



MARK MORRIS  DANCE GROUP

DanceOn! Digital Dance Lab

L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato

Resource Guide

40th Anniversary Digital Season 20/21



Welcome to Dance On! Digital Dance Lab,

a three-part dance series that introduces students to three of Mark Morris's most acclaimed works, *The Hard Nut*, *Dido and Aeneas*, and *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso ed il Moderato*. Utilizing MMDG's inclusive and culturally responsive arts education approach, each session includes a 20-minute movement lesson, led by an MMDG dancer and accompanied by live music, an interactive guide, and is designed for participants and their families with and without disabilities.

This interactive resource guide aims to provide students with deeper engagement and insight into one of Mark's most acclaimed works and contains student-centered activities to further explore the concept of artistic collaboration and inspiration through dance.

We hope you enjoy!

Sarah Marcus, Director of Education

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Learning Objective

In this Digital Dance Lab, students will learn how using multiple artistic forms as inspiration to create an artistic piece can result in dramatic impact, as in Mark Morris Dance Group's *L'Allegro*. They will have the opportunity to learn about the dance and the multiple art pieces that inspired it, think about how those different elements support meaning-making throughout the dance, try out dancing some of the movement themselves, and explore how they might create their own art by using something that inspires them.

About the Artform: Modern Dance

Dance is defined as: "To move rhythmically usually to music, using prescribed or improvised steps and gestures." There are many styles of dance and ways to move the body. The dance form performed by the Mark Morris Dance Group is called MODERN dance.

What Is Modern Dance?

Modern dance developed in the 20th century primarily in the United States and Germany. Along with modern art, it was a rebellious response to the traditional style of classical ballet. The earliest modern dance innovators pushed the boundaries and limitations previously set by traditional schools of dance. American pioneers include Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, and Ruth St. Denis.

Mark Morris creates original dances much as the pioneers of modern dance once did. His company, the Mark Morris Dance Group, is an ensemble that only performs dances that he creates. Many modern dance companies perform dances by several choreographers. Dance companies that perform dances by choreographers' other than their founders are called repertory companies.

Who is Mark Morris?



CHOREOGRAPHER & COLLABORATOR

Mark Morris is the founding Artistic Director of and choreographer for the Mark Morris Dance Group, an internationally renowned touring company he founded in 1980. Since its founding, Mark has choreographed over 150 works for his company. Prior to settling into his dance home, the Mark Morris Dance Center in Brooklyn, NY, Mark was Director of Dance at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, the national opera house of Belgium from 1988-1991. It was during his tenure in Belgium that Mark choreographed some of his most well-known works including *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, the dance we are studying today.

Who is John Milton?



POET/AUTHOR of *L'Allegro, il Penseroso*

December 9, 1608–November 8, 1674

John Milton is an English poet who is most well-known for the epic poem *Paradise Lost*. Milton wrote the twin poems *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* (1631) in the early part of his career. These poems reflect his youth, innocence, and appreciation for nature. In these poems, Milton focuses on feelings of happiness and sadness, using the words MIRTH and MELANCHOLY. Instead of stating an obvious argument that mirth is desirable and melancholy is not, he challenges the reader to imagine that each state contains elements of the other. Milton declares that he is willing to live harmoniously with both mirth and melancholy.

Who is George Frederic Handel?



COMPOSER of *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*

February 23, 1685–April 14, 1759

George Frederic Handel, a musician and composer, wrote the masterpiece *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, a musical ORATORIO, in 1740. He asked his colleague, Charles Jennens, a librettist, to assist him by interweaving John Milton's two poems *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* into the music. Handel felt that a third section needed to be added in order to unite the opposing themes of joy and contemplation, and Jennens produced *il Moderato*, which was intended to balance the work.

While Handel composed hundreds of pieces of music including operas, stage works, choral work, church music, cantatas, chamber music, and large orchestral works, he is best known for oratorios, which were often stories taken from the Old Testament. Later in his writing career Handel continued his interest in writing music to biblical text. The best known of these works is *Messiah*, composed in 1741, which is still performed and recorded today.

Who is William Blake?



PAINTER of *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*

November 28, 1757–August 12, 1827

William Blake is an English poet, painter, and engraver who created a unique form of illustrated verse. In 1803, at the height of his creativity, Blake created twelve watercolors inspired by Milton's poems *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. Blake lived and worked in isolation in London, drawing from a rich imagination populated by angels, mystical creatures, gods, and prophets. Viewed by his contemporaries as bewildering and unintelligible, his work was ignored, and he lived without wealth or recognition. Today, Blake is seen as an iconoclast and visionary, an individual thinker and revolutionary. Many of the figures in his watercolors for *L'Allegro* are drawn in flowing robes like the ancient mythological characters, giving divine form to Milton's scenes. His drawings demonstrate tremendous appreciation of human anatomy with their depiction of heavily muscled figures just like the great artist Michelangelo drew.

"Masterpiece isn't a word to be thrown around lightly, but there's no denying that Mark Morris's 'L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato' is thrillingly that."

The New York Times



L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato

About *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*

L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato is a production of the Mark Morris Dance Group that is a result of a unique COLLABORATION among artists whose lives spanned 350 years. This collaboration combines many art forms, including poetry, music, dance, scenery, costumes, and lighting design. Originally *L'Allegro* was performed as an ORATORIO, which is a piece of music that tells a story, similar to opera, but without action happening on stage. The final production of these artists spans 350 years, not because it was so complicated to create, but because each of the artists lived during a different period in history. Each of these artists commented on or added their impressions to what the artist before them had already created. In 1631, the poet John Milton wrote the poems *L'Allegro* and

About *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* CONTINUED

Il Penseroso. A century later in 1740, George Frederic Handel composed the music and Charles Jennens reworked the poems to fit this music. Fifty years later in 1794, William Blake created illustrations, and most recently in 1988, Mark Morris added stage action with dance, scenery, costumes, and lighting.

The journey of today's production began with the twin poems *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, written by John Milton. In Italian, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* mean "the merry man" and "the thoughtful man." As is highlighted throughout, the work contrasts extreme states of feelings: joy/sorry, places: country-life/city-life, elements: light/dark, and states of being: joyful, unity with others/solitary contemplation. By conjuring up scenes that demonstrate the contrasts John Milton captures the world and all that exists in it. Much after Milton's life, composer George Frederic Handel was inspired to use the poet's words for the oratorio he composed. To provide balance to the work, Handel added a third section, *il Moderato*, meaning "the reasonable man." Handel was not alone in his admiration of these beautiful

poems. Fifty years after *L'Allegro*'s premiere performance, William Blake, a painter and poet, created drawings that illustrated Milton's words and complimented Handel's oratorio. Last to contribute, choreographer Mark Morris created a dance for his company, the Mark Morris Dance Group, that incorporated the works of Milton, Handel, and Blake. He collaborated with contemporary designers in scenery, costume, and lighting to create the current production. By the time Morris set out to create his dance for *L'Allegro* 350 years had passed since Milton first wrote the poems.

In MMDG's production of *L'Allegro*, one can hear Milton's poetry sung by opera singers: four soloists and a chorus. The words these singers sing is called the LIBRETTO. In this case, it is Milton's poetry in the order of the dance that was made by Mark Morris. Some of the words are meant to tell the story (the RECITATIVE) and some words are meant to depict the feelings expressed by the poetry (the ARIAS). Handel wrote the music that one can hear performed by the orchestra.

The Making of a Production

It took 350 years to create the current production of *L'Allegro*. Let's look at some world events during that time.

MILTON'S LIFETIME

1609	In Italy, Galileo builds the first telescope
1631	Milton writes poems <i>L'Allegro</i> and <i>Il Penseroso</i>
1661	In France, the ballet superintendent develops the five positions of ballet

HANDEL'S LIFETIME

1654	Newton describes gravity
1682	Peter the Great named Czar of Russia. Linked with Westernization
1740	Handel composes the oratorio <i>L'Allegro</i>

BLAKE'S LIFETIME

1789	Bill of Rights adopted to US Constitution
1789	Edward Jenner, A British physician develops the first vaccination to prevent illness
1794	Blake creates 12 drawings inspired by <i>L'Allegro</i> and <i>Il Penseroso</i>
1801	Thomas Jefferson elected 3rd President of US, serves two terms

MORRIS'S LIFETIME

1958	Writer Jack Kerouac publishes his novel <i>On the Road</i>
1969	Astronaut Neil Armstrong walks on the moon
1987	The NAMES Project begins, a movement to memorialize those who have died of AIDS. Today more than 43,000 names have been added to the quilt
1988	Morris choreographs <i>L'Allegro</i>

About the Designers

Scenic Design	Adrianne Lobel
Costume Design	Christine Van Loon
Lighting Design	James F. Ingalls

Movement Lesson

Led by MMDG Dancer Aaron Loux and accompanied on piano by George Lykogiannis.

Accessibility: Seated modifications are provided throughout the movement lesson.

WARM-UP

Explore MOTIFS and concepts around how other artistic disciplines can inspire movement: music, poetry, and art

- Arm movements from “Populous Cities”
- Adding lower with body weight shifts, use of focus, and space

INVESTIGATE

Movements to Music–IMPROVISATION responding to:

- TEMPO
- METER
- TONE

EXPLORE

Adding on with movement to TEXT and IMAGERY

- Write your name in space
- Utilize different body parts and with dimension in a circular space
- “Il Penseroso”—this section of the dance uses images of books and reading (reading MOTIFS). Dancers will generate movement inspired by those images.

ELABORATE

Create your own movement phrase that combines music, text and images from L’Allegro’s section “Populous Cities”

- City, busy landscape but peaceful, people, triumphant
- Listen to music:
 - Dancers will think about how the music and the text makes them feel
- Dancers will create their own movement sentence based on what inspires them through music, text/ books, images/visual art. What inspires you? Dancers can play with levels, time, space, effort.

REFLECT

Recall

- Dancers learned about the 350 year multi-disciplinary collaboration that created *L’Allegro*.
- Dancers explored music, text, and imagery to support a story.
- When watching the MMDG *L’Allegro* Digital Content to see how Mr. Morris creates movements that directly relate to words in the poems, respond to music, and reflect on how that makes you feel.
- Dancers will recall they learned real moves that can be seen in the Mark Morris Dance Group’s performance of *L’Allegro*.

For older participants

Facilitate a discussion or writing assignment that addresses the role dance plays in their lives.

Example prompts include:

1. Describe a style of dance that you enjoy doing and explain why;
2. Describe the role dance plays in your culture (American or other);
3. Write a poem or a short story that can be set to movement or a TABLEAU.

Vocabulary Words

Melancholy	Meter	Recitative
Aria	Mirth	Tableau
Choreographer	Modern Dance	Tempo
Collaboration	Motifs	Tone
Composer	Oratorio	
Libretto	Poet	

Digital Content & Discussion Session

Explore *L'Allegro* Digital Content:

"Gorgeous Tragedy"

"Populous Cities"

This discussion will give students the chance to reflect upon their experience with the performance material and to articulate their responses and interpretations. The discussion will allow students to note how ideas and characters can be expressed through dance and music.

Lead the class in a reflection on their experience.

These questions can also be used as prompts for students to think about prior to beginning the Lab and in addition to as a guide for post-activity discussion:

- How do the dancers use their bodies and facial expressions to set the mood without words?
- What was the music like? How did it help to convey the text?
- Do you see the imagery of William Blake's watercolors in the movement?
- How do the costumes help explain the story?
- What was your favorite part of the performance? Why?
- Did any parts of the dance surprise you? Why?
- How would you describe what you saw to a friend?

Further Information and Resources

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