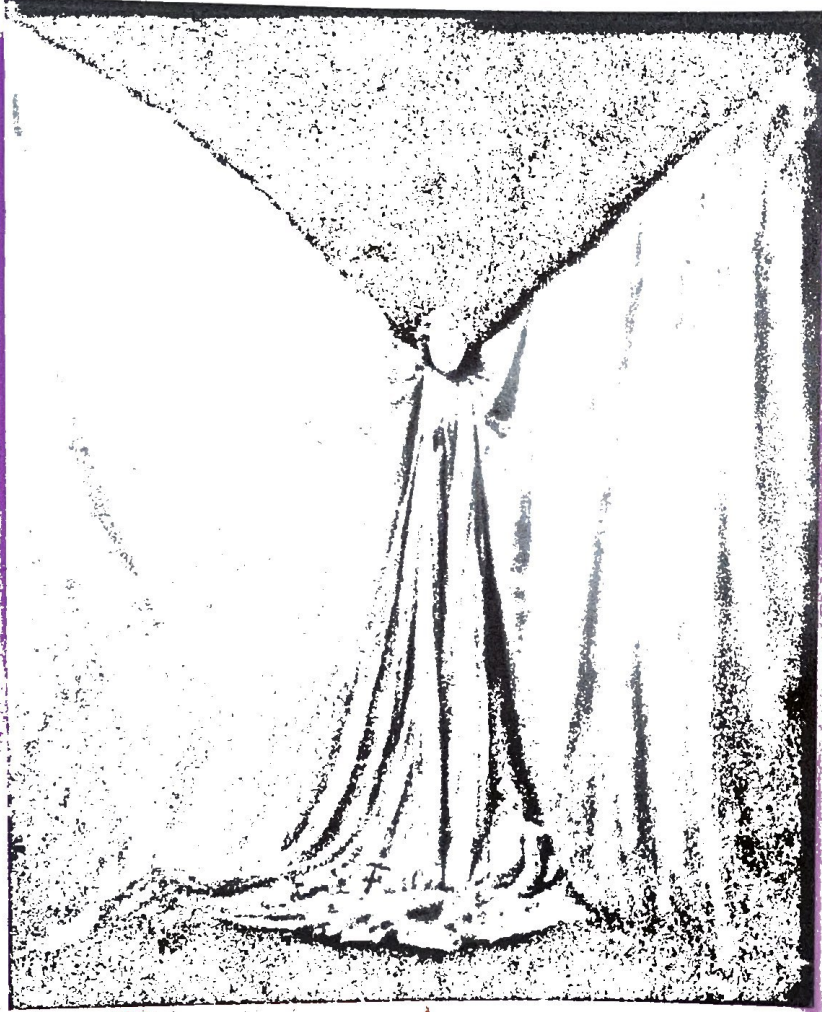


## MAJOR FIGURES IN MODERN, POST-MODERN, AND CONTEMPORARY DANCE

To give readers a perspective on the wide range of dancers and choreographers who were and are involved in the world of modern dance, here is a list of some of the artists that have helped shape modern dance history.



Loie Fuller.

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### The Forerunners

**Loie Fuller** (1862–1928, see Figure 6.14)—Fuller was an American dancer who was popular in Europe, particularly in Paris during the late 1800s, where she was known as “La Loie.” She developed many lighting techniques and lighting instruments and created visual spectacles by dancing with costumes made from yards of fabrics that would pick up the different colors of the lights. She also encouraged Isadora Duncan to come to Europe, where Duncan was embraced by the public.

**Isadora Duncan** (1877–1927, see Figure 6.15)—Credited with being the “mother of modern dance,” Duncan believed that movements should be drawn from nature. Developing the Duncan technique, comprised of basic movements such as swinging, hopping, running, skipping and leaping, Duncan sought to “free”



FIGURE 6.15

Many dance historians credit Isadora Duncan with being the first dancer to present “modern dancing” to the public.

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the body from the confines of ballet and created a truly modern form of dance.

**Ruth St. Denis** (1878–1968)—At first a dancer on the theatrical stage, “Miss Ruth” began to choreograph after seeing a cigarette poster that used the Egyptian goddess Isis in its advertisement. She then became fascinated with Asia and performed for years in Europe and New York. She met and married **Ted Shawn** (1891–1972) and together they formed Denishawn, a school that also had a company that toured throughout the United States. Shawn shared St. Denis’s passion for ethnicity, as well as religious expression. In the 1930s their marriage ended, as did the Denishawn school. Shawn established Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers, an all-male dance company that toured throughout the United States for many years. He also established Jacob’s Pillow, a school in Massachusetts. Jacob’s Pillow is still in existence today and provides dance instruction and performances in the summers.

**Rudolf Von Laban** (1879–1958)—Sometimes referred to as the “father of German modern dance,” Laban is best-known for developing a system of notating dance called Labanotation, as well as a system of notating space, efforts and shapes called Laban Movement Analysis. These two systems are still used today to record and reconstruct dances.

**Maud Allan** (1883–1956, see Figure 6.16)—Influenced by the work of Isadora Duncan, Allan was a dramatic dancer who also had a great knowledge of music. Like Fuller and Duncan, Allan, an American, became popular in Europe.

**Louis Horst** (1884–1964)—Horst was the musical director, composer and accompanist for Denishawn and later Martha Graham’s company and school. He was one of the first artists to develop principles on teaching dance composition, and taught composition and choreography classes that included working with musical



**FIGURE 6.16**

Maud Allan (1883–1956) performed dancing that was dramatic and musical.

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structures. He was the founder and editor of the *Dance Observer*, and authored two important books on dance, *Preclassic Dance Forms* and *Modern Dance Forms*.

**Mary Wigman** (1886–1973)—A German choreographer and dancer whose works are considered to be “expressionistic,” Wigman presented dances whose movements were full of meaning and emotion. She is also one of the first modern choreographers to use musical scores consisting mostly of percussion instruments, as well as danced in silence. A student of Laban, she introduced different concepts of spatial designs to her students.

## The Pioneers

**Martha Graham** (1894–1990)—A Denishawn student, Graham gave her first independent concert in 1926. In 1927, she established the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance (still in existence today) and a company comprised of all women. She later expanded her company to include male dancers. Graham’s dances, most of them psychological dramas, were primarily based on themes drawn from Greek mythology, American pioneers and American Indians. Graham developed a dance technique based on a system of contraction and release of the center of the body.

**Doris Humphrey** (1895–1958)—A Denishawn student, Humphrey eventually became a teacher at the school and developed, along with Ruth St. Denis, a technique known as “music visualization,” in which movement phrases, patterns and rhythms correspond with musical phrases, patterns and rhythms (and enables one to “visualize” the music). In 1928, she left Denishawn and together with **Charles Weidman** (1901–1975), another Denishawn student, developed the Humphrey-Weidman School and Dance Company. They developed a dance technique that revolved around fall and recovery, with a major emphasis on balance. Their company disbanded in 1945 and Humphrey became artistic director of the José Limon Dance Company (Limon was one of her students). Weidman went out on his own and choreographed dances, many of a comic nature. Weidman was truly gifted in the art of pantomime and had a wonderful sense of comic timing.

**Hanya Holm** (1898–1992)—A student of Mary Wigman, Holm came to the United States in 1931 to establish a Wigman school. For a short time she had a company, and became a master teacher using the theories of Wigman as well as her own. Holm is also known as

one of the first modern dance choreographers to choreograph for musicals on Broadway such as *Kiss Me Kate*, *Out of This World* and *My Fair Lady*.

**Kurt Jooss** (1901–1979)—Jooss was also a student of Laban and he carried much of Laban’s principles into his own work. He is famous for choreographing *The Green Table*, in 1932, which was a protest against war. This powerful anti-war statement was created one year before Adolf Hitler came into power. In 1933, Jooss was ordered to fire all of the Jews in his company, which he refused to do. The company fled Germany and eventually settled in England.

## The Second Generation

**Martha Hill** (1900–1995)—One of the best-known dance educators, Hill established the first bachelor of arts degree in dance at Bennington College in 1932. She is also credited with providing teaching and performing opportunities for Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman and Hanya Holm, first at Bennington College, and then at the newly established American Dance Festival. In 1951, she created the dance division of the Julliard School, where dancers from all over the world still train.

**Helen Tamiris** (1905–1966)—Tamiris came to modern dance through the ballet world. In 1927, she began to choreograph solo dances for herself. She also choreographed several musical theatre productions such as *Show Boat* and *Annie Get Your Gun*. She is best-known for creating a dance called *Negro Spirituals*. Although she was white, she was the first choreographer to use these spirituals for concert dance. She often collaborated with **Daniel Nagrin** (1917–2008), who is known for his choreography and master teaching, particularly in the areas of improvisation and composition.

**Lester Horton** (1906–1953)—A West Coast choreographer, Horton developed his company in 1932 and was focused on presenting works depicting American Indian culture. He developed the Horton technique, which requires a strong torso and symmetrical and asymmetrical movements of the arms and legs.

**José Limon** (1908–1972)—A student of Humphrey and Weidman, Limon was a Mexican-American whose heritage influenced his work. After World War II, he formed the José Limon Dance Company and, using the principles of weight, and fall and recovery, developed a technique that was closely linked to the technique of Humphrey and Weidman.

**Katherine Dunham** (1909–2006, see Figure 6.17)—In 1931, Dunham had her first concert in Chicago entitled *Negro Rhapsody*. This concert was to be the beginnings of black concert dance. Dunham is known for combining native Caribbean and modern dance and is also known as a researcher and a scholar. She appeared in several musical theatre productions as well as movie musicals, and her work also had an influence on jazz dance.

**Bonnie Bird** (1914–1995)—Bird’s career included both academic and professional performing experiences. She was one of the first dancers in Martha Graham’s dance company and also served as her teaching assistant. She was a prolific writer and wrote for many of today’s lead-



FIGURE 6.17

Katherine Dunham (1909–2006) helped lead the way in opening stage doors and overcoming racial prejudices for entertainers of color.

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ing dance periodicals and magazines. She also served as the Head of International Development at the Laban Centre of Movement and Dance in London.

**Anna Sokolow** (1915–2000)—One of the first members of the Martha Graham Company, Sokolow also worked during that time as an independent choreographer. Over the years, Sokolow developed professional and personal relationships with dancers in Mexico and Israel and traveled to these places to teach and choreograph. Sokolow’s dances were both political and social comments on societal issues. dances were both political and social comments on societal issues.

**Bella Lewitzky** (1916–2004)—Lewitzky was a student of Lester Horton. Her choreography is most noted for its intricate movement patterns and strong technique. She is recognized as a champion for freedom of expression and anti-censorship. The Lewitzky Dance Company was housed for many years in Los Angeles, but has since disbanded.

**Erick Hawkins** (1917–1994)—Hawkins was originally a ballet dancer and became the first male dancer to join Martha Graham’s dance company. He later became her husband. After their breakup, he left her company and in 1951 began to establish himself as an independent choreographer. He created a new technique that put emphasis on ease and free flow of movements. Today, the Erick Hawkins Dance Company is still a viable part of the dance community.

**Valerie Bettis** (1919–1982)—Bettis, a student of Hanya Holm, was known as a master teacher as well as a choreographer. She is also credited with being one of the first modern dancers to choreograph on a ballet company (the Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo).

**Pearl Primus** (1919–1994)—A student of Graham, Humphrey, Weidman and Holm, Primus is also credited with bringing black concert dance to the forefront. In her choreography, her focus was mainly on African dance and African subject matter. In contrast to Dunham, whose movements were flowing and smooth, Primus’ movements were athletic and dynamic (see Figure 6.18).

**Talley Beatty** (c. 1923–1996)—Beatty performed in the first company that Katherine Dunham established. He eventually established his own company, which performed for about five years. His choreography combined modern and jazz techniques and often revealed the racial injustice suffered by African-Americans. One of his most popular dances is *The Road of the Phoebe*

## FIGURE 6.18

Pearl Primus.

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*Snow*, created in 1959, which portrayed life along the famous railroad line.

**Donald McKayle** (b. 1930)—McKayle studied with Graham and Cunningham, among others. His choreography calls attention to the black experience and is currently performed by such companies as the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre.

**Alvin Ailey** (1931–1990)—A student of Lester Horton, Ailey developed his own company in the mid-1950s. Called the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, the company is located in New York. Ailey was always concerned with making his dances accessible to the audience. He combined modern, jazz and world dance to create a unique style. The Ailey company and school, still in existence today, is world-renowned.

**Eleo Pomare** (1937–2008)—Like Beatty's works, Pomare's choreography often represented the struggles of blacks in America. His powerful *Blues for the Jungle*, created in 1972, was a realistic look at life in Harlem. He studied with Kurt Jooss in Germany and eventually established his own company that made their New York City debut in 1966.

### The Post-Moderners

**Alwin Nikolais** (1912–1993)—A student of Hanya Holm, "Nik" is best remembered for his choreography that explored the use of lighting, costumes and props in a purely theatrical way. Nik was not concerned with showing emotion on stage, but rather motion, and is known as one of the forerunners of the post-modern movement. In 1970, along with fellow choreographer **Murray Louis** (b. 1926), he established the Nikolais-Louis Dance Lab in New York, as well as the Nikolais-Louis Dance Company established in later years. Louis, once a student of Nikolais, continued the artistic directorship of the Nikolais-Louis Dance Company after Nikolais' death. Today, the Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance, in collaboration with the Ririe/Woodbury Dance Company, tours and performs repertory by Nikolais and Louis.

**Merce Cunningham** (1919–2009)—Cunningham came to dance because of tap dance lessons he received at a young age. He was a dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company for five years before establishing the Merce Cunningham Dance Company in 1953. He developed the Cunningham technique, in which the spine acts as a spring and can coil, twist and turn. His technique also employs intricate direction changes and many shifts of weight throughout a given phrase of

movement. He created dances that were devoid of meaning and were “movement for movement’s sake.” He is credited with being “the father of post-modern dance.”

**Anna Halprin** (b. 1920)—One of the leading figures in the Judson Dance Theatre, Halprin had, as a student, studied the more formalized techniques of her predecessors. Today, she is best-known for her work in improvisation.

**Paul Taylor** (b. 1930)—In a career spanning both the modern and post-modern movements, Taylor was both a student of Martha Graham and a dancer with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. He is considered to be one of the forerunners of the post-modern movement. In 1955, Taylor began to create his own dances and in 1961 formed his own company. Taylor’s choreography is a combination of athletic dynamics and beauty. Today, the Paul Taylor Dance Company is world-renowned.

## The Post-Moderners: Second Generation

**Robert Ellis Dunn** (1929–1996)—Dunn, a musician, taught dance composition and improvisation classes at the Cunningham School in the 1960s. In 1962, he organized the first dance concert at the Judson Memorial Church in New York and thus began the activities of the Judson Dance Theatre.

**Viola Farber** (1931–1998)—As a choreographer, Farber was very much influenced by her former teacher, Merce Cunningham, although some of her works were on the comical side. Farber began her own company in 1953. She is also known for succeeding Alwin Nikolais as artistic director of the *Centre National de Dance Contemporaine* in France.

**Dan Wagoner** (b. 1932)—Wagoner came to New York in the late 1950s and danced with the Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham and Paul Taylor companies before he established his own company in 1969. Dan Wagoner and Dancers performed for almost twenty-five years, but had to disband because of financial reasons.

**Yvonne Rainer** (b. 1934)—A student of Cunningham, Rainer was one of the founding members of the Judson Dance Theatre. Rainer was concerned with reducing dance movement to a minimum, without the inclusion of emotion, theatricality, or spectacle. Today, Rainer is still an active choreographer.

**Simone Forti** (b. 1935)—A student of Anna Halprin, Forti’s works took on an improvisational feel, much like those of her teacher. Today, a master teacher herself, Forti continues to create works from an improvisational base.

**Rod Rodgers** (1938–2002)—For several years, Rodgers was a member of the Erick Hawkins Dance Company. In the mid-1960s he formed the Rod Rodgers Dance Company, which performed choreography that was a mix of modern and jazz. He was also a founding member of the Association of Black Choreographers.

**Steve Paxton** (b. 1939)—Paxton is best-known for developing “contact improvisation” (see *Chapter 7: Improvisation and Creative Movement*). Paxton was also a founding member of the Judson Dance Theatre and was a student of Cunningham.

**Trisha Brown** (b. 1940, see Figure 6.19)—Another founding member of the Judson Dance Theatre, Brown’s choreography employed the use of repetition. She created intricate movement patterns that seemed to logically build from one movement to the next.



FIGURE 6.19

Trisha Brown.  
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