

Ballet Together

INTRODUCTION TO BALLET

DANCE FACTS & FAMOUS DANCE PIECES

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DEFINITION OF DANCE

Dance is a **form of art** that is made by purposefully recreating selected sequences of human motion, which can be imbued with the values of aesthetic and symbolism that are acknowledged by both performers and observers from within the particular culture. The dance itself can be freeform or can have a predefined choreography that may or may not align with traditions of origin or historical period.

The dance can be performed to serve various functions - social, competitive, ceremonial, martial, erotic to name a few - but it also has two distinct forms:

1. **Theatrical dance** is when dancers perform for an audience. Theatrical dance is known for having more **elaborate choreography, planning, costume, scenery** and other elements that make the entire production feel more professional. The performers of theatrical dance are usually professional “*virtuoso dancers*”, who practice their craft over the years, and are often tasked to interpret the musical accompaniment with advanced dance moves or routines.
2. **Social dance** is participatory where dancing in a group is encouraged to anyone. Participatory dances are most commonly found at weddings, social gatherings, and festivals, and they can be enjoyed with folk music both alone or in a group (pairs, lines, chains or other forms).

EARLY HISTORY OF DANCE

The dance has always been with us, even before the arrival of written language and modern history, when our earliest cultures evolved utilizing oral and performance methods to pass the stories from one generation to the next. Many historians believe that social, **celebratory and ritual dances** are one of the essential factors of the **development of early human civilizations**.

The earliest findings have pinpointed the origins of ancient dances in 9000-year-old India or 5300-year-old Egypt, but the records of more common infusion of dance into a modern culture can be found from Ancient Greece, China, and India. All these old dances evolved, eventually morphing into a wide variety of Roman and European medieval dances, traditional Chinese dances, Hindi and other traditional dances, respectively.

After the arrival of European Renaissance, the history of music and dance exploded with the new additions to song and dance. Ease of travel and immigration to the new world brought these dances into the mix with many native cultures of the New World, forging countless new dance types that are still popular to this day.

FACTS ABOUT DANCE

- First archeological **proof of dance** comes from the 9 thousand year old cave paintings in India.
- One of the earliest uses of **structured dance** was introduced in religious ceremonies that told the stories of ancient myths and gods. Egyptian priests used this kind of visual storytelling in their rituals.
- In **ancient Greece**, dance was seen as a gift from the gods. The main qualities of dance, such as order and rhythm, were also qualities of the gods.
- **Modern dance history in Europe** started with the Renaissance, when many new dances were invented. After that, periods of Baroque, post French Revolution, Elizabethan era, World War 1, Prohibition, Ragtime and pre-WW2 brought many new waves of dance styles.
- Even people in **wheelchairs** can dance! Such dancing is very popular in Europe where there are even competitions in Latin dances with special wheelchair choreography.
- Dancing is very **beneficial to your health**. It lowers the chances for heart and blood vessel diseases, improves posture and weight, reduces stress and tension, improves brain function because of constant presence of music, and can improve relationships between dance partners.
- **First ballet dancer** that used pointe shoes was **Marie Taglioni** in the 1832 ballet “La Sylphide.”
- Professional dancers are today regarded as **athletes**.
- In 2008, ballet classes were instituted for **police officers** in western Romania to help them move elegantly while directing traffic.

STYLES OF DANCE

- **BALLROOM DANCE:** Origin from the Italian Viennese Waltz.
 - Ballroom became popular again because of the famous TV competition show “Dancing with the Stars.”



- **BALLET:** Origins in Renaissance Italy during the 19th century. It is characterized by light, graceful, fluid movements and the use of pointe shoes.



STYLES OF DANCE

- **BOLLYWOOD:** Origin from the Hindu religion. It has a very close relationship to dance and music. This connection can most visible be seen in their countless Bollywood movies that all celebrate dancing.



- **BREAKDANCING:** First created as a "less lethal" form of fighting between warring African-American street gangs in the 1970s Bronx area of New York City. This form of dancing re-emerged into worldwide popularity during the 1990s.



STYLES OF DANCE

- **CAN-CAN:** Famous energetic ballroom dance which is performed by the row of female dances in long skirts originated from 1830s Paris ballrooms.



- **CHA-CHA:** Famous modern dance originated from Cuba.



STYLES OF DANCE

- **POLKA:** This energetic dance that was focused for young women that liked to jump, hop and turn swept across the world in the mid-19th century.



- **TANGO:** Origin from Argentina in the 1890s. It is the most sensual dance of modern time and it quickly became very successful in Europe.



STYLES OF DANCE

- **TAP DANCE:** Origin from the tribal dances of African slaves. Their arrival in North America introduced that dance to the western audiences.
 - Dancing with **metal tap shoes** became popular in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s.
 - Famous movie stars such as Fred Astaire, Ray Bolger and Gene Kelley **used tap-dancing** to enchant the minds of the worldwide audience with great success.



- **WALTZ:** One of the most popular dances today came into popularity in the mid-19th century by the efforts of the famous composer Johann Strauss, but its origins can be traced even to the distant 16th century.



FAMOUS DANCE PIECES

The Nutcracker



The Nutcracker premiered in 1892 with music by Pyotr Tchaikovsky and choreography by Marius Petipa. It was inspired by *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* written by E.T.A Hoffmann but more closely follows an adaptation of the story by French writer Alexandre Dumas. The story follows a young girl named Clara who is given a magical Nutcracker for Christmas that takes her on a journey into a fantasy “Land of Sweets” where she meets The Sugar Plum Fairy. While the ballet was not a success at first, it is performed in practically every company each year and is a popular holiday tradition. It was the last of Tchaikovsky’s 3 classical ballets and the music is notable for the unique and rare use at the time of the celesta, which is an instrument similar to the piano and used for the popular “Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy”. Also during the premiere of the Nutcracker, the original choreographer Marius Petipa became sick and his lesser known assistant took over which is part of why the ballet was received poorly by critics.

In 1954, the George Balanchine version of the Nutcracker premiered in New York City, following the same general story and using the same Tchaikovsky music. It takes

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inspiration from the Russian version, as Balanchine danced it at the Mariinsky Theatre in Russia himself, but transforms the ballet into the American style that is popular and a beloved ballet today.

Music:

Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy

https://freemusicarchive.org/music/Kevin_MacLeod/Classical_Sampler/Dance_of_the_Sugar_Plum_Fairy

Overture

<https://soundcloud.com/ole-georg/tchaikovsky-overture-miniature-from-the-nutcracker-suite>

Video:

Mariinsky Version

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtLoaMfinbU>

Balanchine Version

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WO2SxXcffyI>

FAMOUS DANCE PIECES

Swan Lake



Swan Lake first premiered in Moscow in 1877. However it was a failure, and the revival which premiered in 1895 was much more of a success and is the version which is most commonly performed today. Swan Lake is the first ballet Tchaikovsky composed and the music was later revised by Riccardo Drigo for the revival. It is choreographed by Lev Ivanov and Marius Petipa for the Mariinsky Theatre.

Loosely based on Russian and German folk tales, it tells the story of Odette, a princess that is turned into a swan by an evil sorcerer. Only true love can free her from the curse. The ballet is known for the challenging demands of the prima ballerina to dance both Odette and her evil counterpart Odile, however, it is believed that originally the role was shared by two ballerinas.

It is a ballet in 4 acts and is known for the beautiful formations and bird-like movements that the group of 24 *corps de ballet* dancers dance in unison. The famous “Dance of the Four Little Swans” has 4 dancers with linked arms moving exactly the same across the stage.

Many different variations of the story and ballet are performed today, but they all reflect the original 1895 version and choreography. It also has been an influence in popular culture inspiring the Oscar nominated psychological thriller film “Black Swan.”

Music:

Dance of the Four Little Swans

https://www.8notes.com/school/mp32/flute/danses_des_cygnets.mp3

Swan Lake Theme

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<https://soundcloud.com/search?q=tchaikovsky%20swan%20lake>

Video:

American Ballet Theater

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfmc6ZVl7uA>

FAMOUS DANCE PIECES

Romeo and Juliet



The ballet *Romeo and Juliet* first premiered in 1940 at the Kirov Ballet in Russia. The music is by Sergei Prokofiev and is based on William Shakespeare's play. The premiere, with choreography by Leonid Lavrovsky, was a success and the production was highly acclaimed internationally. Many people claim that it is the greatest score ever written for ballet. *Romeo and Juliet* was one of Shakespeare's first triumphs in theatre and the ballet follows the story of two young star crossed lovers in Verona, Italy. It ends in their tragic suicides as the result of a long feud between families.

Music:

Montagues and Capulets

<https://soundcloud.com/necmusic/prokofiev-romeo-and-juliet-op>

Video:

Paris Opera Ballet version by Rudolf Nureyev

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hM0B70F1YM>

FAMOUS DANCE PIECES

Revelations



Revelations is a modern dance work premiered by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre in 1960. Using African-American spirituals, song-sermons, gospel songs and holy blues, *Revelations* choreographed by Alvin Ailey himself explores the places of deepest grief and holiest joy in the soul.

More than just a popular dance work, it has become a cultural treasure, beloved by generations of fans. Seeing *Revelations* for the first time or the hundredth can be a transcendent experience, with audiences cheering, singing along and dancing in their seats from the opening notes of the plaintive “I Been ’Buked” to the rousing “Wade in the Water” and the triumphant finale, “Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham.” Ailey said that one of America’s richest treasures was the African-American cultural heritage—“sometimes sorrowful, sometimes jubilant, but always hopeful.” This enduring classic is a tribute to that tradition, born out of the choreographer’s “blood memories” of his childhood in rural Texas and the Baptist Church. But since its premiere in 1960, the ballet has been performed continuously around the globe, transcending barriers of faith and nationality, and appealing to universal emotions, making it the most widely-seen modern dance work in the world. It was even performed for the presidential inaugurations of Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton as well as part of the Opening Ceremonies of the 1968 Olympics.

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Music:

Full Playlist

<https://open.spotify.com/embed/playlist/3caZNdlBotXWnox1TVHz4u>

Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrPJ4kt3a64>