

Myths and Legends

CPDW Spring 2024

This semester, join us as we take you on a whirlwind tour of myths and legends from cultures around the globe.

Big Foot (Children's Jazz)

The legend of Bigfoot, also known as Sasquatch, has captivated imaginations for centuries. This elusive creature, described as a towering, ape-like being covered in dark fur, is said to roam the dense forests of North America. Sightings and alleged footprints have fueled speculation about its existence. While skeptics dismiss it as folklore, the allure of encountering this mysterious creature continues to inspire curiosity and exploration in the wilderness.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bigfoot#/media/File:Patterson_Gimlin_Bigfoot.jpg

Leprechauns (Children's Creative Movement)

Leprechauns are mythical figures rooted in Irish folklore. These small, supernatural beings are often associated with fairies and other mythological creatures, though they most resemble the artisan dwarfs of folklores across Europe. Leprechauns are cobblers whose folkloric depiction of always having a purse with a shilling has given way to the popular modern characterization of possessing a hidden pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. Their depictions vary widely across different locales and time periods, with these mischievous individuals variously donning coats of red or green, often with many buttons, wearing hats round or bicorn or tall, and sporting large, silver buckles on their shoes.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Leprechauns#/media/File:Leprechaun_engraving_1900.jpg

Medusa (Adult Beginning Ballet)

In Greco-Roman mythology, the Gorgons were three sisters—Stheno, Euryale, and Medusa—with snakes for hair and deadly gazes that could turn to stone anyone who looked at them. Of the three sisters, the first two were immortal; only Medusa could be killed. She was infamously slain by the Argive hero Perseus who, with the aid of the gods Hermes and Athena, came upon her as she slept and cut off her head. From her blood was born the winged horse Pegasus, and her head retained its ability to petrify. Perseus gave the head of Medusa to the war goddess Athena, who used it to adorn her breastplate, the *aegis*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medusa#/media/File:Medusa_by_Carvaggio.jpg

The Mountain King (Children’s Beginning Tap)

The “Mountain King” is a common folkloric character across legends of Europe, Asia, and the Americas. He is traditionally a brave ruler who presided over a previous golden age, and who retreats—often into a mountain, and sometimes with his soldiers—to wait in sleep until the day he needs to return to help mankind. Both legendary figures like King Arthur and historical figures like Genghis Khan are thought to be representatives of this mythic trope.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_asleep_in_mountain#/media/File:Holger_Danske_\(2820802699\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_asleep_in_mountain#/media/File:Holger_Danske_(2820802699).jpg)

Arachne (Beginning Pointe)

The myth of Arachne is a story from Greco-Roman legend that serves as a cautionary tale against challenging the gods in their own domains. From a humble background in Lydia, Arachne demonstrated exceptional skill in weaving—so much so that divine nymphs would flock to watch her work. Yet Arachne denied that her skill came from the goddess of weaving, Athena, and she even challenged the goddess to come and compete with her. Athena appeared and the two wove competing tapestries: Arachne wove images of the wrongs the gods had committed upon mortals, and Athena wove depictions of mortals punished for *hubris*, or arrogance against the gods. In the end, the goddess could find not a single flaw in Arachne’s work. Furious, she cursed Arachne to weave forever, transforming her into a spider.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Athena_Changing_Arachne_into_a_Spider_LACMA_65.37.138.jpg

Genies (Children’s PreBallet)

The origins of jinn (anglicized as genies) can be traced back to pre-Islamic Arabia as well as later Islamic folklore. In these traditions, Jinn are supernatural beings created from smokeless fire, existing alongside humans but typically avoiding interference with human affairs. Unlike the Western notion of wish-granting genies confined to lamps, jinn in Islamic tradition possess free will and diverse abilities, ranging from mischief to benevolence. They are mentioned in the Quran and are believed to have their own societies, cultures, and interactions with humans throughout history. The concept of jinn/genies has since permeated global folklore and literature, with various depictions across cultures and in popular entertainment.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jinn#/media/File:Red_Jinn-King_of_Tuesday.png

Mermaids (Children’s Beginning Ballet)

Mermaids are creatures associated with the sea, who join the upper bodies of women with the tails of fish. They appear in many cultures’ folklore, including across the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Their association with beautiful singing and luring in sailors is likely influenced by the Sirens of Greco-Roman myth, though those creatures were half-woman, half-bird. Mermaids are at times associated with events like floods, storms, and shipwrecks, though in some folkloric traditions they appear as benevolent beings, who may even fall in love with humans.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mermaid#/media/File:John_William_Waterhouse_A_Mermaid.jpg

Pandora’s Box (Adult Intermediate/Advanced Modern)

Pandora was the first mortal woman in Greek mythology, created at the behest of Zeus as the ultimate punishment for mankind. Previously, the Titan god Prometheus had crafted mortal men from earth and rainwater. But Prometheus had twice attempted to trick Zeus to the benefit of his new creations, and so Zeus commanded the craftsman god, Hephaestus, to form a woman from the earth after the same fashion as men. Each of the gods gave her a gift, and thus her name was Pandora, meaning “all gifts.” She was given to Epimetheus, brother of Prometheus, as his bride, along with a large jar (*pithos*). By Zeus’ will, Pandora opened the jar and unleashed all evils upon the world. When she slammed the lid back on, Hope was left inside. Some interpret the jar as a representation of a woman’s body, and Hope remaining inside the jar as women’s redemption through the birth of children. It was through a later Latin translation of the Greek *pithos* with *pyxis* (“box”) that the image of Pandora’s Box became the standard.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandora#/media/File:Pandora_-_John_William_Waterhouse.jpg

Echo & Narcissus (Children’s Lyrical)

The myths of Echo and Narcissus became joined together in the Roman period. Narcissus was a young man who had many suitors but turned them all away. One of them cursed Narcissus to suffer the same pain he had made other feels through his rejections. While in the woods, he sees his reflection in a pond and falls in love with himself. He wastes away in front of the pond and is transformed by the gods into the Narcissus flower (a daffodil). Echo was a wood nymph cursed only to repeat what others say. When she encounters Narcissus in the woods, she falls in love with him, as many had before. She too wastes away, pining for Narcissus in her cave, until only her voice (and “echo”) was left. These myths are about reflection—and image in a pool as a reflection of sight, and the echo as a reflection of sound. This dance uses choreography in canon to evoke these reflections and “echoes.”

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nicolas_Poussin,_Eco_e_Narciso_\(ca._1629-1630\),_Museo_del_Louvre,_Parigi.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nicolas_Poussin,_Eco_e_Narciso_(ca._1629-1630),_Museo_del_Louvre,_Parigi.jpg)

Greek Muses (Children's Musical Theatre Dance)

There were nine muses in Greco-Roman mythology, and each was the goddess of inspiration for a different artistic domain: Calliope (epic poetry), Euterpe (lyric poetry), Polyhymnia (sacred music), Thalia (comedy), Melpomene (tragedy), Clio (history), Erato (love poetry), Urania (astronomy), and Terpsichore (choral dancing). You will hear our own ode to this latter muse of dance as the curtain speech for this performance, accompanied by Michael Levy's "Hymn to Terpsichore," played on the ancient lyre. In some of the earliest Greek literature, the Muses were imagined as coming to poets and inspiring them directly, though most moments of artistic "inspiration" in Greco-Roman culture were more abstract—that is, more like our notion of getting "inspired" today.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muses#/media/File:Muses_sarcophagus_Louvre_MR880.jpg

The Dragon (Adult Intermediate/Advanced Ballet)

The dragon in China is an imaginary creature with symbolic significance, appearing in legends, festivals, astrology, and especially Chinese art. These mythical beings are powerful and benevolent, with supposed control over water-related phenomena, like summoning rain during a drought. Indeed, they have an ancient connection to constellations that signal the arrival of spring, with its rains. In a departure from the evil, dangerous, fire-breathing dragons of most Western stories, dragons in China are seen as lucky. Most Chinese dragons are depicted with long bodies like snakes, four legs, and sharp claws like hawks. They dwell in mountains, lakes, rivers—and even the sky.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dragon_from_Chinese_Dragon_Banner.svg

Hephaestus (Children's Modern)

In Greek mythology, Hephaestus is the god of craftsmanship, working in the smithy to forge the weapons of gods and heroes. Though constantly creating beautiful things, he is not considered attractive himself; he is dirty and calloused from laboring over the forge and the fire. In addition, he alone among the gods walks with a limp. His lameness was either present from birth—triggering his mother, Hera, to throw him from Mt. Olympus—or was caused when Zeus, who is sometimes his father, threw him from Olympus as a form of punishment: there are different traditions. This blacksmith god is married to Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty, a detail which becomes a source of mockery in Greek epic.

https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hephaestus#/media/File:Rubens_-_Vulcano_forjando_los_rayos_de_J%C3%BApiter.jpg

Thor (Adult Beginning Tap)

This god of Norse mythology—most famous in modern American culture via the Marvel franchise—has associations with thunder, lightning, and storms and wields his mighty hammer, Mjölnir. This hammer has special characteristics: Thor can hit as hard as he can with it, and it will never fail; he can throw it, and it will always come back to his hand; and if he wishes, it can become small enough to fit within a pocket. Its only flaw was that its handle is too short. Wielding the hammer, Thor defeats countless giants and even the serpent of Midgard. In addition to serving as a weapon, however, Mjölnir can also confer restorative or protective powers.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thor#/media/File:M%C3%A5rten_Eskil_Winge_-_Tor's_Fight_with_the_Giants_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

The Witching Hour (Adult Lyrical/Jazz)

The Witching Hour is a mystical time that starts at three in the morning (or midnight according to some). It is supposedly the hour of night when ghosts, demons, witches, and other spirits roam freely. It is also the most likely time of night to experience other-worldly activity. The Witching Hour stems from growing European fears of witchcraft, and may have specific roots in the Catholic church's prohibitions of activities during the hour of 3:00-4:00 AM (resulting in it sometimes being called the "Devil's Hour").

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witchcraft#/media/File:John_William_Waterhouse_-_Magic_Circle_\(cropped\).JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witchcraft#/media/File:John_William_Waterhouse_-_Magic_Circle_(cropped).JPG)

Loki (Adult Intermediate/Advanced Tap)

Loki is a shapeshifting, mischievous god in Norse mythology—again well-known to modern American audiences through Marvel. He is the archetypal trickster, one who frequently challenges the civilizing forces of society with an eye to either renewal or destruction. When he works together with the other gods, he can bring fantasy, fertility, and life. When he acts outside of divine society, however, he endangers everything. Our piece offers a modern take on Loki's trickster nature, with dancers embodying different characters in a long con: the face, the hacker, the thief, and the wheels.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loki#/media/File:Loki_finds_Gullveigs_Heart_-_John_Bauer.jpg

Gargoyles (Children's Intermediate & Advanced Ballet)

A gargoyle is an architectural feature—a “grotesque,” that is, a mythical creature carved from stone and attached to a building on the walls or roof. These have spouts which help divert rainwater from the roof and sides of a structure, to minimize damage from rainstorms. The French legend of La Gargouille tells the mythical background of these design elements. La

Gargouille was in fact a dragon who terrorized the French town of Rouen until a priest subdued the beast. The townspeople affixed its head to the church, as a symbol of victory of evil, creating the first gargoyle.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gargoyle_statues.jpg

Jack Frost (Adult Hip Hop)

Jack Frost is a legendary figure known for his control over winter weather such as snow, ice, and sleet. Traditionally, he is responsible for the frost patterns left on windows during the night and “nipping” at people’s nose when it’s cold out. Having origins in both Anglo-Saxon and Norse custom, Jack Frost is now portrayed in popular media in roles ranging from hero to villain to snarky sidekick.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Frost#/media/File:Jack-frost.jpg

Boogeyman (Children's Intermediate/Advanced Tap)

This legendary creature is likely very familiar to children—he has been used for centuries by parents to frighten little ones into good behavior. From the Middle English *bugge*, a “hobgoblin,” the Boogeyman (or Bogeyman) appears in various, though always frightening, forms. He may dwell in the basement, under the stairs, in the closet, or anywhere in the shadows. In our interpretation of this figure through dance, we are reviving a dance piece performed several years ago. In that performance, one of our young dancers was turned into a Boogeyman. Now, she returns to the stage to transform the other young dancers, representing how this legend changes throughout a life from a story that frightens someone as a child, to one they might use to scare others as an adult.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bogeyman#/media/File:Francisco_de_Goya,_Que_viene_el_coco_\(Here_Comes_the_Bogey-Man\),_published_1799,_NGA_7459.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bogeyman#/media/File:Francisco_de_Goya,_Que_viene_el_coco_(Here_Comes_the_Bogey-Man),_published_1799,_NGA_7459.jpg)

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