

## **BALLET**

### **WHAT IS BALLET?**

The word “ballet” comes from the French and was borrowed into English around 1630; it means “dance” or “to dance.” A ballet is a dance work, which consists of the choreography and music for a ballet production. Ballet dance works are choreographed and performed by trained artists. Many classical ballet works are performed with classical music accompaniment and are theatrical and use elaborate costumes and staging; exceptions of this due exist.

### **RENAISSANCE BALLET**

Ballets de cour (court ballet) is the name given to ballet performed in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries at court. Jean-Baptiste Lully is considered the most important composer of music for ballets de cour and instrumental in the development of the form. As director of the Academie Royale de Music, which he was employed by Louis XIV, he worked with Pierre Beauchamp,, Moliere, Philippe Quinault and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine to develop ballet as an art form equal to that of the accompanying music.

Beauchamp, superintendent of the ballet and director of the Academie Royale de Danse, codified the five positions based on the foundations set down by Thoinot Arbeau. He also set out the first rules of ballet technique, which emphasized the technical aspects of dance. Pierre Rameau expanded on Beauchamp’s work in *Le Maitre a danser* (1725), further detailing carriage of the body, steps and positions. The work of both Beauchamp and Rameau, along with ballet clothing and footwear was a major turning point in ballet practice that led to the pre-romantic ballet era.

### **BAROQUE BALLET**

Opera-ballet was a popular genre of French Baroque lyric theater, which combined elements of opera and ballet. This ballet form differed from that of Renaissance tragédie en musique in several respects:

1. First, it contained more dance music than the tragédie
2. The plots were not necessarily derived from classical mythology and allowed for comic elements
3. The opera-ballet consisted of a prologue followed by a number of self-contained acts (also called entrees), often loosely grouped around a single theme. The individual acts could also be performed independently, in which case they were known as actes de ballet (acts of ballet).

### **THE RISE OF A MORE FORMALIZED BALLET**

Classical ballet is a traditional, formal style of ballet that adheres to classical ballet technique. It is known for its aesthetics and rigorous technique (such as pointe work, turnout of the legs, and high extensions), its flowing, precise movements, and its ethereal qualities. Various ballet, such as Russian, French, English and Italian feature slight differences in movement and characteristics, but within all of them, the performance and movement vocabulary of classical ballet is largely consistent throughout the world. Depending on the teacher and training system, students may progress through various stages or levels of training as their skills advance. Ballet technique is the foundational principles of body movement and form used in ballet:

### **DEFINITIONS USED IN BALLET TECHNIQUE**

<b>Turnout</b>	The outward rotation of the legs emanating from the hip
<b>Fundamental Positions of the Feet</b>	Combined with turnout, these positions are numbered first through fifth

<b>Balloon</b>	The appearance of briefly floating in the air
<b>Pointe Technique</b>	The part of ballet technique that concerns pointe work, in which a ballet dancer supports all body weight on the tips of fully extended feet
<b>The Center</b>	Term placed on developing flexibility and strengthening the legs, feet and body in order to do turns and many other ballet movements

### **CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR USED IN BALLET**

Footwear consists of ballet shoes, or flats; usually female dancers wear pink or beige shoes and male dancers wear black or white shoes. Ballet clothing can vary, from leotards, tights and/or skirted leotards for women and tights, form-fitting white shirt or leotard for men to unitards, which can be worn by either male or female ballet dancers. The customary attire and hair style are intended to promote freedom of movement and to reveal body form so that the teacher can evaluate dancer's alignment and technique.

### **ROMANTIC BALLET**

The Romantic ballet is defined primarily by an era in which the ideas of Romanticism in art and literature influenced the creation of ballets. This era generally started in 1827 (Paris, France), peaked in 1845 (London, England) and slowly declined until the last considered ballet in 1870 (Paris, France). The development of pointework, although still at a fairly basic stage, profoundly affected people's perception of the ballerina.

Changes in the Romantic ballet to that of prior periods included:

1. The separate identity of the scenarist or author from the choreographer
2. The presence of specially written music as opposed to a pastiche typical of the ballet of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries
3. The invention of gas lighting enabled gradual changes and enhanced the mysteriousness of many ballets with its softer gleam
4. Illusion became more diverse with wires
5. Trap doors became more widely used