

Ephrat Asherie Dance: *Odeon*



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“It means so much to me to create work with my family and dance family. We hope that audiences feel how this music and movement connect us to one another in the present moment, but also creates a sense of timelessness, blurring tempos and genres, to connect us to those that graced countless stages and dance floors for generations before us.”

– Ephrat Asherie



Ephrat Asherie Dance *Odeon*

Ephrat Asherie grew up outside New York City with her brother Ehud where they spent much of their youth in Manhattan clubs—Ephrat at underground dance clubs learning hip hop and house styles and Ehud listening to some of the jazz piano legends. It was there they each found a welcoming community and mentorship in the arts that they loved.

Ehud’s musical passions are jazz, the classic Great American Songbook and Brazilian music, but it was specifically the music of Brazilian composer Ernesto Nazareth (1863-1934) that resonated with Ehud. Nazareth’s music blended the musical style of classical European composer Chopin (1810-1849) with popular Brazilian music like *choro* (considered the *blues* of Brazil), as well as with many traditional Afro-Brazilian rhythms. This combination produced a remarkably unique sound, similar in feel to American ragtime, which also drew on European and African influences (read more about ragtime in the next section).

Odeon, the Asheries’ second collaboration, is named after Nazareth’s composition of the same name. This work pairs the diverse sounds and rhythms of Nazareth’s music with equally diverse dance styles and dancers. Ephrat Asherie Dance blends dance forms and performs with the kind of freedom and acceptance that Ephrat first experienced in the underground hip hop community.

“Choreographer Ephrat Asherie is paving the way for something new.”

– *The New York Times*

WHAT IS SOCIAL DANCE?

Social dance is about a community dancing together!

Dance has been a part of every **culture** on every continent throughout human history. People have used dance to celebrate and connect with their community in various ways. Social dances, in particular, are usually created by dancers of all ages to have fun and show off their unique style and abilities. Around the world, styles have evolved over time, from early line and circle dances, like folk and square dancing, to partner dances, like waltz and samba. In the United States, as jazz music grew in popularity during the 1930s, people were inspired to create new dances, some with partners such as the Lindy Hop and some that could be done in pairs or alone like the Charleston. Social dances continued to develop inspired by rhythm and blues, soul music, rock & roll, funk, disco, and original styles of hip hop dance known as breaking or breakdancing. It was these social dances—hip hop, house and vogue—that inspired Ephrat Asherie to be a choreographer and to share these dance forms, rhythms, and their histories with audiences all over the world.

RAGTIME

Ragtime is a style of piano music developed by African-American musicians in the late 19th and early 20th centuries—the same period that Ernesto Nazareth was composing! Its most notable characteristic is the “ragged,” or off-the-beat, **syncopated rhythm**. This sound is created by placing emphasis in the melody *between* the base notes, instead of in time with them. The syncopated rhythms of ragtime influenced the development of jazz and rock & roll, and have become integral to popular music today. When the music first originated, however, some doctors warned that listening or dancing to uneven rhythms was dangerous to the heart. Luckily, this is not true! In fact, listening to ragtime and music in general can often lift our spirits and make us feel better!

HISTORY OF HIP HOP

Hip hop is a cultural and art movement that began in the 1970s in the Bronx, New York City. Elements that define hip hop are: Rapping/MC-ing—a rhythmic rhyming style; DJing- (DJ, short for “disc jockey,” is someone who plays recorded music for an audience) –playing and making music with record players and sound mixers; Graffiti art—the visual art component of hip hop; B-boy/B-girl dancing (also known as breaking)—the original form of hip hop dance. As breaking was developing in New York, two different funk styles known as popping and locking were developing in California. Eventually, these dance styles, along with many others, became generally known as hip hop dances. Additional elements of hip hop culture include beatboxing, a percussive vocal style, and street entrepreneurship in the spirit of self-creation.

Hip hop was created by African Americans, Latino Americans and Caribbean Americans who **empowered** themselves to address the concerns of their communities, including civil rights, social justice, and political awareness.



FUN FACTS

Odeon is a Greek word meaning, literally, “singing place.” It was the name given to many buildings in ancient Greece and Rome, where music and poetry events were held. These were smaller than the more-famous amphitheatres and were enclosed to amplify sound. Many early movie theatres around the world also used the name “Odeon.”

Did you know that the first movies were silent? Movies didn’t have sound until 1927 and were known as “talkies.” Ernesto Nazareth was hired by an Odeon Cinema in Brazil to accompany silent films from 1920 to 1924. Perhaps inspired by this experience, Nazareth composed a tango called “Odeon.” Decades later, the Asheries’ created their current dance work based on Nazareth’s music.

VOCABULARY

COMPOSITION: A work of music, literature, art or dance.

CULTURE: A way of life of a group of people; their behaviors, beliefs, values, artistic expression, shared history and worldview, among other elements, which are passed on to the next generation by communication and imitation.

EMPOWERED: Having the knowledge, confidence or ability to do things or make decisions for oneself and then taking action to achieve one’s goals.

RHYTHM: A strong, regular, repeated pattern of movement or sound.

SYNCOPATED: Shifting to stress the normally unaccented beats in music so that the emphasis is not “on the beat,” but rather on the off-beat.

TRY THIS

FOLLOW THE LEADER!

Part of dancing together is watching and responding to your partner. In hip hop culture, dancing can be a conversation or a battle! These “conversations” take place between dancers and musicians. There are sequences in *Odeon* that are improvised conversations—can you tell which ones?

Play this dance game to practice your skills of following the leader. Try the game with two people dancing or one person dancing and the other playing music.

Start by facing your partner. Taking turns, Person A will do a few moves/notes while Person B watches/listens. Then Person B copies and repeats/interprets what they saw/heard, giving it their own flare. Switch! Now Person B shows off their moves/notes for Person A to repeat. Keep taking turns and explore the many ways you can copy, embellish and expand what you see/hear. Keep your “conversation” flowing with your partner!

RAGTIME IN MOTION

These activities are inspired by piano playing, which traditionally includes the left hand keeping the rhythm or baseline, while the right hand plays the melody.

Part I – (One or more people) Can your hands do two things at once? Try to clap one hand in a steady rhythm on your thigh or chest. Simultaneously, wave the other hand and arm in big gestures. One hand is keeping the beat while the other hand has more freedom to move continuously (on, off or in between the beat). Switch sides and see which hand keeps a better rhythm!

Part II – (Pairs) Person A walks or marches to a steady rhythm while walking around the space/room. Counting out loud can help keep the beat. Person B moves using every part of their own body, moving on and off the beat. Person B gets to “rag” the rhythm in movement and respond to the beat. Take turns being the baseline and the melody! Add music as another layer to this movement.



TAKE IT FURTHER

Check out our [Resources](#) page with website links to explore school and state standards for use in the classroom.

WEBSITE AND RESEARCH LINKS:

DISCOVERING ERNESTO NAZARETH

WHAT IS RAGTIME?

RAGTIME DEMONSTRATION

THE HISTORY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN SOCIAL DANCE

*HIP HOP HISTORY: FROM THE STREETS
TO THE MAINSTREAM*

HIP HOP: A CULTURE OF VISION AND VOICE

DANCE MAGAZINE INTERVIEWS EPHRAT ASHERIE

*VERSA-STYLE DANCE COMPANY TEACHING
HIP HOP BASICS*

WHAT IS THE SONGBOOK?

THE STORY OF THE GREAT AMERICAN SONGBOOK

SUGGESTED CA STATE STANDARDS:

SEVENTH GRADE STANDARDS

CA VAPA Dance Grade 7 1.5: Use appropriate dance vocabulary to describe everyday gestures and other movements observed in viewing live or recorded dance performances. (Descriptions may take the form of a drawing or video/computer documentation.)

CA VAPA Dance Grade 7 3.3: Explain how dance functions among people of different age groups, including their own.

CA VAPA Dance Grade 7 4.3: Explain and analyze the impact of live or recorded music on dance performances. (Recorded music is consistent. Live music can be altered.)

CCSS ELA Literacy. W7.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS ELA Literacy. W7.7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.

CCSS Literacy RH.6-8.6: Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

CCSS Literacy WHST. 6-8.7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

SOCIAL JUSTICE STANDARDS

ID. 6-8.3: I know that overlapping identities combine to make me who I am and that none of my group identities on their own fully defines me or any other person.

DI. 6-8.8: I am curious and want to know more about other people's histories and lived experiences, and I ask questions respectfully and listen carefully and non-judgmentally.

JU. 6-8.15: I know about some of the people, groups and events in social justice history and about the beliefs and ideas that influenced them.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES

Self-Awareness: Recognizing Strengths, Self-confidence, Self-efficacy.

Social Awareness: Appreciating Diversity, Respect for Others.