

Find Your Song

PARTNER STUDY GUIDE TO



WHAT IS "GOING SOLO"?

If you have ever watched plays, orchestras, or story ballets, you have seen the performers interact through words, music, or movements. Sometimes, a performance has only one person, and it's called a **solo**.

Dancers at American Midwest Ballet (AMB) have been working on a number of solos over the past few months in a series called *Going Solo*.



Even though the person is dancing by themselves, there are still other people involved in the dance... the people watching! Dancers think about the people watching, the **audience** (AW-dee-uhns), and how they can tell them a story with their movements.

Audiences can watch performances from a variety of different locations including theaters, parks, and even from their own homes as with *Going Solo*. These solo dances are filmed along with interview footage and are shared online for the community to enjoy.

DID YOU KNOW?!

Performances can be categorized by the number of performers.



Solos have one performer.



Duets have two performers.



Trios have three performers.



Quartets have four performers.

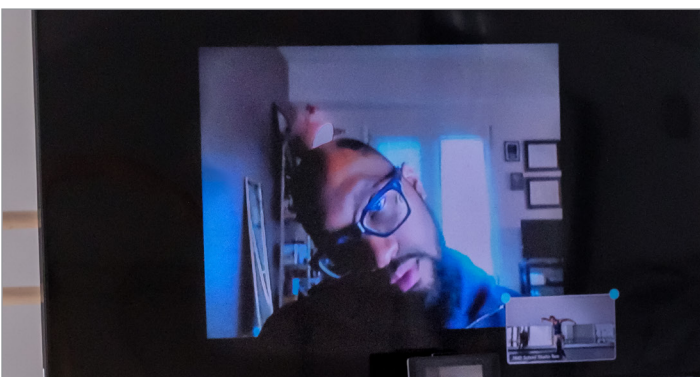
THE STORY BEHIND THE MOVEMENTS

A **choreographer** (kor-ee-OG-ra-fer) is the person who creates movements that the dancers perform. They help dancers tell a story or share a feeling without using words. Choreographers can be inspired by a number of things such as a piece or genre of music, a novel, or a place. Oftentimes, choreographers teach dancers the

movements in a studio where the dancers can practice the moves over and over in front of the choreographer until it's just right.

During *Going Solo*, dancers and choreographers have been working together with the use of technology. If you take a look at the *Going Solo* rehearsal photos below, you'll

notice that the choreographer is working with the dancer through video conferencing - the same way you have connected with your teacher and classmates recently! This makes it possible for choreographers from across the country to work with the dancers and for everyone to work together safely. (continued)





Another exciting element to *Going Solo* is that each performance is filmed and includes behind-the-scenes content from the people involved, such as interviews from dancers and choreographers. This gives the audience more information: what inspired the choreographer, how the music helps tell the story, and what dancers do to prepare for the performance.

Filming also allows the audience to see multiple views and closeups that wouldn't be possible in a theater setting. Notice that filmmaker Lance Glenn is wearing a mask and keeping a safe distance from company dancer Claire Goodwillie while filming on the rooftop of the Hoff Family Arts and Culture Center in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

THE FLAVORS OF DANCE

Dance comes in a variety of genres (JHANN-ruhs) like ice cream comes in a variety of flavors. Each genre has its own performance style with unique moves and steps representing the time and place where the style originated.

Here are some genres of dance that you might see in our solos:

- ▶ **Classical Ballet** - Created for the royal courts of Europe in the 1800s, ballet has precise and elegant movements, usually paired with classical music to tell stories with magical elements. Dancers may wear *pointe* shoes to look like they're floating on their toes.
- ▶ **Modern or Lyrical** - Developed by dancers such as [Martha Graham](#), [Doris Humphrey](#), and [Katherine Dunham](#) experimenting with new forms of expression, this style uses movement from many different genres, including everyday movements such as walking, to tell emotional stories through creative movement.
- ▶ **Jazz** - This form grew alongside jazz music in the 1920s and '30s from roots in Black American society and was perfect for dancing to quick drums or smooth brass.
- ▶ **Tap** - Tap dancing is a type of percussive dance characterized by the "tap" of shoes hitting the floor as the person dances. Tap dancers often wear metal "taps" on the heel and toe of a shoe to accentuate the sound.
- ▶ **Hip-hop** - Parallel with the evolution of hip-hop music, hip-hop dancing is a combination of many styles including breaking, locking, roboting, boogaloo, and popping. The origins of hip-hop dance can be traced to the 1970s, and it continues to evolve today.
- ▶ **Folk** - Every dance begins as a folk dance, or a way that people celebrate and move in a specific community or culture. Folk dances come from every country, and many have become global dance styles, like Indian, African, Irish, Japanese, and Spanish dance.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT TAKE TO CREATE A SOLO?

Costumes: Costumes are an important part of the dance. Just like the movements and the music, they help tell the choreographer's story. Is the costume from a specific time period? Is the fabric shiny or dull? Does it go with a color family? How does the fabric move with the dance? These are a few of the questions that are considered for each piece.

Lighting: Stage lighting enhances visibility, establishes the setting, sets the mood on the stage, and can even portray emotion. Do you want to highlight a certain section of the stage? Do you want lights to shine from the side or from the front? Or both? Does your ballet require bright or dim lights? Do you want your lights to be warm or cool toned? The right lighting is crucial to the performance.



Costume designer Deborah Overturff adds hand-painted details to a costume. Costumes help the audience understand what type of dance they are seeing (Storytelling or abstract? Realistic or fantasy? Historical or present-day?) and make it easier to identify the individual performers. A dance costume also must allow the performer to move freely, and must be sturdy enough to stand up to intense physical activity.



Lighting designer Carol Wisner adjusts an ellipsoidal reflector spotlight, one of several kinds of lighting instruments used in theaters. Her design may involve more than a hundred instruments, shining on the stage from the front, the sides, and above. The instruments are controlled remotely from a lighting board, which she can program in advance with the combinations of settings (cues) that will be used during the show.

DO MORE WITH WHAT YOU SEE

Break It Down

Connecting & Responding

Watch one film from our [Going Solo](#) series. You can watch it as many times as you need to answer the questions below.

Name of *Going Solo* film: _____

1. **What's the feeling?** As you watch the solo, think about how the dance makes you feel.

Describe this feeling. _____

2. **What's the story?** If you told someone about this dance who didn't see it, how would you describe it?

3. **What's the genre?** What clues support your answer? Why do you think the artist chose this genre for this story? _____

Find a movement that is repeated in a **pattern**. This means that moves are combined and repeated in the same way, like how shapes are combined and repeated in the pattern on a t-shirt. Try the move yourself. Repeat it in your own space.

Watch out! Make sure your space is open and safe for moving. Check that it's free of hard or sharp objects, rugs, cords, pets, or anything else that might bump or trip you. Be respectful of your space and the people around you. Create a "dance bubble" of free space around yourself, and imagine another bubble around anyone dancing near you. To check your bubble, stretch out your arms in a T and slowly turn around. If your arms touch anything, you might need to move your bubble!

Natural movements are the basis of every kind of dance. If you try a movement and it hurts your body, stop! Many of the moves you see our dancers do are very challenging, and they use special techniques and training to do them. Instead, try to find a more natural movement that your body can do easily.

4. **Describe the move you chose.** Try to use action verbs (glide, shuffle, etc.) and adjectives (quick, sleepy, etc.) to describe your movement to explain how it makes you feel and what it reminds you of.

5. **Name your movement.** If you gave this move your own name, what would it be? The *Silly Shuffle*? The *Moon Kick*? The *Elephant Stomp*? You decide!

DO MORE WITH WHAT YOU SEE

Create Your Own Solo!

Creating & Performing

This is YOUR dance. No one else's. It's special to you, and there will never be another one like it.

1. **Find a song that you like.** Play it on a speaker or through headphones. (If you're using headphones, be careful, don't get tangled as you dance!)
2. **Move to the music.** How does it make you feel? How do you want to move when you hear it? What's the **tempo**? Is it fast or slow? What's the **rhythm**, or strong repeated pattern? Is it relaxing like a heartbeat or exciting like popcorn?
3. **Develop the story you will tell with your dance.** What do you want people to feel when they watch your dance? Think about your own experiences — is there a story from your own life that the song reminds you of?
4. **Play your song again, and experiment with patterns of movements that will tell your story without words.** Does the meaning of a movement change if you do it again and again? Now every time you repeat it, change the move a little bit. Here are some ideas:
 - ▶ Make the movement smaller each time, then make the movement larger each time.
 - ▶ Turn the movement into another movement, little by little.
 - ▶ Speed up the movement each time, or slow it down.
 - ▶ Do the movement in reverse (backwards).
 - ▶ Use the movement to travel around the whole room, or dance while standing in one place.
 - ▶ Try **isolations** (move one part of your body while keeping the rest still). Move just one arm or just one leg.
5. **Build your dance from your patterns.** Change tells stories, so divide your song up into sections. Listen to the music for cues, and when the music changes, change how you're dancing. Respond to the changes in rhythm by moving faster or slower. Have your dance end when the song ends. If you listen to the song again, you will remember when the ending is coming.
6. **Practice!** Remember that dancers practice over and over to get it right.

Great work! It takes bravery to make up a dance and move your body the way you feel.

Now take some time to record some details of your solo.

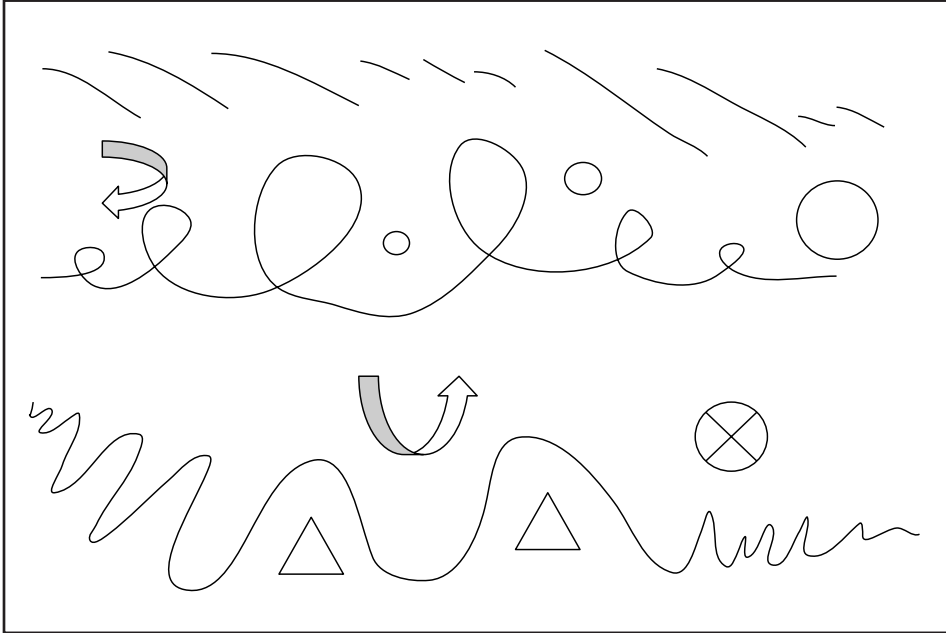
Title: _____ **Dancer:** _____

Music: _____ **Choreographer:** _____

Synopsis (summary of the story you are telling with your dance): _____

DO MORE WITH WHAT YOU SEE

Map Your Dance Using Shapes and Sounds



Sometimes the dancer and choreographer are the same person! Today, you are the dancer and the choreographer. A choreographer writes down notes to remember their dance for later.

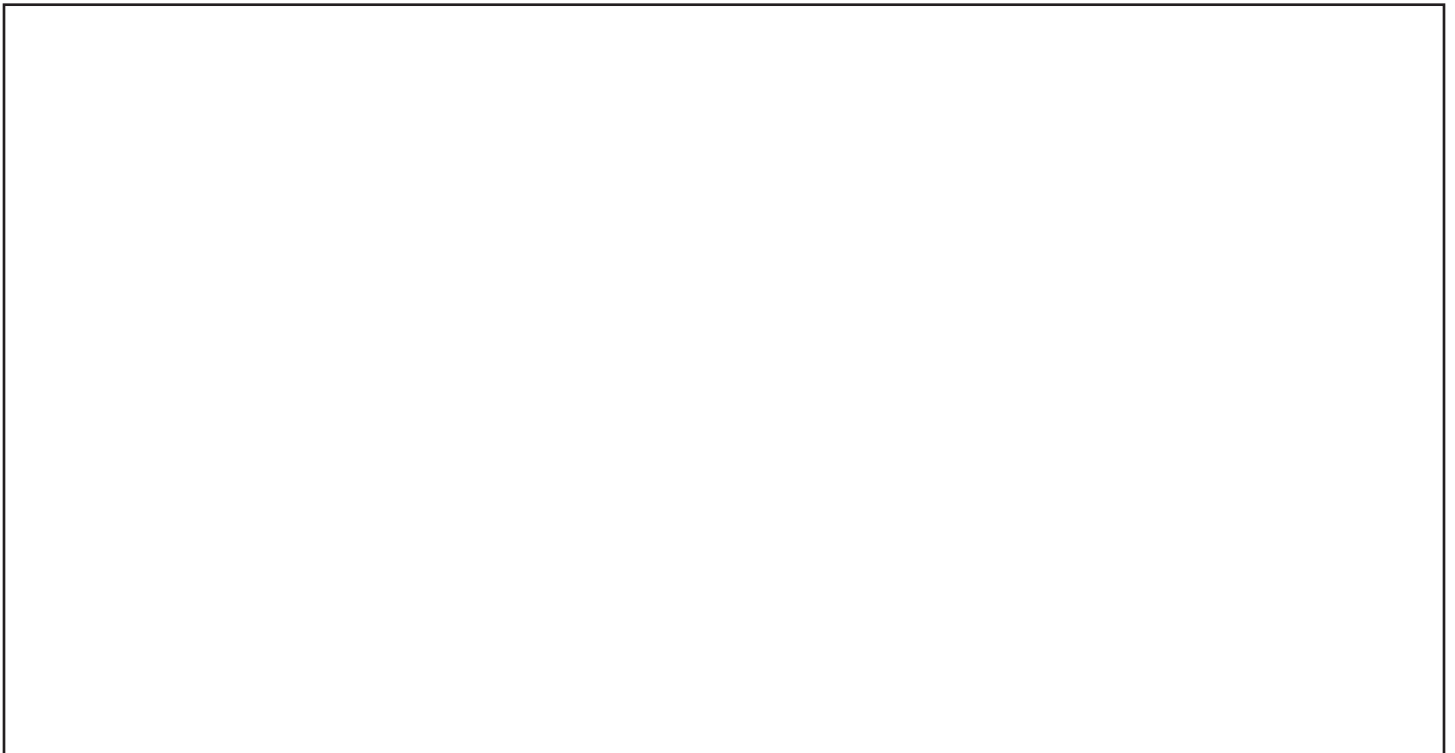
Make a drawing of your dance.

How would it look on paper? Squiggles or straight lines? Circles or squares? Listen to your song again and draw as you listen. Maybe your drawing has arrows to show where you move. Create shapes that remind you of the movement of the music as it changes, getting louder or faster or changing instruments. Try it out on a piece of paper.

All the World's a Stage

Professional dancers have to be able to adapt to perform their dances in many different spaces. Try your dance in a new area, like outside or in a different room. Notice how the ground affects the way your move.

Make a drawing of your stage in the space below. Design the costume you would wear, and the painted backdrop that would hang behind you. What would the lighting look like? All of these elements come together to create your art. This is your dance!



DO MORE WITH WHAT YOU SEE

Time to Shine

Find a Prop

A **prop** is an object that performers use to tell their story. This helps the audience see that the dance is about. A prop can help the audience see what time or place your story takes place, or what your dance is about. Anything can be a prop: a crumpled piece of paper can become a snowball, a pencil can be a magic wand, and a blanket can be a cape. Find something small and light so you can hold it. Make sure it won't break if you drop it. Accidents happen!

My Prop: _____

Is it the real thing, or does your prop represent something else (like the crumpled paper represents a snowball)? _____

How did your prop help tell your story? _____

Share Your Dance

As you dance, try to practice strong, safe dancing by using your muscles.

Here are some tips:

- ▶ Think about making beautiful lines with your arms and legs.
- ▶ Tighten your stomach to keep your core and back protected.
- ▶ If you're having trouble balancing, pick a point on the wall and look at it. This is called **spotting**, and it's how professional dancers keep balance while spinning.
- ▶ Land softly from jumps with your knees bent.
- ▶ Always ask permission before you jump around indoors.
- ▶ Remember that your body is a whole unit, and each part supports the others.
- ▶ Have fun!

After your dance, ask the audience what they thought the story was about. **Feedback** is listening to what others think and using it to improve your dance. Ask for advice. Don't be afraid to say "if you were dancing to show this story, how would you move?" If someone has a different idea than yours, it doesn't mean yours was wrong. Both ideas can be combined to tell an even better story.

We'd love to see your dance!

If you want to share your dance with us, ask your teacher or parent to record you dancing and email it to us at goingsolo@amballet.org. You can also post photos of your dance on our social media pages (with your parents' permission, of course)!