

THE AILEY SCHOOL

OFFICIAL SCHOOL OF ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

PROFESSIONAL DIVISION SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

The Scholarship Program curriculum offers 12-15 dance technique, somatic, dance academics, and creative classes per week.

DANCE COURSES: TECHNIQUE, SOMATIC, AND PERFORMANCE

BALLET – Melanie Person, Chairperson

Ballet II

Simple basic exercises begin at the barre. These exercises develop the muscles of the legs, their turn-out, extension and plié as well as their coordination with the torso, arms and head. In addition, elementary movement coordination is taught as well as the proper distribution of body weight over both legs and on one leg; mastery of the positions of the feet and arms are focused on intently. Concepts of en dedans, en dehors, demi-pointe on both legs and one leg are also introduced. Transition steps such as glissade, pas de bourré, soutenu, etc. are mastered at this level. Simple jumps are done in the center. Short combinations with long jumps and waltz steps, pas de bourrées are done across the floor.

Ballet III

Exercises done at the barre develop greater speed, strength, flexibility and coordination of the legs, torso, arms and head. More of the barre-work is done on demi-pointe for increased strength and balance. Stretches are given to develop increased flexibility in the hips and legs for higher extensions and better turn out. The basic ballet directions are taught in the center. Simple jump combinations are taught and reversed and include simple beats. Pirouettes in the basic positions are mastered. Big jumps traveling across the floor focus on covering space.

Ballet IV

This level develops strength and flexibility with the execution of more complicated combinations at the barre and in the center. Students must be able to change and use different dynamics of movement and attack in the legs and feet. Barre-work involves quick changes of direction, quick weight changes from one leg to the other and more sustained adagios. Balances in different positions are important additions to the end of each combination. Center work includes adagios with rises on demi-pointe, promenades and slow controlled pirouettes. Petit allegro incorporates beats and directional changes using épaulement. Grand allegro requires students to be able to execute grand jeté en tournant, saut de chat, saut de basque and other expansive jumps that challenge their strength and stamina and allow them to enjoy moving through space.

Ballet V

This advanced intermediate level is for students who are ready to experience the full range of exercises that require larger, more expansive movements that test their strength and stability. Higher extensions, multiple pirouettes, petit allegro with batterie, grand allegro and quick transfer of weight and the power of the legs and body are emphasized.

Ballet VI

This advanced level develops a refinement of the work of the feet, legs, arms and head at the barre. Exercises that build higher extensions and increased turn out are given with varying rhythms. Adagios are done at a slow tempo for control and strength; in contrast, very fast exercises develop speed and precision. More stretching develops greater suppleness and ease of movement. Complicated small jumps with beats, multiple turns, changes in direction and coordination of the feet, arms and head are emphasized in the center work. Longer adagios demand high extensions, big pirouettes, balance and musicality. Long grand allegro combinations with big jumps and turns build strength, stamina and power for the men. Women do pointe work in the center and traveling in big combinations across the floor. At this level, artistry and musicality are emphasized.

Ballet VII

Ballet seven is a springboard to the professional dance career. The class is kept small which allows the selected students to receive personal coaching. The standard is raised in all aspects of dancing. Students at this highest level have achieved a high level of mastery of the execution of the ballet technique, placement and alignment. Students work to further advance their technical abilities, with a strong emphasis on artistic and performance achievement. This level continues to develop the refinement of the work of the feet, legs, arms and head at the barre. The finer points of technique are emphasized to highlight the quality of movement as a platform for artistic expression. Center work combinations are intricate in terms of sequence, musicality and execution of the steps. Students are challenged with more difficult choreography and dance to a wider range of music. As the students work to improve and polish their technique, they are encouraged to mentally prepare themselves to cope with the rigorous demands of a professional career. Pointe work is introduced for women at the end of class.

Men's Ballet (beg.)

These classes build the strength, stamina and technical skills needed by male dancers. There is a strong emphasis on alignment, strength and coordination. In all classes, barre-work focuses on alignment, balance, strength and flexibility with a focus on basic and fundamental principles of alignment, use of plie, use of feet and port de bras. Beginning classes offer an introduction to the turning technique. Emphasis is placed on the development of ballon to increase elevation in jumps.

Minimum level requirements: Ballet III and IV men

Men's Ballet (int./advanced)

This class builds strength, stamina, and technical skills needed today by male dancers. Barre-work focuses on alignment, balance, strength and flexibility. In intermediate and advanced classes, center combinations build to multiple grand pirouettes, increased elevation and jumps with batterie. Combinations across the floor emphasize grand allegro and the ability to cover space.

Minimum level requirements: Ballet V, VI, and VII men

Pointe (beg.)

Exercises at the barre build strength, articulation and flexibility in the feet and legs while developing the ability to control the balance on pointe. Center work follows with short adagio work for control and balance. Small jumps in the center prepare for traveling combinations across the floor.

Minimum level requirements: Ballet IV, V, VI, and VII women

Pointe (int.)

More complex exercises at the barre build increased strength, articulation and flexibility in the feet, legs, and torso. Longer adagio work at the barre and in the center develops extensions, control, balance, and turns. Small jumps with beats and pointe work in the center are followed by longer traveling combinations that develop expressiveness and musicality while building greater technical skills.

Minimum level requirements: Ballet V women

Pointe (adv.)

At the advanced level, there is a strong emphasis on the refinement of the technique. Ballet barre en pointe stresses transfer of weight and balances to build increased strength in the feet, turnout in the legs and core strength. Center work includes more complex combinations including pirouettes in open positions. At this level, a dancer should be able to execute allegro movements en pointe with sharpness and attack, and adagio movements with softness and fluidity. Variations from the classical repertoire are learned and virtuosity en pointe is developed.

Minimum level requirements: Ballet VI and VII women

Ballet Partnering (beginning and intermediate)

Working together as one is the essence of partnering. It is the technique of lifts, supported turns and balances. It involves a cohesive physical communication between two people that emulates the design of the choreographer. Partners must execute all movements with coordination to create a fluid design; the hand movements of the male are essential to facilitate his partner's execution. These partnering classes include movements both from traditional ballet choreography as well as contemporary works.

Minimum level requirements: Beginning Partnering - Men in Men's Ballet (beg.) and Ballet III & IV; Women in Ballet V who take intermediate pointe

Minimum level requirements: Intermediate Partnering - Men in Men's Ballet (int.) and Ballet V, VI & VII; Women in Ballet VI & VII who take intermediate or advanced pointe

Barre a Terre (all levels)

A supplemental class for intermediate and advanced students, this class develops in the student a balance of strength, flexibility and endurance. Work on placement and alignment is done while lying on the floor, using both turned out and parallel positions. Instruction is given on the proper use of energy as a means to lengthen muscles and freeing the body from improper tension. Injury prevention and the maintenance of a healthy body are focused on intently. Specific Pilates based exercises are taught that accelerate the training process. Work in turned-out positions and the elongation of muscles through proper use of breath and energy are some of the basic components of this class. The last half-hour of class is a standing barre that requires the students to apply their experiences from the floor-work. Depending on the class size, additional work may involve specific coaching based on each dancer's needs and challenges.

MODERN TECHNIQUES

GRAHAM-BASED MODERN – Jacquelyn Buglisi, Chairperson

Required course

Modern I

This introductory class in Graham-based Modern technique teaches the basic vocabulary rooted in the contraction and release for advanced beginners. This technique divides the class into 3 equal segments: floor-work, standing work in the center and combinations that travel across the floor. The floor-work develops a strong expressive torso as the source of movement with simple breathing exercises that build to contraction and release exercises in various positions. The spiral position of the back leads into turns around the back in 4th position, adding the legs with the back leg extension series. Standing exercises in the center emphasize the use of the leg and the coordination of the legs, arms and torso with the contraction and release and oppositional spiral of the torso in relation to the legs. Short combinations in the center and across the floor focus on covering space and shifting weight.

Modern II

The floor-work becomes more complex with lengthier exercises that emphasize the drama of the contraction and release and spiral of the back. The use of the legs and arms from the back is emphasized as an extension of the torso, neck and head. In 4th position, a coiling of the body's weight into the center in preparation for standing is developed. Standing work in the center develops the ability to shift the weight and work off center. More complicated traveling combinations incorporate the contraction and release, spiral, jumps and moving fully with weight, power, and dynamic changes.

Modern III

This level continues to build strength with an awareness of the torso as the center and initiator of all movement. Spiral, contraction and release exercises become longer and more complex, using the legs more often. Opposition and weight shifts are emphasized, building a stronger movement vocabulary, increased dynamic range and more control. The weight of the body is further explored in primary falling combinations from sitting positions and the knees. Standing work in the center develops more stamina, balance, control, flexibility and expanded sense of movement through extended combinations with contraction and release, leg extensions, plié series and shifts of weight. The centering of the body is heightened with falls to the floor from standing positions off center and pitch turns. Elevation in jumps is emphasized. Longer traveling combinations often use difficult rhythms and contracting spirals along with more complicated movement phrases that call for dramatic expressiveness, use of weight and musicality.

Modern IV

Technical skills are honed at this advanced professional level. Breathing, a gathering and releasing of tension is heightened, increasing versatility in the work. Phrases of movement are emphasized throughout the floor-work. More complicated, longer combinations in the center build control and balance while working on and off center. Leg extensions are higher and the full integration of the legs, arms and head with the torso as the center and the catalyst of all movement is achieved. The body now moves as a whole, not as individual parts. There is no longer a separation of the floor, standing and traveling work, but all are combined in lengthy combinations as an expressive, dramatic, and technically advanced vocabulary. Performance skills are coached, particularly the dramatic expression of the individual.

Modern Partnering (int.)

The modern partnering class begins with a thorough and nontraditional warm-up that focuses on alignment, timing, energy flow, and complex coordinative skills. The class also emphasizes musicality, dynamic range, and focus in terms of working with a partner and develops in each student the sensitivity of give and take with that partner. Numerous movement themes are explored during the class to culminate each session with a final partnering phrase.

Minimum level requirements: Modern II, III, IV or Horton II, III, IV

HORTON TECHNIQUE – Ana Marie Forsythe, Chairperson

Required course

Horton I

This beginning level for advanced beginners lays the groundwork for all that follows in the advanced levels. The basic warm up is taught: flat backs, primitive squat, descent and ascent, lateral stretches, release swings, leg swings and deep lunges. The shapes that will be used throughout the training in Horton technique are emphasized: the T positions, stag position, cross lunge and coccyx balance. The Horton technique was designed with studies to stretch and strengthen different areas of the body. Many of the beginning level studies which are taught focus on the Achilles tendon, the abdominal muscles, and movements that lengthen the spine and the hamstring muscles. Simple combinations of movements that include turns and jumps are taught to introduce musicality and dynamics to the beginning dancer's vocabulary. Performance qualities are emphasized at the very beginning of the dancer's training.

Horton II

This level uses the basic Horton warm-up with more variations. Many of the positions and shapes developed earlier are used in turns, jumps and in combinations of movement. More demanding studies are added which require more stretch and strength in the quadriceps and abdominal muscles. Hinges at the barre and falls are included in this level. The movements across the floor are longer and require more concentration and focus from the dancers. The introduction of canons and rhythmical patterns are stressed as well as the development of dynamics and projection.

Horton III

The warm-up in this level includes exercises to stretch and strengthen the legs, hips and spine. The center floor-work includes longer studies like the Figure 4 and Percussive Stroke Studies which require the dancers to remember long sequences of movements, counts and dynamics. The combinations of movements across the floor are more complicated musically and technically and challenge the dancers to learn movement quickly. The combinations include material just introduced as well as vocabulary learned in the other levels. The performance aspects of dance are emphasized.

Horton IV

The warm-up now includes a long study, Dimensional Tonus, which incorporates many aspects of the warm-up into a complicated and demanding dance phrase. The center and floor work use hinges and falls with more frequency and the combinations of movements are long, sophisticated movement phrases that require strength, speed and flexibility. Individualized coaching on performance and technique is given at this advanced/professional level.

Taylor-based Modern – Carolyn Adams, Chairperson

Elective course

The Taylor technique, though less codified than some others, is still a technique. Although some aspects have their roots in the Graham technique through the use of weight and polarity, the Taylor technique differs in that it reflects the influence of aquatics and classical ballet. As a swimmer, Mr. Taylor's use of space is related to non-dramatic, aerodynamic resistance. The contraction is frequently used for propulsion around the space, as opposed to around the spine. Taylor classes are essentially built around deconstruction of the Taylor repertory, beginning with whole body movements in a standing position, often moving through space prior to floor work. Floor work, including abdominal and other core strengthening exercises, stress the integration of limbs and torso.

The standing portion of the class includes leg strengthening exercises such as plies, tendus, both parallel and turned out, brushes, degagees, developpees, battements, adagio, both on and off center and with and without level change, contraction, spiral, or curve. The classical terminology is used to define leg and arm movements, while core movements are described through spatial imagery. Also inherent in Taylor technique is formalization of the natural rhythmic and visual syncopation (asymmetry) of the body with the shifting of weight. As students progress in the technique, over time, the complexity of direct and indirect movements and gesture is intensified, use of space and direction change become more intricate, and speed increases.

JAZZ AND HIP HOP – Holly Wright, Chairperson

Minimum level requirements: *Students in ballet II and III may take Jazz II; Students in ballet III may take Hip Hop; Students in ballet IV may take Jazz III and Hip Hop.*

Jazz II

This class for advanced beginners begins with a standing warm-up that develops the body's proper alignment, flexibility and control. Exercises follow that isolate the different parts of the body and develop increasingly complex coordination of the arms, head and legs. Longer combinations that emphasize expressiveness in lyrical and dynamic Broadway styles are given in the center and across the floor.

Jazz III

This intermediate/advanced level begins with a fast-paced standing warm-up that emphasizes proper placement, increased flexibility and control. Isolation exercises and short combinations focusing on extensions and turns are done in the center. Long sections of jazz choreography in contrasting styles are given in the center and across the floor. Students are coached on performance skills (focus, dynamic contrast, musicality, etc.).

ELECTIVES

Contemporary

This intermediate level class explores traditional modern dance and ballet concepts, yoga, and athletic training, as they relate to approaching current contemporary dance.

The warm up begins on the floor as a means of opening the spine, backs of the legs, and abdominals. A series of yoga poses are used as a transition to stand. Center work fusing both modern and ballet is designed to improve harmony of movement.

The class will focus on alignment, form, nuanced execution and artistry, as well as explore various contemporary styles. Emphasis is on personal artistic expression, musicality, strength, physical coordination and flexibility.

Dunham II

Barre-work is more complex and intense, building increased strength and stamina, particularly in the back and legs for advanced beginners. Exercises done at the barre and in the center emphasize balance, control and flexibility of the body. Longer combinations are done throughout the class and particularly with progressions across the floor, which include more jumps and turns. Live drumming accompanies this Afro-Caribbean technique class.

West African Dance

This class for beginners brings together body, mind and spirit in an energetic union of music, dance and oral tradition of the people of West Africa. Students are taught regional songs and dances of welcome and praise such as; Lamban (Dance of Celebration), Mandjani (Challenge Dance), and Wolo Sodon Jon Don (Dance of Becoming Free). Each dance is accompanied by live drumming to provide students with an understanding of the relationship between the dance and musician and the common language they must speak in order to execute an African Dance style.

Tap

An approach to tap dance that incorporates four instructional components: *first*, students learn a series of exercises at the barre to strengthen the arches and heels of the feet; *second*, a series of rhythm sequences are done that use syncopation, double and triple timing, hand claps, finger snaps and long breaks; *third*, students begin to learn simple choreography based on exercises learned at the barre. Accompanied by music, students are encouraged to use all parts of their bodies and to develop more complex technical skills while tapping. Last, through a series of progressions, students learn to use the entire space of the room. Exercises are combined into short combinations travelling forwards, backwards, and side to side across the floor.

Body Conditioning

Required of beginning students, this class is based on the Pilates exercise method of mind/body 'controllogy'. The emphasis is on alignment, placement, posture, and injury prevention. The class is conducted without music, utilizing rhythmical repetitions and flowing movements. Concentration on body awareness, anatomy, correct body usage and breath control result in a strong, toned and fully functioning body.

Yoga I

This Anusara yoga-based class for beginners provides an understanding of basic breathing exercises and synchronized breath with movement. It increases the body's overall flexibility and strength through a series of seated kneeling, lying and standing exercises that relate the Yoga basics with fundamentals of dance to develop a sense of balance, control, symmetry and line. It develops the student's ability to unlock spinal energy blocks and open the central nervous system through arching, curling, lateral, twisting, and circular movements of the spine. It prepares the musculature and ligamental attachments for increased flexibility and strength particularly in the hips, shoulders, and chest. Most importantly, it provides an opportunity for each student to examine and maximize his or her own unique potential as a creative and dancer in life. Fall term

Yoga I/II

This class takes the basic movements taught in Yoga I and develops them into a more fluid series that further increases the strength and flexibility already achieved in the body. It develops a sense of creativity and freedom in the body that further relates this particular system of Yoga to dance in all of its aspects. It endorses each student's responsibility to and for him/himself as artist, performer, and person. Spring term

Gyrokinesis®

Gyrokinesis® is an exercise movement developed by Juliu Horvath, a professional dancer who developed a system of exercises that helped repair injuries he had sustained as a dancer. This exercise system is based on fluid movements that offer similar physical benefits of yoga, dance, and swimming, though it is not based on these or other specific exercise models. Gyrokinesis® exercises are designed to work the entire body through spinal movement and joint articulation. Based on the body's natural ability to move forward and backward and side to side, the movements are designed to be rhythmic and fluid. Rather than specific postures of stances being held for long periods of time, Gyrokinesis® exercises are smoothly integrated, seeming more like dance than traditional yoga. Natural breathing patterns are also incorporated into Gyrokinesis® exercises.

PERFORMANCE COURSES

Repertory Workshops and Artist-in-Residence Workshops

Repertory workshops are given throughout the year by a diverse group of Ailey School faculty members and guest artists to offer performance opportunities to intermediate and advanced students. The choreographers create original works and mount existing works on dancers who are chosen by audition. Artist-in-Residence (AIR) Workshops bring renowned dance artists from the profession to share their various areas of expertise with students of The Ailey School. They represent a range of aesthetics from masters like Alvin Ailey, Paul Taylor and Robert Battle, to more contemporary and emerging artists like Ron K. Brown, Ray Mercer, and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater members Matthew Rushing and Kirven Douthit-Boyd. These workshops offer supplementary technique training, creative work, and the opportunity to learn and perform original and classical dance repertory. Students rehearse for 4-8 weeks and perform the works in the School's Ailey Citigroup Theater and in studio performances throughout the year and during the summer. AIR Workshops culminate in the School's Spring Gala held in a New York City theater.

CREATIVE STUDIES

Improvisation

This course is structured to free expression, investigate form, and heighten concentration. Structured dance improvisational problems are given to lead the student to simultaneously invent and perform movement without pre-planning. Each class includes a brief warm-up followed by many different and changing forms - group movement, solos, trios and contact improvisation which begins with duets. Emphasis is placed on the development in each student of a heightened sensitivity and conscientiousness about the creative impulse. Personal movement style and habits and the role of improvisation in both performance and the creative process are thoroughly explored.