

VANCOUVER GOH BALLET

EDUCATION PROGRAM

STUDY GUIDE

The program that the Vancouver Goh Ballet will present to your school is a diversified one which includes various forms of dance – Classical Ballet, Modern Contemporary Dance and Traditional Chinese Dance.

A SHORT HISTORY OF CLASSICAL BALLET

Dancing, like music, is one of mankind's oldest art forms. In villages and towns around the world, dancing has always been a form of entertainment and celebration and, in many instances, helped to mark religious occasions.

Dance evolved over the centuries, achieving great heights during the Renaissance when theatrical, rather than social dancing took shape through the introduction of the ballo. This was an Italian form of entertainment in which simple country dances were adopted by the nobility and executed by the men and women of the court.

When Catherine de Medici of Italy married Henry II of France in the 15th Century, she brought the ballo tradition with her to France. Ballet was born during the 16th century as Medici devised the ballet de cour entertainment at Court in which courtiers danced, sang, recited dialogues and mimed or gestured to an accompaniment of instrumental music.

The first ballet that told a story through dancing was *Le Ballet Comique de la Reine*, which was presented at the French Court in 1581. This type of entertainment became so popular that the members of the nobility all acquired dancing masters to give them lessons in ballet.

In the 17th century, King Louis XIV of France, known as the Sun King, not only greatly admired ballet spectacles but participated in them. He had his own private dance master and he founded the first dance academy in Paris in 1661. In the academy, the ballet masters of the period took on the task of codifying the numerous steps and combinations of moves. It is these same steps that have been handed down through the centuries and form the basis of today's classical ballet vocabulary.

Ballet thus became a very popular art form. At first performances were restricted to the Royal Courts and the dancers were courtiers, but soon ballets began appearing on the newly built proscenium-arch stages (after which today's theatre stages are modeled). In time, learning to dance stopped being only a hobby for the nobility. Dance became a profession and dancers were trained and developed strong technique.

At first only men appeared on the stage and wore masks to distinguish the sex of the characters they played, but by 1685 women began appearing on professional stages.

Classical Ballet (cont'd.)

In productions of the 17th century, dancers' movements were greatly restricted, not only by the masks they wore but also by heavy brocade costumes and large headdresses and ornaments. Dancing shoes also had tiny heels that made pointing the toes rather difficult.

In the early 18th century, the great ballerina Marie Camargo shocked audiences by shortening her skirts to just above the ankle. She did this to be freer in her movements and, since she performed intricate footwork and jumps, she wanted her audience to see and appreciate her technique.

By 1830, ballet came truly into its own as a theatrical art. Influenced by the Romantic movement, which was sweeping the world of art, music, literature and philosophy, ballet took on a whole new look. Writers such as Theophile Gautier paid tribute to the female dance muses of the time who inspired flights of fantasy and amorous liaisons. The beautiful, light and elusive ballerina reigned supreme.

In the early days, the female dancers wore street shoes or soft slippers and ankle length skirts. It wasn't until the middle of the 19th Century that styles for the female dancers began to change and they began to wear tutus, which is the standard ballet skirt made of several layers of tulle, occasionally of silk or nylon, or two of the three materials. Up to this point in time they wore long bell shaped skirts. Maria Taglioni introduced the Romantic tutu (1832). The classical tutu, which reaches to somewhat above the knee or higher was introduced in the 1880's by the virtuoso Italian ballerinas who dominated the European stages at the time and who needed a short skirt to enable them to execute their difficult steps and to display their legs to the spectators.

Male dancers began wearing tights, long sleeved shirts and shorter jackets that greatly facilitated their movements. Ballet technique for both men and women expanded and developed because of these lighter costumes. Many ballets from this period *Giselle*, *La Sylphide* and *Napoli* remain in the ballet repertoire and are a constant challenge for today's dancers.

The pointe shoe evolved in the 19th Century to create the illusion that the ballerina was floating or flying across the stage. The early classical ballets such as *Giselle* and *La Sylphide* were fairy tales, which portrayed the female dancers as spirits or birds in flight. The choreographers wishing to show the female dancers as ethereal creatures wanted them to be suspended above the floor without actually being lifted off the floor. The pointe shoe allows the dancer to give the illusion of skimming across the floor.

Although the word "classical" is used often to refer to traditional ballet, this term really describes a group of story ballets first seen in Russia at the end of the 19th Century when the centre of ballet moved from France to Russia. There the renowned French-born choreographer Marius Petipa collaborated with composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky on

Classical Ballet (cont'd.)

lavish story ballet spectacles that brought ballet to a pinnacle of technical virtuosity. These ballets included *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*. Petipa created works that continued to challenge dancers with their technical and artistic demands for razor-sharp precision graced with flowing ease. These works included *La Bayadere Act II*, *Paquita* and *Don Quixote*.

In 1909, the Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev brought together some of Russia's most talented dancers, choreographers, composers, singers, artists and designers in his company, the Ballets Russes. The trip took Paris by storm as it introduced whole new aspects of classical ballet to the world. Diaghilev's company presented the first one-act ballets. Tightly constructed, exotic and often abstract, these works challenged preconceived notions of the potential of classical dance. Such works included Michel Fokine's *Scherzade*, *The Firebird*, *Petrouchka* and *Les Sylphides*; Vaslav Nijinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and *L'Après Midi d'un Faune*; Bronislava Nijinska's *Les Noces* and *Les Biches* and George Balanchine's *Apollo* and *Prodigal's Son*.

Ballet is an international language and today, all the aforementioned ballets still form the basis of classical ballet repertoire of companies all over the world.

Almost all contemporary ballet companies and dancers have been influenced by the impact of the Ballet Russes. George Balanchine left Diaghilev's company and went to the United States to found the New York City Ballet; Ninette de Valois and Marie Rambert went on to found, respectively, England's Royal Ballet and the Rambert Ballet Company. It is from these roots in England that Celia Franca came to Canada in 1951 to found The National Ballet of Canada.

JAZZ

Jazz is another form of dance in which a dancer can express herself/himself. It is a dance form which evolved in the early part of the 20th century. The dance style is more free than that of ballet in that it uses all parts of the body. The style was greatly influenced by the black man's music and dance styles. In ballet the dancer holds the upper body quite calm, using mainly the legs and arms to perform the ballet technique whereas in jazz the body performs the technique with much more twisting, turning and contracting and isolating various parts of the body.

MODERN CONTEMPORARY DANCE

According to author Paul Love, modern dance is a form of dance based on dynamism, on the collision of two opposites such as contraction and release, fall and recovery, etc., which were formulated from natural rhythms originally used literally. Technically movement is regarded as the substance of the Modern dance and the body is the instrument. All movement comes from a central source, the torso, which is the

Modern Contemporary Dance (cont'd.)

controlling force, and contains psychical (or mental) overtones of meaning (metakinesis). One belief is that modern dance is based on four principles; substance (movement), dynamism, metakinesis, form (as a result of movement, not dependent on musical or other forms).

Modern dance developed at the beginning of the 20th century from the barefoot, free-style dances performed by Isadora Duncan and the colourful light spectacles of Loie Fuller. In Germany, Mary Wigman and Rudolf von Laban established modern dance vocabularies based on natural body shapes and movement. In the United States, Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis turned to Eastern philosophies for inspiration. From the companies of Shawn and St. Denis emerged modern dance pioneers Doris Humphrey and Martha Graham,

Humphrey and Graham developed definitive styles of movement that are today incorporated in the works of many choreographers.

The American choreographer Glen Tetley studied with Graham as well as with Tanya Holm, who was a student of Wigman's; Toronto's Danny Grossman and David Parsons studied and worked with Paul Taylor, who was a student of Graham's and Jose Limon was a disciple of Humphrey's. As you can see, the world of dance is all inter-connected and its rich history and tradition has been passed down from generation to generation.

Choreographers of modern dance are constantly evolving and, therefore, seeking new ways in which to express a story or emotion in dance. They are also constantly employing innovative movements to challenge the body based on the above principles.

CHINESE TRADITIONAL DANCE

Coming from the rich history of China, Chinese Traditional Dance dates back thousands of years. The art form expresses the celebration of an event, holiday or special occasion such as a victory in battle, Chinese New Year, a wedding, etc. Chinese Traditional Dance is also used to depict Chinese Classical Mythology.

Props play an important role in the dance. The dancer uses long sleeves, ribbons, fans and weaponry to help create a pattern on the stage and to tell the story.

The colour of the costumes and the props also have a special significance indicating joy, sadness, love, purity or evil. The costumes are usually very colourful and elaborate head-dresses are generally worn.

CREATING DANCE

There are no hard and fast rules for creating dance. The inspiration for a dance can come from a story, an idea, a beautiful dancer(s) or a piece of music. Once an idea has been conceived, the choreographer begins to plan the work. The choreographer is the creator of the dance and he/she will select the dancers who will best interpret his idea. He must also select the appropriate music and be involved in the design of the costumes, lighting and any sets which are required.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS WHICH COULD BE ASKED

1. What is a choreographer?
2. What are pointe shoes made of?
3. How many years must a dancer study before becoming a professional?
4. What are some of the famous Classical Ballets of the 19th Century?
5. Name a famous composer who wrote music for ballets in the 19th Century.
6. What are the origins of Flamenco?
7. Discuss some themes, which could be portrayed in Chinese dance.
8. What is a male ballet dancer called?
9. What is a female ballet dancer called?

RESEARCH PROJECTS

1. Research the stories or fairy tales on which some of the famous Classical Ballets are based; e.g., **SWAN LAKE, COPPELIA, GISELLE**
2. Research who composed the music for the above-mentioned ballets.
3. Research pictures of ballet costumes noting the different lengths of tutu.
4. Who are some of the famous ballerinas and dancers of today?
5. Who are some of the pioneers of Contemporary Dance?

ART AND DANCE

- Design a costume for a ballet.
- Design a set for a particular story you wish a ballet created to
- Pick a story that you think would make a good ballet
- Draw a series of pictures to show the different styles of dance with particular reference to costumes.

MUSIC

- Listen to music by Tchaikovsky
- Listen to music by Stravinsky
- Listen to music by Spanish composers; e.g., Manuel de Falla, Albeniz, Turina
- Listen to music by Philip Glass and/or modern day pop

Compare the above styles and discuss how they reflect the period in history in which they are written.

Make up a contemporary dance using different parts of the body in time with the music; i.e., shoulders, head, ribs, hips, etc.

CLASS DISCUSSION AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

- How do the dance styles differ from one another?
- Is rhythm important in dance? Why?
- What kind of dance styles was in the program?
- What is the difference between the steps of the female dancer and the male dancer in classical ballet? Why do you think there is this difference?
- What is the story or the mood that was being expressed in the Chinese Traditional Dance and the Contemporary Dance?