

Can *You* Thizzle Dance?  
Why Ballerinas Don't Go Hyphy

I recently had the opportunity to attend a classic ballet performance by the Boston Ballet dance company, as part of Professor Priscilla Reinertsen's course in Sociological Analysis. We were later tasked with answering a series of questions that pressed us to critically analyze and understand what we just saw. The following excerpt is in response to a question that challenged us to compare ballet with any popular style of dance; I chose to compare it to Thizzle dancing.

The term "dance" can be associated with a number of styles of movement. These can range from the highly artistic to the highly unimaginative, from the strict and formal to the casual and unregulated, and from the deep and meaningful to the senseless and unfounded. The following investigation briefly compares and contrasts ballet with "thizzle" dancing.

Thizzle dancing refers to the variety of dance maneuvers and behaviors associated with the hyphy movement and the hyphy style of living. "Hyphy" denotes a cultural movement popularized in the past decade, originating in the San Francisco bay area. Thizzle dancing and hyphy-related activities and behavior are popular with the college-aged demographic on the West coast, and increasingly on the East coast as well. Thizzle dancing is generally performed in conjunction with hyphy-style music, which has gained notoriety as a sub-genre of hip-hop.

There are a number of glaring differences between ballet and thizzle dancing. To begin with, ballet is considered a fine art. This is a result of several central characteristics of ballet including spotless precision and strict choreography. Indeed, the nature of ballet is so precise it can even be used to recount a complex story in vivid detail without a single word spoken. This is made evident in performances such as John Cranko's rendition of Romeo and Juliet as performed by the Boston Ballet. Even one unfamiliar with the story would be struck by the subtle details delivered through this non-verbal account of Shakespeare's classic work. The same cannot be said for thizzle dancing.

Thizzle dancing can oftentimes occur without notice and still achieve a relatively acceptable degree of evaluation. To contrast this, ballet dancers practice for months just to perfect a single performance. A great degree of leniency regarding “choreography” is given to people whom engage in thizzle dancing, as there is typically no set routine to be followed. Indeed thizzle dance choreography is almost exclusively improvisational, with the exception of a handful of general maneuvers.

Noting common maneuvers within each discipline establishes some grounds for similarities between ballet and thizzle dancing. Ballet incorporates a number of basic positions or stances upon which other movements are based. In other words, two experienced ballet dancers who have never met could easily come together and find commonality in what they both know about ballet. The same can be said for thizzle dancing. Some of these common movements in thizzle dancing are (informally) referred to as “the bird”, “the Elizabeth”, “the George Jefferson”, “the swabbage patch”, “the furly”, and the infamous “thizz face”.

However, while each style of dance has its respective positions and movements, it should be noted that thizzle dancing takes little or no practice to perform “well”. Ballet on the other hand, takes years of practice to perfect. Ballerinas are not even permitted to attempt certain maneuvers (such as going “on point”) till they have reached a certain age and are physically able to withstand the demands of such positions. By contrast, an untrained child could thizzle dance, as the movements are fun and generally very easy.

Music is another point upon which ballet and thizzle dancing find minimal common ground. Thizzle dancing is almost always performed in the company of either live or recorded hyphy music performances. Oftentimes overhearing hyphy music may even encourage someone to begin thizzle dancing. Ballet is frequently performed to music as well. However, the choice of music is usually classical, which is sometimes even performed by a live orchestra.