studio are covered with mirrors so that the dancers can observe their own movements. Along one wall is a “barre,” a long wooden railing that the dancers can hold onto for support.

Just as in sports, warming up is an essential part of a dancer’s preparation. Before class or a performance, dancers do stretching exercises to loosen up every part of their bodies.

Both dance and sports can be very hard on the body. For this reason, dancers and athletes tend to have relatively short careers. Retirement usually comes in the mid- to late-30s for athletes, while dancers often stop performing by their mid-40s. Once they retire, some athletes become coaches, managers, or sports executives. In the same way, many retired dancers take up new careers such as teaching, choreographing, or running a dance company.

“The most important lesson for a dancer to learn is that his/her instrument will only perform equal to the effort they put into developing it.”

—Arthur Mitchell, founder, Dance Theatre of Harlem

It Takes a Team

In addition to the dancers, there are many people who contribute to the creation of a dance performance. All of these personnel work together as a team to make the performance come to life.

CHOREOGRAPHER creates the dances, inventing the performers’ movements.

COSTUME DESIGNER researches, designs, and supervises the construction of the costumes.

The **WARDROBE MASTER** or **WARDROBE MISTRESS** maintains the costumes and shoes by cleaning and mending them as necessary.

LIGHTING DESIGNER uses the color, intensity (brightness), and placement of the lights to create a mood for each dance.

SET DESIGNER creates the designs for the scenery, including the backdrops, floor-cloths, and furniture.

SOUND TECHNICIAN is responsible for making sure that the music comes on at the right time and sounds as good as possible.

STAGE MANAGER supervises the technical crew during the performance, giving cues for lighting, sound, and when to raise and lower the curtain. She or he also tells the performers when to make their entrances onstage.

Dance a Biography

Working with two or three classmates, create a brief dance about someone from history you've been studying in class. Start by identifying three things about the person:

1. Something that shaped her or him as a person.
2. Something she or he accomplished.
3. Something or someone she or he had to overcome.

Create a specific movement for each of these elements. Make sure the three movements are different from each other. Practice each movement until it looks the same every time you do it.

Then join the movements together into a dance, using music that fits your subject. You can put the movements in any order, and repeat them if you choose. Your dance should be at least one minute long. It should have:

1. **UNISON** and **NON-UNISON** movement
2. Different **LEVELS** (high, middle, low)
3. **LOCOMOTOR** and **NON-LOCOMOTOR** movement

Rehearse your dance at least three times. Make certain that it is **CHOREOGRAPHED**—not **IMPROVISED**.

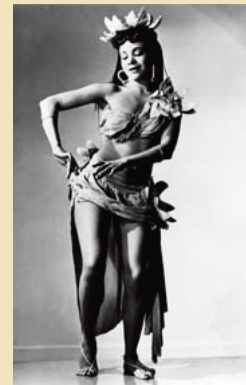
Without revealing the subject, perform your group dance for the rest of the class. Ask them to describe how you used the required dance elements, and whether they can identify anything about the historical subject. Can anyone guess what person is represented in your dance?

Based on the comments of your classmates and your own observations, are there any things you might want to change about your dance? Go back and make these changes, rehearse the dance, and perform it again for the class. Did it get better?

African American choreographers often create dances expressing their feelings about being black in America: the positive as well as the negative. How does the search for identity—and social and political justice—continue to be a concern among artists today? Can you find any examples in other arts, such as poetry, film, music, etc.?

African Americans in Modern Dance

Katherine Dunham (1909-2006)
Called the “Matriarch of Black Dance,” a pioneering dancer, choreographer, author, educator, and political activist.



Katherine Dunham

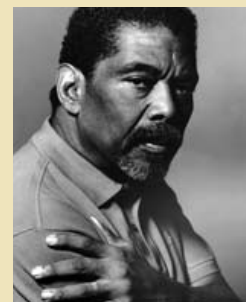
Talley Beatty (1918-1995)
His dances explored the hardships of African Americans.

Pearl Primus (1919-1994)
She helped introduce African dance in America.



Pearl Primus

Alvin Ailey (1931-1989)
A dancer and choreographer who transformed modern dance by integrating African American artists and themes.



Alvin Ailey

Carmen de Lavallade (b. 1931)
A dancer, choreographer, and actress who performed in ballet, modern dance, Off-Broadway, television, and movies.

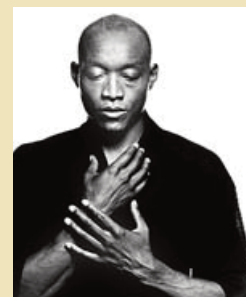
Garth Fagan (b. 1940)
Jamaican-born choreographer whose dances combine modern dance, ballet, Afro-Caribbean, and social dance.



Jawole Willa Jo Zollar

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar (b. 1950)
Founder of the dance company Urban Bush Women. Her dance-theater pieces express a black female point of view.

Bill T. Jones (b. 1952)
Dancer and choreographer who has created dances for his own company as well as for ballet, modern dance, and Broadway.



Bill T. Jones

Know Your Role

Live theater is a collaboration between the performers and the audience. The artists have spent weeks, months—even years—creating a show to inspire and entertain you. Your role in this artistic collaboration is very important to the success of the performance. Make sure you know your part:

- When you arrive at the theater, follow an usher to your seat.
- Before the show begins, make sure to turn off and put away all electronic devices, including cell phones, portable games and music, cameras, and recording equipment. Keep them off for the entire performance.
- Once the house lights (the lights in the part of the theater where the audience is sitting) go down, focus all your attention on the stage. Watch and listen carefully to the performance.
- Attending a live concert in a theater is not the same as watching television at home. At the theater, talking, eating, and moving around can ruin the show for the performers and other members of the audience. And please—**no texting or checking messages during the show!**
- If something in the show is meant to be funny, go ahead and laugh. And of course—feel free to applaud at the end if you liked what you saw.
- After the performers are finished taking their bows, stay in your seat until your group gets the signal to leave the theater.



No Texting



No Pictures



No talking

Resources

INTERNET

Philadanco

www.philadanco.org

Free to Dance: African American Dance Timeline

www.pbs.org/wnet/freetodance/timeline/index.html

African-American Contributions to Theatrical Dance

www.theatredance.com/mhist01.html

International Association of Blacks in Dance

www.howard.edu/collegefinearts/iabdassociation/Home.html

BOOKS

Black Dance in America: A History Through Its People, by James Haskins. HarperCollins Childrens Books, 1992

Dance, by Andrée Grau (Eyewitness Books). DK Children, 2005

Ballet and Modern Dance, by Susan Au. Thames & Hudson, 2002

Funk: The Music, the People, and the Rhythm of the One, by Rickey Vincent. St. Martin's Griffin, 1996

MUSIC

The Very Best of Otis Redding.

Various artists: *Atomic Funk*

James Brown: *Make It Funky: Big Payback 1971-1975*

Parliament: *Mothership Connection*

VIDEO

Free to Dance. A three-part PBS documentary about the role of African-American choreographers and dancers in the development of American modern dance. Educators can purchase the series on DVD. To order, contact Brad Burford via email at brad@nbpc.tv or phone at 212-234-8200, ext. 221.