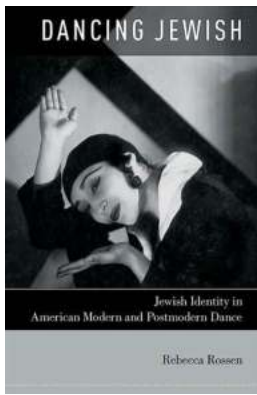


# **The Eternal Harmony: Jewish Identity Explored in American Modern and Postmodern Dance**

Throughout history, dance has been a powerful tool for expressing cultural identities and exploring the human experience. From traditional folk dances to contemporary innovations, dance can serve as a medium for storytelling, self-expression, and preservation of heritage. In the realm of American modern and postmodern dance, Jewish artists have made significant contributions, shaping the artistic landscape and showcasing the richness of their cultural identity.



For centuries, Jews have faced discrimination and marginalization, forced to adapt and navigate complex social landscapes. However, rather than losing their identity, Jewish artists have used dance as a platform to celebrate their heritage, challenge stereotypes, and highlight the struggles and triumphs of the Jewish experience.



## Dancing Jewish: Jewish Identity in American Modern and Postmodern Dance

by Troy Anthony Platt (1st Edition, Kindle Edition)

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 43799 KB

Print length : 336 pages

Lending : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported



### An Artistic Revolution

The emergence of American modern dance in the early 20th century provided a space for artists to break free from traditional forms and express themselves authentically. Jewish choreographers such as Martha Graham, Anna Sokolow, and Lester Horton embraced this artistic revolution, infusing their works with Jewish themes and narratives.

Martha Graham, one of the pioneers of modern dance, explored themes of spirituality, suffering, and redemption in her choreography. Raised in a Jewish household, Graham incorporated Jewish rituals and symbolism into her dances, creating a sense of connection and continuity with her heritage. Her iconic piece, "Chronicle," which premiered in 1936, was a response to the rise of fascism and persecution of Jews in Europe.

Anna Sokolow, another influential Jewish choreographer, played a vital role in shaping the development of American postmodern dance. Sokolow's works foregrounded human struggles, examining themes of displacement, injustice, and

the aftermath of the Holocaust. She once stated, "I have always seen my work as a search for Jewish meaning carried on within the dance idiom."

## **Reviving Jewish Traditions**

While some Jewish artists incorporated their heritage thematically into their works, others took a more overt approach by creating dances rooted in Jewish folk traditions. In the 1960s and 70s, a wave of Jewish choreographers emerged, seeking to revive and reinvent Jewish dance practices.

One of the most notable figures in this movement was Gertrude Kurath. Born into a Jewish family, Kurath dedicated her career to researching and preserving Yiddish dances. Her work served as a bridge between the old world and the new, ensuring that Jewish dance traditions were not forgotten.

The ultimate embodiment of this revival was seen in the establishment of the Israeli contemporary dance scene. In the late 20th century, numerous Jewish artists flocked to Israel, seeking to reconnect with their roots and contribute to the burgeoning artistic landscape. By fusing traditional Jewish music and movements with contemporary techniques, Israeli choreographers were able to create a unique dance form that embodies Jewish heritage while embracing modernity.

## **Breaking Boundaries, Building Bridges**

Jewish dancers in America have not only explored their own cultural identity but have also strived to transcend boundaries and build connections with other communities. They have used dance as a means of advocating for social justice, combating prejudice, and fostering dialogue.

Alvin Ailey, a renowned African-American choreographer, incorporated Jewish motifs and characters in his works. His iconic piece, "The River," explored the

themes of liberation and rebirth using Jewish biblical stories as a framework. Through this fusion of cultural narratives, Ailey created a powerful commentary on the shared human experience.

The groundbreaking dance company, Pilobolus, founded by a group of Dartmouth College students, showcased the diverse talents of its members, including a Jewish dancer. By featuring dancers from various backgrounds, Pilobolus aimed to break down barriers and challenge stereotypes, promoting inclusivity and understanding.

## **Looking Towards the Future**

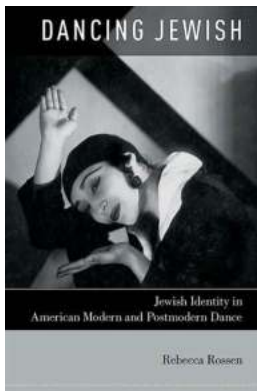
The influence of Jewish identity on American modern and postmodern dance continues to evolve. Today, new generations of Jewish choreographers explore innovative ways to reimagine traditional practices while incorporating contemporary elements.

Artists like Ohad Naharin and Mark Morris continue to push boundaries, creating dance works that reflect their Jewish heritage while challenging societal norms. They take inspiration from their roots, infusing their choreography with a sense of spirituality, resilience, and cultural pride.

In a world where cultural diversity is celebrated, Jewish dancers have made their mark by embracing their identity and using their art form to foster connections and promote understanding. Through their works, they highlight the universal threads that bind us together, reminding us that identity is not confined to one culture or religion, but rather a tapestry woven from the vast human experience.

**In**

Jewish identity in American modern and postmodern dance is a rich tapestry interwoven with themes of heritage, resistance, and dialogue. Jewish choreographers have used dance as a medium for self-expression, celebrating their heritage, and advocating for social justice. By embracing their identity and reaching across cultural boundaries, they have contributed to the artistic landscape of America, enriching it with their unique perspectives and narratives.



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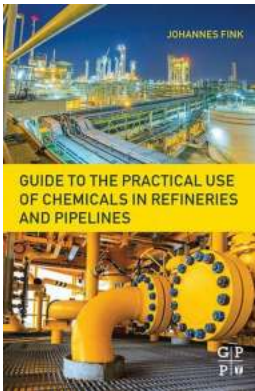
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While Jews are commonly referred to as the "people of the book," American Jewish choreographers have consistently turned to dance as a means to articulate personal and collective identities; tangle with stereotypes; advance social and political agendas; and imagine new possibilities for themselves as individuals, artists, and Jews. *Dancing Jewish* delineates this rich history, demonstrating that Jewish choreographers have not only been vital contributors to American modern and postmodern dance, but that they have also played a critical and unacknowledged role in the history of Jews in the United States.

A dancer and choreographer, as well as an historian, author Rebecca Rossen offers evocative analyses of dances while asserting the importance of embodied methodologies to academic research. Featuring over fifty images, a companion

website, and key works from 1930 to 2005 by a wide range of artists - including David Dorfman, Dan Froot, David Gordon, Hadassah, Margaret Jenkins, Pauline Koner, Dvora Lapson, Liz Lerman, Sophie Maslow, Anna Sokolow, and Benjamin Zemach - *Dancing Jewish* offers a comprehensive framework for interpreting performance and establishes dance as a crucial site in which American Jews have grappled with cultural belonging, personal and collective histories, and the values that bind and pull them apart.



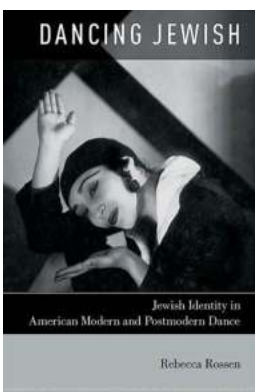
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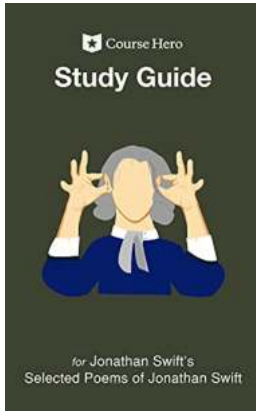
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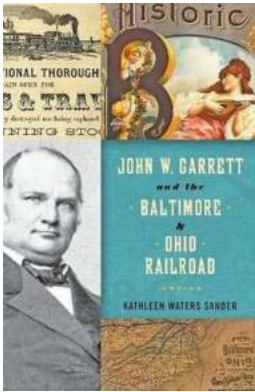
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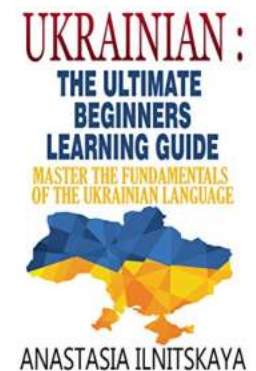
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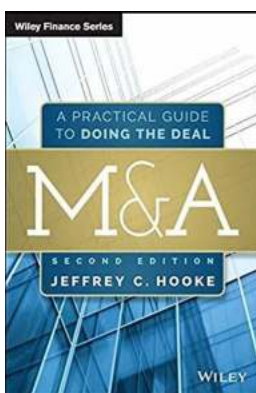
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