

twyla tharp push comes to shove

twyla tharp push comes to shove is a groundbreaking choreographic work that revolutionized modern dance with its innovative fusion of ballet, jazz, and contemporary styles. Created by the acclaimed American choreographer Twyla Tharp in the 1970s, this piece remains a cornerstone in dance history for its dynamic movement vocabulary and theatrical flair. The work showcases Tharp's signature style of pushing traditional boundaries and blending diverse influences to create something uniquely expressive and accessible. This article explores the origins, choreography, music, and lasting impact of Twyla Tharp's Push Comes to Shove. Additionally, it delves into the piece's significance in the context of dance evolution and its reception by critics and audiences alike. The following sections provide a comprehensive overview of Twyla Tharp's creative process, the dancers involved, and the work's enduring legacy.

- Origins and Creation of Push Comes to Shove
- Choreographic Style and Movement Vocabulary
- Musical Composition and Collaboration
- Performance History and Notable Dancers
- Legacy and Influence on Contemporary Dance

Origins and Creation of Push Comes to Shove

Push Comes to Shove was choreographed by Twyla Tharp in 1976, marking a pivotal moment in her career and in the landscape of American dance. The work was originally created for the Joffrey Ballet, one of the most innovative ballet companies at the time. Tharp sought to challenge the conventions of classical ballet by incorporating elements from jazz, modern dance, and popular culture. This blending of styles was intended to appeal to a broader audience and to reflect the rapidly changing artistic environment of the 1970s. The title itself, Push Comes to Shove, suggests confrontation and movement, embodying the energetic and sometimes gritty nature of the choreography. Tharp's creative vision was to produce a piece that was both technically demanding and emotionally engaging, pushing dancers to explore new physical and expressive possibilities.

Development Process

The development of Push Comes to Shove involved extensive experimentation

with movement and timing. Twyla Tharp collaborated closely with her dancers, encouraging improvisation and personal interpretation within the structured choreography. This approach allowed the piece to evolve organically, blending precision with spontaneity. The rehearsal process was rigorous, focusing on mastering complex rhythms and dynamic shifts in energy. Tharp's method emphasized clarity of movement and musicality, ensuring that each gesture contributed to the overall narrative and aesthetic of the performance.

Inspirations Behind the Work

Several influences shaped the creation of *Push Comes to Shove*, including Tharp's background in ballet and modern dance, as well as her interest in popular music and culture. The fusion of classical ballet technique with jazz dance elements reflected the cross-disciplinary trends of the era. Tharp was also inspired by the energy of New York City and the evolving art scenes that challenged traditional boundaries. These inspirations resulted in a piece that was innovative yet accessible, appealing to both traditional ballet audiences and those seeking contemporary expression.

Choreographic Style and Movement Vocabulary

Twyla Tharp's choreographic style in *Push Comes to Shove* is characterized by its eclectic mix of classical ballet technique and contemporary movement. The choreography employs sharp, intricate footwork, fluid torso movements, and dynamic changes in tempo and spatial patterns. This combination creates a visually striking and rhythmically complex performance that demands technical skill and versatility from the dancers. Tharp's movement vocabulary in this work is notable for its use of unexpected gestures, syncopation, and innovative partnering sequences.

Blending Ballet with Jazz and Modern Dance

Push Comes to Shove breaks down traditional genre barriers by integrating ballet's precision and discipline with the freedom and expressiveness of jazz and modern dance. This blend allows for a broad range of motion, from delicate pointe work to grounded, percussive steps. The choreography often juxtaposes classical lines with angular, off-balance poses, creating tension and release throughout the piece. This stylistic fusion exemplifies Tharp's philosophy that dance should be a living, evolving art form reflecting contemporary culture.

Technical Demands on Dancers

The dancers performing *Push Comes to Shove* must possess exceptional technical proficiency and adaptability. The choreography requires mastery of ballet fundamentals alongside the ability to execute fast-paced jazz sequences and

complex rhythmic patterns. Additionally, dancers must convey emotional nuance through their movement, balancing athleticism with theatricality. The physical demands include rapid changes in direction, intricate footwork, and precise timing, all of which contribute to the piece's dynamic energy and visual impact.

Musical Composition and Collaboration

The music for *Push Comes to Shove* plays a crucial role in shaping the choreography and overall mood of the piece. Tharp collaborated with composer and pianist Michael Gibbs to create a score that complemented the energetic and varied movement phrases. The music incorporates jazz influences, syncopated rhythms, and dynamic shifts that mirror the choreography's complexity and intensity. This close integration of music and movement exemplifies Tharp's holistic approach to dance creation.

Role of Music in the Choreography

Music serves as both a structural framework and an emotional catalyst in *Push Comes to Shove*. The score's rhythmic variety challenges dancers to maintain precision while expressing musical nuances. The tempo changes and contrasting musical themes correspond to shifts in the choreography's mood and style, enhancing the narrative flow. Tharp's choreography is tightly synchronized with the music, demonstrating her belief in dance as a form of musical expression.

Collaboration with Michael Gibbs

Michael Gibbs' collaboration with Twyla Tharp brought a distinctive jazz sensibility to the score of *Push Comes to Shove*. Gibbs, known for his innovative compositions, provided music that was both sophisticated and accessible, supporting the choreography's eclectic style. Their partnership exemplifies the synergy between choreographer and composer necessary to produce a cohesive and compelling dance work. This collaboration helped ensure that the music was not merely an accompaniment but an integral component of the performance.

Performance History and Notable Dancers

Since its premiere in 1976, *Push Comes to Shove* has been performed by numerous prestigious ballet companies and dance troupes worldwide. The work's success helped elevate Twyla Tharp's reputation as a leading choreographer in both the ballet and contemporary dance communities. The original cast included some of the most talented dancers of the time, who contributed to the piece's critical acclaim through their technical prowess and interpretive

skills.

Premiere and Early Performances

The world premiere of Push Comes to Shove took place with the Joffrey Ballet in New York City, receiving widespread praise for its originality and vitality. Early performances were noted for their energetic execution and the seamless blending of dance styles. The piece quickly became a staple in the company's repertoire and attracted attention from audiences seeking innovative dance experiences.

Notable Dancers Associated with the Work

Several prominent dancers have been associated with Push Comes to Shove, including Mikhail Baryshnikov, whose performances brought additional visibility to the piece. Baryshnikov's technical brilliance and charismatic stage presence perfectly suited Tharp's choreography, helping to popularize the work internationally. Other dancers have continued to reinterpret the piece, contributing to its ongoing evolution and relevance.

- Mikhail Baryshnikov – original principal dancer
- Other Joffrey Ballet company members
- Subsequent dancers in major ballet and contemporary companies

Legacy and Influence on Contemporary Dance

Push Comes to Shove remains one of Twyla Tharp's most influential works, symbolizing a shift toward genre-blending and innovation in dance. Its legacy is evident in the way contemporary choreographers incorporate diverse movement styles and challenge traditional boundaries. The piece paved the way for greater acceptance of hybrid dance forms in both ballet and modern dance communities.

Impact on Dance Choreography

The choreographic techniques introduced in Push Comes to Shove have inspired countless dancers and choreographers to explore interdisciplinary approaches. Tharp's emphasis on musicality, technical versatility, and theatricality has become a model for contemporary dance creation. The work's success demonstrated the viability of blending classical and popular dance elements to create new artistic expressions.

Continued Relevance in Dance Education and Performance

Today, *Push Comes to Shove* is studied in dance conservatories and performed by companies around the world, highlighting its enduring importance. The piece serves as a benchmark for dancers seeking to develop a broad skill set and for choreographers aiming to innovate within established traditions. Its influence extends beyond performance, shaping the pedagogy and philosophy of modern dance training.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is 'Push Comes to Shove' by Twyla Tharp?

'Push Comes to Shove' is a groundbreaking dance work choreographed by Twyla Tharp, originally created in 1976. It is known for blending classical ballet with modern dance and jazz, showcasing Tharp's innovative style.

Why is 'Push Comes to Shove' significant in dance history?

'Push Comes to Shove' is significant because it marked a turning point in contemporary dance by fusing different dance techniques and breaking traditional boundaries, influencing many choreographers and dancers.

Who performed in the original cast of 'Push Comes to Shove'?

The original cast included Twyla Tharp herself and the legendary ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov, whose collaboration brought immense attention to the piece.

How does 'Push Comes to Shove' reflect Twyla Tharp's choreographic style?

The piece reflects Tharp's signature style of blending classical ballet with modern and jazz dance, incorporating athleticism, humor, and musicality in a dynamic and accessible way.

What music is used in 'Push Comes to Shove'?

'Push Comes to Shove' features music by Cole Porter, including songs like 'I've Got You Under My Skin,' which complements the choreography's lively and jazzy tone.

Has 'Push Comes to Shove' been revived or restaged in recent years?

Yes, 'Push Comes to Shove' has been revived multiple times by various companies, including the Twyla Tharp Dance Company and ballet companies, continuing to inspire new generations of dancers.

What themes are explored in 'Push Comes to Shove'?

The work explores themes of contrast and fusion between different dance styles, the physicality of dance, and the playful interaction between dancers, highlighting innovation and breaking conventions.

How did Mikhail Baryshnikov contribute to the success of 'Push Comes to Shove'?

Baryshnikov's participation brought classical ballet prestige and audience attention, bridging the gap between ballet and modern dance and helping popularize the work internationally.

Can amateurs or non-professional dancers perform 'Push Comes to Shove'?

While technically challenging, some sections of 'Push Comes to Shove' have been adapted for workshops and educational settings, but full performances typically require professional-level dancers.

Where can one watch performances of 'Push Comes to Shove'?

Performances are occasionally staged by dance companies worldwide, and recordings or excerpts can be found on streaming platforms, dance archives, and sometimes during dance festivals or retrospectives dedicated to Twyla Tharp.

Additional Resources

1. Push Comes to Shove: Twyla Tharp and the Art of Collaboration

This book delves into Twyla Tharp's unique approach to collaboration in dance and choreography. It explores how she blends diverse artistic elements and works with various performers to create groundbreaking performances. Readers gain insight into the creative processes that fuel Tharp's innovative works.

2. The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It for Life by Twyla Tharp

In this inspiring guide, Tharp shares practical advice and exercises to develop and sustain creativity in any field. Drawing from her own experiences, she emphasizes discipline, routine, and the importance of

embracing failure as part of the creative journey. The book is a valuable resource for artists and non-artists alike.

3. *Dance Anecdotes: Stories from the Worlds of Ballet, Broadway, and Modern Dance* by Debra Craine and Judith Mackrell

This compilation offers entertaining and insightful stories from the dance world, including references to Twyla Tharp's contributions. It captures the spirit and challenges of dance as an art form, providing context to Tharp's innovative style and career.

4. *Movement Matters: Essays on Dance and Culture* by Susan Leigh Foster

Foster's collection of essays examines the cultural and social significance of dance, touching on choreographers like Twyla Tharp. The book explores how movement shapes identity and community, providing a deeper understanding of the impact of dance beyond performance.

5. *The Art of Making Dances* by Doris Hering

A foundational text on choreography, this book covers the principles and techniques essential to creating dance works. It complements Tharp's approach by offering theoretical and practical insights into the creative process, useful for dancers and choreographers alike.

6. *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage* by Janet Adshead-Lansdale

This book explores the role of women in dance history and performance, highlighting pioneering figures including Twyla Tharp. It discusses themes of gender, power, and expression, providing a critical perspective on the contributions of female choreographers.

7. *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* by Susan Leigh Foster

Foster investigates how dance evokes empathy through movement, a concept relevant to Tharp's emotionally engaging choreography. The book blends theory and practice, offering readers insight into the communicative power of dance.

8. *The Intimate Act of Choreography* by Lynne Anne Blom and L. Tarin Chaplin

This practical guide breaks down the choreographic process into accessible steps, mirroring the structured creativity seen in Tharp's work. It is an excellent resource for those interested in understanding or practicing choreography.

9. *Making Dances: A Step-by-Step Guide to Creating Dance* by Anne Green Gilbert

Gilbert provides a clear and engaging approach to dance composition, encouraging experimentation and personal expression. The book resonates with the innovative spirit of Twyla Tharp, making it suitable for dancers and choreographers seeking inspiration.

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