

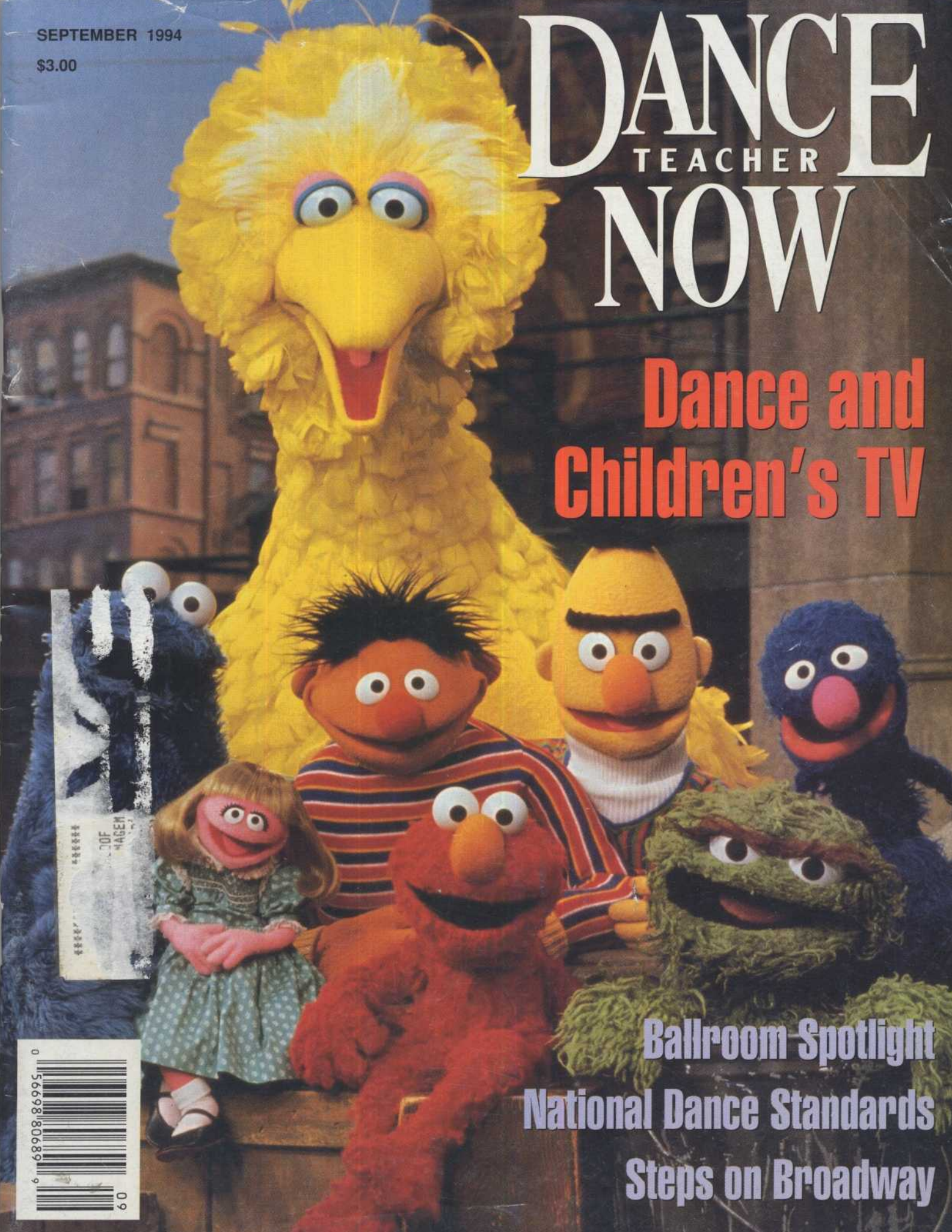
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\$3.00

DANCE TEACHER NOW

Dance and Children's TV

Ballroom Spotlight
National Dance Standards
Steps on Broadway



JOE HAGEN



DANCE & CHILDREN'S TV

Burton and eight dancers to show the process of creating the dance and the teamwork necessary between choreographer, dancers and musical artists.

Ronnie Krauss, writer/producer for the Emmy-winning *Reading Rainbow* says, "We try to use dance whenever it is appropriate. It's another way, other than words, to tell a story."

Using dance as a narrative medium, another episode, *Abiyoya*, offers viewers a variety of storytelling techniques—dance, music, and fable or metaphor. The Melody Stewart Dance Company, a modern dance company based in New York, presents its version of *Beauty and the Beast*; the way in which company dancers use their bodies conveys personality and storyline. For instance, the sneering faces and insolent shouldering pinpoints the sisters' personalities, while Beauty's delicate and gentle hand movements illustrate her feelings for the Beast.

In a segment featuring the book *Silent Lotus*, dance is shown as a form of communication. The main character in the book learns to speak with her body. She must communicate with movements since she lacks a real voice. She finds movement more truthful than words. Using this idea and tying in Martha Graham's belief that the body does not lie, explore the relationship between dance steps and gestures, such as lifted shoulders, a nod or shake of

the head. Is it possible to communicate relaxation with shoulders up to your ears? In the stream-of-consciousness flow of the show, this leads Burton to try out sign language; he then shows how the National Dance Institute (begun by former New York City Ballet dancer Jacques d'Amboise) brings deaf children and dance together.

Krauss credits the success of *Reading Rainbow* to its host, LeVar Burton. "He is wonderful to work with. Very sincere. He is willing to try anything to show children that books are springboards to many other activities."

And you can see that Burton enjoys life and goes out of his way to show that dance is one way to enjoy it. Ben Vereen does a wonderful dance routine around a playground in *Ty's One-Man Band*, to show the rhythms of life. In other segments Burton explores a variety of styles—from clogging in Appalachia, to African dancing with the Forces of Nature dance troupe. In the *Sophie and Lou* episode, a story where a mouse overcomes her shyness by learning to dance, Burton tries everything from hip-hop to the mambo, and then treats viewers to a look at dance in Bali, Ireland and Australia, showing some dance forms indigenous to those countries along the way.

Try checking out a few *Reading Rainbow* books from the library and incorporate them into your next class just as Burton does. Many bookstores have special displays for books featured on *Reading*

Rainbow. The discount chain store, Target, offers them at 10% off retail price.

You can contact your local public television station for a listing of books featured on the show. A volunteer parent, grandparent or senior student can make the call and then duplicate the list for handouts to your class. Many books on the list will lend themselves to dance. Recreating the story through movement can be an enriching and liberating experience for students.

The Mickey Mouse Club

For entertainment with a message, you can't beat the *Mickey Mouse Club* shown daily on The Disney Channel. Things have changed from the days when Annette, Cubby and Karen graced the small screen. The dancing, music and casting have kept up with the times.

Myles Thoroughgood, choreographer for *MMC*, is expected to invent dance material for every episode. A normal week of programming combines production numbers, music videos, and live concert performances. On the set of *MMC*, Thoroughgood works with 21 talented teens. During the shooting season (spring through fall) it's a hectic schedule rehearsing and taping numbers within each week; the result is a rich amalgamation of dance ranging in styles from hip-hop to modern, rock and traditional jazz, tap, and ballet.

Thoroughgood reaches back to his own training at The Philadelphia College of Performing Arts to bring out the best in each performer. "The cast comes from a variety of backgrounds and so have a variety of talents and expertise. They force me to be creative and come up with fresh moves all the time."

While the dances are a source of entertainment for the viewers, they are not without a message. Depending on the music for the choreography, Thoroughgood hopes to convey that, "Movement expresses more [than words]. It can be used powerfully to tell a story and to entertain. The feelings expressed through movement communicate at a different level than words alone."

MMC has used dance to celebrate community achievement and to highlight literacy, racism and other social issues. An important message from Thoroughgood is, "You should keep trying new things so you never have to ask 'What if...?'" The variety of dance presented on *MMC* is a visual reminder of that philosophy. The pro-

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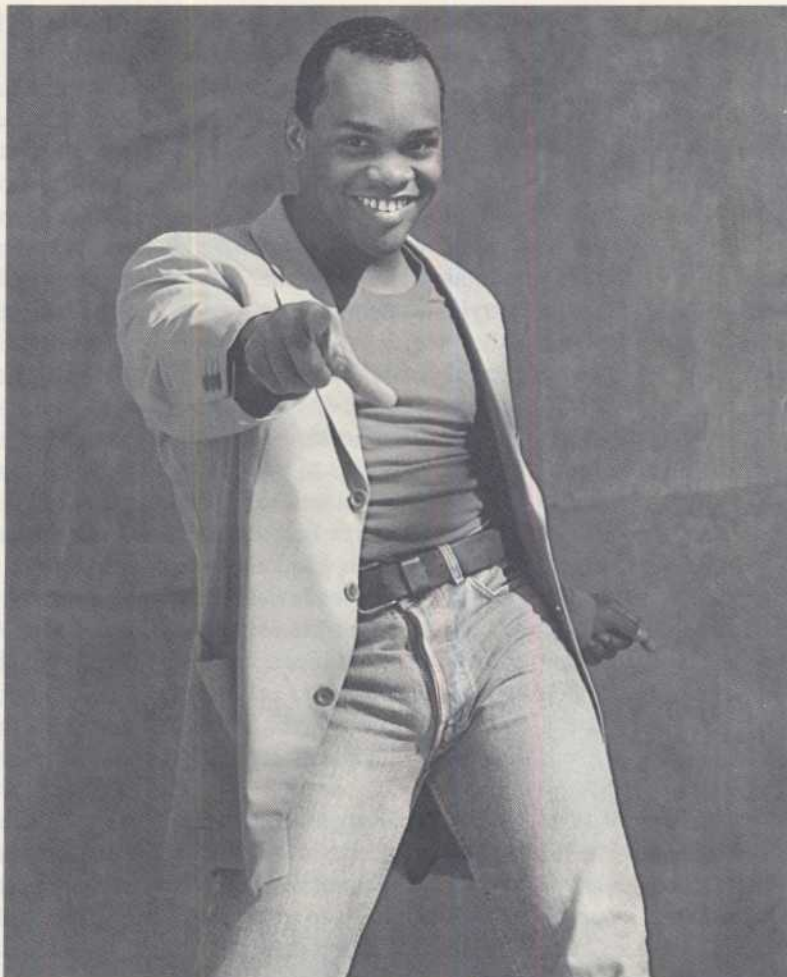


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gram has to speak to a wide range of viewers, and dance is often the medium that can talk to the widest range. It spans language, age and color differences.

Take a bit of Thoroughgood's philosophy to class with you and let your students try something new. Challenge their sense of movement adventure with a new style. Challenge yourself and see how inventive you can be so you can ask, "What if...?" What if you started facing upstage? What if you changed the way of counting? A simple eight-count movement phrase takes on new life when reversed, slowed down, speeded up, augmented or inverted. Give the students a "What if...?" assignment and implement one or more of the choreographic tools above for a new perspective on old material.



Myles Thoroughgood, choreographer for the *Mickey Mouse Club*.
Photograph by Don Lewis

Around the Corner from *Sesame Street*

The best known children's program is probably *Sesame Street*. Now in its twenty-fifth season of teaching preschoolers their numbers, letters and colors, this program remains on the leading edge of children's television.

David V.B. Britt, the Children's Television Workshop (CTW) president and CEO says, "The Workshop's initial mission was to experiment with the use of television in the service of educating young people, with particular concern for poor and minority kids." The Workshop was so good at their project, that nearly all children have *Sesame Street* as part of their early childhood education.

Sesame Street was CTW's first production and the mission that started in 1969 continues today. At first, the program stressed the cognitive goals—letters, numbers, opposites—concepts that children needed for kindergarten. From that time to today, dance has been used as a means to present the material to preschoolers.

Ballerina Suzanne Farrell can be seen dancing the opposites *big* and *little*. First

she takes little steps (bourees), then big steps (grand jetes). Later in the same program she might be seen eating a little lunch (a small container of yogurt) and a big lunch, (a container of yogurt larger than her head). These kinds of comparisons and extremes tickle a preschooler's funny bone and make learning fun.

Savion Glover is a regular on *Sesame Street* and can often be seen teaching tap dance to Mr. Snuffleupagus, or tapping away and letting the Count (a muppet character based on Count Dracula) count the taps.

The alphabet dancers wiggle themselves about to make letter shapes with their bodies. (This is a great activity that can be taken directly into the studio to your students. It teaches not only letter recognition, but also cooperation between children.)

A new item on *Sesame Street* is the addition of a dance studio, around the corner from Big Bird's nest. The studio comes complete with teacher, Miss Celina. Annette Calud, the actress portraying

Celina, has starred in the leading role of Kin on Broadway in *Miss Saigon* as well. The *Sesame Street* dance studio is the site for many neighborhood activities and dance classes. Each day there is a segment for participation dances so that young (and old) viewers can get into the action. These might be dances from around the world, or a variation of "Doing the Pigeon," a dance favorite of pigeon-loving muppet, Bert.

Calud will be presenting the participation dances with the help of other characters both human and muppet. Styles presented will include all forms of dance—tap, jazz, modern, ballet, ballroom, folk dance and creative movement.

Calud comments, "I hope that the dance studio will encourage both children and parents to incorporate dance and movement with learning. I also would like children to express themselves through move-

ment and realize what fun dance, exercise and music can be."

Choreographer Bryant Young began on *Sesame Street*, dancing as a muppet performer 14 years ago and has been choreographing the show for the past two seasons—dances for the muppets and children mainly. He doesn't choreograph for the guest performers or for Savion Glover. "We have respect for the talent of the artists and what they can bring to the scene. It's important that the talent and personality of the guest artist is brought out in the scene. As for Savion, he is such an amazing tap dancer, I would never presume to suggest how he should do a tap routine. His sense of rhythm and syncopation within a phrase is truly inspiring. We have worked together in group pieces though.

"There was a number that had to be done for Savion, Annette, and six four- and five-year-olds. No one noticed that there was a dance in there until it was about to be taped! I had about 30 minutes to come up with something and rehearse a big production number before it was thrown in