

Ida Rubinstein: Revolutionary Dancer, Actress, and Impresario

Judith Bennahum

Abstract

This paper explores the life of the brilliant Jewish Russian actress and dancer, Ida Rubinstein (1883-1960), whose name appeared in the newspapers and gossip columns in Paris for nearly half a century from 1909 to 1949. She was born into a wealthy family in Kharkov, and lost her parents to an epidemic, then raised by her Aunt Horwitz in St. Petersburg. She was discovered by Serge Diaghilev in St. Petersburg and spent her performing career in Paris and Europe. What intrigued me about her were her performing personas as both sexually seductive women and men, her full and expressive gestural interpretations of major acting roles as well as her strong and original dance, or rather pantomimic movements. She was also one of the most distinguished impresarios of the time.

Sadly, she has faded into oblivion, barely remembered by dance and theater scholars. She was a fascinating and remarkable woman performer whose deep intellectual qualities and formidable ability to recognize great talents kept her in the limelight throughout the first half of the 20th century. A glittering personality on stage she lived to perform, imbuing her roles with sublime gestures and movements uncommon to actresses at the time. Her roles in the 1909 and 1910 Ballets Russes productions as Cleopatra and Zobeide in Sheherazade signaled her brilliance and a life long career on stage. Like her mentor Sarah Bernhardt, she often played male characters, beginning with her shocking and fully realized impression of d'Annunzio's Saint Sebastian in 1911. She went on to star in plays as Orpheus, David and Amphion, poetic dramas and ballets that surprised and pleased her dedicated audiences.

In her early private life in Paris she fell in love with the American artist Romaine Brooks who introduced her to the Sapphic group among whom were Winnetta Singer, Natalie Barney and Radcliffe Hall. She was unafraid to reveal her beautiful body on stage or in many of the portraits by different artists, including Romaine Brooks.

My study of Ida Rubinstein attempts to unmask and celebrate her lost achievements at a time when women artists, especially Jewish women, were painted in scandal and ignominy.

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Presenter Bio

Judith Chazin-Bennahum, UNM Distinguished Professor Emerita, researcher, and choreographer. She was Principal Soloist with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet Company when Antony Tudor was Director of Ballet. She danced with Robert Joffrey, Agnes de Mille and John Butler among many others. She received her doctorate in Romance Languages at the University of New Mexico and is the author of numerous articles as well as eight books: *Dance in the Shadow of the Guillotine*, *The Ballets of Antony Tudor* which received the De la Torre Bueno prize in 1995, *The Lure of Perfection: Fashion and Ballet 1780-1830* published by Routledge, She edited the book *The Living Dance: An Anthology of Essays on Movement and Culture*, now in its third edition; She compiled a series of essays on *Teaching Dance Studies*, 2005; *Rene Blum and the Ballets Russes: In Search of a Lost Life*, in 2011. And recently a book on a friend, *Malka's Journey: From the Holocaust to a Life Beyond* in 2015 and *Ida Rubinstein: Revolutionary Dancer, Actress and Impresario* in 2022 by SUNY Press. She received a life time achievement award from the Corps de Ballet in 2011 and a Distinction in Dance from the Society of Dance History Scholars in 2016.

Where are all the Pageant Queens in Classical Ballet?

George Berry

Abstract

Before drag television programs, drag queens were separated into two categories: pageant and comedy. In the Miss Continental drag pageant, Brooke Lynn Heights performed a Swan Lake inspired number, infusing her classical ballet technique while performing en pointe. She is a former member of Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, which infuses classical ballet with comedy to produce parody. Societal ideas of gender performance have shifted since this company's founding in 1974, but the representation of drag queens and transgender dancers has barely changed in fifty years. Other companies have also created farcical classical ballet with men en pointe and drag ballet has relegated itself to smaller traveling companies. While more traditional ballet companies have drag roles in ballets such as the Stepsisters in Cinderella and Old Madge in La Sylphide, these characters are meant to be camp or grotesque, and their stylized drag reflects a comedy queen aesthetic. Where are the pageant ballet queens represented in today's ballet? Why can't men perform en pointe without relying on gay minstrelsy? We can now define our identities as genderqueer, non-binary, and transgender, so why can't we make a place for gender non-conforming dancers in classical ballet? Laughing at a man's ability to fail at cisnormativity worked last century, but transgender women are no longer the butt of the joke. It's time for ballet's ideas of gender to change. Transgender and non-binary individuals need a place to call home in between the échappé en pointe and the double tour en l'air to the knee.

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Arresting Dress C. Sears

Rethinking the Travesty Dancer F. Kennedy

Bike Boys, Drag Queens, & Superstars J. Suárez

Presenter Bio

George Berry is a second year MFA candidate at the University of Alabama originally from Atlanta, GA. He began his training at Atlanta Ballet in the Pre-Professional program and performed in their Nutcracker at the Fox Theatre. While at the University of Alabama for undergrad, George starred as Don Quixote in Don Quixote, Lucien in Paquita, Hilarion in Giselle, and the Knight in Rita Snyder's El Dorado, under the direction of Cornelius Carter in addition to many contemporary and modern works by faculty and guest artists. After graduating in 2016, he became a company member of the Proia Dance Project in Atlanta, GA. He was then invited to join Roxey Ballet in Lambertville, NJ where he danced for two seasons. He has performed as a guest artist for the Nutcracker as Snow King, Spanish, and Arabian at the Southeast Alabama Dance Company and at the Bama Theatre. His choreographic works have been featured at the Young Choreographer's Festival in New York City, Broadway Dance Center's Professional Showcase, Benjamin Briones's the Round Table, and the Alabama Dance Festival for multiple years. Last year, George had the chance to share his research on the Importance of Dance Performance at Walt Disney World at the Southwestern Popular American Culture Association Conference. Recently, his film in collaboration with Brandon Hall, Fragile, was featured in the Final Night Gala of the American College Dance Association's Screendance Festival. His film work was also a part of the MFA Makers in Film Festival at UNC Greensboro.

Ballet science: combining pedagogical tradition with modern innovations to create injury resistant dancers

Shayla Bott, Ashley Parov, and Brenda Critchfield

Abstract

Purpose

Our motivation for conducting this research was to further understand the postural and muscular deficiencies present in pre-professional ballet dancers and to utilize science-based training solutions to address these issues and mitigate injury.

Methods

This study was approved by an institutional review board and conducted with consent of participants.

By conducting a postural analysis and Functional Movement Screen (FMS) on each dancer six times annually, we recorded postural and muscular deficiencies, and applied correctives for common faults. These treatment plans have been overseen by our dance medicine practitioner and given during ballet technique and Pilates mat class.

Results and Discussion

We have found a correlation between the weak posterior gluteus medius and low FMS scores. Additionally, upon improving this weakness through targeted treatment, we have seen improvement in overall postural and muscular strength.

The movement session will demonstrate a full FMS and Postural Analysis. Participants will physically move through ballet technique and Pilates mat correctives with a fascial focus. These exercises target common balletic postural imbalances and muscular weaknesses.

Conclusion and Mission Relevance

In addition to seeing an increase in FMS scores and more neutral joints in dancers, anecdotally we see an improvement in technique, and the overall ballet aesthetic. We continue to develop and adjust training modalities by infusing the ballet technique exercises with Pilates and fascial components.

By furthering this line of inquiry, we are developing universal training modalities which will assist in the development, exploration, and advancement of strong, injury resistant ballet dancers in higher education.

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Presenter Bios

Shayla Bott is currently an Associate Professor of Ballet at Brigham Young University (BYU). Her current assignments include the Artistic Direction of BYU Theatre Ballet, Ballet Area Coordinator and Associate Chair of the Department of Dance. From the University of Utah, Shayla holds a BFA in ballet performance and an MFA in ballet with a focus on music, choreography, and pedagogy. After retiring from a professional career with Utah Metropolitan Ballet, she has continued to choreograph and teach in professional and academic venues. Her creative work has received multiple awards. Shayla is certified in Progressing Ballet Technique, and STOTT Pilates Matwork and Reformer. She is working on a comprehensive STOTT Pilates certification which includes a rehabilitation-based focus to work with special populations. Current assignments include teaching Kinesiology for Dancers and conducting research to create safer training protocols for ballet dancers by fusing Pilates-based correctives with a strong focus in fascial connectivity and health into ballet technique courses. She has also successfully completed the ABT® Teacher Training Intensive in Pre-Primary through Level 7 of the ABT® National Training Curriculum.

Ashley Ivory Parov began her early ballet training under the tutelage of Richard Cammack and Zola Dishong at the Contra Costa Ballet Centre in Walnut Creek, California. Ms. Parov spent her youth training under some of the country's most notable teachers and subsequently joined the San Francisco Ballet as an apprentice at the age of 17. After three years at SFB, Ms. Parov came to Brigham Young University to pursue her BA in Dance. Upon graduation, she returned to the San Francisco Bay Area to join Company C Contemporary Ballet. While at Company C, Ms. Parov danced lead roles in works by Twyla Tharp, David Parsons, Charles Anderson, Val Caniparoli, Michael Smuin, Amy Seiwart, and Lar Lubovich. Ms. Parov is a certified Pilates instructor. Ms. Parov's current teaching assignments include BYU's Theatre Ballet, pas de deux, and pilates Mat and reformer classes. Ms. Parov has a comprehensive Pilates certification through Balanced Body and has also successfully completed the ABT® Teacher Training Intensive in Pre-Primary through Level 7 of the ABT® National Training Curriculum.

Brenda Critchfield, MS, ATC, CSCS, LAT is the Director of Dance Medicine and Wellness Facility for the BYU Department of Dance. She is a certified athletic trainer, a national strength and conditioning specialist and has earned certifications in kinesiotaping and Graston technique.

She has worked in a wide variety of athletic training settings including NCAA Division I and III athletics, semi-professional hockey, ESPN X-Games, and the U.S. military. She started working with performing artists in 2007 while obtaining a Master of Science from University of New Mexico. Brenda received her BS in athletic training from Brigham Young University. She has worked with professional dancers from New York City Ballet Company, American Ballet Company, the Martha Graham Company, and with actors on Broadway to prevent dehydration in Shrek. Critchfield published two position statements for the International Association of Dance Medicine & Science. She has also written a chapter in the book *Dancer Wellness*. Her interests lie in the prevention and treatment of injuries in dancers and global body healing. As Director of Dance Medicine and Wellness Facility, Critchfield utilizes manual therapy techniques, myofascial release techniques, and soft tissue work to help dancers recover from injuries.

Deconstructing Masculinity in Ballet: Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake (1995)

Afreen Sen Chatterji

Abstract

For my paper I propose to look at Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* (1995) in which he reversed the traditional gender roles by employing not only a male Swan but also an entirely male corps-de-ballet. Through this I would like to look at both the construction of masculinity in ballet, the subversion of it as well the challenges it poses to spectatorship.

Neither female nor effeminate, Bourne's swans are sexually charged, individualised and characterised, providing a stark contrast to the faceless homogeneity of the traditionally female corps de ballet and 'points out that swans are not necessarily light beings of grace, and in so doing, draws viewers' attentions to the bio-political control required to produce popular ballet aesthetics' (Hickey-Moody, 2013:90). Bringing to the forefront that which has been 'closeted' in ballet for years, Bourne not only transmutes the relationship that exists between the dancers but also the relationship shared by the audience and the dancers. It is the Prince's pas-de-deux with the Swan that has been described by Kent Drummond (2003:248) as the first 'moment of crisis' for the audience, arguing that by creating and sustaining the male gaze on another man. The unease surrounding this sensuous representation and the refusal of critical coverage in both Britain and the United States of America to accept the homoerotic nature of the ballet illuminates how little sexuality, let alone homosexuality, is explored in within ballet even today.

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Presenter Bio

Afreen Sen Chatterji (she/her/hers) is a first year PhD student and a Regents' Fellow in the Department of Theater, Dance and Performance Studies at UCSB. She completed her Bachelor's in English (Honours) at Delhi University, India (2014-17), followed by a Master's in Theatre and Performance Studies at King's College London, United Kingdom (2017-18).

In her MA thesis, "The 'Exotic' East in Western Ballet: Examining the Disjunction between La Bayadère and India's Bayadère(s)/Temple-Dancers", Afreen had begun with an exploration of the gender and imperial politics of classical ballet and its interface with generic constructions. But the examination of the Orientalizing project led her to also see the limitations of this critical framework and a realization of the structures of oppressions that predated imperialism in India, particularly those of caste and gender, that still wield hegemonic power in this modern, decolonized nation despite rising Dalit and feminist assertions. She now seeks to explore further – beyond the rather static binary of colonizer and colonized – realms of cultural narratives and the play of power that sanctions norms and forms by looking at nineteenth century ballets dramatizing exoticized 'eastern' worlds.

Gender, Muses, and the Virtuosa in Frederick Ashton's 'Rhapsody'

Steven Ha

Abstract

In this paper I examine Frederick Ashton's *Rhapsody* (1980), a ballet choreographed in celebration of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother's 80th birthday and the guest appearances with the Royal Ballet by Mikhail Baryshnikov, one of the most iconic male dancers of the Cold War era. Ashton chose the ballerina Lesley Collier—an exemplary interpreter of the choreographer's style—to partner with Baryshnikov which brought into focus a juxtaposition of Russian and English ballet training. Set to the music of Sergei Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Op.43, Ashton's *Rhapsody* is a plotless ballet that gestures toward the Paganini myth (a Faustian bargain with the devil exchanging the soul for prodigious talent), but instead takes for its central subject the notion of balletic virtuosity. As a result, *Rhapsody* is a glittering whirlwind of fast footwork and athleticism; most interpretations of *Rhapsody* tend to associate the Baryshnikov role with Paganini and bestow the label of virtuoso to him, while the Collier role is likened to a muse. However, choreographic analysis and critical attention to the writing about the ballet reveal a slightly different narrative, one which raises questions about the gendered assumptions of the terms virtuoso and muse. Accordingly, I argue that *Rhapsody* disrupts conventions of gender by embodying notions of the male muse and female virtuosa. In addition, I consider the bejeweled appearance of the male dancers' costumes and theorize the "opulent male body" as subversive to the heroicized male body of classicism.

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Presenter Bio

Steven Ha is a lecturer in dance at The Ohio State University, where he received his Ph.D. in 2021. His dissertation, "Classicism and Romanticism in Three Ballets by Frederick Ashton," examines the varied ways in which the choreographer subscribes to the aesthetic theories of classicism and romanticism, and how the respective tenets of these artistic movements lead Ashton to respond to various historical and sociopolitical contexts. Extracts of this research have been presented and published for the German Shakespeare Society (Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft). Additionally, his research interests include attending to representations of gender and sexuality on the ballet stage in ways that challenge classical convention and illuminate queer histories.

NIQUE: Empowering freedom and upholding excellence
Madeline Jazz Harvey, Meg Paul, and Christina Johnson

Abstract

As shared during the 2021 CORPS conference, Complexions Contemporary Ballet's co-founders Dwight Rhoden and Desmond Richardson have begun codifying their own training system. NIQUE is committed to helping dance teachers and students become more fluid, versatile, and culturally interconnected. Drawing from over twenty-seven years of internationally revered repertoire, NIQUE uses sound anatomical principles and cutting-edge choreography to propel student growth and excellence. The proposed lecture demonstration with heavy emphasis on movement exploration, seeks to unpack five key principles of this emerging technique: coordination, physical ignition, precision, efficiency, and clarity of form. Integrated discussions will highlight specific teaching methods and practices that help redefine gender norms and promote equity, diversity, and inclusion within the ballet classroom. Examples include non-binary spoken and curated movement languages and obtaining on-going consent for tactile feedback and touch. From an aesthetic perspective, we will examine how the exposing of effort, directing of gaze, removal of gendered expectations, and offering of choices, help liberate and empower ballet students. Among Complexions Contemporary Ballet's foremost innovations is the notion that dance should be about removing boundaries, not reinforcing them. NIQUE bridges the divide between classical and contemporary movement languages, activates keen memorization skills allowing students to quickly interpret complex movement sequences, increases the body's availability and fluency, and helps dancers to unlock their expressive potential. As part of the creative team helping support the development of the NIQUE teacher training manual, co-presenters are honored to share the work and vision of two prolific artists who have reshaped ballet.

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Presenter Bios

Madeline Jazz Harvey is a dance educator, choreographer, and performer specializing in classical and contemporary ballet. She began her performance career at age fourteen as an apprentice with Charlotte Ballet. In 2010, Madeline joined Hernan Justo's Carolina Ballet Theatre where she served as a principal dancer, resident choreographer, and outreach coordinator. She was honored to become a member of IMPACT Dance Company in May 2020. Madeline has been teaching and choreographing since 2006 in a variety of studio and collegiate settings. In 2007, she was the youngest recipient of the New York Choreographic Institute Fellowship Award. Her choreography has been featured in concerts and festivals across the nation including Universities of North and South Carolina, Davidson College, Converse College, Furman University, Tampa University, and as part of the Regional Ballet and American College Dance Associations. She was appointed Instructor of Ballet at the University of South Carolina in 2015 and became Assistant Professor of Dance at Colorado State University in August 2017. Madeline holds a BA and Professional Training Certificate in Dance from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and an MFA in Choreography from Jacksonville University. Human connection and vulnerability drive her choreographic process. Recent projects explore the artistry of parenting through dance. She is currently working in collaboration with psychologist Zeynep Biringen to test the efficacy of dance intervention for enhanced emotional availability

during pregnancy. Her creative research investigates play as a paradigm for choreographic process and is centered on community engagement.

Meg Paul brings a wealth of experience in classical and contemporary ballet, Broadway performance, choreography, and teaching artistry. Her career spans four decades and encompasses a wide range of national and international experience in performance, choreography, directing, teaching, program development, community engagement, and arts management. Paul has worked with dance pioneers in the field and has performed master works from the repertoire and artistic direction of Gerald Arpino, Robert Joffrey, Twyla Tharp and Dwight Rhoden, to works by Petipa, Ashton, Nijinsky, Massine, Balanchine, Forsythe, and Alonzo King. She was a principal dancer with The Joffrey Ballet/NYC and has extensive national and international touring credits. Paul performed both leading roles and served on the creative team and as dance captain for Twyla Tharp's Tony award-winning Broadway musical, *Movin' Out*. Her awards include The Princess Grace Award, winner of The International Dance Competition of the Americas, Detroit Renaissance Hero Award, Sue Nine Endowment for Faculty Achievement Award, Wayne State University's College of Fine, Performing, and Communication Arts Teaching Award, and the Copperfoot Award. Paul is Director of Dance for the Maggie Allesee Department of Theatre and Dance and serves as BFA advisor and coordinator of dance recruitment and ballet curriculum. Since her full-time appointment in 2010, Paul has curated and directed the Complexions Detroit Summer Intensive at Wayne State University. Concurrently, Paul serves as rehearsal director and Academy Director at Complexions Contemporary Ballet and teaches masterclasses worldwide. Paul is certified in Vinyasa Yoga, Progressing Ballet Technique, and Youth Protection Advocates in Dance.

Christina Johnson trained at Boston School of Ballet, School of American Ballet and Dance Theatre of Harlem. She began her professional career with Boston Ballet, before joining Dance Theatre of Harlem, where she became a principal dancer. In her tenure with DTH, she worked with legends Frederic Franklin, Ulysses Dove, Glen Tetley, Suzanne Farrell, Geoffrey Holder, Allegra Kent, Alonzo King, Jerome Robbins, Carmen De Lavallade, and Sir Anthony Dowell. She danced leading roles including *Giselle*, *Swan Lake*, *Serenade*, *Concerto Barocco*, *Firebird*, *Prodigal Son* and *Fancy Free*. She was a member of Le Ballet du Grand Theatre de Geneve and Ballett Basel, where her repertoire expanded to include works by William Forsythe, Jiri Kylian, James Kudelka, Twyla Tharp, Ohad Naharin, Jean-Christophe Maillot, Amanda Miller and David Parsons. Christina is an original member of Complexions Contemporary Ballet and has been a featured guest artist with various companies worldwide, including the Royal Ballet of London, where she and her dance partner, Ronald Perry, were the first African-American couple in history to perform with the company. Christina has been sought after as a teacher and coach working with companies and schools such as Pacific Northwest Ballet, Washington Ballet, Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, Joffrey Ballet, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Pennsylvania Ballet, Gotesborg Ballett, Cornish College of the Arts, University of Washington among others. Christina holds an MFA in Dance from Hollins University in collaboration with the American Dance Festival, The Forsythe Company and Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts in Germany.

Sylphs Supporting Sylphs: A Feminist Restaging of Les Sylphides

Jamie Johnson and Christa St. John

Abstract

The ballet *Les Sylphides* (Chopiniana), by Michel Fokine, was created in the hyper-cisgendered world of the early 20th century. The historical gendering of this dance d'ecole brings up pedagogical considerations when restaging the work within the context of 21st century higher education. Informed by our embodied history of the work and feminist theory, we restaged and reimagined excerpts of *Les Sylphides* with an all female-identifying cast for a university performing ensemble. As Linda Caruso Haviland eloquently states, "There are no reconstructions of the past in the present that are ideology-free and all reconstructions construct a picture of the past that equally reflects what was and who we, as reconstructors and recontexters, are" (4). During the act of restaging, we questioned the following: How does an all female-identifying cast alter the meaning of the work? Which performative masculine actions, such as port de bras, partnering, and allegro, to include? What value does this serve the students and ballet in higher education? Diving into feminist theory, surveying the students about their experience, and wrestling with challenges of reconstruction, we posit the sustaining pedagogical value of restaging canonical works, but advocate for a fresh perspective and a sensitivity to past and present cultural values.

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Presenter Bios

Jamie Johnson is an Associate Professor of Dance at Utah Valley University, where she instructs all levels of ballet technique, pointe, and ballet pedagogy as well as a classes from the core curriculum. Since 2015, she has served as the co-Artistic Director of Repertory Ballet Ensemble, a student ensemble of dance majors, who perform classical and contemporary works. Johnson's teaching is informed by her professional performing experience. After graduating cum laude from the University of Utah with degrees in Ballet and English, she went on to perform nationally and internationally with companies such as—Sacramento Ballet, Ballet Pacifica, Ohio Dance Theatre, and Boulder Ballet, reaching the status of principal dancer. Later with MOMIX, she served as Dance Captain and performed upon world-renowned stages, such as the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., the Joyce Theater in New York, and Teatro Municipal in Rio de Janeiro. Jamie is a prolific choreographer and dance scholar. Her choreography has been performed by St. Paul Ballet, Utah Metropolitan Ballet, Boulder Ballet II, and the University of Wyoming. As a dance scholar, Johnson explores dance and diversity. Her research has been presented at the National Dance Education Organization, the World Dance Alliance, and the American College Dance Association conferences. Her article, "Culturally Inclusive Dance: Working with Chinese English Language Learners in the Dance Technique Classroom" has been published in the *Journal of Dance Education*. Ms. Johnson holds a MFA in Dance from the University of Washington with additional certifications in Autism Movement Therapy and Yoga.

Christa St. John is an Assistant Professor of Ballet and Co-Artistic Director of Repertory Ballet Ensemble at Utah Valley University. Christa spent her professional career dancing with Ballet Austin, Louisville Ballet, Charleston Ballet Theatre, Atlantic City Ballet, and Northwest Florida Ballet. Throughout her career, she had the opportunity to work with renowned national and international artists and to perform diverse contemporary and classical repertoire.

Prior to joining the faculty at UVU, Christa was the Elementary Division Director for the Northwest Florida Ballet Academy, was on faculty as Artist-in-Residence at Western Kentucky University, and was a Graduate Teaching Fellow at the University of Oklahoma. Christa served as Ballet Master for Oklahoma Festival Ballet and Ballet Master and Choreographer for OU Opera Theatre.

Throughout her choreographic career, she premiered numerous works for professional and university dancers and frequently collaborated with professional and university orchestras.

Christa was the 2020 recipient of the University of Oklahoma Provost's Graduate Teaching Award for Excellence in Teaching in the Arts and Humanities. She is also a Dance for Parkinson's Disease instructor with teacher training through the Mark Morris Dance Group in Brooklyn, NY. Christa holds a BA in Dance from Western Kentucky University and an MFA in Dance from the University of Oklahoma

Dewd Drop

Yvonne Racz Key

Abstract

Classical story ballets are of the most gender-codified productions in the performing arts. Although both male and female dancers share ballet steps in class and most story ballet choreography, historic tradition relegates roles described as "gallant, strong, courageous" to male dancers. However, several innovative versions of story ballets alter the traditions, such as Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake, Akram Kahn's re-telling of Giselle, or the productions of the all-male comedic ballet company Les Ballets de Trockadero de Monte Carlo. Professional companies have the resources to create productions with amended and diversified stories and cast. For directors in pre-professional dance schools, how does one integrate progressive choices in casting and choreography? How far can the pre-professional academic dance world adventure in dance education while maintaining peace among the parental tribes of dance families? Unintentionally, I addressed those as mentioned above by casting a male dancer in the traditional role of the Dew Drop Fairy in The Nutcracker. The investigation provided discoveries emanating throughout from the initial casting through the rehearsals and culminating in a performance. From a scholarly perspective, the unknown local Nutcracker production in West Texas was a small vehicle educating students and the community of ballet's impact on youth's perspectives on an evolving art form. Traditional ballet vocabulary can tell all stories for everyone as it is a personal experience for the audience. At its base layer, ballet language, the movement, pointe, flat shoes, or bare feet tells the story, not the gender.

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Presenter Bio

Yvonne Racz Key is the artistic director of Ballet Lubbock, a pre-professional ballet school with a performing company and a developed Community Outreach Program. She received her MFA in

Theatre Performance and Pedagogy from Texas Tech University and is on the Dance faculty of Texas Tech School of Theatre and Dance. After graduating from the University of Utah, Yvonne danced professionally with Maryland Ballet, Desrosiers Dance Theatre (Canada), Catanach Ballet Theatre (N.Y.), Ballet Hispanico of N.Y, Washington D.C.'s Arena Stage, and Cirque Du Soleil. She has appeared in publications, VOGUE, TIME, and Dance Magazine. Her international guest teaching includes NOW Dance, Mexico, and Budapest Dance Theatre. She has choreographed musicals for Moonlight Musicals and the Texas Tech School of Music. Performance collaborations include Lubbock Symphony the Texas Tech School of Music and various composers and musicians in the community. Ms. Racz has given a TEDx talk on the positive effects of ballet training on young people. Her awards include The Arts Alliance Dynamic Force ACE award, YWCA's Woman of Excellence in Culture, the Louise Hopkins Underwood Arts Center's "Performing Arts Award.". Yvonne is a 2021-2022 School of American Ballet Visiting Fellow.

The Plight of the Ballerina: Past and Present

Shani Robison

Abstract

As a traditional classical ballet unfolds on stage, one is enthralled by its exquisiteness, symbolically inspired, and emotionally stirred. It is an artistic representation of beauty, etherealness, and other-worldliness. However, behind the fantasy, ballet has always been more than tutus and pointe shoes; it has been utilized as a veneer behind which the female gender has been pushed into compromising political, social, economic, and personal positions for hundreds of years.

Since its official inception and codification during the reign of Louis XIV, ballet became a veritable smoke screen masking created and imposed political, social, personal, and economic strategies. Ballet has aided in pushing political leaders toward dominance, used for social class acceptance and elevation, served as an economic draw, and created opportunities for personal arrangements of wealth and power at the expense of female dancers. Throughout its history and within each of these contexts, ballet has had great power and influence in determining and reinforcing gender roles in practice and performance, thereby reflecting past and present social values, despite efforts to the contrary.

To serve or reinforce these external purposes, a disembodiment and fracturing of ballet as an art form resulted, causing a continuous recycling of issues that haunt those within the ballet profession today. Ballet has been utilized and manipulated as a tool within and between contexts that are far beyond pure artistic and unaffected human expression, thereby creating a vehicle by which women have been politically minimized, socially defeated, economically strapped, and personally conquered past and present.

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Presenter Bio

Shani Robison is an Associate Professor of Dance at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, USA. She teaches all levels of ballet technique, pointe, variations, Dance History, and Introduction to Dance courses. Shani served as the ballet area administrator for 9 years and was the artistic director of both university ballet performing companies; BYU Theatre Ballet for 9 years and BYU Ballet Showcase for 6 years.

Shani has presented ballet pedagogical research and choreography at professional conferences in Greece, Toronto, Canada, Florida, Ohio, Texas, Colorado, Massachusetts, and New York (Athens Institute for Education and Research's International Conference on Visual and Performing Arts, International Association of Dance Medicine and Science Conference, National Dance Education Organization Conferences, America College Dance Association, and CORPS de Ballet International Conferences).

Throughout her career thus far, Shani has choreographed contemporary and classical ballet works for university and professional companies. At BYU she has also created original full-length ballets, re-staged full-length classical ballets, and choreographed full-length operas and musicals.

Shani is a professional member of the Utah Dance Education Organization, and currently serves on the National Dance Education Organization's advocacy committee. She has been a member of CORPS de Ballet International since 2001, serving on various committees and in the elected board officer positions of Treasurer, President Elect, President and Past President.

The Gendered Ballet Aesthetic

Rain Ross

Abstract

What makes a ballet good? Is it an objective concept or something taught? If something taught, who holds the keys to these values? Who is prioritized; who is left out?

When looking at ballet choreographers, the gender imbalance is striking. According to the Dance Data Project, in 2019-2020, only 19% of the works presented in ballet companies were choreographed by women (up from the previous year's 17%). Does the aesthetic of ballet perpetuate this choreographic gender imbalance?

Looking at ballets receiving good reviews, we gain a sense of prioritized aesthetics, including objectification of the female body, traditional gender roles and narratives, and an emphasis on hyper-femininity which includes an idea of "weakness" for women.

For a female ballet choreographer to "make-it" in this aesthetic world, she either needs to choreograph works that continue the objectification and oppression of women, putting herself in a sticky situation of perpetuating misogyny and making it difficult to create art from her own lived experience, or she can push against these aesthetic norms, making it harder to get commissions and sustain a choreographic career, and also making it less likely that audiences see a work contrary to these gendered aesthetic priorities.

Looking at examples of the various ways ballet aesthetics are gendered, this paper asks us to open our eyes to the way our trained aesthetics discourage women in ballet choreography, and challenges us to push against this norm, creating space for more voices and more visions.

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Presenter Bio

Rain Ross is a choreographer, dancer, and educator. She has worked with a diverse range of choreographers including Meredith Rainey, Toni Pimble, Wade Madsen, Deanna Carter, David Dorfman, Catherine Cabeen, and Hannah Wiley, and has performed with The Playhouse Dance Company in South Africa, and Arc Dance in Seattle.

Her choreography has been presented in New York, Philadelphia, Seattle, Santa Barbara, Beirut, and other places. Since its inception and for the ten years of its running, Rain participated as a choreographer, teacher, and performer at the International Dance Day Festival in Lebanon, for which she was also the Guest Artist Coordinator. Rain has also presented papers at Congress on Research in Dance and The Association of American Geographers. She trained at the Cornish College of the Arts, Preparatory Division and earned her B.A. from Mount Holyoke College, and her M.F.A. from the University of Iowa. Currently, she serves as Associate Professor of Dance at Stockton University in New Jersey.

Stuck in First Position: A historical examination of the ballet classroom

Jennifer Weber

Abstract

In this paper, through historical contextualization of training manuals and resulting methods of teaching ballet, I trace how the progression of ballet pedagogy intertwines with ballet's desire to uphold tradition. Born out of hegemonic narratives, ballet pedagogy is sustained through exclusive measures and reinforced by employing a large percentage of female identifying instructors. These instructors have emerged from the ranks of ballet, expected to obey and to never question authority. While progressive approaches and instructors exist, the field will not fully advance unless there is acknowledgement of the fact that these instructors are working within a system that continues to avoid change.

By tracing key advancements in ballet pedagogy, I was able to draw parallels to current practices. This process revealed that the institution has, since its inception, been effective in establishing hierarchical ranks that determine who can enter and how long they remain. This pattern is particularly evident given that more worth is given to an instructor's professional performing career over their pedagogical skills when it comes to securing employment as an educator. Additionally, men continue to hold the majority of power as company directors, school directors, and choreographers, requiring women who often are at the forefront of progressive pedagogical approaches to challenge the status quo. By more deeply understanding the development of ballet pedagogy, we can more clearly understand what is at stake, how preserving these norms is harmful, and critical actions we can take to break tradition and forward the field.

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Presenter Bio

Jennifer Weber holds an M.F.A. from the University of Iowa where she was an Iowa Arts Fellow and was a recipient of the Caroline H. Newhouse Scholarship. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She has been on faculty at the College at Brockport SUNY, University of Utah, the University of Iowa, the University of Iowa Youth Ballet, and Brooklyn Ballet Theater as the Intermediate Director. She currently is Assistant Professor of Dance at Dixie State University. She danced professionally with Omaha Theater Company, Ballet Quad Cities, and Ballet Nebraska. Ms. Weber's choreographic work has been presented internationally and nationally, spanning full length narratives, such as *The Nutcracker* to abstract contemporary works. She has presented her scholastic work at conferences including CORPS de Ballet International, NDEO, World Dance Alliance Americas, Royal Academy of Dance, and the Evans Somatic Conference. Her research engages critical approaches to existing codified dance techniques to reimagine the ways in which the various training methods, practices, and genres of dance can be in conversation. The direct areas of application she investigates are dance pedagogy, creative process, and the individual artist, and anti-racist practices.

Confronting Traditions: Analyzing the Consequences of Classical Ballet's Dependence on the Gender Binary

Jessica Williamson

Abstract

This paper examines classical ballet's dependence on the gender binary and its consequences by analyzing pedagogy, traditions, ideologies, and methodologies that perpetuate unduly gender norms. This paper will also study the unique contributions of select dance practitioners who intentionally dismantle gender binaries through their teaching, choreography, restaging, partnering, and costuming, initiating many long-awaited changes in the dance field.

In ballet, women's bodies become exposed as an aesthetic object, as their fragile and limber movements, thin figures, and delicate features are demarcated predominately by men and patriarchal structures (Markula & Clark, 2018). The gendered difference in choreography, casting, and expression between the man and the woman implies a vacuous requirement—the weak, feeble, and inferior woman needs a man's strength and romance without considering the impact of the social construct of gender. These realities produce submissive and docile bodies, as they reinforce gender norms and hierarchy, authoritarian teaching methods, body objectification, and disordered eating (Vandekerkhove, 2018).

There is an unethical pressure to conform to dominant norms of gender and sexuality and a blatant lack of representation for the LGBTQ+ community in ballet. Dancers who do not identify with these gender binaries and norms cannot fully express themselves through ballet's overwhelmingly heterosexual depictions of romance and implicit yet fundamental elements of idyllic "feminine" and "masculine" movement and aesthetics (Weems, 2008).

While these ballet traditions still hold strong, influential dance practitioners are pushing for evolution in the field. The current generation of dancers, choreographers, and leaders can and should serve as the bridge between old traditions and new standards.

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Presenter Bio

Jessica Williamson is a dance educator and choreographer based in the Tampa Bay area. Williamson began her pre-professional training with The Tallahassee Ballet, and trained under Richard Sias, Janet Pichard, Joyce Straub Fausone, Kathryn Cashin, and Balanchine's muse, Suzanne Farrell. She has danced, and trained with Pacific Northwest Ballet, Joffrey Ballet, Atlanta Ballet, Orlando Ballet, North Carolina Dance Theatre, Nevada Ballet, and The Tallahassee Ballet. Williamson earned her BS in Human Sciences from Florida State University with an emphasis in Professional Education. After a 7-year performing career, including collaborative performances with the world-renowned Cirque du Soleil, Jessica went on to pursue her MFA in Choreography from Jacksonville University. There, she studied how traditional ballet maintains philosophies, ideologies, and methodologies that inadvertently create docile and submissive bodies.

Williamson enjoys choreographing and restaging ballets that dismantle notions of patriarchy, hierarchy, racism, gender norms and binaries, and unhealthy perfectionism and body image issues. She appreciates collaborating with other artists to produce dynamic performances. Recently, Williamson has collaborated with internationally recognized visual artist, Kenneth Huff, who designed a program that interacts with dancers, creating a unique and innovative performance. Williamson has acquired 16-years of experience as a passionate and impactful dance educator and choreographer, who strives to empower a rising generation of dancers. As a pedagogue, she seeks to deliver dance education through techniques that resonate with the context and social movements of a twenty-first century.