

You know what dance is: moving your body, usually in a way that goes with music. You've seen people dance. Maybe you dance, too, making up the movements as you go. Sometimes, when a group performs on stage and everybody's moving together, their moves were planned in advance. That planning is called **choreography** (koh-ree-AH-grah-fee), from two Greek words meaning "dance" and "writing." So, "choreography" means "writing out a dance."



Dancers perform choreography from "Swan Lake"



A choreographer, George Balanchine, teaches a dance to a ballerina

Now imagine **choreographers** (people who create dances) watched dancers for many years, remembering what looked best. They wanted only the moves and poses that showed how beautiful and graceful the human body can be; how smoothly it can move or how suddenly; how excited or how calm those movements can make you feel.

Choreographers wrote down those movements and poses, and dancers study them for hours every day, for years, until the movements are as perfect as a dancer can make them.

That way, when a choreographer sets those movements to music by a **composer** (a person who writes music) the dancer knows exactly what movements the choreographer is looking for, how they fit the music, and how to make every movement — large or small, fast or slow, excited or calm — as perfect as it can be.



Ballet Pensacola performs in a ballet

And **that's** ballet.

Ballet is easy to understand if you think

about the three things; it combines dance, music, and storytelling. Ballet tells a story using dancers moving to music. And like all three of those things, ballet can be very modern, or it can date back many, many years.

The 1400's

European royalty enjoyed fancy occasions, and in 1489 the Duke of Milan, Italy hosted a "ballet dinner" — a feast with dancing as entertainment. Unlike today's ballet, the audience members (the royalty) were invited to take part in the dance. As

the idea caught on and spread to other royal courts, the dancing evolved into an event of its own; an elaborately staged dance that told a story.

The 1500's

The first recognizable ballet was presented in 1581 in the court of the important **Medici** (MEH-dih-chee) family in Italy, but the style had also spread to France, where the first important book on ballet was published in 1588. It described one of the most important principles of ballet: turn-out, or the way dancers can rotate their legs from the hips so their toes point straight out to each side. Turn-out allows dancers to move gracefully in any direction.



Catherine de' Medici



Louis XIV

The 1600's

By now every royal court in Europe had to have a ballet master, in addition to a court composer to write the music. **Louis XIV**, king of France, loved ballet so much he became quite a good dancer himself. His dance teacher, **Pierre Beauchamps**, invented a standard vocabulary for dance, making it easier to teach and choreograph. In 1661 the king established France's Royal Academy of Dance. Also during this time the first professional dancers began to appear.

The 1700's

Pierre Rameau, a French dance instructor, wrote **Dancing Master**, a book which listed the five basic positions that form the foundation of ballet even today. Dance became easier for women when they began to wear simpler costumes and slippers rather than full dresses and heels. And all professional dancers began appearing without the masks that were traditional since the first masked balls and ballet dinners. Ballet spread to Russia when **Peter the Great** returned to St. Petersburg from a trip to Europe and established the Imperial Ballet School, and the first American ballet company debuted in Charleston, SC in 1791.



Peter the Great

The 1800's

In 1832, **Filippo Taglioni's La Sylphide** was the first "romantic" ballet, in which the mood and story are as important as the dancing. Russia began to replace France as the world's ballet capital. War and revolution were causing the decline of European royalty and its aristocratic entertainments, like ballet; and ballet disappeared completely from America. Many important dancers moved to Russia because ballet was

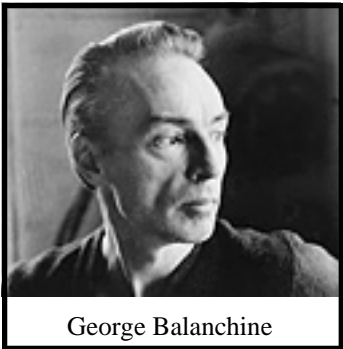


Marie Taglioni
daughter of Filippo
Taglioni

still valued there. History's most famous ballet, **The Nutcracker**, was presented in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1892.

The 1900's

The Russian Revolution (1917) displaced the royalty, and dancers and choreographers were forced to move again, back to Europe and the US. Russian arts patron **Sergei Diaghilev** took his **Ballet Russes** (ballet ROOSE, or Russian Ballet) around the globe. It became the most important ballet company in the world, spinning off other important companies and launching the careers of the most famous dancers and choreographers in history. One of those was **George Balanchine**, who came to the US and started the School of American Ballet. Also during this time new music became important to ballet, with some of the world's best composers creating ballet scores, including **Igor Stravinsky**, **Claude Debussy**, and **Aaron Copland**. Other styles of dance like modern and jazz began to influence ballet.



George Balanchine



Sergei Diaghilev

The 2000's

Ballet spread rapidly throughout the world, from royal court to royal court, in the 1600s. It suffered a worldwide decline in the 1800s everywhere but Russia, and eventually even there after the revolution. But dedicated and devoted artists such as George Balanchine, and dance companies such as Ballet Russes, cherished and preserved the art. Today, ballet is again popular around the globe, thanks in part to superstars such as Mikhail Baryshnikov. Nearly every major American city has a ballet company. More than a century after its premiere, **The Nutcracker** is the most popular annual holiday event in the world. And millions of young people study ballet in thousands of dance schools and afterschool programs across the US — maybe you do, too!



Mikhail Baryshnikov



Terms and Vocabulary

Artistic Director person whose creative ideas guide the ballet company.

Artistic Staff people who work for the artistic director putting the ballets on stage.

Ballet style of dance that began in the 1400s based on ideals of movement and form.

Ballet Master or Mistress person who works with a dance company to get a ballet ready to perform.

Choreographer person who creates a dance.

Choreography the art of creating a dance, or the dance itself.

Composer person who writes music.

Costumers people who make clothes for the dancers to wear on stage.

Dance stylized body movement, usually to music.

Dancers/Dance Company people who dance / a group of dancers who work together.

Executive Director person in charge of the day-to-day operation of the ballet company.

Lighting Designer person who creates the lighting plans for the stage.

Pas de Deux a dance for two people.

Principal Dancer one of the best or most experienced dancers in a company.

Production Crew people backstage who run the show and make everything happen on time.

Rehearsal Director person who assists the artistic director by running class and rehearsals.

Répétiteur in music or dance, a coach; particularly one who teaches a specific style.

Set Designers people who design and build the backgrounds and scenery on stage.

