



# *Ballet Together*

Train together. Be together.

## **STYLES OF BALLET**

For Instructors & Students

# STYLES OF BALLET

This document serves to help dance instructors and students differentiate the various styles of ballet. Each major style is described with a combination of helpful text, images and video links.

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# AMERICAN / BALANCHINE

## STYLE OF BALLET



Photo on left: George Balanchine and Arthur Mitchell | [Source](#)

Photo on right: *Serenade* | Ashley Bouder and New York City Ballet dancers | [Source](#)

**FOUNDED:** By George Balanchine in 1934 in New York City, NY, U.S.A..

**DESCRIPTION:** This style was developed by choreographer George Balanchine, a graduate of Vaganova Ballet Academy. After immigrating from Russia to New York City, Balanchine founded The School of American Ballet, where he developed his specific style of ballet and later began the professional company, The New York City Ballet. Also considered neoclassical ballet, this style is thought to mirror the vibrant and sporty American style in contrast to the more noble and tranquil Russian and European ballet style counterparts. Balanchine is celebrated worldwide as the “father of American ballet” and choreographed 465 ballets in his lifetime.

### DISTINCT STYLE FEATURES:

- While Balanchine’s style took initial inspiration from the traditional Russian method, he rejected classical stiffness for jazzy, athletic movements.
- The characteristics of this style include: extreme speed, an athletic quality, a deep *plié*, an emphasis on line, *en dehors pirouettes* taken from a lunge in fourth position with a straight back left.
- The “Balanchine arms” are more open, less curved, and often bent at the wrists.

### FAMOUS BALLET ASSOCIATED WITH THIS STYLE:

- *Serenade* (1934) | Full Ballet | [video link](#)
- *The Four Temperaments* (1946) | Full Ballet | [video link](#)
- *The Nutcracker* (1954) | Waltz of the Snowflakes | [video link](#)
- *Square Dance* (1957) | Full Ballet | [video link](#)

# CLASSICAL / ROMANTIC

## STYLE OF BALLET



Photo on left: *Giselle* | Jessica Xuan and Semyon Velichko | [Source](#)

Photo on right: *Don Quixote* | San Francisco Ballet | [Source](#)

**FOUNDED:** While originating in the 17th century French royal court, classical ballet became a true style in the 19th century at the Russian Imperial School of Ballet.

**DESCRIPTION:** Classical ballet, also called Romantic ballet, is known as the first style and the originator of all other ballet styles. Inspired by the elegance and effortless movement of people in the French courts, classical ballet not only incorporates an elegant feeling but a light and airy aesthetic. In classical ballet, the focus is always on the female dancer, as the male dancer is there to support and highlight, by lifting and presenting the female. Marius Petipa, the director of the Russian Imperial School of Ballet in the 19th century, was known as the father of classical ballet. Petipa transformed the art by creating a style that required dancers to be of a higher physical level. In Petipa's ballets, all female dancers danced en pointe, which gave the look of elongated legs.

### DISTINCT STYLE FEATURES:

- Classical ballet movements are based on traditional vocabulary and technique.
- Dancers move with agility and grace.
- Female dancers always dance *en pointe* in Pointe shoes.
- Classical ballets are typically full-length stories.

### FAMOUS BALLET ASSOCIATED WITH THIS STYLE:

- *Giselle* (1841) | Act II Pas de Deux | [video link](#)
- *Don Quixote* (1869) | Act I Finale | [video link](#)
- *La Bayadère* (1877) | Entrance of the Shades | [video link](#)
- *Swan Lake* (1877) | Full Ballet | [video link](#)
- *Romeo and Juliet* (1938) | Balcony Pas de Deux | [video link](#)

# CONTEMPORARY

## STYLE OF BALLET



Photo on left: *Rite of Spring* | The Joffrey Ballet | [Source](#)

Photo on right: *The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude* | Boston Ballet | [Source](#)

**FOUNDED:** No one person is credited with the start of this particular style and it continues to evolve in the present.

**DESCRIPTION:** Contemporary ballet dates back as early as the 17th century, but became popular in the 1960's, when innovative collaboration began taking place between directors, choreographers, dancers, and musicians. A blending of classical ballet and modern dance, contemporary ballet is constantly evolving with new works are always being created. The style is known for its experimentation and creativity, as well as the athleticism of the dancers and quicker tempos of the music it often employs.

### DISTINCT STYLE FEATURES:

- The music chosen for contemporary ballet pieces range from classical to pop tunes.
- The body is in constant motion with a focus on flexibility and extended movements which reach beyond the more traditional classical ballet positions.
- Contemporary ballets often incorporate movement done on the floor.

### FAMOUS BALLET ASSOCIATED WITH THIS STYLE:

- *The Rite of Spring* (1987) | Full Ballet | [video link](#)
- *The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude* (1996) | Clips | [video link](#)
- *Million Kisses to my Skin* (2000) | Clips | [video link](#)
- *After the Rain* (2005) | Full Ballet | [video link](#)
- *Emergence* (2009) | Clips | [video link](#)



# DANISH / BOURNONVILLE

## STYLE OF BALLET



Photo on left: *La Sylphide* | Isaac Hernandez and Jurgita Dronina | [Source](#)

Photo on right: *Napoli* | Alexander Stæger | [Source](#)

**FOUNDED:** By August Bournonville in the 1830s in Copenhagen, Denmark.

**DESCRIPTION:** In 1829, at the age of 24, August Bournonville became a soloist and choreographer with the Royal Danish Ballet. His style particularly showcased the intricacies of males solos. Interestingly, some of his pieces are interchangeable between genders, meaning the same part can be performed by a male or female dancer, which is uncommon for most other styles of ballet. In his lifetime, Bournonville choreographed 50 ballets. The most famous Danish male dancer of the 20th century, Erik Bruhn, wrote in *Bournonville and Ballet Technique*, "In dancing Bournonville, the dancers often feel they spend more time in the air than on the floor."

### DISTINCT STYLE FEATURES:

- The style is characterized by a quality of effortless and lightness. A quiet upper body juxtaposed with buoyant jumps and precise footwork.
- The transitions between steps are smooth and even, and no step is given more emphasis than the others.
- The *port de bras* is low and rounded, gesturing toward the audience to welcome them into the production. There is a focus on mime in many of the story ballet productions.

### FAMOUS BALLET ASSOCIATED WITH THIS STYLE:

- *La Sylphide* (1832) | Full Ballet | [video link](#)
- *Napoli* (1842) | Full Ballet | [video link](#)
- *Flower Festival* (1858) | Pas de Deux | [video link](#)
- The Bournonville School Terms | [video link](#)

# ENGLISH / ROYAL ACADEMY OF DANCE

## STYLE OF BALLET



Photo on left: *Romeo and Juliet* | The Royal Ballet | [Source](#)  
Photo on right: Royal Ballet School | [Source](#)

**FOUNDED:** Formed in 1920 in London, United Kingdom.

**DESCRIPTION:** The English style of classical ballet was highly influenced by the Cecchetti method, as well as becoming a merger of the Italian, French, Danish and Russian methods of ballet. The training of dancers in Britain is noted for its slow progression, with a great focus on basic technique. The Royal Academy of Dance (RAD), an international dance examination board, was established in London, England in 1920 and had become a notable standard of ballet teaching worldwide. The comprehensive RAD syllabus is suitable for students from the age of 3 years old to the professional level. Notable choreographers of the British style are Sir Frederick Ashton and Sir Kenneth MacMillan.

### DISTINCT STYLE FEATURES:

- The identifying characteristic of British ballet is the focus on clean, precise technique and purity of line that is free of exaggerations and mannerisms.
- The RAD training has a focus on attention to detail when learning ballet's basic technique and the progression from level to level is slow.
- English dancers have an emphasis and attention to detail in getting each and every movement exactly, with an emphasis on perfecting the basics.

### FAMOUS BALLET ASSOCIATED WITH THIS STYLE:

- *La Fille Mal Gardée* (1960) | Act I Pas de Deux | [video link](#)
- *Romeo and Juliet* (1965) | Balcony Pas de Deux | [video link](#)
- *Manon* (1974) | Bedroom Pas de Deux | [video link](#)

# FRENCH / PARIS OPERA BALLET SCHOOL

## STYLE OF BALLET



Photo on left: *Emeralds* | Paris Opera Ballet | [Source](#)  
Photo on right: Paris Opera Ballet School | [Source](#)

**FOUNDED:** By Rudolf Nureyev in the 1980s in Paris, France.

**DESCRIPTION:** In 1661, Louis XIV founded the Académie Royale de Danse, the first dance institute in the Western World. It was here that the French style was codified and was originally restricted to only male dancers. Rudolf Nureyev helped shape ballet as an artform when he revitalised the French school while adhering to the codified technique still used in modern times. The Paris Opera Ballet is the leading school and company that exemplified this style of ballet.

### DISTINCT STYLE FEATURES:

- The French style emphasizes elegant lines, fluidity and gracefulness.
- There is a focus on technical precision and precise, fast footwork.
- The carriage of the upper body, known as *épaulement* and *port de bras*, are performed in a more rounded way than in the Vaganova method but less rounded than the Bournonville method.

### FAMOUS BALLET ASSOCIATED WITH THIS STYLE:

- The Paris Opera Ballet Documentary | [video link](#)
- *Sleeping Beauty* (1890) | Fairy Variations | [video link](#)
- *Swan Lake* (1877) | Act II Swans | [video link](#)
- *Emeralds* (1967) | Variation | [video link](#)
- *Raymonda* (1898) | Pad de Deux | [video link](#)



# ITALIAN / CECCHETTI

## STYLE OF BALLET



Photo: Maestro Cecchetti teaching Anna Pavlova | [Source](#)

**FOUNDED:** By Maestro Enrico Cecchetti in 1905 in St. Petersburg, Russia.

**DESCRIPTION:** Created by Enrico Cecchetti, the Cecchetti style heavily focuses on the anatomy of the human body. The British writer and dance historian, Cyril W. Beaumont collaborated with Cecchetti to codify the technique into a printed syllabus, *The Cecchetti Method of Classical Ballet*, which has become the foremost reference for Cecchetti method teachers worldwide. Classes are conducted strictly by following a specific plan, unlike other styles that rely on the teacher to create new combinations. This rigorous style is taught more like a science than an art, where there is right and wrong.

### DISTINCT STYLE FEATURES:

- The Cecchetti style focuses on quality of the movements instead of quantity. Meaning, dancers are trained with proper placement and clear execution of movements versus performing multiple pirouettes or the highest extension.
- Unlike other ballet styles, Cecchetti works on the student's natural turnout, without pushing to a 180-degree turnout.
- This style is taught with predetermined classes with strict combinations and heavy repetition each day of the week to work the body evenly.

### VIDEOS:

- Cecchetti Demonstration | [video link](#)
- Enrico Cecchetti Diploma | [video link](#)

# RUSSIAN / VAGANOVA

## STYLE OF BALLET



Photo on left: La Bayadère | Yekaterina Osmolkina | [Source](#)  
Photo on right: Vaganova Ballet Academy | [Source](#)

**FOUNDED:** By Agrippina Vaganova in the 1920's in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

**DESCRIPTION:** The first ballet performed by Russians was in 1673 and the first Russian ballet school was established in 1734. The Russian style is classical ballet mixed with folk dance. There are several methods that exist in Russian ballet, but the most widely used is the Vaganova method. This method of teaching ballet fuses the classical French style with the soulful Russian style. The training includes eight levels of training to complete the full syllabus. Some of the world's most famous dancers were trained using this method, including Natalia Makarova, Rudolf Nureyev, George Balanchine, and Mikhail Baryshnikov.

### DISTINCT STYLE FEATURES:

- The Russian style emphasizes a dancer's high extensions and dynamic turns.
- There is a harmony and coordination of all body parts. The expressive upper body supports the precise work of the lower body.
- Similar to the French style, there is a focus on the uniformity of dancers in large groups, known as *corps de ballet*, and the precise movement showcasing clean lines of the dancer's body.

### FAMOUS BALLET ASSOCIATED WITH THIS STYLE:

- *Scheherazade* (1910) | Mariinsky Ballet | [video link](#)
- *Nutcracker* (1892) | Mariinsky Ballet | [video link](#)
- *Coppelia* (1870) | Mazurka | Bolshoi Ballet | [video link](#)
- *Coppelia* (1870) | Waltz of the Hours | [video link](#)
- Vaganova Ballet Academy Classical Exam | [video link](#)