

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE STUDIO COMPANY

Study Guide



WELCOME!

American Ballet Theatre is one of the world's largest ballet companies. Our mission is to create, to present, to preserve, and to extend the great repertoire of classical dancing, through exciting performances and educational programming of the highest quality, presented to the widest possible audience.

Thank you for joining us for today's performance. Attending the ballet can be a magical experience for students of all ages. Watching the beautiful artistry of ABT's dancers, listening to the harmonious sounds of the orchestra, and marveling at the magnificent costumes can create memories that last a lifetime. It can also leave you with a lot of questions!

This guide is designed to offer a window into the world of American Ballet Theatre and the ballets you are about to enjoy today.



BALLET BEGINNINGS

The beginnings of ballet date back to 15th century Italian royal courts where kings and princes used ballet to fill their court with artistry and to show off their wealth and power. During aristocratic gatherings, the nobility used ballet in court life to create grand spectacles for the amusement of courtiers and kings, who thought ballet was an important form of entertainment. Court life could be quite monotonous and learning the art form became a necessary social accomplishment. Ballet was performed in the rooms and gardens of palaces. Graceful upper body movements were used as well as hops, slides, curtsies, turns, and promenades. Given that ballet originated many hundreds of years ago, the fashion of the time included clothing with many layers, so movements were limited and restricted.

Catherine de Medici, an Italian noblewoman who married the French king Henry II, further popularized ballet in the 16th century by bringing this early style of ballet to the French royal courts. She was a great patron of the arts and funded extravagant festivals that incorporated dance, music, costumes, and poetry. Over the next hundred years, the French gradually codified the language of ballet, but it is King Louis XIV who is given most credit for standardizing the art form. The king loved to dance and performed in popular dances himself, including the role of the Sun King in *Ballet de la Nuit*. His involvement heightened the level of dancing, and soon professional dancers - not just the nobility - were hired to dance popular roles.

Evolving from an amateur pastime, ballet moved from the court to stages in order to showcase and present dance to a wider audience. The art form experienced tremendous growth under King Louis XIV, and the first official ballet academy was established in 1661. Today, the school is known as The Paris Opera Ballet and still exists today as the oldest ballet school in the world. This was part of King Louis' effort to improve and refine the level of dance instruction. Even though the word ballet comes from the Latin word "ballare," which means to dance, the language of ballet is French, as many of the terms and steps were created by the king, his court, and the first ballet teachers.



Louis XIV in *Ballet de la Nuit* (1653)

AMERICA'S NATIONAL BALLET COMPANY

In 1940, American Ballet Theatre emerged onto the American cultural landscape with a unique, exciting vision of a ballet company that functioned like an art museum. Just as a museum presents paintings by different artists to showcase a wide range of beauty and art, the Company would present ballets by diverse choreographers to showcase the variety the ballet world had to offer. The Company preserves many of the great European masterpieces and has also been at the forefront of laying the foundation for new American works.

In 1957, with encouragement from President Eisenhower, the Company's name changed from Ballet Theatre to American Ballet Theatre. On April 27, 2006, by an act of Congress, American Ballet Theatre became America's National Ballet Company®, which means that ABT represents our country's ballet to the world. ABT has become a cultural ambassador and is the only ballet company that has performed in all 50 states and 50 international countries. But what does it mean to be America's Ballet Company? What does it mean to be American?

You can see on the map below that ABT's dancers come from all over the world, drawn to ABT for its repertoire, artistry, and the camaraderie of its dance artists. ABT is proud to mirror the "melting pot" of America's population through the diversity of its dancers, their genealogy, and their cultural heritage.



ABT STUDIO COMPANY

ABT Studio Company, the young professional company of American Ballet Theatre, is currently made up of 18 rising stars of the ballet world between the ages of 18 and 22. ABT Studio Company prepares these outstanding young dancers, who hail from all over the globe - from New York, Texas, and California, to Spain and Portugal, to the Philippines and Japan - to enter American Ballet Theatre or other leading ballet companies worldwide. Nearly 80% of current dancers in American Ballet Theatre are alumni of ABT Studio Company.

ABT Studio Company dancers perform classical ballets, alongside contemporary and newly created works. The group commissions a wide variety of choreographers to create new, custom ballets on the dancers each season.

The highly mobile ABT Studio Company serves as an ambassador for American Ballet Theatre by touring to venues large and small. In recent years, the Studio Company has performed in such international cities as London, Athens, Manila, and St. Petersburg, and to a wide variety of US performing arts centers, outdoor festivals, museums, and college campuses.



ABT'S LIBRARY OF BALLETS

Close your eyes and picture a library. It is hard to imagine anything other than rows and rows of shelves filled from floor to ceiling with books of all shapes, sizes and colors. The books are all neatly organized by genre or categories; there are fairytales, fantasies, dramas and Shakespearean plays, along with any subject you can imagine.

This library you are imagining is really no different from American Ballet Theatre, except instead of books we have ballets. Every time ABT performs a new ballet, it is added to the Company's *repertoire*, or collection of ballets. Since 1940, ABT has performed over 475 different ballets, with over 180 of those works commissioned or first performed by the Company.

At any time, ABT and ABT Studio Company's artistic directors can pull any of these ballets down from the shelf and bring them to life for a new generation of dancers and audiences!



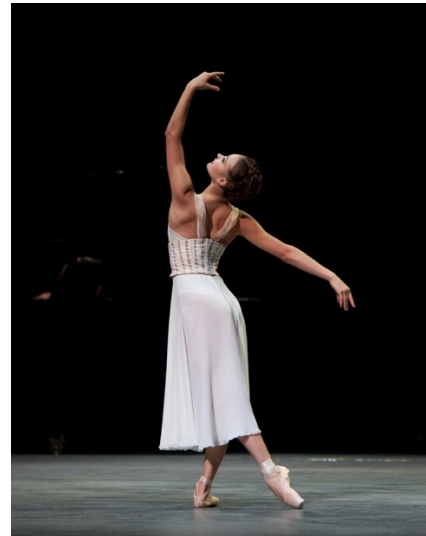
THE SEVEN MOVEMENTS OF BALLET



Plier
to bend



Relever
to rise or raise



Etendre
to extend or stretch



Elancer
to dart



Tourné
to turn



Glissé
to glide or slide



Sauté
to jump

BALLET TERMS TO KNOW

There are many special words that are used to talk about ballet. Because ballet was developed three centuries ago in France, most of the ballet words we use today are French. Here are some examples of important terms:

- *Plier* - the French term for 'Bend'; used to warm up and strengthen muscles and as a preparation for jumps.
- *Relever* - the French term for 'Rise'; rising to the demi-pointe or full pointe.
- *Tendu*- the French term for 'Stretch'; stretching a straight leg and pointed foot to the front side or back of the body.
- *Pas de deux* - pas is the French word for dance or step; a pas de deux is a dance for two people; in classical dance it is a man and woman performing multiple lifts, turns, and balances.
- *Arabesque* – to pose on one leg while extending the other leg to the back.
- *Pointe shoes* - dance shoes made of canvas, satin, and leather hardened by glue so the dancer can balance on the tip of the shoe.
- *Tutu* – a type of costume worn by female ballet dancers. A tutu may contain one layer or many layers of fabric known as tulle. It is usually connected to a bodice.
- *Choreographer*- the person who puts dance steps together to create the dance.
- *Repertoire* - a ballet company's list of dances (their library) performed in the past, as well as dances they are currently performing.

BALLET FUN FACTS

- Not made to last, a ballerina can go through 2-6 pairs of pointe shoes per week.
- Pointe shoes need to be broken in, and some ballet dancers go through extraordinary measures to mold their pointe shoes to their feet. This can include: scraping the shoe to offer more traction, banging on them to reduce sound on stage, and cutting the shank (the inner part of the shoe) to make the shoe more malleable.
- Tutus are handmade and require several hours of labor. One tutu can cost almost \$2,000 to make.
- When a ballerina jumps on pointe, all of her weight is carried in her big toe.
- Only men initially danced ballet and women did not appear until 1691. It was 40 years later that women began to rival men in their technique.
- The male equivalent of a ballerina is called a danseur.

