presidio dance theatre

SHERENE MELANIA, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

A PROGRAM OF PRESIDIO PERFORMING ARTS FOUNDATION

*Dancing Across Cultures*tm

STUDY GUIDE

Bringing the World of Dance Into the Lives of Childrentm

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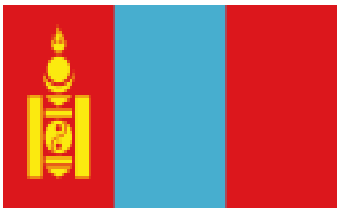
MONGOLIA



"Dance of the Tatars"
Music: Moiseyev Orchestra

Origin: Mongolia is located in East-Central Asia. It borders Russia to the north and China to the south. The Tatars were nomadic peoples of northeastern Mongolia in the region near Lake Baikal. Historically this minority was known as Dada and first was mentioned in the Tang Dynasty (618 - 907). After the break up of the Mongol Empire, the Tartars spread from present day Mongolia throughout Eastern Europe.

Dance History: Currently, the largest population of Tatars live in the Republic of Tatarstan and are a lively and vivacious people. They have many distinctive amusements and sports that are commonly held during festivals, such as dance, wrestling, and horse racing. Their dances are characterized by their swift intricate footwork.

Costume Notes: Svetlana Semyonova, Costume Designer of the Mariinsky Theatre (home of the Kirov Ballet) in Saint Petersburg, Russia designed and created the traditional costumes in an adaptation for children of Presidio Dance Theatre.

IRAN

"Fire In The Moonlight"
Music: Traditional Composition

Origin: Iran is located in Central Eurasia. It borders Armenia, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan to the north, Pakistan and Afghanistan to the east, Iraq and Turkey to the west. It is home to one of the world's oldest civilizations, the Persian Empire dates back to 4000BC.

Dance History: An important era influencing Persian dance was the Quajar dynasty which reigned from 1795 to 1925. It is during this period that "classical Persian dance" evolved. Dancers performed in the court of the Shah for entertainment purposes such as coronations, marriage celebrations, and Norouz celebrations (Iranian new year). The court dancers were well received and respect for dance grew and eventually it was elevated as an art form. The Shah rewarded performers with jewels, thus many costumes had elaborate gold embroidery, pearl beading and gemstones.

Costume Notes: A traditional costume consisted of a long dress, covered with an embroidered jacket, and harem pants. A small paisley-shaped hat adorned with jewels, pearls, a feather, and veil, was also worn. There is a distinctive style to Persian dance, including lovely expressive hands, eyes and face.

IRELAND

"Sweets of May"
Music: Ronan Hardiman. Siamsa.

Origin: Ireland is the third largest island in Europe. It lies to the northwest of continental Europe Great Britain is located to its east.

Dance History: The history of Irish dance can be traced back to the Celtic people (or Gaels), who arrived from central Europe in the third century. Traditional Irish dancing has been shaped by migrations and invasions throughout the years, as people brought their own traditions to the region. In the sixteenth century invaders were so impressed by the dances, that they brought them back to Great Britain and were performed for Queen Elizabeth. In 1750 Dance Masters began to teach pupils throughout the country and as steps became more intricate, the dances became more complicated. Irish dances can be divided into social and performance dances. The four main types of Irish dancing and muic are: Reels, Jigs, Hornpipe, and Set dances. Performance dance is typically referred to as step dance. It became popularized 1994 by the world wide sensation "Riverdance". Step dance is noted for its quick and precise leg movements, while the body and arms remain largely stationary.

Costume Notes: The girls' costumes are based on Celtic peasant dresses, although they are now highly embellished. The boy's costumes are much simpler, as not to distract from their footwork. Step dancing can be performed in hard shoes, or soft shoes. Hard shoes resemble tap shoes, but they are bulkier. Soft shoes worn by girls are called ghillies, they resemble a lace up ballet shoe. Boys wear a shoe similar to jazz shoes.

UKRAINE

"Ukranian Suite"

Music: Moiseyev Orchestra

Origin: The Ukraine is located in Eastern Europe. It borders Russia to the east, Belarus to the North, Poland to the west, and the Black Sea to the south.

Dance History: Dance has always played an important role in Ukrainian culture. Regional dances have been influenced throughout the years by various invasions. The Hopak or Gopak, is one of the most popular national dances. It was originally a peasant dance, performed only by men.

Costume Notes: The men's costumes for these dances are styled after Kozak dress, with boots, a comfortable shirt, a sash tied around the waist, and loose, billowy riding trousers. The women's costumes consist of a heavily embroidered blouse, skirt, and vividly colored vest. Women often wear a wreath of flowers, with ribbons cascading down the back. The Hopak is highly acrobatic and physically demanding for the men, they often take turns to showcase their talents. The women usually dance in unison. They must maintain their grace and beauty while dancing technically demanding steps.

Russia

"Danse Russe" from the ballet Swan Lake
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Origin: Russia is the largest country in the world. It is transcontinental, spanning across much of northern Eurasia.

Dance History: The ballet Swan Lake was composed by Tchaikovsky in 1875. The ballet was originally choreographed by Julius Reisinger, a German ballet master. It premiered in Moscow and was a failure. The ballet was later revived by the great choreographers Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov, their version was a tremendous success and today the ballet is enjoyed around the world. The danse russe (Russian dance) is an example of a classical character dance. These types of dances combine ballet steps with traditional folk dances. Unfortunately, this dance is often omitted from the third act of the ballet and it is rarely seen in.

Costume Notes: The costume consists of is a lavishly beaded dress, shiny blouse, and a traditional Russian headdress known as a "kokoshnik".

POLAND

"Polonaise & Mazurka" from the Ballet Paquita
Music: Ludwig Minkus

Origin: The Republic of Poland is located in central Europe. It is bordered by Germany to the west, Czech Republic to the south, Lithuania to the east, and the Baltic Sea to the north.

Dance History: The ballet Paquita premiered in the Académie Royale de Musique theatre in Paris April 1, 1846. The original paquita was choreographed by Joseph Mazilier to a score composed by Edouard Deldevez. The following year, the ballet was danced and staged by Marius Petipa in Saint Petersburg, Russia. In 1881 he staged a new version of the ballet to musical additions contributed by Ludwig Minkus, including this dance.
This dance is a classical character dance, consisting of two distinct Polish dances. The mazurka is a stylized Polish folk dance in triple meter with a lively tempo, containing a heavy accent on the third or second beat. The polonaise is a slower dance of Polish in 3/4 time. It was a popular court dance.

Costume Design: The costumes are designed in white and red, to represent the colors of the Polish flag. Designer Nonna Shestova, a favorite designer of Kirov ballerinas in Saint Petersburg, Russia, created these costumes for Presidio Dance Theatre.

BULGARIA

"Reka"
Music: Traditional Composition

Origin:The Republic of Bulgaria is one of the oldest states in Europe. It is located is Southeastern Europe. The Black Sea is to the east, Macedonia to the west, Romania to the north, and Greece to the south.

Dance History: Reka is a dance commonly found in Dobrudja. Reka means "hands", which are in constant motion throughout the dance.
Bulgarian folk dances are normally performed in lines. Hands are joined either in low "V" hold, belt hold, or crossed in front forming a "W" hold. Dances vary by region, footwork is always precise and ranges from slow to extremely fast paced.

Costume Notes: The costumes styles also depend on the region. The costumes you'll see today were a gift from the Minister of Culture of Bulgaria.

CHINA

"Parasol Dance"
Music: Traditional Composition

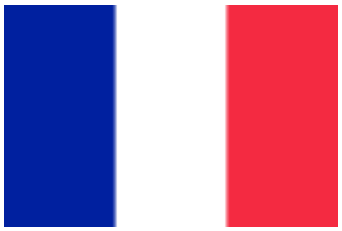
PARASOL DANCE

Origin: China is located in east Asia. It is one of the world's oldest civilizations.

Dance History: Chinese dance has a history of over five thousand years. Chinese folk music and dance presentation evolved during the Han dynasty (206 B. C. - A. D. 220), as court entertainment was developed for the Imperial family. During the Tang dynasty (A. D. 618 - 907), poetry, music and dance flourished. Contact with neighboring countries developed during this time, mainly through trade, and new techniques and styles were adopted. Korea, India, Persia, Vietnam, and Cambodia among other central Asian countries, were great influences. Music, dance, drama, and poetry were often combined to present an early type of dance theatre.

Costume Notes: Colorful costumes complemented the newly refined traditional dances, and props such as parasols and fans were also used. The advancement of the performing arts was so great during the Tang dynasty, that it is known as the golden age of ancient China.

FRANCE



"Puss In Boots"
Music Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Origin: France is located in Western Europe. It also has many overseas territories. France is bordered by Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Monaco, and Spain.

Dance History: The ballet Sleeping Beauty is based on Charles Perrault's *La Belle au bois Dormant*. Marius Petipa choreographed the original version which premiered at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg in 1890. Sleeping Beauty is one of the most beloved story- book ballets. Puss in Boots, his ballerina kitty and other fairy tale characters attend Princess Aurora and Prince Desire's wedding in Act III of the ballet. Puss in Boots is a classical dance, but it also displays a great deal of pantomime, commonly used in ballets to tell a story.

Costume Notes: Nonna Shestova adapted the costumes for Puss In Boots from the Kirov Ballet's Sleeping Beauty, original version.

LEBANON

"Ka'an Azzaman"

Music: Fairuz

Origin: The Lebanon is a small, mountainous country in Western Asia. Located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, it is bordered by Israel to the south, and by Syria to the north and east.

Dance History: The national dance of Lebanon is a Debke, a line dance, this type of dance is also found in Palestine, Syria, and Jordan. Debke was an important pat of village life and people often danced at gatherings and rituals, such as weddings. These traditional circle dances consist of intricate footwork. The Lebanese folk music and dance reflect their joy in life. Belly Dance is another type of dance in the Arab World. The dance you will see today combines traditional folk steps to create a more theatrical interpretation.

Costume Notes: The Costumes are very vibrant and display a mixture of bright colors.

ITALY

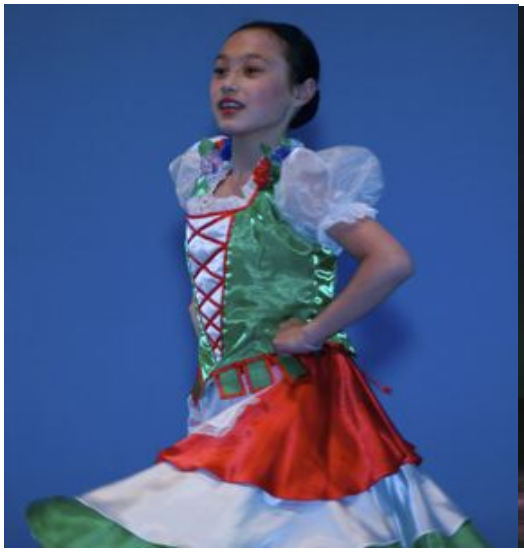
"Tarantella"

Music: Traditional Composition

Origin: Italy is located on the Italian Peninsula in Southern Europe, and on the two largest islands in the Mediterranean Sea, Sardinia and Sicily. It shares its northern Alpine boundary with France, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia.

Dance History: The tarantella is a traditional, southern Italian dance of 6/8 or 4/4 time. It originated in the city of Taranto, from which it received its name. The tarantella is characterized by the its fast tempo and usually performed in a circle. Variations of the dance occur in different regions. The dance tarantella is also associated with the word "tarantula" (meaning spider). It was believed that only the fast paced dancing of the tarantella could cure the bite of the local wolf spider. The legend said that a dancer must perform the dance with such joy or he/she would die from the venom. In reality, the spiders were not dangerous, and often avoided human contact. The tarantella is always performed in couples, either girl/boy or 2 girls, performing this dance alone is considered bad luck.

Costume Notes: The costumes represent the colors of the Italian flag. Dancers often perform with tambourines, adorned with ribbons for festive occasions.



WHO MAKES THE DANCES?

SHERENE MELANIA,
Artistic Director & Principal Choreographer

In January 2008, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom re-appointed Ms. Melania to the San Francisco Arts Commission. As Commissioner, Sherene Melania advocates for children, especially from the underserved communities and hopes to use her passion for dance to encourage not only an appreciation for the arts and artistic excellence, but also the value of developing "complete artists" who utilize academic and dance education, as a tool for promoting cultural awareness and understanding, leading to a deep compassion for humanity.

Sherene Melania has had an extraordinary dance education. She has been fortunate to study under teachers who were students of the direct pupils of Agrippina Vaganova (Ballet) and Igor Moiseyev (Character/Folk). She began her professional training at the age of 8 with San Francisco Ballet School, (Helgi Tomasson, Artistic Director). At age 12, Ms. Melania continued her classical training at the Kirov Academy of Ballet in Washington, D.C. (Oleg Vinogradov, Artistic Director). She achieved the distinction to perform principal youth roles with both the San Francisco Ballet and Kirov Ballet of the Mariinsky Theatre and be a participant in the Prix de Lausanne Junior International Ballet Competition, representing the USA.

In 2000, Ms. Melania accepted the invitation to study Ballet at the Saint Petersburg State Conservatory, the only American with this honor and received a Certificate for Ballet DirectionSpecialty &Choreography.Concurrent-ly, she completed a two-year ballet apprenticeship, studying under Kirov Ballet Mistress Gabriella Komleva. She performed in Russia, France, Switzerland, Brazil, and the United States and for international television. In 2005, Ms. Melania earned a B.A. Summa Cum Laude from the University of San Francisco (Performing Arts and Social Justice) and was awarded the *Dean's Medal for Excellence in the Arts,* USF's most prestigious academic award. She performed as a member of the USF Dance Ensemble for His Holiness the Dalai Lama. She is listed in Who's Who in International Dance and holds an International Baccalaureate Diploma with Honors in English, French, and Russian.

Since Fall 2005, Ms. Melania is Artistic Director and Principal Choreographer of Presidio Dance Theatre. She has tripled the Academy enrollment, formed a Junior Company for students 8-18yrs. as wells as an Adult Company with a repertoire of more than 100 new choreographic pieces for three signature productions: *Dancing Across Cultures*, *Winter Wonderland*, and *Holiday Divertissments*, performed annually at the most prestigious west coast venues, such as: SF War Memorial Opera House, Palace of Fine Arts, Herbst Theatre, Marin Center, and special events for the United Nations, Smithsonian, International Red Cross and others. This is Ms. Melania's 3rd Year to direct PDT's camps.

Ms. Melania appreciates for the purest form of classical ballet and the richly diverse world of folk dance traditions, from which she draws on to create a highly innovative approach to bridging eastern and western traditions of classicism and folklore.