



Well known choreographers

Martha Graham Martha Graham has been called the "Picasso of Dance," because she changed visual art. In a way, Graham is the creator of modern dance. Through the World Wars, the interest in ballet and classical dance had suffered. Graham reinvented ballet with her own twist resulting in a new creation, "modern dance" or contemporary ballet. Bob Fosse Bob Fosse is known for combining dance styles. Although that doesn't seem revolutionary today, it was in the 1950s. In the premier of his eclectic style Fosse combined ballet with jazz, a cancan, a middle eastern dance, and a court dance. He also thought beyond the dance styles. He encouraged his dancers to act while dancing supposedly saying, "The time to sing is when your emotional level is too high to just speak anymore, and the time to dance is when your emotional level is too strong to only sing about how you feel." Fosse was also one of the first choreographers to design lighting for dramatic effect. Alvin AileyAiley did not require his dancers to be trained in a specific technique before they performed his choreography. Dancers with the Alvin Ailey dance troupe have backgrounds in ballet, modern, jazz and/or even hip-hop. Ailey was more focused on asking dancers to draw on their personal style and individual talents. He did require long leg lines and "a ballet bottom" combined with "a modern top." His willingness to have a dialogue with dancers broke the mold of classical dance choreography. Twyla TharpTharp's choreography is known for creativity, wit and technical precision coupled with a streetwise nonchalance. By combining different forms of movement - such as jazz, ballet, boxing and inventions of her own making -Tharp's work expands the boundaries of ballet and modern dance. One of Tharp's books explore the idea of extracting ordered meaning from chaos, an idea that echoes in her style. Mikhail Baryshnikov is a choreographer and actor, he is mostly known for his dancing. He is often cited as one of the top three ballet dancers EVER. His jumping ability is unparalleled. Born is Russia, he defected to Canada in 1974. He joined the New York City Ballet as a principal dancer. He then danced with the American Ballet Theatre, where he later became artistic director. Baryshnikov used his talents both on stage and in film, leading him to discover his taken for acting, eventually winning a Golden Globe for his work in Turning Point. You may recognize him from the final season of Sex in the City. When I saw the program for this Dance Festival I started to think about my TOP 10 famous contemporary Choreographers. It is difficult to say what I love most and what I have seen lately which, which is uppermost in my mind. Sydney Dance Company/ Interplay As Contemporary dance is an art, it is judged by each person in a subjective way. This means that what one person perceives as ,the best' for another one. So please tell me your TOP 5! I am very curious to hear your opinion. Here are my TOP 10 William Forsythe - all pieces of the 80thies Wayne McGregor Jiri Kylian Akram Khan Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui Alvin Ailey Maurice Bejart Mats Ek John Neumeier Lin Hwai-min/ Clouds Gate Taiwan Theatre LAST BUT NOT LEAST Rafael Bonachela/Sydney Dance Company and Christian Spuck/ Stuttgarter and Zurich Ballet. I include Spuck even though he is considered more neo-classical. These famous choreographers present their work all over the world and with the most well known dance companies and while I love to watch their productions, I regret not seeing other smaller companies with less well known artists. Smaller dance festivals would be an excellent opportunity for relative 'unknowns' to perform in front of an audience. It seems to me that there is no financial risk for the festival promoter to sign up the internationally known choreographers and dance companies. Perhaps well endowed sponsors should consider other platforms for those performers and choreographers and choreograph This high quality contemporary Dance Festival takes place every second year. For those of you who do not live in Switzerland I am including my recommendations, my TOP 5 on the STEPS program as well as some videos, so as you are able to keep up to date. Atomos - challenging innovative, new cool moves Eastmen/Sidi Larbi Cherkauoi / Fractus V - an intercultural dialogue Ramirez, Molina and Wang/ Felahikum - ballet and hip-hop meets flamenco Watch Video on steps.ch Candoco Dance Company/ Set and Reset - a restaging Project by Trisha Brown Dance Company + Thomas Haubert Notturnino Watch video on steps.ch Not to forget Huang Yi -a poetic encounter between human and machine AND the South Korean Eun-Me Ahn - the dancing grandmothers. Have fun at STEPS and enjoy all these great companies! The world of dance has a rich history of change and innovation, but these things cannot happen alone. You have to know where you've come from to know where you are going. California Ballet's mission of preserving the classics while fostering new works is the embodiment of this concept. As we look back at the 1900's for inspiration and understanding. We'd like to present a list of the 20th Century's top five choreographers (in no particular order). Now, let's be honest: this is a hard list to make. Many people were instrumental in shaping dance during the 20th century. And no matter who you choose, someone influential will be left off of this list. We're quite certain that you, the reader, will likely disagree with at least one of the choices or say, "Well, what about so-and-so?" We welcome discussion, so please, feel free to include your suggestions for alternate choreographers in the comments section! Sit back and enjoy this quick rollick through 20th century: 1) George Balanchine (1904-1983) Co-founder and Principal Choreographer, New York City Ballet Born Giorgi Balanchivadze, George dancer in which he danced with the Soviet State Ballet (during a tour he would defect) and Diaghilev's Ballet Russes (to which he defected). In 1933, Balanchine met an American ballet school and company, and he felt Balanchine was the man to do it . . . he could not have been more right! Together, Balanchine and Kirstein founded the School of American Ballet. This company would go through a couple reincarnations, including Ballet Society. In 1948, Ballet Society was offered the position of resident ballet company of the New York City Center. This solicited a name change to . . . you guessed it! New York City Ballet! Balanchine create countless famous works. His prodigious body of choreography is instantly recognizable by his signature neoclassical style of movement with little or no narrative. Balanchine believed that dance should shine on its own, and therefore felt little need to embellish movement with storytelling. While the ballet world knows him for signature works such as Apollo and Serenade, his most widely known, and most profitable, work is his interpretation of The Nutcracker every holiday season. George Balanchine passed away in 1983 at the age of 79. He left behind quite a legacy: a premiere ballet. He is widely considered the preeminent choreographer of the 20th century. George Balanchine Retrospective - New York City Ballet 2) Martha Graham (1894-1991) - Founder, Martha Graham was the daughter of a prominent Presbyterian physician. Coming from a family of high standing, Graham was the daughter of a prominent Presbyterian physician. Coming from a family of high standing of high standi Denishawn School, where she received instruction from modern dancer, but she knew her calling and refused to be swayed. Graham danced with the Denishawn Company for seven years before moving to New York City to begin her own company and school. Her work in New York would change the face of dance forever. Graham forged new ground with choreography that was topical and controversial. She created a new style of dance and choreography whose sole purpose was to elicit emotion and thought Martha Graham's style has been deemed uniquely American, but took the world by storm. Her career and skill as a modern dancer is unmatched, and Graham didn't take her final curtain call until she was 75 years old! She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, received the Local One Centennial Award for dance (given only once every 100 years) and in 1986 was named Time Magazine's Dancer of the Century. The legacy she left behind rivals even that of George Balanchine: a world-renowned dance school and company, a new genre of movement, and a choreographic body of 181 works. She is considered by many to be the mother of 20th century modern dance. Graham continued to teach until she died in 1991 at the age of 96. Martha Graham's Lamentation 3) Alvin Ailey (1931-1989) - Founder, Alvin, abandoned his family when he was only six months old. Life in Texas in the early 30's was turbulent for African Americans, and segregation was predominant. Lynchings were common, and when he was five Ailey's his mother was raped by a gang of white men. This left Ailey scared of whites as a youth, and eventually led to a fierce pride in his black heritage, which would heavily influence his choreography later in life. Living through the Great Depression was difficult for Ailey and his mother. Employment was difficult to find and hard to maintain. When the United States joined World War II in 1942, Lula Ailey moved her family to Los Angeles to seek employment in support of the war effort. In California, Ailey's exposure to the arts would flourish. He studied many forms of art as a child and young man, including poetry and gospel. He started his dance training at the age of 18, but did not begin to take dance seriously as a profession until a late age. Ironically, it was the same age as another dance icon. He was 22! In 1953 Alvin Ailey joined the Lester Horton Dance Company. When Horton died later that year, Ailey took over as the company's Artistic Director and began his long career as a choreographer. His stint in San Francisco with the Horton Dance Company lasted only one year, and in 1954 he moved out to be one of the best decisions he could have made for himself and, indeed, the entire dance world. While his experience on Broadway was no doubt incredible, Ailey was dissatisfied with New York's modern dance scene. He attended classes and performances of the greats: Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Jose Limon. He didn't like any of them. He found himself incredibly disappointed that there was no one in New York's modern dance similar to the Horton technique he had excelled in while in California. With no mentor readily available, Alvin Ailey decided that the best thing he could do was to create dance on his own. In 1958 Alvin Ailey founded the Alvin Ailey American American American culture. In a time when the modern dance scene was dominated by white dancers, Ailey created a company that not only gave blacks a cultural mouthpiece, but became one of the very few multi-racial dance company was uniquely positioned at the beginning of the Social Rights Movement, giving Ailey's work an amazing opportunity to shape America's understanding of itself, its citizens, and its art. He also created the practice of hiring dancers solely based on talent, skill, and merit with no consideration to race, gender, or creed. Alvin Ailey spent his entire career making dance accessible to anyone and everyone who wanted to experience it. He brought dance to underserved communities, and crossed racial boundaries. He created a pioneering company that continues to innovate and educate to this day. He developed a new technique of modern dance and founded a school to teach it. He created 79 choreographic pieces and inspired countless youth. Alvin Ailey was awarded the Kennedy Center Honor in 1988 and was posthumously inducted into the National Dance Hall of Fame. Alvin Ailey passed away from AIDS in 1989 at the age of 58. The New York Times said of Mr. Ailey, "You didn't need to have known [him] personally to have been touched by his humanity, enthusiasm, and exuberance and his courageous stand for multi-racial brotherhood." Alvin Ailey's Revelations 4) Bob Fosse (1927-1987) - Broadway and Hollywood Choreographer/Director/Producer Bob Fosse was born in Chicago, Illinois, the second youngest of six children. He spent his entire childhood surrounded by dance, and was the stereotypical boy who got dragged along to his sister's dance classes. He spent several classes standing in the viewing area and trying out the steps for himself, before being invited to join the class properly. Ironically, his sister would go on to become a dance legend. Fosse's training was troubled by the fact that he did not have a traditional dancer's body. He suffered from knock-knees, pigeon-toes, and a slouch. Obviously not suited to ballet, he turned to tap. His ability as a tapper was phenomenal, and he set his sights on becoming the "new Fred Astaire." As a youth he performed on the Vaudeville circuit in Chicago, gaining exposure to new dance styles that would eventually influence his own choreography. He would spend the second World War touring the Pacific Theater in a show called Tough Situation. Fosse moved to New York to continue his dream of becoming the new Fred Astaire. While there, he caught the eye of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis who contracted Fosse and his wife at the time, Mary Ann Niles, to appear on the Colgate Comedy Hour. Their success on television led to Fosse securing a MGM contract in 1953. He appeared on the silver screen multiple times, but his performance in the movie musical Kiss Me Kate led directly to his success later in life. The short dance sequence in which Fosse appeared was choreographed by himself, and caught the attention of Broadway producers. Fosse found himself cashiered from the Hollywood spotlight in 1954. While the history books say that it was due to "typecasting," it was in reality due to early balding. His lack of hair made him undesirable at the time, and he lost his contract with MGM. This turned out for the best, as he was being sought out by Broadway producers. Fosse took the leap to the stage, where he would change the face of dance as a choreographer. Fosse's first stage work was The Pajama Game. It was with this musical that he would begin to develop his trademark style of jazz that is instantly recognizable. Knocked-knees, pigeon-toes, slumped shoulders, shuffling steps, bowler hats - they all appeared in his unforgettable number Steam Heat. These innovations in style, heightened by a dramatic sense of sexuality, were the culmination of Fosse's early childhood training, his personal peculiarities (such as his bald head and his dislike of his hands), his time on the Vaudeville circuit, his rebelling against Hollywood conventions, and his own personal need to push the boundaries of dance. The result: one of the most technically challenging, aesthetically pleasing, and recognizable styles of jazz and musical theater dance to ever grace the stage. Broadway, and his choreography and vision would eventually bring him back to Hollywood for countless screen-adaptations and original works. He would net him 9 Tony Awards, 3 Oscar nominations, 1 Academy award for direction, and 1 Emmy. He is the only person to have ever received all three award in the same year! Fosse created an amazing body of work that graced the stage, the silver screen, and television. He developed a brand new style of dance that continues to challenge dancers today the world over. Bob Fosse's Steam Heat - The Pajama Game (1957) 5) Jerome Robbins (1918-1998) - Choreographer & Director, Stage/Television/Film; Ballet Master, New York City Ballet Jerome Wilson Rabinowitz (later Robbins) was born in the heart of Manhattan's Lower East Side. His family had many show business connections, and he was surrounded by artists. Robbins began his college education at New York University in Chemistry, but dropped out after one year to pursue dance. He studied at the New Dance League, receiving ballet training from Ella Daganova, Antony Tudor, and Folk dance styles. By the end of the 1930's, Robbins was appearing regularly in the chorus of Broadway shows. He appeared in the 1940 production of Keep Off the Grass, where he worked with George Balanchine for the first time (Balanchine for the show). In 1940, Robbins decided to refocus his efforts from theater to ballet, and joined Ballet Theatre. Can you guess what that company's name eventually became? That's right, American Ballet Theatre. Robbins performed as a soloist with the company for three years, where he gained attention for his dramatic abilities. It wasn't long, however, before he was drawn back to theater. With the success of choreographers like Agnes de Mille, who had integrated dance into the drama of musicals, Robbins felt compelled to challenge his own choreographic chops. His first foray into theatrical dance was Fancy Free, a ballet about three sailors on liberty. It was a huge success! most stunning music and dance moments of the 20th century. What Bob Fosse was to jazz dance and pop culture, Jerome Robbins was to ballet blended to create some of the most technically impressive, visually pleasing, and emotionally exhilarating dance pieces in musical theatre and movie history. Robbins brought ballet to the masses, cleverly disguised as frothy theater. But the dance community was not fooled. Robbins continued to split his work between theater and ballet for two decades - creating works for ABT and the Joffrey Ballet while also making a huge splash in Hollywood and on Broadway. In 1972 Robbins was asked to join New York City Ballet as Ballet Master. He would work alongside his dance idol, George Balanchine until Balanchine's death in 1983. The two choreographers, while sharing a mutual respect, were very different sides of the same coin. Where Balanchine's choreography was minimalist in nature, Robbins' works ran the gamut from dramatic to comedic and married technique with acting. Together, Robbins and Balanchine gave America's finest ballet Director Peter Martins as a Co-Director. He staged his last ballet, Les Noces, in 1998 before dying two months later at the age of 80. Jerome Robbins bridged the gap between classical and popular dance, creating his own vision of a dramatic contemporary ballet style. the world over. Jerome Robbins Retrospective - New York City Ballet So there you are! Five dance legends. Five giants that shaped not just dance, but how we view the world. But, let's not get mired in the past. Let's look towards the future! Join California Ballet on March 22, 2014 as we explore new works of the choreographers of the 21st century: www.californiaballet.org/beyond-barre

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