I feel that today, jazz dance is most often taught two ways. The first is with a chronological, history-first approach. The second is with a contemporary pop culture slant that forgoes such historical knowledge. In this research, I’ll propose another method; prioritizing deep embodiment of music as a way to be contemporarily relevant while incorporating historical perspectives.

Connecting to rhythm and musicality through the body is a poignant and widely enjoyed way to express oneself while relating to others. As a dance artist and educator, I am deeply inspired by this kinesthetic embodiment of the auditory. I have chosen to focus in jazz and American vernacular dance forms because they allow me to do this in rhythmically specific, individually groove-laden, and expressive yet cool ways. When people simultaneously explore kinesthetic embodiment of the auditory by dancing to jazz and American vernacular music, communication lines open and information is developed and exchanged. This positions the practice of as a powerful and important carrier of cultural knowledge.

I also find great depth in linking dance and music to their historical locations in culture. Jazz dance scholar Minda Kraines notes in her book *Jump Into Jazz*; “jazz dance is a mirror of the social history of the American people, reflecting historical events, cultural changes, ethnic influences, and especially the music and social dances of its eras” (4). However, I find that today, there is a disconnect between historical understanding and current practices in jazz dance.

This disconnect is fueled by commercialized, balleticized approaches to jazz that are popularized by television shows and adopted by many private K-12 studios (Risner, Godfrey and Simmons 26). These studios often serve students of high socio-economic status that are more able to pursue dance as a career. Such students carry their perceptions of jazz into higher education, where their dance history classes often do not spend enough time addressing jazz and
American vernacular dance forms. In this chain of education, historically rooted perspectives on jazz and American vernacular dance go missing.

I wish to address this disconnect between historical understanding and current practice in jazz dance by offering another perspective from which to educate. Teaching jazz dance technique and history by way of musical concepts allows students to get invested quickly, as nearly everyone can connect to music in a personal way. This approach has allowed me to gain the trust and enthusiasm of my students, enabling me to help them make innovative and individual choices about how they exist within historically rooted styles. This research outlines a unique twelve unit course that uses musical elements as the basis for delivering information on dance and music history alongside technique.

**Terminology**

‘Jazz dance’ will be defined as a collection of movement ideas driven by interaction with jazz and other American vernacular music forms. Jazz is a living thing that changes as new perspectives are explored within its wide perimeters. Therein, by embracing movement and music material that includes roots, rock, blues and other offshoots of jazz, educators also encourage versatility within their students.

The term ‘social’ will be applied to indicate movement practiced in social settings during specific time periods. The term ‘presentational’ will be applied to denote movement formulated into a series of choreographed choices meant to frame a viewing experience (Moradian 1). This term will apply to work ranging from choreography on television shows to staged Broadway productions to the work of concert choreographers.

The term ‘vernacular’ is used to denote music and dance that occurs in normal rather than
formal scenarios that can be attached to a particular country and time period (Merriam Webster Dictionary). Music scholar Archie Green notes that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, music critics began using the term ‘American vernacular music’ as an all-encompassing descriptor for the plethora of music being heard on the American jazz festival circuit. This included styles like bluegrass, western swing, rockabilly, soul, Cajun and folk, to name a few (Green 36). Dance scholars have long searched for such an all-encompassing term to indicate the off shoots of jazz dance. The clarity with which Green employs his terminology leads me to believe that ‘American vernacular’ would be equally as articulate when applied to dance.

**Methodology**

Methods of research included field experimentation with this teaching approach in programs with a various enrollment, age and ability levels over the course of the last three years. Additionally, I conducted an American vernacular dance and music theory, pedagogy and history literature review to uncover relevant facts and resources to include in the teaching material. The result is a technique class model organized around music concepts that integrates dance and music history.

The material is organized into twelve units. Under the byline of each unit is a summary that includes a definition of each concept, as well as historical background on its application to both dance and music. Each unit also includes movement exercise and assignment ideas. Finally, I have provided an appendix of suggested music artists to explore as auditory base from which to work. If one carefully plans their exercises, each concept outlined in this paper can apply to practically any piece of music. Therein, selection of your own songs for each exercise is a way to make this material more personal.
This research is not meant to be exhaustive; rather, it is a collection of examples that give students a sense of how each concept applies to various trends and influential artists. The suggested material is purposefully open ended to encourage creative freedom for educators developing class exercises, as well as flexibility in planning for different age levels, class sizes, abilities, and institutional requirements.

General Assignment Ideas:

• Required or Suggested Reading: Summaries provided under the byline of each unit can be read aloud during class or provided as reading. Students can also read the specified chapters from works cited below;

• Important Figure or Trend Summaries: Ask each student to research and write a summary about an important figure, company or trend, emphasizing the ways one of the BLANK music concepts has influenced their development.

• In or Out of Class Journals: Ask students to self-define terms used in class, note their physical uses, and record trends and figures in music and dance discussed during class.

• Music Listening: Have students listen to a piece by each week’s suggested artists prior to those class periods and ask them to create an eight-count movement pattern to be performed to the song. Have them share the patterns in class.
• Timeline Assignment: Each class unit has jumped through various points in history without following a lineage. This assignment asks students to gain an understanding of lineage by highlighting important developments, trends and figures from our reading and class explorations by placing them into a bullet-point timeline.

• Extra Credit – Book Report: Have students select a related source, then write a 3-4 page report centering the information around a class concept.

UNIT 1 – Rhythm: Downbeat, Tempo and Groove

Dance is composed of three basic elements; space, energy and time. Rhythm is the element of time in both dance and music. ‘Keeping the beat,’ or following the structural rhythmic pulse of the music serves as the base approach for jazz and rhythm-driven, vernacular dance forms. Important aspects of this element are tempo and meter. Tempo is the speed at which the beat reoccurs.

Common tempo indications in jazz are indicated with vernacular language including ‘slow’ or ‘down tempo,’ ‘medium,’ and ‘up tempo.’ This is a departure from other forms of music that teach traditional, Italian music terms such as Largo (laboriously slow) and Allegro (fast). Other important tempo considerations include the practice of decelerating, accelerating and frequently changing the tempo for expressive purpose. Meter is the way in which beats are organized into recognizable or reoccurring accent patterns. Meter is felt in either Duple or Triple patterns, which are groupings of two or three (The Elements of Music 2).

A steady pulse has always been central to the American vernacular. This characteristic was evident in the traditions of both African and European music and dance, which met in the late 1800s in America and spurred the development of jazz and its successive vernacular lineage.
In the late 1950s, the general public perceived music as ‘danceable’ only if it was up-tempo enough to ‘blow off steam,’ or down-tempo enough to slow dance with a partner. This is directly liked to the popularity of both hard and fast rock and roll and roll and smooth and slow crooning singers. Therein, the fluctuation in popularity of social dancing in American culture can be seen as related to the typical tempo of a time’s most popular music.

For example, social dancing was very popular during the Swing Era of the 1930s and early 1940s because large ensembles lead like the Fletcher Henderson and Bennie Goodman Orchestras were playing music created for the express purpose of dancing. When jazz music shifted to the bebop style of musicians like Charlie Parker in the 1940s (which emphasized virtuosic playing at extremely fast tempos), jazz music was perceived as too fast for social dancing.

During the 1950s and 1960s, vernacular dance developed alongside rock and roll, with its tempos moderate enough to move rhythmically with comfort. During this time, dancers enjoyed moving to music by artists like Chubby Checker and The Beatles. Rhythm-driven social dancing continued to be popular throughout the height of disco in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It experienced concurrent downturns and upswings as related to punk and funk music during the mid-1970s and early 1980s. Disco and soul music cultivated artists that relied on a ‘four on the floor’ downbeat structure at moderate tempos to attract dancers.

Possible Class Exercises:

- Subdividing Beats: Walk-around improvisations emphasizing how to feel and count quarter notes, half notes, whole notes and eighth notes allows students to explore subdividing beats while feeling their personal groove.
• Groove: Ask students to maintain their groove or understanding of the downbeat while shifting it into various parts of their body (feet, knees, ribs, hips, head, etc.).

• Duple and Triple: Footwork patterns emphasizing duple versus triple meter, both in the center and traveling across the floor, allow students to start feeling the difference between the two in the rest of their bodies.

Assignment Ideas:

• Reading: Ferris pgs. 15-36, DeVeaux pgs. 1-13, 187-201, Stearns pgs. xvi-42

• Important Figure Summaries: Vernon and Irene Castle, Jerome Robinson, Talley Beatty, Matt Mattox, Gus Giordano, Lynn Simonson

UNIT 2 – Rhythm: Polyrhythm and Rhythmic Accuracy

Polyrhythm is the simultaneous use of two or more contrasting rhythms central to both music and dance. Polyrhythm is an Africanist idea that made its way into American music and dance via the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (Asante 146). The early American roots music and movement developing in the countryside became an amalgam of Africanist ideas such as polyrhythm and European classical ideas including structure and form. Because early bluegrass and string music by artists like Doc Boggs did not have percussive accompaniment, people began stomping and sliding out rhythms in flat-soled shoes on their front porches. This practice would become known as in flatfooting. Africanist body percussion also began to work its way into flatfooting, a practice that would become known in this genre as hamboning.

In community halls where there was more space, people would two-step, fox trot, contra and square dance to almost any kind of music. Informal and formal groups of dancers began to form to create and show choreographed, presentational versions of their social dances. This trend
was most specific to flatfooting, which became more performance oriented with the introduction of shoes that featured metal plates on the heels and toes to amplify sound. Thought to be a cross between Scandinavian wooden and Irish hard-soled dancing shoes, the shoes we refer to today as ‘tap shoes’ became known as clogs. Presenting choreographed square dancing and flatfoot clogging has since become very popular as entertainment and educational programming.

In the early 1900s, presentational jazz dance was starting to gain popularity through minstrel and Vaudeville shows. Clog, tap and eccentric dancers like Bill ‘Bojangles’ Robinson and Fayard and Harold Nicholas had rhythmic ways of moving that were novel for the time. The influence of such performers eventually found it’s way onto Broadway. Though much of this work made use of Africanist ideas in relatively invisible ways, musicals such as Shuffle Along (1921) and Runnin’ Wild (1923) featured African American casts and dancers like Josephine Baker, who introduced new dance trends including the Charleston (Kraines 6). Mass distribution of film made the dancing of tappers including Bill ‘Bojangles’ Robinson and swing partnerships such as Fred Astaire and Ginger Rodgers popular. After this surge of popularity in social dancing, the austerity measures of World War II marked its decline, and created space for the increased popularity of professional jazz dancing that would be seen in the stage and movie musicals of the 1950s and 1960s.

Possible Class Exercises:

- Polyrhythm Explorations: Have students hold two different rhythms in two different body parts. Ex: In a song that has a 5/8 meter, ask that students walk across the floor stepping every two beats (1, 3, 5, 2, 4, 1, etc) and allowing their head to oscillate right and left in the following pattern (1, 3, 5, 1, 3, 5).
• Footwork Patterns: Teach students several different traveling rhythmic patterns in their feet that can reoccur evenly within the meter of the song being explored, then have them repeatedly practice to gain rhythmic accuracy.

Assignment Ideas:

• Reading: Ferris pgs. 33-35, DeVeaux pgs. 8-12, 57-76, Stearns pgs. 35-85
• Important Figure Summaries: Bill ‘Bojangles’ Robinson, The Nicholas Brothers, Josephine Baker, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, Katherine Dunham

UNIT 3 – Rhythm: Syncopation and Swing

Syncopation and Swing are elusive, yet essential time and energy elements of American vernacular music and dance. Syncopation is the accenting of the normally weak beat in a rhythmic pattern rather than the downbeat. Swing is “a way of performing eight notes where down beats and up beats receive 2/3rds and 1/3rd of the emphasis to provide a rhythmic lilt,” a definition by music scholar Andy Wasserman (Grotting). Swing hit jazz music hard in the 1930s and didn’t let up until after World War II. The Swing craze produced an influx of big dance bands that boasted large rhythm and horn sections and had singers. Woody Herman, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong and Benny Goodman all lead such bands and toured to halls like the Savoy Ballroom that had a reputation for enthusiastic dancers.

Swing became a codified social form that displayed polyrhythm, syncopation, complicated footwork and grounded body postures. These elements were both knowingly and unknowingly appropriated from Africanist movement. ‘The breakaway,’ also reminiscent of traditional African dance, was a moment in which couples would split off to improvise alone then partner back up (Kraines 8). The syncopated action of these styles of music grounded
dancers in ways that were new from the body postures of traditional minuets and waltzes.

At the end of the war, some social dancers began to seek training in presentational concert ballet and emerging modern dance forms. *Oklahoma* (1943), choreographed by Agnes de Mille, and *On the Town* (1944), choreographed by Jerome Robbins, were both early examples of stage choreographers incorporating rhythmic qualities found in jazz music and social dance into their work (Kraines 9). It was Jack Cole who began to refine this trend into a technique. Cole also integrated his appropriated understandings of other ‘ethnic forms’ such as classical Indian dance and ‘Oriental dance’ from his training at the Denishawn School into his understanding of musicality and isolation. Another such important figure was Katherine Dunham, a dancer and anthropologist whose stage choreography made use of the Afro-Cuban traditions she researched.

Dance artists that followed in these footsteps in the 1950s included Talley Beatty and Alvin Ailey. During the 1960s through 1980s, Matt Mattox and Gus Giordano continued this path. Mattox, who choreographed for Broadway and the Metropolitan Ballet, propelled Jack Cole’s work through an outlook on the body as a straight line from which an infinite number of designs could arise (Kraines 13). At this time, concert jazz dance was starting to exhibit a set of common traits that included the double-bounce found in Swing, angular movement motifs, percussive accents, rebounds and sharp turns.

Possible Class Exercises:

- **Syncopation Exercises:** Continue exploring rhythmic footwork, but start emphasizing syncopated rhythms. Then have them work on creating footwork patterns that are similar, but straightened out. Have them perform the two back to back to feel the difference.
- **Double-Bounce/ Swing-Bounce:** Have students bounce in place at the start of your center warm-up to begin feeling the buoyancy of the double-bounce. Work on embodying this
double-bounce while executing a basic Jitterbug step, maintaining that presence even when performing elevated or suspended choreography.

- Full-Bodied Swings: Explore how the feeling of swing is not only felt quickly and rhythmically, but also in an over-arching sense through catch and release suspension. Create floor leg swing and upright torso swing combinations.

Assignment Ideas:

- Reading: Ferris pgs. 33, 356-364, DeVeaux pgs. 118-164, Stearns 315-336
- Important Figure Summaries: Whitey’s Lindy Hoppers, Pepsi Bethel, Norma Miller, ‘Shorty’ George Snowden, Jump Rhythm Jazz Project

UNIT 4 – Melody: Motif and Blued Sound

A melody is a recognizable sequence referenced throughout a piece of music. It often also serves as the base for the creation of dance that corresponds to a piece of music. Melody is an element that can be identified primarily with the ideas of time and energy. A melody exists within time because it is reliant on rhythmic structure, and it often provides the energy quality for dance. Motif, similar to melody, is a shorter pattern that reoccurs throughout the composition.

One important constant in jazz-influenced styles is ‘blue notes’ or bent notes. Played at slightly lower pitches within a major scale, blue notes give a sense of bend that is native to the blues. The blues tradition has a long history of interacting with dance. Blues music began developing in the United States when the vocal expressions of traditional African music met Europeanist ideas of musical structure. Slaves that were isolated from their families and forbade to play their drums or dances began working rhythms into vocal hollers and strains of body percussion that were passed from field to field as a way to communicate (Kraines 4).
The appropriation of field hollers and body percussion into the minstrel and Vaudeville circuits gave these forms widespread popularity and passed them into the hands of the time’s emerging stars. In the 1930s, musicians like Lead Belly, Ma Rainey and Mamie Smith became known for their soulful, down-tempo 12-bar adaptations of African melodies and rhythms. This music started to become known as ‘the blues.’ White Vaudeville entertainers like Al Jolson, while borrowing form but little character from black blues musicians, found popularity by performing ‘blues dance music’ (Starr 93).

Blues music continued to spread throughout the country, working its way up from the bottom rung of American social stratification as it found its way into other emerging forms of music like ragtime, gospel and country (Santelli 37). Artists like Blind Lemon Jefferson fused the blues into country, and later on, it crossed into rock with artists like Eric Clapton (Santelli 200). During the 1950s and 1960s, popular musicians like Ray Charles, BB King, Etta James, Muddy Waters and Bob Dylan became American music icons in part for the ways they incorporated blues into their work.

Both slow, rolling blues and faster, upbeat rhythm and blues started finding their way into presentational dance in the 1950s and 1960s, appearing in Broadway choreography and on television social dance programs. Partnered social blues dancing is still trending today. In the late 1960s and early 1970’s, artists like Miles Davis hinted at the blues in cool jazz compositions that had danceable tempos. Today, music artists like McCoy Tyner and Brad Mehldau further the tradition of blues-tinged music that provokes both listening and dancing.

Possible Class Exercises:
• Vocalize: Play through a C major scale on the piano, then incorporate a bent note into the scale. Have the students sing the scale, then improvise as they sing it to see how their body responds.

• Sinking vs. Suspending: Blue notes often make the body feel melty or sinking, a feeling that can be contrasted with suspended movements. Build motifs that show up several times in the same exercise that address this difference in feeling.

Assignment Ideas:

• Reading: Ferris pgs. 37-44, DeVeaux pgs. 21-26, 36-48

• Important Trend Summaries: minstrelsy, Vaudeville, contemporary blues social dancing

UNIT 5 – Form: Call, Response & Comment, 12-Bar and AABA

Form is the overall structure or plan with which a piece unfolds. This element applies to the concept of time in music and space in dance. Previous to the development of the American country and roots genres, many early social-turned-presentational dances were modeled off English country dances and performed to European classical music styles (Starr 29). This affected the way many vernacular music and dance traditions found compositional structure, incorporating the ideas of theme and variation.

Some of the country’s original vernacular music was born out of the importation of European military instruments circa 1895 to aid United States soldiers in the Spanish-American War (DeVeaux 52). These early brass bands played music formed heavily around European classical music structures. They also incorporated an upbeat, marching sound that produced a distinct, danceable tempo that served as a base for the development of jazz music. Additionally, they
introduced Americans to saxophones, trumpets and trombones, which would go on to become very important instruments in jazz-influenced musics.

Common forms in jazz and American vernacular music include 12-bar blues and AABA, which is commonly known as popular song format. Field holler and work song influences can be felt in the composition of the blues structure by its twelve bar structure (DeVeaux 46). The first four bars of music establish or ‘call’ an idea, with the second set of four bars responding to that idea. Lastly, the final set of four bars comments on that exchange. This subtle communication can be heard in many popular American blues tunes.

Finally, the AABA, or popular song format, was common in tunes that emerged from Tin Pan Alley in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This was a small section of New York City where writers like Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern penned songs that would become popular standards. Many of their songs would be included in Broadway and movie musicals, as well as in the repertoire of popular touring big bands like the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra (DeVeaux 127). In presentational dance, Danny Buraczecki’s JAZZDANCE company became known for their carefully-choreographed reflections of song form.

Possible Class Exercises:

• Call, Response and Comment Improvisations: Have students listen carefully to a song with 12-bar blues structure. Then, have them split into groups of three, assigning call, respond and comment sections of each phrase to each person in the group. Encourage students to carefully observe their group members to get a sense of their motifs, and ask them to experiment with those motifs. Switch roles until everyone has had a chance to fill each.
• Set Warm-up Exercises: Create set warm-ups in which the movement phrases correspond with phrasing changes in the music. After the warm-ups have become embodied, ask students to identify the structure of the song.

Assignment Ideas:


• Important Trend Summaries: Vaudeville, Broadway and movie musical choreography, JAZZDANCE company

UNIT 6 – Harmony: Tonal and Atonal

Harmony, or the interaction of multiple notes together, creates texture in music. Applied to dance, harmony is present in the ways bodies interact with one another in space. Primarily, this is through unison versus non-unison movement. At the most basic level, unison movement, or bodies performing the same phrase in the same timing and facing, can be considered ‘tonal.’ This is the music term for relating to a specific tone or key. Counterpoint, or movement in which dancers are structurally interdependent but rhythmically and dynamically independent, can also be seen as tonal harmony. In this practice, while dancers do not perform the same movements, they have been carefully crafted to relate to one another. Disparate movement, or movement that is not in unison and is not designed for performers to be interdependent can be considered ‘atonal.’ This music term for when sounds are not centered around a specific tone pattern.

American roots music was deeply influenced by harmonizing family singing groups that toured through the country during the mid to late 1800s. Such music groups quickly sprung up all over the countryside, creating music based upon the multi-part harmonies both sung and
played on string instruments (Santelli 14). The launch of commercial radio by Westinghouse in 1920 in Pittsburgh was a crucial development for the spread of this sound. As time progressed, radio became a crucial tool for popularizing new styles of music. This impact was felt deeply in the 1950s as rock and roll came to the forefront of popular music and dance culture.

As rock and roll developed throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, dancers were beginning to move away from choreographed, unison partner dances and toward independent, non-unison improvisation. While no longer moving in unison harmony on the dance floor, shared downbeat and groove gave dancers a sense of underlying harmony. Social hip-hop dances like House have also developed to emphasize atonal harmony in movements and tonal harmony in feeling.

Social hip hop dancers practiced in clubs and at house parties, pioneering dance styles like breaking and Campbell Locking, which emphasized careful attention to rhythm. Many hip hop styles were eventually adopted by choreographers that were creating movement for music videos. Growing interest in music television aided in the development of hip hop dance as a tonal, visual element harmonious with the listening experience (Dodds 249).

Possible Class Exercises:

• Unison vs. Counterpoint vs. Disparate: Have students split into groups and create two repeatable counts of eight to an AABA song, in which all group members move in unison. Then, have different groups dance together in an effort to identify with choreographies feel related, creating counterpoint, and which feel entirely disparate.

• Hip Hop Choreography: Create an intricate hip hop phrase to teach to the students. Have them split into two groups to view each other so they may see the power of unison choreography.

Assignment Ideas:
UNIT 7 – Harmony: Canon and Borrowing

This unit will continue to apply harmony to dance as an understanding of unison versus dissonance. ‘Canon’ is when groups of dancers perform the same phrase with different timings, creating new texture with the same movement. ‘Borrowing’ is another way to create texture by sharing movement; it encourages improvising dancers to borrow physical ideas from fellow dancers to explore unfamiliar territory. One way to think of this musically is to consider sampling.

Sampling is when a small section of an already-existent song is selected to build or embellish a new piece. Sampling began with artists like Grandmaster Flash in the late 1970s, and has continued to grow in popularity. Entire genres of electronic music have grown around the practice of sampling, connecting the music to the past while innovating. This remixing of ideas is exemplified in the work of electronic artists like Pretty Lights and Big Gigantic.

In the early 1990s, increasingly available Internet access further encouraged the fusion of world music styles into folk and electronic music (Starr 465). Social dancers began to gravitate to these sounds. Of dancing socially to electronica music, dance scholar Sally Sommer notes “the vibe is constructive, a distinctive rhythm and groove that carries the party psychically and physically” (Sommer 286). This sense of inclusiveness encourages underlying harmony among people dancing together to feel comfortable borrowing one another’s movement ideas.

Possible Class Exercises:
• Borrowing in Improvisation: Have students start walking around to warm up, eventually locating a partner. Have them trade eights for several exchanges, emphasizing the exploration of borrowing motifs or ideas from their partner to create new, yet-related material in their own improvisations.

• Canon Exercises: Have students remember the two repeatable counts of eight they created in groups. Then, have each member of each group start four counts behind the person to the right of them as they travel the phrase across the floor. Try a difference of two counts and one count as well.

Assignment Ideas:

• Reading: Stearns pgs. 285-314, DeVeaux pgs. 235-258

• Important Trend Summaries: House dancing, Breakdancing

UNIT 8 – Timbre: Dynamics and High-Affect Juxtaposition

In music, ‘timbre’ describes color or quality through elements like tone and volume. In dance, timbre is the dynamic with which energy is applied. ‘Dynamic’ means the overall, stylistic execution of a piece. One dynamic common within jazz and American vernacular dance forms is ‘high affect juxtaposition.’ Africanist dance scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild defines this as contrasting a cool temperament with hot, fast movements (Gottschild 275). It can also be thought of as alternating between cool and smooth versus hot and fast movements. Figures like Jack Cole, considered the father of presentational jazz dancing, pioneered the of fusing hot, Africanist footwork into cool and collected Europeanist alignment. High affect juxtaposition also offers dancers and musicians entry points into the ‘aesthetic of cool,’ an Africanist sense of performing coolness under pressure.
Cole called his style ‘urban folk dance,’ indicating mass appeal and availability, and ability to fuse folk traditions into dance practices becoming popular in developing urban areas (Kraines 3). Early New Orleans jazz was frequently heard in whorehouses and bars, giving the music a reputation for being uncouth and overtly sexual. Over time, this reputation, coupled with the aesthetic sense of cool, has caused jazz dance to be associated with overt sexuality. While this approach has been effective commercially, it can also foster confidence and ability to overcome challenge. Please note that this is a very simplified mention of the history of sexuality within jazz dance. A fair amount of literature has been written on this subject. If you’d like to learn more about it, please refer to the bibliography of this research for ideas on where to start.

Possible Class Exercises:

• Dynamics: Have students perform previously learned across the floor combinations with different dynamic approaches. Ask them to try the phrase with quiet, subtle energy. Then have them try the same thing with 90% energy and raw edge. Keep trying different approaches to help them find how they can make the same choreography look and feel different.

• High-Affect Juxtaposition: Have students perform a phrase that incorporates frequent dynamic shift.

• Aesthetic of Cool: Create center exercises that contrast fast, fleeting footwork with a cool, relaxed torso. Have students discuss how this feels like coolness under pressure.

Assignment Ideas:

• Reading: Ferris pgs. 53-64, DeVeaux pgs. 302-326, Stearns pgs. 231-284

• Important Trend/ Idea/ Figure Summaries: The Lindy Hop, Jack Cole, Bob Fosse, Gene Kelly, ‘the aesthetic of cool’
UNIT 9 – Timbre: Accenting Staccato, Legato and Sforzando

Timbre is also present in dance through the development of accent patterns. To ‘accent’ means to place emphasis on a particular note in a specific way. While accents are commonly classified in jazz and vernacular music as sharp or smooth, there is a wide spectrum of ways these two kinds of accents can be played on an instrument or in the body. The smooth approach, also know as ‘legato’ in classical Italian music language, was very popular during the 1940s and 1950s. This era saw the rise in popularity of crooning musicians like Frank Sinatra, Nat ‘King’ Cole and Doris Day. This popular down-tempo music was used to ‘slow dance,’ a step-less form of partner dance.

Around the same time was the Mambo Craze. The 1920s social dances of icons Vernon and Irene Castle appropriated various ‘ethnic dances’ like the tango. Tango caught on, and in the late 1940s, found its way into the developing professional ballroom circuit. Additionally, the Mambo, a dance practiced by Puerto Rican and Cuban immigrants at big ballrooms like New York’s Palladium, gathered a strong following among casual and professional social dancers. Mambo dancing emphasized sharp, strong footwork and accents within the torso. Sharp accents are known to be ‘staccato’ in classical Italian music language.

A modern-day example of dance with strong attention to accents is the Jump Rhythm Jazz Project, a professional company based in Chicago that embodies dynamic shift with extreme clarity. The company learns their movement by scatting first (vocalizing rhythmic syllables) and moving second, allowing them to carefully embody specific dynamics in rhythmic patterns. Company founder Billy Siegenfeld has developed a whole technique based around this approach.
called ‘Jump Rhythm Technique.’ These unique approaches to dynamics are examples of how coloring movement in a personal way creates timbre in dance.

Possible Class Exercises:

• Accent Improvisation: Walk around improvisations that ask students to emphasize different body parts with different accent styles.

• Center and Across the Floor: Apply specific accent instructions to new or previously learned patterns.

Assignment Ideas:

• Reading: Stearns pgs. 337-370

• Important Figure Summaries: Jump Rhythm Jazz Project, the Mambo Craze

UNIT 10 – Improvisation

Improvisation is the art of creating your music or movement in the moment. Vibrant improvisation simultaneously considers manipulation of time, space and energy through all of the discussed concepts; rhythm, melody, form, harmony and timbre. Improvisation is a key component of jazz music. In early New Orleans music, the entire ensemble (usually composed of a banjo, marching drum, tuba, trombone, cornet and clarinet) would improvise at the same time. This practice became known as collective improvisation.

It has since become more common to hear improvisations by one player, supported by the rest of the players riffing or accompanying in the background to keep the rhythm, tempo and feeling of the song. Improvisation has become a mainstay within jazz, blues, funk and several other kinds of American vernacular music because it is social and relatable. By focusing upon
the in-the-moment ideas of the soloist, fellow musicians, listeners and dancers are given a unique opportunity to relate to them.

In the 1960s, improvisation became the standard in social dance. Chubby Checker’s 1960 hit song and accompanying dance ‘The Twist,’ was the gateway for improvised social dance (Starr 238). In his book *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MP3*, Larry Starr notes “the free-form dances that have accompanied, and in some cases inspired, so much of American popular music from the 1960s to the present thus all find their point of origin in The Twist . . . Rock and Roll had found a social body language that matched the novelty of the music and the feeling of liberation that it celebrated” (Starr 241).

Improvisation was not a spontaneous trend that took off with The Twist. The roots of improvised, rhythmic movement can be traced back to Africa. Dance scholar Kariamu Welsh Asante, in her article *Commonalities of African Dance: An Aesthetic Foundation*, identifies improvisation as a trait that has been shared for centuries across the many African countries with strong dance traditions. Improvisation is one of the most prolifically present Africanist elements within jazz and American vernacular music and dance, which are amalgams of Africanist and Europeanist ideas at the base.

From the 1960s forward, social dancers continued to practice improvisation by making physical the rhythm and musicality of the popular songs of the time. As applied to dance, ‘musicality’ indicates sensitivity to, knowledge of and ability to embody music. In the 1960s and 1970s, music artists like Creedence Clearwater Revival found their audiences continuing to dance to their music despite the belief by some that it was not created for that intention. This phenomenon can be attributed to the popularity of the ‘self-awareness’ movement and the practice of improvised dancing to earlier rock and roll.
This focus on improvisation and de-emphasizing of training in specific steps relates to the decline of social dance as a source for the creation of presentational choreography. Without specific steps becoming codified and passed along, rock and roll music’s contribution to concert jazz dance was simply to provide a source of groove. This surge of interest in improvised social dance actually found its way more deeply into the emerging postmodern dance scene. While presentational jazz dance developed to be primarily choreographed, some companies like Decidedly Jazz Danceworks had wholly embraced improvisation, using it as both a source for creating choreographed movement and a mode of stage presentation.

Today, rock and fusion musicians carry along the tradition of forward-thinking music that inspires listening and improvised social dancing. Additionally, rap music, which was rooted in the Jamaican tradition of ‘toasting,’ or improvising rhyming patterns of words, has created another mode through which improvisation has again gained notoriety and popularity within the public sphere. Related hip-hop dance styles such as house and breaking have fed this interest in improvisation, as well as given them a new home in presentational dance. Improvised breaking and house dance have also become commercial music video and Internet sensations, stacking up millions of visitor ‘hits.’

Possible Class Exercises:

• Live Music: This unit is greatly embellished by inviting live musicians to class. This allows students to explore not only interacting with music, but the ways in which music can interact with them and continue to incite new responses.

• Walk-Around Warm-Up Improvs: A play off of previous ‘walk-around warm-ups,’ this exercise asks students to frequently switch their improvisatory focus. Have them explore
UNIT 11 – Interaction

‘Interaction’ is the practice of relating to the other members of the ensemble. Jazz and American vernacular musics are social. They have a history of being played in social settings for social events, where the primary goal is for people to interact with one another. This sense of interaction also shows clearly within the practice of musicians and presentational dancers. Performers relating to one another give art an additional focus and sense of purpose. In music, interaction is often present in players borrowing musical ideas from one another. In dance, interaction is the practice of physically and visually connecting with one another through movement.

Interaction can be traced to many places within the development of American vernacular dance and music. One such place is the rural parts of the country in the 1920s. Many self-taught country and roots artists like guitar player Jimmie Rodgers didn’t have backup bands. When he created recordings, he worked with players of a myriad of musicians, from Hawaiian guitar players to jug bands, black blues guitar players to small string orchestras (Santelli 23). This spirit
of inclusive creation started to cultivate versatility and ability to fuse with many styles, a trait reflected in many genres of American vernacular music. As radio technology spread various kinds of music across the country, experiments fusing different forms ignited new sub-genres of music. This included the Western swing of Bob Wills, the gospel and blues-influenced country of Bill Monroe, and fusions of Native American and Mexican country music by artists such as Narciso Martinez and R. Carlos Nakai (Santelli 29; 126).

Another example of fusion music is boogie woogie, a precursor to rock and roll that formed out of blues piano meeting big-band swing, country and gospel at the hands of guitarists such as John Lee Hooker (Santelli 46). Similarly, fusion-based dance trends started to form. Along with boogie woogie music came country swing dance, a fusion of two-step and swing styles. In the early 1950s, rock and roll pioneers like Little Richard, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley followed in this tradition. Their music reflected their exposures to country, gospel, blues and rockabilly, and led them to find new musical ideas. Their musical styles were spread to the masses by home television sets, which were just catching on (Kraines 11). Dance affected and was affected by this, as it was included on television shows to gain viewership while also infiltrating improvised dancing in social settings.

As the rock and roll found popularity, folk music was also experiencing a revival, with musicians like Pete Seeger and Joan Baez becoming celebrities. The festivals that arose from the folk revival went from mono-cultural, or completely focused on American folk music, to multi-cultural, featuring folk and vernacular music from all over the world (Santelli 76). This multicultural spirit further enabled the trend toward fusion, which has provided social and presentational dancers alike with countless new flavors to explore.

Possible Class Exercises:
• Walk-Around Warm-Up: In another play on a previously suggested exercise, ask students to locate call and response improv partners by connecting visually.

• Center Exercises: Build specific focus changes into center exercises as a part of the sequence.

Assignment Ideas:

• Reading: Ferris pgs. 343-349, DeVeaux pgs. 327-372, Stearns pgs. 173-230

• Important Trend Summaries: Tribal Fusion dance

UNIT 12 – The Whole Sound

Virtuosity in jazz and American vernacular dance and music requires the ability to simultaneously apply all discussed elements. In dance, this encompasses mastery of rhythmic ideas like downbeat, tempo, groove, rhythmic accuracy, polyrhythm, syncopation and swing. It includes melodic ideas like motif and blued sound, and considerations of form such as call, response and comment, 12 bar blues and AABA popular song format. It works with harmonic concepts like unison versus disparate movement, cannon and borrowing. Finally, it asks performers to color the music or movement through timbre considerations like dynamics, accenting and high affect juxtaposition.

As this class has highlighted, there are numerous ways that these ideas have been and can be explored through both music and movement, which is part of what can make the term ‘jazz’ confusing. The 1980s saw the term ‘jazz dance’ becoming a catchall descriptor for any movement performed to popular music, regardless of whether it occurred on the social dance floor, the Broadway stage, the concert dance stage, in film, or in educational settings. Despite their past applications, jazz and American vernacular music and movement concepts should
accurately emphasize the understanding of how to be a historically rooted individual within a larger group working to innovate.

Possible Class Exercises:

• Walk-Around Warm-Ups: Emphasize use of all class concepts, and shift between them as a measure of encouraging versatility.

• Center Work, Across the Floor and Combinations: Emphasize all concepts, instructing students to shift their focus toward various concepts at various times.

Assignment Ideas:

• Reading: DeVeaux pgs. 373-397

• Creative Project: Divide students into groups and ask them to create a certain length of phrase to a song of their choice that has been approved as falling into jazz or American vernacular music genres. Instruct them to create movement that considers at least three class elements.

In summation, the information above is offered as a resource for teaching jazz dance technique organized by music concepts while carefully intertwining historical knowledge. Approaching the subject from this stance allows students to connect with the material in their own innovative ways while still providing historical context. Do note that the summaries included for each unit discuss just a few examples, providing plenty of space for educators to offer their own unique insights. It’d take a full book to provide a complete history of American vernacular music and dance development as explained through these music concepts. What a great reminder that the sky is the limit within this subject matter. This research is simply a starting point for another endless and exciting way to teach jazz dance.


