**Classicism: Conversation 3: Transitions & Transformations:**

**Question:**

How have classicism and ballet influenced each other over the eras?

**Images:**

1. Greek Vase with Different Sportsmen

2. Apollo Belvedere – ca. 130BC

3.1490: Vitruvian Man, Leonardo Da Vinci

4. 1634, Nicolas Poussin – Dance to the Music of Time

5. 1653, Louis XIV as Apollo, Le Ballet de la Nuit

6. 1680’s, Jean Pierre Beauchamp, Ballet’s FIVE POSITIONS

7. 1580 Mercury by da Bologna juxtaposed with Maria Tallchief in Swan Lake

8. 1912 V. Nijinsky – Afternoon of the Faun

9. 1921, Diaghilev & Stravinsky

10. LK & GB with Noguchi’s Lyre

11. Arthur Mitchell & Diana Adams, rehearsing AGON

12. Three Dancers in an Exercise Hall, Edgar Degas

**Texts:**

**1*.*****Lincoln Kirstein, SAB Catalogue**

*Every artistic medium has its peculiar nature which allows it to express some things better than any rival medium and prohibits it from expressing other things altogether…in its dazzling display of physical energy, the ballet expresses, as no other medium can, the joy of being alive…*

*W.H Auden, A Past and Present Eden, 1954, Essay from THE NUTCRACKER program, 1954*

Classical ballet is a unified system of movements gradually designed over the ages to constitute a veritable language of the dance. The exercises and steps that compose it are aimed at extending the scope of human motion, whether on the ground, as in arabesques, attitudes, *developpes*, turns, etc., or in leaps and *batterie*. Dancing on toes not only enhances the impression of airiness and fleetness, but makes possible a highly effective series of steps such as *fouettes* and *chaines* for which the foot is used to pivot on. All ballet movements stem from the five absolute positions of the feet which oblige the dancer to turn his leg outward from the hip, greatly increasing his mobility and extension, and from definite positions of the arms, torso and head. As training develops, the contrast between male and female dancing, so vital to effective scenic performing, is increasingly emphasized. This system, taught in the American Ballet classes, forms the basis of all the courses given at the School of American Ballet. Like the alphabet, every movement is learned separately, then woven into the choreographic poems we call ballets.

**2.** **Carlo Blasis, An Elemetary Treatise upon the Theory and Practice of the Art of Dancing (p.36)**

Infuse your attitudes, arabesques and groups with feeling and expression. The position which dancers specifically refer to as the attitude is the loveliest and most difficult of execution in dancing. In my opinion it is an adaptation of the much admired pose of the celebrated Mercury of Bologna. A dancer who can dispose himself well in the attitude will be outstanding and give proof that he has acquired a knowledge requisite to his art. Nothing is more graceful than those charming positions we call arabesques, which have been inspired by the bas-reliefs of antiquity and fragments of Greek painting, as well as by the delightful frescoes from Raphael’s drawings in the loggias of the Vatican. Dancers should learn to portray these spirited and lovely effects of sculpture and painting in their own art.

**3. Edwin Denby, October 28, 1945 (Looking at the Dance, 1949)**

You see as *Apollo* proceeds how from a kind of pantomimic opening, it becomes more and more a purely classic dance ballet. More and more it offers the eye an interplay of lines and rhythms, of changing architectural balances the edge of which becomes become keener and keener. In this sense *Apollo* conveys an image of increasing discipline, of increasing clarity of definition. It grows more and more civilized. But the rhythmic vitality of the dance, the abundance of vigor increases simultaneously so that you feel as if the heightening of discipline led to a heightening of power, to a freer, bolder range of imagination. Since the piece is about the gods of poetry, and how they learned their art, it seems, too, to be describing concretely the development of the creative imagination.

**Link:**

**4. Balanchine Variations, Nancy Goldner, 2008**

Because Apollo is not a literal narrative, it’s not wise to look for specific reasons why Terpsichore’s solo is the “best.” But it’s worth noting that hers is the most three-dimensional of the lot. If there is one salient characteristic of her solo, it’s that she keeps revolving around herself, showing her body to the audience from all possible angles. She offers full disclosure. Decades later, in other ballets, Balanchine was still presenting his choreography so that the ballerina would be presented to us as fully as possible. Indeed, self-revelation is the definition of a Balanchine ballerina – and if you wish to extend the physical realm into a disposition of courage and honesty, please feel free. Naturally, Apollo brings back Terpsichore for a pas de deux, after he does a variation of his own. What I particularly love about his solo is its encoded homage to ballet technique. Accompanied by grand chords from Stravinsky, Apollo thrusts his arms skyward, as if holding up the world in the raised palms of his hands. But it’s not his arms that give him Herculean strength; it’s his legs locked tightly in fifth position. Fifth position, of course, is the cornerstone of ballet; it’s the beginning and the end.