

Analyze the “Wedding Pas de Deux” for Aurora and the Prince (Act 3) - Middle and High School

PA Standard - 9.1: Production, Performance and Exhibition of Dance, Music, Theater and Visual Arts



Resources:

[Royal Ballet video on YouTube](#)

Characteristics of Classical Ballet:

- Stresses prescribed steps and academic technique
- Dancing on pointe
- Turn-out of the legs and hips
- Upright torso
- Graceful, flowing movements
- Symmetry
- Precision, exactness, clarity of movement
- Athleticism

Artists: Lucius Kirst, Hannah Carter; Photo: Kelly Perkovitch

Activity

1. Review classical ballet characteristics. Watch the video and discuss how the movement that we see in the pas de deux can be characterized as classical ballet. Give specific examples.
2. Classical ballet pas de deux have a standard structure - the entrance (featuring both dancers), variations (or solos) by each dancer individually, and a coda, where dancers return to dance together once again. Have students identify each section and the characteristics that each dancer displays.
3. Musicality is the ability of the dancer to express the notes of the music with their movement. Where do we see examples of this in the pas de deux?

More information if you'd like to dive deeper!

Breaking Down a Pas de Deux

The phrase pas de deux translates roughly into “step of two.” This duet performance was originally created in the early 18th century and would often feature dancers performing identical steps as the opening act of operas and ballets. As the form progressed, and with help from the choreographer Marius Petipa in the late

19th century, this section of the ballet became more climactic. The dance began to involve closer physical contact with ballerinas on pointe performing more sophisticated moves with the assistance of their partners.

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
- the Coda, or conclusion, in which the partners dance together in a rousing finale.

The Coda serves as the culmination of many of the themes and movements from the adagio and variations. The movements are often combined with energetic motifs in the music. The Coda involves many jumps, acrobatic lifts, and pirouettes to finish the pas de deux with a climax. Each grand pas de deux is unique to a specific ballet and choreographer and is considered an honor to perform.

Pas de deux tips:

- To help distinguish the sections of the dance from one another, look for moments when the music stops for a few beats. The dancers may be frozen in a pose for a few seconds before the next section begins.
- Listen for distinctions in the music! When does the music change tempo dramatically? When are new instruments (such as heavy percussion) introduced? This can signal a musical shift to parallel a new section of the pas de deux.
- Watch for when the dancers turn to make eye contact with the audience. These few seconds between sections of the pas de deux allow the dancer a moment to breathe and the audience has time to share their appreciation before the next section!

Here's how this structure works in *The Sleeping Beauty*

This pas de deux occurs during the third act of the ballet and is known as the Wedding Pas de Deux.

Entrée: about the first two minutes of the 11-minute dance. Aurora and Desiré meet with formal bows and deliberate control. Desiré supports Aurora while he rotates her on pointe (called a promenade) and in arabesque, her leg extended at hip height, parallel to the floor.

Adagio: Aurora's movements are delicate and fluid yet exact; in his choreography Desiré is enamored with Aurora. The music is very grand in this section. The choreography is deceptively difficult, with multiple lifts and "fish dives." In a fish dive, as Aurora pirouettes and dives toward the floor Desiré grabs her around the waist with one arm, and his other arm and body mirror Aurora's downward angle. This is a very tricky maneuver, requiring strength and skill, which is done three times in a row! The music lightens and at the end of the adagio section Desiré helps Aurora up from a delicate position on the floor, she stands up on pointe (very difficult as well!) and finishes in a fish dive.

Variations: Desiré's solo is first, with acrobatic leaps and airborne turns. Notice the airborne choreography for the male dancer that is well controlled but full of open arms and rapid spins. Aurora's solo is second, with delicate steps that should be timed perfectly with the violin music, and slow graceful port de bras (movement of the arms). Notice that as she travels across the stage she motions with her arms from low to medium to high level - these motions tell the story of her growing up from a baby, to a young girl, to now a princess. She finishes by traveling in an arc around the stage while turning 20 or more times.

Coda: begins when Desiré enters the stage after Aurora's variation. The music is livelier here and the dancers rejoin each other, confirm their love with movements that often mirror each other. Toward the end the dancers leap across the stage toward each other, crossing in perfectly-timed grand jetés - high leaps with each dancer hovering above the stage in a split at the top of the leap.