

Appropriation, Assimilation, Acculturation, Inspiration, or Celebration of Identity: Examining History to Affect Changes in Dance Education and Training

Introduction

This presentation advocates for raising awareness of cultural identity as represented in dances and dance-making, and for serious and deliberate change in approaches to these topics within dance education and training as we create, think, and collaborate in our global society.



Abstract

In the accountability for past ignorance and aggressions, we cannot disregard the current discussions about schisms created from cultural appropriation, colonization, and representations of "other" in choreographic choices. This schism needs careful attention, consideration, and exposure. Many ballets, old and new, are under scrutiny for being inappropriate cultural representations in today's world. In addressing the gap between appropriation and colonization, this presentation offers a conversation about appropriation, assimilation, acculturation, and celebration of Identity, which is vital and necessary in dance education and training.

Background

The discussion focuses on a reconsideration of restaged "classical" ballets in contemporary context and new understanding of historical sensibilities. Using examples such as *Le Tricorne*, a paradigmatic and iconic Spanish-themed ballet created for Serge Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, the question of cultural representation becomes a complex issue a hundred years later.

Lisa Fusillo

Athens, Georgia USA



Department of Dance
Franklin College of Arts and Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



Start the Conversation

What is cultural appropriation and why does it matter?

Cultural appropriation in its simplest form, is when person(s) of one culture adopt elements of a different culture.

Assimilation refers to person(s) try to "fit in" to another/different group or culture, abandoning their own culture, primarily for survival.

Acculturation is defined as person(s) of a one group adopt another group/culture, but "still hold onto their original cultural values and traditions." (Cole, Nicki Lisa. Understanding Acculturation and Why It Happens)

Celebrating cultural identities can be done within and outside of the cultural group.



adapted from:
<https://www.culturalappropriation.com/2013/06/cultural-appropriation-what-is-it/>

Conclusion

The research concluded that *Le Tricorne* should be viewed as a celebration of cultural identity and the majority of reviews and critics, as well as the cultural ministry of Spain supports this result. The larger issue that resulted from this research was the absolute necessity for dance educators to address the issues and concepts of appropriation, assimilation, acculturation, and celebrations of Identity, in dance history, dance studies and dance-making training. The clarity and distinct differentiation of these constructs is imperative to an understanding of society and culture particularly in the voices and stories told through dance.

Léonide Massine in
Le Tricorne

Photo by
Cecil Beaton



Research Question

The research considers the argument of cultural representation versus cultural appropriation, assimilation, or acculturation of *Le Tricorne* as an example of essential conversations in dance education and training. The research postulates that the intent and context of dance-making can supersede perceptions of appropriation.

Methodology

This project began with historical research on the ballet *Le Tricorne*, originally created in 1919 by a Russian choreographer and Russian producer with Spanish collaborators, a Spanish libretto, and used traditional Spanish dances. The restaged throughout the world for 100 years and has been controversial for its "Spanishness", which raised the issues of appropriation. Archival research included footage of restagings from 1938 to 2019, review of dance literature, newspaper reviews, interviews, etc. Investigation continued to a study of appropriation to accurately make an assessment.

Results

In his autobiography Massine wrote, "*Le Tricorne* began as an attempt to synthesize Spanish folk dances with classical techniques and as it evolved, it was also a choreographic interpretation of the Spanish way of life." Many critics for the past hundred years agreed with this intent and during the centenary congress in Spain in 2019, Spanish historians and critics praised the ballet has a celebration of Spanish dance, acknowledging that the choreography was not purely authentic.

Selected References

- Brassai, Picasso and Company, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1966
Buckle, Richard, *Diaghilev*, New York: Artheneum, 1979
Cole, Nicki Lisa. Understanding Acculturation and Why It Happens. <https://www.thoughtco.com/acculturation-definition-3016600/>. Accessed 15 November 2019.
Cooper, Douglas, *Picasso Theatre*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1968
Fusillo, Lisa, contributor, "*Le Tricorne*", *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, London: Oxford University Press, 1998
Grigoriev, S. I., *The Diaghilev Ballet 1909-1929*, New York: Dance Horizons, 1953
Johnson, Malsha Z. "What's Wrong with Cultural Appropriation?" *Everyday Feminism Magazine*. June 14, 2015. <https://www.everydayfeminism.com/2015/06/cultural-appropriation-what-is-it/>. Accessed 14 November 2019
Lawrence, Robert, *The Victor Book of Ballets and Ballet Music*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950
Migel, Pammenia (editor), *Pablo Picasso: Designs for "The Three Corners of Hell"*, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1978
O'Brien, Patrick, *Pablo-Ruiz Picasso*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1976
Pahissa, James, *Manuel de Falla: His Life and Works*, London: Museum Press Ltd., 1954
Prophet, W. A., *The Russian Ballet in Western Europe 1909-1920*, New York: Benjamin Blom Inc., 1972
Sallier, Lionel, "*Manuel de Falla*", *The Decade Book of Ballets*, London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1958
Serkar, Ash. "Why we need to pause before claiming cultural appropriation". *The Guardian Online*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/29/cultural-appropriation-racial-oppression-exploitation-colonialism>. Accessed 19 November 2019
Spielberger, Charles, *Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology*, New York: Academic Press., 2004. p. 615.
Interview recorded on tape, Marian Horosko interviewing Léonide Massine, 1969, in the Dance Collection of the Library of Performing Arts, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
"Massine Dances in his 'Tricorne'", *Clipping from the files of the Dance Collection at Lincoln Center*, October 10, 1942, New York (no credit to reviewer or original newspaper identified).
Conversations between Léonide Massine and Lisa Fusillo, 18 March 2019



The Arts in Society