

twyla tharp push comes to shove

Twyla Tharp's "Push Comes to Shove" is a seminal work in contemporary dance that showcases the choreographer's innovative blending of classical ballet and modern dance. Premiering in 1976, this piece has become a hallmark of Tharp's career, reflecting her unique vision and style. The work, both challenging and entertaining, is characterized by its intricate choreography, compelling narrative, and the seamless integration of movement and music. In this article, we will explore the genesis of "Push Comes to Shove," its thematic elements, the choreography itself, and its impact on the dance community and beyond.

Background of Twyla Tharp

Twyla Tharp is one of the most influential choreographers of the 20th and 21st centuries. Born on July 1, 1941, in Portland, Indiana, she grew up in a family that encouraged her artistic pursuits. Her dance education began at the University of New York and later expanded through various forms and styles, including ballet, modern dance, and jazz. Tharp's background in different genres has contributed to her distinctive choreographic voice, marked by a blend of technical precision and emotional depth.

Throughout her career, Tharp has created over 160 works, collaborating with prominent dance companies and artists. Her innovative approach has earned her numerous accolades, including Tony Awards, Emmy Awards, and a Kennedy Center Honor. "Push Comes to Shove" remains one of her most celebrated pieces, encapsulating her signature style and artistic philosophy.

The Genesis of "Push Comes to Shove"

"Push Comes to Shove" was commissioned by the American Ballet Theatre (ABT) and premiered on September 22, 1976. The work was created for the renowned ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov, who was at the height of his career. Tharp's collaboration with Baryshnikov was pivotal; his virtuosic technique and dynamic stage presence provided the ideal canvas for Tharp's choreography.

The piece was inspired by Tharp's desire to explore the relationship between dance and music. The score for "Push Comes to Shove" was composed by Philip Glass, whose minimalist style complements Tharp's choreographic language. The collaboration with Glass allowed Tharp to delve into the rhythmic and structural aspects of movement, creating a dialogue between the dancers and the music.

Thematic Elements

"Push Comes to Shove" is not just a display of technical prowess; it also conveys deeper

themes that resonate with audiences. Some key thematic elements include:

1. **Conflict and Resolution:** The title itself suggests a confrontation, reflecting the struggles and triumphs inherent in the human experience. The choreography illustrates this conflict through the dancers' interactions, showcasing both tension and harmony.
2. **Identity and Transformation:** The work explores the idea of self-discovery and transformation, as the dancers navigate their roles within the group dynamic. This theme is particularly evident in the way the choreography evolves, reflecting the characters' journeys.
3. **Collaboration and Community:** At its core, "Push Comes to Shove" is about the interconnectedness of individuals within a community. The ensemble work highlights the importance of collaboration, emphasizing how collective effort leads to greater artistic expression.

Choreography and Style

Twyla Tharp's choreography in "Push Comes to Shove" is characterized by its complexity and innovation. The work incorporates a wide range of movement styles, drawing from ballet, modern dance, and even elements of social dance. This eclectic approach creates a vibrant and diverse visual landscape.

Movement Vocabulary

The movement vocabulary in "Push Comes to Shove" is marked by several key features:

- **Dynamic Contrasts:** Tharp employs sharp contrasts in movement quality, alternating between fluid, lyrical phrases and abrupt, staccato actions. This adds a sense of unpredictability and excitement to the choreography.
- **Use of Space:** The dancers navigate the stage in varying formations, utilizing both vertical and horizontal space. This spatial exploration enhances the visual impact of the piece, drawing the audience's eye to different areas of the stage.
- **Physicality and Athleticism:** Tharp's choreography demands a high level of physicality from the dancers. The movements are often athletic and require strength, agility, and endurance, showcasing the dancers' technical skills.
- **Interaction with Music:** The relationship between movement and music is central to the choreography. Tharp's keen ear for rhythm and phrasing allows the dancers to respond to the score in nuanced ways, creating a cohesive artistic experience.

Signature Moments

"Push Comes to Shove" is filled with signature moments that have become iconic in the dance world:

1. The Opening Sequence: The piece begins with a striking opening sequence that establishes the tone and energy. The dancers move in unison, creating a sense of anticipation and excitement.
2. Baryshnikov's Solo: Mikhail Baryshnikov's solo section is a highlight of the piece, showcasing his extraordinary talent and charisma. This moment captures the essence of Tharp's choreography, blending technical skill with emotional expression.
3. The Finalé: The concluding section brings together the themes of conflict and resolution, as the dancers unite in a powerful display of collaboration. This moment leaves a lasting impression on the audience, encapsulating the spirit of the entire work.

Impact and Legacy

"Push Comes to Shove" has had a profound impact on the dance community and has influenced generations of choreographers and dancers. Its blend of classical and contemporary styles has opened new avenues for exploration within the art form.

Influence on Contemporary Dance

The piece has inspired countless choreographers to experiment with the fusion of different dance styles. Tharp's innovative approach has encouraged artists to push the boundaries of traditional ballet and modern dance, leading to the emergence of new choreographic voices.

Recognition and Awards

"Push Comes to Shove" has received critical acclaim and numerous awards since its premiere. The work is frequently performed by major dance companies around the world, solidifying its status as a classic in the repertoire. Tharp herself has been honored for her contributions to the field, further cementing her legacy as a trailblazer in contemporary dance.

Education and Outreach

Tharp's work has also had an impact on dance education. Many institutions incorporate "Push Comes to Shove" into their curricula, using it as a teaching tool to explore the principles of choreography, movement, and collaboration. Workshops and outreach programs centered around the piece have introduced new audiences to the world of dance, fostering appreciation for the art form.

Conclusion

Twyla Tharp's "Push Comes to Shove" stands as a testament to the transformative power of dance. Through its innovative choreography, rich thematic content, and dynamic integration of movement and music, the piece continues to resonate with audiences and artists alike. As we reflect on its legacy, it is clear that "Push Comes to Shove" is not just a work of art; it is an enduring exploration of the human experience, a celebration of creativity, and a powerful reminder of the beauty and complexity of dance.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the central theme of Twyla Tharp's 'Push Comes to Shove'?

The central theme of 'Push Comes to Shove' revolves around the struggle between artistic expression and the constraints of traditional forms, highlighting the tension between creativity and discipline.

What is the significance of the title 'Push Comes to Shove'?

The title 'Push Comes to Shove' signifies the moment when an artist must confront challenges and push beyond their limits, symbolizing a pivotal point in artistic and personal growth.

How does Twyla Tharp incorporate different dance styles in 'Push Comes to Shove'?

Twyla Tharp incorporates a blend of classical ballet and modern dance styles in 'Push Comes to Shove', showcasing her versatility and the seamless fusion of various techniques to create a unique movement language.

What role does music play in 'Push Comes to Shove'?

Music plays a crucial role in 'Push Comes to Shove', as Tharp uses it to enhance the emotional depth of the choreography, often opting for a dynamic score that complements the themes of struggle and triumph.

What are the notable characteristics of the choreography in 'Push Comes to Shove'?

The choreography in 'Push Comes to Shove' is characterized by its athleticism, intricate footwork, and innovative use of space, reflecting Tharp's signature style that challenges conventional dance form.

How did 'Push Comes to Shove' influence contemporary dance?

'Push Comes to Shove' influenced contemporary dance by pushing boundaries and encouraging dancers to explore a wider range of movement, thus inspiring future choreographers to blend genres and experiment with their own styles.

What can audiences expect from a performance of 'Push Comes to Shove'?

Audiences can expect a visually stimulating performance filled with dynamic energy, emotional depth, and a captivating exploration of human relationships through the medium of dance.

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