

The evolution of dance in American musicals

Geta-Violeta RĂVDAN*

Abstract: Dancing for musicals includes several forms and styles of dance. And how else could it have evolved if not through an equally eclectic history, starting from Greek and Roman theatrical performances (from 500 BC onwards) to the dazzling musicals of today. From performances in which it played a supporting role in drama shows, operas and morality plays, dance gained its own identity in the 19th century, in minstrel and vaudeville shows. Later, it would manage to occupy an important place in Broadway musicals, because it evolved with each period to better support the stories and connect with the audience. The men who created the choreographies were initially called dance directors and later choreographers. They strove to integrate dance into the storyline of the musicals and became directors-choreographers who created conceptual musicals and dance musicals. But gradually, women demonstrated their skills as creators of musicals and helped evolve not only dance, but also Broadway musicals.

Key words: show; production; dance; musical; Broadway;

Introduction

In musicals, text, music and dance are harmoniously combined. Musical performance dance can include any form of movement and style of dance that combines with acting and singing, and helps to support, advance and add new meanings to the story of the show. The choreography is secondary to the text and to the music, but it can also complement the dramatic action, which is why the imagination and creative complexity of the choreographer are just as important. In fact, the choreographer must have a particular sense (a talent) and intuition in order to properly integrate the dance interventions. The choreographies of the actors adapt to the abilities of the performers, their talent and creativity, while following the trajectory of the characters.

As for the dancers, they need to be trained to perform any genre of dance that the choreographer or director may want to work with. Some shows include folk dances, jazz, tap, modern dance, hip-hop or even ballet, while others only require

* Lecturer PhD, Faculty of Arts, „Ovidius” University of Constanta.

stylized movements and gestures that cannot be categorized into a particular style, but require professional dancers. The dances in these shows are not designed to entertain the audience separately, although they could. Their main purpose is to help the audience understand the storyline better, which is why dancers should go beyond their condition as dancers and also be good performers. An aspiring musical theatre dancer must be aware that there will be high expectations, which is why their training should also include acting and singing alongside a variety of dance styles. In addition, their dance will be performed to different types of musical accompaniment, with different costumes and footwear (ballet, jazz, tap, character shoes), decor and props. Sometimes, within the same production, it is possible for various forms of dance to be performed, therefore the dancer becomes well versed in several styles and forms of dance.

The so-called „triple-threat performer” is the artist who is able to act, sing and dance well enough. In a musical, it is not enough to be trained in one area only (acting, music or dance), because the performer must act in a manner suited for the character while dancing or sing while dancing. It was not until the 1930s and 1940s that musicals became integrated; but until then, many artists (musicians and dancers) were employed in this type of production, which meant high costs and many rehearsals, because they worked separately. To be a musical theatre dancer also means having to adapt to a series of challenges. Thus, the dancer: works with a director, a musical director and a choreographer; dances in costumes that are appropriate for the role, which are meant to emphasize the dance (initially, even the shoe type can create small difficulties for the movement); works with props; once the stage rehearsals start, the choreography is adjusted to the decor (the dance is rarely performed on the entire stage – the movement generally occurs in a certain area of the stage, around or within the decor); at first, the dancers rehearse using prerecorded music or piano accompaniment, and once the technical or general rehearsals start, they face orchestra music, which may sound different in tempo or speed; the dancer must learn to pay attention to any necessary modification and apply it immediately.

1. The Roots of Musical Theatre Dance

Greek dramas, which included music and dance in the 5th century BC and were later adopted by the Romans,¹ are among the first to introduce dance in the unfolding of a theatrical performance. Later, in the Middle Ages, travelling actors

¹ It seems like the Romans were the ones who created the prototype for tap shoes. They attached metal pieces to the soles of their sandals, so their steps could be heard.

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used dance to tell stories to the people, and the Catholic church included music and dance in liturgical drama to present Bible stories to the people and offer them moral lessons. In the Renaissance, Greek dramas reappeared. Some of them, such as „Orpheus” (1607) to the music of Monteverdi, included music and dance. But another type of show was also popular, the pantomime. It included music, dance, acrobatics, and elements of clowning. Show dance could include anything, from hornpipe dances to tightrope dancing, acrobatics, pantomime. Dance was also introduced between the acts of Shakespeare’s plays or of John Gray’s „The Beggar’s Opera” (1728).

1.1. Musical Theatre Dance in Colonial America

In colonial America, people came into contact with theatre through British acting troupes, and with dance mainly through the tours of the Europeans who came to America starting at the end of the 18th century. Great European dancers performed in romantic ballets, but Americans soon lost their interest in them in favor of some more entertaining shows.² As early as the 18th century, performances by English theatre companies became the main form of American theatrical entertainment, until after the Civil War. On the other hand, immigrants and explorers brought with them their own cultures and dances, which gradually blended with those specifically American. Various dancers, dance masters and choreographers from different countries and cultures contributed to the development of American dance. The dancers of the 18th century performed in circus arenas, by dancing on horseback, as well as in ballets and Italian shadow plays.

The first musical performed in New York took place in 1750, „The Beggar’s Opera”, and the first musical created in America is thought to be the comic opera „The Archers” (1796). The ban on public shows (which were considered scandalous) during the Revolutionary period (1764-1789), only led to the birth of a new form of performance, called *minstrel show*. The Continental Congress could not stop dance and, in fact, between 1750 and 1843, white men in blackface performed songs and dances across the country, in circuses or as entertainment during the actors’ breaks. In fact, in the 18th century, there was already a resident theatre company almost in every town.

The minstrel show was born with the presentation of a long show in 1843 by artists in blackface called *Virginia Minstrels*. Consisting of parody dances and Black

² The *melodramas* of the 19th century (which were tragicomedies where Good always defeated Evil) would be built following the same romantic line. Their structure included music, dance and pantomime.

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songs, this type of show was not well received on Broadway, the cultural center of New York. Unlike the stage of operas and theatre plays that was intended for the social elite, minstrel shows were performed at „Bowery”, for the lower classes. But in 1866, a production marked the birth of the American musical theatre. „The Black Crook” was scheduled to be performed in New York. A Parisian ballet company had booked the Academy of Music to perform a show, but a fire that broke out there caused the two shows to merge. The entire performance was a lineup of songs and dances stretched over five and a half hours. „The Black Crook” resembled a circus show, with dancers in tights and corsets. The show was performed for over a year and whetted the appetite for the vaudeville and burlesque shows that emerged in the late 1800s. The burlesque shows of the time entertained the middle and lower classes, with dancing, singing and women showing off their curves. Another characteristic of the show was that it poked fun at theater plays and operas, as well as people from the upper classes. Vaudeville, on the other hand, was made of unrelated artistic moments. Many types of dances and movement were incorporated, such as tap dancing, Irish dancing, comic dancing, clogging, toe dancing,³ fancy dancing, acrobatics, skirt dancing.

Vaudeville was where performers prepared for the musical shows created on Broadway in the following century. Vaudeville and revue shows gained popularity in the 20th century. They were based on the structure of the minstrel, on the constant change of the performers, and on placing greater emphasis on the dancer. As opposed to vaudeville, which, despite its lack of coherence, was the preferred form of entertainment for the masses, revue was elaborate, it had coherent, superior productions, but did not enjoy the same appeal to audiences outside of New York. Vaudeville shows, performed on tours throughout the United States, created star dancers, as had existed for centuries in ballet. Because these performances had no narrative requirements, the dancers were famous for their diverse dancing skills, which did not conform to the request for precision in the dance chorus.

Tap dancing was a staple of the late 19th and early 20th century entertainment. During this period, the Black style in song and dance influenced American art, especially the lower-class vaudeville (as the Black minstrel show was considered). But tap dancing was promoted as an art form both in white vaudeville (because adding a „Black number” was always auspicious), and in Black vaudeville. Once film became

³ *Toe dancing* was different from the pointe technique of ballet. While dancing, the dancers performed tricks, such as rope jumping. Some of them added metal to their shoe tips to mark the rhythm while dancing.

popular, tap dancing moved onto the big screen, instigating its discreditation. Ted Shawn, an important precursor of modern dance, who was bothered by the ever-increasing popularity of tap dancing, said in “Fundamentals of a Dance Education” (1937): „[i]f tap dancing has any legitimate place at all it is in vaudeville and the revue as a cheap form of entertainment.”⁴

1.2. Dance on musical theatre stage in the 1920s-1930s

In the early 1900s, ragtime music took to the theater stage. Ragtime was a syncopated musical style, with influences from minstrel shows, West African drum rhythms, European folk songs, and the syncopated dance rhythms of the cakewalk. This would influence the development of jazz music. During this era, dance teachers focused on teaching the dancers specific ways of moving, and some of them (the spouses Vernon and Irene Castle) refined the dances that Black dancers performed to ragtime music. They also modified social dances in order to make them likeable to the public and popularized ballroom dancing. They pioneered the castle walk dance and animal dances (turkey trot, bunny hug, grizzly bear) which scandalized society with their close embraces between partners. These years were characterized by the variety of dance styles used on Broadway. Dance studios and dance schools offered classes in a variety of styles, from ballet to tap, acrobatic, jazz, ballroom, tango, Spanish dancing, precision lines, musical comedy, revues, pantomimes. In dance training, ballet taught in either the Italian, Russian or American technique was the foundation for the preparation for musical comedy. However, once jazz dancing was introduced on Broadway, it came to dominate the dance language on the musical stage.

One of the greatest dance educators of the time was Ned Wayburn (1874-1942). He was a successful dance director and ran a chain of dance schools. He developed a course called *Home-study* and was among the first people in the field to codify a system for training Broadway dancers. This system was inspired from „American Delsarte System”, military drills and the hierarchical systems of 19th century ballet shows. He said of the dancer’s body that it was the instrument that helped him dance and upon which he must gain control. For that, he recommended a special technique that would guide the harmonious functioning of all parts of the body. „The foundation technique which I evolved for the Ned Wayburn courses is a limbering and stretching process for the body, which precedes the teaching of dancing

⁴ Dustyn Martincich, Phoebe Rumsey (ed.). 2024. *Dance in Musical Theatre A History of the Body in Movement*. London: Methuen Drama, p. 190.

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steps, fitting all pupils properly with a basis, a foundation for the important work to come. Without these exercises, all of which are set to inspiring music, muscles employed in dancing would remain taut or soft and not respond properly, the pupil would quickly tire, and the attempt to dance become an unavailing effort. With the limbering and stretching course, time is saved in preparing the student for the lessons to come, and the time necessary for the training and development of a dancer is significantly shortened from the long apprenticeship that once prevailed under the old, antiquated Ballet technique. What is known as the Ned Wayburn method brings into play all the bodily muscles that are essential to the dancer's use, gives strength, suppleness and symmetry to the entire body.”⁵ His vocabulary focused on six categories of musical dance: Musical Comedy Technique, Exhibition Ballroom, Toe Specialties, Tapping and Stepping, Acrobatic Work, Modern Americanized Ballet. The latter was meant to be different from European ballet, by rejecting the lengthy training that was specific to classical ballet in favor of a condensed training that would allow the dancers to take the stage more quickly.

Obviously, the Russian and European teachers who lived in America and had had long-term classical training could not accept this approach. Ballet was perceived as a real art, while jazz and tap dancing were considered low-class. White choreographers, however, worked with tap dancing but still maintained that demarcation between the dance forms they used. For example, later, even George Balanchine, in „Boys From Syracuse” (1938) used *en pointe* dance to illustrate marital love and tap dance to suggest fleeting attraction. But there were also a few exceptions, such as the imperial ballet dancer Mikhail Mordkin, who, while touring in the American land with Anna Pavlova, accepted and felt the potential of Ned Weyburn’s vision, imagining a potential fusion between ballet and jazz dancing.

The audiences enthusiastically welcomed the new movement vocabulary infused with the jazz dancing in Black productions. White producers oftentimes paid Black dance directors to remove their names from certain choreographies and replace them with the names of white dance directors. For example, „The Black Bottom, attributed to white performer Anne Pennington who introduced it in *George White's Scandals of 1926*, was in fact taught to Pennington by Black dancer Freddie Taylor.”⁶

⁵ Ned Weyburn. 1925. *The Art of Stage Dancing The Story of a Beautiful and Profitable Profession* [Electronic version 2008], 63. Retrieved April 1, 2025, from https://www.gutenberg.org/files/27367/27367-h/27367-h.htm#NED_WAYBURN_STAGE_DANCES.

⁶ Liza Gennaro. 2022. *Making Broadway Dance*. New York: University Press, p. 15.

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In 1921, „Shuffle Along”, which was produced, written and performed by Black theater professionals, featured exciting dances that captivated Broadway. The chorus made of sixteen dancers set a new trend in musical dance – musical comedy started to gain rhythm, and the girls started to learn jazz dancing. At the same time, John Tiller (1854-1925) opened a school in London to train women. He supplied musical comedies and revues with women dancers who were trained to dance in unison and march in the style of military formations. His dancers were known as the „Tiller Girls” of London. He also brought young women from America to dance in vaudeville and musicals. With time, he introduced vaudeville and can-can steps into the girls’ training. Similar schools opened in America as well.

The annual production „Ziegfeld Follies” was a revue that was produced by Ziegfeld Florenz Jr. from 1907 to 1931, with revivals in 1934, 1936, 1943, and 1957. Many artists of the time launched there. The main attraction was the chorus of dancers, who were called the *Ziegfeld Girls*. They were also considered hoofers (professional dancers) or showgirls (this was considered a better status). Ned Wayburn was the first dance director who requested that the chorus dancers all be of the same height. In 1905, he created his „Studio of Stage Dancing” in Manhattan, where he created kick lines. Even though he wanted dancers to be well trained, he chose them based on their physical appearance. His choreographies featured complex and fast steps and tableaux (groups of dancers who stopped in poses). Smiling and musicality were attributes required of those who worked for him. He was the most renowned dance director of his time. He worked at the „Ziegfeld Follies” from 1915 to 1930, where he became famous for inventing the Ziegfeld walk (the dancers walked down the stairs while simultaneously pushing one hip and the opposite shoulder forward, while maintaining their balance despite their enormous headpieces or ornaments).

Wayburn’s legacy also included a textbook in which he presents the training and choreography at the turn of the century, „The Art of Stage Dancing” (1925). He explains the dance styles that are present in modern stage dancing (which he defines as distinct from ballroom and social dancing): musical comedy dancing, tap and step dancing (both of which dominated the stage of the 1920s-1930s), American ballet dancing, acrobatic dancing, ballroom dancing. „Musical comedy dancing, which Wayburn defined as containing elements of tap dance incorporating kicks and turns alongside balletic movements, was the type of dancing he taught to Fred and Adele Astaire. He identifies tap dancing (a term some dance historians claim he coined), conversely, as an American art form that relies on the syncopated rhythms of the footwork. Wayburn developed his own codification of tap dancing technique by

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identifying the different uses of the foot and the way it can create different sounds. Many styles and components of Wayburn's stage dancing would become passé as ballet technique became more influential in the overall aesthetic of the musical theatre dancer, yet his systematic approach to training dancers at his school would provide a clear model for the period.”⁷ A few of his other significant contributions to musical theatre include the following: he explored and showcased movements derived from cultures other than white, such as Turkish, Indian and Egyptian; he helped transform a chorus girl into a dance star. For example, his school student, Marilyn Miller, who was trained in a variety of styles and excelled at tap dancing, became a true star when she landed a leading role.

Other notable dance directors at the „Ziegfeld Follies” were Julian Mitchell (1854-1926) and Albertina Rausch (1891-1967); Mitchell developed the girls’ chorus envisioned by Tiller and increased the size of the productions. Rausch, in contrast, offered a novel approach to dancing on Broadway, introducing elements from ballet training into the show, at the expense of jazz and tap dance elements. (As to the development of tap dancing at the time, it was due to the fact that it was a virtuoso dance style that used fashionable syncopated rhythms, and because it did not need to be tied to any plot of the show. It was also assimilated along with the rhythm of jazz music, which is why the musical rhythms used in musical theatre changed by the 1940s, ballet made its way onto the Broadway stage, and very few choreographic scores were ever still intended for tap dancers.) In Rausch’s choreographies, classical *port de bras* were combined with stylized movements, eccentric vaudeville movements, and above all that, the precision of the Tiller style. She worked with modern music, and she named the result *American ballet*. In 1923, she opened a dance school in New York, where she created units of six to up to twenty girls who were called the *Albertina Rausch Dancers*.

At the same time, in Harlem, upper Manhattan, Black musical theatre was developing as well. In 1911, an all-Black musical, „The Darktown Follies”, was created. The shows of Black artists were created for their own communities but drew the attention of white people. Florenz Ziegfeld purchased one of the dances from this show to use in his revue (a dance performed in a circle where every dancer held the hips of the person in front of them with their hands). Then, in 1923, the show „Runnin’ Wild” included one of the Ashanti dances from Africa, the Charleston. When white dancers began to appropriate more and more moves from Black dancers, the boundaries between the two musical theatres (white, and Black) started to fade. But

⁷ Dustyn Martincich, Phoebe Rumsey (ed.). *op. cit.* p. 38.

Black musical and revue shows developed their own forms because they made little use of the conventions that were present in white musicals. The Whitman Sisters produced the most famous of these touring revue shows featuring the highest-paid Black performers. Among them were Alice, one of the most highly regarded tap soloists off-Broadway, and the dancer and choreographer Buddy Bradley, who often contributed choreographies to Broadway (sometimes without public recognition) before moving to the UK, where he continued his career.

1.3. Choreographic methods

The development of dance in this world has always depended on various people who responsibly and creatively prepared dancers for the musical stage. In addition to the technique and training of the aforementioned Ned Weyburn, two dance directors appeared on Broadway in the 1920s, who took on the six categories defined by Wayburn along with jazz movements: Seymour Felix and Sammy Lee. But there were also women dance directors on the musical stage, such as the Black women Aida Walker, Lyda Webb, and the white ones, Gae Foster and the great Albertina Rasch. It was George Balanchine who saw beyond the racist ideas around jazz dance, which he appreciated and recognized for its power. As to tap dancing, Balanchine was renowned for not respecting those who practiced it, but the truth is that he was not trained in this regard and always left it to the experts to create the choreographies for those moments in the musicals.

Since 1943, American ballet and modern dance have been making their way onto a Broadway that was dominated by white American choreographers. With the advent of integrated musicals, in which dancers sang and danced, the training programs began to change, to be based on the classical concert jazz dance styles of Matt Mattox, Luigi, and Gus Giordano, or studios such as the „Phil Black Dance Studio”, which offered their dancers training in ballet, jazz, tap dancing and exercises for flexibility and musicality. „These centers were open to all levels of dancers, from youth to adult beginners to previously-trained dancing professionals. Classes by master teachers who were themselves performers and choreographers, were specifically crafted for singing, acting dancers looking to enter the professional industry. These spaces gave way to the now epicenters of professional training for aspiring musical theatre dancers: Broadway Dance Center, formally JoJo's Dance Factory, which was founded by *Doctor Jazz* Frank Hatchett in 1984, and Steps on

Broadway, NYC, which was founded by Carol Paumgarten and Patrice Sorier in 1979 and is now run by leading jazz dance instructor Joe Lanteri.”⁸

Currently, musical theatre courses in American universities offer training in acting, voice, and movement. Dance courses include a wide range of styles: from ballet to jazz, tap dancing, modern dance, social dance, and even hip hop. These not only shape a diverse movement vocabulary, but also support the adaptability to various approaches and styles. This training leads to full-scale musical productions, in which dance is joined by acting and voice training, and working with props, decor and costumes. But there are also off-campus programs for that, such as „Jacob's Pillow”, „Broadway Theatre Project” and „CAP21”. These programs offer training where dancers practice techniques they already acquired in musical choreography and focus on the quick practice of the choreography (as happens in rehearsals and auditions). They focus more on style and less on the actual technique, on the adaptability to a particular choreographic style.

Musical theatre dancers in the United States benefit from master classes in and out of universities, where they are taught by teachers who have worked with a choreographer in an original cast of a show. They are in fact the real keepers of the musical theatre dance. They train in certain styles by passing on the vocabulary, the methods of training and the indications that were used by the choreographer or the dancer in the original production. By learning the choreography in a production and thus taking it out of its context, a repertoire-style model of training is created. Although there are currently teachers in dance studios, school clubs and coaches who take online choreographies and try to replicate them with their students, obtaining copyright in the USA is an extremely difficult process which often prevents choreographies from circulating.

2. The Dance director

At the beginning of the 20th century, the places where white people would gather to dance were still different from those of Black dancers. White people would meet in bars called honky-tonks, while African Americans would meet in run-down shacks, called juke joints. In these, one could distinguish in their dances hip movements that were specific to the Congo, footwork borrowed from Pygmy tribes and movements of the upper body originating in West Africa. These movements, combined with the European jig and clog dances, helped shape the American musical theatre dance.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

At the same time, people desired and worked to bring dance to the forefront of musical shows, which is why the dance directors began to explore, mixing different dance forms and styles. In doing so, they strayed from the conventional formula of dancing in unison, which was specific to dancers who worked with Albertina Rausch, for example, or to groups like the Tiller Girls. The formation of musical theatre dance was based upon the contributions of certain dance directors of the 1920s and 1930s. For example, Bobby Connolly (1897-1944) made tap dance the most popular form of dance in the chorus numbers and in films created between the 1900s and 1930s. The most prolific and highest paid dance director of the time, Seymour Felix (1892-1961), also contributed to the development of dance moments. In a time where the dancing chorus and the singing chorus were still separate, and dance had only a decorative role in musicals, he presented the plot in „Simple Simon” (1930) through pantomime, helping the story unfold. He realized that dances had little relevance in musicals unless they were integrated. He developed a collaboration with the librettist and composer and changed the face of the dance chorus. He focused more on dances that reflected an atmosphere and less on their spectacularity; he gave chances to individual parts and imposed a repetitive rhythmic structure to tap dancing on Broadway.

2.1. The Choreographer

In the era of the choreographer, we can already see a mix of styles and forms that make their way into the musical show. Until the 1910s, no names were included in the printed programs for the dance moments, and it was not until the 1930s that they would be called choreographers. When he was hired to create the dances for „On Your Toes” (1936)⁹, George Balanchine (1904-1983) was the one who requested to have the title of choreographer. He showed that dance could be interwoven with the story of a musical, supporting the advancement of the plot and the shaping of the characters. In addition to „Slaughter on Tenth Avenue” in this show, he also choreographed musicals, but without the dance supporting the story as much („Babes in Arms” – 1937, „I Married an Angel” – 1938, „Boys from Syracuse” – 1938). In the 1930s, modern dance also entered Broadway musicals. Among the notable productions were: „I’d Rather Be Right” (1937) by Charles Weidman, „Showboat” (1946) and „Annie Get Your Gun” (1954) by Helen Tamiris, and „Kiss Me Kate” (1948), „My Fair Lady” (1956), and „Camelot” (1960), choreographed by Hanya Holm.

⁹ In 1939, Balanchine also choreographed the film version of *On Your Toes*.

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Another notable choreographer of the same period was Jack Cole (1911-1974) who had danced on Broadway in the 1930s. In the 1940s and 1950s, ballet and modern dance monopolized Broadway dances, although jazz dance did not completely disappear from musicals, but was mixed with other forms of dance with modern influences. An important influence of jazz dancing on Broadway was the contribution of the theatrical jazz style of Katherine Dunham (inspired by African influences) and the style of Jack Cole (which brought together the Lindy techniques and Bharatanatyam in Eastern India.) As a student of the Denishawn School, Jack Cole was unique in that he was the first to introduce ethnic dances into the musical show and developed a series of stylized Latin dances. In fact, his choreographies were very difficult and included not only these dances, but also ballet, modern dance and folk dance. Called the father of theatrical jazz and/or modern jazz dance he had the ability (and the necessary editing skills) to make non-dancers in movies seem like skilled dancers. The most famous example is that of actress Marilyn Monroe. He also trained future great dancers, such as Gwen Verdon, teachers such as Matt Mattox, or great choreographers, such as Jerome Robbins, Bob Fosse and Michel Bennett. Cole produced dancers who could embody the characters by working with images. For example, in an Indian dance, he advised them to dance as if they were an elephant (a sacred creature in Hindi culture) or to dance as a sacred cow. Even though he worked in more than twenty Broadway shows, none of them were considered great successes. Some of the films and musicals he choreographed and/or directed are: „Flanders”, „Zenda”, „Foxy”, „Kismet”, „A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum”, „Jamaica”, „Man of La Mancha”, „The Merry Widow”, „Gentlemen Prefer Blondes”, „There’s No Business Like Show Business” and „Some Like It Hot”.

Another influential Broadway choreographer was Katherine Dunham (1909-2006). Her entire career was based on her anthropological studies of Caribbean dances and customs. Her technique encompassed a variety of influences from different cultures. She worked with isolations and emphasized hip movements and the fluidity of the spine and of the torso. Through her Broadway choreographies, such as „Tropics”, „Le Jazz Hot” (1940), „Tropical Revue” (1943), „Carib Song” (1945), „Bal Nègre” (1947), „Caribbean Rhapsody” (1948), she introduced audiences to new styles of music and dance from other cultures. The technique she taught in her school between 1945-1954 brought an important contribution to Broadway musical theatre and to musical film in Hollywood. While the white dancers in Cole’s group were becoming Broadway stars (Gwen Verdon, Matt Mattox, Buzz Miller, Carol Haney), many of Dunham’s dancers were performing on Broadway, but suffered because of

racist casting, which made it so they could not get a lead role with a few exceptions. Matt Mattox (1921-2013) developed a jazz dance technique based on the accumulations of Cole, who also had a strong influence on Broadway choreography.

During this period, a series of changes were introduced in musical shows. Besides the new musical styles that were included on the musical theatre stage, new Latin-inspired rhythms were also included. The development of the cinema attracted artists who moved to the West Coast to work in Hollywood, while the audience had ever increased expectations of Broadway shows. It is a period of exploration and accumulation that would lay the foundation of the theatrical dance and shape an audience.

2.2. Integrated musical shows

Up until the 1940s, the actor in a musical sang and danced, because singing was not too demanding and the choreography relied on simple steps and movements. But once dance became an integral and significant part of the musical show, dance ceased being seen as a break from the story, and began to be used to support the plot. Thus, a new form of musical theatre emerged, a unified model, in which choreographers required the dancers to be trained in a formal technique, in order to be able to use broader dance vocabularies.

For the 1943 production of „Oklahoma!”, the dancer and choreographer Agnes de Mille (1905-1993) used two distinct groups of performers for the first time: singers and dancers. Using her popularity, she conducted the auditions with force, choosing talented dancers who had skills to interpret the character of her dances in a fusion of ballet and modern dance, although director Rouben Mamoulian declared he was unhappy with their appearance. But de Mille insisted that they were not chorus girls, but well-trained actress-dancers. She used dance to tell the story of the musical which integrated the music, the dance, and the storyline.¹⁰ There were no breaks from the dramatic flow. From her point of view, ballet, tap dance, ballroom dance and acrobatic dance had limitations, so she created a new style of interpretative dance, a mix of ballet and modern dance, driven by the character, which could exist on its own, in the absence of the other elements of the show. The dancers in her cast acted and danced. If until then, the music meant for the dances was based on repeated fragments from

¹⁰ Agnes de Mille came from a family that benefitted from models that would shape her personality and education. She was the daughter of a playwright and the niece of the famous film director Cecil B. de Mille.

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the original score of a show, Agnes de Mille demanded that the music be composed according to the dance. As for the contribution of the librettists and costume designers, this again meant something new, everything had to be adapted to the ideas related to dance.

Between 1943 and 1945, Agnes de Mille achieved one success after another and dominated Broadway choreography with shows that presented dance from a feminist perspective: „Oklahoma!” (1943), „One Touch of Venus” (1943), „Bloomer Girl” (1944) and „Carousel” (1945). While the choreography of „One Touch of Venus” was considered a parody praised by the critics for its comedy, in „Bloomer Girl”, the dance is isolated, but it expresses the experience of women during the Civil War. In an attempt to depict the oscillating roles of women in society, the choreographer distorts the social dances of the 18th century and at the same time presents the women of the 1940s as strong, ready to replace the absent men. At the same time, she uses American country dance to create a metaphorical language of the American freedom and democratic ideals. And the musical „Carousel” (1945) marked another one of her innovations. The choreographer used 12.5 minutes to present a character and summarize his life. She also created a six-minute sailor’s hornpipe, which naturally illustrated the everyday life of sailors. A strong personality, de Mille elevated the role of the choreographer, thus paving the way for future choreographers and directors on Broadway. The dance moves she used in „Rodeo” (1942) and in other ballets and musicals became models of the American style. One of her great abilities was to avoid using jazz dance in favor of American modern dance and ballet. The immediate success she had on Broadway led to the creation of several more works, including „Brigadoon” (1947), „Gentlemen Prefer Blondes” (1949) and „Paint Your Wagon” (1950).

Robert Alton (1902-1957) was another major figure who expanded the function of dance in revue shows, in Broadway musicals and in Hollywood musicals between the 1930s and the 1950s. He created dances which he linked to song lyrics, using elements of tap dancing, ballet, ethnic and ballroom dance. Trained by Mikhail Mordkin and mentored by director John Murray Anderson, he moved away from the dance chorus (which until then was a precision line) in favor of small groups and soloists. He required that the dance chorus should be able to dance both ballet and tap. It was Alton who discovered Gene Kelly, who would become a musical film star. He was the prototype of the dancer with the impressive technical skills that Alton requested from his dancers. By using various genres of dance, Alton showed that dance was capable of meaning. The use of the upper body, the influence of ballet, jazz

and tap dance elements and the adoption and adaptation of other dance styles became part of the concept of the musical show. Among the Broadway shows to which he contributed are: „Life Begins at 8:40” (1934), „Ziegfeld Follies” (1936 and 1943), „Pal Joet” (1940), „The Vamp” (1955). Although, like other musical theatre choreographers, he did not talk about his methods, de Mille presented Alton’s rules for rehearsals:

- „ 1. Begin with something technical and definite.
2. Begin on time. Be prompt.
3. Do not let the chorus sit down.
4. Never let them make a mistake. Do not pass over a fault. Stop them in the middle of a bar if necessary and correct.
5. Polish as you go along.
6. Never seem in doubt.
7. Never let the bosses see anything unfinished. If you have only eight bars to show them, show them this much and no more. If you have not this much, get up yourself and demonstrate.”¹¹

But in a 1952 interview, Alton talks about the way he creates: „I study the script, listen to the music, and then go away and dream about it for a while. When I have the ideas I need, I get together with the designers, begin rehearsals, and work out from there the final arrangements of both dances and music.”¹²

2.3. Conceptual musical shows

„The objective is to make it appear as if the step came out of the dancer's own emotion. I want my dancers, just as in acting, to find an emotional justification for an extension or whatever movement they're doing. I want them to understand who they are and what they're doing. I am influenced by the dancers. I see how they move, and this stimulates my own creative thinking.”¹³ Jerome Robbins

Jerome Robbins (1918-1998) and Gower Champion (1919-1980) carried on the legacy of Agnes de Mille and pushed forward the status of choreographers who yearned to have full control of the show. Once they gained this total control over the production, choreographers found it difficult to work alongside directors and began directing their own musicals. It was Robbins who kick-started the director-choreographer era, and his entire contribution to Broadway shows had a very strong

¹¹ Liza Gennaro. *op. cit.* p. 38

¹² Dustyn Martincich, Phoebe Rumsey (ed.). *op. cit.* p. 44.

¹³ Liza Gennaro. *op. cit.* p. 91.

impact in the domain. Director-choreographers used all the dance genres of the time in their productions: ballet, jazz, tap, ballroom, folk dance.

Although Robbins initially imitated de Mille, he quickly developed his own style. He created movements for the Broadway stage in a completely different way from her and managed to surpass her in terms of integrating dance into musicals. His dance training from the „Gluck-Sandor Dance Center” modern dance company meant for him a wide array of forms of movement, with influences from Mary Wigman and Michel Fokine. „The Group Theatre” also introduced him to the theatrical technique of Konstantin Stanislavski. Between 1947 and 1949 he studied at „Actors Studio”, where, among others, he studied alongside actor Marlon Brando. This entourage certainly prepared him to dance in Fokine’s, de Mille’s and Antony Tudor’s narrative ballets and to choreograph musical shows. Although he fused the existing forms on Broadway, in Harlem and in Hollywood, academic ballet was the foundation of his dances, alongside American modern dance. Balanchine had also fused jazz and ballet in „On your Toes”, but in a European aesthetic, while Robbins preferred authentic American jazz dance. In „Coney Island Dream Ballet” from the musical „On the Town” (1944), he created the choreography using elements of ballet, jazz and American social dance. „The Mack Sennett Ballet” from the „High Button Shoes” (1947) was one of his most acclaimed choreographies on Broadway. But with the choreography of this musical, a characteristic of Robbins’ practice can be seen, that of appropriating other people’s ideas. Telling in that aspect is the observation Liza Gennaro made in „Making Broadway Dance” (2022) about the resemblance between „The Mack Sennett Ballet” and Charles Weidman’s 1941 „Flickers”, which was a dance parody of the silent film era. And Robbins’ choreography contributed to the plot of the show through narrative pantomime.

With „Look, Ma, I’m Dancin’” (1948), a new creative era began for the choreographer. With George Abbott by his side, he choreographed and co-directed. His acting training led him to research before creating a dance. In order to follow the style of the libretto, he established the time, place and style of movement following the Stanislavskian model. In the ballet from „Anna and the King of Siam, The King and I” (1951) we find a fusion of Asian (Kabuki, Noh, Siamese dance) and American theatrical techniques, wrapped in Robbins’ trademark comic style. The transformation of his „Fancy Free” ballet in the musical „On the Town” (1944), opened Robbins’ path to Broadway. Through his chorus of dancers, the choreographer wanted to reflect the racial diversity of New York. Thus, he paved the way for Black dancers on Broadway. With serious training in classical dance, Robbins arrived in the world of

musical performances, he studied the foundations of the musical show, the characters, and the motivations behind the choreographies. He introduced the *musical concept*, in which all the elements of the show come together to support a main idea or theme.

2.4. The director-choreographer

The role of the choreographer in the musical show is to create dances that support the libretto and the director's vision. The choreographer is subordinate to the director, but also to the producer, the writer and the composer. To ensure the success of the production, there must be a solid collaboration between the director and the choreographer, they must create a common front. Otherwise, there will be dissensions between the various departments, the performers may rebel, and the production will suffer, even result in layoffs. Oftentimes, choreographers brought significant creative contributions to productions. As for Agnes de Mille, she stated that she encountered problems with the male collaborators in the business on several occasions. For example, for „Oklahoma!“, Reuben Mamuolian sent her to work in the basement, while he occupied the stage, and director Rodgers did not like to collaborate with her either; or, right before beginning the rehearsals as a director-choreographer for „Allegro“ (1947), her authority was dismissed by hiring designers and establishing the final cast without her approval. Her collaborators kept control over the production until they realized that it would be a flop and then blamed her for it. But the challenges of creating dances in musicals did not stop her from imposing her own ideas: „In *Oklahoma!* her insistence to create a ballet that explored the suppressed sexual desires of Laurey enriched the libretto; in *One Touch of Venus* it was de Mille who came up with the idea for the final scene of the show; and in *Bloomer Girl*, against the judgment of her male collaborators, she fought for and won the inclusion of *The Civil War Ballet*.“¹⁴ Although no longer highly acclaimed, de Mille also directed and choreographed the following shows on Broadway: „Allegro“ (1947) – direction and choreography; „Rape of Lucretia“ (1948) - direction; „Out of This World“ (1950) – direction (she was subsequently replaced by George Abbott), and choreography by Hanya Holm; and „Come Summer“ (1969) – direction (she was fired again). We do not know the reason for these setbacks, but we can certainly consider sexual discrimination and her attitude towards directing, which she thought to be inferior to creative composition. For the rest of her career on Broadway, she only revived her own early works.

¹⁴ Liza Gennaro. *op. cit.* pp. 114-115.

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As for Jerome Robbins, he directed seven musicals, among which the first two in collaboration with his mentor, George Abbott („Look, Ma, I’m Dancin’” and „The Pajama Game”). For „The Pajama Game”, Robbins was called upon to be an understudy to the young choreographer Bob Fosse, who had more experience in creating duets and trios than groups and narrative dance. The success of this show presented Robbins as being ready to take over the production of „Peter Pan” (1954) and then „Bells Are Ringing” (1956). Unlike de Mille, he found directing extremely demanding, which is why he turned to Bob Fosse to choreograph together. After his 15-year collaboration with director George Abbott, Robbins created „The Pajama Game”, his first show as a director, with Bob Fosse as choreographer. Then, he appeared as a director-choreographer for „Peter Pann” (1954), and along Bob Fosse for „Bells Are Ringing” (1956). But the production that would establish him as a director-choreographer was the 1957 „West Side Story”. The show is a modern version of the story of Romeo and Juliet, where street violence is brought to the forefront. The performers all sing in a chorus, because, in order to avoid the high expense of hiring a group of dancers and a group of singers, Robbins only employed dancers who could both sing and dance. Also, in order to obtain the most realistic actions, he kept the two gangs (the Jets and the Sharks) at a distance, not allowing them to desegregate for rehearsals, and launched various rumors among them, which created tension between the dancers to keep the action as realistic as possible. The show is considered one of the most valuable on Broadway. Besides the fact that the dances blend harmoniously with the unfolding of the action, the performance of the men in this show gives the male dancers a new image for the audience. In 1961, the film version of the show was released, for which he worked briefly (before he was fired) with Robert Wise.

People described Robbins as a demanding choreographer, who acted like a dictator with the dancers and did not always find the tools needed to have a prolific collaboration with the actors. He was accustomed to dancers who were classically trained and obedient, which made his style seem harsh and difficult for the actors. Sometimes, that was the reason for bringing in assistant directors, as was the case for „Bells Are Ringing”. Unlike actors who waited to be directed, or liked to explore, the dancers on the musical scene are accustomed to waiting to be told how and when to move. For „West Side Story” he hired Gerald Freedman again as an assistant (he had also worked with him on „Bells Are Ringing”), but the cast was made mostly of dancers, and there were no complains about his work process – they even perceived him as a genius, calling him „Daddy God”. Even those who complained about his

abuse worked with him on several other productions, because they thought he was capable to bring out the best in them.

Thinking of „West Side Story”, Robbins quickly realized that it would be a difficult choreography to create, which is why he asked for an assistant choreographer again. But Peter Gennaro only agreed to be a co-choreographer, and he accepted. Despite this status, Gennaro signed a contract in which he accepted that Robbins could use his concepts and choreographic materials at will, in other words, to take over the copyright to his choreographies. At that moment, he was married and had a child on the way and was forced to accept this unfair situation, but only after Robbins passed away was his contribution publicly acknowledged by the initial cast members. He contributed to „West Side Story” with the Shark entrance in „Dance at the Gym” and „Mambo”; „I Feel Pretty”, and he helped create the „Prologue”. Gennaro took advantage of the variety of dance styles he knew and used Latin dances and flamenco in his choreography for the Sharks, which he stylized for theatrical effects. He was very effective in conceiving the steps and he worked great with Chita Rivera, but more was needed for the show, the artistic sense and intuition of Robbins were necessary. „All Peter’s work in West Side Story sparkled but it was Jerry who pulled it into the style of the show and made it dazzle. A little change here, a small addition there; an attitude made specific where it had been general; the structuring of a number like a play. What made Jerry’s touch individual and so brilliant were his use of humor and his use of dance to express emotion. He would not choreograph a dance as a dance, he had to know what the dancing was about.”¹⁵ (Arthur Laurents) Robbins’ choreography for the Jets reminds of Anna Sokolow’s work, who focused on exposing social injustice, but his choreography remains unmatched in that aspect on the stage of musical theatre. For this, he fused ballet, modern dance, and lindy.

Robbins’ last productions on Broadway were also great successes, „Gypsy” (1959), inspired from the life of a stripper called Gypsy Rose Lee, and „Fiddler on the Roof” (1964), another remarkable success that had no less than 3,242 shows. It was an era where the producers of musical theatre demanded that dance be as fully incorporated as possible into the unfolding of the action, that dance be effectively an extension of the libretto, and he succeeded by reducing the space of dance in the production to fluidly combine the forms of expression used (text, song, dance). The famous „The Bottle Dance” from „Fiddler on the Roof”, which is performed at a wedding, is based on a Jewish wedding custom in which the wedding guests entertain the bride by performing various acrobatic and comical tricks. Robbins had apparently

¹⁵ Liza Gennaro. *op. cit.* p. 129.

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witnessed a Hasidic wedding in which a comedian performed a number with a bottle on his head. He expanded the trick by using a chorus of male dancers in the show, who without having the bottles in any way secured to their hats, were forced to learn to balance the bottles on their hats. Appreciated for his directing ability, Robbins was asked to take over two flops, which he would turn into hits: „A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum” (1962), and „Funny Girl” (1964), which would propel Barbra Streisand to stardom.

Another director-choreographer who integrated dance into musicals was Gower Champion. Although at times the musical numbers seemed more important than the plot, his shows flowed smoothly, because everything came together seamlessly and the dance did not stand out. In terms of choreography, he used ballroom dancing with elements of decor and props. In 1960, he achieved success with his show „Bye, Bye, Birdie”. Its choreography was the first on Broadway to be preserved in the Labanotation notation system. Then followed „Carnival” (1961), and in the same year that Robbins released „Funny Girl” and „Fiddler on the Roof”, Champion recorded his greatest success, „Hello Dolly” (1964). Over the course of seven years, this production ran no less than 2,844 times. The show was a surprise at the time because of a ramp that ran across the pit all the way to the front row of the audience, where the male dancers stunned the audience by jumping back and forth. In 1967, the show was created with an all-Black cast. For the director-choreographer Champion, other shows followed, such as: „The Happy Time”(1968), „Prettybelle” (1971), „Sugar” (1972), „Mack & Mabel” (1974), and „42nd Street” (1980), but without ever registering such great success again. He was not an innovator of movement and did not follow the modern dance patterns imposed by de Mille and Robbins, but he was a master of entertainment. He created exquisite choreographic moments, he was masterful in choosing the right movement styles, combining the right steps and applying cinematographic techniques on the Broadway stage. He introduced new ways of presenting musicals, by doing away with blackouts, overtures, and curtains. And even though he used the *a vista* transition technique, as Robbins did in „West Side Story”, Champion deserves credit for all his other accomplishments.

The successors to Jerome Robbins are considered to be director Harold Prince and choreographer Bob Fosse (1927-1987), by his real name Robert Louis Fosse. He was a choreographer who emerged in the world of musical theatre in the 1950s. Strongly influenced by the accumulations of Robbins, eccentric and innovative, he brought jazz technique to Broadway. Like his model, he was initially supported by

director George Abbott, who gave him the impetus to create ten successful Broadway musicals. Fosse's first Broadway choreography was for „Damn Yankees” (1955), with (former Jack Cole dancer) Gwen Verdon as lead character (Lola) and choreographer. In the famous tango-based choreography „Whatever Lola Wants”, Fosse incorporated vaudeville steps, elements of Cole's dance vocabulary and seductive feminine poses. The two worked together again on „New Girl in Town” (1957), in which he created his first sexually suggestive choreography, „Red Light Ballet”, which also drew all sorts of unfavorable reviews. It was a kind of preamble to the atmosphere that he would recreate in „Mein Herr” from the film version of „Cabaret” (1972). For Fosse, the following titles followed: „Redhead” (1959) – direction and choreography, „How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying”(1961) – choreography, „Little Me” (1962) – direction and choreography, and „Sweet Charity” (1966) – direction and choreography. The latter, created for Verdon, was a very important moment in his choreography. In the following years, the qualities and aesthetics of the movements in the „Big Spender” scene, which was similar to Fosse's style, will be found in his dances. Through „Big Spender”, he provided the commercial theatre with an example of dance movement vocabulary of the female body that remained a landmark even after his death. A former student of Anna Sokolow and a close friend of Louis Horst, Fosse seems to offer, with or without intention, a modernist and feminist discourse with accents inspired by the direction of Mary Wigman and the paradigm of Agnes de Mille. As a director-choreographer, he had two distinct periods of creation: the *musical comedies*: „Redhead” (1959), „How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying” (1961), „Little Me” (1962), „Pleasures and Palaces” (1965), „Sweet Charity” 1966); and the *progressist shows*: „Pippin” (1972), „Chicago” (1975), „Dancin'” (1978), „Big Deal” (1986). He also directed and choreographed the film versions of „Sweet Charity” (1969), and „Cabaret” (1972) (for which he received an Academy Award), and „All That Jazz” (1979).

Fosse danced in Burlesque shows and in night clubs from a young age, but his volcanic personality prevented him from being hired as a Broadway dancer. Instead, he chose to become a choreographer and later, his lack of flexibility led him to become a director-choreographer. His desire for his dances to be noticed in shows did not appeal to directors, who saw certain scenes differently. In 1957, he worked on George Abbott's production, „New Girl in Town”, until the director rejected part of his choreographies, and he vowed that the following shows that he would work on would be directed and choreographed by himself. He had a unique choreographic style and

distinguished himself through isolations and fragmentations, head rolls, bent knees, slouched shoulders, jazz hands, body tilted backwards, turned toes, limp wrists, finger snaps, groups of dancers moving compactly across stage called *Fosse amoeba*. His dancers wore bowler hats, white gloves, fishnet stockings, black costumes and used canes and chairs, reminiscent of the Black minstrels or vaudeville performers. The choreographer himself said that the uniqueness of his style stems from his physical flaws (once bald, he always wore a hat, he had bad posture, he disliked his own hands, and he was born pigeon-toed). On the other hand, he helped his dancers by giving a subtext to the choreography. „The time to sing is when your emotional level is too high to just speak anymore, and the time to dance is when your emotions are just too strong to only sing about how you 'feel.'”¹⁶

Known as a jazz choreographer, Fosse also managed, nonetheless, with other dance styles such as ballet, pop, tap and more. For example, „Redhead” and „Dancin’” showcase different styles of choreographies, „Percussion” and „Big City Mime” show the choreographer’s appreciation for traditional ballet, and „Sing Sing Sing” features dancers jumping and tap dancing. His choreographic style and storytelling emphasize the feminine, provocative, and even aggressive characters. Another important aspect of his shows and films is his use of light design. He used it to highlight moments of the show, and in film, he used fragmentation and isolation through short jumps, and close-ups. In 1972, he made the first television commercial that promoted a musical, „Pippin”.

In the 1970s, another great director-choreographer distinguished himself on the Broadway stage, Michael Bennett DiFiglia (1943-1987). Influenced by Jerome Robbins, he did not have a distinct style, but he used the techniques of ballet, modern dance and jazz to create his choreography. He was able to choreograph in a wide range of styles. He was also familiar with the social dances of the time, and he liked to do research before starting work. Regardless of the better or worse reviews of the shows he choreographed, his contribution was generally acclaimed, right from the beginning of his career, when he was nominated for a Tony Award for his choreography of „A Joyful Noise” in 1966. Before his first big break as a choreographer in 1968 with „Promises, Promises”, he choreographed for „A Joyful Noise” (1966) „Henry, Sweet Henry” (1967), and „Coco” (1969). Together with his associate, Robert Avian (dancer, director, and choreographer), Bennett brought the dancer back to center stage. Through movement, his shows presented universal themes to which the audience could easily relate.

¹⁶ Michael Joosten. 2009. *Dance and Choreography*. New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, p. 4.

His first directorial endeavor (with director Harald Prince) was the show „Follies” (1971), for which he received awards both for direction and choreography. He went on to direct and choreograph „Seasaw” in 1973, but his greatest success as a director-choreographer was „A Chorus Line” (1975). „Starting from real interviews taken for a casting session, the storyline of this show is made of life stories of dancers who attended Broadway audition sessions and was a huge success. The premise used by the production team can be summarized as follows: ... *a show has to offer an audience hope*. By merging elements of verbal confessions, music and dance, Bennet transforms artistic ambition into a universal metaphor of human effort and success.”¹⁷ The show which was born out of a series of workshops was successfully performed on Broadway for 15 years. Suddenly, Michael Bennett became a sought-after director and choreographer. In 1985, the film version was made, for which he was hired as a creative consultant. Other Broadway successes followed, such as „Ballroom” (1978), „Dreamgirls” (1981), (the latter was also created through workshops and choreographed together with African-American Michael Peters), „Hair” (1968), „Oh! Calcutta!” (1972). As a director-choreographer, Bennett made an important contribution to musical theatre by developing the show material through the establishment of the workshop-based method and through the innovative form of musical-verité.

In the following decades of the 20th century, the director-choreographer model became increasingly prominent. Choreographers other than Fosse, Champion, Kidd, and Bennett, also directed, including Donald McKayle, Joe Layton, Ron Field, Tommy Tune, Patricia Birch, Graciela Daniele and Susan Stroman. They kept de Mille and Robbins as their standards and leaned either towards de Mille’s modernism or Robbins’ realism. Choreographer George Faison (1945-) made his Broadway debut with „Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope” (1972). This was followed in 1974 by his successful choreography for „The Wiz”, the all-Black musical adaptation of „The Wizard of Oz”, for which he won a Tony Award, the first African-American in that category. He choreographed and directed over thirty plays and musicals, including on Broadway, such as „Via Galactica” (1973) and „1600 Pennsylvania Avenue” (1976), „Porgy and Bess” (1983), for which he was nominated for the same Tony Award, and „Sing, Mahalia, Sing” (1985).

¹⁷ Geta-Violeta Huncanu (Răvdan). 2018. *Choreographer Directors in the Realm of Musicals*. Education, Research, Creation. Periodical of the Faculty of Arts of the University „Ovidius” from Constanța, Vol. 4 No. 1. București: Editura Muzicală, p. 66.

Despite the success of *Black Musicals*, white choreographers still dominated the Broadway stage. Donald McKayle (1930-2018) was among the few Black director-choreographers after de Mille and Robbins to achieve success on Broadway. A particularly good dancer, trained in the tradition of modern choreographers, he was also an excellent choreographer who unfortunately suffered because of the racism on the musical stage. He collaborated with Robbins as dance captain in „West Side Story” and with Fosse as an associate choreographer in „Redhead”. His Broadway contribution includes: „Golden Boy” (1964) - choreography, „Raisin” (1973) – direction and choreography, „Dr. Jazz” (1975) – direction and choreography, and „Sophisticated Ladies” (1981) – direction and choreography.

The 1980s and the 1990s were turbulent years for the artistic community on Broadway. The evolution of dance in the musical theatre was interrupted by the AIDS epidemic that claimed the lives of many artists, including Michael Bennett, Ron Field, Christopher Chadman, and by the untimely departure of others such as Gower Champion, Joe Layton and Bob Fosse. The director-choreographer Graciela Daniele, along with Susan Stroman and Tommy Tune, remained to carry forward the precepts imposed by de Mille, Robbins, Fosse and Bennett. With the disappearance of men director-choreographers from Broadway, the talent of women was recognized on the once male-dominated stage. Until after the 1980s, of all the women who had distinguished themselves on Broadway, only two were offered the role of director-choreographer – de Mille and Patricia Birch.

2.5. The return of tap dance on Broadway, Women choreographers, Revivals, Dance Musicals

In the 1980s, there was a return of tap dance to the Broadway stage, through productions such as those of Gower Champion, „42nd Street” (1980), „The Tap Dance Kid” (1983), „Black and Blue” (1989 on Broadway), and those of Savion Glover (1973-), which kept tap dance in the public spotlight well into the 1990s. For example, in „Bring in Da’ Noise, Bring in Da’ Funk” (1996), he used tap dance and hip-hop. The revue „Black and Blue”, choreographed by Henry LeTang, Cholly Atkins, Frankie Manning, and Fayard Nicholas, focused on the lives of Black people. Although it undermined the usual structure of the revue and seemed more like a return to the structure of vaudeville, it showcased the tradition of tap dancing, Black subjectivity, and the satirical side of tap dancing. The cast included great dancers of the genre, such as Savion Glover, Bunny Briggs, James „Jimmy Slyde” Godbolt, Lon Chaney, Dianne Walke, and others.

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The choreographers of the 1980s kept dance as an important part of Broadway shows. One example is Graciela Daniele (1939-), whose choreographies told stories that captivated the audience, in the shows „Pirates of Penzance” (1981), „The Mystery of Edwin Drood” (1985), and „Ragtime” (1998). In a male-dominated space, a few women choreographers make their way onto Broadway and change the face of musicals through various innovations. Choreographer, director and producer Dame Gillian Lynne DBE (1926-2018), is best known in musical theatre for her contribution to the choreography of „Cats” (1981), „The Phantom of the Opera” (1986), and „Aspects of Love” (1990). Strongly influenced by the American modern jazz dance of the 1970s, Arlene Phillips CBE (1943-) entered the world of musical theatre by creating the choreography for the musical film „Annie” (1982). From here, numerous other musical productions followed in the UK and not only, including „Starlight Express”, „Saturday Night Fever”, „Grease” and „Flash Dance”.

Revivals are part of the history of musicals. The 1990s saw a series of revivals of popular shows, with new directors and a different cast, at the expense of the original productions. During these years, a powerful director-choreographer emerged on the musical stage: Susan Stroman (1954-). After winning the Tony Award for her choreography for „Crazy for You” (1992), she became an important name in the industry, and this would prove to be only the beginning of her success. The following productions she worked on showcased her versatile personality based on her early training in classical dance, jazz and tap: „Showboat” (1994), in which she brought the Charleston dance to the public, „Music Man” (1999), „Oklahoma!” (1999), „Young Frankenstein” (2007), „The Scottsboro Boys” (2010).

There were productions that were built from the works of a choreographer, such as „Jerome Robbins’s Broadway” (1989), made up of the choreographer’s recreated choreographies from 1944 to 1964, or „Fosse” (1999). Then, came dance-based musicals. The show created by Stroman, „Contact” (2000) won a Tony Award for Best Musical, although it lacked an orchestra, vocal scores, and a libretto. Twyla Tharp (1941-) also made her contribution to this genre of dance musical. The dances in the musical „Movin’ Out” (2002) won a Tony Award. „The Times They Are A-Changin’” featured dancers and singers, and in 2010, she directed and choreographed a series of dances she created in the 1980s to the music of Frank Sinatra, which she brought together under the name of „Come Fly Away”.

3. Dance in musical theatre in the 21st Century

But the surprise in musical theatre came from two people outside Broadway: from postmodernist Bill T. Jones (1952-), and from the creator of the physical theatre, Steven Hoggett (1971-). Through the successful choreography of „Spring Awakening” (2006), Jones pointed the audience in a new direction for Broadway dance. If Jones was influenced by the explorations of the Judson Dance Theater, Steven Hoggett choreographed “American Idiot” on Broadway in 2010, drawing on the techniques and methods of physical theatre developed by Scott Graham and himself. The two did not follow the line of Robbins’ creative process (including the Stanislavskian approach), so admired on Broadway, but rather embraced Judson’s vision and exhibited their own aesthetic and artistic systems. If the immediate followers of Robbins, such as Fosse, Bennett, Daniele, Stroman, Mitchell applauded and followed dictatorial methods, Jones and Hoggett went further and followed new paths. Hoggett had no formal training in choreography, nor were all his performers dancers, which is why his work method offered space for the performers and was far from the style of the imposing choreographers.

In terms of the attention given to corporeality in productions, there were several people who tried to develop techniques and methods to help actors obtain a body that can be easily molded. Already in the 1950s, British movement director Litz Pisk had an approach in which the voice and movement were integrated into the rehearsal process. „She developed a series of movement progressions rooted in breath, mobilization of the spine, and physical transformation. These approaches allowed actor movement to, as Pisk describes, *spring from physical, emotional, and mental sources*.”¹⁸ Other practitioners, such as Jacques Copeau, Jacques Lecoq, Anne Bogart and Tina Landau structured training methods for actors which involved dance improvisation, isolation, finding physical momentum etc. These movement trainings focused more on discovering bodily capacities and a detailed movement vocabulary, and less on teaching movements.

Alongside traditional choreographers, Jerry Mitchell, Sergio Trujillo, Andy Blankenbuehler, Casey Nicholaw, Christopher Gatelli and Savion Glover, since 2010, contemporary dance choreographers such as: David Neumann, Camille A. Brown, John Heginbotham, and Theresa de Keersmaker make their presence known on the musical scene. But those who will continue the tradition of the pre-Hoggett musical are the traditionalists who move from the position of dancer to that of Broadway choreographer. Among their relevant works are „Bring In 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da

¹⁸ Dustyn Martincich & Phoebe Rumsey (ed.). *op. cit.* p. 260.

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Funk” (1996), „Shuffle Along, The Making of the Musical Sensation of 1921 And All That Followed” (2016) - Savion Glover; „Jersey Boys” (2005), „Next to Normal” (2009), „Memphis” (2009), “The Addams Family” (2013), „Hands on a Hardbody” (2013), „On Your Feet” (2015), „Ain’t too Proud” (2015) - Sergio Trujillo; “In the Heights” (2008), „Hamilton” (2015) - Andy Blankenbuehler. The contribution of Savion Glover is related to the reinvention of tap dance on the musical scene through the aesthetics of hip-hop and to his ability to interpret text through dance, through formations, the use of space and the embodiment of characters.

In the music industry, African-American choreographers were marginalized and relegated to the *Black Musicals* category. In an attempt to explore the methods of de Mille and Robbins in order to discover new movement, Camille A. Brown worked with traditional African dance and folk music, modern American dance, jazz dance, contemporary floor dance, and with club culture. Her contribution to the musical theatre includes: „Cabin in the Sky” (2016), „Once on This Island” (2017), „Jesus Christ Superstar Live” (2018), „Choir Boy” (2019), „Porgy and Bess” (2019).

In the 21st century, dance in musical shows has the tendency to become a form of entertainment to the audience once again, similar to the vaudeville form, this period being referred to as the *Disneyfication of Broadway*. The advancement of technology in the movie industry has changed the expectations of the audience, which is no longer as easily impressed. From the moment Disney started to create shows, the *corporate musical* appeared. In fact, entertainment corporations produced shows similar to those in Disney theme parks. Productions such as „Beauty and the Beast” (1994), „The Lion King” (1997), „The Little Mermaid” (2008), „Newsies” (2012), „The Jungle Book” (2013), „Aladdin” (2014), „Frozen” (2018), „Hercules” (2019), contain elements reminiscent of vaudeville shows, with backflips, cartwheels, heels, and kick lines.

The few new shows that appeared on Broadway featured eccentric songs and dances, raising questions regarding the future of the Broadway musical. For example, Susan Stroman used the props in „Producers” (2001) in creative ways; Sergio Trujillo brought back the popular dances of the 1950s (the watusi, the twist, the mashed potato) in „Jersey Boys” (2005) and „Memphis” (2009); in „In the Heights” (2008), Andy Blankenbuehler (1970-) used athletic movements mixed with street dance, and in „Bring It On: the Musical” (2012), he introduced acrobatic stunts in the cheerleading dance; in 2009, Bill T. Jones showcased Nigerian dance in „Fela!”. In addition to these, there were other choreographers such as Bill T. Jones, Peter Darling, Jerry Mitchell who never stopped integrating dance into the stories of the shows and to whom we owe the fact that dance remained an important component of the musical

show. As for Andy Blankenbuehler, his groundbreaking work on the Broadway and West End stage is already recognized and award-winning. Among his other works as a choreographer and director are „9 to 5” (2009), „Annie” (2012), „Cats” (2016), „Bandstand” (2017). His style was influenced by modern jazz styles with forays into the form of hip-hop.

During the global pandemic, Broadway was shut down, but musical theatre found new and innovative methods to be there for the public. Currently, the characters of musical theatre are highly diverse in their expression of gender and sexual identity, but the ground work for the manifestation of diverse bodies and sexualities has been prepared in the past (as much as the times allowed) by choreographers like Robbins, de Mille, and Field. But Fosse was the one who had the most open attitude towards sexual expression on Broadway. He acknowledged the gay dancers in his casts and blurred the lines between the sexes through gestures and movements performed by all dancers, regardless of their sex, and through costumes – the male dancers exposed their flesh as much as the women.

The choreographers of contemporary musical shows carry within them the roots from the methods of Robbins and de Mille, but at the same time, they are moving away from past expectations and coming up with new methods. A characteristic of contemporary musical theatre is also the fact that movement is used for its beauty, but at the same time, has the ability to bring discomfort to the audience. Stereotypes are reconsidered, bodily expectations are disrupted, physical satire is used, difficult subjects and narratives of marginalized cultures are addressed, there is a wide range of genres and dance forms which bring to the audience a diverse cast in terms of size, ability, experience, and age.

Contemporary musical dance bypasses the classical expectations of its form and training but instead reflects the current styles of movement and circumstances. It also includes increasingly similar aspects to contemporary concert dance and commercial dance.

3.1. Musical theatre, a competitive field

After their years of study, dancers audition to dance professionally, in a competitive world of theatre. Few are chosen to be part of a Broadway production. For dancers, there is also the possibility to audition for cruise companies, as their shows are similar to Broadway. Or they can audition for commercials or musical films. Even if you do not intend to perform among professionals, the physical training that is specific to musical theatre dance will enrich you with useful life skills, not just

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physically, but also emotionally and intellectually. The process of auditioning will help you learn to introduce yourself to others as favorably as possible, and to adapt to whatever may arise or may be asked of you. After the first auditions where you have been rejected, you learn to cope with failure and not become discouraged, but to persevere and work harder, regardless of the talent you were gifted with. In terms of physical appearance, dancers develop their muscular strength and flexibility and quick and efficient movements. „Additionally, dance can improve the efficiency of your body's systems. Dancers' bodies have circulatory and respiratory systems that are able to circulate blood efficiently and deliver oxygen to cells quickly. Dance requires movements that help to establish new pathways within the nervous system. In turn, these pathways improve communication between the brain and the body's muscles. Dancers' bodies often metabolize food quickly, meaning that they can rapidly and efficiently convert food to fuel for the muscles to use.”¹⁹

Unlike other dancers, they may be tasked with telling a story through choreography to the people in the audience, who may not have much knowledge or experience with dance. Therefore, in musical theatre, the dancers reflect on their art form, they research and work with their imagination and creativity in order to build their unique characters. Also, by working on a musical production, the dancers learn to appreciate the hard work put in by all the people who participate in its construction. Thus, certain dancers who do not succeed as performers may become interested in other theatre jobs or become theatre philanthropists or simple spectators. All in all, being a dancer on Broadway is not so easy. You need not only talent, but also adaptability and the ability to communicate with a large crew.

3.2. The hierarchy in musical theatre

The creation of a successful production involves skilled people responsible for putting together the elements that create it: the producer, the director, the music director, the choreographer, the technical director, the wardrobe and makeup supervisor.

The Producer supervises all the elements of the production, is responsible for the budget, sets the rehearsal calendar together with the director, provides the rehearsal and performance rooms, decides the times and dates of the performances, the price of the tickets, the marketing and the advertising for the show. He hires and supervises the stage manager and the house manager. *The Stage Manager* is responsible for what happens backstage and communicates with the cast members and

¹⁹ Diana Dart Harris. 2016. *Beginning Musical Theatre Dance*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, p. 5.

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the designers during rehearsals. He does the planning, gives directions, and takes notes. He supervises every show, and is responsible for the scene changes, and for the timely presence of performers on stage. The *House Manager*, on the other hand, oversees the employees on the other side of the curtain, those who stand at the entrance to the theater, at the box office, and those who sell or serve various products. He also solves any problems that may arise among the audience.

The Director controls all the artistic elements of the production. He holds the auditions, chooses the cast, is responsible for the staging, guides the actors in building the characters. He also develops the concept of the show, which he then explains to everyone involved. He collaborates with everyone involved in order to integrate the acting, singing and dancing.

The Music Director works with the cast and with the orchestra musicians. He guides the director and the choreographer and, if necessary, makes changes to the music (the music may be lengthened or shortened). He arranges the rehearsals of the accompanists, the orchestra and the cast, he hires the singers for the show and the pit orchestra.

The choreographer is in charge of the movement in the show. He collaborates with the director and the musical director. After reading the script and listening to the music, he develops the movements and the gestures that make up the choreography of the show. He also researches the era where the action takes place, in order to create appropriate dances. The choreographer creates the dances, teaches them and rehearses them with the cast, ensuring that the movements allow them to manifest themselves through their acting and singing. Sometimes, he also manages the gestural movement of scenes other than the dances. *The Dance captain* is the choreographer's assistant. He knows the choreography very well and helps others learn it or teaches the choreography to those who replace cast members. Sometimes, he organizes additional rehearsals and provides notes to cast members. There is often a *swing* in the cast. This person learns several roles in the show and is ready at any time to replace a colleague who cannot perform.

The Technical Director deals with the technical aspects of the production. He helps the director create the atmosphere of the show, by hiring the scenic designer, lighting designer, and sound designer. *The scenic designer* works with *the lighting designer* to make certain areas of the stage visible at the right moment, to achieve the desired atmosphere, in order to manipulate the audience's attention and to indicate the time of the action (day, night). The *Sound designer* is responsible for preparing the

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sound effects, balancing the sound in the theater, and ensuring that the performers and musicians are heard optimally.

The wardrobe and makeup supervisor consults with the director, choreographer and costume designer to ensure that the costumes are appropriate for all the scenes, the type of makeup and the vision of the show. The same person is responsible for taking the measurements of the cast members and making sure that their costumes fit, that they are washed and pressed and prepared for rehearsals. Plus, he is in charge of storing the costumes and transporting them to and from the theater.

The Director, the Choreographer and the Music Director start their collaboration at the beginning of the production, the set builders start working at the beginning of rehearsals and the technical staff start their work in the theater only a few weeks before the premiere (the lighting and sound crews come to the theater once all the set elements and props are brought on stage).

3.3. The language specific to musical theatre dance

In musical theatre, dancers benefit from a language made up of general terms and of the names of steps that are specific to a dance form. Movement and choreographic terms are used to designate *where*, *how* and *what kind* of movements are performed.

- Space is an important aspect of storytelling through movement. Communication with the audience is made through the concepts of *positive space* (the space covered by the body) and *negative space* (the empty space that is created between different parts of the body).
- The use of levels in dance keeps the attention of the spectators. During a moment of movement, some dancers may move at a *low level*, while others can simultaneously move at a *high* or *medium level*. Not only is this interplay of movements on different levels interesting to watch, but it also allows all the performers to be seen. The best results are obtained when the alternance of levels is used at the end or at the beginning of certain phrases, or when two groups move at the same time, alternating between levels differently.
- The choreographies are rarely performed in place, rather they are performed while *traveling* from one place to the other, forward or backward, in *different shapes* (straight lines, spirals, diagonals, circles, Vs, Xs, diamond shapes etc.).

The movement phrase is learned with the right foot, but the dancer is likely to be asked to work in reverse, on the other foot, in the opposite direction.

- *The awareness of the gaze and of the focus* while dancing is equally important. First of all, it creates an image of unity and of clarity for the audience and it can also direct or redirect the attention of the audience towards a particular character or a specific part of the stage.
- In the movement sequences performed in *unison*, all the dancers perform the same movements at the same time. „Unison dancing can make a powerful statement. In unison dancing, everyone must dance in the same way; legs, arms, hands, and heads must move in the same direction at the same time. The final scene from *A Chorus Line* features a unison dance to the song *One*. The dancers are costumed identically in gold costumes and top hats, and they perform precise, identical movements including chorus line kicks. The unison movement creates a spectacular sight for the audience and emphasizes the show's main idea that all Broadway performers long for the same goals in spite of differing backgrounds and experiences.”²⁰
- *Fan* movements or *undulations* are obtained from a gesture performed by one dancer and then repeated in turn by the following dancers, until the last one. *The fans* resemble the *waves* that are found in sports arenas.
- The *canon* is a choreographic tool used to increasingly attract the attention of the audience. Each dancer performs the same movement phrase but starts it at different times. It can be performed from two dancers upwards, i.e. also with two groups, where each dancer starts the phrase at a fixed moment.

But the movements, the gestures, the levels, the paths and everything else that is used in choreography are of no interest to the spectator unless there is an intention behind the movement. The movement should reflect the character being interpreted and convey a message, which is achieved by using different qualities and dynamics of the movements.

3.3.1. Specific vocabulary

The dance vocabulary in musical theatre presents terms that are specific to certain dance steps that come from certain forms of dance. These may undergo certain variations and adaptations. Here are some of the dance steps that can be found on the musical stage:

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

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Jazz Steps: jazz walks, jazz runs, jazz square, jazz hands, turns, leaps, isolations, split, jazz split, lunge, fan kick, pivot turn, hitch kick, tuck jump;

Ballet steps: walks, bourrée, balancé, tombé, pique turn, pas de chat, jeté, arabesque sauté, waltz.

Social Dance Step: step hop, box step, rock step, triple step;

Folk Dance Steps: step, stamp, polka, schottische, walz, heel and toe, do si do.

In „Beginning Musical Theatre Dance” (2016), Diana Dart Harris outlines four important general aesthetic principles in dance, through which the performers communicate with the audience, as she also says: „Artistry is not something that is saved for the stage. Each time you dance, you must remember that you are an artist delivering a message.”²¹

Unity – all the movements are connected to a unifying theme or intention;

Balance – all the parts of the dance are proportionate;

Variety – signifies the use of different steps, movements, paths to challenge the dancer and to maintain the attention of the audience;

Repetition – a connection with the spectators is established through the repetition of movements;

Contrast – to avoid monotony in a choreography, certain parts of the dance are highlighted that emphasize the movements and their messages.

The compositional structures and choreographic elements used in the early 20th century are still found in contemporary productions. Ever since then, it has been observed that the movement of the group, the line, the synchronized dance all captivate and entertain the audience. Musical shows are a combination of sound and visuals and include solo dances and group dances, performed in unison or not. There are also dances of certain groups that are created in different styles in order to emphasize through movement that which differentiates them. It is the case with „West Side Story”, where in the song „Cool”, the movements of the Jets group are jazzy, while in “America”, the choreography of the Sharks combines a variety of Latin influences. The lack of unison dancing can be an instrument of the dramatic intention. On the other hand, by using canons, choreographers sometimes aim to emphasize certain movements through repetition. Clichés and conventions are also present on the musical theater stage. The „jazz hands” with their roots in the minstrel show, introduced by Fosse (shaky and wearing white gloves) have become a movement specific to musicals.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

The ensemble numbers produced a so-called „ensemble effect” for the audience, which shows the emotional impact of a group dance or song. There is efficiency to group dance, in that it serves the needs of the show by following the stylistic requirements, the size of the cast, and by being able to heighten the intensity of the moment, direct the attention of the audience, or clarify the plot. An eloquent example is the number „Everybody Say Yeah”, from the first act of „Kinky Boots” (2012), directed and choreographed by Jerry Mitchell. The two groups of factory workers, who are seemingly completely different, eventually intermingle, moving as a single team, and in the end, they become united by the common goal of making shoes. Here, their unison suggests the idea of accepting strangers among them. Also, the unison of an ensemble may have the role of shifting the attention from the singular to the whole.

Often, the entire ensemble of dancers or the entire cast is used, which amplifies the impact of the music through the corporal dynamics of the group. The combined movement of the ensemble, ranging from virtuosity to unison, and changes in transitions (shifting from fluidity to sudden movements) help communicate a theme or an emotional state. Sometimes, breaking away from the unison and the ensemble suggests belonging, just as Robbins emphasized the tensions between social groups in „Fiddler on the Roof”. Also, the formations made of multiple dancers create abstract geometrical shapes, bringing them together as a unit rather than individuals.

4. Conclusions

Despite the fact that dance includes a series of conventional movements and gestures, it has the potential to communicate emotions, moods, ideas and situations that sometimes the musical score and the text do not have. The development of dance in musical theatre has been closely linked to cultural, artistic and political issues. Its foundation was laid from the beginning of the 20th century, when musical theatre enjoyed a development that was far from linear. The genre of musical theatre continues to face critics who consider it slightly superficial, as entertainment, simply because it is exciting. It is true that musicals were most often created for entertainment purposes, but there are a lot of directors and choreographers who showed that they can convey complex themes and ideas. The musical theatre performance is commercial, aimed at mass audiences, and its success relies on financial viability. The musical is an expression of wealth. It takes a lot of money to pay for the professionalism of the performers and of the production team, to pay for expensive costumes, sumptuous decor, and electrifying lights.

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Since the 1940s, when dance became an important contributor to the form of musical theatre, a mix of influences emerged which led to the use of broader dance vocabularies. This also entailed the exhaustive training of the dancer. The body is the instrument with which they operate, and must be kept under their command, mastered and controlled, ready to promptly respond to any challenge. Although the 21st century enjoys new choreographers who work with current dance styles, the musical theatre dance remains closely tied to the accumulations of the early 20th century. Similar to the genre of musical theatre itself, it too retains its appeal and importance, and while it is tributary to its lineage, dance continues to evolve and be influenced by the evolution of society and the time in which it is created.

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