

Artículo para estudios en el Programa
Pre-Profesional: Mime Meanings in
Ballet

ALICIA EXTREME DANCE ACADEMY

UNIDAD: BALLET MIMES
Profa. Alicia Oliveras, RAD RTS

Mime Meanings in Ballet

Mime has been a part of ballet for centuries. The gesticulations of dancers demonstrates any and everything in the back story that cannot be conveyed through dancing alone, from Giselle's heart condition to Aurora's greeting to her suitors. While mime scenes are added and cut, then re-added and remodeled for all different ballets, the basic gestures always remain the same. It is important to recognize this timeless, universal body language—whether you're a dancer learning a new role or a balletomane curious about the stories dancers tell with their hands. Here is an explanation of the most common mime symbols:

Emotions and Notions

Love: Probably the most common and easily recognized mime symbol, love is represented simply by a dancer crossing their hands over their heart.

Anger: This feisty emotion is oft performed by jilted suitors, demonstrated by waving two fists wildly in the air.

Weeping/Sadness: Weeping and sadness are frequently mimed since distraught scenes are common as pointe shoes in the classical and romantic ballets. The dancer runs hands, palms inward, down their face to represent the many tears they have shed (usually over an errant prince or shameless lover).

Think/Remember: Internal thought or remembrance is presented clearly; the dancer mimes it by bringing a hand to their temple (close to where the brain itself resides).

Beautiful/Beauty: Similar to its depiction in American Sign Language, beauty is mimed in ballet by the dancer running a hand circularly around their face before clasping it at the end.

Hear/Heard: To show that they have heard sometime, a dancer will place a dainty hand cupped next to the ear. Sylphs often do this gesture, though what it is they hear is never really described.

Hot Tip: Cope with Context

Since ballets cannot get overly complicated with the grammar of their mime sequences, take into context the action of the ballet when watching mime sequences. This will tell you whether the character is speaking in the past, present, or future tense.

Actions

Asking/Begging: Asking and begging are both represented by the dancer clasping their hands in front of them, often done in a kneeling, prostrated stance. These gestures are most notably used when Giselle begs the Wili queen Myrtha to save the life of her love.

Dance/Dancing: You wouldn't think that the word dance would have to be mimed within an actual dance, but it actually is, as seen Giselle's Act I solo. It is represented by the dancer first framing the arms high and rounded over their head, then circling the hands around each other.

Knocking: Many scenes include knock-knock-knocking on a dancer's door—like when Giselle 'hears' the tell-tale raps in the opening of the ballet. This is represented by the dancer holding one hand flat and knocking a fist against it, just like a real door knock.

Kiss: A kiss is represented tenderly and daintily in ballet, mimed by the dancer placing one or two fingers to their mouth.

Swear/Promise: A promise is represented by a dancer holding up a hand with the index and middle fingers pressed together and the rest of the fingers curled shut in a fist. When combined with a second hand placed over the heart, it represents a promise of true love.

Order/Command: The more dominant royal ballet characters order others around by pointing a finger straight to the floor with confidence.

See/Saw: A dancer who has witnessed something can inform the audience of it simply by gesturing with one hand toward the eyes.

Stop: The hand gesture for stop is the same in ballet as it is in real life. The dancer places one hand out in front of their body, like a traffic guard.

Sleeping: Sleeping is mimed by the dancer placing their hands together in a steeple shape. (S)he then lays their head in their hands to mimic resting on a pillow and slumber.

Events

Ballets don't take marriage or death lightly; you as an audience member shouldn't either! Any time you see dancers miming these gestures, pay attention; it often comes just before a major event, whether it's the marriage of the main characters or the death of another!

Death: Death is mimed by the dancer bending their arms and crossing their wrists over each other while holding the hands clenched in fists.

Engaged/Married: One's marital status is described by the dancer pointing to the ring finger, suggesting a bond of engagement or marriage.

People or Things

Me/You: This one is a more obvious mimes, as the dancer refers to the pronoun simply by pointing at it. Pointing at oneself represents "I" or "me," while signaling to another dancer mimes "you."

Someone: One finger held in the air references someone—usually just any someone (the generic pronoun).

He/She/Them: These pronouns are represented by the dancer holding a hand out with the palm facing upward.

Prince/Princess/King/Queen/Royal: The presence of royalty is shown by the dancer using a straight hand placed vertically on their head to mimic the three points of a crown or tiara.

Dress/Clothing: A dress or one's outfit is mimed by a dancer running their hands outward where a beautiful skirt would fall.

Hands on!

Though the use of classical mime in ballet has diminished in the last century with the evolution of dance, it is still commonplace in older classical and romantic ballets. So the next time you're at a *Giselle*, or even *The Nutcracker*, look for the mimed sections—you may become a translator for other audience members!

Read more at: <http://ballet.isport.com/ballet-guides/mime-meanings-in-ballet>