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Examination session (May or November)	May	Year	2013

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: Dance  
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Title of the extended essay: Bob Fosse's Influence on Jazz Dance in America

**Candidate's declaration**

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The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

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Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

did an excellent job of narrowing her original topic (the evolution of jazz dance) to something clear and specific (Fosse's influence on jazz dance). At first she struggled to find resources, but then she reached out to other libraries in our community and was very successful. I observed her really strengthen her research skills and build her confidence in her own ability to gather information and synthesize an effective argument. I think that the level of independence involved in the EE truly served to better prepare for University study.

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I spent  hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

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**Assessment form (for examiner use only)**

Criteria	Achievement level				
	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3
A research question	<b>2</b>	2	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>
B introduction	<b>2</b>	2	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>
C investigation	<b>4</b>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
D knowledge and understanding	<b>4</b>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
E reasoned argument	<b>4</b>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
F analysis and evaluation	<b>3</b>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
G use of subject language	<b>4</b>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
H conclusion	<b>2</b>	2	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>
I formal presentation	<b>4</b>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
J abstract	<b>2</b>	2	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>
K holistic judgment	<b>3</b>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
Total out of 36	<b>34</b>		<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>

**Bob Fosse's Influence on Jazz Dance in America**

Extended Essay In Dance

By:

Examination Session: May 2013

Word Count: 3,314

## **Abstract**

Bob Fosse is one of the most influential choreographers to ever exist in the dance world. Since he first began choreographing, he has revolutionized the jazz style as he created unique, unconventional movement that contrasted the accepted jazz style at the time. Developing such distinct innovative movement, Bob Fosse's choreography became known as the "Fosse style". By studying the jazz dance style in the 1930s and 40s, just before Bob Fosse began choreographing, it can be understood that jazz dance was socially focused and very high energy as it consisted of intricate footwork. By learning about Bob Fosse's distinctive "Fosse style", one can grasp the distinct movements commonly used in the "Fosse style". By studying these two aspects, it can then be seen how different the "Fosse style" was from jazz dance in that era. Then, analyzing modern dance pieces and recognizing movement and themes created by Fosse, one can then understand how influential Bob Fosse's style has been. Looking at the revolutionizing movement that Bob Fosse created allows one to easily see how it changed the style of jazz forever. After studying and analyzing these different aspects of jazz dance, Bob Fosse, and the modern influence of the "Fosse style", it can be concluded that Bob Fosse revolutionized jazz dance and is one of the most influential choreographers on jazz dance in America.

Word Count: 224

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## **Introduction**

Throughout the history of dance, there have been many choreographers who have developed new styles and have had lasting effect on the dance world. These choreographers seem to remain a constant influence in dance long after their passing as their pieces are recreated and used as inspiration for new works. One such choreographer was Bob Fosse. Bob Fosse has had a perpetual influence on jazz dance in America as he developed a new and unique style. Creating distinctive and innovative movement, Bob Fosse's trademarked style drastically contrasted any style of jazz popular at the time. His "enormous talent and enormous appetite for life drove him to greatness" as he not only became a renowned choreographer but forever changed and influenced the style of jazz dance in America (*Biography-Bob Fosse*).

## **Jazz Dance: Prior to Fosse**

Jazz dance "resulted in the assimilation of many different cultures, techniques, and dance styles- all set to the pulse of the city" which in general was fast-paced and constantly changing (Cohen 598). Jazz is seen mainly as a combination of European and African dance styles. Brought over as slaves, the African people brought with them a unique variety of unstructured, ritual dances. African-Americans continued to develop their style by creating moves such as the "Strut", the "Shuffle", and the "Drag". As the decades passed, European immigrants tried to adapt this African style and fuse it with their own. This led to the emergence of new dances in the 1930s and 1940s, thus, solidifying the identity of jazz dance (G. Giordano 12).

Jazz dance in the 1930s and 1940s revolved entirely around society. With popular big-band jazz music came the classics such as the "Swing", the "Charleston", the "Lindy Hop", and the "Jitterbug". These dances epitomize everything that jazz dance was before the emergence of

Bob Fosse. They are dynamic, energetic, and fast paced. Each dance parallels the rhythm and pace of the music that they are generally danced to. The footwork in these dances is extremely intricate and consists of many quick hops and balance changes. Hand placement was commonly relaxed or made use of jazz hands while the common arm placement was energetically swinging with the body's movement from side to side. Knees were commonly over the ankles and bent to make use of plié or to jump. The shoulders were not commonly isolated but rather moved with the arms as they swung. The feet were also not commonly isolated. They were usually pointed or just relaxed. Many different parts of the body remained relaxed because jazz dance was entirely social, so there was a wide range of levels. Each dance has its simple moves that anyone could pick-up but more advanced dancers were known to add in tricks such as partner flips or turns. This wasn't the only kind of jazz dance in the 1930 and 1940s as jazz was also a part of "night clubs, Broadway shows, films, and television"(Cohen 598; R. Giordano 41,79).

Jazz dance could also be seen in burlesque clubs in the 1950s. In these clubs, jazz dance "shocked the conservative" with its more sensual dancing(G. Giordano 33). Movements such as high kicks greatly contrasted the high energy, innocent movements of popular dances like the "Charleston" and the "Swing". Because of the suggestive nature of burlesque dancing, it was not widely accepted by the public in the 1950s, yet during this evolutionary point in jazz history, one of the most influential choreographers of all time was introduced to the dance scene; Bob Fosse (33) .



## Bob Fosse's Dance Career

Bob Fosse first started dancing as a young boy at the Chicago Academy of Theatre Arts. Initially, Fosse saw dance as a way for him to gain attention from his parents and his parents saw dance as a way to help strengthen their epileptic son, but this small side activity quickly became Bob Fosse's passion. From a young age, Fosse felt pressure from his parents as both had tried to find success in the performance industry and had failed. They recognized the talent in their young son and began living vicariously through his passion. This pressure was something that drove Bob throughout his career as he always feared failure (*Biography-Bob Fosse*).

From the very beginning of his career as a dancer, Bob Fosse idolized Fred Astaire, a successful dancer at the time. Fred Astaire was "Fosse's idea of the world's most beautiful and perfect dancer for the rest of his life" (Gottfried 17). He dreamed of having a career just as successful as Astaire's. This, too, drove Fosse to work endlessly to achieve success in the dance world (17).

At the age of ten, Fosse was paired with another talented dancer, Charles Grass. Together, Fosse and Grass formed the group, The Riff Brothers. They began doing performances in local clubs, specifically burlesque clubs, in the Chicago. Although this was not an ideal place to work, Fosse saw it as an amazing opportunity to improve his performance skills (Zaremba).

In 1946, Bob Fosse moved to New York with the hopes of being a successful dancer and gaining fame. On his second audition, Fosse earned the lead in *Call Me Mister*, his first big role. During this show, Bob Fosse met Mary-Ann Niles with whom he formed the act, Fosse and Niles. With this new acrobatic act, Fosse was able to tour and perform at night clubs and on television. With this new success, Bob Fosse earned another lead role in *Dance Me a Song*. This

role helped him gain fame and eventually, he began choreographing. His first job in 1957, *The Pajama Game*, was a huge success and really launched his career as a choreographer (*Biography-Bob Fosse*).

Bob Fosse went on to choreograph dozens of pieces and shows, many of which are still well-known today. Some famous ones include *New Girl in Town*, *Redhead*, *Sweet Charity*, *Cabaret*, *Damn Yankees*, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, *Pippin*, *Liza with a Z*, *Lenny*, *The Little Prince*, *Chicago*, *Big Deal* and *Dancin'*. Through these many masterpieces, Bob Fosse developed a very distinct, sensuous style that is commonly known as the "Fosse Style" as it was completely unique to him (Sparrow).

### **The Fosse Style**

Bob Fosse's style is very specific when it comes to body movement and angles. Most of the movement is isolated and exaggerated, making it extremely distinct and recognizable as part of the "Fosse Style".

Fosse used a variety of definitive hand placements in his choreography. A few hand positions include splayed fingers, soft-boiled-egg hands, teacup fingers and the fist. Some of these terms were coined by Fosse while others were not, yet all were made noteworthy as they were used by Fosse during his career as a choreographer. These hand positions were so unique because before Fosse, the jazz style did not place much focus on the hands. They were generally relaxed when dancing and had no specific positions. Choreographers had not used hands as a specific focus in movement yet Fosse's use of hands forever influenced choreographers as they have since seen how specific hand position can entirely change the appearance of movement (McWaters 20).

Hand positioning is not the only specification crucial to the execution of the Fosse Style. The placement of the elbows and wrists greatly affects the appearance of Fosse's style. Elbows are commonly drawn back and out creating a chicken-wing effect. The wrists are commonly "broken" or "loose" which means that the arm line is not one long line, but rather broken up. Another wrist movement is the isolated circular snaps that were commonly used in the Fosse Style. These isolations were so noteworthy because they had not been seen in the dance world to this extent. Fosse created movement that had unconventional, broken lines which has influenced choreographers and has caused them to rethink what lines or lack of lines they enjoy in their choreography (31).

Arm placement revolves mainly around how the hands are positioned yet there are still some key pictures that are executed in the Fosse Style. Most of the arm movement in this style follows a general pattern of leading with the elbows then breaking through to the wrists and finally lengthening the hands. Positions such as Fosse arms, curved arms, arm drape and muscle arm are specific placements that were used by Fosse. Fosse revolutionized jazz dance with his unique arm placements. His trademarked arm placements have been continually used in jazz choreography since he first introduced them (43).

Fosse used the shoulders, hips, knees and feet as ways of isolating the movement of the body as well. These isolations are commonly paired with specific hand and arm positions or movement to create a distinct step in the Fosse Style.

The shoulders are commonly isolated in three different ways. Other than being relaxed and down, Bob Fosse would exaggerate the shoulders forward or backwards which would result in either a hunched, slouchy look or a look that leads with the chest and leans backwards. He also

would isolate the shoulder by either pulling the right or left shoulder up and having the other shoulder contrast by pushing downward. Isolating the shoulders in a way that moved away from proper posture was a new concept that Fosse introduced to jazz dance, one that inspired choreographers to play with posture more often (52).

The hips were isolated in a few distinct ways. Fosse would commonly have one arch their back, thus, pushing their hips and *derrière* back. He would also do the opposite and have one push their hips forward and thus tuck their *derrière* under and round their back. Additionally, he would have a dancer "sit" into a hip when posing thus putting more weight on one leg. Finally, he would have the dancer roll their hips in a circular motion and have it be completely isolated from the rest of the body meaning that the upper body does not circle with the hips. These hip isolations that Fosse is known for channeled sensuality much like burlesque dancing did. Choreographers did not use hips in this way before Fosse introduced it, yet because of Fosse, jazz dance was forever influenced (62).

Bob Fosse isolated the knees in an interesting way. He would commonly have the dancer turn their knees inward so that they were touching. Contrastingly, he was also known for having them turn their knees outward almost into a second *grandè pliè* position but with the feet closer together. Finally, he would have the knees bent extremely far, causing the dancer to shift their hips forward and "hinge" back. This position was commonly on forced arch too. Fosse's distinctive knee placement has inspired choreographers over the decades to explore new ways to use knees to change the level and appearance of traditional jazz moves (70).

The Fosse Style is infamous for the turned in feet position in a lot of its movement. Bob Fosse began using the turned in position simply because his body had a hard time turning

outward, thus, he choreographed for his own comfort. Fosse used this turned in position in many of his poses and also walks. The broken doll walk, for example, uses the turned in position as it travels with the broken doll arms. Before Fosse, choreographers never used turned in feet as it was an “improper” position yet Fosse revolutionized jazz dance by embracing the limitations of his body to create a trademarked position (*Biography-Bob Fosse*; McWaters 75).

Additionally, Fosse also varied his walks. He was known for the hip circle, sugars, sneakies, and hinged walk. These specific walks that Fosse created have been used endlessly by choreographers in the jazz world as they are a more exciting way for dancers to transition and travel while dancing (78).

In addition to these movements that are unique to Fosse, there are also some costume pieces that are distinct to him. Gloves, usually white, were commonly worn in Bob Fosse's pieces. Derbies, a kind of hat that is similar to a rounded top hat, is also commonly worn in Fosse works (15).

By creating distinctive and revolutionizing movement, Bob Fosse was able to not only revolutionize jazz dance in America as he explored isolations and movement that had never been considered, but he was able to leave a lasting mark on the dance world as many choreographers have continually turned to him for inspiration. Fosse's unique outlook on dance and his ability to create unconventional movement eventually allowed him to create his trademarked style that choreographers and dancers can forever recognize as the “Fosse style”.

## **Influence in Modern Times**

Clearly, Bob Fosse developed a very unique, innovative style that can be recognized as being specifically his. This distinct presence in the dance world did not end when Bob Fosse passed, but rather grew even stronger as it can be seen that he still influences many choreographers and artists in recent decades and today, specifically, Michael Jackson, Paula Abdul, the Pussycat Dolls, and Beyoncé.

Many people remember Michael Jackson's unique dance moves and style but what they don't know is that Bob Fosse influenced much of the "unique" style that Michael Jackson had. First, Michael Jackson was infamous for wearing one glove, commonly white, and using a hat similar to a derby. Both of these pieces were worn by Fosse's dancers decades before Michael Jackson debuted them. Secondly, many of the moves, such as the kick and spin, moonwalk, side snap, and hip thrust were seemingly distinct to Michael Jackson, but in studying the Fosse Style, it is evident that Fosse choreographed that movement first. Looking at Michael Jackson's "Smooth Criminal" music video, there are many moves that are clearly influence by Fosse. Michael Jackson does a specific slide with one knee inward and one elbow bent in on his chest while the other leg and arm are stretched outward. This pose is one commonly seen in Fosse's work as he commonly isolated the knees and used stances that had more weight on one leg than the other. Jackson also hits a position in which his feet and knees are turned inward and his hands are "splayed" with elbows outward. These positions are also some that are very distinct to the Fosse Style. Jackson also has back-up dancers standing in a leaning stance with one knees turned out and they are doing an isolated snap. This was a move commonly used by Fosse in his pieces. Michael Jackson also channels a "sneakie" walk when travelling up the stairs in this music video. This was a walk familiar to Fosse as he used it often. Also, Michael Jackson

commonly used the "teacup hand" when grabbing his hat, which is a move distinct to the Fosse Style. Additionally, this music video channels a bit of a burlesque club which Fosse found inspiration from as he performed at one when he was a young boy, thus, Jackson's choreography was influenced by Fosse's experience there. Based on the aforementioned examples, it is clear that Michael Jackson and his choreographer were greatly influenced by Bob Fosse's unique dance style ("Smooth Criminal").

Paula Abdul is another artist that has been influenced by Fosse's innovative style. Paula Abdul's "Cold Hearted" music video very much channels the "Take Off With Us" scene in Fosse's *All That Jazz*. Fosse had scaffolding as a prop, a band and "executives" in the "room", and the girls wore dance clothing and had hats similar to policemen attire. Paul Abdul had scaffolding, a band, executives, and costumes very similar, almost identical, to Fosse's original scene. Additionally, Paula Abdul performs many dance moves that were originally Fosse's. For example, she travels using "bicycle" walks which were a walk unique to Fosse and his style. She also uses both "splayed" hands in much of her movement. She uses a lot of hip isolations as she walks while rolling her hips, something Fosse was famous for putting in his pieces. Also, in the beginning of "Cold Hearted" one of the characters mentions that her dance is "a Bob Fosse kinda thing" which verbally confirms that Abdul's choreography was influenced by and was trying to channel Bob Fosse's style. Finally, she alluded to an underlying burlesque theme which as mentioned before, was a great inspiration in Fosse's work. Analyzing Paula Abdul's "Cold Hearted" it is evident she and her choreographer were greatly influenced by Bob Fosse and his style ("Cold Hearted"; "Take Off With Us").

The Pussycat Dolls' "Buttons" music video has one specific scene that channels Bob Fosse's "Big Spender" from *Sweet Charity*. In "Big Spender", there are a couple of times when

the women are all posed differently, somehow hanging on a bar that resembles a mobile ballet bar. The women are meant to look seductive while they melt into poses on this bar. Similarly, there is a scene in "Buttons" where the Pussycat Dolls melt into different poses while hanging on an almost identical bar. The Pussycat Dolls also do a lot of movement that includes hip isolations which is a big part of the Fosse style. Additionally, these girls are channeling a burlesque feel in their music video, something Fosse commonly channeled in his choreography. This sensuous scene was definitely influenced by Bob Fosse's "Big Spender" for the multiple aforementioned reasons ("Buttons"; "Big Spender").

Beyoncé has been greatly influenced by Bob Fosse. Her music video "Single Ladies (Put A Ring On It)" is very similar to Bob Fosse's "Mexican Breakfast". Not only does the background look similar in both videos but the movement is almost identical in some sections. For example, there is one part in "Mexican Breakfast" in which the three ladies arch their backs and then contract very quickly and they do this as they plié. In "Single Ladies (Put A Ring On It)", Beyoncé does the exact same movement. Also, there is a part in "Mexican Breakfast" where the girls run in a circle, following one another. This exact same movement happens in "Single Ladies (Put A Ring On It)". Additionally, much of Beyoncé's hip rolling channels Bob Fosse's hip rolling. Also, when Beyoncé does the chug sideways in which she switched feet and arms and flips her head up on every fourth chug, she is channeling Fosse's "sneakie" walks which were common in his choreography. Beyoncé is quoted in the United Kingdom's *The Sunday Times*, saying " 'I saw a video [Mexican Breakfast] on YouTube. [The dancers] had a plain background and it was shot on the crane; it was 360 degrees, they could move around. And I said, 'This is genius.' We kept a lot of the Fosse choreography and added the down-south thing — it's called J-Setting, where one person does something and the next person follows. So it was



a strange mixture ... It's like the most urban choreography, mixed with Fosse — very modern and very vintage". It is clear Beyoncé and her choreographer were influenced by Bob Fosse's distinct style (Simonson; "Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)"; "Mexican Breakfast").

## **Conclusion**

Studying jazz dance and the Fosse Style, it is clear that Bob Fosse was a hard-working, focused man whose ultimate goal of success and legacy was achieved. Analyzing four modern works created within the past couple of decades, it is clear that Bob Fosse's style has continually influenced the jazz style in America. He revolutionized jazz dance from a solely high energy, socially focused style with movement that was intricate in footwork to a style that takes advantage of all body has to offer including turned in feet, broken lines, and hunched shoulders. He developed a style that was considered unconventional at the time as it contrasted the "proper" and accepted movement of jazz dance. From isolations, to staging, to costuming, Bob Fosse created a distinct, innovative style that has inspired and influenced long passed his life and career. He created a legacy for himself as a man who changed the jazz style in America, forever influencing choreographers and artists.

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Appendix

<b>Arm drape</b>	the elbow is bent and the forearm resting on the top of the head with the fingers relaxed and relatively close together; this can be done with one or both arms
<b>Bicycle walks</b>	dancer steps with a flexed foot and lowly scuffs the other leg up, envelopéing it inward to a turned in possé position and then stepping and repeating with the other leg.
<b>Broken Doll Arms</b>	the elbows are drawn upward with the forearm hanging downward; a broken line that resembles a doll or puppet
<b>Curved arm</b>	the elbows and wrists are slightly bent forming a curved line from the shoulders to the fingertips; the arms are drawn back with fingertips pointing downward and forward
<b>Derby</b>	a hat commonly worn in the Fosse Style
<b>The Fist</b>	the fingers are clenched tightly inward toward the palm
<b>Fosse arms</b>	arms are positioned behind the back and move from side to side; elbows are bent and drawn in and backward; fingertips are soft yet the palm still mimics a flexed position; the movement moves through the elbows then breaks through the wrists and then the hands

<b>Hinged walks</b>	knees are bent, the hips tucked forward and under, and the back is "hinged" back; commonly done on forced arch with the shoulders back and hands hanging loosely behind
<b>Hip circles</b>	the dancer takes small steps and with each step, he/she circles his/her hips; commonly accompanied by an isolated snap
<b>Kick and Spin</b>	a move in which one kicks out one leg and then crosses it over the other to initiate a spin
<b>Muscle arm</b>	one has their arms at almost a shoulder level, with the elbow bent at a ninety degree angle and the hands commonly in a fist; a series of small punches can be done with the arms alternate the punching motion; fists are commonly at the eye level of the dancer
<b>Sneakies</b>	the dancer hunches the shoulders forward, has both knees bent and drags the foot that is not being stepped onto; knees are kept very close together during this movement
<b>"Soft-boiled-egg hands"</b>	hands consist of relaxed, partly bent fingers in which the thumb and the third or fourth finger slightly touch; the dancer often times walks and sways the hands back and forth behind the back while breaking the wrists, creating a wave like motion
<b>Splayed Fingers</b>	very similar to "jazz hands" as it is when the fingers are separated from one another and the hand is fully stretched; these hands can be rested on the hip bone or rib cage

**Sugars**

done on relevé with the knees turned out; dancer has both knees facing the same direction and with each step, the knees switch to the opposite side; hips slightly sway when walking

**Teacup fingers**

tips of the thumb and index finger touch while "splaying" the three remaining fingers; position is mainly as a way to hold a derby