

Pilobolus is a Fungus Study Guide

Credit: Ruth M Feldman

History of Dance

PILOBOLUS came to be in 1970. That's more than 40 years ago. That may seem like a very long time ago, but for dance, it's barely an eye-blink.

Just as in literature, take Shakespeare for example, where themes transcend centuries, the life of a piece of choreography continues to speak in a language that knows no time limit. So, let's look back at how dance evolved.

Centuries ago, in Europe, only the men danced, in fact, women weren't even allowed onstage; in early theatre, women's roles were played by young boys or men. And just as today's dancers use movement to tell a story, those early dances would most likely to be about myths or war.

Ballet, as we now know it, originated in the 1400s and was used as entertainment for Italian and French royalty. That is why all the names for the various ballet positions are in either French or Italian. In ballet, the body is held mostly upright, with the legs turned out from the hip.

In the early **1700s**, dancing for both males and females became popular. Female dancers, or **ballerinas**, began wearing short skirts, or **tutus**, so that audience members could see their legs and appreciate and understand the new dance techniques being developed. During the **1800s**, most ballets told a story from beginning to end; famous examples include the Christmas holiday ballet, **The Nutcracker**, or **Swan Lake**, which is based on a fairy tale.

Then in the 1900s, dance began to change. Dancers removed their shoes; they performed in clothes normally reserved for rehearsal; and the way in which their bodies moved, changed. Dancers felt free to show off their athleticism in new and different ways along with their individual personalities and range of emotions.

This was the beginning of **modern dance**. Certainly, an interesting journey dating back centuries when **only men danced**, and fast forwarding to 1970 when four men came together, and in turn, PILOBOLUS was born.

PILOBOLUS is Born

In 1970, several young men enrolled at Dartmouth College, took a dance class...to fulfill a physical education requirement. With interests as diverse as history, philosophy, and psychology, the idea of standing alone, in front of a class, and moving, was frightening. So they

“clung to one another for both moral and physical support” building dances as a collective while at the same time creating something they thought was “cool”.

Following graduation, the “company without a name” headed to a member’s dairy farm in Vermont where they continued their movement discoveries; creating choreography that relied on their collective creativity, humor, and interest in telling stories with their bodies. It was here, that PILOBOLUS was born; and audiences loved this new kind of Modern Dance.

This collective creativity continues to this day. Dancers along with members of the Artistic Team and often artists from different genres, create dance collaboratively. Their physical inventions often appear to defy gravity or create new life forms right before your eyes.

As you watch our show, keep in mind how this company came to be. Watch for those moments of connectiveness; when one or more bodies join together to support another while moving through space; when dancers appear to transform into something completely new. In those moments, you too will become connected...to PILOBOLUS.

What’s in a Name? *Where did the name PILOBOLUS come from?*



Fabulous Youtube of the (poo loving) fungus in action:

<https://youtu.be/T8OAmcUnm4g>

If you read the story about how PILOBOLUS came to be, you might recall the group of “dancers” from Dartmouth. One of those dancers had a father who was a biologist, studying Pilobolus the fungus in his lab. The first dance they made was inspired by the incredible physical nature of the fungus a mushroom, found in barnyards and pastures. “It’s a feisty little thing—only ¼ inch tall, the length of your fingernail—and can throw its spores nearly 3 feet!”

The image of a spore shooting itself through the air was the perfect metaphor for the style dance they were creating, and hence, the perfect name for their new dance.

Later, when they started touring as a dance company, they needed a name for their company, they decided it was a perfect name for their dance company.

About the Performance

Pilobolus is a Fungus is an interactive performance for young audiences based on a recent site-specific commission by Jacob's Pillow titled Branches. The audience takes a journey through nature, perceiving the sounds, shapes, colors and movements of birds, water, trees, and of course, our namesake fungus, in new and unexpected ways. With the help of the Pilobolus dancers, audience members learn to express their deep connection to the world through movement and dance.

BRANCHES (2017)

Created by Renée Jaworski and Matt Kent in collaboration with Itamar Kubovy, Mark Fucik and Antoine Banks-Sullivan, Nathaniel Buchsbaum, Krystal Butler, Isabella Diaz, Heather Jean Favretto, and Jacob Michael Warren

Performed by Nathaniel Buchsbaum, Krystal Butler, Isabella Diaz, Quincy Ellis, Heather Jean Favretto, and Jacob Michael Warren

Music by David Van Tieghem, David Darling, Riley Lee, Olivier Messiaen, Bonobo

Sound Design	David Van Tieghem
Costume Design	Liz Prince
Lighting Design	Thom Weaver

BRANCHES premiered at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Inside/Out Series, June 21, 2017, and was commissioned by Jacobs Pillow Dance Festival and the National Endowment for the Arts, which believes a great nation deserves great art.

Section Titles

1. Down by the Water
People are animals. Animals have a community too. They all meet at the watering hole. This is the center of their community, interaction, and social life.
2. Up in a Tree
Have you ever noticed the movement of trees and plants outside your window? The world outside is full of movement and motion, wind and light. The animals in the landscape are in constant interaction with these elements.
3. Mr. Right
Humans have dances they do to attract love. Animals do too! We dance the tango, and the bird of paradise performs an equally intricate mating dance.
4. What's Left?:

The sun goes down, flowers wilt, light falls, and the cycle of life continues. Our inspiration doesn't only come from the beautiful things in nature, but sometimes the decay that is necessary to create new life.