

Intermediate Ballet History

Definition: (From *History of the Dance in Art and Education* by Richard Kraus and Sarah Chapman)

“The term ‘ballet’ came to mean a form of theatrical storytelling through dance. The Encyclopedia of Diderot, published in France about 1772 says, ‘Ballet is action explained by a dance...specifically theatrical, spectacular, and done to be seen...’”

Characteristics of ballet include rotation or turnout, a lifted, high center of gravity, and little floor work, if any.



Brief History:

Ballet is the oldest form of western dance art that exists today. The strict rules and movement patterns of ballet are derived from the Italian court dances of the 15th and 16th centuries. The courts of Europe were swept with the creation of new musical forms. The creation of the new music insured new forms of entertainment beyond the traditional court dances, thus the rise of ballet in France. Historians credit the “Ballet Comique de la Reine” as the first ballet performed in 1581. It was an elaborate production depicting the celebration of the marriage between the mother queen, Catherine de Medici, and Henry II.

In 1661, because of his tremendous love for dance, King Louis XIV, affectionately known as “The Sun King,” asked his ballet master to establish rules for the study of ballet. Some of what we recognize today as the positions of the feet and arms, as well as other movement patterns, are a result of those rules. At this time, King Louis XIV also began the Academie Royale de Danse as the first formal ballet school in one of the rooms of the Louvre.

The 19th century brought more codified instruction of ballet study by the Italians such as Carlos Blasis. He developed a comprehensive system for the teaching of ballet which included barre work. This era of ballet was influenced by the Romanticism evolving in art. It represented an escape of reality. It provided fantasy in the bitter reality of life. The ballerinas such as Marie Taglioni were raised to a new height of glamour. Gravity was being defied when they soared through the air and danced on pointe. Men’s roles became that of support for the ballerina, which added to the sense of etherealism when she was lifted off the ground. Solo parts were only for the women as the men were diminished to the background. In time however, there was a decline of great ballerinas, and without the great male dancers, the interest in ballet declined in Italy, France and England. Russia was the only country to retain its popularity and prestige due to unprecedented support for Czars. Dancers and dance masters who established a name in the other countries were employed in Russia. Marie Taglioni and Enrico Cecchetti were among them. Taglioni was considered the greatest dancer of the 19th century Romantic era. She was the first to dance en pointes. Cecchetti from Italy, formed a major ballet company that was the first to tour in the United States. He later became the ballet master of the Imperial Theater in Russia where he trained many of the great dancers of the 20th century such as Anna Pavlova and Vaslav Nijinsky. The most influential foreign artist that came to Russia was Marius Petipa of France, whom is considered to be the “father of the classical ballet”. He was a great performer himself,

but was best known for his choreography and direction of the St. Petersburg Ballet.

There are three schools or methods of ballet: French, Russian, and Cecchetti. We study mainly the French school of ballet, though there are some parts of the Cecchetti method that we will also cover. The French school was known for its elegance and soft, graceful movements, rather than technical virtuosity. Its influence spread throughout Europe and is the basis of all ballet training.

Some notable ballet choreographers and dancers include:

Anna Pavlova- was a famous Russian prima ballerina and choreographer. The company she founded in 1911 was the first to tour ballet around the world. *The Dying Swan* was her signature role.

Carlos Blasis-was an Italian dancer, choreographer and dance theoretician. He is well known for his very rigorous dance classes, sometimes lasting four hours long. He also developed a comprehensive system for the teaching of ballet which included barre work.

Enrico Cecchetti-considered the link between the past and the present, contributing to the birth of modern classical ballet. Worked with the Imperial Ballet and trained many dancers.

Margot Fonteyn-an iconic figure in British ballet, her dancing was distinguished by its perfect line and exquisite lyricism. Her dance partnership with Rudolf Nureyev towards the end of her career won them both worldwide fame.

Marie Taglioni- was the first to make gravity-defying pointe work popular among performers and audiences alike. However it was her artistry, particularly in her signature role in *La Sylphide*, that inspired a devoted following and forever changed the artform of ballet.

Marius Petipa-known as the "father of classical ballet." Marius Petipa is considered one of the greatest choreographers of all time. He researched the subject matter of the ballets he staged, making careful and detailed preparations for each production, and then worked closely with the designer and composer. He elevated the Russian ballet to international fame and laid the cornerstone for 20th Century ballet. His classicism integrated the purity of the French school with Italian virtuosity.

Rudolf Nureyev-was a soloist with the Kirov Ballet. His primary partnership with Margot Fonteyn was legendary. He ended his career as the ballet director for the Paris Opera.

Vaslav Nijinsky-was a Russian ballet dancer and choreographer of Polish descent. Nijinsky was one of the most gifted male dancers in history. His ability to perform seemingly gravity-defying leaps was legendary.



Contemporary Ballet: (from Wikipedia.com)

Contemporary ballet is a form of dance, which incorporates elements of both classical ballet and modern dance. It takes its technique and use of pointe work from classical ballet, although it permits a greater range of movement that may not adhere to the strict body lines set forth by schools of ballet technique. Many of its concepts come from the ideas and innovations of 20th century modern dance, including floor work, balletic movements and turn-in of the legs.

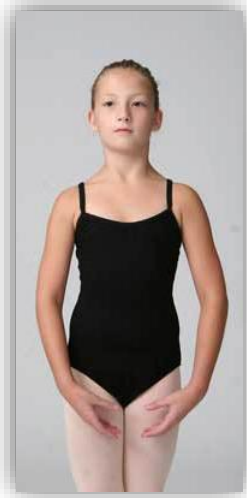
The Five Positions of the Arms and Feet

There are five basic positions of the feet...

- * Start in **first**. **Première** is the French word for first, but we just call 1st position "First". The heels are comfortably together, with the toes comfortably turned-out.
- * Then slowly slide one foot out to the side, apart from first where the heels are together until the feet are as wide as your shoulders. This is **second** position, **à la seconde**.
- * Slide the heel of the right foot slowly back in toward the left foot. Keep sliding the heel of the right foot back in slowly until the heel is in line with the middle of the left foot that is not moving. This is **third**, **Troisième**. You may also practice this, and the next two positions, with the left foot in front of the right.
- * **Fourth** position, or **Quatrième**, is like fifth, with the front foot out in front of the back foot. Be sure to keep the hips in line by turning out the front foot as far as possible first, then the back foot, and keeping your belly button facing forward.
- * **Fifth**, **Cinquième**, is like third except that the front foot crosses completely over the toe joint of the of the back foot.

The Five Positions of the Arms and Feet

**Preparatory Position (En Bas)
(Première)**



First Position



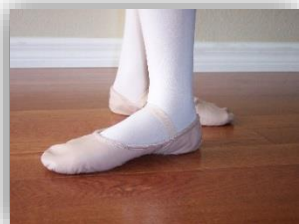
**Second Position (Seconde)
(Troisième)**



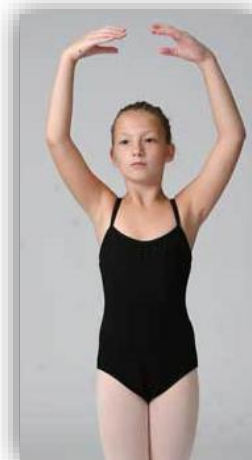
Third Position



**Fourth Position (Quatrième)
(Cinquième)**



Fifth Position



More at: <http://dance.about.com>

The Three Arabesque Positions

What's an Arabesque?

It is a position in which a dancer stands on one leg with the other extended derriere. An arabesque may be taken **à terre** or **en l'air** in a number of body alignments and a variety of arm lines to make up the 1st, 2nd or 3rd arabesques. In general, arabesque arm lines are elongated with the palms facing downward and the hands and fingers extended to complement the long line created through the working leg, torso, and head. Note the line of the body, placement of arms and shoulders in order to get an accurate alignment of these positions. The eye line for all arabesque positions should be over and beyond centre finger of higher arm.

1st Arabesque:

Done with the the arm on the supporting side extended in front of its shoulder so that the hand is eye height, and the arm of the working leg is extended to the side half way between demi-seconde and 2nd position and taken slightly back.

First arabesque à terre pictured to the right; en l'air below.



2nd Arabesque (à terre):

Done with the arm on the supporting side extended to the side slightly lower than the shoulder, and the arm of the working leg is extended in front of and fractionally above its shoulder.



3rd Arabesque (à terre):

Done with the downstage side extended in front of and fractionally above its shoulder, and the arm on the upstage side is extended at eye height in front of its shoulder.



Intermediate Ballet Body Positions and Orientations

Croise Devant
(crossed over to front)

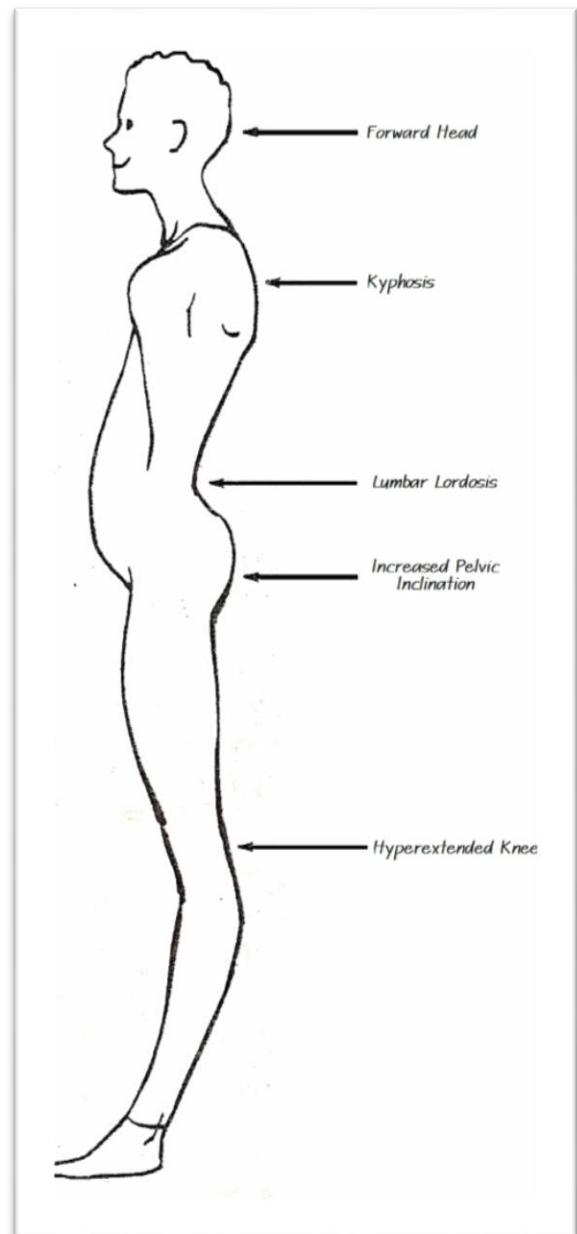
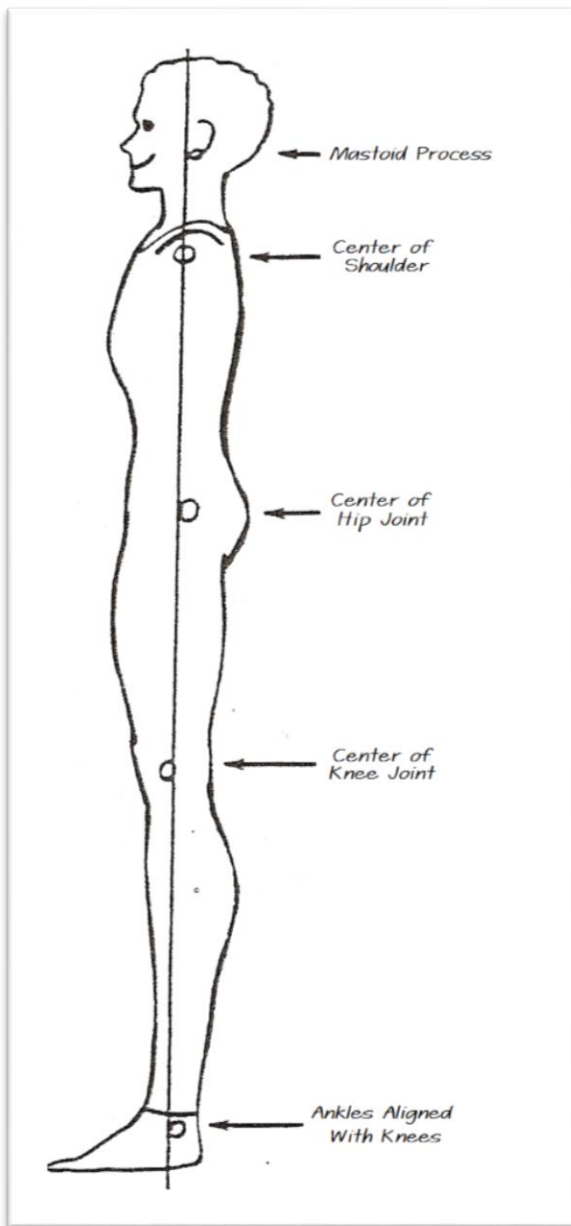


Croise Derrière
(crossed over to back)



A la Seconde
(to the second)





Elements of Proper Ballet Alignment/Posture

1. Spine lengthened (all the way up behind the nose)
2. Chin and eyes level, not lowered
3. Shoulders down and relaxed and centered over the hips
4. Sternum lifted, but ribs not flared
5. Arms rounded and forward of the body, supported from the back
6. Abdominals lifted, not “sucked in”
7. Pelvis is neutral, neither tucked nor swayed
8. Legs turned out at hip sockets only as far as the rotation can be maintained without disturbing the rest of the alignment
9. Knee caps in line with toes, knees straight but not locked
10. Ankles are straight, no pronation or supination
11. Ankles in line with knees and the weight slightly forward on the balls of the feet.
12. Toes relaxed on floor—no gripping

Intermediate Ballet Vocabulary

Combinations	
Adagio	Slow and sustained
Petit Allegro	Small jumping and turning steps, performed at a lively and brisk tempo
Port De Bras	Carriage of the arms
Grand Allegro	Consists of combinations of large, leaping steps and jumps
Jumping Movements	
Saute	To jump
Changement	To change
Chasse	To chase
Grand Jete	Large throw
Soubresaut	Sudden spring from 5th
Echappe	To escape
Pas De Chat	Step of the cat
Assemble	To assemble
Temps Leve	Time raised
Turning Movements	
Chaine	Chain or link
Pirouette	To whirl or spin
En De Hors	Outward (“Open the door”)
Soutenu	Sustained
Detournee	In a turn
Pique	To prick
En De Dans	Inward

Directions	
Devant	to the front
A La Seconde	to the side
Derriere	to the back
En Croix	in the shape of the a cross
Croise	Crossed
Promenade	In a walk
Level Change	
Plie	to bend
Demi	half
Eleve	to rise
Releve	to rise without a plie
Fondu	to melt
Cambre	to arch
A Terre	on the floor
Penche	inclining
Leg Action	
Tendu	to stretch
Degage	to disengage
Grand Battement	large beat
Retire	withdrawn
Pas De Bourree	a travelling step (back, side, front)
Glissade	to glide
Balance	a rocking step (down, up, up)
Rond de Jambe	around the leg

Petite Battement	Small beat
Passe	To pass
Arabesque	Pose with one leg directly behind the body lifted off the floor
Developpe	To develop
Tombe	To fall
Sous-sus	Under over
Attitude	Pose when the leg is in arabesque but slightly bent
Enveloppe	To enveloped (opposite of developpe)
Fouette	To whip
Tour Jete	Turning leap (Battement to arabesque)
Foot Action	
Coupe	To cut
Frappe	To strike
Pas de cheval	Step of the horse
Misc. Terms	
Barre	Structure used in ballet class to help with balance
Ballerina	Female ballet dancer
Ballerino	Male ballet dancer
Turn Out	Degree of natural rotation
En Bas	In low
En Haut	In high