

History of Ballet 102

Word “Ballet”

Ballet is a French word which had its origin in Italian balletto, a diminutive of ballo (dance) which comes from Latin ballo, ballare, meaning "to dance", which in turn comes from the Greek "βαλλίζω" (ballizo), "to dance, to jump about".

The word came into English usage from the French around 1630. Early on the word Ballet was used in the Italian Renaissance courts of 15th and 16th centuries.

The first formal 'court ballet' ever recognized was staged in 1573, 'Ballet des Polonais'. In true form of royal entertainment, 'Ballet des Polonais' was commissioned by Catherine de' Medici to honor the Polish ambassadors who were visiting Paris upon the accession of Henry of Anjou to the throne of Poland.

The word "Ballet" is written in a highly decorative, flowing cursive script. The letters are interconnected with elegant, sweeping lines. There are long, horizontal flourishes extending from the beginning and end of the word, giving it a graceful and artistic appearance.

32 Fouettes

Legnani was born on September 30, 1863, in Milan and originally studied with famous ballet dancer Caterina Beretta at La Scala, where she developed her technical expertise. Her professional career took off when she appeared as prima ballerina in the Casati ballet, *Salandra*, at Alhambra Theatre in London. She was titled prima ballerina for La Scala in 1892, before moving to St Petersburg in 1892, where she reached fame dancing with the Tsar's Imperial Ballet at the Maryinsky Theatre until 1901.

Under the direction of famous ballet choreographer Marius Petipa, Legnani originated numerous roles including, 'Cinderella' in 1893, 'Swan Lake' in 1895, 'Raymonda' in 1898, and 'Carmargo' in 1901. She is widely reputed to be the first ballerina to perform 32 fouettés en tournant in the coda of the Grand Pas d'action of the ballet *Cinderella*.

The execution of 32 turns on pointe is a bravura achievement emphasizing the dancer's strength and technique. A sequence of 32 fouetté turns was later choreographed into the Black Swan solo in act 3 of 'Swan Lake' and is still used to this day. Legnani was one of only two ballet dancers appointed prima ballerina assoluta at the Mariinsky Theatre.



Ballets Russes

The Ballets Russes (French: [balɛ ʁys]) was an itinerant ballet company based in Paris that performed between 1909 and 1929 throughout Europe and on tours to North and South America. The company never performed in Russia, where the Revolution disrupted society. After its initial Paris season, the company had no formal ties there.

Originally conceived by impresario Sergei Diaghilev, the Ballets Russes is widely regarded as the most influential ballet company of the 20th century, in part because it promoted ground-breaking artistic collaborations among young choreographers, composers, designers, and dancers, all at the forefront of their several fields. Diaghilev commissioned works from composers such as Igor Stravinsky, Claude Debussy, Sergei Prokofiev, Erik Satie, and Maurice Ravel, artists such as Vasily Kandinsky, Alexandre Benois, Pablo Picasso, and Henri Matisse, and costume designers Léon Bakst and Coco Chanel.

The company's productions created a huge sensation, completely reinvigorating the art of performing dance, bringing many visual artists to public attention, and significantly affecting the course of musical composition. It also introduced European and American audiences to tales, music, and design motifs drawn from Russian folklore. The influence of the Ballets Russes lasts to the present day.

BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE

BALLETS RUSSES



*Stories from
a Golden Age*

MICHAEL MEYLAC



Ballets Russes

Russian ballet continued development under Soviet rule. There was little talent left in the country after the Revolution, but it was enough to seed a new generation. After stagnation in the 1920s, by the mid-1930s that new generation of dancers and choreographers appeared on the scene. The technical perfection and precision of dance was promoted (and demanded) by Agrippina Vaganova, who had been taught by Petipa and Cecchetti and headed the Vaganova Ballet Academy, the school to prepare dancers for the Kirov Ballet in St. Petersburg/Leningrad.

Ballets Russes

Following the move of the Ballets Russes to France, ballet began to have a broader influence, particularly in the United States of America.

Choreographer and New York City Ballet founder George Balanchine, a Russian who emigrated to America, would change ballet even further. He introduced what is now known as neo-classical ballet, an expansion on the classical form. He also is considered by many to be the greatest innovator of the contemporary “plotless” ballet. With no definite story line, its purpose is to use movement to express the music and to illuminate human emotion and endeavor. Today, ballet is multi-faceted. Classical forms, traditional stories and contemporary choreographic innovations intertwine to produce the character of modern ballet.





Modern Dance

Martha Graham (May 11, 1894 – April 1, 1991) was an American modern dancer and choreographer. Her style, the Graham technique, reshaped American dance and is still taught worldwide.

Graham danced and taught for over seventy years. She was the first dancer to perform at the White House, travel abroad as a cultural ambassador, and receive the highest civilian award of the US: the Presidential Medal of Freedom with Distinction. In her lifetime she received honors ranging from the Key to the City of Paris to Japan's Imperial Order of the Precious Crown. She said, in the 1994 documentary *The Dancer Revealed*: "I have spent all my life with dance and being a dancer. It's permitting life to use you in a very intense way. Sometimes it is not pleasant. Sometimes it is fearful. But nevertheless it is inevitable."^[2] Founded in 1926 (the same year as Graham's professional dance company), the Martha Graham School is the oldest school of dance in the United States. First located in a small studio within Carnegie Hall the school currently has two different studios in New York City.