

# The art of ballet

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The art of ballet started out as a fun dance for the wealthy and throughout history, has evolved into an elegant, world wide form of structured expression. From its beginnings in European cultures to its now widespread and diverse variations, ballet shows no signs of slowing down in popularity any time soon. Early ballet was influenced by the social dancing of its day, ballroom dancing. This art was born when the ancient Greek and Roman renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries took place, reviving an interest in all things human and the arts.

The word “ ballet” derives from the Italian word “ balla,” meaning dance. In the Italian city-states of the fifteenth century, many “ balli” meaning “ dances” were held. The ballis involved specific steps that our generation would classify as ballroom steps. Ballet got much recognition when Louis XIV ascended to the throne of France. He came from an arts school where he studied the arts of fencing, music, and dance. His passion for dance was very serious. So serious in fact, that he established theAcademicRoyale de Danse in 1661, employing 13 ballet instructors.

Another well -known founder of ballet is Jean-Georges Noverre, also known as the “ Shakespeare of Dance”. He argued for a new, more expressive form of ballet. He created ballet d’action, meaning ballet with out instruments. The Romantic Period played a very important role in the development of women in ballet. This period began in the early eighteen-hundreds. The milestones accomplished within this time period included large female background dancers to accompany the prima ballerina, the lightening of female costumes, and women dancing en pointe.

Dancing en pointe, turn out, and the basic five ballet positions exemplify ballet, and are now standard for all ballerinas. The next step on the road to modern ballet is the formation of classical ballet. While the first production of the ballet known as *La Sylphide* took place in Paris and most famous ballerinas of the day were still coming from Italy, the second half of the nineteenth century saw the axis of the ballet world shift from Western Europe to Russia. However, a Frenchman was responsible for this shift.

Marius Petipa created five of ballet's greatest classics in the late nineteenth century: *Don Quixote*, *La Bayadere*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake*, and *The Nutcracker*, as well as restaging *Giselle* and *La Coppelgia*. All of these classics share common similarities marking them as the trademarks of what is now regarded as the classical repertoire. They generally begin with group dances and evolved into complex stories between two or three main characters. The grand pas de deux, meaning big step for two, commonly begins with an adagio (slow, lyrical dance) between a male and a female dancer.

The dance includes high extensions of the woman's legs, multiple pirouettes, and big leaps forming a long straight line with the female's legs in the air. Following the adagio is the allegro. This portion is merely a solo showcase of the male dancer's ability and strength across the stage. An allegro for a ballerina features softer, yet intricate footwork and pirouettes. Finally, we have the coda, or finale, which reunites the dancers in an exuberant flourish. During that time period, three schools of classical ballet emerged.

The French school is the oldest of the three. Known for its grace and elegance rather than its technical virtuosity, the French school was

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nevertheless held in high regard. The Italian school was known for its dexterity, difficulty of its steps, high leaps, and multiple turns. Lastly there was the Russian school. The Russian school was basically a hybrid of the prior schools. This school was held in high esteem due to its combination of serene elegance, breathtaking choreography, and the most complete and well-developed technique in all of ballet.

The Russian ballet school slowly led the movement of ballet throughout the world and is responsible for how far ballet has grown. While Petipa's traditional romantic style still held sway over Europe and Russia, Isadora Duncan, a freethinking American brought a completely new aesthetic to the stage. She believed in a more "anti-ballet" view of dance. She believed ballet was elitist and superficial. Duncan started a form of dance that was quite the opposite of what ballet was known for. This style of dance would be natural, free, and unbounded by rules.

Duncan took her dancing on the road, touring through Europe and Russia alone, barefoot, and dressed in long tunics. The traditional aspect of her performance was the music she danced to, which was mostly Mendelssohn, Beethoven, and Chopin. She had many enemies, but with every enemy she gained, there were hundreds who thought her dramatic expression was lively and quite enjoyable. Through the next few years, modern dancers began to fuse ballet with their own expressive movements. Also, ballet choreographers began incorporating modern techniques into their dances.

As time moved forward, so did the swift evolution of ballet. Cultures took the basics and made it their own and by the late 1970's, many classical ballet companies started incorporating modern steps into its repertoire and hiring

modern choreographers to construct distinctive works on its own dancers. It is evident that as the world changes and its people continue to gain knowledge about their surroundings, the art of ballet will continue to spark interest and develop creativity in many people aspiring to gain the technique of the craft.