



Polishing a Stylized Jazz by Donna M. Haas

Many dance team directors are exploring new ways to expand their students dance repertoire and experience by introducing them to many different dance styles. One such approach could involve performing a stylized jazz. This would allow the team to broaden its concept of jazz. However, with this new form comes the task of polishing effectively. Here are a few hints that could help in overcoming this hurdle and make it not only educational but enjoyable:

- Begin by viewing a video of the particular style selected. Presenting a professional visual, such as a performance of a Bob Fossé or Tremaine number, will aid in the comprehension of the overall method.
- Explain the mood and attitude of the piece. Have small groups create dance steps that would exemplify the selection, i.e. prissy, saucy, sultry, arrogant, etc. Quite often the dancers will create steps and movements that will not only be usable but also inventive.
- Ask small groups to list the differences in this style compared to jazz style they utilized in the past. This exercise should list differences such as body angles, facials, positioning of hands or feet, overall attitude, etc. Then allow the groups to share their findings.
- Select one dancer or group of dancers, hopefully the captain or officers, who perform this specified style to perfection. Have that person or group teach the routine, being sure to detail the differences from their former method. This will give the team another visual to emulate while training their bodies to accept this new technique.
- Utilize mirrors whenever possible to allow the dancers to compare their head, arm, body, and foot positions. Even allowing only a few dancers at a time to see themselves in comparison to dancers who are performing the movement correctly will yield a marked improvement.
- Have students line up in files to view sections that are especially difficult to clean. Take the movement count by count and permit the dancers to match their positioning. Hand positions in stylized jazz seem to be a particular problem in consistency of form and placement.
- Concentrate on cleaning one specific area of the body at a time, i.e. feet, hands, arms, heads, and body angles. By “zooming in” on this one perspective, the director may find different problem areas.
- Video the team performing the routine and allow them to critique their performance. Directors should not only mention the movement mistakes, but also concentrate on the overall attitude and general effect of the presentation.
- Compare the video of their performance with the example video utilized to demonstrate the style. Have them critique the technique, showmanship, and general effect.
- Record a cassette critique of the final rehearsal and allow the dancers to listen to your critique the following morning. This will help the students to regain their mental

attention from the previous practice and, hopefully, allow them to begin at a higher level of concentration.

Working as a team toward a successful performance of this piece will be rewarding both educationally and personally. Remember to emphasize that their performance will reflect their dedication, but also stress that if they have performed to their best ability, they should be proud!