

Jazz

Jazz has become one of the most popular dance styles in recent years, mainly due to its popularity on television shows, movies, music videos and commercials. People enjoy watching jazz dancers, as the dancing is fun and energetic.

Jazz dancing is a form of dance that showcases a dancer's individual style and originality. Every jazz dancer interprets and executes moves and steps in their own way. Jazz dancing is energetic and fun, consisting of unique moves, fancy footwork, big leaps and quick turns. To excel in jazz, dancers need a strong background in ballet, as it encourages grace and balance.

What to Wear

Jazz classes are casual and relaxed, so feel free to select your own clothing. A dancer's body lines need to be visible, however, so baggy clothes are generally discouraged. Tights and leotards are fine, but most jazz dancers prefer to wear jazz or dance pants. Jazz pants are usually boot-cut or flared styles, as tight bottoms would restrict ankle movement. Tops usually worn for jazz include form-fitting tank tops, t-shirts or leotards. Check with your teacher before buying jazz shoes, as many classes have preferences.

Class Structure

A good jazz class explodes with energy. With music styles ranging from hip-hop to show tunes, the beat alone will get you moving. Most jazz teachers begin with a thorough warm-up, then lead the class in a series of stretching exercises and isolation movements. Isolations involve moving one part of the body while the rest of the body remains still. Jazz dancers also practice the art of suspension. Suspension involves moving through positions instead of stopping and balancing in them. Most jazz teachers will end the class with a short cool down to help prevent muscle soreness.

Jazz Steps

In a jazz class, dancers are encouraged to add their own personality to make each step unique and fun. Jazz steps include basic turns including chaines, piques, pirouettes, jazz turns, and some ballet turns, to name a few. Leaps include grande jetes, turning jumps, and tour jetes. Signature to jazz dancing is the "jazz walk." Jazz walks can be performed in many different styles. Another popular jazz move is the "contraction." A contraction is accomplished by contracting the torso, with the back curved outward and the pelvis pulled forward.

Pioneers of Jazz Dance

Considered the father of jazz dance technique, Jack Cole developed techniques that are used today in musicals, films, television commercials and videos. His style emphasized isolations, rapid directional changes, angled placement and long knee slides. Winning eight Tony awards, Bob Fosse was a musical theater choreographer and director, and a film director. Characteristic of his dance style are inward knees, rounded shoulders and full-body isolations. Considered a founder of jazz dance, Gus Giordano was a master teacher and gifted choreographer. His dance style has influenced modern jazz dancing.