

CMBA HONOR SOCIETY EDITORIAL

A Brief History of Ballet

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Ballet was first developed in the prestigious Italian ballrooms of the 1500s as court entertainment. At luxurious balls and weddings, dancing and music were combined into a great spectacle. The epicenter of ballet moved from Italy to France when Catherine de Medici married King Henry II and introduced the lavish Italian ballet to French courtrooms. Dancers wore many layers including masks, gilded costumes, and headdresses. Although these outfits were appealing to look at, they were next to impossible to dance in. At this time dancing was kept to a minimum and consisted mainly of small steps, curtsies, and promenades, nothing like what ballet is like today.



Catherine de Medici



King Louis XIV

Over the next century, ballet terminology and bigger steps started to take hold, especially under the reign of Louis XIV who danced principal roles himself. As the court grew in size, performances began to be elevated on stages so everyone could see. Eventually these ballets would be performed at grand theaters with a full house of audience members.

As the years continued, ballet spread throughout Europe. Ballet techniques were developed, such as Russian, French, and Italian. Russia became another hub for ballet with the development of the Mariinsky Ballet and the Bolshoi Ballet.



Mariinsky dancers Natalia Dudinskaya and Rudolf Nureyev



Pointework, arguably the most important part of ballet, was first introduced in 1823 when Italian dancer Amalia Brugnoli rose up onto her toes wearing only satin slippers. Other dancers continued in her footsteps, such as Marie **19th century pointe shoes** Taglioni who was the first to dance a full-length ballet (*La Sylphide*) on her toes. Early pointe shoes were developed later in the 1800's by Italian shoemakers. These pointe shoes were made of cardboard, flour paste, and newspaper: hardly what we are familiar with today.

Marie Taglioni

Ballet came to America in the mid-19th century, along with the infamous Russian dancer and soon to be choreographer George Balanchine. European ballet changed as it dispersed throughout America. American technique offered more physical feats and stunts while European companies focused more on gratefulness and symmetry. It was mainly here in 1920s America where neoclassical ballet first started to take a foothold. Eventually in the 1980s, contemporary ballet was developed and is a big part of ballet today. Nowadays we see all sorts of different techniques and styles, all of them unique and beautiful in their own ways.



New York City Ballet's *The Nutcracker*



George Balanchine

The history of ballet is not over. Ballet will continue to change and evolve as the years go on, perhaps in ways we can't even imagine yet. Will pointe shoes get more comfortable? (Hopefully) Will costumes change? Will new steps be developed? We will have to wait and see.

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