

Composition 4

Doris Humphrey ~ The Art of Making Dances ~ Check List

- Symmetry is lifeless - symmetrical design always suggests, stability, repose, a passionless state, the condition before will and desire have begun to operate, or after these have subsided. Therefore it is never exciting, and if it is misused it will weaken the dance and result in tedium. Overuse of symmetry is not only naïve and unimaginative, but also very dull.
- Two-dimensional design is lifeless - Full dimensions must be used if the piece is to look warm and alive. Nothing dehumanizes movement so completely as the flat, linear design.
- The eye is faster than the ear - Movement must take the spotlight; it must not be repetitious or lazily lean on the music to carry it along.
- Movement looks slower and weaker on the stage - Distance weakens almost everything about the dance when it is transferred from a studio to a stage. Dynamics are not so strong, personalities are dimmer, and timing looks slower. The obvious remedy is to remember to compensate for the expected changes in the studio.
- All dances are too long
- A good ending is forty per cent of the dance - the ending is a highly important affair, which choreographers should worry about fully. We as individuals passionately long to be satisfied emotionally with our theatrical fare, and the supreme satisfaction is the final statement, the ending. When the last curtain comes down, we don't want to feel puzzled or at a loose ends or cheated; we want to be refreshed and stimulated enough so that we, too, can break into a release of physical action. (applause)
- Monotony is fatal; look for contrasts
- Don't be a slave to, or a mutilator of, the music - The dance should be related to, but not identical with, the music, because this is redundant - why say in a dance exactly what the composer has already stated in the music? The choreographer should be a great respecter of music. Arbitrary cutting and juggling of parts to suit his own convenience should not be tolerated. Also stopping short at an arbitrary point in the music where there is no cadence, or ending. These painful errors call for heavy doses of knowledge, taste and respect.
- Don't intellectualize; motivate movement - The intellectual approach to movement is out of place in an art which has, as its medium, movement of the human body. Movement should be motivated from feelings and emotions. Communication in terms of nonintellectualized movement seems to me the desirable goal.
- Don't leave the ending to the end - I strongly advise choreographers to consider and shape the end long before it is upon him. This will mitigate some of the disasters caused by vagueness of conception - lack of time, the ending that seems perfect in the end, but that is not right in practice. The end, a statement, a resolution, is a conception, which must be considered and decided on. This takes thinking. I would like to persuade choreographers to stop in the middle somewhere and spend many concentrated hours, if necessary, on the conceiving of, the shaping and redoing of the final statement.