

DANCING OVERVIEW

Dancing is natural to human beings and probably as old as the human race. When young toddlers hear various kinds of spirited music, they usually break into dancing. Encourage them and they become pleased performers. Visits with traditional people around the world elicits hospitality, and on special occasions, dancing. Dancing seems to be universal.

The word dance generally refers to (according to the Wikipedia Encyclopedia):

... human movement either used as a form of expression or presented in a social, spiritual or performance setting. People who dance are called dancers and the act of dance is known as dancing. An event where dancing takes place may be called a dance. Choreography is the art of making dances.

To the rhythm of drums and instruments, the body responds with movement. Music and dance have a long history together—from King David and Israel dancing to tambourines, harps and cymbals (see Psalm 149:3 and 150:3-5) to the modern dance floor, films and music videos, hip-hop and moshing.

(Again, from Wikipedia's Wiliquote):

- Everything in the universe has rhythm. Everything dances. (Maya Angelou)
- Dance first. Think later. It's the natural order. (Samuel Beckett)
- To dance is to be out of yourself, larger, more powerful, more beautiful. (Agnes de Mille)

High school senior Chris Vo, 18 of Dallas, Texas is an ARTS winner and a Presidential scholar in the Arts spotlighted by Parade Magazine's "Fresh Voices" (19Sep04: 14). He brings a dancer's heart to life:

My parents were refugees from Vietnam, and they divorced when I was in high school. So I had feelings I needed to express. Dancing was my way of doing it. My mom wanted me to study medicine, but I couldn't live without dance.

... success hasn't always been fun. I've lost friends... But I've worked full speed since fourth grade, and it's been tough.

In Asian cultures, you only dance if you're poor and have no other talent, and guys aren't supposed to be dancers. Growing up, the people at my Buddhist temple weren't always supportive. But I performed there recently, and everyone loved it. I hope I've changed their perspective on being Vietnamese and being a male dancer.

Chris's story reminds us that dancing can be controversial. Dancing puts one in the spotlight. At first, non-dancers can see a dancer as self-promoting, even narcissistic. In some cultures (or subcultures) dancing may be seen as a woman's thing and the gender issue intrudes.

Dancing is physical and sensuous; it can be erotic. Slow couples dancing can be a prelude to greater intimacy. Vince Lombardi is quoted as saying, "Football isn't a contact sport; it's a

collision sport. Dancing is a contact sport.” Chaperones at school dances are often called upon to draw a line between appropriate and inappropriate dancing.

In 1684, Boston’s Increase Mather intoned: “If we consider by whom this practice of promiscuous dancing was first invented, by whom patronized, and by whom witnessed against, we may conclude, that admitting of it, in such a place as New England will be a thing pleasing to the Devil, but highly provoking to the Holy God.”

Dancing was not allowed among Christian Fundamentalists and various other groups in much of the twentieth century. Students at many Christian colleges were forbidden to dance on or off campus. Even today some reject all, or certain kinds of, dancing. (Articles that follow will allow you to follow this issue further.)

Dancing, in its full historic sense, is a celebration of the human body, spirit, and culture. Dance, in musicals and plays, illustrates themes or heightens drama. Some dancers (illustrated by Chris’ story above and the testimonies of krumpers in following Articles) are born to express themselves more through bodily movement than speech or song. Others bear burdens that can only be relieved through dancing. Dances also provide alternatives to violence (as in moshing, break-dancing and krumping). And dancing can build friendship and community.

The Bible describes dancing as a beautiful way to worship God (Exodus 15: 20-21, 2 Samuel 6:14 and Psalm 150: 4) as well as a good way to have fun (Psalm 30: 11; Ecclesiastes 3: 4, Matthew 11: 17, Luke 15: 25).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What brought you to this subject and article? What story do you have to tell about dance?
2. Did you learn anything new from the article above? Did anything in particular impress you? With what did you disagree, or wish it were better written or more fully explained?
3. Do you agree that dancing is natural and universal? Why or why not?
4. What kind of a dancer are you? Herman Hesse is supposed to have asked; “So you can’t dance? Not at all? Not even one step?... How can you say that you’ve taken any trouble to live when you won’t even dance?” What is your response?
5. How can we distinguish worshipful dance from social dance? Do we need to? And how would you distinguish what is appropriate and healthy dance from dancing that is detrimental or inappropriate?

IMPLICATIONS

1. We are saying that dancing is natural to human beings and universal in human cultures.
2. Much of the frustration of young people comes from the fact that they do not sense themselves to be significant and don’t have an adequate way to express themselves. For some of them, at least, dance is an answer.

3. Some schools, more than others, and some churches have made use of dance (perhaps along with drama, poetry reading, and music). It usually involves hard work but is usually described as being uniquely beneficial.

4. Underprivileged young people especially ought to be given opportunity to express themselves through the arts and dance.

Dean Borgman c. CYS