

# FRANCISCO MARTINEZ

## DANCETHEATRE

### *American Collage*

**Art Form:** Dance

**Style:** Contemporary/Classical

**Culture:** North American

#### MEET THE ARTIST:

**Francisco Martinez** is a dancer, choreographer and the artistic director of *Francisco Martinez Dancetheatre*. Mr. Martinez began dancing in Mexico, continuing his studies in the United States when his family relocated to Los Angeles. After attending the University of Arizona, Mr. Martinez studied in New York with the Nikolais/Louis Dance Lab, among others. In 1975 he received a dance scholarship to the Texas Christian University, during which time he became a member and eventual principal dancer of the Fort Worth Ballet. Returning to Los Angeles in 1981, he founded Francisco Martinez Dancetheatre, drawing from both a classical and modern dance vocabulary to create over 65 dance works; the company has been in residence at Plaza de le Raza in East Los Angeles since 1988. Mr. Martinez has received two Horton dance awards for his choreography. He is also the recipient of the California Dance Educators Association's Artist Educator Award for 2001.

#### ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

*American Collage* is a tribute to unique American music, offering a spectrum of styles that depict the heritage and spirit of America. George and Ira Gershwin's "Summertime," Scott Joplin's syncopated rhythms, Patsy Cline's interpretation of "Sweet Dreams" and Aaron Copland's score based on the hymn "Tis the Gift To Be Simple" serve as inspiration for a quartet of dances. Mr. Martinez's narration gives insight into both musical composition and the choreographic process. The dances journey through an American landscape: musical theatre; pre-war dance styles of the Speakeasy and Charleston era; compelling rhythms of Country and Western music; and finally the pure line of dance collaborating with the pure line of the Shaker hymn. From dramatic to lyrical to comic in style, connections abound between thought, feeling, sound and movement.



#### PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

The dances and music that make up the performance reveal the beauty of the American spirit, and show the timeless thoughts and emotions inherent in music and dance.

**George Gershwin's** music was selected by Francisco Martinez because it was instrumental in the development of American musical theatre. Inspired by the European light operas in the late 1800s, musical theatre combines song, dance and the spoken word to tell a story. Born in 1898, George Gershwin and his brother Ira drew from the disparate styles of ragtime, the blues and Latin American rhythms to create a vibrant sound. Popular compositions include: "I Got Rhythm" and "Strike Up The Band." Serious orchestral work by George Gershwin includes "Rhapsody in Blue" and "An American in Paris."

**Scott Joplin** has been called the father of ragtime music. Born in Texas in 1868, Mr. Joplin taught himself to play the piano. After refining his musical skills in St. Louis, Missouri, he began composing the music that would make him famous. *Ragtime* is syncopated piano music. The melody is played with the right hand, and the constant beat played with the left. A forerunner of jazz music, ragtime also revolutionized the dance styles of the early 1900s.

Country music grew from the grassroots of America. Old English and Scottish ballads, influenced by African American rhythms, became part of the music of rural communities. Born in Virginia, **Patsy Cline** (1932--1963) began singing and dancing at country fairs. She went on to become one of the most beloved country singers in America. "Sweet Dreams" was composed by Don Gibson.

**Aaron Copland** (1900--1990) is one of the most respected American composers. His work, including "Rodeo" and "Billy the Kid" (both written for dancers), "A Lincoln Portrait," and "Appalachian Spring," a ballet composed in 1943 for legendary dancer Martha Graham, all provide insight into the soul of America.

Copland was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1986.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What does a choreographer do? (creates dances)
- What does a composer do? (creates music)
- Did you have a favorite dance from *American Collage*? Why was it your favorite?
- How did the dances convey the different styles of the music?
- What are the differences between modern dance and classical ballet? (classical ballet has codified body positions; modern dance has more freedom)

## FRAMEWORK FOCUS - LANGUAGE ARTS:

Discuss the performance, recalling the different dances and music. Ask students to describe the mood of each piece, trying to identify the following:

**Time:** Fast? Slow? Syncopated? Did the tempos change? Were there repeated patterns in the music or in the movements?

**Energy:** Did the movements convey an emotion? Tell a story? How did the dancers move differently in order to show contrasting emotions? Did they change levels? Face different directions? How is a swing different from a bounce or a reach different from a roll?

**Space:** How did the choreographer use space to convey ideas? Was space used differently in each dance? Why? Did the music influence the use of space? Did the number of dancers change the way space was used?

Now select two pieces and write a short paragraph comparing and contrasting them. Younger students may write as a group, older students in pairs or write individually. Use the following criteria for the task:

Compare and contrast:

- the themes
- the mood, as influenced by the music
- the use of space and design
- repetition
- rhythm and tempo
- the energy qualities used.

Legend:

- 🌀 Artistic perception
- ❖ Creative expression
- ▶ Historical & cultural context
- ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
- \* Connections, Relations, Applications

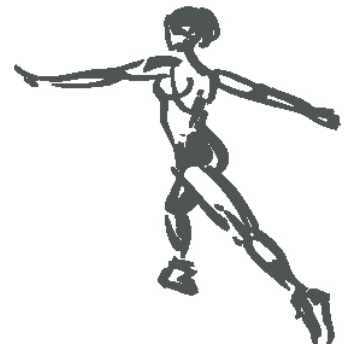
## ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

❖ Dance can convey a variety of feelings and thoughts. Ask students to show a feeling through a movement or body posture. Use the following emotions:

Sad Happy Excited Afraid Angry Surprised

🌀 Ask students to pick one of the above emotions to explore in movement. Ask them to try changing and enhancing their gestures: make them bigger, change and add levels, repeat gestures and change the speed. Have students share their movements in groups of four and ask observers to identify the emotions being expressed.

❖ A choreographer paints a picture of music through dance. Ask the students to listen to different pieces of music, trying to decide what the music is telling them, or how it makes them feel. Ask students to create movements reflecting the moods of the music or the images it creates. Use the following as examples of movements: opening/closing, turning, reaching or withdrawing.



\* Divide the students into groups of four or five. Ask each group to choose a photograph from a magazine, book or newspaper. Have the students answer the following questions: What is the mood? Who are the characters? What are they doing? Where have they come from? Where are they going?

Ask students to take four ideas and create four tableaux (frozen pictures) to represent their ideas.

Include the following dance elements:

- A clear beginning, middle and end.
- A change in level
- A change in energy

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Balanchine, George and Francis Mason. *101 Stories of Great Ballets*. Anchor Books Doubleday, New York, NY, 1989.

Stinson, Sue. *Dance for Children: Finding the Magic in Movement*. The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. Reston, Virginia. 1988.