

MAJOR FIGURES IN BALLET

Ballet, which has its roots in the court dances of Italy and later France (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), has in its long history many outstanding choreographers and dancers. Here is a list of some of the artists that helped shape the world of ballet.

The Beginnings: Sixteenth through the Eighteenth Century

Catherine de' Medici (1519–1589)—A member of one of Italy's royal families, de' Medici married into the French monarchy. Neither a dancer nor a choreographer, de' Medici had a love for dance and brought several dancing masters with her from Italy to France. Thus began the long reign of the court ballet.

Balthasar de Beaujoyeulx (c. 1535–1587)—Beaujoyeulx was one of de' Medici's dancing masters. He is credited with producing the *Ballet Comique de la Reine*, the first court ballet of note.

Pierre Beauchamp (1631–c. 1705)—Beauchamp was a dancing master and the first ballet master of the Academy of Dance in France. He created the five ballet positions of the feet and legs used today and developed the technique of using the turned-out leg. He also devised a system of dance notation.

Jean Baptiste Lully (1632–1687)—A dancer and composer, Lully was the director of the Royal Academy of Music and Dance, which opened in 1672. Louis XIV granted permission for this academy, which later came to be known as the Paris Opera. Lully was instrumental in elevating the status of opera and ballet in the courts from entertainment to a professional art form.

Louis XIV (1638–1715)—Also known as the Sun King, Louis XIV was the King of France from 1643–1715. He was a great lover of dance and appeared in several court ballets. He granted permission to establish the first Academy of Dance.

Louis Pecour (1653–1729)—One of Beauchamp's former students, Pecour succeeded Beauchamp as director of the Paris Opera. He also introduced the minuet to the nobility of France.

John Weaver (1673–1760)—Weaver was an English choreographer who published the first written history of ballet. He also was the first choreographer to employ the use of pantomime in his ballets.

Francoise Prevost (1680–1741)—A star of the Paris Opera, Prevost was also an outstanding teacher. She was mostly known for her dramatic ability and was gifted in her use of pantomime.

Marie Salle (1707–1756)—Salle was a student of Prevost's and was known for her dramatic ability. She performed in both Paris and London and is credited with being the first female choreographer.

Marie Camargo (1710–1770)—One of Prevost's students, Camargo was a Paris Opera dancer who was known for her great technical ability, especially in performing "beats."

Jean Georges Noverre (1727–1810)—Noverre authored *Letters on Dancing and Ballet*, which presented the concept of *ballet d' action*. In this article, choreographers were called upon to create a new type of ballet—one that had a plot and followed a logical progression, rather than being abstract.

The Romantics of the Nineteenth Century

Charles Didelot (1767–1837)—Didelot was a French dancer, choreographer and teacher whose choreography was characteristic of the Romantic style. He also introduced several changes to the typically worn ballet costumes, including flesh-colored tights for women. He also employed "flying machines" in his ballets and the newly introduced pointe technique.

Filippo Taglioni (1778–1871)—An Italian dancer and choreographer, Taglioni choreographed *La Sylphide* in 1832. This ballet is said to have begun the Romantic Era.

Carlo Blasis (1795–1878)—Blasis opened one of the most important dance schools in Milan (Royal Academy of Dance), where his method of teaching dance shaped much of the teaching of ballet technique. He was also an author of instructional textbooks.

Marie Taglioni (1804–1884)—Daughter of Filippo Taglioni, Marie performed in many of her father's ballets. She introduced a new costume design (bare neck and shoulders, tight fitting bodice and skirt reaching just

below the knee, also known as a “romantic” tutu) and is known for her beautifully executed jumps and leaps. She also perfected dancing *en pointe*, and her dancing appeared effortless.

August Bournonville (1805–1879)—Once a student of the Paris Opera, Bournonville brought the Romantic ballet to his native Denmark and became director of ballet at the Royal Theatre. His dance aesthetic became a part of the Royal Danish Ballet and he worked to elevate ballet and the dance profession.

Fanny Elssler (1810–1884)—A dancer born in Vienna, Elssler was a rival of Marie Taglioni while they were both employed by the Paris Opera. Elssler is known for her ability to execute small, quick steps. One of Elssler’s most famous roles, *Cachucha*, was a Spanish-style dance that she performed very sensuously, which led critics to call her “pagan.”

Jules Perrot (1810–1892)—Co-choreographer of *Giselle* (with Jean Coralli), Perrot used movement (as opposed to pantomime) to move the storyline of the ballet along. One of his most famous ballets that was strictly movement-based was *Pas de Quatre*, choreographed in 1845 and danced by Maria Taglioni, Carlotta Grisi, Fanny Cerrito and Lucile Grahn.

Carlotta Grisi (1819–1899)—Grisi was an Italian ballerina who created the leading role in *Giselle*, a ballet of the Romantic Era that is still performed today.

Arthur Saint-Léon (1821–1870)—One of the last great choreographers of the Romantic era, Saint-Léon was also a dancer and violinist. He became ballet master of the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg in 1859 and attempted to develop a system of dance notation. The last ballet he choreographed, *Coppélia* (1870), is still performed today, although there are many different versions that are based on Saint-Léon’s theme.

The Russian Influence (1910–1930s)

Marius Petipa (1818–1910)—A French-born choreographer, Petipa came to St. Petersburg in 1847. Petipa formulated “classical ballet,” which stressed formal values such as symmetry and order of movements, staging, etc. Much of what we know today to be “classical” ballet directly descends from the teachings and choreography of Petipa. Some of his famous ballets are *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake* (the latter choreographed with Lev Ivanov).

Lev Ivanov (1843–1901)—Ivanov was Petipa’s assistant that collaborated with him to develop two of today’s most loved classical ballets: *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker*. Ivanov’s choreography is best known for expressing emotion through pure classical dancing (without pantomime).

Enrico Cecchetti (1850–1928)—Cecchetti was an Italian whose outstanding teaching ability made him important in Russian ballet. He became the private ballet instructor for Anna Pavlova and then the ballet master for Diaghilev’s Ballet Russes. The Cecchetti method of teaching is used around the world today. In 1922, the Cecchetti Society was established in England and in 1939 the Cecchetti Council of America was formed in the United States.

Alexander Gorsky (1871–1924)—Gorsky began the turn away from the formality of the established classical ballet in Russia. He did away with symmetry and used character dances to embellish the storyline. He wanted to use the ideas of drama teacher and director Konstantin Stanislavsky (working from the “inside” to the outside) in his ballets. Therefore, he gave his dancers different motivations and characters to portray on stage.

Serge Diaghilev (1872–1929)—Diaghilev was the director of the Ballet Russes, which was a company made up of dancers from the Imperial Theatre of St. Petersburg (Fokine was hired as the company’s first master choreographer). Diaghilev is also credited with giving **Vaslav Nijinsky** (1889–1950) his first opportunity as a choreographer. Nijinsky, known for his outstanding dancing ability, shocked audiences with his ballets *L’Après-midi d’un Faune* (*The Afternoon of a Faun*) and *Le Sacre du Printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*). Audiences were shocked due to the storylines which included references to sex and death, and to the unique movement style. In these ballets, Nijinsky abandoned the well-known technique of classical ballet and replaced it with stylized movements that were asymmetrical, heavy, and employed both turned-in and parallel positions.

Agrippina Vaganova (1879–1951)—Vaganova was the founder of the Soviet system of ballet education. She created a method of teaching ballet (known as the Vaganova method) that was adopted by all Soviet dance schools. Russian dancers trained in this method for many years. Today, the Vaganova method is still taught around the world.

Michel Fokine (1880–1942)—Fokine followed the path that Gorsky had set up, although he believed strongly in technique. Fokine also believed that a fusion of dance, music, drama, scenery and costumes was necessary and he broke many rules of ballet to fit his aesthetic. His choreography is known as contemporary ballet.

Anna Pavlova (1881–1931, see Figure 5.11)—A principal dancer with Russia’s Imperial Ballet and the Ballet Russes, Pavlova was known for her beautiful and dramatic dancing. One of her most famous dances was *The Dying Swan*, choreographed for her by Fokine in 1907. After she left Russia in 1911, she went to London and formed a company of English dancers (who changed their names to sound Russian). She and her company toured all over the world for many years.



FIGURE 5.11

Anna Pavlova is one of the world’s most recognized ballerinas.

COURTESY OF PHOTOFEST.

Bronislava Nijinska (1891–1972)—Nijinska was the great Nijinsky’s sister and became an outstanding choreographer in her own right. Diaghilev hired her to choreograph for the Ballet Russes, and she created such ballets as *Les Noces*, in 1923, and *Les Biches*, in 1924. Her choreography was as experimental and abstract as her brother’s.

Leonide Massine (1895–1979)—Massine was another choreographer hired by Diaghilev for the Ballet Russes. By 1917, with the premiere of Massine’s *Parade*, the Ballet Russes had established the reputation for offering modern or contemporary ballets.

George Balanchine (1904–1983)—A student of the Russian Imperial School of Ballet, Balanchine toured with a small troupe of dancers until he was offered a job at the Ballet Russes, where he stayed for four years. In the year of Diaghilev’s death (1929), Balanchine created one of his best-loved ballets, *The Prodigal Son*, which is still performed today. After serving as a resident choreographer for the Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo (a company created by Sergei Denham), Balanchine came to the United States in 1933 at the invitation of art patron **Lincoln Kirstein** (1907–1995). In the United States, Balanchine established the School of American Ballet and had four successive companies: The American Ballet, American Ballet Caravan, Ballet Society and the New York City Ballet (developed in 1948, it is the only one still in existence). Balanchine is best-known for his sophisticated use of music, plotless ballets and minimal costume and set design. His artistic neoclassical style has continued to keep him, even years after his death, at the forefront of today’s choreographers.

Beyond the Russian Borders: Britain, France and the United States (1930s–1940s)

Marie Rambert (1888–1982)—Rambert developed the Ballet Rambert in England in the mid-1920s. Although not a choreographer, she was a master teacher and trained many outstanding dancers. The company still exists today and is known as the Rambert Dance Company.

Lucia Chase (1897–1986)—An American ballerina, Chase, along with dance director **Richard Pleasant** (1906–1961), organized Ballet Theatre (now American Ballet Theatre) in New York. Beginning in 1940, Chase went on to direct the company for many years.

Ninette de Valois (1898–2001)—de Valois developed the Sadler's Wells Ballet in England in the late 1920s, which eventually became the Royal Ballet. Together with Rambert, she helped sustain the Carmargo Society, an organization developed to provide financial support for Britain's ballet companies.

Frederick Ashton (1904–1988)—Ashton was a choreographer and director of the Royal Ballet, succeeding de Valois in 1963. As a student of Marie Rambert, he was encouraged to choreograph. He is best-known for the outstanding *pas de deux* sections that appear in his ballets.

Serge Lifar (1905–1986)—Lifar was a Russian dancer who, in 1929, became ballet master of the Paris Opera Ballet. He believed that dance should not follow the rhythm that music dictated, but should have its own rhythm. He is credited with elevating the position of the male dancer in ballet and provided several outstanding dance sequences for males in his choreography.

Anthony Tudor (1908–1987)—Tudor danced in both the Ballet Rambert and Sadler's Wells (Royal Ballet) dance companies. He also choreographed for Ballet Rambert, before coming to the United States in 1940, where he joined Ballet Theatre (now the American Ballet Theatre) in New York. Tudor's choreography is known for its psychological meaning depicted through movement.

Alicia Markova (1910–2004)—An English dancer, Markova danced with Diaghilev's Ballet Russes for five years, where she changed her name to sound Russian (her birth name was Marks). She also danced with Ballet Rambert in the works of Ashton and Tudor. Markova was loved by the American and European dance audiences.

Roland Petit (b. 1924)—A French choreographer who believed the Paris Opera Ballet was too restrictive, Petit developed the *Ballet de Paris* in 1948. He is known for blending jazz and ballet techniques in his highly dramatic choreography.

Rudolf Nureyev (1938–1993)—Nureyev, a Russian, was a soloist with the Kirov Ballet before he defected from the Soviet Union (while the Kirov was on tour in Paris). He remained and danced in France before being hired by the Royal Ballet. Here, he was partnered with ballerina

Margot Fonteyn (1919–1991), who was a British dancer. Their partnership is among the best-known and loved in the ballet world. Together they danced in many famous

ballets and are well-known for their work in *Romeo and Juliet*, choreographed by Kenneth MacMillan.

Into the Present

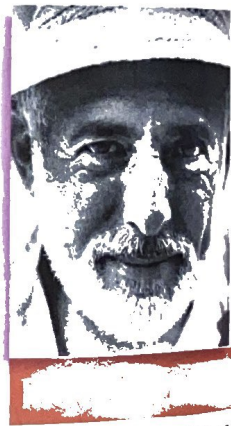
Agnes de Mille (1905–1993)—An American dancer trained in ballet, de Mille choreographed on such companies as the Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo and the American Ballet Theatre. She is also known for her choreography of musical theatre productions such as *Oklahoma*, in 1943, and *Carousel*, in 1945.

Catherine Littlefield (1908–1951)—Littlefield was the founder of the Littlefield Ballet, later to be known as the Philadelphia Ballet. She is credited with presenting the first full-length American production of *The Sleeping Beauty*. She also choreographed for ice skaters and presented ballet on ice in a 1940s production entitled *It Happens on Ice*.

Jerome Robbins (1918–1998, see Figure 5.12)—An American dancer and choreographer, Robbins performed with the Ballet Theatre (later called American Ballet Theatre) and was affiliated with the company for eight years. He choreographed on several ballet companies, particularly New York City Ballet, of which he was associate artistic director from 1949 to 1963. He also co-directed New York City Ballet with Peter Martins in the 1980s, until the end of the 1990–1991 season. Robbins is also known for his musical theatre choreography, such as *West Side Story* (1961).

Maurice Béjart (1927–2007)—Béjart, from France, danced with many leading European companies. His debut as a choreographer was in 1954. In 1959, he was appointed director of the *Theatre Royal de la Monnaie* in Brussels, Belgium, where he stayed until 1988. He then established *Béjart Ballet Lausanne* in Switzerland. Béjart's choreography is referred to as contemporary, sexy and dramatic.

Yuri Grigorovich (b. 1927)—A Russian, Grigorovich danced with the Kirov and eventually became a prolific choreographer. In 1964, he became chief choreographer of the Bolshoi Ballet, where he is credited with the creation of characterization through dance.



Jerome Robbins (1918–1998), an American choreographer
COURTESY OF PHOTOFEST.

Kenneth Macmillan (1929–1992)—Macmillan was a Scottish dancer and choreographer who succeeded Frederik Ashton as artistic director of the Royal Ballet. He is known for creating ballets that employed large casts and lavish costumes.

Robert Joffrey (1930–1988)—An American ballet dancer and choreographer, Joffrey established the Joffrey Ballet in 1954. This company is primarily known for dancing contemporary works by leading choreographers such as Joffrey and Alvin Ailey. Previously housed in New York, the company is now located in Chicago and opened its own academy. The original Joffrey Ballet School is still located in New York. **Gerald Arpino** (1928–2008) also choreographed for the company and served as assistant director. After Joffrey's death, Arpino took over artistic directorship of the company.

Arthur Mitchell (b. 1934)—Previously a dancer with New York City Ballet, Mitchell wanted to develop a company where African-American dancers could perform in classical ballets. In 1972, he established Dance Theatre of Harlem. Today, the company is under the artistic direction of Virginia Johnson.

Natalia Makarova (b. 1940)—A Russian dancer who defected to the United States, Makarova is one of today's most well-known ballerinas.

Eliot Feld (b. 1942)—Previously a dancer with American Ballet Theatre, Feld established the Feld Ballet in 1974, later called Ballet Tech, which performed contemporary ballets that were described as fast-paced and sexy. Although Ballet Tech disbanded in 2003, Feld still choreographs and presents concerts.

Helgi Tomasson (b. 1942)—Tomasson has been the artistic director of the San Francisco Ballet since 1985. Originally from Iceland, Tomasson studied at the School of American Ballet in New York in the early 1960s, and joined the Joffrey Ballet in 1962. Today, the San Francisco Ballet is an internationally known company, whose dancers are recognized for their powerful technique and dramatic performance ability.

Peter Martins (b. 1946)—A Danish dancer and choreographer who performed with New York City Ballet for many years, Martins is now the artistic director of New York City Ballet. He has been in this role since 1983 and also choreographs for the company.

Jiri Kylian (b. 1947)—Kylian is the artistic director of the Nederlands Dans Theatre, whose works are a com-

bination of modern dance and ballet. Kylian's works are dramatic and usually fast-paced and powerful.

Mikhail Baryshnikov (b. 1948)—A Russian dancer with the Kirov Ballet, Baryshnikov defected while on a tour in Canada in 1974. After several guest appearances with different companies, Baryshnikov went to American Ballet Theatre where he danced for several years. He also served as artistic director of the company. Baryshnikov has been involved in several projects, including dancing with the White Oak Dance Project, which he cofounded in 1990 with choreographer Mark Morris. (The company disbanded in 2002.) He has since opened the Baryshnikov Arts Center in New York, an organization dedicated to artistic experimentation and collaboration. He is still an active performer in dance, television and theatre.

William Forsythe (b. 1949)—Born in New York, Forsythe has spent much of his dance career in Europe. After dancing with the Joffrey Ballet, he was hired by the Stuttgart Ballet where he was encouraged to choreograph. In 1984, he became artistic director of the Frankfurt Ballet. His work, influenced by Pina Bausch and Jiri Kylian, is considered provocative and elegant. He has choreographed on major ballet companies all around the world, including New York City Ballet, Nederlands Dans Theatre, the Joffrey Ballet and the Australian National Ballet. He also collaborated with dance educators and media specialists to create new approaches to dance documentation and research. His computer program, *Improvisation Technologies: A Tool for the Analytical Dance Eye*, is used in universities and by professional dance companies worldwide.

Alexander Godunov (1950–1995)—A principal dancer with the Bolshoi Ballet, Godunov defected from the Soviet Union to the West in 1979. He became a principal dancer with American Ballet Theatre, and performed with them until 1982. He left his dance career for a career in movies, with one of his most popular roles as an Amish farmer in the movie *Witness*.

Ohad Naharin (b. 1952)—Born in Israel, Naharin was a student with the Bathsheva Dance Company before going to New York and studying at Juilliard. In 1980, he made his choreographic debut that was met with critical acclaim and identified him with a style that demonstrated smoothness with difficult technique. He has choreographed for some of the world's greatest companies, such as Nederlands Dans Theatre, who has

over ten of his dances in their repertoire. In 1990, he was appointed artistic director of Batsheva Dance Company, which is based in Israel.

Karole Armitage (b. 1954)—Although trained in ballet, Armitage joined the modern Cunningham Dance Company in 1975. After she left the Cunningham Company, she began, in the late 1970s, to create ballets that have been referred to as “punk-rock” ballets, because of their use of punkrock music, costumes, hair styles and makeup. She is still an active choreographer today.

Nacho Duato (b. 1957)—A native of Spain, Duato studied in both Europe and New York before taking his first professional position as a dancer with the Cullberg Ballet in Stockholm. He soon began choreographing and had major successes, which led to the appointment of resident choreographer for the Nederlands Dans Theatre in 1988. In 1990, he was invited to become the artistic director of Compañia Nacional de Danza. His ballets are performed by the leading ballet companies in the world, including American Ballet Theatre, Royal Danish Ballet, San Francisco Ballet and the Australian Ballet.

Matthew Bourne (b. 1960)—Bourne, from London, is the former Artistic Director of Adventures in Motion Pictures, and the current Artistic Director of New Adventures. In 1995, he choreographed a critically acclaimed version of *Swan Lake* in which all of the swans are men. This production has been called groundbreaking and has won a record number of awards, including two Tony awards for Choreography and Direction. In 2004, Bourne choreographed and co-directed Disney’s *Mary Poppins*, and later worked on a stage version of *Edward Scissorhands* (2005).

Sylvie Guillem (b. 1965)—A native of France, Guillem trained at the Paris Opera Ballet School and then became a dancer with the Paris Opera. She is known for her extreme flexibility and the ability to extend her legs and hold them in difficult lines, shapes and positions. Some critics say that this use of the legs distorts the classical ballet line, but audiences world-wide are mesmerized by her abilities. She was a principal guest artist with the Royal Ballet, as well as other ballet companies around the world, and has since retired from performances after a thirty-year career.

Trey McIntyre (b. 1970)—For years, McIntyre worked as a freelance artist, creating dances for such companies as American Ballet Theatre, Stuttgart Ballet and The Washington Ballet. In 2004, he founded the Trey McIntyre Project, which was based in Boise, Idaho until it was disbanded in 2014. McIntyre frequently uses pop music in his dances, and creates works that are full of details within a contemporary ballet vocabulary.

Christopher Wheeldon (b. 1973)—Wheeldon was born in England and began his ballet training when he was 8 years old. In 1991 he danced with the Royal Ballet, and in 1993 he was invited to join New York City Ballet. In 2001, Wheeldon was named Resident Choreographer of New York City Ballet, where he stayed for seven years. In 2008, Wheeldon created his own dance company, Morphoses/The Wheeldon Company, which included dancers from New York City Ballet, The Royal Ballet, the Bolshoi Ballet, and other prominent companies. Today, Wheeldon has expanded into television, film and theatre, and received a Tony Award for choreography for the Broadway show *An American in Paris*.

Benjamin Millelied (b. 1977)—This French dancers and choreographer, who performed with the New York City Ballet for sixteen years, is now the Director of Dance for the Paris Opera Ballet. He is also widely known as the choreographer and one of the stars of the movie *Black Swans*.

Troy Schumacher (b. (c)1987)—Schumacher has been a dancer with New York City Ballet since 2005, and is also being recognized as an innovative choreographer. In 2010, he established BalletCollective, which performs contemporary ballet in intimate settings, focusing on artistic collaboration between the choreographer, dancers, musicians and artists.

Justin Peck (b. (c)1988)—Peck is a soloist and resident choreographer for the New York City Ballet. He received this position after participating in the New York Choreographic Institute. Peck was the focus of a documentary entitled *Ballet 422*, which provides a backstage look at Peck’s process in creating a dance for New York City Ballet.