

## WATCHING A DANCE PERFORMANCE

A Guide

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Photo BJM – Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal. © Svetla Atanasova.

Here's a little guide to help you enjoy a dance piece or performance.

First, a few basic guidelines!

- *Be open to a new experience.*
- *Be aware of your emotions; let yourself be affected by what happens.*
- *Arrive without expectations of what you're about to see.*
- *Let yourself be carried away by what you see; don't put pressure on yourself to understand everything!*

During the performance, you may choose to write down your first impressions, your emotions, the things you find interesting or impressive, etc.

After the performance, you can think about it in a different way using the short guide below. You can select the aspects that apply to the work you saw. You won't necessarily see them all in a single work! It's up to you. It's also nice to discuss it with your friends or classmates to get their point of view. The most important thing about the overall experience is to be open to it.

There is no one right way to watch, see, or understand dance. Depending on your personality, your personal experience, and your dance experience, you'll make your own connections!

## 1. What I OBSERVED – The stage and the dancers

It's very important to be able to BACK UP your answers and opinions with CONCRETE EXAMPLES.

Example 1: "I liked how projections were used in the show. It was as if they were interacting with the dancers. When the dancers made pushing motions with their arms, the projections 'reacted', and the image exploded into a thousand little pieces."

Example 2: "I think the piece is about space, because the dancers use light weight and sustained energy when they dance. They are also in slow motion and tightly controlled. They seem to float. Also, the lighting and sets remind me of a sky: a very dark blue general lighting, with small twinkling lights."

- *Type of performance space (non-traditional space, fragmented space, etc.);*
- *Performance area (downstage [near the front of the stage], upstage [near the back], backstage, etc.);*
- *Stage elements (sets, lighting, curtains, costumes, props, etc.);*
- *Number of dancers.*

## 2. What I SAW – The physical elements of the dance

*Things to look for:*

Dance style of the company/piece, the historical dance context to which it belongs.

*Body:* Locomotor and non-locomotor movements (i.e., movements that involve travelling from one place to another vs. movements without travel, such as bending, swaying, or wiggling), body shapes, symbolic gestures, everyday gestures, etc.

*Time:* stopping, acceleration, deceleration, fast/slow movement, binary or ternary structure.

*Space:* levels, directions, amplitudes, patterns in the air and/or on the ground, action zones, personal space (small, medium, large).

*Energy:* sporadic/sustained, heavy/light, direct/indirect, free/controlled.

*Relationship between the dancers:* relative position (face to face, back to back, near/far, etc.), spatial actions (meeting, crossing paths, coming together, moving apart), dynamic actions (carrying, pushing, lifting, supporting), roles (doing the opposite, imitating, etc.), group cohesion (solo, duet, trio, ensemble, etc.).

*Structure of the piece:* beginning/middle/end, form of the piece (binary/ABAB, ternary/ABC, rondo/ABACADA ..., themes and variations, etc.).

*Compositional elements:* repetition, variation, contrast, accumulation, unison, succession, canon, action/reaction, collage, etc.

### **3. What I UNDERSTOOD and FELT**

- The theme;
- The meaning or message;
- The story (as I see it);
- How the piece made me feel.

### **4. What I LIKED the most about the piece, and what I liked the least.**

Describe the parts I enjoyed, those I didn't enjoy, those that surprised or impressed me.