

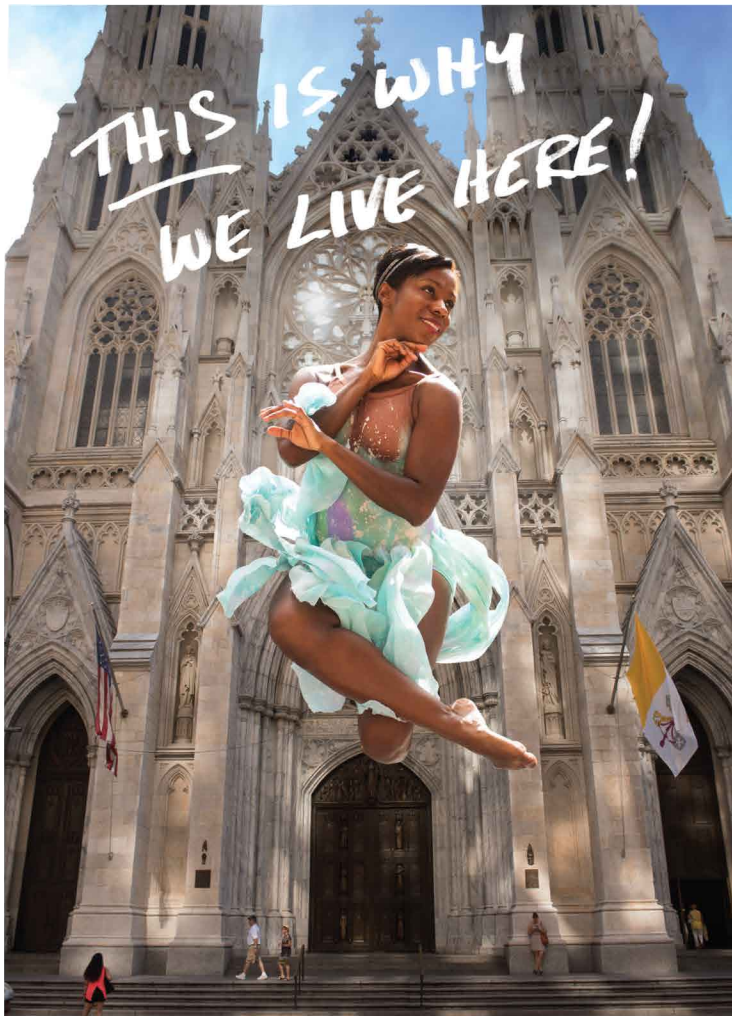
# PAUL TAYLOR

## AMERICAN MODERN DANCE



# CONTENTS

A Few Words About Dance	3
About Paul Taylor and Paul Taylor's American Modern Dance	4
"Why I Make Dances" by Paul Taylor	7
The "Family Tree" of Modern Dance	11
Interview with Parisa Khobdeh	14
Resources	16



The Paul Taylor Dance Foundation is grateful to Jody and John Arnhold for their generous support of Tier 3: Arnhold Dance Education and Audience Development Initiative.





Jordan Matter

Michael Apuzzo

## A FEW WORDS ABOUT DANCE

People have danced since the dawn of humankind. Dance is a non-verbal means of communicating, so even if people don't understand each others spoken language, they can understand the universal language of dance, the language "spoken" by the body's movements and gestures.

Dances can inspire acts of bravery, celebrate rites of passage or express urban experiences; mark the change of seasons, honor deities or move audiences to tears and individuals to action. Dances can express a range of human emotions, thoughts, and physicality. They can tell stories, comment on relevant social and political events or remain abstract expressions

of time, space and physical energy. People have danced and continue to dance for just about every reason and occasion you can think of. Dancing, ubiquitous around the globe, is a fundamental aspect of the human condition.

When dance occurs in places of worship throughout the world as part of religious rites, we call this "Religious Dance" or "Sacred Dance." India's Bharata Natyam (Hindu) and Turkey's Whirling Dervishes (Sufi) are just two examples of "Sacred Dance" still practiced today.

Dances that are less religious in nature and yet are embedded in the social and cultural fabric

of their society make up the broad category of dance called “Social” or “Cultural” dance. Some common types of early 20th century American social dances are The Charleston and the Lindy Hop rooted in American-born jazz music. The mid-20th century in America saw

## In the 20th Century, “modern dance” was born in the United States

the emergence of cultural dances like the twist, and Disco, and later, the widely practiced forms of American street dance — Hip Hop and Breakdancing — all generating from popular music genres of the day. Many kinds of African and Latin dances have become part of our multicultural American dance heritage as well. These and many other cultural dance forms continue to be practiced today, frequently making their way onto concert stages.

“Concert Dance” also called “Art Dance” or “Theatrical Dance” is yet another category of dances that can be seen around the world.

Concert dance is generally performed by trained dancers expressly for the enjoyment of audiences. Concert dance took more of its current shape in the courts of emperors and royalty where dances became so lavish that professional dance masters were needed to rehearse dancers, oversee production of sets and costumes, and actually create the steps the dancers would perform. These were the original dance makers, also called “choreographers.” Today, choreographers are creating dances wherever we find dances being performed for audiences. Kabuki from Japan, Flamenco from Spain and Ballet from Europe, are just a few of the concert dance forms that have evolved in different countries over the last few hundred years.

Modern Dance is a major genre of concert dance that was born in the early 20th Century right here in the United States. Over the past 100 years, Modern Dance has had a huge impact on emerging dancers and choreographers around the world. One of its greatest practitioners is Paul Taylor.

## ABOUT PAUL TAYLOR AND PAUL TAYLOR’S AMERICAN MODERN DANCE

Paul Taylor, one of the most accomplished artists this nation has ever produced, continues to shape America’s homegrown art of modern

dance as he has since becoming a professional dancer and pioneering choreographer in 1954. Having performed with Martha Graham’s



company for several years, Mr. Taylor uniquely bridges the legendary founders of modern dance — Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, Doris Humphrey and Ms. Graham — and the dance makers of the 21st Century. Through his new initiative at Lincoln Center — Paul Taylor's American Modern Dance — Mr. Taylor is presenting:

- ★ His own vast and growing repertoire
- ★ Great modern works of the past
- ★ Outstanding works by today's leading choreographers

Also...

- ★ He is commissioning the next generation of dance makers to work with his renowned Paul Taylor Dance Company, thereby helping to ensure the future of the art form.
- ★ As an integral part of his vision, these dances will be accompanied by live music whenever so intended by the choreographer.

Paul Taylor was born on July 29, 1930 — exactly nine months after the stock market crash that led into the Great Depression — and grew up in and around Washington, DC. He attended Syracuse University on a swimming scholarship in the late 1940s until he discovered dance through books at the University library, and then transferred to The Juilliard School. In 1954 he assembled a small company of dancers and began to choreograph. A commanding performer

despite his late start in dance, he joined the Martha Graham Dance Company in 1955 for the first of seven seasons as soloist while continuing to choreograph on his own troupe.

At an age when most artists' best work is behind them, Mr. Taylor continues to win public and critical acclaim for the vibrancy, relevance and power of his dances. He offers cogent observations on life's complexities while tackling some of society's thorniest issues.



Jordan Matter

Parisa Khobdeh

While he may propel his dancers through space for the sheer beauty of it, he more frequently uses them to illuminate such profound issues as war, piety, spirituality, sexuality, morality and mortality.

Mr. Taylor has made 142 dances since 1954, many of which have attained iconic status. He has covered a breathtaking range of topics, but recurring themes include life and death; the natural world and man's place within it; love and sexuality in all gender combinations; and iconic moments in American history. His poignant looks at soldiers, those who send them into battle, and those they leave behind prompted *The New York Times* to hail him as "among the great war poets" — high praise indeed for an artist in a wordless medium. While some of his dances have been termed "dark" and others "light," the majority of his works are dualistic, mixing elements of both extremes. And while his work has largely been iconoclastic, he has also made some of the most purely romantic, most astonishingly athletic, and downright funniest dances ever put on stage.



Jordan Matter

Jamie Rae Walker and Sean Mahoney



# “WHY I MAKE DANCES”

BY PAUL TAYLOR

No one has ever asked me why I make dances. But when flummoxed by the financial difficulties of keeping a dance company afloat, I sometimes ask it of myself. Dance makers are most often quizzed this way: which comes first, the dance or the music?

This conundrum was answered most tellingly by the celebrated choreographer George Balanchine, who said: “The money.” Nobel Prize-winner Orhan Pamuk has often been asked why he writes. The savvy answer in his *My Father’s Suitcase* was so meaningful and



struck such a chord of recognition in me — his devotion, his steadfastness, his anger — that it caused me to ponder my own reasons. Motivated by Balanchine’s sensible quip and Pamuk’s candid perceptiveness, this is how I might reply:

To put it simply, I make dances because I can’t help it. Working on dances has become a way of life, an addiction that at times resembles a fatal disease. Even so, I’ve no intention of kicking the habit. I make dances because I

believe in the power of contemporary dance, its immediacy, its potency, its universality. I make dances because that’s what I’ve spent many years teaching myself to do and it’s become what I’m best at. When the dances are

good nothing else brings me as much satisfaction. When they aren’t I’ve had the luxury, in the past at least, of being allowed to create others.

From childhood on, I’ve been a reticent guy who spends a lot of time alone. I make dances in an effort to communicate to people. A visual medium can be more

effective than words. I make dances because I don’t always trust my own words or, for that matter, those of quite a few others I’ve known. I make dances because working with my dancers and other cohorts allows me to spend time with trustworthy people I’m very fond of and who seldom give me trouble. Also because I’m not suited to do the jobs that regular folks do. There is no other way I could make a living, especially not at work that involves dealing face-to-face with the public. I make dances because crowds are kept at a safe distance.



Francisco Graciano

That's what proscenium stages are good for.

Dance making appeals to me because, although group projects and democratic systems are okay if they work, when on the job I find that a benevolent dictatorship is best. I don't make dances for the masses, I make them for myself. That is, even though they are meant to be seen in public (otherwise, what's the point?), I make dances I think I'd like to see.

I'm not above filching steps from other dance makers, but only from the best — ones such as Martha Graham and Antony Tudor — and only when I think I can make an improvement.

Although there are only two or three dances in me — ones based on simple images imprinted at childhood — I've gone to great lengths to have each repeat

**To put it simply, I  
make dances because  
I can't help it.**

of them seem different. Because of the various disguises my dances wear, viewers sometimes mistake them for those made by other choreographers. My reaction to this depends on how talented I think that person is. Imitating a chameleon has always come easy.





James Samson

## Ideally, my work would be anonymous.

Maybe it's genetic, or a protective artifice. The only identity that bugs me is that of the lauded personage. This is because the responsibilities demanded by fame are nuisances that I could easily do without. Ideally, my work would be anonymous.

Stylized lies (novelistic truths) for the stage are what the medium demands. I love tinkering with natural gesture and pedestrian movement to make them read from a distance and be recognizable as a revealing language that we

all have in common. Of particular interest is the amorous coupling of men and women, as well as the other variations on this subject. In short, the remarkable range of our human condition.

Whenever a dance of mine is controversial it brings me much satisfaction. One of my aims is to present questions rather than answers. My passion for dance does not prevent me from being terrified to start each new piece, but I value these fears for the extra energy they bring. Getting to know the music I use is a great pleasure even though toilsome. After making sure that the rights to use it are affordable, each piece needs to be scanned,

counted out and memorized. Since I've not learned to read scores, this can take an awful long time.

I make dances because it briefly frees me from coping with the real world, because it's possible to build a whole new universe with steps, because I want people to know about themselves, and even because it's a thrilling relief to see how fast each of my risk-taking dancers can recover after a pratfall.

I make dances, not to arrange decorative

pictures for current dancers to perform, but to build a firm structure that can withstand future changes of cast. Quite possibly I make dances to be useful or to get rid of a chronic itch or to feel less alone. I make them for a bunch of reasons – multiple motives rooted in the driving passion that infected me when I first discovered dance. The novelist Albert Camus said it best:

A man's work is nothing but this slow trek to rediscover through the detours of art those two or three great and simple images in whose presence his heart first opened.



Jordan Matter

Heather McGinley



# THE “FAMILY TREE” OF MODERN DANCE

We’ve seen that Mr. Taylor makes a kind of dance called modern dance – which he actually helped create. Where did this style of dance come from?

Modern dance evolved in the early 20th Century as choreographers sought to develop a new, individual form of artistic expression through dance. Some of the most influential creative forces aspired to break from the dance traditions of the time which were predominantly ballet and vaudeville. Modern dance pioneers were primarily focused on contemporary perspectives of the day. Here is a short list of some of the better known choreographers and performers from the early days of what has come to be known as Modern Dance.



**Isadora Duncan** (1878-1927) – generally considered the mother of Modern Dance. She

developed a movement style connected to Greek culture using natural actions in response to music. Duncan was revolutionary for her time, donning loose clothing and dancing in bare feet. She worked with a range of motion in the torso and pelvis, and an overall freedom of motion and expression never seen before in Western culture.

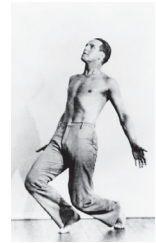


**Ruth St. Denis** (1879-1968) & **Ted Shawn** (1891-1972) – often called the parents of American Modern Dance.

Their company, Denishawn, was the first

large American company to perform modern dance in concerts. St. Denis and Shawn were often inspired by ethnic dances of Asian and Native

American people. They developed new styles of movement and created productions about exotic cultures and customs.



**Martha Graham** (1894-1991) – trained and performed with Denishawn before establishing her own

company in 1929. Graham developed a unique style and technique that emphasized pelvic contraction. Many of her dances are considered to be dramatic depictions of human emotions. She often used the Greek myths as source material.



**Doris Humphrey** (1895-1958) & **Charles Weidman** (1901-1975) – worked

with Denishawn before forming the Humphrey-Weidman Company (1928-1945). **Together and separately they created works of great humor and drama as well as choreographing for original musicals of the day.** They developed a dance technique that explored “fall” and “recovery” while also developing a system of approaching choreography.



**José Limón** (1908-1972) – he danced in the Humphrey-Weidman company before forming the Limón Dance Company in 1947. **Limón’s style**

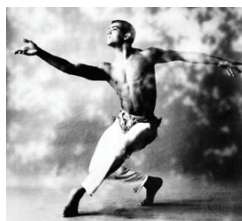
**and technique, built on the natural rhythms of Humphrey-Weidman’s fall and recovery, emphasizing use of breath and weight.** His choreography was an extension of his ability as a performer to embody emotion.



**Katherine Dunham** (1909-2006) & **Lester Horton** (1906-1953) – **pioneers in developing new styles of dance and highlighting African-American and Asian-**

**American dancers on the concert stage.** Both

were influential master teachers who developed techniques based on their research into Afro-Caribbean (Dunham) and Native American (Horton) dance forms. Dunham technique focused on polyrhythmic body



isolations while Horton technique highlighted the linear actions and correct alignment of the body.

**Merce Cunningham** (1919-2009) – **father of Post-Modernism in dance. An innovator who introduced the idea of chance choreography.**



Cunningham danced in the Martha Graham Dance Company until he formed Merce Cunningham Dance Company (1953-2011). He used chance methods like the roll of dice to make choreographic decisions. For Cunningham, the process of making dances was as important as the final performance, if not more so. Additionally, non-linear narratives, pedestrian movement, and abstraction from meaning became more commonplace in modern dance during the 1950’s.



**Alvin Ailey** (1931-1989) – **founded Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre in 1958, currently the largest Modern Dance repertory company in the USA.**

Ailey was a protégé of Lester Horton, and was deeply influenced by Katherine Dunham as well. He is known for being one of the first to create opportunities for African-Americans to choreograph and to perform on the Modern Dance concert stage.

**Paul Taylor** (b. 1930) – most widely revered for the contrasts within his creations — light-dark, romantic-nihilistic, comic-tragic — but always a reflection of some aspect of humanity. Taylor danced in the companies of Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham, branching

out with his own work in 1954. He never wanted to develop a technique to support a singular style of movement. Rather, he has been creating work from myriad perspectives for more than sixty years, consistently redefining his “process.”



Jack Mitchell

Paul Taylor

Here is a short list of some of the better known choreographers from the 1960s to the present day.

Robert Battle	Larry Keigwin	Alwin Nikolais	Anna Sokolow
Camille Brown	Murray Louis	Dave Parsons	Elizabeth Streb
Trisha Brown	Lar Lubovitch	Stephen Petronio	Twyla Tharp
Doug Elkins	Bebe Miller	Dwight Rhoden	Doug Varone
Bill T. Jones	Mark Morris	Shen Wei	Jowale Willa Jo Zollar



## A TALK WITH TAYLOR DANCER PARISA KHOBDEH

*Paul Taylor's work is known for being incredibly athletic and emotionally demanding. How do you address these challenges in your daily routines?*

**Parisa:** Eat, sleep, and feel good is my mantra.

Every day begins with some kind of practice: meditation, yoga, ballet, and/or modern dance class. There's an element of ritual in practicing something each day that bestows gratitude. I do everything I need to prepare the mind and body for a good day, but life doesn't always go as expected. So I find the beauty in the unexpected.

*How do you prepare to get a good night's sleep?*

**Parisa:** Let go. Don't think.

*How do you balance your physical, mental and nutritional needs in a typical day?*

**Parisa:** Staying balanced physically, mentally, and nutritionally means knowing my limitations, which can be really hard. During my career, injuries occurred when I wasn't aware of how

hard I was pushing my body, dancing and working out excessively with no rest, or lying to myself that I wasn't in pain. The body talks to you, it's your best friend—listening helps.

Awareness and gratitude are essential parts of a

balanced lifestyle for me.

When I started listening to my body and feeling grateful for my body, my whole consciousness shifted to a more positive one. My diet and nutrition is consistent but tailored according to the demands of the day. I eat light before rehearsals and performances, then eat my largest meal of the day — which includes vegetables and protein to repair and recover

muscles — after all physical activity. I avoid anything packaged or that has ingredients that I can't pronounce; processed meats and packaged foods are harder to digest. As for psychological demands, I find time every day for solitude and quiet with no cell phone or computer; when I just close my eyes and focus on breathing and going inward. When I give myself 5, 10, 20 minutes to breathe, to be



silent, then I feel calm and compassionate about what "is," then with what "isn't."

*What kinds of foods have you found help you to maintain your level of fitness?*

**Parisa:** I look for vegetables and fruits that are easy to digest, and proteins for muscle maintenance. I don't add sugar to my foods, no artificial colors, no additives, no hormones, and everything in moderation. My biggest challenge is drinking 80 - 100 ounces of water a day.

*What's your guilty pleasure for a treat that may not be best for your health?*

**Parisa:** Caffeine and sweets are my nemesis. I limit myself to 1 - 2 cups of coffee per day because caffeine is dehydrating. For a decadent dessert, instead of ice cream, I add maple syrup to yogurt with fresh raspberries and chia seeds! Yum!

#### QUESTIONS FOR YOU:

1. Parisa says quiet and solitude away from her cell phone and her computer are very important to her. Have you tried spending time away from your electronic devices? If so, what was your experience? If not, you may want to try it for a specific period of time and see how it affects you.
2. What types of physical activities do you like to do, apart from dance? Sports? Games? Other disciplines?
3. What are your favorite fruits, vegetables, and proteins to eat every day?
4. What do you do to relax and focus when you get very anxious about a difficult test or an audition?



Jordan Matter

Christina Lynch Markham



Jordan Matter

George Smallwood

## RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

### Books:

Anderson, Jack. *Ballet & Modern Dance: A Concise History*. Second edition. Princeton Book Company, Publishers. 1992.

Legg, Joshua. *Introduction to Modern Dance Techniques*. Princeton Book Company, Publishers. 2011.

Taylor, Paul. *Facts and Fancies*. Delphinium Books, Inc. 2013.

Taylor, Paul. *Private Domain*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1987.

### Film:

Paul Taylor: *Dancemaker*, A film by Matthew Diamond. Documentary. Four Oaks Foundation. 1998.

Paul Taylor: *Creative Domain*, A film by Kate Geis. Documentary. Robert Aberlin, executive producer. 2013.

### Web Sites:

[www.ptamd.org](http://www.ptamd.org) The official website of Paul Taylor's American Modern Dance

[www.ndeo.org](http://www.ndeo.org) The website for the National Dance Educators Organization. A dance organization for dance students and teachers that offers everything from job listings to arts advocacy, to research articles on dance, national conferences and much more.

[www.dancemedia.com](http://www.dancemedia.com) The website for all of the major dance journals including Dance Magazine, Dance Teacher, and Dance Spirit.



# ROSES



**Choreography:** Paul Taylor

**Musis:** Richard Wagner and Heinrich Baermann

**Costumes:** William Ivey Long

**Lighting:** Jennifer Tipton

**Date First Performed:** April 10, 1985

**Notes:** Set to music by Richard Wagner and Heinrich Baermann, **Roses** is a paeon to love and relationships in various stages. Some couples' duets illustrate youthful ardor and love's first blush. A central duet suggests a more mature relationship characterized by support, security and the anticipation of one another's needs. Whether these are all distinct relationships or different stages of the same one is for the viewer to decide.

# CONTINUUM



**Choreography:** Lila York

**Musis:** Recomposed by Max Richter (based on Vivaldi's "Four Seasons")

**Costumes:** Santo Loquasto

**Lighting:** James F. Ingalls

**Date First Performed:** February 11, 2017

**Notes:** *Continuum* is a new work by Taylor Alumna Lila York, commissioned through Taylor Company Commissions and made on the Taylor dancers. *Continuum* is set to Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons" recomposed by Max Richter. It is an abstract work in nine sections that offer images of contemporary life in a fraught world. It is about finding peace in a hostile environment.

# ARDEN COURT



**Choreography:** Paul Taylor  
**Musis:** William Boyce  
**Set & Costumes:** Gene Moore  
**Lighting:** Jennifer Tipton  
**Date First Performed:** April 15, 1981

**Notes:** One of the exuberant dances from Mr. Taylor's highly acclaimed collection of works set to baroque music. Music by William Boyce accompanies a look at three kinds of relationships: supportive, competitive and flirtatious. "One of the few great art works created in [the 20<sup>th</sup>] century... exploring a new movement field of love and relationship. The women dance into the men's arms as if Shakespeare had only written *Romeo and Juliet* the day before yesterday. One of the seminal works of our time... something extraordinary in the history of dance." - *New York Post*