



Beginner HEELS Workshop

With Sabina Budd





Dancing in HEELS



High Heel Latin shoes

Heels dance is a dance form that emerged and evolved in the United States and Europe in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. It is named after the women's shoe style, since one of its distinguishing features is the wearing of high-heeled shoes during performance.

Heels dance is most often a solo dance genre often featured in routines seen in pop and hip-hop music videos. Its techniques and dance vocabulary derive from a wide range of dance styles used in music video choreography as well as traditional dance genres. It is characterized by dynamic footwork and technique from jazz dance, showgirl dance (the first style of technical dance to be performed in high heels), ballroom dance and Latin dance.

Many other dance styles have influenced this modern-day dance style: for example, torso isolations borrowed from belly dance and hip-hop dance, floor work, fluid arm work and body language in some forms of heels dance coming from contemporary dance. Heels dance is technically demanding, and dancers who perform it are typically professionally trained in jazz dance and other styles, including ballet.

Heels dance is not a social dance style; it is seen mainly in the context of professional stage performance, cruise ship entertainment, dancers performing behind the lead performers/pop artists, or dancers in music videos or a live musical production. Their movement, especially where there are many performers moving together, provides a visual symmetry and rhythm to accompany the music.



Heels dance is also practiced as a physical fitness movement discipline taught and practiced in workout or leisure format in dance studios or gyms and performed by both men and women.



A HEEL with History

An excerpt adapted from DANCE Magazine, November 20, 2008 by Phoenix Lauren Katy



Before heels were used in dance, they were used in life. In the Middle Ages, cork wedges and stilts helped wearers stay above mud. Catherine de'Medici brought high heels into vogue in the 1500s when she wore two-inch heels in order to compete with the tall mistress of her betrothed, the Duke of Orleans (later the King of France). In the 1700s, King Louis XIV wore heels adorned with min murals including complete battle scenes. He also decreed that only nobility could wear red heels, establishing the shoes as a status symbol.

Considered a mark of wasteful nobility, heels fell into disfavor during the French Revolution, but they later re-emerged in varying styles. Traveling through countries and decades, heeled footwear morphed into recognizable form during the flapper era of the 1920s. Since then, the jabbing lift has outlived many other fashion phenomena.

Dance, Lifted Up

As high heels moved into the mainstream, parallel versions kept pace in the dance world. From classic court dances performed in low heels, to folk dances including the jig, tarantella and the Scottish fling, dances called for structured shoes. Phil LaDuca, former Broadway dancer and creative director of LaDuca Shoes, explains: “When the traditional dances were established, there was so much stomping, jumping, scuffing and pounding that they all required inflexible, hard-soled character shoes that capitalize on the sound of a heel dropping to the floor.”



Since then, heels in dance have diversified and evolved to include options like tango shoes, character shoes, and styles for gliding waltzes. While some dancers seem to have been born with heels attached to their feet, many others find it takes diligent practice to master dancing in them.



For Ballet Hispanico dancer Angelica Burgos, learning to love heels took time. “Before Ballet Hispanico I had only done pointe work,” she says. “Dancing in heels is night and day from pointe shoes, including the posture, balance, and weight shifts. It’s taken me five years, but now heels are like my running shoes. I love the way they make your leg so long, show off your foot, and pop your arch.”

Broadway dancer Donna Marie Asbury wore her first pair in a summer stock tour of *Bye Bye Birdie* at age 16. Now, she loves the heels she wears as a merry murderess in *Chicago* on Broadway. A dancer in the Fosse musical since 1999, Asbury says she prefers character shoes with a suede sole, two straps that cross over the instep and an extra platform under the ball of the foot for extra support—plus they add height to her 5’3” frame. “In the ‘All I Care About’ number, we are sexy and wanton, strutting around with the heels,” she explains. “Then, in ‘Cell Block Tango’ we are angry, and stomping in heels is really empowering for that moment.”

Staying Well-Heeled

To acclimate to the specific way a shoe affects movement, dancers wear the same style and heel-height in rehearsal as those worn in performance. They also say that adding a metal brace between the heel and arch portion of the sole creates extra stability.

Dancers recommend exercise programs that strengthen the core, like Pilates and Gyrotonics, because you have to readjust your center when dancing in high heels. After workouts or shows, they stretch their calves and Achilles tendons daily. They also soak in hot baths with mineral salts and do extra strength training for the ankles.

Fortunately for heel addicts, more help is available from shoe companies that take an interest in comfort and functionality. LaDuca founded his shoe company based on his own experience in dance and observations of frustrated female dancers. “Watching my gypsy friends slam their shoes in door jams really resonated with me, especially as they got injured,” says LaDuca. “When you jump or do a big movement, you have to be able to roll through the foot as you land and brush it as you take off. So, my shoes are flexible enough to point and brush, but are still supportive and stable in the heel cup and toe box.”

Many other shoe companies are following suit, with character shoes more closely resembling a pliable ballet slipper with added heel than a wooden clog. But while this change is very welcome to dancers, heels would have a place in dancers’ hearts regardless.



“There are times that we have to rehearse a piece in flats, and it just feels so wrong,” says Burgos. “The minute you put on heels, you become a different woman—sexy, powerful. It’s like Cinderella.”
Lauren Kay is assistant editor at Dance Spirit magazine and is also a dancer and writer in NYC.



Medically speaking...

While dancers love how heels look and have learned to accommodate to their demands, Dr. Lori Weisenfeld, a New York-based sports podiatrist, sees the effects on her patients. “Heels do elongate the leg and make the calves contract. But there’s nothing less sexy than women having difficulty walking in them.”

Weisenfeld explains that the discomfort has several sources. The first is pressure on the ball of the foot below the big toe joint on the two small bones called sesamoids. The second is on the paddy part of the ball of the foot, just below where the toes attach, which is stressed from the added weight. The last can come from corns on the top of the toes, when they are pushed forward in a narrow toe box.

“High heels do not allow us to walk in a regular heel-to-toe fashion,” she says. “Also, some high, narrow heels are unstable and leave the wearer vulnerable to twisting the ankles, tightening the calves, and shortening the Achilles tendons.”

Weisenfeld says that character shoes are the best choice for dancers due to their wide heel, deep and wide toebox, and common T- or ankle-strap that adds support and stability. In some styles, low platforms in the front of the shoe offset some of the heel height. Wider heels that are placed more firmly below the ankle also help.

Weisenfeld reminds dancers that whatever the issue, foot health is vital. “Foot pain is never normal. Any repetitive pain, swelling, or discoloration should be evaluated by a podiatrist.” —L.K.

So, let's talk about **The TRIANGLE of the FOOT**

Weight bearing for ballet is considered correct when divided evenly over three main weight bearing points on the plantar (sole) surface of each foot: one third is on the heel, two thirds are on the ball of the foot. Dancing in heels demands that the dancer execute the movement balanced between two of the three weight bearing points on the foot. Dancing en pointe in ballet demands that dancers perform balanced on the tip of the toes, an extraordinary feat.

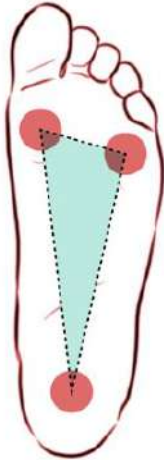


Photo (b) demonstrates *demi pointe* with lengthened toes



Photo (c) demonstrates the extreme position of the foot on pointe, indicating how the weight of the body is carried through the ankle joint

Making HEELS Work

Depending on the style of dance, heels are used in different ways. In tango, you need to put the whole foot down and push off from the heel. The heel is what allows you to glide forward from the momentum of pushing through it. The three points of the foot are all in use: two in the front, and one in the heel, creating a triangle of support as detailed above and rebound for the earthy movements of traditional Argentine tango.

Some pieces require character shoes with a wider heel and toe box, and others call for ballroom shoes with a very thin heel and tapered front. The diversity in footwear makes special demands. When on demi-pointe, the stomach is pulled up and the shoulders are back. In transitions you have to go through your whole foot. But even when you do, you aren't on your actual heel; you're on the shoe.

Many dancers say they wouldn't trade dancing in their heels for flat slippers. But they do admit that wearing heels creates physical challenges, from dealing with the shift of the body's center to added stress on the balls of the feet and strain on the lower leg.

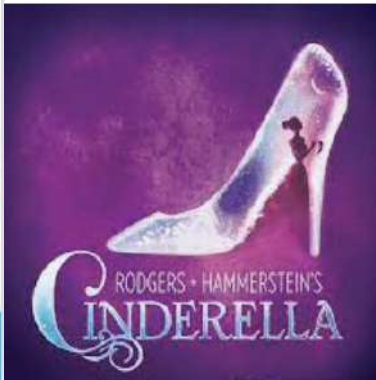
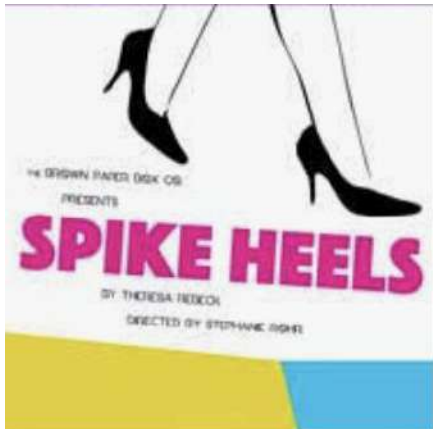
Challenges like lower back pain is due to the altered position of the spine when wearing higher shoes. In addition, the discomfort on the balls of the feet is the worst aspect, especially on days with both matinee and evening performances. "You have to give your feet a break sometime," one dancer says. "Because I wear heels for a living, it takes a special occasion for me to put on a pair outside the theater."



On top of discomfort, wearing heels also requires serious readjustment in larger movements. For one dancer, sliding into a full split during “All I Care About,” is the hardest move to maneuver in heels. To avoid wrenching her ankle, she slides on the outside part of her foot, essentially sickling it.

Another dancer finds large jumps difficult. “Unless you have a partner to support you on your landing, when you jump in heels you have to compromise your height and power,” she says. “You have to make the jump smaller and increase the plié for a softer landing.

Heels that are high will be a lot easier to dance in if the heel itself is thick. Thicker heels give the dancer more support, but advanced dancers should wear stiletto heels to classes.



How to Dance in HIGH HEELS – Without Injury

Ever wondered how Beyoncé pulled off those sick dance moves while wearing high heels? Well, she isn't called "Queen B" for nothing. But beyond her obvious oozing talents, Beyonce could sashay in those 6-inch heels because she actually trained how to do it. It means she practiced many times and took proper measures to avoid injury.

Yes, it is not a physical impossibility to slay the dance floor while wearing your favorite pair of spikes. And we will give you **tips on how to dance in heels**.

Why Wear High Heels?

There are many reasons ladies love their pair of heels. One, the extra 5 inches can make your legs appear longer. The calf muscles get worked up when you wear heels, so their shapes get more pronounced. The toes appear pointed, which adds more sensual looks when you walk. You also have better posture when wearing heels.

Heels can give you a sense of a confidence. Possibly the added height to your frame; standing tall can make you feel stronger and proud of your femininity.

Lastly, top brands of high heels look and feel nice. The color and design can complete any fashionable outfit. Quality heels are not only well-crafted but are also comfortable to wear.



How High Heels Affect Your Body

But those *stiletto*s aren't named after a dagger because they're harmless. Wearing high heels has profound effects on your body - and we don't just mean the beauty aspect.

Spine / Back

Try standing on your toes. It is hard to maintain your balance, right? That's what happens when you wear heels. To correct your balance, you push your chest and lower back forward, and your hips back. This improper posture takes your spine out of its proper alignment, which may cause injuries in the long term.

Heels / Toes / Feet

When you wear heels, you put almost 70% of your weight on the balls of your feet. This uneven weight distribution can put so much strain on your toes, which can cause swollen and painful toes (*metatarsalgia*).

There's also a strong connection between high heels and *plantar fasciitis*, or the inflammation of the tissue that connects your heel bone to the toe muscles (*plantar fascia*). It feels painful when you walk fast or land hard on your stilettos because your heels don't lay squarely on the ground, which causes the shock to be unevenly distributed. Achilles tendon strain is also a common high heels-related injury.



Wearing high heels also puts you at a greater risk of rolling your ankles. If your whole foot isn't square with the ground, a wrong step can cause your ankles to buckle and roll sideways.



Calf Muscles / Knees

If you are not comfortable wearing heels, you tend to stand in an awkward, non-relaxed way. This means you "hold your weight", or you don't put it all on your feet. Instead, your calf muscles contract to absorb this extra stress (like lifting weights). This is why regular wearing of high heels can sculpt those sexy calves. However, prolonged contraction in a given period can cause calf injuries.

This awkward standing position also puts some unnecessary pressure on your knees. Besides absorbing shocks when you walk, your knees now feel pressure from your weight. And we all know that too much pressure on the knees is not a good thing.

Hips

Wearing high heels causes you to shift your posture to maintain your balance when you stand and move. An improper posture can cause undue strain on your hip muscles, which don't normally get it when you are flat on the ground.

Tips of How to Dance in HEELS

Having mentioned all the caveats, wearing high heels isn't always a bad thing.

The key thing to remember is proper preparation.

You can still make the audience swoon when you perform killer *sa/sa* or modern hip-hop moves provided you follow these tips.

STRETCH before Dancing

Warm-up stretching is a must before doing any physical activity like dancing, but it still merits a friendly reminder in case you forget. Before you slide your feet inside those spikes, stretch your legs first, especially the calves. Do some runner's stretches to warm up those calf muscles.



Once you strap on your heels, walk around for a few minutes to make your body get used to the feeling of wearing high heels.

PRACTICE Ballet

Any self-respecting dancer knows versatility of style is a must to be called a true artist or performer. So, if you haven't yet, add ballet to your repertoire of moves. Ballet gives you an advantage when you dance on heels because as we all know, those *pirouettes* and *arabesques* launch from a tip-toe position. Ballet dancers train using pointe shoes, which require them to practically stand and move on their toes during the whole routine.



EXERCISE Leg, Core and Back Muscles

If you are a true dancer, then you know that regular workouts should be part of your everyday routine. If you plan to dance more often on heels, spend more time strengthening your legs (calves), core and back muscles. Working out these muscles enables them to survive the stress of high-impact dancing on heels.

Lead with Your Hips

When you lead with your hips, you distribute your weight more evenly (unlike when you lead with your feet or chest). Engaging your hips also puts your thigh muscles at work, which is better at absorbing stress. This takes the unnecessary pressure off your knees and calves.

Get a Good Pair

Of course, everything boils down to your very own high heels. If you want to dance on high heels for a long time - and maintain an injury-free career - invest on a good pair of high heels. Expensive brands don't always equate to performance. Most lack the proper heel support and toe cushioning. Some are made of materials that feel uncomfortable when worn for a long time. Get high heels that are designed especially for dancing. To start out, buy a lower, wider heel like found in a character shoe and then progress to the higher, narrower heel.

Besides the different height in heels, both men and women's dance shoes often have differently shaped heels. These heels do feel different when dancing, and it is up to you to decide which style fits you best. For beginners, it may be better to choose the lower heel, as these are easier to dance in and put less strain on the body. Higher heels in Latin allow for a nicer foot point and a longer leg line.

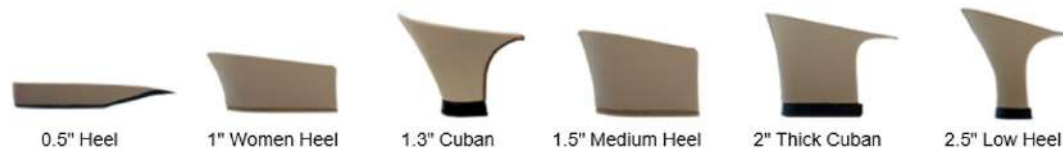
Supadance:



Dance Naturals:



Very Fine:



Top 10 Iconic Broadway Dance Numbers noting that the footwear of most female dancers is quite often heels and like Ginger Rogers is quoted as saying when dancing with Fred Astaire, "*I did everything he did, but **backwards** and in high heels.*" – **Ginger Rogers**

http://www.youtube.com/c/MsMojo?sub_confirmation=1

Although the roles of female characters in musical stage productions most often wear heels and the male characters wear flats when dancing, there are the exceptions. In the Broadway musical **Kinky Boots**, the story demands the male roles walk and dance in high-heeled platformed boots as drag queens.



Kinky Boots
A NEW MUSICAL INSPIRED BY A TRUE STORY



MUSICAL THEATRE HEELS Assignment:

1. Identify a musical theatre production where the performers are wearing heels?
2. Describe how heels play a role as part of the costuming for the characters. Explain how the choreography and performance would be affected if the dancers wore flats instead of heels.
3. Find choreography in a musical production where heels are worn and learn part of the dance to perform for the class. Your teacher will determine the length of time of the dance segment. Be sure to follow the tips for safe practice wearing heels while rehearsing and performing this dance segment.
4. Compare two contrasting musical productions, where the characters are wearing types of heels but with different intensions. Explain how the use of heels in these uniquely different performances affect the plot, the attitudes of the performers and the reaction of the audience.
5. Identify the dance styles performed in heels in these two contrasting musical productions. Why did the director/choreographer/costume designer choose to the dancers perform in heels?



Bob Fosse (1927-1987) was a huge influence in the American musical theatre. He directed, choreographed and performed many musical works on stage and screen having the dancers wear heels. Identify five musicals (5) Bob Fosse directed/choreographed.

Research the following:

1. Bob Fosse's birthplace and where he grew up.
2. When and where he started to dance.
3. His dance experience, challenges and his start in dance professionally.
4. His signature moves, preferred dance style and unique contributions to the artform of musical theatre.
5. Identify performances in stage and movie productions where dancers are wearing heels.
6. Awards or other special accomplishments he was presented with over his career.
7. A photo of Bob Fosse and photos of two different styled performances where the dancers wore heels.



References (from Wikipedia)

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3. *Hilary Howard (2012). "A Stiletto Workout? It Can Be Done". The New York Times. May 2015.*
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5. *Phoenix Lauren Katy (2008) 'A Heel With History'. DANCE Magazine, November, 2008.*
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