

Singapore Arts Festival Resource Pack

Dance to Remember: Kazuo Ohno

This resource pack contains 1 lesson which lasts for 90 minutes.

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Introduction

Workshop - Dance to Remember: KAZUO OHNO (90 minutes)

Kazuo Ohno (October 27, 1906 – June 1, 2010) was a revered Japanese dance artist who, along with Tatsumi Hijikata, founded butoh, the dance-theater form that resembled, for many, the darkness of life and death after World War II. Rejecting the limitations of Western dance and the binds of classical Japanese dance traditions, butoh developed to be the much needed expression of humanity at that time. Today, there are butoh practitioners and students all over the world and many contemporary artists continue to embrace and adopt the philosophies and teachings of Hijikata and Ohno.

Born in Hokkaido to a local fisherman and his wife, Ohno was very much influenced by the German expressionist dance training he received from students of Mary Wigman, a pioneer of modern dance, as well as his first-hand experience with the horrors of war during nine years in the Japanese Army. One of his most resonant works, *Jellyfish Dance*, was inspired by his observations of jellyfish at a burial site for fallen combatants.

Ohno is a testament to the agelessness of dance. Less than three years before his passing at age 103, he was still performing in Japan. As his body deteriorated, he continued to dance with his functional parts – mostly his extremities – in order to reach out to his audience. The Kazuo Ohno Dance Studio in Yokohama, which is run by his son, Yoshito Ohno, remains open to the public for workshops every week.

To Kazuo Ohno, dance technique alone is not the mark of a good dancer. Physical responsiveness to one's environment and sensitivity to one's memories and history were what he imparted to his students and held to be essential in a dancer's development. This sense of openness was central to his performance, whether he was addressing a crowd or improvising for the camera. This resource packet guides teachers in introducing their students to Ohno's artistic concepts through interactive activities.

Preparation

Theme 1: Writing a Memory

- 1) Students need writing materials: Paper and pencil or pen

Theme 2: Avatar

- 1) Students need to have their writing from Activity 1 for this activity.
- 2) Select 4- 5 pieces of instrumental music that will be played softly.

Theme 3: Slow Motion

- 1) Each student picks out three movements that they created in Theme 2 for use in Slow Motion.

Talk Back

- 1) Search for photographs of Ohno's performances and/or rehearsals in books and/or on the internet. Video samples of butoh are optional. Suggested weblinks are included as recommended resources.
- 2) Make the necessary technical arrangements for the projection of the images and video samples.

LESSON PLAN

Theme 1: Writing a Memory

Description: Kazuo Ohno began each new dance with a pen and journal at hand, ready to record thoughts and reflections throughout his choreographic process. Memories, imaginings and inspirations from other people's art and poetry would work their way into his writings and eventually, into his dances. In Writing a Memory, students are given a chance to write freely on a given subject and experience the connection that Ohno made between writing and dancing.

Objective:

To introduce students to the life and artistic concepts of Kazuo Ohno

Outcome:

Students will be able to briefly introduce Kazuo Ohno to others

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| 1) Describe to the students what a life form is – a real or imagined being of any shape, size or color. Examples include robots, insects, mythical creatures, etc. | 2 min |
| 2) Guide them in writing a memory or fantasy of a life form they have encountered, read about, or imagined. Instruct them to write for 5 straight minutes, without lifting their pens off the paper as much as possible. Remind them that the goal in this exercise is to write continuously, even if they may break some grammatical and punctuation rules. Invite them to draw a picture of their life form for 5 minutes after writing. | 12 min |
| 3) Encourage some students to share what they wrote or drew. Have a discussion about the factual and imagined aspects of the life forms. | 6 min |

Total: 20 min
 Use writing materials.

Theme 2: Avatar

Description: Mythological creatures and movie characters are often able to physically transform to look and move in a way entirely unlike them. Similarly, Ohno, with strong determination and rigorous training, often adopted characteristics of various creatures and personalities in order to embody their instincts and movement. Students will be inspired by their own writing and create movement according to the idiosyncrasies of their respective life forms.

Objective:

To engage students in a dance-making process of Kazuo Ohno

Outcome:

Students will be able to identify key elements in a dance-making process.

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| 1) Students underline verbs (action words) and circle adverbs (descriptive words) in their writing from Theme 1: Writing a Memory. | 2 min |
| 2) Instruct the students to pay close attention to the words that they had underlined or circled and allow them some time to think about how these words affect the movement of their life form. Encourage the students to close their eyes for a minute to imagine. | 3 min |
| 3) With the pre-selected pieces of music playing in the background, invite the students to move around the space with characteristics of their life form. Remind them to explore the movement independently and with as little interaction with other life forms as possible. Ask questions such as: How do these life forms eat or clean themselves? What would the resting position for these life forms look like? What do they do for fun? | 10 min |
| 4) Split the students into groups of 4 – 5 and allow the individual life forms within the group to begin interacting with each other. Ideas for interaction: How are the different life forms able to move freely, while sharing a very small amount of space? Are they able to travel around as a group? | 10 min |
| 5) Invite some individual life forms and groups of life forms to perform their movements for the rest of the class. | 5 min
Total: 30 min. Use writing from Theme 1 and pre-selected music. |

Theme 3 – Slow Motion

Description: Kazuo Ohno was very fond of having his photograph taken and had amassed over four thousand slides and prints of himself. Inviting photographers to rehearsals became almost a ritual for both him and his son, Yoshito. Being observed by a photographer in the studio heightened their awareness of being seen and prompted them to consider what their movement looked like. In this activity, students experience moving in slow motion – a result of the hyper-control that is often linked with butoh – as if they were being photographed for stop motion animation.

Objective:

To stimulate the creativity and sense of experimentation among the students

Outcome:

Students will be able to create a short dance based on studies inspired by Kazuo Ohno

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| 1) Each student picks out three movements that they created in Theme 2: Avatar. | 2 min |
| 2) Explain the concept of stop motion animation – an object is moved in small increments between photographed frames, creating the illusion of movement when the series of frames is played as a continuous sequence. | 3 min |
| 3) Instruct the students to attempt the three movements that each of them picked out in slow motion. Ask them to imagine that they are being photographed for stop motion animation; each movement has to be small and deliberate. | 5 min |
| 4) Split the students into the groups from Theme 2: Avatar and have the students practice the slow motion concept with their groups. | 5 min |
| 5) Frame this activity as a performance and competition. The group that demonstrates the ability to move the slowest and with the most articulation will emerge the winner. | 10 min |
| | Total: 25 min.
Use three movements from Theme 2 |

Talk Back

Description: Students view a selection of six photographs that feature Ohno in performance or rehearsal to enhance their understanding of his particularly expressive movement style and to make a connection between that and their personal experience with the activities. If there is sufficient time, video samples of butoh performances may be shown.

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| 1) Present the six prepared photographs and optional video samples to the students. | 5 min |
| 2) Invite the students to describe what they see and feel from the photographs and video samples. Lead the students in a discussion about how Ohno's expressions in the photographs and the dances in the video samples relate to their experience participating in the activities from this packet. | 5 min |
| 3) Ask questions that relate to larger ideas of spectatorship and performance, eg. What do you think draws people to butoh performances? How might one train to be a butoh performer? Would fast or slow movement be more popular among young people? | 5 min |

Total: 15 min.

Recommended Resources

Official Website:

Kazuo Ohno Dance Studio:

<http://www.kazuohnodancestudio.com/english>

Books Available at National Library Board:

Kazuo Ohno's World: From Without and Within by Kazuo Ohno and Yoshito Ohno

Dancing into Darkness: Butoh, Zen and Japan by Sondra Horton Fraleigh (reference only)

Internet Links to Video Samples:

Excerpt of *Mother*:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jlidd4L6_UM

Excerpt of *The Dead Sea*:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUjhQLB0hXY>

Excerpts of Sankai Juku's *Kinkan Shonen* (partial nudity)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gw8FOuw6_UU

Internet Link to Photographs:

<http://photobucket.com/images/Kazuo%20Ohno>

Internet Links to Articles and Interviews:

Kazuo Ohno Articles - New York Times

<http://www.nytimes.com/keyword/kazuo-ohno>

In Celebration of the Yin of Butoh – Japan Times Online

<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/ft20100723a1.html>

Singapore Arts Festival 2011

Remembers Kazuo Ohno
With a performance of *Kuu*
By his son,
Yoshito Ohno

Kuu Review in Ballet-Dance Magazine

<http://www.ballet-dance.com/200712/articles/Ohno20071027.html>

Annex 1

FEEDBACK FORM

Thank you for using this resource pack.
Please give us your feedback.



Name : _____
Occupation : _____
Tel : _____
Email : _____

Name of Resource Pack			
Usefulness of the Resource Pack	Very applicable	Applicable	Not applicable
What did you enjoy most from this Resource Pack?			
Any suggestion on how to improve this Resource Pack?			

Thank you once again!