

PBT Digital Spotlight Virtual Student Matinee

A survey of pas de deux
performances

PITTSBURGH BALLET THEATRE



Artists: Victoria Watford, Jake Unger
Photo: Kelly Perkovich



Guiding Questions

What is a pas de deux in ballet?

How do we evaluate dance?

How do we write critically about dance?

The Sleeping Beauty



Artists: Alexandra Kochis, Alejandro Diaz; Photo: Rich Sofranko

The Sleeping Beauty

- Composer: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
- Choreographer: Marius Petipa
- January 15th, 1890 at Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia

Wedding pas de deux

- Petipa refines the “stunt” work of Italian ballet dancers
- Technical standard of ballet choreography - “pure” ballet
- Multiple fish dives

Don Quixote



Artists: Christine Schwaner, Alexandre Silva; Photo: Duane Rieder

Don Quixote

- Composer: Ludwig Minkus
- Choreographer: Marius Petipa / Alexander Gorsky
- 1869 at Imperial Bolshoi Theatres in Moscow, Russia
 - Revived in 1902 by Gorsky in St. Petersburg

Grand pas de deux

- Petipa used his experience from living in Spain to incorporate Spanish dance themes and motifs
- Costuming helps convey story and themes
- Thrilling choreography and intense musicality

Ave Maria



Artists: Diana Yohe, Corey Bourbonniere; Photo: Rich Sofranko

Ave Maria

- Composer: Giulio Caccini
- Choreographer: Dwight Rhoden
- 1995 with Complexions Contemporary Ballet in New York City
 - Part of a larger ballet, *The Grapes of Wrath*

Pas de deux

- Contemporary ballet choreography with religious imagery
 - Repetition of prayer hands motion
- Two dancers supporting each other for complicated stunts

Breaking Down a Pas de Deux

- “step of two” → duet performance
- Became a performance staple in the late 19th century after Marius Petipa
- Involves close physical contact between partners
- Dancers on pointe
- Showcase dancer’s talents and hard work



Choreographer Marius Petipa.
Photo courtesy of Petipa Society.

Breaking Down a Pas de Deux

There are traditionally five sections of a grand pas de deux:

- Entrée (entrance)—a prelude in which the dancers greet each other—the mood here is one of formal pageantry;
- Adagio (slowly)—the couple dances together, showing off slow and extended technique and partnering;
- Two Variations (solos), one for each partner, which are intended to showcase skill and athleticism; typically the male dancer will perform first
- Coda, or conclusion, in which the partners dance together in a rousing finale.

Pas de Deux tips

Notice...

- When the music stops or pauses for a few beats!
- When dancers freeze in a pose!
- When dancers make eye contact with the audience and bow!

Listen for...

- Changes in the music tempo!
- Addition of new instruments!

**These moments can help
you distinguish the
different sections of a pas
de deux**

What is textual evidence in dance?

- Dancers
 - How do they move?
 - Posture?
 - Did they make eye contact with each other? The audience?
 - Movement
 - Which direction(s) did the dancers move across the stage?
 - When were moments of coordination or synchronization?
 - When did they spin or leap?
 - Were any moves impressive? Why?
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What is textual evidence in dance?

- Costumes
 - What colors? Any accessories?
 - What did the costume remind you of?
 - How did the costume move with the dancer?
 - Music
 - What is the tempo of the music?
 - What is the tone?
 - What instruments are used?
 - When does the music change?
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After watching

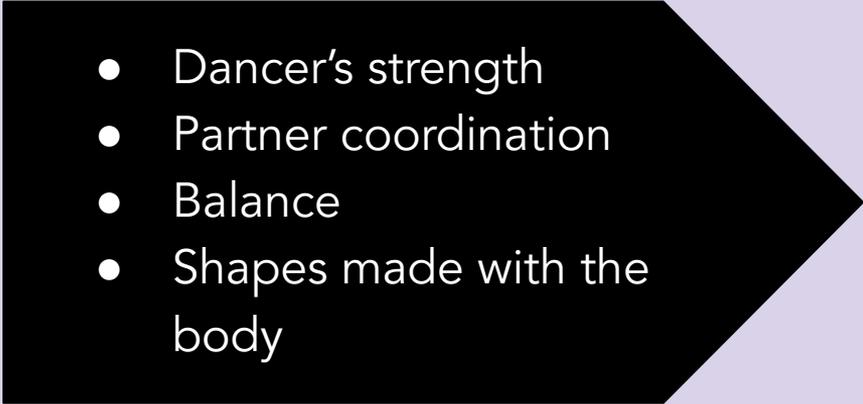
1. What part of the pas de deux was your favorite?
2. What was the most impressive skill? (This could be a stunt, spins, strength, etc.)
3. What did this performance remind you of?
4. How did this performance make you feel?
5. Who was your eye drawn to during the performance? Why?

Evaluating a Pas de Deux

Everyone who watches a pas de deux is welcome to have an opinion on it - so long as they can support it!

- Avoid words like “good” or “pretty” or “bad”
- Think about audience reactions, if you can hear them or if you had a strong reaction
- Pick a moment or two that was very impactful

Consider...

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- Dancer's strength
 - Partner coordination
 - Balance
 - Shapes made with the body

Evaluating a Pas de Deux

When writing a review, be sure to include

- Context: When did you see it? What type of performance?
- Brief description of the story and aesthetic elements
- A claim about the performance
- Evidence you observed for support
- Conclude with a recommendation!
 - Who should see this and why?

Classical Ballet

- graceful, flowing movements
- classical form: turn-out of the legs and pointe work
- balance and symmetry of the body and also of the image that the audience sees on stage
- ethereal quality
- emphasis on story ballets and narrative
- elaborate sets and costumes

Contemporary Ballet

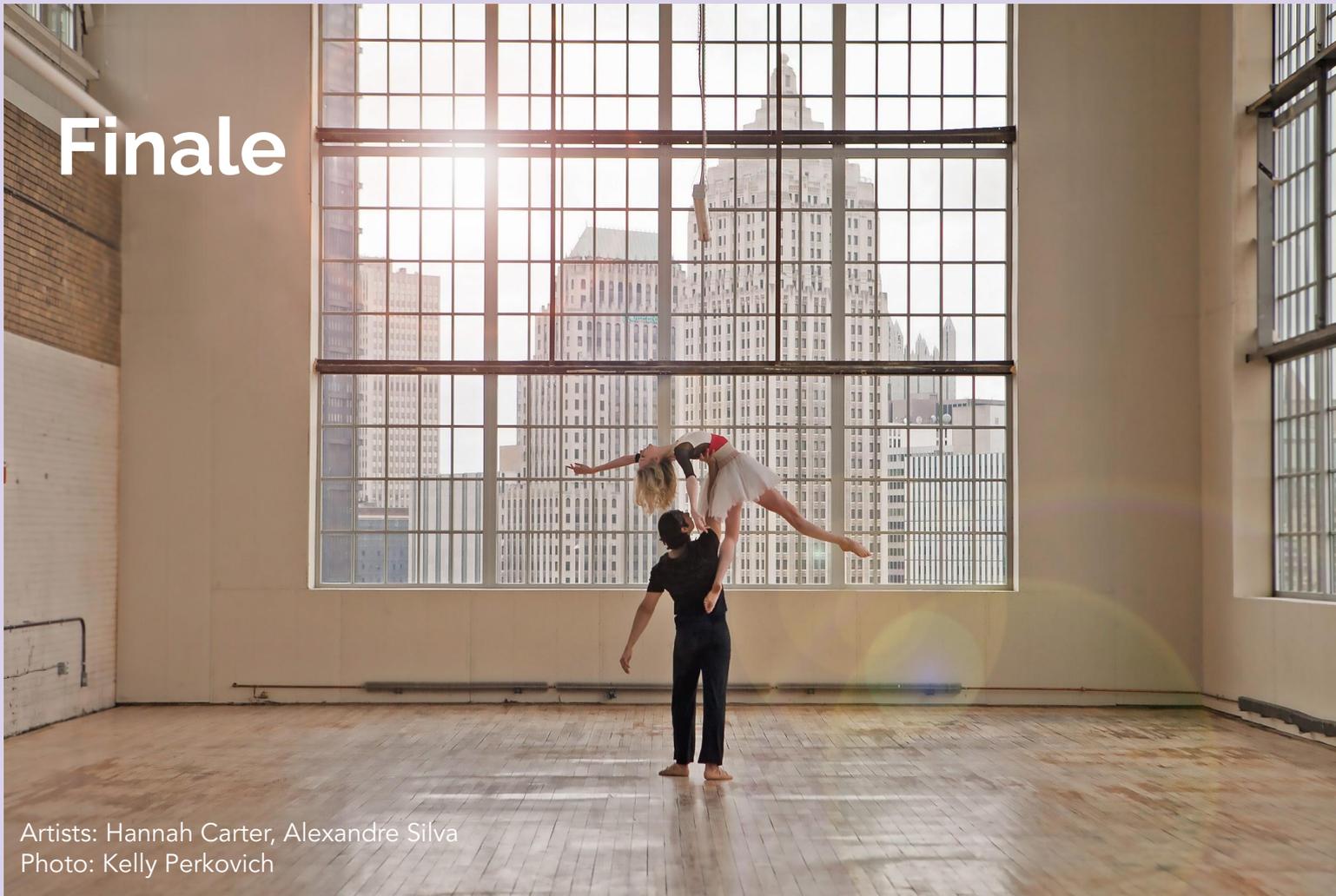
- floor work - groundedness
- Turn-in (rather than out) of the legs
- greater range of movement and body line
- pointe shoes but also bare feet

Evaluating a Contemporary Pas de Deux

1. How did this performance make you feel? How was this feeling different from watching a classical pas de deux?
2. Who or what was your eye drawn to during the performance?
3. What themes or stories are being told? How do you know?
4. What technical dance skills are highlighted? What is similar to classical ballet?

*Classical ballet and contemporary ballet are not at odds with one another. Be sure to review one form without dismissing the other.

Finale



Artists: Hannah Carter, Alexandre Silva
Photo: Kelly Perkovich