

PITTSBURGH BALLET THEATRE

Ballet Dancer Hierarchy

In the United States ballet dancers in a professional company are divided into three ranks: **corps de ballet**, **soloist**, and **principal**. PBT has: 20 dancers in the corps de ballet, five soloists and six principal dancers. A ballet company's artistic director is the one who promotes dancers through the levels of the company. The salary of a dancer is also tied to their level.

Corps de ballet—This is the beginning level, and where most professional dancers start out. Most of a ballet company's dancers are at this level. These dancers usually are in the big group dances, working together as one unit. They tend to do the same choreography but in unison (like the Flowers or the Snowflakes in *The Nutcracker*) making complicated steps and movements at the same time. They also are cast in supporting roles, like the party-goers in *The Nutcracker*. Corps de ballet literally means the “body” of the ballet company—they form the backbone of the company.



Soloist—This is the middle level. If the artistic director sees that a dancer in the Corps de ballet really shines and excels technically, he or she may promote the dancer to the Soloist level. This dancer will get leading solo roles that show off their abilities. In *The Nutcracker* soloists often get roles like those in the Arabian, Spanish, and Russian dances.

Principal—This is the highest level a dancer can reach. A dancer can be promoted to principal dancer if they have top-notch technical ability and can combine that with beautiful artistry. That means they have to have great acting skills – for story ballets, like *The Nutcracker*, a dancer is playing a role like an actor would in a play or a movie. They also have to connect with the audience—they can't just be technically perfect, their movements also have to communicate emotions and ideas to the audience. The principal dancer gets the most important roles—in *The Nutcracker* it would be roles like the Sugar Plum Fairy, Cavalier, Marie, or the Nutcracker.

