

**COLLABORATION NURTURES LEARNING ABOUT THE ARTS:**  
**Oregon Ballet Theatre and Portland Art Museum join together for Arts Education**

During the past year, Oregon Ballet Theatre and Portland Art Museum's Education and Outreach departments have engaged in a stimulating collaboration surrounding OBT's French show, highlighting ballets created to French music and PAM's exhibit entitled *The Dancer: Degas, Forain, and Toulouse-Lautrec*. Realizing the collaboration has taken planning, luck, endurance, and a willingness to be open to the ideas of others. OBT's Dance Historian, Linda Besant has been actively engaged in the training of PAM docents so that they might know more about the world of ballet captured within the art. Both organizations have shared in writing curriculum and making presentations to increase understanding of our art forms. I am pleased to have contributed a lesson plan for Portland Art Museum's Teacher Packet for *The Dancer*.

We believe that this effort will enhance your teaching experience. We hope you will see our performance and go to the museum with a deeper knowledge. Within this study guide you will find websites that reveal events and activities that highlight our collaboration. There you will find links to lessons and resources and even a link to a KGW TV spot, which merges OBT's Alison Roper and the art! Enjoy!

~Kasandra Gruener, Director of Education and Outreach with Linda Besant, Dance Historian

**BALLET IN PERFORMANCE**

**PAS DE DEUX PARISIEN** (Léo Delibes / Christopher Stowell - World Premiere)

*Pas de Deux Parisien* is a virtuoso duet for a ballerina and a danseur, using the terms as they are meant to be used, as titles reserved for dancers of the greatest achievement. The *pas de deux* highlights its two dancers, flattering their talents and showcasing their artistry. In addition, it honors the music of Léo Delibes (1836-1891), a French composer revered at the Paris Opera during the last half of the nineteenth century for the ballet *Coppélia*, and his opera, *Lakmé*. This work uses music from Delibes' ballet *Sylvia*.

For *Pas de Deux Parisien*, choreographer Christopher Stowell employs the structure of the *grand pas de deux*. In ballet, this title refers to a duet that follows a certain form, developed by the great choreographer Marius Petipa in *The Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*. A *grand pas de deux* always opens with an *entrée*, followed by a partnered slow section called an *adagio*, where the *danseur's* job is to showcase the *ballerina* in beautiful balances, lifts and turns. The structure concludes with dazzling solos, passed back and forth between the two dancers, and a shared finale called a coda.

Christopher is a choreographer who is very good at finding the essence of ideas from earlier eras of ballet and turning that into choreography that is both interesting and beautiful to today's audiences. Here, he goes back to the time when Edgar Degas was just beginning to create some of the artwork that is on display at the Portland Art Museum. In the 1860s and 1870s, the ballet stars of the Paris Opera were the Parisian celebrities of their day. Photographs were just beginning to be available as popular culture, and fans collected *cartes-de-visite* of dancers, similar to the way that people today collect trading cards of sports stars. Fans named hairdos and desserts after their favorite dancers. In *Pas de Deux Parisien*, the *ballerina* and *danseur* dazzle us with that same *bravura* star quality.



Photo by Andy Batt



ABOVE: A sheet of *cartes-de-visite* of ballerina Fanny Cerrito. This sheet would have been cut into 8 cards. Students can download and print their own *cartes-de-visite* featuring OBT dancers at [www.thedancerpdx.org](http://www.thedancerpdx.org). Click on "Educational Resources" menu link and scroll down to "OBT Student Performance Series."

**What's inside this Study Guide?**

Letter to Educators ..... 1  
Ballet in Performance ..... 1-2  
Ballet in the Classroom ..... 3-4  
Websites ..... 4

## BALLET IN PERFORMANCE, CONTINUED

**ZAIS** (Jean-Philippe Rameau / Christopher Stowell - *Company Premiere*)

The ballet *Zais* takes its name from a court pageant called an *opéra-ballet* composed for Louis XV of France by Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764). Rameau was the son of an organist, and began to learn music even before he could read or write. Music was always in his mind, so he was frequently in trouble at school for disrupting class with his singing. Rameau wasn't engaged to be a court composer until he was in his 50s. He is famous for writing two books about music theory. As he formed his ideas about harmony, he brought to bear the scientific and the philosophical ideas of the 1700s, to the extent that he was known as the Isaac Newton of music. Dancers loved Rameau's music for ballet because it is so rhythmic and fits naturally to choreography.

Although Rameau lived at the same time as Vivaldi and Bach, his music is not as well known today. Christopher Stowell, the choreographer of *Zais*, discovered this music when he was on vacation in France and purchased some cds in the gift shop at Versailles. As a choreographer who is often inspired by music, Christopher is always looking for new sources. When he listened to *Zais*, Christopher "loved that the music was 260 years old but it felt contemporary and shocking, even a little bit menacing. That juxtaposition intrigued me right away." In fact, the Overture to *Zais* was meant to be startling. It depicts the chaos of the four elements just before the creation of the universe.

In *Zais*, Christopher takes ideas from an earlier time and transforms them into contemporary movement. In the part of *Zais* that you will see, the *corps de ballet* dancers move in shifting patterns. Christopher found inspiration for



Christopher Stowell's *Zais* is laced with traces of Baroque ballet as it was performed at Versailles during the reign of Louis XV.

those patterns in the formal gardens while he was visiting the ornate grounds at Versailles. The dancers' costumes are pared down versions of the elaborate costumes worn by dancers during the Baroque era when Rameau composed this music.

**BOLERO** (Maurice Ravel / Nicolo Fonte - *World Premiere*)

When Christopher Stowell first asked Nicolo Fonte to choreograph a *Bolero* for OBT's French program, Nicolo said, "I'm not interested." He was put off by the many associations we have with Ravel's greatest hit—the movie *10*, the Torvil and Dean ice dance, Frank Zappa, Blue Man Group—and he wondered how he could make *Bolero* relevant to ballet in 2008. Then he listened to the music. Christopher called back and asked again, and Nicolo said, "Well, it's great music. I'll do it."

Though *Bolero* has come down through history as French composer Maurice Ravel's most admired composition, its popularity caused Ravel great irritation. He called it "orchestra tissue without music." The more popular it grew, the more he disliked it, but *Bolero* is indeed masterful because of its orchestration. The piece is built of a rhythmic *ostinato*, or phrase that is repeated over and over, with a plaintive melody repeated above it. *Bolero* achieves its exciting climax entirely by adding instruments step by step, in very unusual and colorful combinations such as introducing the piccolo and the celesta together to sound like a calliope.

Ravel (1875-1937) composed *Bolero* for the Ida Rubenstein Ballet in Paris in 1928. The original ballet was set as if in a Spanish tavern. This unimaginative interpretation disappointed Ravel, who had in mind a stage set as if outside a factory, with the rhythmic *ostinato* representing the noise of machinery. Choreographer Nicolo Fonte adopted Ravel's idea.

Fonte is a young American choreographer, born and trained in New York, who had most of his career as a dancer in Europe and has since made acclaimed ballets for many companies throughout Europe and the United States. His ideas require dancers who are trained in classical ballet, but who can also leap outside the bounds of ballet's movement vocabulary in every imaginable direction. The notion of a *Bolero* with scenery inspired by factory mechanics suits Fonte's work well. Thus corrugated metal panels, like those we can buy at Home Depot for roofing or siding, hang throughout the stage space.



A 3-D rendering of Michael Mazzola's scenic concept for Nicolo Fonte's *Bolero*.

"The panels are metaphorical for me," Nicolo says, "like having our guards up. As the music gets richer and stronger, we become more open. The panels fly up, the dancing becomes freer, and we reveal more of who we are as people. How interesting that I'm using a very mechanical piece of music to explore something basic about what it is to be human: Can we let our guards down? And what might happen if we do?"

### VOCABULARY

- *Pas de deux* - (Fr.) a dance for two people
- *Ballerina* - (Fr.) a female dancer of the highest achievement
- *Danseur* - (Fr.) A male dancer of the highest achievement
- *Corps de ballet* - (Fr.) the dancers that perform as a group

## BALLET IN THE CLASSROOM

Explore two lessons which link paintings by Edgar Degas and Jean-Louis Forain to what students see when they attend an Oregon Ballet Theatre performance. Go online to [www.thedancerpdx.org](http://www.thedancerpdx.org). Click on "Educational Resources" menu link and scroll down to "OBT Student Performance Series" to print transparencies of the paintings.

### 1. AT THE THEATRE

In this painting we see the *corps de ballet* dancing on the stage. The *corps de ballet* is a large group of dancers that dance together, often creating patterns with the directions that they dance in, often with *unison movement*. Degas created this work to make it seem as if we are in the box seats peering down at the dancers.



Theater Box, Edgar Degas 1885

#### ACTIVITY: WHERE DO YOU LIKE TO SIT?

Theaters are created so that most of the audience has a clear view of the stage. Some people like to sit very close to see the dancers' faces and even hear their breathing—but they could miss out on the floor patterns. Other people like to sit in the balcony so that they can see the patterns, but they cannot see the dancers' faces very well.

Ask students to think of times when they have seen patterns of movement from above the action—like being in the bleachers at a basketball game, or watching black ants follow each other back and forth across the sidewalk. What happens if you are very close, like being on the court at a basketball game or lying on the ground at eye level with the ants? Think about what it is like if you are very high or very close. How does that change your experience? Remind students to notice the seating arrangement in the Keller Auditorium—are there box seats? Ask students where they would most like to sit if they could choose.

#### AT THE KELLER AUDITORIUM:

In *Zais* and *Bolero*, you will see the *corps de ballet* performing unison movement and *floor patterns*. A floor pattern occurs in a dance when the viewer imagines patterns and designs as dancers travel across the stage, as if the dancers were painting lines with their feet across the stage.

In *Zais* the dancers remind us of being in a king and queens court. The partners are very formal and precise as they dance together. They bow to each other and dance in formation-like patterns. In *Bolero* you will see the dancers do floor patterns, too. But, just as the music is very different, so are the patterns.

The other work that you will see is called *Pas de Deux Parisien*. This work is a *pas de deux* (a dance for two) performed to music of Léo Delibes. The dancers in the Degas painting could have been dancing to the same music, as it was popular during the late 19th century.

#### VOCABULARY:

- *Box seats* - seats in the front and sides of the first balcony, often the most expensive seats, allowing the audience to be very close to the stage and still see the designs of the choreography.
- *Choreography* - the steps and movement designs of a dance.
- *Unison movement* - movement that is done in the same way at the same time.
- *Floor pattern* - the imaginary design made by the dancers as they move across the stage.



Dancer in Her Dressing Room, c.1890 Jean-Louis Forain

### 2. POINTE SHOES

In this painting we see a dancer, sitting, bent across the yards of *tulle* in her *tutu*. When you come to the performance at the Keller Auditorium you will see dancers wearing this type of long tutu as they make poses inspired from the paintings in Portland Art Museum's *The Dancer* exhibit. You will also see the women dancing *en pointe*. *En pointe* is a French phrase meaning to dance on the tips of the toes.

In this painting the dancer is tying the ribbons of her *pointe* shoe. *Pointe* shoe design continues to improve, but certain traditions remain. *Pointe* shoes come without ribbons attached so the dancer must sew hers on. She must break them in to suit her feet and she must tie them on in such a way that the ends of the ribbons will not stick out or come undone during the performance. The ribbons are wrapped around the ankle (never up the lower leg!) and knotted on the inner side, just as the dancer in Forain's painting is doing.



#### ACTIVITY: THIS IS A POINTE SHOE AND THE FOOT INSIDE!

Observe the picture of the *pointe* shoe above and the x ray of a dancer standing *en pointe*. Each pair of *pointe* shoes is made to special specifications for each dancer. Principal dancers may use 1 or 2 pairs of *pointe* shoes per performance because they dance so extensively on them. They may be able to reuse the shoes for rehearsal, but usually they are just "dead" after that show. Some of the *corps* members who have smaller roles in the performance will make their shoes last a little longer. Oregon Ballet Theatre buys 2,500 *pointe* shoes a year. They are hand made in England and shipments have to be ordered long in advance so that the dancer has what she needs. It takes a lot of planning and money to keep dancers in *pointe* shoes! Dancing *en pointe* also takes a lot of practice. Girls take years of classes before their teachers allow them to try it out and women continue to perfect their *pointe* work in their daily class. Warning!! People should never stand on the tips of their toes without proper training. It is very dangerous, especially for young people whose bones and muscles are still growing.





# BALLET IN THE CLASSROOM, CONTINUED

## VOCABULARY

- *Tulle* - (Fr.) a special, soft netted fabric
- *Tutu* - (Fr.) a skirt made of layers of gathered tulle. Nowadays the length varies from just above the ankle to very short and sticking out at the hip. During the time of these artworks tutus were raising up to knee height. Seeing the knee was a scandalous thing at this time and women wore bloomers under the tutu to properly cover the knee. (But we can see in Degas' *The Ballet Class*, that the dancers probably pushed them up to move easier.)
- *Pointe shoe* - (Fr.) a special shoe designed for a dancer to dance on the tips of her toes.
- *En pointe* - (Fr.) To dance on the tips of the toes in pointe shoes.

## WEBSITES

-  [www.thedancerpdx.org](http://www.thedancerpdx.org) - Click on "Educational Resources." Scroll down to "OBT Student Performance Series" to download the on-line teacher study guides. OBT *cartes-de-visite* are available for download and printing for your students.
-  [www.freedusa.com](http://www.freedusa.com) - OBT dancers wear pointe shoes made by Freed of London. Check out their website to see the shoes up close. Here is how to get there: After the Introduction, enter the site, click on "Ballet" then "Shoes" then "Ladies and Girls" then "Pointe Shoes". There is a 3-D button on this page which will display the shoes at all angles.

## CONTENT STANDARDS

This Student Performance Series and Study Guide provide opportunity for engaging in Oregon Content Standards for the Arts, especially:  
*Historical and Cultural Perspective:* Understand relationships of works of art to their social, historical, and cultural context, and the influence of arts on individuals, communities and cultures. (AR.05.HC.03, AR.08.HC.03, AR.CM.HC.03)

PASS Criteria: Standard B.3  
*Aesthetics And Criticism:* Respond to and analyze works of art, based on essential elements, organizational principles and aesthetic criteria. (AR.03.AC.01, AR.05.AC.01, AR.08.AC.01, AR.CM.AC.01)  
PASS Criteria: Standard A.1

## Frequently Asked Questions about BALLET

### Why do the guys wear tights?

Almost every activity requires a special uniform of some kind. Just as football players, wrestlers, and baseball players wear stretchy material to help them move with flexibility and speed, ballet dancers often wear stretchy tights so they are able to leap, kick, and stretch as they dance. Another reason tights are worn is so the audience can see the incredible leg muscles that allow them to jump so high.

### How do the ballet dancers stand on their toes?

Female ballet dancers wear special shoes called "pointe shoes" to help them achieve dancing on the tips of their toes. Pointe shoes are hard at the ends, and are handmade with layers of satin, glue and leather. Dancers must take several years of ballet lessons before they are allowed to wear pointe shoes. With hard work and good training to develop strong ankles and feet, most young ballet students begin working *en pointe* at age 11 or 12.

### This ballet has no plot! Or does it?

Some do, and some don't. Ballets with plots, like *The Nutcracker*, are called story ballets. There are also abstract ballets, with a focus on movement instead of a specific story. Abstract ballets are meant to evoke ideas or emotions, and the audience can interpret them many different ways.

### How old are the dancers?

Oregon Ballet Theatre's professional company members range in age from 18 to 34, but most are in their early-to-mid-20s. A few of the apprentices, however, are still in high school. All of the dancers began studying ballet when they were children, as it takes many years of dedication to become a professional ballet dancer.

### How often do they practice?

Ballet dancers take class every morning for 1.5 hours, and then they rehearse all day. They have Sundays and sometimes Saturdays off, and they have a lunch break. Dancing is their full-time job.

### Where are the dancers from?

Oregon Ballet Theatre dancers come from all around the world: Japan, Russia, Albania, and different areas within the United States. There are dancers from Nebraska, California, New York, and several who grew up right here in Portland.

### APPLAUSE

**DO** clap after a really spectacular movement. Laugh if the situation onstage is funny. Applaud and yell "Bravo!" at the end.

**DON'T** boo, whistle, hiss or make noise during the performance. It is distracting and disrespectful of the performers and to your neighbors in the audience.

### FOOD

**DO** eat before you get to the theater if you think you might get hungry before the performance is over.

**DON'T** bring food or gum into the seating area. It makes noise, trash, and distractions.

### TALKING

**DO** wait. Make a note on your program or a piece of paper if you want to remember something. Tell your friend at intermission or after the ballet is over.

**DON'T** whisper or discuss things with other people during the performance. Your friends may want to listen to the music or pay attention to the dancers' movement or the story.

### DRESS & BACKPACKS

**DO** dress neatly as a sign of respect to the artists and the theater.

**DON'T** wear over-powering perfume, big hats, or jingly bracelets. Leave backpacks at school. If you must bring one, you'll be asked to leave it in the lobby.

### CELL PHONES, CAMERAS, IPODS, MP3 PLAYERS, ETC.

**DO** relax when the lights in the house (seating area) get dark. Sit back and enjoy the live performance with your eyes, ears, and imagination.

**DON'T** bring electronic devices into the theater. The noise and clicking can be distracting to your neighbors, and camera flashes can be dangerous to the dancers.

Please direct any questions to:  
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