

doris humphrey the art of making dances

Doris Humphrey: The Art of Making Dances – A Deep Dive into a Modern Dance Pioneer

Have you ever felt the raw power of movement, the visceral storytelling embedded within a dance? If so, you might appreciate the groundbreaking work of Doris Humphrey, a titan of modern dance whose innovative approach to choreography continues to inspire awe and admiration. This in-depth exploration delves into Doris Humphrey's philosophy, techniques, and lasting legacy, offering a comprehensive look at "The Art of Making Dances" as seen through her revolutionary lens. We'll examine her core principles, analyze her iconic works, and uncover the secrets behind her enduring influence on the world of dance.

Understanding Doris Humphrey's Revolutionary Approach

Doris Humphrey (1895-1958) wasn't just a dancer; she was a visionary choreographer and teacher who fundamentally reshaped the landscape of modern dance. Rejecting the rigid structures of ballet, she developed a unique system based on principles of gravity, weight, and fall and recovery – concepts still studied and applied by dancers today. Unlike some of her contemporaries who focused primarily on emotional expression, Humphrey integrated a profound understanding of physical mechanics into her choreography. This resulted in a style characterized by its intellectual rigor, its exploration of human potential, and its powerful storytelling capabilities.

The Fall and Recovery: A Cornerstone of Humphrey's Technique

Perhaps the most defining element of Humphrey's technique is the concept of "fall and recovery." This isn't simply about literally falling to the ground; it's a metaphor for the cyclical nature of life, the constant interplay between yielding to external forces and regaining control. In her dances, this principle manifests in fluid transitions between stillness and movement, weight shifts, and a graceful surrender to gravity, followed by a powerful exertion of energy to regain balance. This rhythmic interplay created a dynamic and visually arresting style, captivating audiences with its organic beauty and emotional depth.

Exploring Humphrey's Key Choreographic Principles

Beyond the fall and recovery, Humphrey's choreography rests on several fundamental principles:

Space and Time: Humphrey meticulously utilized the stage space, crafting intricate patterns of movement that conveyed narratives and emotions. Her use of time was equally significant; she manipulated tempo and pauses to amplify the impact of her choreography.

Suspension and Release: This principle complements the fall and recovery, emphasizing the tension and relaxation of muscles, creating a sense of dynamism and fluidity in the movement. It allowed for a more nuanced expression of emotion, moving beyond simple exertion to a more subtle and controlled artistry.

Shape and Design: Humphrey viewed the human body as a sculptural form, carefully shaping the body's lines and gestures to enhance the visual appeal and narrative impact of her dances.

Motif and Development: Like a composer developing a theme, Humphrey used recurring motifs – short, repeated phrases – to create unity and build emotional resonance throughout her works. These motifs were then transformed and developed throughout the piece, creating a fascinating interplay of familiarity and surprise.

Analyzing Humphrey's Iconic Works: A Legacy in Motion

Humphrey's influence is undeniable, evident in her many iconic works that continue to be performed and studied today. Pieces like "Air for the G String," "Shakers," and "With My Red Fires" stand as testaments to her innovative approach and her ability to weave profound narratives through movement. These works not only showcase her technical prowess but also delve into complex themes of human experience, ranging from the spiritual to the deeply personal. Each piece offers a unique exploration of her core principles, demonstrating the versatility and depth of her creative genius.

"Air for the G String" showcases Humphrey's mastery of space and time, utilizing Bach's music to create a visually stunning and emotionally resonant experience. The dance subtly explores themes of longing and the ephemeral nature of beauty.

"Shakers" demonstrates Humphrey's exploration of ritual and community, showcasing the power of collective movement to create both physical and emotional energy. The piece's stark simplicity contrasts with its emotional depth.

"With My Red Fires" epitomizes Humphrey's ability to use movement to convey

intense emotion, representing the power and vulnerability of the human spirit.

The Enduring Influence of Doris Humphrey

Doris Humphrey's contributions to modern dance are immeasurable. Her revolutionary techniques, her insightful choreographic principles, and her unwavering commitment to artistic integrity continue to shape the landscape of contemporary dance. Her work is not only studied in dance conservatories worldwide but also inspires choreographers and dancers to push boundaries and explore new frontiers in movement and expression. Her legacy is not just a collection of dances; it's a philosophy of movement, a testament to the power of the human body to tell profound stories, and a continuous inspiration for generations to come. Understanding Humphrey's work provides crucial context for appreciating the evolution of modern dance and its lasting impact on the art world.

Conclusion

Doris Humphrey's journey as a choreographer was a radical departure from tradition, forging a new path in modern dance that continues to resonate with dancers and audiences alike. By understanding her innovative techniques and principles, we can appreciate the depth and complexity of her work, solidifying her place as a pivotal figure in the history of dance. Her legacy challenges us to explore the full potential of movement, to find narratives within the body, and to appreciate the power of artistic expression to transcend cultural and temporal boundaries.

FAQs

1. What is the main difference between Doris Humphrey's technique and other modern dance techniques? Humphrey's technique is uniquely rooted in the principles of fall and recovery, gravity, and weight shifts, creating a more physically grounded and dynamically driven style compared to some of her contemporaries who focused more on lyrical expression.
1. Are Doris Humphrey's dances still performed today? Yes, many of her iconic works are still performed and studied in dance companies and conservatories around the world, highlighting their enduring relevance and artistic merit.
1. What is the significance of "fall and recovery" in Humphrey's work?

"Fall and recovery" is more than just a physical technique; it's a metaphor for life's cyclical nature, representing the interplay between surrender and resilience, yielding and exertion.

1. How did Doris Humphrey's background influence her choreography? While details on her specific background are less readily available compared to her dance theory, her rigorous approach to movement was likely influenced by a profound understanding of physics and the body's mechanics, leading to a structured approach in her choreography.
1. Where can I learn more about Doris Humphrey's work? You can find extensive information about Doris Humphrey through academic papers, biographies, video recordings of her dances, and archival materials in major dance libraries and archives. Searching for her name paired with specific works will yield many results.

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