

C H A P T E R

9

Ballet

Chapter 9

Ballet

Enduring understanding:

Ballet is a classic, Western dance genre and a performing art.

Essential question:

How does ballet help me express myself as a dancer?

Learning Objectives

- **Recognize major ballet works, styles, and ballet artists in history.**
- **Execute basic ballet technique, use ballet vocabulary, and perform barre exercises and center combinations.**
- **Apply ballet etiquette and dance safety while dancing.**
- **Evaluate and respond to classical and contemporary ballet performances.**

Introduction

Ballet began as a Western classical dance genre 400 years ago and has evolved into an international performing art form.

The word *ballet* comes from the Italian term *ballare*, meaning to dance.

Chapter 9 Vocabulary Terms

adagio

allegro

à la seconde

à terre

ballet

ballet technique

barre

center

derrière

stage directions

Devant

turnout

en l'air

Ballet Beginnings

Ballet moved from Italy to France when Catherine de' Medici married the heir to the French throne, King Henry II.

She produced what has become known as the first ballet, *La Comique de la Reine*, in 1588.

Ballet at the French Court

Louis XIV performed as a dancer and gained the title The Sun King after one of his most famous dancing roles.

A patron of the arts, Louis XIV established the Academy of Music and Dance. In the next century the Academy would become the Paris Opéra.



Court Ballets

- **During the 17th century, court ballets were dance interludes between dramatic or vocal performances or entire performances.**
- **Sometimes ballets were part of themed balls such as pastoral or masquerade balls.**
- **Performers were noble men**
- **The production had a storyline or theme.**

18th-Century Ballet

- **In the 18th century, ballet moved from the court to the theater where music, costumes, and dance changed.**
- **New choreographers and composers brought fresh ideas about what ballet was.**
- **Dancers and choreographers developed new artistic visions and expanded ballet technique in the opera houses and theaters in London, Milan, and Vienna that began to rival the Paris Opéra.**

18th-Century Dancers

At the beginning of the 18th century in France, male dancers continued to dominate the stage. During the century, female dancers developed their technique and made costume innovations.

Jean George Noverre: choreographer who wrote about *ballet d'action*, *codifying ballet and dance techniques*.

Marie Salle: popular dancer who abandoned the fashionable hairstyles and dress to dance in soft gowns

Marie Camargo: dancer and rival of Marie Salle who shortened her skirts so her jumps and beats could be seen and who danced in flat-soled slippers

19th-Century Romantic Ballet

Romantic ballets were dramatic action stories told through dancing and pantomime in two acts.

This style of ballet most often told stories about love triangles.

In Act I, female dancers usually portrayed villagers.

In Act II the dancers were transformed into spirits or similar ethereal beings.

Ballet Dancers of the Romantic Era

Marie Taglioni (1804-1884): An Italian dancer, she was one of the first dancers to poise for an instant on the tip of her dance slipper inspiring the modern day pointe shoe.

Jules Perrot (1810-1882): A French dancer and choreographer, he is considered the greatest male dancer of the romantic era.

Carlotta Grisi (1819-1899): An Italian dancer, she performed the lead dance role in the ballet *Giselle* with choreography by Perrot.

Giselle: the most famous ballet of the romantic era, exhibiting supernatural elements, emphasizing pointe work to bring out a weightless, ethereal quality.

19th-Century Classical Ballet

Classical ballets told stories through ballet, character dance, and pantomime. Classical ballets contained two or more acts; the *Nutcracker* ballet has two acts, while *Swan Lake* has four acts. A feature of classical ballet is the pas de deux (dance for two).

Classical Ballet Choreographers

Marius Petipa (1819-1910): A French dancer who moved to St. Petersburg, he choreographed evening-length ballets.

Lev Ivanov (1834-1901): A Russian-born choreographer who worked with Petipa, Ivanov's claims to fame include the *Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*, acts II and IV.

Early 20th-Century Diaghilev Ballet

A Russian theater director and entrepreneur, Serge Diaghilev selected an all-star cast from the Russian Imperial Theatres for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes premier appearance in Paris in 1909.

- For the next two decades, Diaghilev's company traveled throughout Europe, the United States, and South America presenting works by new choreographers and dancers.**

Early 20th-Century Ballet Dancers and Choreographers

Michel Fokine (1880-1942): Russian dancer and choreographer. Primarily he choreographed story ballets, such as *Firebird* (1909), but his signature work was an abstract ballet, *Les Sylphides* (1909).

Anna Pavlova (1881-1931): Russian dancer and prima ballerina at the Russian Imperial Theatres. She created her own company and toured the world. Her signature work (the *Dying Swan* solo) was choreographed for her by Michel Fokine.

George Balanchine (1904-1983)

Russian dancer invited to the United States to establish and direct The American Ballet company and school.

By the end of the 1940s, the New York City Ballet emerged, with Balanchine as its artistic director and choreographer.

He is known as the father of American ballet. Balanchine wanted to express modern 20th-century life and ideas. Most of his works were abstract ballets in the neoclassic style.

Neoclassic (meaning *new classic*) ballet is a style that was built on classical ballet technique but overlaid with contemporary ballet style to create a new classic style.

21st-Century Ballet Choreography

By the end of the 20th century, modern ballet had morphed into contemporary ballet. Underlying this style was the traditional ballet technique. Contemporary ballet demanded that dancers train in ballet and other genres such as modern and jazz dance to interpret the ballets being created.

Methods and Schools of Ballet

During the 19th and 20th centuries ballet training systems evolved.

Enrico Cecchetti developed the Cecchetti method. He recorded and published his ballet curriculum in the 1920s. His method continues through international dance organizations.

Russian dancer and teacher Agrippina Vaganova developed her method. In 1934 she published her ballet method, *Basic Principles of Ballet*, which is used widely today.

In England, the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) developed a graded ballet curriculum taught around the world. In the latter 20th century, the Balanchine method of training emerged. ABT has developed a training curriculum that is reaching into academic and community settings.

Basics of Ballet Class

The ballet class is made up of two sections:

- 1. At the barre, dancers execute exercises to gain strength and practice technique in preparation for dancing.**
- 2. The second part of the class in the middle of the dance space is known as the center.**

Ballet exercises or steps are performed as adagio (slow) movements or allegro (fast) movements to the musical accompaniment.

Ballet terminology uses French language terms because of its French heritage.

Characteristics of Ballet Technique

- **Classical alignment of the body**
- **Outward rotation of the legs from the hip sockets (turnout)**
- **Codified positions of the feet and arms**
- **Pointed feet**
- **Basic movement principles (alignment, turnout, stance, weight transfer, and balance)**

Ballet Class Safety

Pay attention to your clothing, accessories, and your space.

- **Shoes should fit well with elastic straps and ties tucked in.**
- **Hair is pulled away from your face and secured so that you can see and it doesn't hit you or another dancer in the face.**
- **When dancing as a group, you need to practice awareness of personal space and group space.**
- **Following the teacher's instructions for entering or leaving the space will help to avoid traffic jams or personal collisions.**
- **When moving across the floor, you should move without stopping and keep aware of other dancers moving across the floor.**

Positions of the Feet

Classical ballet has five basic positions of the feet.

- **First position**
- **Second position**
- **Third position**
- **Fourth position**
- **Fifth position**

In these positions, the weight of the body is vertically centered over the feet and the entire foot rests on the floor (full-foot position).

First Position



Second Position



Third Position



Fourth Position



Fifth Position



Ballet Positions of the Arms

Classical ballet has five basic positions of the arms. They are numbered similar to the positions of the feet.

- Preparatory position
- First position
- Second position and demi-seconde position
- Third position
- Fourth position
- Fifth position

To create long, curved lines your arms slightly flex at the elbows and the wrists, and your hands extend the lines created by the arms.

Preparatory Position



First Position



Second Position and Demi-Seconde Position



Third Position



Fourth Position

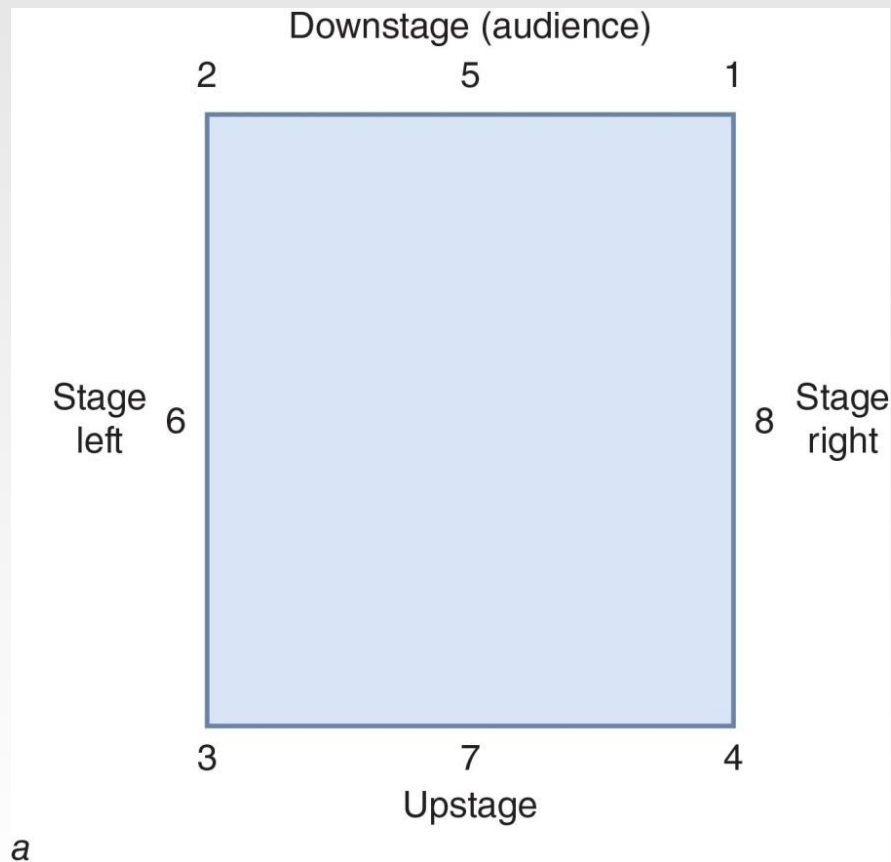


Fifth Position



Dancer Directions

Cecchetti



Working Leg Direction

The working leg extends and foot points

- **à terre (on the floor) or**
- **en l'air (in the air);**
- **devant (to the front),**
- **à la seconde (to the side or second position), or**
- **(derrière) (to the back of the body).**

The Barre

The barre is the first part of the ballet class.

- Barre exercises prepare you to dance in the center.**
- A second definition of the term *barre* is the actual bar—a rail that helps you to increase or test your balance while doing the barre exercises.**