

Modern Dance in the Drill Team World

by *Jamie Drake Stephens*

Over the past 15 years modern dance has exploded onto the drill team scene! Opportunities for drill team students to experience this kind of technique have become more accessible, and a growing number of directors and teachers are trained in this dance form. Therefore, modern dance performances are now a solid presence during contest season that further educates the audience. This transformation has been exciting, but there seems to be a need for clarification. What is modern dance technique's true meaning for existence in the scope of drill team dance?

Modern Dance began as a rebellion at the end of the 19th century against ballet and traditional movement. It was "a choice to move away from the rules, structures, and ideas of the past, those belonging to other ages, and cultures of people, and to move toward a more individually creative theory of dance." It has also been described as a "point of view" that has been different for every decade, every country, every human who gives birth to it. Modern dance has grown into a serious art form with various choices of movement base. Today, professional modern dance companies are seen fighting against any recognized modern movement to develop their own unique style, some incorporating gymnastics, mime, or creative staging, and some basing their dances on myths, folk songs, and legends. Others are using high-level energy output in nonstop movement, and some are creating performances that are transformational; a meditation focus taking dancers and audiences into altered states of consciousness. Also there are those who have returned to "dances that speak again of movement that means, of movement that tells us of certain feelings, attitudes, and points of view."

Space

TIME

Energy

Modern dance "purists" obviously have a plethora of views on how they will move, but they still were trained with the basics of modern dance technique through which developed their own unique style. These elements are simple but need to be developed and understood by every modern dance student. The body is our instrument, so

the primal function of breath is crucial to the movement we will produce. For example, breathing in constricts our muscles while breathing out relaxes them. Coordinating this with movement enlivens the quality of motion and gives the dancer a richer feeling. Articulation of body parts develops more sensitive dance. The torso and manipulation of the spine is core to modern dance movement. Physical laws determine limitations and potential for all dancers. Modern dancers should know how to use their bodies with or against these forces of nature such as gravity, centrifugal and centripetal forces, inertia and momentum. One problem that still exists in drill teams performing modern dance is the use of release. Drill team dancers are trained to control their movement so much with muscular strength the action of releasing; using the physical law of gravity, and rebounding from it is very difficult for them to perform. Space, time, and energy are the abstract elements of movement that need to be explored in modern dance. Choreography, partner work, improvisation, and performance can help a dancer discover the colorfulness of these abstract elements that will develop a smarter dancer. All parts of modern dance technique are important in the path to becoming an advanced modern dancer.

Locomotor Movements:

Walk
Run
Skip
Hop
Jump
Slide
Leap
Gallop

Non-Locomotor Movements:

Bend
Stretch
Twist
Swing

Since the art form of modern dance is quite young in the drill team world compared to other dance categories, mastering the basics is crucial. These basics should be incorporated and displayed in every modern dance performance by drill teams until those dancers fully understand the technique and are on an



advanced level. As in Ballet, many other forms of drill team dance feel very safe to the dancer because the movement and shapes are so structured. For example, high kick and military technique are almost as strict as ballet technique. Everything is placed and has a clear definition. Therefore, modern dance can be intimidating and confusing if the dancers are not clear of its theory and basics of movement. It is a more cerebral form of dance rather than just physical. HOWEVER, the history of drill team and its theory should blend with the modern dance thought of movement if the venue is still in the world of drill team such as contest performances.

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Drill team began in 1940 at Kilgore College by Gussie Nell Davis in Kilgore, Texas. Their halftime performances were to be entertaining in order to keep the football game crowd in the stands. Drill team has evolved into so much more (and so have the fabulous Rangerettes), but this main

thought of creation is still very important. Therefore, drill team modern dance performances should be entertaining. It is a challenging feat to accomplish the ideas of modern dance while still grabbing the audience. It is well known most audiences do not want to be “spoon-fed” the concept of a routine, but also do not want to walk away in confusion. A modern dance does not always have to tell a story nor does it need to be “ugly” to be considered modern. The technique was created by a rebellion of what was familiar. Therefore, any drill team modern dance performance should not look like it belongs in the jazz, military, or lyrical category. Stick to the basics of modern technique. Stay away from the familiar. If there is a need for an axel or fouettes to be in a modern dance routine, think about the physical laws and mechanics of that particular movement. Discover how it can be manipulated and changed through creativity. Make it your own; make it look new and innovative rather than familiar. Again, sticking to the basics of modern dance technique infused with the theory of drill team dance can be an exciting experience!

