

Timeline: Transnational History of Modern Dance
compiled by Susan Manning
for Reggie Wilson

- 1900 The Universal Exposition in Paris features Loie Fuller and Saddyakko, a Japanese dancer intent on modernizing traditional forms. In the audience are Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis, who each in her own way extends new possibilities for solo dancing. Duncan remains in Europe, while St. Denis returns to Europe for extensive solo tours from 1906 to 1909 before returning to the U.S. and later embarking on tours of Asia.
- 1910 Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, a composer and music educator, establishes a school at Hellerau, a model garden city near Dresden. Among the many influences on eurhythmics, Dalcroze's method for interrelating music and movement, are North African music and the example of Isadora Duncan, Grete Wiesenthal, and many other European proponents of "the art of the dance"—to quote Duncan's description of her innovations.
- 1912 Michio Ito, a Japanese artist inspired by seeing Nijinsky and Duncan perform in Paris, enrolls at Hellerau.
- 1912 Rudolf Laban, trained as a painter, opens a school in Munich to explore *Tanz-Ton-Wort* (dance-sound-word) and spends the summer at Monte Verita in the Swiss Alps, a center for life reform and artistic experimentation.
- 1913 Diaghilev's Ballets Russes premieres *The Rite of Spring/Le Sacre du Printemps* in Paris, with choreography by Vaslav Nijinsky, music by Igor Stravinsky, and design by Nikolai Roerich. Diaghilev and Nijinsky had visited Hellerau as part of the preparations for the work, and they hired Marie Rambert, a student at Hellerau, to assist Nijinsky in translating the complex rhythms of Stravinsky's score into movement.
- 1913 Mary Wigman, a recent graduate from Hellerau, joins Laban at Monte Verita.
- 1914 After World War I breaks out in Europe, Ito leaves Hellerau for London, Jaques-Dalcroze relocates his school to Switzerland, while Laban and Wigman remain in voluntary exile on Monte Verita and begin a four-year period of intensive collaboration on new principles for dance.
- 1915 Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn open the Denishawn School in Los Angeles.
- 1916 Ito dances in the premiere of William Butler Yeats's Noh-inspired play *At the Hawk's Well* in London and then emigrates to the U.S., where he establishes a concert career and becomes involved with the Little Theatre movement.

- 1917 Martha Graham enrolls at Denishawn and within a few seasons joins the Company. At Denishawn she meets Louis Horst, musical director of the company.
- 1920 Baruch Agadati, a Russian-Jewish immigrant to Palestine, presents the first modern dance concert in Tel Aviv, which he tours to Europe from 1924 to 1929; Agadati is also known for his paintings and films.
- 1920 Laban publishes *Die Welt des Tänzers* ("The World of the Dancer," a mystical manifesto that remains untranslated into English) and returns to Germany. Over the next decade he starts several companies and schools, develops his notation system, and promotes the amateur form of the *Bewegungschor* ("movement choir"). By 1927 there are 27 accredited Laban Schools across German-speaking Europe.
- 1920 Wigman also returns to Germany and establishes a school in Dresden. Within a few years she has trained a dance group, and she tours her solo and her group programs extensively throughout German-speaking Europe. By 1926 the Dresden School enrolls 360 students, several dozen of whom are full-time professional students following a rigorous three-year curriculum.
- 1923 Graham leaves Denishawn and makes her debut in the *Greenwich Village Follies*, performing Michio Ito's *The Garden of Kama* and Ted Shawn's *Serenata Morisca*.
- 1925 Gertrud Kraus makes her concert debut in Vienna to great acclaim. Kraus originally trained as a pianist, and it was while accompanying a dance improvisation class that she decided to take up dance. After studying and performing briefly with Gertrud Bodenwieser, she launched her independent career.
- 1925 Horst leaves Denishawn and spends six months studying musical composition in Vienna and seeing the new developments in German dance first-hand.
- 1926 Graham presents her first independent concert with three dancers, the start of her company and the start of her close association with Horst as musical collaborator and artistic mentor. Over the next decade her distinctive style and technique develop as she and her all-female company premiere new works twice a year in New York for small audiences of artists and intellectuals.
- 1927 Kurt Jooss, a student of Rudolf Laban, becomes Head of the Dance Department at the newly founded Folkwang School in Essen and establishes the Folkwang Tanztheater one year later.
- 1929 Ito relocates to Los Angeles, where he continues his concert career and stages large-scale pageants at the Hollywood Bowl.

- 1929 Laban choreographs a large-scale festival in Vienna that highlights local crafts and industries; he hires Gertrud Kraus as a rehearsal assistant.
- 1930 Third Dancers Congress is held in Munich, drawing more than 1000 participants and featuring works by modern dancers from across Europe, including Gertrud Kraus's work *Song of the Ghetto*.
- 1930 Laban is appointed movement director and balletmaster at the Municipal Opera in Berlin, his first position as a public employee rather than free-lance artist and teacher.
- 1930 In December Wigman embarks on the first of two highly successful solo tours tour of the United States. (A group tour in 1932-33 is less successful.) Her performances galvanize the New York dance world, and John Martin lauds her as a creator of "modern dance," a term he defines at a series of lectures at the New School of Social Research in 1931-32, published in book form in 1933.
- 1931 Graham premieres *Primitive Mysteries*, inspired by trips to the Southwest where she observed dances by the Pueblo Indians.
- 1931 Hemsley Winfield and Edna Guy present their choreography in what they call "The First Negro Dance Recital in America." Winfield had worked in the Little Theatre movement in Harlem and in Greenwich Village, and Guy had studied with Ruth St. Denis while also working as her maid.
- 1931 In Chicago Katherine Dunham, then a student at the University of Chicago, envisions a company called *Ballet Nègre* with the support of Mark Turbyfill, then a dancer and later a poet, and Ludmilla Speranzeva, a Russian immigrant who taught ballet and mime. The company presents one concert, then folds.
- 1931 The success of Wigman's tour lead her impresario Sol Hurok to underwrite the founding of a New York branch of the Mary Wigman School, headed by Hanya Holm.
- 1931 Gertrud Kraus and her company tour Palestine and return again in 1933, when she stages a large-scale outdoor pageant in the tradition of Laban's "movement choirs."
- 1932 Zora Neale Hurston presents *The Great Day*, her adaptation of Bahamian dances and folklore that dramatized a day in a Florida work camp; Hurston was dedicated to creating what she called "A Real Negro Theatre."
- 1932 The New Dance Group, a collective, is founded by students at the Hanya Holm Studio; the Group takes a leading role in the burgeoning leftist dance movement [Note: One of the founders was Fe Alf, a Wigman student who assisted Holm

- during the early years of the school; Alf was the mother of Lynne Blom, who later taught Reggie Wilson at a Northwestern program for high-school students in 1984.]
- 1932 Jooss's *The Green Table* wins first place at a choreographic competition in Paris; there are no American choreographers among the 20 contestants.
- 1933 The success of *The Green Table* enables Jooss to leave his position at Folkwang and begin intensive touring, including to the U.S. in November. By this time his company has gone into exile, because Jooss refused to dismiss his Jewish composer Fritz Cohen. Between tours, the company takes up residence at Dartington Hall, a model farm and arts school in Great Britain. Not until after World War II is *The Green Table* performed again in Germany.
- 1933 At the Chicago World's Fair Katherine Dunham stars in Ruth Page's *La Guiablesse*, staged to music by William Grant Still and based on a Martinican folktale; the plot turns on a "She-Devil" (Page) luring a young woman (Dunham) away from her beloved.
- 1934 The Bennington Summer School of the Dance is founded and elevates Graham, Holm, Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman to leading positions in the emergent movement of American modern dance
- 1934 Zora Neale Hurston presents a version of her earlier concert in Chicago under the title *Singing Steel*. Katherine Dunham loans her rehearsal space and later admits that she was quite jealous of how easily Hurston mingled with Melville Herskovits and other anthropologists who attended the concert.
- 1934 Asadata Dafora, an immigrant from Sierra Leone, stages *Kykunkor*, what he calls a "native African opera" to great acclaim in New York. The work dramatizes how a Witch Woman casts a spell on an engaged couple, a spell broken by a Witch Doctor. (Dafora takes the role of the Bridegroom.)
- 1934 Laban is appointed Director of the German Dance Stage by the National Socialists. Wigman alters the curriculum of her school in accord with Nazi directives.
- 1935 Gertrud Kraus emigrates to Palestine, opens a school and founds a company in Tel Aviv. Under her impact, Ausdruckstanz (as German modern dance was known) becomes the most significant influence on younger modern dancers in Palestine.
- 1935 In the U.S. the Workers Dance League is renamed the New Dance League, signaling the embrace of the Popular Front by the American Communist Party.
- 1935 Dunham travels to the Caribbean to undertake ethnographic fieldwork,

- supervised by Melville Herskovits. A few years after her return in 1936, she submits a master's thesis titled "Dances of Haiti: Their Social Organization, Classification, Form, and Function" to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago.
- 1936 The New Deal launches the Federal Dance Project under the auspices of the Federal Theatre Project, an initiative that absorbs many of the dancers committed to the left. Indeed, participants' leftist politics leads to the Dies Committee hearings in 1939, which abolish the Federal Theatre Project as part of a deal Roosevelt strikes to save the WPA.
- 1936 The Olympic Games take place in Berlin, with the involvement of Laban, Wigman, Kreutzberg, Palucca, and other leading German modern dancers. The dance festival associated with the Games is boycotted by Martha Graham, who refuses the invitation to participate in solidarity with her Jewish dancers. Leftist dancers in the U.S. protest Holm's affiliation with Wigman, and Holm responds by changing the name of her school to the Hanya Holm Studio.
- 1936 Kazuo Ohno, inspired by a touring performance of German dancer Harald Kreutzberg in 1934, seeks out Takaya Eguchi as a teacher. Eguchi had studied with Wigman in Germany and had brought back her techniques to Japan.
- 1937 Edna Guy and Allison Burroughs organize a "Negro Dance Evening" at the 92nd Street YHMA, with works by both along with works by Katherine Dunham, Asadata Dafora, and Clarence Yates. The program order suggests a commitment to leftist politics, which not all spectators recognize.
- 1938 Dunham choreographs *L'Ag'Ya* for the Federal Theatre Project in Chicago: the plot turns on the attempt of Julot to use sorcery to estrange Loulouse (Dunham) from her beloved Alcide. At the end Alcide defeats Julot in a martial arts dance, the *l'ag'ya* which Dunham had observed during her fieldwork in the Caribbean.
- 1938 Graham premieres *American Document* at Bennington, her first work to cast a male dancer, Erick Hawkins, and her first work to tour nationally. Anticipating the theatrical turn of Graham's later works, the dance is framed as "minstrel show" and features spoken excerpts from the Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Proclamation, and Roosevelt's Second Inaugural Address.
- 1938 Laban leaves Germany and emigrates to Britain, where he takes refuge with Kurt Jooss at Dartington Hall.
- 1939 Alvin Nikolais co-creates *Eight Column Lines* with his teacher Truda Kaschmann, a German-Jewish immigrant who had studied with Wigman and Laban. Nikolais had seen Wigman on her 1933 tour and had studied with Hanya Holm at Bennington from 1937 to 1939.

- 1940 Dunham moves to New York and her company program *Tropics and Le Jazz "Hot"* becomes a sensation and launches Dunham on a cross-country tour, engagements on Broadway and in Hollywood.
- 1942 Wigman's farewell performance is filmed by the National Socialists.
- 1942 The Jooss Company disbands on tour to Chile. Leading dancers Ernst Uthoff, Lola Botka, and Rudolf Pescht remain in Santiago and create the Chilean National Ballet.
- 1942 Ito, after his internment as an "enemy alien," returns to Japan and there encounters Kazuo Ohno and Tetsuro Hijikata, both of whom had studied German modern dance techniques with Japanese disciples of Wigman and later create Butoh.
- 1942 In *Dust Tracks on a Road* Hurston writes that Dunham popularized the concert format that she herself had innovated.
- 1944 The Graham Company first appears on Broadway and premieres *Appalachian Spring*. Yuriko, who was interned as a Japanese American in 1942-43, joins the company. From this point, the company draws increasingly large audiences.
- 1947 The Dunham Company embarks on the first of many international tours, which continue through the early 1960s
- 1948 After a break from his artistic career for army service, Alvin Nikolais takes a teaching position at the Henry Street Settlement. One of his first students is Phyllis Lamhut, who performs with his company from 1948 to 1969, as Nikolais develops his mature choreographic style. Lamhut later becomes a teacher and mentor to Reggie Wilson.
- 1949 The year after Israel is founded, Gertrud Kraus travels to the U.S. to see new developments in modern dance and realizes that the codified vocabularies of American modern dance have displaced the improvisational methods of Ausdruckstanz.
- 1949 Jooss returns to West Germany and resumes directorship of the Dance Department at the Folkwang School. His students there include Pina Bausch, Susanne Linke, and Reinhild Hoffmann, all of whom go on to play leading roles in the emergence of *Tanztheater* ("dance theatre") in the 1970s and 1980s.
- 1956 The Graham company makes its first tour of Israel.
- 1962 Anna Sokolow creates the Lyric Theatre in Israel, which lasts for two seasons.
- 1964 Batsheva is founded, supported by Bethsabée de Rothschild and Martha Graham.

1965 Dunham retires from performing and settles in East Saint Louis to pursue arts as a means for community development.

1966 Dunham attends the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar.

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