

# Beginner Ballet Workshop

with Sarah Bowman



# A Brief History of BALLET

## 16th and 17th Centuries

- Ballet's origins lie with the French and Italian court dances of the 16th and 17th centuries, where performers danced in the centre of a hall with the audience seated on tiers or galleries above the floor. The focus from above was on floor patterns traced by the dancers
  - Costumes were heavy and embroidered, making it difficult to create much movement and gesture
  - The implementation of a proscenium arch in 1618 distanced performers from the audience.
- French King Louis XIV established the Academy Royale de Danse in 1661 to establish standards and certify instructors. In 1713, he created the first professional ballet company, the Paris Opéra Ballet.
- Ballet was first seen in the theatre as part of opera, where professional dancers rather than courtiers were performing.



# 18th Century

- Ballet broke away from opera by mid-century
- Ballet began to develop into the Romantic style. Ballets were created to make the audience feel happy or sad, as well as to show them good technique.
- Mime and gesture made it more expressive, taking the place of words and song. An early example is *The Loves of Mars and Venus*.
- Costumes became lighter, and skirts were raised a few inches from floor length to allow emphasis on physical movements and emotions.
- *La Fille Mal Gardée* is a ballet from 1790, although the original choreography was lost. The ballet was re-choreographed by Sir Frederick Ashton nearly two centuries later.



The Loves of  
Mars and Venus



La Fille Mal Gardée

# 19th Century

- Romanticism became prevalent early in the century with ballets such as *La Sylphide*.
- Most ballet themes were escapist, with unreal or fantasy elements. Dancers in these scenes jump high as if they are flying, footwork is silent, female dancers appear weightless. In the real-life scenes, the footwork is fast and jumps are low.
- Group dances for the corps de ballet became more important, with the corps moving as one.
- Dancers had now developed new skills such as dancing en pointe and appearing weightless.
- Costumes were close-fitting, with corsets, embroidered and with jewels and bedazzled
- Classical ballet became prevalent near the end of the century with story ballets created in Russia, such as *La Bayadère*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*.
- Classical ballet structure includes three or four acts, with each act having an entrance parade, a pas de deux, and a corps de ballet dance. Character or national dances are included.



La  
Sylphide



Swan  
Lake



The Sleeping  
Beauty

# 20th and 21st Centuries



The Firebird



Elite Syncopations

- Choreographers moved away from the formal structure of Classical ballet with displays of amazing technique, to create one-act ballets using dance, music and design in equal parts plus used male dancers equally with ballerinas. Ballet Russes, founded by Diaghilev just before WWI, started the modern era of ballet.
- Dancing became more expressive with dramatic choreography that meant mime gestures were not needed to tell the story. The corps de ballet might not all move in unison. Ballets such as *The Firebird*, *Rite of Spring* and *Apollo* are examples.
- As the 20th century progressed, ballet had a wide influence on other dance genres, in particular leading to the the development of modern dance.
- Later choreographers were inspired from all past styles and borrowed from other dance styles to present movement in new ways. Arms may not be standard, and bodies seem more athletic than effortless. Relationships are more realistic, and less purely romantic. Examples are *Manon*, *Onegin*, *Symphony in C* and *Elite Syncopations*.

- Eurocentric ideals of beauty were frequently tested throughout the 20th century with the advancement of dancers of colour. Continuing into the 21st century, many companies and schools continued to endorse retrograde aesthetic values that placed dancers of colour at a disadvantage in the realms of hiring, casting, and promotions. There was also desire for female members of the corps de ballet to share a common body type.

## Ballet in Canada



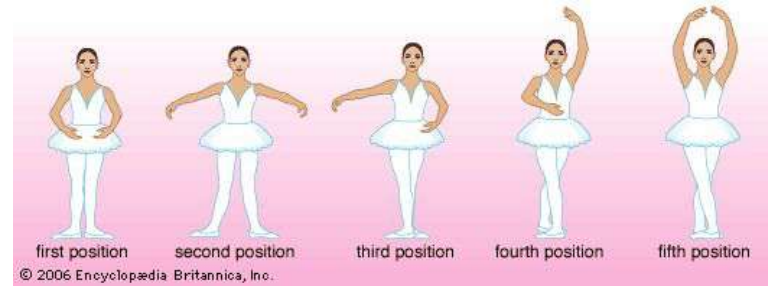
All of Us, inspired by the Tragically Hip for Alberta Ballet 2018 by Jean Grand-Maitre



Alice's Adventures in Wonderland for NBOC 2011 by Christopher Wheeldon

- Royal Winnipeg Ballet - founded in Winnipeg in 1939 by Gweneth Lloyd and Betty Farrally; it is the longest continuously operating ballet company in North America
- National Ballet of Canada - founded Toronto in 1951 with Celia Franca as the first artistic director
- Les Grands Ballet Canadiens - founded in Montreal in 1957 by Ludmilla Chiriaeff; their repertoire includes classical, neoclassical and contemporary ballets, as well as modern and contemporary dances
- Alberta Ballet - founded in Edmonton in 1958 by Muriel Taylor and Dr. Ruth Carse; became a professional company in 1966; their repertoire ranges from avant-garde contemporary works to classical masterpieces
- Ballet BC - founded in Vancouver in 1986 by David Y.H. Luis, Jean Orr and Sheila Begg. Annette av Paul was the first artistic director. They are a contemporary ballet company.

# Ballet Styles and Instruction



- The main ballet styles are Classical, Romantic, Neoclassical, and Contemporary. They evolved over time and depended on geographic location.
- There are three main instruction methods, all with similar steps. Differences are in the position of head and arms.
  1. Royal Academy of Dance - founded in England by a group of Italian, French, Russian and Danish dancers. It is recognized internationally as the English style of ballet. Basic ballet is taught at a slow pace, with slower progression to allow for better mastery of more advanced steps.
  2. Vaganova (Russian) Method - founded in Leningrad by Agrippina Vaganova (1879–1951). It is a fusion of the classical French style, with elements from the Romantic era, athleticism of the Italian method and passion of Russian ballet. It stresses the equal importance of the arms and the legs, and focuses on strength, flexibility and endurance.
  3. Cecchetti Method - founded in Italy by Enrico Cecchetti. It pays careful attention to the laws of anatomy, recognizing that all parts of the body move together. Emphasis is on essential dancer qualities of balance, poise, strength, elevation, elasticity and "ballon".

# Ballet Steps, Positions & Terms

- First, second, third, fourth and fifth positions of the arms and feet \*
- Port de bras \*
- En pointe
- En croix
- Demi-plié \*
- Grand-plié \*
- Tendu \*
- Piqué
- Développé
- Frappé
- Rond de jambe
- Jeté/dégagé \*
- Petit Battement
- Grand Battement \*
- Attitude
- Arabesque
- Glissade
- Changement
- Échappé
- Sauté
- Pas de chat
- Cambré \*
- Fondu



Pas de bourré

- Pas de bourré
- Pas de deux
- Enchaînement
- Pirouette
- Temps lié \*
- Relevé
- Retiré
- Devant \*
- Derrière \*
- Turn-out \*
- Reverence \*

\* Movements stressed in **Sarah Bowman's** Choreography:



# FAMOUS DANCERS - The ten greatest ballet dancers of the 20th century

Deborah Bull, 28 October 2014, Updated: 6 January 2017

<https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/periods-genres/ballet/greatest-ballet-dancers/>

1. **Vaslav Nijinsky** (1889–1950) - Russian dancer and choreographer of Polish descent, celebrated for his virtuosity and for the depth and intensity of his characterizations.
2. **Anna Pavlova** (1881–1931) - Russian prima ballerina, recognised for the creation of the role, 'The Dying Swan', who became the first ballerina to tour ballet internationally.
3. **Galina Ulanova** (1910–1998) - Acclaimed Russian dancer transferred by Stalin to the Bolshoi Theatre to be prima ballerina assoluta for 16 years.
4. **Rudolf Nureyev** (1938–1993) - Soviet-born dancer whose expressive skills, provided a new role for the male dancer who previously served primarily as support to the women.
5. **Margot Fonteyn** (1919–1991) - Fonteyn spent her entire career as a dancer with The Royal Ballet, eventually being appointed Prima Ballerina Assoluta by HM The Queen.
6. **Mikhail Baryshnikov** (1948–) - After defecting from Russia, he later became artistic director of the American Ballet Theatre. In 1977, he received an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actor in *The Turning Point*.
7. **Natalia Makarova** (1940–) - Russian ballerina who performed with the American Ballet Theatre in New York and the Royal Ballet.

8. **Anthony Dowell** (1899–1987/1943–) – Most noted for the role of Oberon in *The Dream* by Sir Frederick Ashton and for his filmed performance as Siegfried in *Swan Lake* with Natalia Makarova in 1980.
9. **Gelsey Kirkland** (1952–) – After joining the New York City Ballet at 15, she was promoted to soloist in 1969 and principal in 1972. She went on to create leading roles in many of the great 20th-century ballets.
10. **Sylvie Guillem** (1965–) – The top-ranking female dancer with the Paris Opera Ballet from 1984 to 1989, before becoming a principal guest artist with the Royal Ballet in London.

## FAMOUS INTERNATIONAL Choreographers to research:



1. **Sir Frederick Ashton** (1904–1988) – British – widely credited with the creation of a specifically English genre of ballet, such as *La fille mal gardée* and *Monotones I* and *Monotones II*
2. **George Balanchine** (1904–1983) – Russian – co-founder of the New York City Ballet; choreography is characterized by plotless ballets with minimal costume and décor, performed to classical and neoclassical music
3. **August Bournonville** (1805–1979) – Danish – known for Bournonville style; also his egalitarian choreography, giving equal emphasis to male and female roles at a time when European ballet emphasized the ballerina.
4. **Dame Ninette de Valois** (1898–2001) – Irish/British – founder of Vic-Wells Ballet (now the Royal Ballet); Job is their oldest ballet and crucial in the development of British ballet
5. **Mikhail Fokine** (1880–1942) – Russian – was a groundbreaking Imperial Russian choreographer, creating ballets for Ballet Russes in Paris and American Ballet Theatre such as *Les Sylphides*, *Scheherazade*, and *The Firebird*

6. **Jiří Kilián** (1947-) - Czech - worked with Stuttgart and Nederlands Dance Theatre; style included exploration of the limitations and capabilities of space, body parts, entrances and exits, contrasts, and humor
7. **Lev Ivanov** (1834-1901) - Russian - co-founder of the New York City Ballet; choreography is characterized by plotless ballets with minimal costume and décor, performed to classical and neoclassical music
8. **Sir Kenneth MacMillan** (1929-1992) - British - mainly associated with the Royal Ballet, but frequently worked with Stuttgart Ballet, Deutsche Opera Ballet, and American Ballet Theatre creating classical story ballets
9. **John Neumeier** (1939-) - American - focused on the preservation of ballet tradition, while giving his works a modern dramatic framework
10. **Marius Petipa** (1818-1910) - French - one of the most influential ballet masters and choreographers in ballet history, creating ballets for the Imperial Ballet such as *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*
11. **Antony Tudor** (1908-1987) - British - developed the so-called psychological ballet; seen as a principal transformer of ballet into a modern art along with Balanchine
12. **Alexei Ratmansky** (1968-) - Russian - noted for restaging traditionally classical ballets for large companies.
13. **Jerome Robbins** (1918-1988) - American - choreographer, director, dancer, and theater producer who worked in classical ballet, on stage, film, and television creating classics such as *West Side Story* and *The King and I*
14. **Twyla Tharp** (1941-) - American - her ballet *Deuce Coupe* is considered the first "crossover ballet", a mix of ballet and modern dance.
15. **Christopher Wheeldon** (1973-) - British - international choreographer of contemporary ballet. *Polyphonia* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* for

# FAMOUS CANADIAN Ballet Dancers and Choreographers to research:

1. **David Adams** (1928–2007) – NBOC first premier danseur (male principal dancer); then in UK with Festival Ballet and Royal Ballet
2. **Frank Augustyn** (1951–) – NBOC principal dancer
3. **Anne Ditchburn** (1999–) – NBOC choreographer in 1960’s, one of few women at that time; later moved to act and choreograph for film and television
4. **Celia Franca** (1921–2007) – co-founder of NBOC and first artistic director
5. **Rex Harrington** (1962–) – NBOC principal dancer
6. **Evelyn Hart** (1956–) – RWB principal dancer
7. **Karen Kain** (1950–) – NBOC principal dancer; current artistic director
8. **James Kudelka** (1955–) – NBOC former artistic director; choreography for NBOC, GBC and Toronto’s Citadel + Cie
9. **Brian MacDonald** (1928–2014) – NBOC founding member; choreographer and director of opera, theatre and musical theatre; final work was *Requiem 9/11* in 2002 to Verdi’s *Requiem*
10. **Crystal Pite** (1970–) – international choreographer known for a breadth of movement fusing classical elements and the complexity and freedom of structured improvisation
11. **Peter Quanz** (1979–) – international choreographer known for his groundbreaking choreographic collaborations in dance, in music, and in visual art.



Evelyn Hart  
David Peregrine  
in *Belong*

12. **Veronica Tennant** (1946-) - born London, UK - NBOC principal dancer; producer, director writer and filmmaker
13. **Lynn Seymour** (1939-) - born Wainwright, AB - Royal Ballet principal dancer
14. **Lois Smith** (1929-2011) - born Vancouver, BC - NBOC first prima ballerina; first artistic director of Ballet BC

## References

National Ballet of Canada - <https://national.ballet.ca/Homepage>

Royal Winnipeg Ballet - <https://www.rwb.org/>

Les Grands Ballets Canadiens - <https://grandsballets.com/en/>

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Paris Opera Ballet - <https://www.operadeparis.fr/en/artists/ballet>

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Dutch National Ballet - <https://www.operaballet.nl/en/ballet/ballet>

New York City Ballet - <https://www.nycballet.com/>

American Ballet Theatre - <https://www.abt.org/>

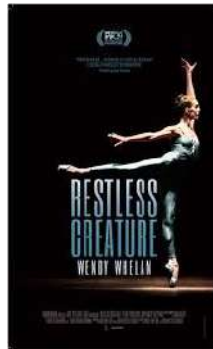
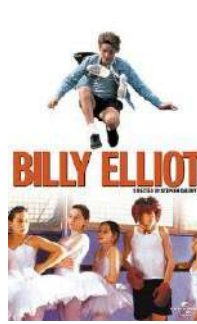
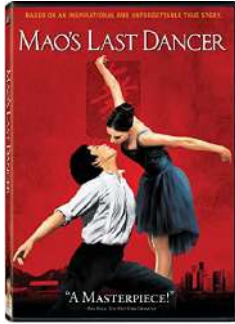
San Francisco Ballet - <https://www.sfballet.org/>



Mikhail Baryshnikov

# Ballet Assignment:

1. **What is your favourite film that includes ballet?** If you haven't watched one, choose one to view. Identify the choreographer of the film. (*This maybe someone you wish to research for the Choreographer Assignment*) Describe the role of dance within the plot and the types of Ballet movements and other Elements of Dance you saw in the film?



**2. Choreograph a ballet composition** recognizing that this dance style, like others, are always creating new movements that blend a variety of styles, use a high level of athleticism, increasingly advanced tricks, and incorporate all the Elements of Dance: Time, Shape, Space, Energy and Relationship. So, **what will your new ballet dance look** like as you continue to apply the Principles of Composition: Variety, Transitions, Sequencing, Climax/Resolution, Contrast, Development, Unity, Balance, Repetition, Formations, Levels, Tempo, Dynamics and Qualities of movement.

**3. Choose an influential Ballet dancer or choreographer from the lists above, or from your teacher's suggestion. Research the following:**

1. Their birthplace and where they grew up.
2. When and where they started to dance.
3. Their dance experience, challenges and start professionally.
4. Their Ballet style and unique contributions to the artform of BALLET.
5. Ballets they have choreographed; videos, concerts, or movies they have made; musicians they have worked with.
6. Awards they have earned or other special accomplishments they have made in their career.
7. A photo of the choreographer.

