

# Pointe

BOOK

2

SAMPLE



## **More About** **Pointe** *in the* **Second or Third Year**

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**PURCHASE POINTE 2**

# **● Information for the Teacher**



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# The Teacher Must Decide

This manual provides information and suggestions for the teaching of beginning pointe work to students who are in the opinion of their teacher, ready for this instruction. The information in this book has worked well for the author, and for other teachers of her acquaintance. However, the author cannot know what approach to

pointe work will be appropriate and safe for any particular teacher, class, or student. Pointe work by its very nature carries a risk of injury. It is the responsibility of each ballet teacher to use his or her best judgment in interpreting, applying and using the information, opinions and teaching suggestions contained in this book.

# Teaching Pointe in the Second or Third Year

This manual is intended to assist you in improving the effectiveness of your teaching, and to give you some new ideas about arranging classes, organizing what to teach and when, and hopefully some new steps and enchainements (combinations) to use.

Pointe work is the finishing touch for ballet. In the beginning, it was not attempted until the student had finished learning all of the regular ballet skills, and was at the advanced level.

In the “Manual of Classical Theatrical Dancing, Cecchetti method”, pointe work is included in only three of the exercises, and only on Friday of the daily schedule, though most of the work described is quite advanced. (Echappés and relevés to 5th are included on pages 200 & 213.) Marie Taglioni did not begin pointe training until she was in her 20’s.

With the development of the modern, stronger pointe shoe, we can put students on pointe who have covered less than half of their ballet training. Remember that the ballet without pointe still needs to receive the main focus of their teaching in all ballet classes.

Because of the earlier start we give pointe, (age 12-14) the following guideline is important: Pointe work is improved only by doing and improving the regular ballet work without pointe shoes. Pointe work will not improve very much by increasing the use of

pointe shoes. Frustration may set in if this is tried.

Again, to strengthen and improve the pointe work, one must strengthen and improve the ballet itself. Pointe is an enhancement of ballet, an extension of it. It does not stand alone, and cannot replace the art of ballet which is its foundation.

Patience is needed. Enthusiasm and creativity by the teacher will help students to be happy with the level they need to work at.

This is no different than the methods you have used up to now in their ballet training. Tell them the facts about physical conditioning, and that pointe is nothing without the ballet that supports it. It requires a patient strengthening and conditioning of bones, muscles, and ligaments in the feet and ankles. This takes time. It will take about four years before the pointe shoes will become an automatic, natural part of their dancing.

In the meantime, for pointe class, create enchainements with artistic challenges, using a lot of “off pointe” movements, and using only those things they can do comfortably and well on pointe.

This earlier start on pointe is actually better, so long as it is done with common sense, slow enough to let nature to take care of the physical requirements. It allows the dancer more time to grow with and perfect

the pointe work.

Continue to use the principles of physical conditioning mentioned in the [Pointe 1](#) book. The Twelve Week Rule is at work whenever a new physical skill level is introduced on pointe. Give it several weeks at the barre, in simple form before moving it to the center, or into combinations.

Students need constant monitoring to be sure they are using the correct weight placement on pointe, until that correct centering becomes a habit.

The value of “interval-type training” is just as useful in ballet as in sports. When your class needs improvement on something, (such as changements), sprinkle it throughout the class in small doses rather than concentrating on it all in one spot. This works for all of the items taught in ballet, not just for pointe work.

So much of traditional ballet has become distorted through misunderstandings about why something was done a certain way, and about which muscles to use to get the desired result.

A psychological phenomenon sometimes helps: instead of correcting an offending area of the body, draw attention away from it by making a suggestion for improvement elsewhere.

Often the error in muscle use comes from tension, which increases when a teacher tries to correct it, because the student becomes more worried about it. Get the

student to put their thoughts elsewhere, and the area of concern has a better chance of relaxing and working correctly. It is worth a try.

## **THE INTERMEDIATE POINTE CLASS**

Note: to help development of feet, wear soft ballet shoes when not doing pointe work. Even advanced students benefit from one ballet class per week done entirely in soft shoes. Pointe students should take ballet at least twice a week.

If taking three classes a week, they can wear their pointe shoes for 6-8 minutes at the end of a second ballet class, and the pointe shoes for about the first half of the “pointe class”, mixing the pointe barre with a normal short barre, performing the pointe center mixed with the port de bras and center exercises, then changing shoes for the adage, pirouettes and allegro.

## **FITTING POINTE SHOES**

Most teachers who have written on the subject continually stress two things about the fitting of pointe shoes: Students must be able to use the demi pointe position, and the shoe must not do the work that the muscles are supposed to learn to do. Some add a third caution: the shoes must be wide enough to allow the toes to move and feel the floor when on pointe. Shoes that are too tight cause serious problems.

When the student is ready for the second pair of pointe shoes, I give them a few rules:

1. Whatever you buy, do nothing to them

until your teacher checks the fit and style. Leave them in the box!

2. Don't just follow the clerk's advice about how they fit, or about what pointe shoes may "do" to you.\* Only you can feel how your foot can or cannot work in the shoe. Clerks nearly always fit shoes too small: an average of two sizes too short, and sometimes 3-4 widths too narrow. Shoes that fit too tightly cause corns, bunions, and weaknesses in feet and ankles, resulting in unnecessary discomfort and injury.
3. Try on every shoe they've got for style, and every size anywhere near the one you had at first. You probably need at least one width wider, and perhaps a bit shorter. Find the most comfortable size for you. If your exact size and style is not there, order it.

In conclusion to students: Find a shoe that allows your foot to stand flat correctly, with toes not scrunched or overlapped; that you can rise to a reasonable demi pointe in; and that is comfortable on pointe, with no specific pressure or pain spots.

The shoe must allow you to place your weight correctly on the end of the big toe and whatever other toes are able to help. It must not tend to cause you to be off balance.

The shoe must encourage you to keep your weight centered through the center of the

foot, center of the ankle, center of the knee, etc. The style and stiffness of the box and the shank must give the support that your foot needs, but not what it does not need.

Try on and fit the shoes with the padding you intend to use. If you need help finding the right shoes, ask your teacher to help, don't just get "all they've got" or "the best you can find" because you are tired of looking, or out of time.

Wait for the right shoes, so you can really dance. To do otherwise is to punish yourself, and to possibly damage your feet and your dancing—perhaps permanently.

\*I have heard teachers and parents tell of clerks in dance supply stores who told students horror stories of bleeding feet and horrible pain and ruined feet, assuring them that pointe work would surely cause all of this for them, too.

It is sad that there are teachers, often former professionals, who do not know how to proceed with pointe without causing this kind of a result.

Mostly, teachers teach the way they were taught, so the blame for these problems must be laid back a couple of teaching generations! I wish everyone could know and follow good rules of physical conditioning!

**Pointe work should be fun, not torture!**

# Choosing Class Format: Mixed or Section?

## ADVANTAGES OF THE MIXED CLASS

The mixed class method makes use of the principle of “interval training” by providing a rest for the “pointe muscles” between each pointe exercise. This allows more pointe work to be done sooner than could safely and productively be done in the more traditional “section class”.

In theory, then, students should progress a little faster by this method. It is with some groups a bit more difficult to handle in the classroom, and the shoes will wear out a bit sooner with this method.

The advantage is that by alternating your exercises, and very slowly increasing the time and strain actually spent on pointe you will find your students will be much more comfortable, and after the first year, progressing faster and stronger in their pointe work.

## SECOND OR THIRD YEAR

During the second year, a few pointe exercises can be included at the end or in the middle of one of their other weekly ballet classes. After the second year, a little pointe work could be included in every class.

Example:

Monday: 3 or 4 exercises at the end of class.

Wednesday: 3 or 4 exercises at the end of the barre, and 1 or 2 in the center.

Friday: Begin class on pointe, remove shoes for adage and allegro.

## ADVANTAGES OF THE SECTION CLASS

The “section class” method is more traditional. Pointe work is done in one section of the class, either at the end of the barre or at the end of class. Many teachers prefer the end of class, as it motivates the girls to get their shoes changed quickly, and eliminates the second changing. (Students tend to socialize while changing shoes.)

Students will be less tired, and better able to do a little more on pointe at the end of the barre, than at the end of class.

In a beginning pointe class, if the teacher will not stop the class, but continue with those students who are not yet on pointe, and do “fun” things during the shoe changing time, the girls will be more likely to hurry. It helps if they are not allowed to leave the dance classroom while changing shoes.

Placing pointe at the end of class does motivate the students to change quickly, as there is only one change. The mixed class method also requires only one change.

There is still a third way to arrange the pointe class: Start the class with the pointe shoes on, and do a very short flat barre,

then the pointe work, then change shoes for the rest of the class.

Each teacher must decide which method or class format suits her, her students, and her school the best, and use it. Consistency within a ballet school is important, so if working with other teachers, there must be an agreement on the syllabus and methods to be followed, at least within each year.

### **POSSIBLE POINTE CLASS FORMATS:**

- A. Mixed Class**—wear pointe shoes for the barre, and center until pointe work is finished; requires one change of shoes; wears shoes out faster.
- B. Section Class**—end of class; requires one change of shoes.
- C. Section Class**—end of barre; requires two changes of shoes.
- D. Section Class**—Start class with pointe shoes, but using them only after the warmup. Do a short barre and short center on pointe then remove the pointe shoes. Requires one change of shoes.

# Conditioning Principles to Improve Pointe Work

Two main principles of physical training used in sports that support the idea of a gradual build up of strength:

- The “Twelve Week Rule” applies to increasing both specific and general strengths, and to learning any new skill.
- “Interval Training” permits a faster increase in strength by slowing down the fatigue factor.

Other principles listed below can also help the pointe work to be better.

## **1. INTERVAL TRAINING LETS MUSCLES DO MORE WORK AT A SESSION, BY PROVIDING SHORT RESTS FOR THE MUSCLE GROUPS BEING TRAINED.**

Fatigue works against the improvement of strength or endurance. Successful improvement comes from a reasonable work load combined with short rest periods.

## **2. THE JOINT THAT MOVES IS THE ONE THAT IS BEING STRENGTHENED.**

Strength comes from movement, not from lack of it. Holding a position does not strengthen a muscle except in that precise position.

## **3. IMPROVING THE BALLET WORK IMPROVES THE POINTE WORK.**

Pointe is an extension of Ballet. Pointe steps and movements need to be learned first on demi pointe. Technical improvements are most effective when learned in soft shoes, without the stress of being on pointe. Improve and strengthen each item or concept taught in soft shoes.

When the strength needed to consistently perform it, and the time needed to make it a habit are there, it can carry over to the pointe work.

## **4. WOLFF’S LAW**

Bones and joints assume their final shape, size and strength as a result of:

- the force of gravity, and
- the forces created by the actions of the muscles on the bones and joints.

Letting incorrect placement and movement habits continue over time can cause them to become permanent. It takes time to create the technical habits needed for classical ballet.

## **5. TEACH ONE IDEA AT A TIME. MAKE YOUR TEACHING MOMENTS COUNT.**

Not all barre exercises or all center sections need to be done or covered completely in every single ballet class. Choose one or two main improvements to work on in a class. Apply these principles to all of the items performed in that class. Other principles can be covered in another class.

**No student can learn everything in one day!**

## **6. THE “OVERLOAD PRINCIPLE”**

This is working to nearly full capacity of the muscles, but not overworking them. This is what we need to do for pointe work, but not more. It's OK for muscles to be tired after class, but not for them to be in pain. Pain indicates injury at the cellular level. Injuries must heal before further progress is possible.

Successful pointe work must be taught with a good dose of common sense. The old idea of “artists must suffer” doesn't make good dancers. The popular saying of “no pain no gain” is not correct.

Physical therapists agree that pain indicates injury at the cellular level. Injuries must have time to heal before progress can resume. Teach your dancers to appreciate and respect and care for their physical selves, the selves that can dance so beautifully, and that can learn so much more about ballet.

# The Twelve Week Rule:

## A Magic Rule That Really Does Work!

It takes the body just about 12 weeks. . .

- to complete any major repairs or major changes in structure, (such as broken bones or surgery).
- to break a bad habit.
- to create a good habit.
- to learn a new physical skill.
- to noticeably strengthen a muscle group.
- to put new academic information into long term memory, etc.

### THE TWELVE WEEK RULE

It works for ballet in learning new skills. When a new type of requirement is put upon the body, especially one that is not the usual, like pointe work, it requires some major reinforcing of the cells in the bones, ligaments and muscles, especially of the feet and ankles.

This is why it is so very important to go slow, and to not cause pain or discomfort during the first twelve weeks.

This is why home practice should not be done. This is why only one class per week should contain the pointe work regardless of how many classes the student is taking, or how strong they are in their non-pointe ballet skills.

### WE EXPERIENCE TWELVE WEEK PLATEAUS FOR STRENGTH AND FOR LEARNING

Weight trainers know that strength will show significant increase about every twelve weeks, but not much in shorter time

periods.

When I first tried this with a beginning pointe class, I could not believe how much easier the students found pointe work, and how much more they could do once that initial strengthening period was over.

Note: The student with higher arches will need a longer conditioning period, usually a second twelve weeks, sometimes more.

The Twelve Week Rule works both ways: it takes twelve weeks to break a bad habit, but it also takes twelve weeks to permanently create one.

Therefore, we need not panic at every little mistake students make. Ask them to improve one thing at a time. Give them time to fix that, then improve the next item.

### THE TWELVE WEEK RULE REALLY WORKS!

That's why:

1. Insist on correct weight placement on pointe in parallel position the first week or two. Other positions are an extension of the principle.
2. Use this rule with any dance skill. Present the new skill and the principles involved, then extend it and apply it for about twelve weeks. You will find that it becomes a more permanent learning.
3. All of the pointe steps must first be learned on demi pointe. Go slower if students seem to need it, but don't skip anything.

# Is The Student Ready For Intermediate Pointe?

Review these basic pointe exercises and steps to help determine your student's readiness for intermediate pointe.

## I. BASIC POINTE MOVEMENTS

\*Starred items are essential, and need to be well learned before joining the Intermediate Pointe class.

**\*1. Exercise for Weight Placement:** Sitting on a chair without shoes, showing straight strong toes and firm metatarsal joints; showing how the feet should be in the pointe shoes. Weight bearing toes must not extend or curl, whether in this exercise, or in the pointe shoes.

**\*2. Exercise for Weight Placement:** Standing, facing the barre. See notes above, but use only one foot at a time. Put pointe shoes on, then repeat this exercise.

**\*3. Step Up & Roll Down:** Feet parallel.

**\*4. Rises (elevés) on two feet:** In parallel, 1st, small 2nd, 2nd, open 5th.

**\*5. Relevés on two feet:** In parallel, 1st, small 2nd, 2nd, open 5th, 5th.

**\*6. Demi Detourné:** Relevé to 5th, half turn, pivoting between the feet to face the other way, (feet stay in place), demi plié.

**\*7. Duck Feet:** In 1st, and 5th. This strengthens the ankle action needed for

bourrées and other small fast footwork.

**\*8. Walking on Pointe:** In parallel, and in 5th. Sometimes called emboité.

**\*9. Bourrées:** In place, en avant, en tournant (bourrée couru).

**\*10. Echappé Relevé:** To a small 2nd, and to 2nd, and with an extra Plié Relevé in 2nd (Echappé in four counts).

The following steps should have been learned in the Beginning Pointe class, but can be perfected in the Intermediate Pointe class.

**11. Practice for Retiré:** Relevé to 5th, lift leg to Retiré devant, lower foot into 5th on pointe, lower into Demi Plié.

**12. Coupé to Retiré:** From Fondu on front leg, with back foot in Petit Retiré, step up on back foot & straighten knee, lifting front foot to Retiré Devant; step down onto front in the Fondu position again.

**13. Pas de Bourrée Pique Dessous (under) Finishing in Demi Plié:** From fondu on R with L foot in Demi Retiré derriere, step up on L to retiré devant, step R to 1st or 2nd on pointe bringing L to retiré devant, lower into 5th demi plié. Fondu on L leg and repeat the other way.

**14. Pas de Bourrée Pique Dessous (under) Finishing on one leg (fondu):** From Fondu on R with L foot in Demi Retiré

derriere, step up on L to Retiré Devant, step R to 1st or 2nd on pointe, bring L to Retiré Devant, lower onto L in Fondu.

**15. Posé to 5th, lower to Demi Plié or with straight knees stepping en avant, and de côté:** From Fondu on L, reach R forward or side, keeping knee straight, step R up on pointe (pushing off with L leg), then quickly close L to 5th derriere, lower to Demi Plié 5th.

**16. Chaîné Turns:** From Fondu, step up with Pose, do three turns (six steps of half turn each), lower into Demi Plié, 5th or 1st. Repeat.

**17. Quiet Walks:** Flat, or Demi Pointe.

## II. READY FOR INTERMEDIATE POINTE?

The Intermediate Pointe student must be able to use all three ways of getting up on pointe, with correct placement, and technical accuracy.

- A. Relevé, (on two feet).
- B. Posé, from a Fondu on one leg, reaching forward or side, keeping extended knee straight, step up on extended leg, close to 5th on pointe.
- C. Coupé, (step up into 5th from a fondu).

To be ready for Intermediate Pointe, the student should be able to show all of the beginning steps with correct placement, technical excellence to their ability, and sufficient strength and confidence.

Students should be able to quickly learn and perform an enchainement composed of two, three, or four of the basic pointe steps

listed on the preceding page.

Sloppy work in any of the beginning steps indicates that the student is not ready for intermediate pointe steps.

Exercises for Intermediate level can be a little longer than for beginning pointe. Fewer barre exercises will leave more energy for center work. Just be sure they are well warmed up.

### The barre is where:

- a. we warm up our ballet and pointe muscles, and
- b. where we learn and practice new skills—where we train our muscles.

### The center is where:

- a. we perform what we have learned at the barre, and
- b. where we add artistry and expression as we combine steps and movements into enchainements and dances.

## III. SYMPTOMS OF NOT BEING READY

A student is not ready if she is not advanced enough in the basics of ballet technique.

At a pointe workshop I gave to students a few years ago, many the following items were not correctly performed, even at the barre.

Basic technique was not clearly established:

- Demi plié—they were missing the correct use of it in sautés and other center steps; and the correct use of

muscles during the demi pliés and fondus at the barre.

- Battement Tendu—many students had no idea how the feet were supposed to work in a battement tendu—which is a technique basic to all ballet.
- They did not use the metatarsal joint in performing the battement tendu.
- They could not hold their toes straight when pointing, in tendus or sautés, even without ballet shoes.
- They could not find their correct weight placement on pointe.
- They did not know where the arabesque leg should be, or which muscle areas should be holding it there.
- They could not perform all three directions of the basic center steps such as balancé, glissade, assemblé, pas de bourrée, etc.
- They could not count music.

#### **IV. A FEW IDEAS TO TRY FOR CORRECTING THESE PROBLEMS.**

Wearing soft ballet shoes that are too tight will prevent students from being able to use the feet and toes in a technically correct manner. It will cause the toes to curl and buckle. The digital extensors will not be able to strengthen as they need to for pointe work.

When standing flat, the shoes must allow the toes to extend their full length, straight out from the metatarsal joint. When on demi

pointe, the toes should lay flat on the floor, and not curl or buckle.

To produce a fine dancer, the actual use of the feet and toes is far more important than the outward appearance of the ballet shoe!

Be sure the muscles of the feet and toes are doing a correct job, then fit the shoes to look as correct as possible. Be willing to sacrifice a “perfect look” for correct muscle action.

Get the [Ballet Is Spoken Here!](#) books, and teach the various ways basic center steps can be done. Put some of the less usual ways into enchainements and dances for your students.

Teach them to always have their hips centered over the supporting leg or legs. Then shoulders must be centered over hips, and head over shoulders.

They must use the force of gravity to assist them in dance, rather than fighting it. One way to describe correct centering of a person’s balance is to tell them to imagine a gentle rain is falling straight down, and they must “stand between the raindrops” so they won’t get wet.

**It’s more fun to be creative and different! And it builds better technique.**

For counting music, use some simple printed music to show them how the counting happens, and how the notes have different values. These variations in time value of the notes produce the interesting rhythms.

Have them clap the basic musical meters most often used in dance, 2/4, 3/4, 6/8, separate from the music. Then play a piece

of music and show them how to clap that rhythm while hearing the notes. A music teacher could be brought into class to help with this.

The centering of one's balance is very important at the barre because this is where the muscles learn what to do. Then, it can happen correctly in the center.

## **V. THOUGHTS ON UNDERSTANDING BALLET AND THE USE OF BALANCE**

Every step, every pose, every part of ballet is a whole body experience.

The barre is a friend to help, but not a crutch to hold you up. After learning something and perfecting it at the barre, practice it in the center so you can use it as you dance.



Balancing against gravity begins with the child's first step. Natural movements (walk, run, hop, jump, skip, gallop, slide, etc.) are designed to refine and improve that sense of balance.

Ballet training makes use of what nature has accomplished, and carries the development and use of balance to an unlimited, often unbelievable level.

As the dancer grows, and changes shape, the body must constantly adapt its kinesthetic response to gravity.

Sometimes growth spurts occur rapidly, and the dancer needs help in finding the new center of balance. This does not mean they are doing anything "wrong", but only that they have a new, more mature place from which to dance.

For posture and placement, and centering of balance to be perfect, there must also be balance between the various muscle groups.

Having good muscle balance reduces the likelihood of injury, and is especially important in intermediate and advanced work.

Taking time in some classes to do dance steps without turnout (free or natural movements) can help muscles to strengthen in their natural alignments, and maintain a safe strength relationship.

This can be a relaxing, fun time where the dancers can work on artistic expression, presentation, and staging. It also prepares them for a profession that today includes the performance of ballets in styles other than classical.

# Artistic Principles

Some great information to pass on to your pointe students.

## ARTISTIC SENSITIVITY

Eyes lead hands; hands lead feet. When arms and feet move, the arms start, feet follow, then they move together. In closing, feet will arrive first.

In transferring weight (travelling steps) eyes start, then shoulders, then hips will automatically move to overbalance the body in the direction of the movement as the legs reach out.

Learn to lead with the eyes and let the shoulders and hips follow for posés on pointe, and diagonal turns.

In spotting pirouettes and turns, the same principle applies: Eyes lead, they do not follow the movement! Spot into the turn rather than out of it. Turns in the direction of your master eye will be easier than those in the other direction.

Artistry is saying something with your dancing. If you feel it, and express that feeling in your movements, the audience will be able to feel it with you.

Learn secure habits of artistry, so that your work will always look finished, never insecure:

1. Decide on and practice some usual ways of using your head and arms with your

ballet and pointe steps. Practice these until they become habits, then your work will never look flat and uninteresting. Your teacher can help you with this.

2. Once you have these usual ways firmly in your movement memory, then use a few different ways for variety. Different ways of using your arms, hands, and head in ballet can convey different ideas, feelings and moods.

## CONTRAST IS AN ARTISTIC PRINCIPLE

If you are not always on pointe during the performance of a dance, it can make the pointe work stand out and look more important.

## MUSICAL SENSITIVITY

The music is a partner to the dancer. Artistic ballet involves a blending of the music and the movements.

Learn to hear and feel the musical meters: 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 6/8.

Match your movements to the music. To do this gracefully you will need to anticipate and control your balance, your center of gravity.

Dancer's counts, and musical counts—the numbers don't always match, but the rhythm and feel of the music should match!

## **A LEARNING PRINCIPLE**

Brains often understand things very quickly—muscles take a long time, and lots of repetition before the movement becomes smooth and secure, and permanently yours. You, the student, must assume responsibility for your own learning, and for doing sufficient practice and reinforcement of each new movement.

Practice long sequences in short sections or individual steps. Do this until each piece is secure—then blend everything together.

It takes time and determination to become excellent at ballet.

# Working Towards Excellence in Classical Ballet

## I. ARMS FOR CLASSICAL BALLET

Arms speak for the dancer. The classic line should convey a feeling of clean, free, open, strong, beautiful. Arms are a large part of the artistic effect of ballet.

We don't put arms "somewhere" just to get them out of the way. They must enhance and compliment what the legs and feet are doing. Always use first position in transitions.

We learn the usual ways of doing things—learn the rules with understanding—then, as a choreographer, teacher, or dancer we can use the rules or knowledgeably break them in order to say what we want to say.

## II. THE COMPLETE BALLET CLASS

It must be properly paced and arranged if it is to create progress.

- Mental pacing for best learning.
- Physical pacing for best use of muscles.
- Artistic pacing to provide a sense of performing.
- Emotionally positive in nature.

It is not always desirable to follow the traditional model of ballet work. Consider the learning desired, and how it can best be accomplished. Give an adequate warm-up, then teach something.

Overloaded brains cannot retain information, or sort it out effectively. Don't

try to do everything in every class—it is just not possible!

Responsibility for practice of things learned should rest on the student. Students age 10 and up should be expected to retain what is taught, to practice it on their own, and be able to reproduce it when asked without a complete session of re-teaching.

Eight and nine year olds can begin taking some responsibility. Teens must take responsibility for their own learning, once the lesson has been presented to them.

Have a single main objective for students to think about during an exercise; & when possible, a single main theme for a class (such as correcting the demi plié, fixing the arm positions, etc.).

Pace the class for best use of both muscles and brains. Alternate the use of the various muscle groups; alternate new and familiar movements and enchainements.

## III. ACCURACY IN PERFORMANCE

Accuracy in reproducing what is asked for only comes after many hours of work and practice. The performing art of ballet has no room for sloppiness or inaccuracies.

Simply knowing the choreography or the technique in the brain is not enough! The muscles must be thoroughly programmed to perform it correctly every time, so that the feelings and artistry of the dancer can

be free to give the performance to the audience.

#### **IV. ABOUT PLIÉS, RISES AND SAUTÉS**

The goal is the properly coordinated use of the muscles in the legs and feet. Heels down after jumps is not the goal, but a result of the goal happening. A good, useful depth of the demi plié is also a result of correct muscle use.

In the lower leg, a balance of strength is needed. The calf muscles are stronger because they help get us up in the air, or up in a relevé. The shin muscles are the ones that let us down easy into the demi plié. They are the plié muscles.

When coming down into a demi plié, the calf muscles must relax and let the shin muscles do their part of the work.

The purpose of grand pliés is to warm, flex, and gently stretch the dancing muscles in the legs. In all movements, but most especially in the grand plié, correct relaxation is just as important as correct effort.

Both the roll up and the snatching type of relevé are correct for pirouettes and relevés. The roll up type has been statistically proven to prevent many ankle injuries at the professional level. It is easier to do, and the safety factor seems well worth the small amount of extra study needed to find their balance.

#### **V. ABOUT SECOND POSITION**

The exact position is irrelevant. The goal is to use the intended muscle groups. Positions are correct because the right muscles are being used in the right proportions and sequences.

*The goal of classical training is always the correct muscle use, not the exact position, degree of outward rotation or height of the extended leg.*

Do a grand plié in 2nd. Feel the relaxation as well as the tension that occurs in hip and thigh area. Now do a développé in 2nd, duplicating this same muscle use!

#### **VI. ABOUT STRETCHING**

A better way is to keep the movement going, slowly towards the limit of flexibility, then slowly back to normal. Repeat, but no more than four times.

Keep the movement smooth and not jerky, so that the muscles gain the needed strength continuously throughout the range of flexibility.

Holding a stretch position longer than about ten seconds is not a good idea.

Stretch a muscle group to its limit of flexibility no more than four times in any one day.

Stretching, like strengthening, needs to be done slowly, producing noticeable results after about twelve weeks.

Trying to force the flexibility will result

in an overdevelopment (unnecessary enlargement) of the muscles involved, and probable damage to ligaments, muscles, and joints. The “stretch reflexes” are there to prevent injury turning them off is not safe.

The basic ballet barre exercises are designed to increase flexibility gradually, and safely. Be patient. Muscles increase in flexibility quite naturally when they are aligned correctly, and used in ways in which they were intended to be used.

Movement strengthens and movement increases flexibility. Both need to happen gradually, at the same time, for greatest effectiveness.

Muscles must be in use while being stretched if strength is to be maintained. Best stretching is done by the opposing muscle groups—not by forceful means. Stretching while muscles are relaxed can be very dangerous. Holding a stretched position for very long does not activate or strengthen the muscles which protect from injury.



# II ● Information for the Teacher

# Classwork for Pointe 2:

## Second or Third Year

There is more than enough work for one year! Choose the items you want to use; include those you plan to use in performances.

Use six to eight exercises (3 or 4 at the barre, the rest in the center, using a buddy barre if needed.) Three or four exercises can also be done at the end of the other ballet class each week, strength permitting. Don't let students do so much that they are stressing the muscles and joints. Keep the work comfortable for them, physically.

Exercises from **Pointe 1** not included here should continue to be a part of the classwork. These can be moved to the center, included in enchainements, or done only occasionally to maintain skills.

Choose exercises that contain movements you intend to use in their dances. Most classes will not learn all of these these exercises in one year.

### BARRE

#### 1. Rises

- a. Rise and lower 3x, tendu to 2nd; repeat in 2nd.
- b. Alternate version: rises through the feet in the two open fifth positions.

#### 2. Rises & Relevés

Facing barre, in 1st and 2nd.

1- Degagé R foot to 2nd.

2- Lower heel in 2nd.

3-4- Rise in 2nd.

5-6- Lower on straight legs.

7- Degagé R foot in 2nd.

8 Close to 1st.

1- Degagé R foot to 2nd.

2- Lower in demi plié, 2nd.

3- Relevé 2nd.

4- Demi plié 2nd.

5- Relevé 2nd.

6- Demi plié 2nd.

7- Degagé R foot in 2nd.

8- Close 1st.

Repeat with other foot.

### 3. Relevés

Simple relevés need to be included once a week all during the year. Use one of the echappé exercises in the other weekly class.

### 4. Echappés (use one version each week)

a. Eight Echappés to 2nd.

b. 3 Echappés not changing, then 1 changing; Repeat.

c. Facing the barre: 3 Echappés to fourth, then change feet.

d. Echappé en croix (facing the barre at first).

### 5. Relevés 2 to 1, Devant, Derriere

Facing the barre:

a. 1- Relevé 5th.

2- Relevé Devant.

3- Relevé Devant

4- Tendu to 2nd changing feet.

b. Same, with relevés derriere.

c. 1- Relevé 5th.

2- Relevé Devant.

3- Relevé Derriere.

4- Echappé to change feet.

### 7. Relevés 2 to 1, Passé

In both passé relevés, the foot is shown & held in the devant position, then closes devant or derriere to complete the passé movement.

# Thank you!

Thanks for taking [Pointe 2](#) for a test run!

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