

Ballet from the beginning essay

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Ballet was not created with rules and points, the art of ballet was created over 500 years ago and is still being changed and improved upon today.

There have been over 100 ballets choreographed in the world. Early in the art of ballet, the ballets were stories of Greek myths, later the stories involved more fantasy creatures and had stories from faraway lands, and now there are so many different types of stories. The ballet technique was created by people and passed on by common knowledge and by books that were written to guide a dancer through training and performances. Although the world of ballet is small, it has produced many well-known stars that will never be forgotten. There are also many choreographers, musicians, and artists that have contributed to make the art of ballet what it is today. The art of ballet was established and preserved over many years, and it took many people and eras to create the technique and art we know today.

Ballet, coming from the Italian word ballo, meaning dance, was not developed over a few years or a few decades (Castle 48). Ballet originated in Italy in the 15th century during the Renaissance. The wealthy rulers of Florence and other major Italian city-states promoted the arts and had competitions in giving fancy entertainments that included dancing. The dancers were nobles of the court who danced for their rulers for entertainment (World). In 1463, Domenico da Piacenza wrote a treatise on dancing and the development of grace, rhythm, and memory.

Catherine de Medici married the future King Henry II of France and introduced Italian dancing to the French court (Minden 292). Many people moved from Italy to France to be with Catherine and to be her servant.

Balthasar de Beaujoyeulx was one of the many to move in 1555. He was her servant and dancing master. Beaujoyeulx's first ballet, running for over five hours, was Ballet Comique de la Reine. It was performed in Paris in 1581 at a royal wedding. Beaujoyeulx made the costumes and scenery extraordinary to impress the audience because dance technique at the time was very limited.

Dancing masters taught European courtiers how to dance, but they also wrote manuals to preserve steps that could be performed (World). Thoinot Arbeau published a manual on steps, rhythms, and notation in 1588 (Minden 292). Although the technique was improving, the ladies continued to wear long, heavy dresses which made it difficult to see the new steps.

However, the male dancers' clothes allowed them to move freely (World). Court entertainment soon became very popular throughout England and all around Europe. In the 17th century, ballet required more skill and practice, which was the beginning of professional dancers. Ballet Comique de la Reine helped make France the center of ballet, and so did King Louis XIV.

He ruled France from the mid 1600's to 1715, and during his reign he promoted ballet and enjoyed dancing himself (World). The King participated in the Ballet de la Nuit as the role of Apollo in 1653, and became known as the Sun King himself (Minden 292). The Royal Academy of Dancing was founded by Louis in 1661, as well as the Royal Academy of Music, later known as the Paris Opera. The profession of ballet began when the Paris Opera established a dancing school with serious training (World). At the theater of the Palais Royale the successful ballet, Moliere's, Le Bourgeois

Gentilhomme, was performed with dances by Pierre Beauchamp (Minden 292). Beauchamp is known for defining and naming the five basic positions of the feet in ballet.

Jean-Baptiste Lully, the composer of the music in the ballet *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, was a ballet master and he invented the pirouette, created ballets to perform for the King, and he codified ballet technique that focused on turnout. In 1681, the first performance by a professional female was performed publicly. Mademoiselle Lafontaine danced the lead role in the ballet Lully and Beauchamp created (Minden 292, 293).

After the 17th century the art of ballet became more distinct from early forms of dancing with more turnout and more graceful movements. The 18th century was a turning point in ballet history in technique and in many other ways. The earliest change to ballet was the new elevation of male jumps and beats (Minden 293). Another change was the costumes for women on stage.

The first alter was the shortening of the dress by Marie Camargo, a very well known dancer in Paris. Camargo shortened her skirt to show the audience her new and more technical steps (World). She also took off the heels on her shoes and performs “male” steps (Minden 293). She introduced new steps to the ballet vocabulary and performed with amazing talent that had rarely been seen (Britannica). A decade later in 1734, a rival of Camargo, Marie Salle made another change to the standard performing costume.

She loosened and made her costume with lighter material while keeping it as short as Camargo’s length (Minden 293). She also danced with a freedom of

expression while letting her hair down and choreographed the ballets in which she appeared (Britannica). In 1738, The Kirov Ballet was founded in Saint Petersburg and is still in Europe today. In the mid 1700's multiple ballet masters developed the ballet d'action, meaning ballet with a story (World). Jean-Georges Noverre, the father of the ballet d'action convinced to express emotion with body and facial gestures without dropping the five basic positions (Britannica). He changed ballet to tell stories with movement, not words. He wanted to stop using masks and wigs to explain characters and the plot.

He thought any skillful dancer could easily express their character only using their bodies and faces. The ballet d'action changed the subject of mythology in ballets to many different types of stories. *La Fille mal gardee*, a story of young lovers, premiered in 1789 and is the oldest ballet still performed today (World).

The changes in the 18th century were popular for the audiences and for the dancers, and lead to more changes in technique and performances. In the 19th century, also known as the Romantic Era, many features and ballets we have today began. It is also the century of ballerinas who are still known greatly today all over the world.

There was a new emphasis on fantasy and distant land stories other than mythology. The technique expanded even more and the necessity of talent became grater. The development of point shoes needed talent and strength (World). The rising on oes created more thrilling moments for the audience and the costume added to the performance of the dancers. The “ Romantic

tutu” was the new costume of the 19th century. It was a simple white gown with or without a light overlay, and with a high empire waist (Minden 293).

Carlo Blasis, an Italian, was the most important teacher of the 1800’s. He taught many of the famous dancers of the 19th century and wrote many books on teaching, training, and technique (Castle 50) (Minden 293). Italian choreographer, Filippo Taglioni, created the ballet *La Sylphide*, the first Romantic ballet, for his daughter Marie Taglioni in 1832 (World). Marie was the first ballerina to dance on her toes and dance a full performance on point (Castle 50).

For her beautiful, graceful movements, said to be from her father’s teaching, she became the greatest star of Paris (World). Taglioni’s rival, Fanny Elssler, was an Austrian ballerina but danced in Paris. Elssler was not famous for her graceful performances, but she was famous from her lively character dance in 1836 called *cachucha* (World). In 1836 a new version, which is now seen today, of *La Sylphide* starring Lucile Grahn premiered (Minden 294). Soon another star, Carlotta Grisi, was the lead role of *Giselle* in 1841.

Choreographed by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot, the newcomer instantly becomes famous for her performance of another outstanding ballet of the Romantic period (World) (Minden 294). Paris was the center of ballet with the well-known Marie Taglioni, Fanny Elssler, Lucile Grahn, and Carlotta Grisi performing new outstanding performances, but ballet had spared and was producing more stars. After the stars were distinguished in Paris, there were many more ballets that premiered and many more lead roles that could not be performed by just the famous four. In 1842, Bournonville’s *Napoli*

premiers. In 1845, a historic dance with Marie Taglioni, Fanny Cerrito, Lucile Grahn, and Carlotta Grisi was performed in London. In 1846, Mazilier's Paquita, starring Grisi, was premiered. While all these ballets were being performed and being spread in publicity, a tragedy surprised everyone. A young prodigy, Emma Livry's life was taken on stage while performing because her tutu caught on fire with the gas lamps providing light on stage.

Marius Petipa becomes well known throughout the world for his ballets. In 1869 Petipa creates his own version of Don Quixote. In 1870, Saint-Leon's Coppelia premiers in Paris. In 1876, Merante's Sylvia premieres. In 1877, Petipa's La Bayadere premieres in Russia, and the premiere of Reisinger's Swan Lake was a failure. With all the performances premiering there became more lead ballerinas.

Italian ballerinas became very famous in the late 1800's. Pierina Legnani, Virginia Zucchi, Antonietta Dell'Era, and Carlotta Brianza amaze everyone with their technique. In 1890, Petipa's The Sleeping Beauty premieres with Carlotta Brianza as Aurora. In 1892, Petipa's The Nutcracker premieres with Antonietta Dell'Era as the Sugar Plum Fairy.

In 1893, Pierina Legnani performs multiple turns on new reinforced shoes which amaze the audience. In 1895, a new version of Petipa's Swan Lake is a success. In 1898, Petipa's Raymonda premieres with Pierina Legnani as the lead role. In the turning of the century, Legnani is declared prima ballerina assoluta. Many talented ballerinas became known globally in the 18th century, and other contributors to the art of ballet (Minden 294). Petipa was the most famous choreographer at the time. He created 57 new ballets,

revised 17 ballets, and choreographed 34 ballet dances for operas. Ballet technique was expanded, especially for women, and many new ideas came about in the Romantic Era of ballet.

It also presented women as greater importance than men. This era was a big part of what ballet is today. The 20th century was filled with even more ballerinas and choreography, even though there were many differences from the previous century. Marius Petipa was still the best choreographer, and still very well known. His dances were combined between dance and mime. In 1905, Michel Fokine, a choreographer, created *The Dying Swan* for Anna Pavlova, after being encouraged to reform ballets (Minden 295). The choreography had true Classical style and was a huge success and amazed everyone (Castle 52).

Pavlova became popular, as well as Vaslav Nijinsky (World Book). In 1907 Fokine's *Les Sylphides* premiered (Minden 295). Fokine started to work with the Ballets Russes and created ballets for them. Tamara Karsavina and Vaslav Nijinsky were the leading ballerinas in the company. Serge Diaghilev led the Ballets Russes and he was one of the world's best ballet producers.

He established the company in Russia in 1909. He attracted many famous choreographers such as: George Balanchine, Michel Fokine, Leonide Massine, and Nijinsky. Fokine had the ability to show his ideas once he was with the company. One idea was to take out all the unrelated choreography and only allow elements that were contributing to the story. Fokine created many beautiful and successful ballets for the company. In 1917, the Ballets Russes

presented Massine's ballet *Parade* with sets and costumes by Picasso and music by Satie.

In 1918, Enrico Cecchetti established the Cecchetti Society, which is later expanded to the "Cecchetti method", after his career as a dancer and his experience of teaching. In 1921, Diaghilev revived *The Sleeping Beauty* and later in 1924 hired Balanchine to choreograph for his company. In 1928, he is described as a turning point in his creative life after the premier of *Apollo* (Minden 295). After the death of Diaghilev in 1929, his knowledge spread because people took and shared what they had learned from him (World).

The Ballets Russes were renamed the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, with Balanchine and Massine as the choreographers. In 1933, Lincoln Kirstein persuaded Balanchine, one of the most important choreographers of the 1900's, to go to the United States. A year later, they established the School of American Ballet. Balanchine was an important teacher because he expanded the ballet vocabulary and technique (World). In 1939, the American Ballet Theater was found by Lucia Chase and Richard Pleasant. Soon after, Balanchine and Kirstein's ballet Society became New York City Ballet.

In 1952, Robert Joffrey and Gerald Arpino found the Joffrey Ballet School. In 1958 the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater debuted in New York. Many more schools and companies were founded in the 20th century and more ballets were created (Minden 298). The Kirov and the Bolshoi had very talented and accomplished dancers. The Ballet Rambert and the Vic-Wells

Ballet were major companies in England. The Stuttgart Ballet and the Hamburg Ballet were very important to Europe (World).

The world of ballet may seem large with all the companies and schools, but really there are not many spots to be in a company and get to the top. The ballet world was hard long ago and still is very challenging. Today there are still performances of ballets from the 1700's being performed today, but there are also more modern, or contemporary, styles of the 21st century. It began to change in the 20th century. The dancers kept the technique classical but used it over dramatically (Castle 54). Modern also can refer to the new style that choreographers added to another or created themselves (Minden 21).

Modern is more weighted and into the ground. Contemporary is a wide range of styles and techniques combined (Minden 24). Clearly styles changes between the 20th century and the 21st century. Since ballet is passed on by your teacher's knowledge or a book, the technique and style of ballet will always be changing.

Over the 500 years the performing art has changed. Choreographers, ballerinas, and musicians from the birth of ballet have made it what it is today. The world of performing and learning, which came from court entertainment in the 1400's, is now a very popular art to participate in, watch, or learn about.

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