

# Glorious History of Ballet

Ballet has incredibly long and interesting roots. Of course, the history of ballet is far too rich to be condensed on to one page. Here then, is a condensed chronicle of the world's most romantic form of dance.

Historians believe that the history of ballet can be traced back to renaissance Italy. In or about the 15th century, people would dance in the courts to entertain Italian royalty. As the people became more aware of art and culture, the dances flourished into the ancestors of today's modern ballet. **Courtyard Dancing**

As mentioned earlier, it was common practice for people to dance and entertain royalty in the courtyards of 15th century Italy. These courtyard dances were performed by members of the court, and took place in large halls that were also used for balls and court banquets. This initial chapter in the history ballet reached its peak during the reign of Louis XIV, who was established the world's first professional ballets.

## Rise of Formal Ballet

Formal ballet, as we know it today, owes its very existence to Louis XIV. He established the Royal Academy of Dance to train dancers for the court's ballets, and actually did the training himself. In 1670, Louis XIV was forced to stop dancing for personal reasons. His courtiers followed his example by starting their own classes, but the Royal Academy of Dance remained the favorite. Court dancing soon gave way entirely to professional ballet.

History shows that in these earliest chapters of ballet, most of the dancers were men. These men would wear masks and perform in the roles of women. It wasn't until later in the 16th century that women began to dance professionally in ballet theatre productions.

From the 16th century onwards, the art of ballet developed using a number of fresh toe movements. Early ballet dancers such as Marie Sall and Marie Camargo were made famous by their magnificent leaps and jumps. Later, in the 18th century, French artist Jean Georges Noverre became the most famous choreographer of dramatic ballet. It was Monsieur Noverre who became a notable influence to other choreographers, both during his lifetime and long afterward. Jean Georges Noverre encouraged choreographers to use movements that could be easily understood and naturally performed by the dancer. He believed that the movements should work in harmony in order to express the feelings and messages portrayed in the storyline. As such, Noverre would become one of the most important characters in the history of ballet.

## The Romantic Period

No history of ballet is complete without mention of Romantic ballet. This popular form of dance is said to have started in 1832 with a performance by *La Sylphide* in Paris, France. The dance repertoire inspired a number of changes in all elements of the ballet. Theme, style, techniques and costumes all began to undergo the changes of the time. While not a restricted form of ballet, historians suggest that the subjects it presented were out-of-this-world beings. Another significant change that came about in this period in the history of ballet was the new role of women as dominate figures on stage.

## The Twentieth Century

The new century brought about an evolution of traditional ballet. The concept of "pure dance" became to grow in popularity. As a result, ballet began to capture the attentions of younger audiences. More demanding movements, techniques, styles and forms began to emerge. Probably the best-known ballet to have been created in the 20th century is *Swan Lake*, which was initially choreographed and performed by Russian dancers. The important modern evolution of ballet within the 20th century opened a new chapter of interest to young fans and future historians.

Fans of ballet, and those with an interest in the evolution of modern entertainment, will enjoy learning more about the history of ballet. Watch any modern ballet performance, and you'll see elements of an enduring art form with centuries of history.