



Ballet Together

Train together. Be together.

INTRODUCTION TO BALLET

For Students & Parents

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This document serves to provide ballet teachers, students, and families with some basic information about ballet, a brief history of the art form, some comparisons to other styles of dance, and where you can find common ballet vocabulary in sports.

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BASIC BALLET INFORMATION

WHERE DID BALLET BEGIN?

Ballet began in the courts of Italy and France in the 1500s. A century later, King Louis XIV helped to popularize and standardize the art form. This led to the creation of the first ballet academy which is why the official language of ballet is French.



King Louis XIV in Ballet de la nuit, 1653.

Source: Wikipedia

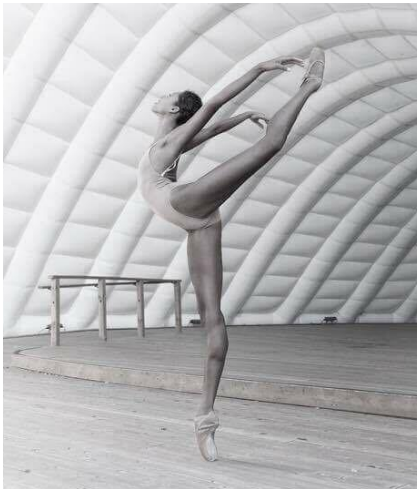
WHO DOES BALLET?

In the beginning, ballet was only performed by royalty in the courts of kings and queens. Now, people of all ages and backgrounds around the world take ballet classes. Some ballet students start at very young ages (3-4 years old), others start as teenagers or adults. Most professional ballet dancers begin dancing at a young age (7-8 years old). On average, it takes about ten years or more of training to become a professional ballet dancer.

WHAT IS BALLET?

Ballet is an artistic dance form performed to music using precise and highly formalized set steps and gestures. Classical ballet, which originated in Renaissance Italy and established its present form during the 19th century, is characterized by light, graceful, fluid movements and the use of pointe shoes. (Oxford dictionary definition)

There are many similarities between ballet and other forms of dance; however classical ballet is a very specific form of dance, movement, and artistry.



Flexibility of a dancer – she is balancing “en pointe” while showing grace and calmness.



A contortionist showing off her flexibility – her purpose is to be as flexible as possible and create almost surreal shapes with her body.

Both ballet dancers and contortionists (among many other movement styles) require flexibility. Ballet dancers need to build strength, control, and create specific shapes with their bodies – sometimes being overly flexible can actually create challenges in ballet training if a dancer does not have the correct body control and positions.

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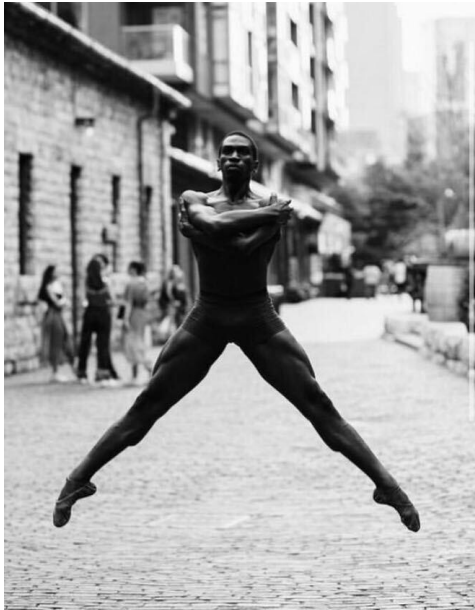
Ballet dancers and hip hop dancers have many similarities. As seen in these pictures, both use a lot of balance and strength. The artistic qualities of each are quite different, as are their music and histories. Notice the extended lines, grace, and pointed feet (on the woman) of the ballet dancers, compared to the powerful kick and upside down shapes of the hip hop dancers. While ballet has its history in European royalty culture and classical, often orchestral music, hip hop history is rooted in African-American and Latino-American urban culture with much more popular music.



Partnering is an important part of both ballet and ballroom dancing. Ballet partnering often includes male and female variations (as individuals) in addition to their "pas de deux" or dance for two. Ballroom dancers are almost exclusively connected to each other at all times, using specific "holds" with their partner. Footwear is also very different – ballet dancers wear ballet slippers or pointe shoes while male ballroom dancers wear shoes resembling men's dress shoes and the females wear high heels made for dancing.

BALLET and SPORTS

There are many similarities between ballet and sports. Both dance and sports require strength, speed, balance, flexibility, and endurance.



Male dancers have to be strong to do big jumps and turns and to lift women into the air.



Women must have strong ankles and feet to wear pointe shoes. They also need strong legs for jumps.



All dancers need to have very strong core (abdominal and back) muscles. Often, dancers use exercise machines and lift weights to build their strength and endurance.

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Athletes also use many movements similar to those of ballet dancers.



One of the most common movements in ballet is called a **plié** [plee-AY]. Plié means “to bend”.



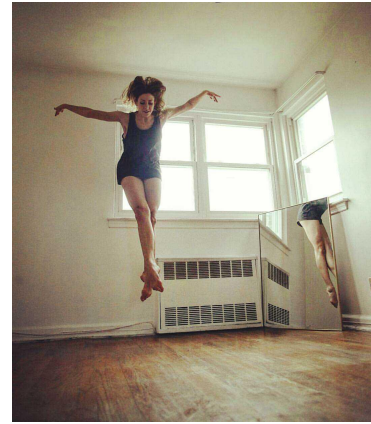
Tennis players use plié while preparing to hit the ball.

Basketball players often use plié while dribbling the ball, playing defense, and before making a jump shot.

Dancers use their strong legs and feet to do **sauté** [so-TAY], which means “jump”. There are many ways to do a sauté.



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Basketball players use sauté to score baskets.



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One large sauté that dancers do is called **grand jeté** [grahn zhuh-TAY], which means “big throw”. This step is also sometimes called a leap.



Track and field athletes do a similar type of jump. Hurdlers jeté to leap over the hurdle on their course.



In ballet, **grand battement** [grahn bat-MAHN] means “large beating” of the leg. It is a big kick with a straight leg and pointed foot.

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Many football and rugby players lift their legs high as they kick the ball.



Many professional athletes such as football players and basketball players take ballet to help increase their flexibility and coordination.