



## **He was a Punk, She did Ballet**

Grace is found in varying modes and in the most unlikely of places. A saffron-toned leaf swirling softly to its siblings in early November is graceful. The follow-through of a three-point shot swished by Larry Bird is graceful. The burger flip of a seasoned cook is graceful. Grace shows up in many forms, it just requires a long and intentional look to locate its existence.

Graceful is the first adjective normally used to describe a superb dancer. If a dancer lacks this mystical grace that is undoubtedly expected, they are not only seen as unskilled, but also the dedication to their craft is seen as lacking and somewhat disrespectful. Grace is qualitative data that cannot be measured on a graph or added or subtracted with a calculator; a dancer either has it or they don't. This harsh reality is not unescapable. With practice and continuous dedication – as in any activity or sport – a dancer may increase their skill level or, in this case, amount of grace by which they move.

As someone who has been dancing for eighteen years, I have been called graceful, as well as ungraceful (the annoying beauty of subjectivity in the arts), both behind and in front of my back. Dancing is a place where my identity has been solidified, for better or for worse. It has given me so many positives: true friendships, dedication, a solid work ethic, personal value, and the importance of a healthy lifestyle. It has also damaged me in ways that are difficult to reverse: negative body image, perfectionism, and the fear of never being good enough. I have found the best way to hold onto those positive parts and appreciate but reject the negative is to turn them into a conversation that exists beyond the dance-bubble I most often reside in. And to my surprise, the one thing that has enhanced my appreciation for my craft, as well as expanded my appreciation for another, is skateboarding.

Grace is not the first adjective used when describing a skateboarder, skilled or not. The norm of descriptors used are rough, rebellious, and dare-devilish. Even the act of skateboarding, at most times, involves breaking the law, most often disregarding NO TRESPASSING signs, or blatantly ignoring signs nearly yelling, NO SKATEBOARDING. Yet the world of skateboarding, its unique traits of those who skate, as well as skate culture is much more than the preconceived stoner-esque stereotypes most frequently taken as truth. Even more so, the skills exhibited by talented skaters can be described as graceful, used in the same connotation as with a dancer. Apart from the use of graceful as a compliment, dancing and skating share a shockingly wide range of similarities unbeknownst to me until I became close friends with a blond, curly-haired skateboarder named Kennedy whose pant hems were either always frayed or cuffed.

Kennedy had skated for the latter part of his adolescent life. Similar to me and my relationship with dance, skating was his stable solace in times of uneasiness, as well as something that brought him joy. He started around the age of thirteen, with hours spent in the driveway of his two-story home in Arnold, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis. A basketball goal jealously imposed judgement upon the landings or failings of his initial, all-around shaky ollies. A clunky gray camcorder balanced precariously upon piled garage items tracked his progress and tallied the scrapes he regularly accumulated on his elbows and knees.

Fast forward to present day, Kennedy is studying electronic arts in college, the possibility of being featured in *The Skateboard Mag* or having a sponsorship with *Polar*, a skateboarding brand, far from realistic thoughts. He skates when he can, usually on weekends alone or with one of the few, “non-poser” (his words not mine) skaters left in Springfield. Coming from the rich, eclectic, and somewhat dangerous skate scene in St. Louis, these milder streets offer both a good and bad change of pace.

Kennedy and I are both art students and, similar to many, feel that one of the most valuable elements of creating unique and thought-provoking art is collaboration. Upon initially realizing our intense passions in our respective fields, we discovered the similarities in the two sports. The skater's movement in a *frontside 360 no comply*<sup>1</sup> mirrors a dancer's leg whip in a *fouetté*<sup>2</sup>. A popular dance leap known as a *firebird*<sup>3</sup> is very similar to a *hardflip*<sup>4</sup> in skateboarding; when viewed in slow motion and focusing on the board rather than the skater, the board flicks like the dancer's leg in the leap. As we continued to discover more than just a few similarities in moves, a collaborative art project began, one that would compare and contrast dance and skating, and what it means to be a performer and consumer in both fields.

When learning about anything new, whether it be how to make the perfect meringue, how to change a tire, or how to play croquet, one must learn the rules. That's where we began. Dance is easily defined into rules and regulations. Speaking strictly of ballet, it began in the court system of France. Most of the movement I do currently is based upon the rules outlined in ballet that have been transferred to other styles, such as jazz, musical theatre, contemporary, and modern. These rules determined by ballet are easily seen and understood, such as *fifth position*<sup>5</sup>, or the placement of a dancer's arms and *épaulement*<sup>6</sup> in *effacé devant*<sup>7</sup>. There are innumerable descriptions of what a dancer should look like when performing a single movement. Even when executing a simple *plié*<sup>8</sup>, I think: keep your shoulders down, turn out from your hips, tighten your

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<sup>1</sup> "Removing your front foot and rotating the body and board in a clockwise, rotating, 360-degree motion" (Girard).

<sup>2</sup> Means "whipped turns." The standing leg bends and straightens, while the other moves from *passé* (toe touching the inner knee) to extended completely.

<sup>3</sup> A jump where one of the dancer's legs is extended and pointed off the floor, while the other is bent at the knee with the foot pointing to the head.

<sup>4</sup> "The combination of *kickflip* and *frontside shove it*. The board flips vertically between the skater's legs" (Girard).

<sup>5</sup> A position in classical ballet where one foot is in front of the other, with the heel of the front foot touching the toe of the back foot.

<sup>6</sup> A quality of movement where the shoulders are free to follow the body in motion with much freedom.

<sup>7</sup> A body position where the legs appear open, with one leg extended to the front.

<sup>8</sup> When both legs are bent, then extend to straighten.

abs, curve your arms, stay lifted through your head, and don't roll forward in your feet. When I don't follow these rules, I look uncoordinated, awkward, and not graceful.

Strangely enough, there are rules in the world of skateboarding as well, but who determines what they are is loosely defined. Most skaters start skating initially because they want to abandon the rules normally outlined and enforced through most team sports. They want to move beyond a codified rubric, but eventually come to terms that the rules still exist and will always exist. These rules are unspoken, but administered nonetheless. They are qualitative in nature, usually based upon the *coolness* of a trick or the execution by the rider of the four wheels. The rules ebb and flow with the ever-changing culture of the dominant community of skaters.

The rules for both dance and skating wouldn't still be living, breathing, and causing frustration without the dancers' and skaters' submissions. We realize not all rules apply to every individual. We acknowledge that the rules aren't always kind. We appreciate the rules for the betterment of our craft.

The rules are learned, not all are followed, but still we go on. Technique and style are two of the most vital elements when either skating or dancing. It is arguable which one carries more weight, for both qualities are markedly interchangeable. For dance, technique is heavily based upon the rules previously discussed. Rules establish technique, and once technique is covered, style can flourish. Technique most commonly corresponds with the skill of the dancer, which typically increases as the years a dancer dances increase. Technique manifests as proper turnout in a *développé*<sup>9</sup>, or the pointedness of feet, just to name a few. Technique in dance comes down to the visual aestheticism of the movement above all else.

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<sup>9</sup> When the non-standing leg begins at the floor and gradually extends to finish in a straight line.

Kennedy corrects me in that technique is more commonly addressed as *form* in the skate world. Good, respectable form for a skater involves height in any trick, either performed on the street or off any sort of skateable architecture. The fluidity of the skater's movement, from initial takeoff to landing, as well as the progression from trick to trick, is another distinguishing factor in determining exquisite or messy form. This fluidity is also essential in dance. *Transitions*, as they are called, are the moments occurring in-between the notable, more eye-catching movements, but they are integral placeholders in any complete movement. Same with skating. Clean tricks and solid landings continue the definition of impressive form, and undoubtedly produce the sacred approval of the compliment, "sick."

Skating and dance both have styles that differ based on the artist/athlete and where their talents lie. For skating, there are two explicit types which are decided based upon location. You're either a bowl, pool, and ramp skater, and/or you're a street skater. For reference, the X-Games cater more toward the external, fixed elements of a bowl, pool, or ramp, while street skating is more organic and changes drastically depending on what street a skater is on, the time of day – or night – they are skating, and the external distractions that manifest on this said street. With each of these types of skating come an individualistic *style* that is exclusive to the wheeled individual. A skater's style most usually corresponds with their personality, with many falling into the categories of: aggressive, rigid, careless, and cool. These styles are made obvious in the attempts and execution – successful or not – of a trick, as well as a skater's response – outraged or chill – to the attempt and execution of a trick.

Styles sometime allows a dancer's personality to come through in their movement, but usually only in improvisation or when prompted by a teacher or choreographer. Most commonly, styles of dance are split up into genres that share a wide array of qualities but are also quite

different. Jazz, modern, ballet, contemporary, West African, musical theatre, and tap name a few of the most commonly learned and performed styles in The United States, although there are many more. The style expressed in a skater is more commonly referred to as *quality* in the dance world. Just like skating, the quality is transferred onto the movement and allows it to be perceived in innumerable amounts of ways. Sharpness, strength, airiness, and groundedness are all examples of potential qualities found in a dancer. It is also possible for a single dancer to possess and display multiple qualities at once.

It is possible for anything to possess multiple qualities at once. Kennedy is a skater and an artist, and I am a dancer and an artist, among so many other things. The beauty of self-expression comes when the expressions you create from within your innermost self are seen and appreciated simply for what they are. That is exactly what dancing and skating come down to be: self-expression. Only when we began to ignore the stark differences in the two crafts were we able to see the striking similarities. The lack of blatancy in the similarities, the fact that it took an intentional search to find them, made that search that much more rewarding. An artform can be a sport. An artist can be an athlete. Grace can coexist with danger.

### Videos of Dance and Skateboarding Comparisons

| <i><b>Move</b></i>                       | <i><b>Dance</b></i>                                                                     | <i><b>Skateboarding</b></i>                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Grande Jeté v.<br>Ollie                  | <a href="https://youtu.be/oHivyA_fwPA">https://youtu.be/oHivyA_fwPA</a><br>skip to :04  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tgOPrGlp6A">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tgOPrGlp6A</a>                 |
| Fouetté v.<br>Frontside 360<br>No Comply | <a href="https://youtu.be/EixtGKNP6ok">https://youtu.be/EixtGKNP6ok</a><br>skip to :18  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vgy56yuMqBs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vgy56yuMqBs</a><br>skip to :07  |
| Pirouette v.<br>Kick Turn                | <a href="https://youtu.be/fm-XZCi9skQ">https://youtu.be/fm-XZCi9skQ</a><br>skip to :09  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uNmv-7gEDQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uNmv-7gEDQ</a><br>skip to 3:06 |
| Firebird v.<br>Hardflip                  | <a href="https://youtu.be/pc_OdLZqF-w">https://youtu.be/pc_OdLZqF-w</a><br>skip to :06  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOmTK_LL2HE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOmTK_LL2HE</a>                 |
| Axle Turn v.<br>Frontside 360            | <a href="https://youtu.be/A0FX1fD6BHU">https://youtu.be/A0FX1fD6BHU</a><br>skip to 1:52 | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6-c0nc80lM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6-c0nc80lM</a>                 |
| Switch Leap<br>v. Kickflip               | <a href="https://youtu.be/MOlmBCGP9UU">https://youtu.be/MOlmBCGP9UU</a><br>skip to :33  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_OlonkDafsE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_OlonkDafsE</a>                 |

### Works Cited



Personal Interview. 30 November 2018.