

A brief history of contemporary ballet



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Contemporary ballet is a form of dance influenced by both classical ballet and modern dance. It employs the fundamental technique and body control principles of classical ballet but permits a greater range of movement than classical ballet and may not adhere to the strict body lines or turnout that permeate classical ballet technique. Many of its concepts come from the ideas and innovations of 20th century modern dance, including floor work and turn-in of the legs. This ballet style is often performed barefoot.

George Balanchine is often considered to have been the first pioneer of contemporary ballet through the development of neoclassical ballet. One dancer who danced briefly for Balanchine was Mikhail Baryshnikov, an exemplar of Kirov Ballet training. Following Baryshnikov's appointment as artistic director of American Ballet Theatre in 1980, he worked with various modern choreographers, most notably Twyla Tharp. Tharp choreographed *Push Comes To Shove* for ABT and Baryshnikov in 1976; in 1986 she created *In The Upper Room* for her own company.

Both these pieces were considered innovative for their use of distinctly modern movements melded with the use of pointe shoes and classically trained dancers—for their use of contemporary ballet. Twyla Tharp also worked with the Joffrey Ballet company, founded in 1957 by Robert Joffrey. She choreographed *Deuce Coupe* for them in 1973, using pop music and a blend of modern and ballet techniques. The Joffrey Ballet continued to perform numerous contemporary pieces, many choreographed by co-founder Gerald Arpino. Today there are many contemporary ballet companies and choreographers.

These include Alonzo King and his company, Alonzo King's Lines Ballet; Complexions Contemporary Ballet, under the direction of Dwight Rhoden; Nacho Duato's Compania Nacional de Danza; William Forsythe, who has worked extensively with the Frankfurt Ballet and today runs The Forsythe Company; and Jiri Kylian, currently the artistic director of the Nederlands Dans Theater. Traditionally "classical" companies, such as the Kirov Ballet and the Paris Opera Ballet, also regularly perform contemporary works. Although contemporary ballet is still not as prized as that of classical and neoclassical it never the less a work of art.