Modern Dance

- Modern dance is a point of view that encourages artistic individualism and the development of personal choreographic styles.
- There are as many ways of dancing it as there are talented choreographers.
- There are no general rules.
- It remains in a perpetual state of metamorphosis.
Beginnings of Modern Dance

- Many of the founders of modern dance were Americans
- Began in the late 1800s/early 1900s as a direct revolt against the “restrictions” of ballet
- Dancers attempted to discover their own artistically valid approaches to movement; separate from traditional ballet
Isadora Duncan

- “Mother of Modern Dance”, Laid the foundation of modern dance
- Born in San Francisco 1899
- Believed art was about personal expression
- No more corsets and slippers, Duncan was the first to rebel against ballet and use free flowing movement and barefoot technique
- Typical attire was a simple tunic and bare feet
  - Was seen as vulgar like nudity
- Consisted of walks, skips, jumps, and runs
- Died September 14, 1927 in freak accident
Ruth St. Denis

- Using exoticism of the Orient with theater and dance movement, St. Denis made the popular vaudeville circuit of her time more artful and set the stage for modern dance. 1879-1968
- Technique was mostly poses and manipulation of scarves and draperies
- Used decorative costumes, very pictorial
- Married Ted Shawn and opened Denishawn, the first school and performing company for modern dance
Ted Shawn

- Shawn, who originally trained in Germany, brought various types of dance into St. Denis’ shows - from tango to ragtime. He was also the founder of Jacob’s Pillow, the Becket, Massachusetts summer dance festival. 1891-1972
- Fought for recognition and development of male dancers
- First champion of the male dancer
Denishawn

- Company founded: 1915
- Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn married and founded the Denishawn school, fostering the talents of many greats of modern dance.
- Nearly all originators of early modern dance companies either studied or performed with Denishawn
- Among them are Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Martha Graham
Doris Humphrey

- Student of Denishawn from 1917-1928
- Her dance partner was Charles Weidman (1901-1975)
  - Student of Denishawn
  - Choreography based on pantomime, gesture, and spoofs of old silent films
  - Contrast to dramatic and emotional
- Technique, based on “fall and recovery”
- Optimistic works based on an idealistic view of community.
- Pioneered the term “music visualization”-becoming the music as you dance
Martha Graham

- Generally accepted as the greatest single figure in American modern dance
- Danced with Denishawn from 1916-1923
- Created “Graham technique,” One of the only codified dance techniques- gave modern dance a vocabulary
- Dances were about heroic women in myths and history
- Graham developed the principles of “contraction” and “release”
- Graham technique was notable for its nervous energy. It was based on a study of breathing
Martha Graham Dance Ensemble
Erick Hawkins

- Joined the *Graham company* in 1938 he became her principle partner
- Married Martha Graham
- Created his own technique, softening the Graham technique, infusing it with nature imagery; the moon, stars, desert, and sea
Merce Cunningham

- Member of the Graham company from 1939-1945
- Most influential of Graham’s students
- Mixed elements of music, set, costumes, and dance-shifting their relationship
- Applied philosopher/composer John Cage’s theory that “any sound can be music” to dance and realize that any movement can be dance
- Known for decentralizing his dancers-moving them all over the stage in a random scattered way
Twyla Tharp

- Studied with Graham and Cunningham
- Tharp works in every possible style (ballet, tap, jazz) to involve movement - she could easily make a dance out of chewing gum
- Created over 70 works for her own company, ballets, modern dances, Broadway shows and films
- Created her own movement style
Paul Taylor Dance Company
Alvin Ailey

- The first to give black dancers and choreographers opportunities in concert dance. Ailey began his company by looking for dancers with unique qualities—not only strong personalities but also impeccable technique. His choreography related to the prejudices he endured as an African American.
Alvin Ailey
American Dance Theater