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## What is Ballet?



Ballet is an art form created by the movement of the human body.

It is theatrical – performed on a stage to an audience utilizing costumes, scenic design and lighting. It can tell a story or express a thought, concept or emotion. Ballet dance can be magical, exciting, provoking or disturbing.

## Types of Ballet

PBT's *The Sleeping Beauty*. Photo by Rich Sofranko

**Story ballets** (not surprisingly!) tell a story. They contain narrative action, characters, a beginning and an end. [The Nutcracker](#) and [The Sleeping Beauty](#) are famous story ballets from the 19th century; classic stories and novels such as [The Great Gatsby](#) and [The Three Musketeers](#) also have been transformed into ballets.

William Forsythe's *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated*. Photo by Rich Sofranko

**Plotless ballets** have no storyline. Instead they use the movement of the body and theatrical elements to interpret music, create an image or express or provoke emotion. Choreographer [George Balanchine](#) was a prolific creator of plotless ballets.

## Styles of Ballet



**Classical ballet** is what people generally think of first when it comes to “ballet.” Classical ballet reached its height in 19th- century Russia through the work of choreographers like Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov. The following elements characterize this style:

- graceful, flowing movements
- classical form: turn-out of the legs and [pointe work](#)
- balance and symmetry
- ethereal quality
- emphasis on story ballets and narrative
- elaborate sets and costumes

PBT in George Balanchine's *Agon*. Photo by Rich Sofranko

**Neo-classical ballet** was introduced in the 20th century by choreographers like George Balanchine. It generally includes:

- increased speed, energy and attack
- manipulation of the classical form
- asymmetry, an off-balance feel
- non-narrative, often one-act ballets
- pared-down aesthetic with simple sets and costumes

PBT in Jiri Kylian's *Petite Mort*. Photo by Rich Sofranko

**Contemporary ballet** is influenced by modern dance. Renowned contemporary ballet choreographers include Twyla Tharp, Jiří Kylián, Paul Taylor, William Forsythe and Dwight Rhoden. In contemporary ballet, you may see:

- floor work
- turn-*in* of the legs
- greater range of movement and body line
- pointe shoes but also bare feet

### LEARN MORE!

Experience ballet for yourself with [classes for all ages](#), including adult beginning ballet classes. Or, introduce your little ones to ballet with [Dance the Story at Home!](#)

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