



BA (Hons) Musical Theatre

Assessment Cover Page

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From stiffness to fluidity: the power of flexibility in jazz dance

Flexibility is often seen as a cornerstone of any dancer's technical ability, but its importance in the art of jazz dance is paramount. As a form of dance that thrives on showcasing the highest ability, jazz demands flexibility in so many ways; whether it be high kicks and deep lunges or adapting to various rhythms and styles. My personal journey with jazz has taught me that flexibility is so much more than the ability to touch your toes. It is about pushing every limitation in your body while portraying real, raw emotions to captivate the feelings of others. As stated by Amelia Atwater-Rhodes "[dance] is a prayer for the future, a remembrance of the past" (Goodreads 2023). It is one of the few things throughout the course of history that all humanity has in common. Although I would not brand myself as much of a dancer, I feel its importance resonates with me. My appreciation for its captivating beauty gives me the drive to want to adapt myself to become a part of its rich culture and to try captivating others as many before me have.

A brief history and appreciation

The history of jazz is truly astonishing. In a time when people were given extreme limitations to where they could go and the way in which they led their lives, jazz was theirs to show that they are so much more than the world perceived them to be. Jazz is about beauty as a way of expressing your thoughts and opinions developed when people do not have the freedom to speak for themselves. For this reason, learning to fully extend your leg or to clearly isolate your body's parts is vital to display the full range of motion and emotion needed.

My personal struggle

Flexibility is something that I have never really worked on as I was unaware of the degree it needed in order to be successful. Dance is also my weakest skill, so this is something that I struggle with. Usually, it is more difficult for a male to work on their flexibility than a female (Guarino and oliver2014). this does often make me feel a little held back as I am the only male in my class. I do not worry about timing as I have a strong understanding of musicality, so I feel when I am falling behind or struggling it is often because I find that I cannot physically push my body to achieve a move or sequence. This tells me that I need to practice more and try different exercises to work on my flexibility.

My journey towards improvement

The first and perhaps the most obvious is working on our set exercises from Justin Sparkes in order to build strength, stamina and muscle memory. I find these exercises difficult although I find I am greatly improving and gradually feel more ease towards the exercise. This led me to start looking into practitioners so I could perhaps take things a little slowly to help my flexibility. I then came across Luigi, a practitioner who, after becoming paralyzed, created new ways to train his body, becoming considered a pioneer of the jazz world. His technique focuses on opposition, such as using one side of the body to extend the other or to push down in order to extend up (Cohen 2014). I find that thinking this way and practicing this technique greatly improves my flexibility and control over movement.

Another practitioner I looked at was Gus Giordano. “The Giordano technique leans on vernacular dances born in New Orleans.” (GDC 2025). Its key characteristics are: its isolations, precise port de bras, counterforce (or resistance), and kinetic energy. I find this technique more challenging than Luigi's as I feel it is a little more advanced. I find Luigi's technique a strong basis, then Giordano's technique to be more of a flourishment. I find it is quite physically demanding, so I feel as though I should revisit it when I have become stronger in my movement. I also noticed that whichever technique I used I was struggling with breathing restricting my movement. This led me to come across Joel Hall.

Bringing my research to a temporary close

Joel Hall is known for creating the Joel Hall urban dance method. The primary focus of this technique is to focus on getting used to the feeling of breathing in strenuous positions so that your body can adapt (teachable 2026). Although not necessarily a dance, I find the method is extremely helpful as it focuses on starting small and working your way up. Since experimenting with this technique, I have noticed a vast improvement in both my stamina and my ability to control movement. I found that after working on my breathing I was able to heavily focus on working on finesse rather than spending so much time trying to successfully complete a move to a professional standard. I felt as though this would be a good place to put my research on hold while I focused on improving the movement we were learning in class instead of delving too deeply into research, overloading myself with information and struggling to differentiate between the things that I needed to focus on for my assessment and things that may become relevant in the future.

Conclusion

In my experience i have learned that the most effective way for me to learn is by practicing my applied skills. Jazz is not a subject that I feel very comfortable in however I greatly understand its importance and wish to be able to successfully show off my knowledge by the end of my time in university. I have had no previous training in this area of dance however I find that i am becoming increasingly able to perform movement correctly and feel as though my enjoyment and confidence towards the subject are ever increasing.

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