

# Michael jackson approach to dance drama essay



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World-renowned for his influence on the international music and dance scene, Michael Jackson is an iconic figure in the entertainment industry. His talent in being able to fuse his music and dance style together so seamlessly was probably one of the reasons for his booming success as an artist. The transformation and influence that he had brought about in the entertainment industry, dance included, might very well be the greatest legacy that any solo artist had ever left behind.

Michael Jackson, as great a dancer as he was, had surprisingly no formal dance training throughout his career. He was completely self-taught and worked very much in isolation when it came to perfecting many of his famous dance moves (Beers). He had a strong ability as a child to absorb and imitate what he saw quickly. Lacking a formal education, as Michael went around performing, he learnt by watching. Michael Jackson said that “the greatest education in the world is watching the masters at work” and that was what he did, making the best of his circumstances as a child. He was a perfectionist in many aspects, including dance, spending hours refining his steps and moves till they were flawless before they were presented on stage.

Michael Jackson’s dance style was influenced by a wide range of people and styles, from R&B artists to ballerinas, from jazz to street dances and African-American indigenous styles. He was creative in the way he brought different techniques of various dance forms together, taking whatever he saw and liked in other dances and making them his own (Roy). Eventually, the dance style that became uniquely his spanned a wide range dynamically, from fluid, smooth dance movements to sharp, angular and accented ones. His

smooth dance style was visually appealing in that his movements were so connected they just seemed to flow from one to another. At the same time, his signature movements, such as the moonwalk, posed a sense of mystery to the audience as to how it could be done, especially since he seemed to be able to do it so effortlessly. What made the moonwalk so intriguing was that walking, which we are all so familiar with, lifting one foot and putting it in front of the other, could in fact be done without lifting a foot off the ground at all. Perhaps it was the desire of uncovering the “mystery” and mastery of his steps that sparked off so much interest in learning them. At the opposite end of the spectrum was his strong accented style of dancing, like that of the robot dance. The movements were a lot less connected and much more punctuated. His accented style of dancing involved intricate bodywork and precise isolation.

Even with such a range of movements in his dance vocabulary, there was a certain consistency in his dance style: visual appeal. Though many of his movements and lines were angular and not exactly beautiful and sophisticated like ballet was deemed, there was something about them that was captivating. Despite the seeming simplicity in some of his movements, there was a certain groove and swing in his steps, emphasized by his music that made him such an amazing performer. As a result of his talent in both music and dance, his music and dance style complemented each other to bring out the uniqueness of his style that made him stand out as an artist of his time.

Michael Jackson was born with a talented and creative mind. His creation of dance movement was closely intertwined with his creation of music. In his <https://assignbuster.com/michael-jackson-approach-to-dance-drama-essay/>

movement creation, he not only goes with the music, in some cases, he goes against the music as well, giving diversity to the fusion of music and dance. He varies his movements and music in terms of rhythm, for example syncopations, or differing emphasis in music and movements. For example, he chooses to do many short and sharp movements during the silence in the music. His accented movements are usually done along with the bass beat of the drums in his music but sometimes, he chooses to leave out certain accents and hit only some of them. On the other hand, sometimes when there are many accents in his music, he chooses to do the opposite with his movements, changing to the smooth style of his dance rather than the accented style. His choreography also catered very aptly to the lyrics and content of his songs, exemplified by the movements that likened to zombies choreographed for the song "Thriller". This is an example of versatility in his choreography to suit his music and probably was an added factor to success. Such an integration of choreographic movements and music allows the essence of Michael Jackson's style, both in music and dance, to stand out and complement one another at the same time.

Another element that he incorporated into his music and dance was the element of theatre or drama. In his music videos, he combined song, dance and drama together such that many of his music videos had storylines, almost like a miniature movie or musical, as in "Smooth Criminal". If it was a live concert, he used over-the-top costuming, massive visual elements and even incorporated acrobatic stunts such as having aerialists in his performances. All these were technically complicated and required much technical support (Jackson). As an artist, Michael Jackson strived for

perfection by always pushing the limit of complexity and intricacy in what he did and produced. He worked and created with the aim of wanting his audience to feel a sense of awe and wonder watching his works, live or on film. One of the moves he was best known for, the anti-gravitational lean, was one of the stunt that achieved that aim and was evidence of his strive in his artistry. The uniqueness of his works was in the perfection he desired in every aspect of his art form, music, theatre, dance and acrobatic elements.

Michael Jackson's approach to dance was a relatively holistic one, he incorporated various diverse elements to enhance the effect of his dance. His career, being a singer, songwriter, dancer and actor, created the platform for him to develop dance, not as an isolated entity but as part of a larger picture that included music, drama and other visual elements.

### **Its Relation and Impact on Dance**

Michael Jackson was one of the pioneers who paved the way for dance on film, introducing the commercialization of dance in the later part of the twentieth century. Though dance had already existed in other films such as "West Side Story" and "Singin' in the Rain", Michael Jackson's music videos markedly pushed dance in film to the next level through the exploration of camera movement and video-editing skills in the developing computer age (Genne 140), along with his extensive use of props, over-the-top costumes and sets as well as dramatic effects. Before Michael Jackson's music videos, camera movements were limited to a planar view and kept mostly to one level. Michael Jackson's videos introduced a 3-dimensional view with varying camera movement, along with explorations of different levels. In some of Michael Jackson's videos, some of the screenshots were pulled as high as a <https://assignbuster.com/michael-jackson-approach-to-dance-drama-essay/>

few storeys. The video-editing skills required to produce the dramatic effects that his music videos had were also considerably phenomenal, when put in contrast to what had been produced in the past. These progresses enabled audiences to see a fuller picture of dance on film as it was now less 2-dimensional and somewhat closer to seeing it in real-life.

With the social and political climate of America at that time, street dance had become popular as a form of self-expression. America was still experiencing the aftermath of World War II and undergoing social changes. Advances in civil rights were taking place and African-Americans began to rise in society as the number of black members in Congress increased. Street dance was generally associated with the African-Americans and was an expression of the freedom from discrimination that they were slowly experiencing. Such dances began to appear on film, taking dance beyond the studios and even beyond the streets. As Michael Jackson's works gained popularity, his music videos added new dimension and development to the existing dance on films as he was an African-American himself and represented not only the rising of the African-American population but also the coming of a new genre of dance on film, street dance or what is now called hip-hop.

In many of Michael Jackson's dances, he incorporated strong elements of popping and locking, as well as isolation techniques. These have very strong influences on the hip hop genre of dance that we know of today. At that time, when Michael Jackson first commercialized the technique of popping and locking, it was coined the term robot dance and was very popular amongst the audience. The unveiling of Michael Jackson's robot dance gave

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new vocabulary to street dance, which eventually gave rise to hip-hop. Hip-hop today has opened up into several different genres such as popping and locking, and break-dancing, all of which still have tinges of Michael Jackson's influence visible in their styles.

Michael's success as a musician and singer attributed to his worldwide influence.. The style of his dance complemented his songs so well that these two elements came together as a package for Michael Jackson as he built his image as an artist. This was possible due to his success in commercializing his music videos which included the aspect of dance. His works were so well-received globally and many sought to imitate what Michael Jackson was capable of doing. His works tug at the heartstrings of audiences and convey Michael Jackson's emotions genuinely through his songs and dance.

Moreover, through his years of experience, he recognized what audiences wanted through a performance. " They (referring to the audience) just want wonderful experiences, they want escapism. We want to take them to places they've never been before, we want to show them talent like they've never seen before." says Michael Jackson. He realized what his audience wanted and sought to deliver exactly that, setting him apart from the other artists of his time.