

Study Guide for Teachers

Darrah Carr Dance
Steppin & Stompin:
Ireland in Dance & Song
presented by
Young Audiences New Jersey & Eastern PA
(866) 500-9265
www.yanjep.org



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Trace the lineage of Irish dance from its traditional role in 18th-century Ireland to its success on the international stage. Featuring live music on the bodhrán and accordion, this spirited look at Irish dance and music presents the history, traditions, and costumes of this lively indigenous art form. The infectious energy of the performers is quickly picked up by the audience, and lucky volunteers get a chance to join the excitement on stage!

- LEARNING GOALS**
- Students will
- Identify basic characteristics of Irish dance.
 - Make the connection between Irish music and dance.
 - Understand different contexts of Irish dance, beyond the familiar commercial success of *Riverdance*.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

Throughout the 18th century, Irish dance was taught by traveling dance masters. When they met at fairs, they challenged each other to public dancing contests that only ended when one of them dropped with fatigue.

Solo dancers were held in high esteem. Barn doors were placed on the ground for them to dance upon. Solo dances use fast, intricate footwork, with limited arm movements. Dancers use hard or soft shoes. Hard shoes have tips and heels, enabling the dancer to make pounding rhythms. Soft shoes are like ballet or Scottish Highland slippers. These dances are performed on the balls of the feet, with airy, graceful, light legwork.

Group dances were developed to give less gifted pupils the chance to enjoy dancing. These feature interlacing weaving patterns, often seen in Celtic knotwork.

Neighbors would often gather for a *ceili*—or house party—featuring music, dances, songs, and storytelling. Through emigration, Irish dance and music were carried to many continents. Traditions are kept alive through *feiseanna*—competitions—for dancers of all ages. Competition dresses are based on the Irish peasant dress worn two hundred years ago. Most are adorned with hand-embroidered Celtic designs. Copies of the Tara brooch are often worn on the shoulder, holding a cape, which falls over the back.

The worldwide success of commercial shows such as *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance* has placed Irish dance on the international stage. Today, many students of Irish dance are not of Irish descent, and classes have sprung up in places as distant from Ireland as Mexico and Japan.

BEFORE THE PROGRAM

1. Show a map of Ireland. Locate the capital, Dublin. If any students are of Irish heritage, welcome them to show on the map the region of Ireland their family is from. Ask them to share Irish traditions their family upholds or celebrates.

2. Get the music teacher involved! In music class or your own classroom, play some reels and jigs. Clap in 4s for the reel (remember the clue that R-E-E-L has four letters, so you clap in fours) and in 6s for the jig (T-H-E J-I-G is 6 letters). Go around the circle and have students choose a body part upon which to clap. Standing up, have students march, walk, or run to the beat. Alternate tracks and have students identify which is a reel and

ARTIST INFORMATION

The defining focus of Darrah Carr Dance is the incorporation of Irish culture into contemporary dance choreography through music, step-dance footwork, and spatial patterns. This has resulted in a large body of fast-paced, high-energy work that is rhythmically based, spatially oriented, and accessible to a wide audience. Committed to audience outreach and arts education, the company uses the choreography's Irish elements to place dance within an interdisciplinary context and illuminate its connection to society, history, and related art forms. In New York City, Darrah Carr Dance has been presented by the Harry de Jur Playhouse, Snug Harbor Cultural Center, Lehman College, FringeNYC, Dancenow/NYC, and the New York City Irish Dance Festival. They have toured in New England and have enjoyed international engagements in Ireland and Japan. In addition to being on the roster of YANJEP, they have offered arts in education workshops through the Muse Machine of Ohio and The Yard on Martha's Vineyard.

VOCABULARY WORDS

Bodhran: A goat-skin drum.

The Book of Kells: An illuminated manuscript book in Latin. Widely regarded as Ireland's finest national treasure.

Ceili: A house party. Neighbors gather for an evening of music, dance, and song.

Feis: An Irish dance competition. In ancient Ireland, a *feis* referred to a gathering of chieftains to review laws. The plural form is *feiseanna*.

Gaelic: Another word for Irish. The native language of Ireland.

The Tara Brooch: A Celtic brooch made around 700 CE and found in 1850. Now on display in the National Museum of Ireland.

AFTER THE PROGRAM

1. Practice the 5 basic moves of Irish dance:

Jump, Hop, Leap, Walk on Heels, Fast Feet (small, quick steps on balls feet).

Lay out a pathway of colored tape on the floor.

Practice these moves over the pathway. Include "Dancer's Choice," in which each student devises their own sequence from the 5 basic moves.

Conduct the same exercise with a jump rope swinging back and forth on the ground.

Have students practice the 5 moves over the jump rope, then devise a "Dancer's Choice" sequence.

2. Review the instruments that were played in the program (accordion and bodhran) as well as the improvised instruments (spoons and mouth music). Ask students what other household items could be used to make music. Identify additional instruments used in Irish music (fiddle, flute, tin whistle, harp, pipes) and play examples of them on CD or the Web.

3. Get the visual art teacher involved! In art class, or your own classroom, discuss Celtic knotwork as seen in jewelry, calligraphy, and embroidery.

Show photos of Celtic jewelry and of the Book of Kells calligraphy designs.

Print out examples of Irish dance costumes from the Web. Discuss how the interlacing patterns are templates for Irish dance spatial patterns. Discuss emigration and how these interlacing patterns are forerunners of some American square dances and New England contra dances. Have students in groups of 3 study some dresses and choose a pattern to create in space. Other students can watch each group perform and guess which pattern they created. Students can also design their own interlacing patterns with colored pencils and paper.

RESOURCES

Anna Marlis Burgard, *Flying Feet: A Story of Irish Dance* (K-4).

Declan Carville, *Kathleen O'Byrne* (K-4).

Mark Thomas, *Irish Step Dancing (Let's Dance)* (K-4).

Arthur Flynn, *Irish Dance* (5-12).

Frank Whelan, *The Complete Guide to Irish Dance* (5-12).

Helen Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance* (5-12).

The Music of Ireland Website:

www.irelandseye.com/aarticles/culture/music/index.shtm