

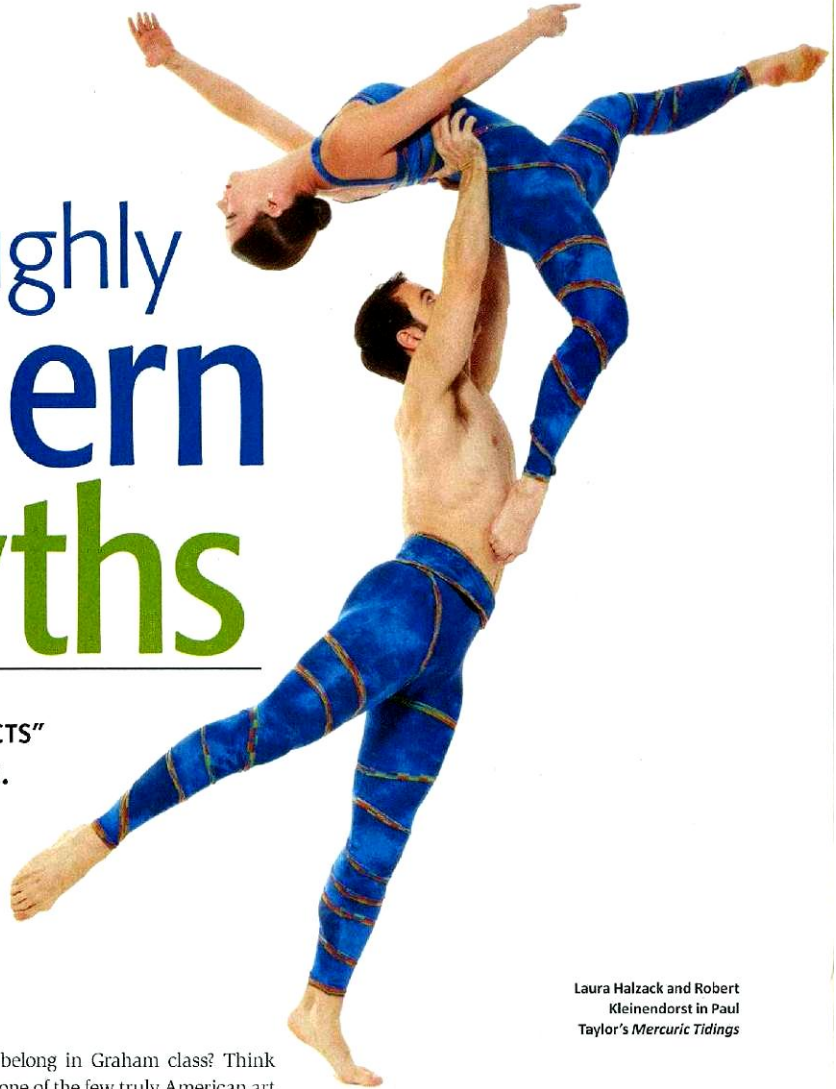
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**MODERN**spotlight

# Thoroughly Modern Myths

THESE FIVE  
MODERN DANCE "FACTS"  
ARE FLAT-OUT FALSE.

By Emily Macel Theys



Laura Halzack and Robert  
Kleinendorst in Paul  
Taylor's *Mercuric Tidings*

Think bunheads don't belong in Graham class? Think again! Modern dance is one of the few truly American art forms, and its various techniques can benefit dancers of all persuasions. We got some pros in the know to debunk five negative myths about modern dance.

## 1. MODERN DANCERS ARE "FAILED" BALLET DANCERS.

"The assumption that a dancer only chooses modern because she doesn't have good enough technique to cut it in the ballet world is ridiculous," says Laura Halzack, who has danced with the Paul Taylor Dance Company for the past seven years. "In most cases, ballet dancers switch to modern when they discover the great things it has to offer. It requires just as much technique, athleticism and brains as ballet."

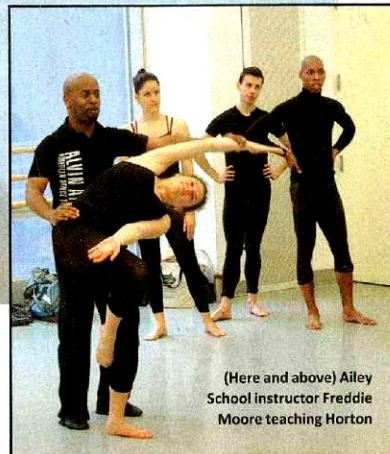
"I started off in classical ballet because that's what I knew and saw around me," says Katherine Crockett, principal dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company. But as soon as she tried Graham technique,

she knew she'd found her home. "What drew me to Graham was its incredible expressiveness," she says. "Graham is about showing effort rather than effortless-ness, and I really connected with that."

## 2. LIKE JAZZ DANCE? YOU WON'T LIKE MODERN.

Actually, jazz and modern are not-so-distant cousins. "So much of jazz came out of the modern techniques," says Freddie Moore, a Horton technique teacher at The Ailey School. "Like modern, jazz also has a rhythmic connection to the pelvis and back," Halzack adds.

Moore suggests researching your favorite jazz dancers' backgrounds—because you'll almost always find they've trained in modern dance.



(Here and above) Ailey School instructor Freddie Moore teaching Horton

**3. IF YOU WANT TO BE A PROFESSIONAL BALLET DANCER, YOU DON'T NEED TO TAKE MODERN.**

Take a look at any ballet company's current repertory, and odds are you'll find a bunch of modern or modern-influenced works. Graham pieces have been set on ballet companies all over the world; Mark Morris regularly choreographs for ballet companies; Paul Taylor's work is in the reps of Paris Opéra Ballet, Miami City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre and San Francisco Ballet, to name just a few.

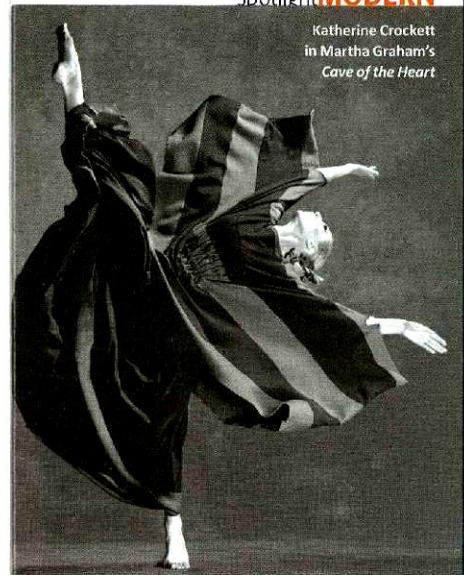
"Ballet dancers must be versatile enough to perform modern," Crockett says. And "having modern training will give ballet dancers an edge," Halzack says. "You can climb faster through the ranks if you have a more thorough understanding of movement."

"Don't lock yourself in and say, 'Ballet is all I need to be the best ballet dancer out there,'" Moore says. If you want to make it into a prestigious ballet company, "you need modern training to balance your ballet training."

**4. WORKING IN PARALLEL IN MODERN CLASS WILL MESS UP YOUR TURNOUT.**

Not only is this false, but the opposite is true! It seems counterintuitive, but working in parallel actually helps balance out the muscles in your legs, ensuring that you don't overdevelop—or strain—the muscles involved in turned-out positions.

Katherine Crockett in Martha Graham's *Cave of the Heart*




"While we do work in parallel, we also work turned out a lot—and the combination of the two has made me much stronger," Halzack says. Moore says honing your muscles in parallel positions will also improve your balance. "The parallel line will allow you to figure out how to shift your weight and place yourself properly."

**5. MODERN CLASS IS BORING.**

"Before I found Graham, I took a general 'modern dance' class and hated it—it was boring to me," Crockett says. "For two years after that, I didn't step into a modern class. I thought I already knew what it was. But it turned out I just didn't like that one teacher's style."

There's a wide range of modern techniques, which all feel very different. If you have the modern blahs, try taking classes in specific styles (Graham, Cunningham, Limón, Horton, Taylor) instead of a generic "modern" class. That'll help you figure out which style speaks to you.

And once you find the right fit, "modern class is anything but boring!" Halzack says. "You're developing your technique and musicality, but not by standing at a barre. You're out in the center getting in touch with yourself from the beginning of class." 

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