

WHEN BALLET CAME TO AMERICA

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Group Documentary

Process Paper: 499 words

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How We Chose Our Topic

Growing up we both read *A Child's Introduction to Ballet*, a book which contains information on ballet history including the Ballets Russes. When the theme for this year was announced, we remembered the company and their tour of America and thought it fit the theme of cultural encounter and exchange. As we began our research, we quickly noticed connections beyond the art of Ballet. We soon discovered that the Ballets Russes' influence can be seen throughout American culture, an influence that continues to this day.

How We Conducted Our Research

Our research started at LaGrange College's Research Round-Up to seek general information about the Ballets Russes and the American tour. We also used the University of Georgia's Galileo and other online databases to find articles, images and videos on the artists and the situation in the world during the time period. After getting a tour timeline from one source, we used the "Chronicling America" newspaper database to find primary source stories about the tour. We interviewed Dr. Lynn Garafola, the Ballets Russes scholar from Barnard College, and Modernism expert Michelle McCrillis. Dr. Garafola introduced us to the concept of "Gesamtkunstwerk" (the fusion of the arts to tell a story) and how it applies to all the performing arts, not just dance. This led us back to the online databases for more research.

How We Selected Our Presentation Category and Created Our Project

As our subject relies on artistic movement and music we thought documentary would be the best format. From our research and our image and media collection we wrote a project outline first, then a script. After recording the script we built the first draft in Adobe Premiere, combining our collected audio/visual research with the audio. We were very careful with music,

using only pieces by the composers in the documentary. After each level of competition we used the judges' feedback to make improvements in the documentary.

How Our Project Relates to the National History Day Theme

Our topic is an example of the lasting impact of cultural Encounter and Exchange. The first encounter (via the Ballets Russes tour) brought the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk and Modernism to many Americans, planting it fully in the minds of both audiences and performing artists. In addition, this encounter and exchange affected the touring artists, as the dancers, directors and crew saw new cultural and economic opportunity in America. Many moved to this country as a part of the artist immigration between the wars. With Ballets Russes alumni leading or teaching in new world institutions, the arts saw growth of ballet as an American art form, the growth of modernism in music, and Gesamtkunstwerk as an artistic model for American Dance and the American Musical. Americans encountered ballet as they had never seen it, with all artistic elements combining to tell the story. Hollywood began integrating the fashion and the dance of Ballet to its films. Musicals began using dance and design to help tell the story of the show. Contemporary composers were inspired by Stravinsky and the Modernists. This cultural exchange taught Americans new ways to appreciate art, ways which are still practiced to this day.