

SEÁN CURRAN

COMPANY



Show Time for Teachers

Welcome to *Show Time*, a performing arts resource guide published for the CSB/SJU Fine Arts Education series. This issue of *Show Time* is designed to be used before or after a performance of the Seán Curran Company.

Suggested activities in this issue include background information and ideas for integrating the performance with several subject areas. The activities may be adapted to meet your classroom time and needs.

Please feel free to copy pages in this guide as needed for student use.

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PERFORMANCE SYNOPSIS

Vocabulary

amadinda - a wooden xylophone from Uganda

Charlie Chaplin-a comedian and star of silent films of the early 1900's.

Buster Keaton-a comedian and star of silent films of the early 1900's.

choreographer-- someone who designs and maps out the steps in a dance piece.

percussion-beating or striking an object to create sound;

Seán Curran believes that children are more receptive than adults to abstract patterns in dance, largely because they have no preconceptions about dance.

"Kids aren't afraid of abstraction. They are willing to make a leap of faith." Seán Curran

In this show, the Seán Curran Company will perform three dance pieces full of high energy and high-contact choreography! Each piece will address a different theme:

1 **The Amadinda Dances** is inspired by Seán's experiences in South Africa.

2 **Metal Garden** is a funny tongue-in-cheek look at gardening.

3 **Companion Dances** is a tribute to friendship.



Greenfield photo

Curran is a modern dance choreographer who has been compared to Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton; he is naturally funny and likes to make people laugh. Curran likes to think of his dance studio as a playful space where his dancers can be inventive and spontaneous, like children at a playground!

Known for his wit and intelligence, Seán Curran began Irish step dancing lessons at an early age. He also studied modern dance and performed in the Off-Broadway hit, *Stomp!* Curran's style is a fusion of these many dance experiences, filled with humor and the unexpected.



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MODERN DANCE

THOROUGHLY MODERN!

Ballet was the traditional European and American form of theatrical dance until the early twentieth century. In the early 1900's some dancers began rebelling against the rigid constraints of classical ballet. Ballet shoes, costumes, and dance techniques were replaced by bare feet, loose, flowing garments, and a concept called 'free dance'.

This new dance style flourished in the United States which lacked a rich ballet history of its own. The experimentation of dancers such as Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis began a new era in dance history – the American modern dance movement of the 1920's.

Discarding the set forms and limited gestures of ballet, the leaders of this movement used their bodies to communicate personal experiences and feelings.

In the 1930's a second group of American modern dancers emerged in New York. Dancers such as Martha Graham and Charles Weidman turned natural human movement experiences such as walking and breathing into dance movements.

Following World War Two, modern dance masters like Merce Cunningham

and Twyla Tharp began combining dance techniques from several sources including social dance, ballet, and modern dance. This style of modern dance is still widely used today.

Postmodernists of the 1960's and 70's maintained that all movement was dance, and that any person was a dancer. Postmodern dancers regarded the use of everyday movements as being valid for performance and encouraged novel methods of dance composition.

Each of the twentieth century dance movements live on in contemporary dance. By blending modern and post modern approaches to choreography a wide variety of dance styles continues to emerge.

QUESTIONS to ASK:

? Why was the decade between 1920–1930 in America referred to as the “Roaring Twenties?” What other inventions and new ideas were born in this decade?

? Do you believe that everyone is a dancer? Is it necessary to be formally trained to be a dancer? Why or why not?

? Which modern dance influences do you think you will see (or did you see) in the Seán Curran performance?



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LIVE, LAUGH, and DANCE

HUMOR ME!

Seán Curran has been compared to early film stars Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin. Both men were comedians, actors, and film directors who became legends of the silent film era.

Buster Keaton is considered to be one of the greatest comedic and acrobatically skilled actors in film history. He often played a deadpan hero who survived against incredible odds, unperturbed by danger and calmly saving himself from calamity.

Charlie Chaplin was widely loved for his well-meaning character, Little Tramp. The Little Tramp, a lovable man who wore a raggedy suit and carried a cane always found himself wobbling into awkward situations. The Little Tramp charmed audiences with his uncanny ability to miraculously wobble away from those same situations.

Locate a few Charlie Chaplin or Buster Keaton films at the local library. Show some comedy clips from the films to your students.



The Little Tramp PBS photo

Invite students to discuss the styles of comedy they observed in the films.

Questions to Ask:

- ? How does the lack of talking in silent films (and dance performances) affect the style of comedy used?
- ? What did you observe in the Curran dance performance that might have been influenced by Chaplin or Keaton?

Buster Keaton films:

- College*
- Go West*
- The General*
- The Navigator*
- Our Hospitality*
- Sherlock, Jr.*
- Steamboat Bill, Jr.*

Charlie Chaplin films:

- The Tramp*
- The Kid*
- The Idle Class*
- The Pilgrim*
- The Gold Rush*
- A Dog's Life*
- The Immigrant*
- The Vagabond*



Buster Keaton in *Go West*



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THREE DANCES, THREE THEMES



Metal Garden involves metallic-clad dancers who perform not only for the audience but show off for each other as well! One dancer plays the comedic role of the gardener complete with theatrical props.

Pre-show:

What are some steps gardeners must take to care for their gardens?

Post-show:

What kind of garden is being tended in this piece?



A traditional amadinda

The Amadinda Dances fuses elements of South African culture (clothing, music, and movement) with American modern dance. The dance is set to music played on the amadinda which is a wooden xylophone from Uganda.

Pre-show:

Locate Uganda on a map of Africa. Why might the amadinda be crafted out of wood?

Post-show:

How do different musical instruments change the style of dance used in a performance?

Companion Dances is a dance about a special friendship between two choreographers. The two friends created the dances to pay tribute to one another.

Pre-show:

What are some ways that one person might pay tribute to another person?

Post-show:

Ask students to think of someone they admire. Invite them to pay tribute to that person through poetry, song, sculpture, collage, or dance.

DISCUSSING DANCE

What kinds of live dance performances have you attended or participated in?

How does the Seán Curran performance differ from dance performances you have experienced?

Who are traditional dance partners? How does the Seán Curran Dance Company break this “rule”?

How does different music affect the movements of dancers?



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DANCE = MOVEMENT

THEMES TO MOVE BY

Dance is often created around a common theme. Different movements in the dance relate to the theme in some way.

Use the list below (or brainstorm as a class) to create a working list of possible themes for dance movements.

snow day	loneliness
birthday party	friendship
home alone	kindness
babysitting	bullying
picture day	fearfulness

Divide the class into groups of four to six students. This will be their dance group.

Ask students to draw a slip of paper containing one of the theme words from a hat to keep it confidential until the performance. Alternately, groups may choose a theme from the list.

Instruct each student to create a unique verbal sound and motion that will represent the theme their group is portraying. When the movements are established, ask students to choose a sequence for the movements to be performed within their dance group. Allow students several minutes to experiment with their sequences.

Invite students to try changing the

tempo (speed) of their movements to see what happens.

After a few more minutes of practice ask for volunteer groups to perform their movement sequences for the class.

Invite the audience to guess which theme they are portraying.

ABSTRACT ZOO

Choreographers often vary the levels (floor, crouching, standing, jumping mid-air, etc.) at which dance movements occur to make the portrayal more accurate and interesting.

Invite students to choose an animal to portray for this activity. Each student will create a movement and a non-verbal sound to represent the animal. Remind students to consider what level they may need to use for their particular animal.

Allow a few minutes for students to explore their movement options. When the movements/sounds are established, gather students into a circle. Ask one student to begin the dance sequence by performing his or her movement/sound and move slowly around the circle to include all "animals". Repeat the sequence several times varying the tempo. Invite students to exaggerate their movements and add a bit of humor, then repeat the sequence. -5-



SEÁN CURRAN COMPANY

DEGAS, DUNCAN & DANCE

Make a color transparency of this page to share the images to your students. Shown in this column is *Two Dancers*, an oil painting by Edward Degas. A photograph of Isador Duncan, the “Mother of Modern Dance”, is shown in the second column. Degas is well known for the paintings and sculptures

he made of ballet dancers in late nineteenth century France. Isadora Duncan was rejected by American audiences in the early 1920’s when she rebelled against ballet in favor of “free dancing.”



Global Gallery image

- ? How might the performances shown in these images differ from the Seán Curran dance performance?
- ? What kinds of music might you expect to hear at a ballet or “free dance” performance of the early 1920’s?
- ? Why might Isadora Duncan’s dance style have been rejected at first?



OREMUS danse photo

QUESTIONS to ASK:

- ? What are some similarities and differences between the dancers shown?
- ? Which image shows the most traditional style of dance?

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THEATER ETIQUETTE

Each year, thousands of teachers, students, bus drivers, and parents take part in CSB/SJU's Fine Arts Education Series. Please review the **LOOKING** and **LISTENING** information with your students to help make your theater experience the best it can be.

LOOKING and LISTENING

Attending a live performance of *The Seán Curran Company* will be interesting and enjoyable for everyone if you remember to...

~watch for dance movements that are used to convey ideas and feelings

~listen for the musical rhythms to help you identify the musical instruments that are used to accompany the dancers

The dancers in *The Seán Curran Company* need help from you, the audience. You are an important part of the performance. Being an audience member in a theater is different from watching a movie or television show. The performers are in the same room with you and are affected by what you do. To do their best, the performers need you to watch and listen closely. Audience members also depend on your quiet attention during the performance so that they can enjoy their theater experience as well.

Please review the **PROCEDURES** information below to help your theater visit go smoothly.

PROCEDURES

~Please bring a minimum of one adult chaperone for every fifteen students.

~Please remind chaperones that the theater etiquette they model speaks volumes to your students.

~Prepare your students to enter the theater in single file in order of seating.

~Position your chaperones to maximize adult supervision of your group.

~Please wait until your whole group is seated before making trips to the rest room. Then students may go in small groups with the teacher's permission. Younger students making trips to the rest room will need to be chaperoned.

~The theater is a food, gum, drink, radio, camera, tape, and video recorder free zone!

~Please leave inappropriate behaviors behind when visiting the theater.

~Please remain seated following the performance. Your group will be dismissed from the theater by a Fine Arts Programming staff member.

Enjoy *The Seán Curran Company* performance!