

The Ballet Continuum - Session 1 Outline

General Points

1. Working definition of ballet for this SG: work choreographed for and presented by ballet companies.
2. 21st century ballet incorporates much from other forms of 19th and 20th century dance, including modern, jazz, tap, postmodern, and hip hop.
3. See more, enjoy more
4. All videos are excerpts from named ballet, not full productions.

Introductory video

Tides, Jennifer Archibald for Ballet West, 2020. Choreographer blends hip hop elements with ballet. Her signature moment comes in male section with drum-based music and forceful movement.

Then and Now Comparisons in Video Excerpts

1. Large Group

- a. **Swan Lake, Act 1.** Marius Petipa, 1895. Prince Siegfried's friends gather to celebrate his 21st birthday. They dance for him and bring him into part of the dance. The dance displays pure ballet technique: stretched legs, pointed feet, pointe shoes, aristocratic bearing, lifted and open upper body, precision corps work, and formation of patterns with lines, groupings, and weaving of dancers.
- b. **Giselle, Act 1.** Akram Kahn, 2016. New music, setting, and style for classic ballet. Class divide is between factory workers and factory owners. Worker are dancing for owners in this scene. Movement is blend of ballet, modern, and folk dance. Dancers move on stage in less formal arrangements.

2. Pas de Deux

- a. **Giselle, Act 2, traditional version.** Derived from Petipa's 1850 version. The duet highlights the illusion of weightlessness created using ballet techniques that enable balancing on pointe shoe, soft little jumps, leaps with outstretched legs, and partnering that lifts ballerina above the stage.
- b. **Migration, duet.** Alonzo King, 2006. Notable contrast with previous selection is the grounded nature of the dancing. There is a steady downward focus, deep knee bends with feet on the floor, movement close to or on the floor, and lack of lifts or individual balances. There are also many features of neoclassical ballet: turned in legs, flexed feet, acrobatic partnering.

3. Male Solo

- a. **Swan Lake, Act 1 Summary**, Marius Petipa, 1895. The pensive Prince Siegfried performs solo with slow tempo, controlled turns, many balances, and smoothly unfolding extensions of the leg. You see ballet technique in the long lines of body and leg, turned out legs, balanced placement of the body.
- b. **Ces Noms Que Nous Portons**, Kyle Abraham and Taylor Stanley, 2020. Program note explains that the piece is an expression of the difficulties of living with queerness and color. Notable features include the powerful conveying of emotions such as pain and uncertainty. There is a fusion of ballet steps and technique with not balletic arms flailing, upper body undulating, and pedestrian runs.

4. Boys being Boys

- a. **Romeo and Juliet**, Act 2, Kenneth MacMillan, 1965. This scene is the sword fight in which Tybalt kills Mercutio and Romeo kills Tybalt. The sword fights display fast foot work, low leaps, spins, and acrobatics, as well as ballet's traditional turnout and upright posture. The music enhances the staggering bravado with which Mercutio meets his death. The Mercutio dancer defines and maintains his character role throughout the scene.
- b. **Rodeo: Four Dance Episodes**, Justin Peck, 2015. In this segment for five male dancers the dynamic is calm. The group formations suggest community rather than division. The male partnering is supportive, rather than pugilistic. Most of the movement is quite balletic with recognizable positions and steps though the transitions from one to another are particularly lyrical and fluid. There are also modern dance features including the closeness to the floor and occasional rounded backs. We see a bit of Peck's trademark skill in moving dancers in and out of interesting and changing groupings.