

**This is a series of articles I wrote for *Gotta Dance!*, a regional dance publication of the Charles Stewart Dance Institute in Redding, CA, from 1987 to 1989.**

Articles include:

The Training of Male Dancers.

How to Choose a Dance Teacher.

What Does it Take to be a Professional Dancer?

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### **The Training of Male Dancers.**

The day of “Ballet is Woman,” as once said by Balanchine, is gone forever. The stellar roles of Nureyev, Baryshnikov and Godunov and their phenomenal success and breath taking virtuosity have opened vast possibilities for the male dancer. They reflect the growing need for new training techniques to enable male dancers to realize their full potential.

To reflect those new training techniques, classical dance is best taught to boys and girls in separate classes.

In the first two years, from ages nine to eleven, this difference is not very noticeable, but later it becomes quite marked. Girls, especially teenagers from twelve to sixteen, already show a desire to be graceful and elegant, the boys of the same age show a certain boyishness and awkwardness.

At the age of seventeen to nineteen, the young boy begins to acquire a certain masculinity and coordination while girls at the same age are already much more independent, assured and active. While the grace of the girls is most appreciated, the male pupil must move in a way natural to his age, while not being hindered in his technical development. During the lesson, the teacher must direct each one of them, the

uncouth as well as the elegant, to avoid that gracefulness to welcome in the girls and so unwelcome in males.

Boys and girls in all classes must be reared in good taste, musicality, nobility of movement, artistry, etc., but in accordance with their age group. Since the basis for the male performing style is laid in those early years, the appearance of effeminate mannerisms may be the result of wrong teaching at this early stage.

It must be remembered that a too refined performing style that copies the grace of women contradicts the nature of the male dance and only gives rise to effort and falseness, which is contrary to the realistic school of Soviet classical ballet.

With boys, the movements may be the same but it has more resolve, physical force, simplicity, terseness and vigor in performance. This translates into training for lighter jumps, more turns and beats.

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### **How to Choose a Dance Teacher.**

The days when a foreign named dancer could open a school of dance and be guaranteed success are over. Today's teachers are better educated and are in many cases credentialed.

There is no one right way to evaluate a potential dance teacher. The items to consider are -- you and your child's expectations and the teacher's background as a teacher, performer and student.

If your interest in dance is casual, then a teacher who has rudimentary dance knowledge would suffice. If you have professional objectives, then the teacher must have a mastery of the required skills and must have been recently involved in the dance scene. Teachers who have not danced or taught professionally within the past few years would be out-of-touch with what is being sought of the new crop of dancers.

Besides professional experience as a performer and teacher, most all universities have programs for the credentialing of dance teachers. A credential guarantees a certain level of technical proficiency.

Another consideration is whether your child is a boy or girl. Boys should train predominantly with a male teacher. Girls should train equally with male and female teachers. Generally, male teachers ask for greater effort in jumps, turns and batterie since the male repertoire requires such skill. This strength is of equal importance to female dancers.

It should be emphasized that all advanced students should study simultaneously with a number of qualified teachers. This will prepare them for the crucial auditioning process during their late teens and early twenties.

The final consideration is simply how well the teacher communicates to the student. Each of us has learned dance through our own bodies. Thus, different angles or approaches work better for different people. Try out a teacher. No credential or past laurels of a teacher will insure a good working relationship with all students. If the class does not work for you, try another teacher. It is to your best interest to find what works for you.

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## **What Does it Take to be a Professional Dancer?**

### **Part I**

To succeed at dance, a dancer must have a coincidence of three contributing factors -- skill, timing and opportunity.

In the world of classical ballet, most female professional dancers started their training at the early age of 8 or 9 years old. At that age, they usually take 2 or 3 classes per week. By age 11 or 12, they increase their class schedule to 5 or 6 times per week, culminating with at least 1, usually 2 classes each day around age 15.

At the age of 15, girls should have started attempting major dance company and company school auditions. It is also the time to start taking classes from more than one teacher. If the student has trained with only one teacher, the chances of success are diminished since they will probably be awkward during an audition.

Most professionals obtain their first dancing contracts around age 17 or 18. Balanchine once said that a girl is an "old woman" by the age of 22. It may seem unfair that dance is so youth-oriented, but that is how it is.

It is important to realize that daily training is the norm for professionals from age 15 through their entire careers. Remember, if you are unwilling to make the same commitments, thousands of others will. You are in charge of developing your skills.

### **Part II: Development of Opportunities.**

In Part I of this series, the need for daily training with a variety of teachers for the serious student of dance was presented. This need for at least one daily class is the normal regimen for the professional dancer. Tens of thousands of dancers are willing to make this effort, thus to seriously pursue this goal, you must make a similar effort.

The student has absolute control over his or her training. But in obtaining jobs, this is not as direct. Other persons are making the decisions thus a coincidence of your being at right place at the right time is paramount.

The first step in developing opportunities is to expose yourself. Go to auditions, many, many auditions. Psychologically this can be tough since you will surely experience rejection. Try thinking of the audition simply as a free class. If you get the job, great, but if you don't, you lost nothing and you got a free class from a top-notch professional. Also remember that when a company auditions, it is looking for particular people, not necessarily the best dancer. This may seem strange but if you need a corps dancer of particular height, build and style to fit an existing role and costume, the unique superior dancer would stand out and you would not hire him.

Most ballet and modern companies have schools associated with them. A good way of maximizing your chances at those jobs is to: (1) find out when the audition is going to held, (2) find out who is going to conduct the audition and make the decisions, and (3) take daily classes from this person for a 3 to 4 week period before the audition. This will make yourself known, give you better insight as to what the auditioner is looking for and indicate what your chances are.

For TV, Broadway, Las Vegas, etc. a similar approach is possible. Again, find out when the audition is to be held and by whom. Most choreographers also teach at local rehearsal facilities. Find out where they are teaching and go take many classes before the

audition. A special note concerning these types of shows. Many of them do not hold auditions but instead the choreographers pull from their students or friends. Find out who the working choreographers are and take many classes from them.

Some good sources of audition dates are the guilds--Equity, SAG, AFTRA, AGMA telephone hot-lines, the professional papers-- Variety, Drama Log, Dance Magazine, the large professional schools, and of course other dancers.

Remember, being a great dancer is not enough. Those who hire must know you exist. Go out and audition, take class from these important people. Be seen.

### Part III: Differences for Men and Women.

In Part I of this series, the need for daily training with a variety of teachers for the serious student of dance was presented. Part II reviewed ways to create job opportunities by getting out there and being seen at auditions and classes taught by those who are in the position to hire dancers.

Historically, the number of female dancers has far exceeded the number of male dancers by a factor 20:1. This is still true today. Consequently, it is far more difficult for a woman than for a man to get a dancing job. Similarly, at the corps level, the expertise expected for men is much lower than that for women.

Principal dancers comprise a select few within any company. Since principal dancers perform together, both sexes must have equally high skill. Particularly for dancing teams, if either dancer is significantly lower in skill than the other, many jobs will be lost.

With the advent of the male superstar such as Baryshnikov, Bujones, Nureyev, more and more has been expected of the male dancer. No longer is the male dancers just there to support the female. The male soloist and star must have impeccable technique and dazzling bravura. Male superstars have far greater incomes and opportunities to perform, but more is expected of them.

Balanchine once said that a female dancer is "an old woman" by the age of 22. Dance has always been an art form practiced by the young. Combine this societal predication towards youth and that there are an excess of females in dance, women must start their initial ballet training around age 7, many years before that of most males. Also their careers are usually shorter than males because of the crippling pain from wearing toe shoes daily.

Women dancers have more competition and must start training earlier than men and will have harder times finding work, but to truly excel, both sexes must dedicate themselves equally to their art.

### Part IV: Jazz Dancers.

In Part I of this series, the need for daily training for the serious student of dance was presented. Part II reviewed ways to create job opportunities by getting out there and being seen at auditions and classes taught by those who are in the position to hire dancers. Corps female dancers must train earlier and longer than for males as discussed in Part III, although all great dancers are of equal ability.

Jazz dancing, like jazz music is the art form that could be considered uniquely American. The evolution of the musical theatre from opera to Broadway and finally musical reviews such as seen in Las Vegas or TV, shows a continual shift from strict formalism to a more natural human expression. To fill this need, dance adapted ballet and social dancing to a highly skilled, yet natural form of dance called Jazz.

The key to being a professional jazz dancer is skill and naturalness. Most successful jazz dancers have trained a relatively short 3 to 4 years, taking an equal number of ballet classes as they do jazz classes. This is sufficient time to gain the skills required yet they retain their natural style. A dancer over-trained in ballet will be more accomplished at turns, balance, strength and other skills, but their style will be less natural. As a result, they will have less likelihood of obtaining jazz jobs. But, do not neglect your ballet training as jazz by itself does not give you much skill.

As with any form of dance, you must still get out there and be seen. Take classes from working jazz choreographers and from a variety of teachers. Audition every chance you can.

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## **Stretch for Life**

### UPPER BACK

A tense upper back is a serious problem for the ballet dancer. It is common for male dancers to strain or rip these muscles during partnering. Most of the exercises we perform emphasize an extremely straight back, only aggravating the problem. Before going to the barre to start your plies, a few short exercises should be performed to relax the upper back.

### ROUTINE

(1) Roll the head slowly to the right 4 times, then to the left 4 times. Repeat, but twice as fast. (2) Drop the head and bend at the waist until your hands touch the floor. Hang there for 20 seconds. Slowly rise. (3) Reach slowly with the right hand over the head 4 times, always letting the upper shoulder move up with it. Repeat left, then right and left again. (4) Extend the right arm to the side and stretch the arm socket out and in 4 times. Repeat left arm. Repeat with both arms at the same time. (5) Roll both shoulders together 4 times forward, then 4 times back. (6) Reach the right hand overhead, bend at the waist and touch it to the left foot. Straighten up, reach the left hand overhead, bend at the waist and touch it to the right foot. Repeat 6 times.

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## **Tips on Health**

### RELAXATION

Have you ever had a dance class where the more you struggled, the worse you danced? The harder and harder you pull up during pirouettes the more you fall. These problems are related to relaxation.

Relaxation is not just confined to non-working hours spent sitting in front of the TV or lying down sleeping. The most important times to learn to relax are when you are under stress, when you are exerting great physical effort.

The two aspects of dance most affected by relaxation are balance and stamina. The human body is a dynamic system--that is, it is in constant motion, with varying centers of gravity. While we are balancing, it may seem that there is no motion, but even the pumping of the heart requires small weight adjustments to be made. Thus, to pull up rigid is the opposite action you need while balancing. Relax, let the ankles and feet make the necessary adjustments but keep the adjustments out of the torso to prevent the need for large motions requiring even greater adjustments.

Do you ever wonder how a person is able to hold an extended leg for such a long period without cramping. Most dancers do not think of the effort required to hold the leg out; instead they blank out the mind and listen to the music. In effect, they let the music hold the leg up. This is a perfect example of relaxation. While holding any extended position, think of your center, think of the music; don't muscle it. You will balance better, hold it longer and have more control when you relax.

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### **How Old Should a Child be When Going on Toe for the First Time?**

“Most dancers do not go on point until about twelve years of age,” Capezio’s publication *Everything We Know And You Should Know About Fitting Dance & Fitness Footwear*.

“The proper age for starting on toe is 12 years old,” Edith D’Addario director for the Joffrey Ballet School. “ABT does not accept students under the age of 12. The girl must be on toe but usually not more than a few months prior,” Kelly Ryan publicist with American Ballet Theatre.

“Only after a student has reached Level 3 may she go on toe. This is usually at 12 years of age with rare exceptions,” Diane Kounalakis publicist with San Francisco Ballet School.

“A child starting with our school at age 8 may audition to go on toe after the 4th year. A child starting with our school at a later age of 10 or 11 may audition to go on toe after the 3rd year. Never would a child go on toe before 11 1/2 years or age. It shocks us to see so many students coming to us who were put on toe at the age of 9 ,10 or 11,” Madame Gleboff, Director School of American Ballet (NYC Ballet).

The general consensus is that a student should be about 12 years of age before going on toe and must have had a number of years of ballet training before hand and must have developed strong, flexible feet.

The age criteria is the result of physiological considerations. Bone development is far too incomplete before the age of 12 to be subjected to the unnatural forces of dancing on toe. Permanent damage can occur, including a halt in bone growth. Adult toe dancers experience a multitude of physical problems including shin splints, tendonitis, bone spurs and fractures. Starting at too early of an age intensifies these problems—problems that will last a lifetime.

Even though youngsters under the age of 12 may plead to go on toe, both parents and teachers should not capitulate. Similarly, if a teacher does let their students go on toe too early, parents should consider removing their child from that teacher's care since it is reasonable to assume that the teacher is making other major errors in the rest of their teaching methods.

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## ***CAPEZIO'S EVERYTHING WE KNOW AND YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT FITTING DANCE & FITNESS FOOTWEAR***

### **TOE SHOES:**

A toe shoe is an extension of a dancer's body. If it is fitted properly, it gives her greater mastery, comfort and confidence. Most dancers do not go on pointe until about twelve years of age. Dancers on a student level require different features in a shoe as contrasted with professionals. To sum up, each pair of feet must be regarded as a challenge for which there is a solution.

Before we start: there is no left or right in toe shoes. A shank is the back bone of the shoe and is shaped like a foot without toes. A shank is inserted underneath the sock liner and ranges from very light to very strong. For instance, a student needs more support or a stronger shank. Dancers who tend to go backwards also require a very strong shank. However, professionals usually prefer a light shank and very often a 3/4 shank, because their feet are stronger.

The vamp, the part of the toe shoe upper that covers the toe, also gives support. The same rule usually applies here: harder and longer for the less trained foot, softer and shorter for the trained foot. The quarters or sides differ too. Higher or lower depending on preference.

**THE FITTING OF A TOE SHOE:** Six easy steps.

1. Dancer should sit on the edge of a straight chair, feet firmly on the ground.
2. Put on any padding that she normally uses on her feet.
3. To determine the length needed, begin by using a Ritz Stick. The dancer should put her foot on it while seated. The small number indicates the pointe shoe size.
4. Soften box with heel of your hand; then with thumbs, press sole in at point of arch before the shoe is put on. Push shoe toe into heel of your hand and work until the dancer's toes are at the very front of the shoe.
5. Make sure the back fits snugly, and there is no space in toe. Vamp also should be snug when dancer stands flat.
6. Help dancer rise on pointe on a wooden floor. If the shoe gaps, go still wider and shorter until gap is eliminated.

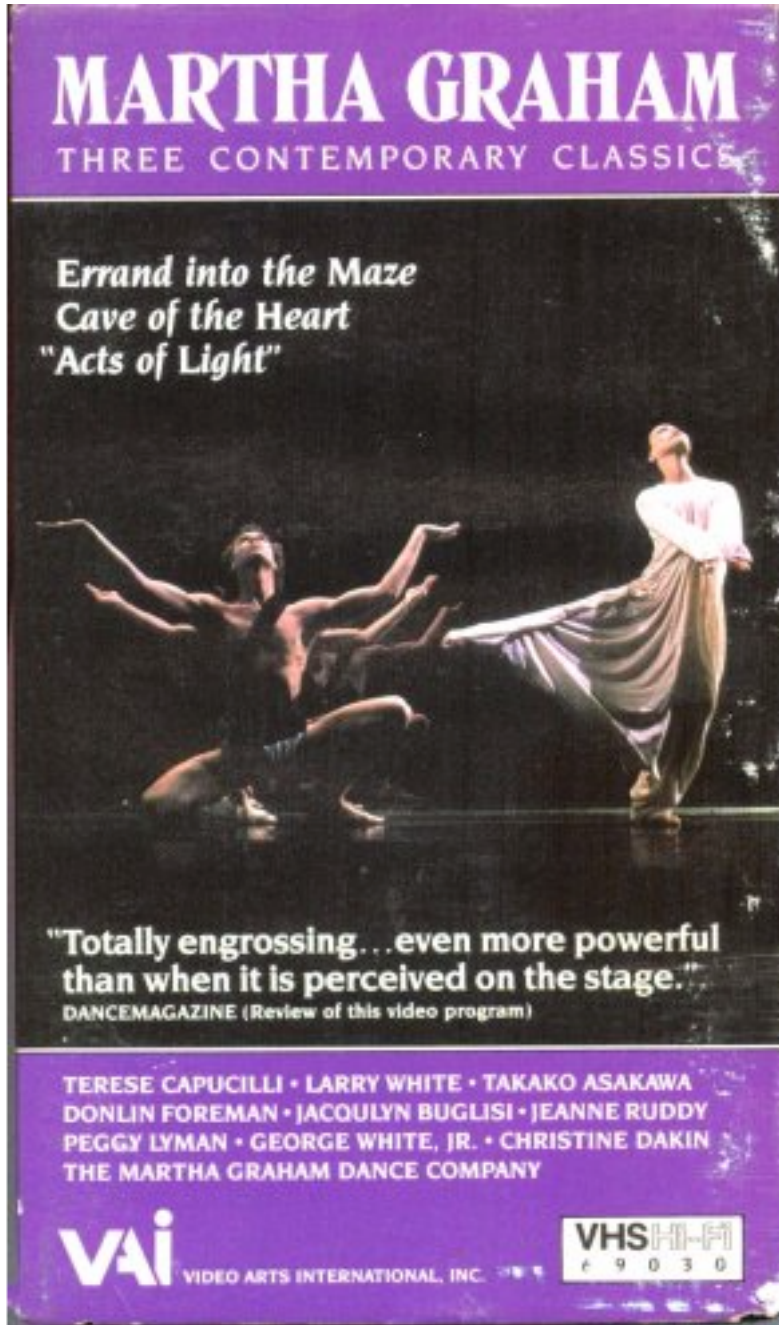
**A GUIDE TO CAPEZIO TOE SHOE:**

1. Duro Toe® and Pavlowa® (suggested shoes for beginners) are made with a # 3 shank and reinforced box.
2. Nicolini®, with a tapered box, Contempora®, with a broad box and Ultimo®, with a moderate box are made with a #2 shank.
3. Assoluta® is made with a #1 flexible shank and a lighter box.
4. Infinita™ is made with a unique, very flexible shank.

5. Perfetta® is the professional pointe shoe with a 3/4 shank and is also a lighter constructed shoe.

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## Video Reviews



THREE CONTEMPORARY CLASSICS  
VAI 69/29014

Martha Graham has been one of the major influences on the development of modern dance. Over the years, she and her company have created many classic pieces.



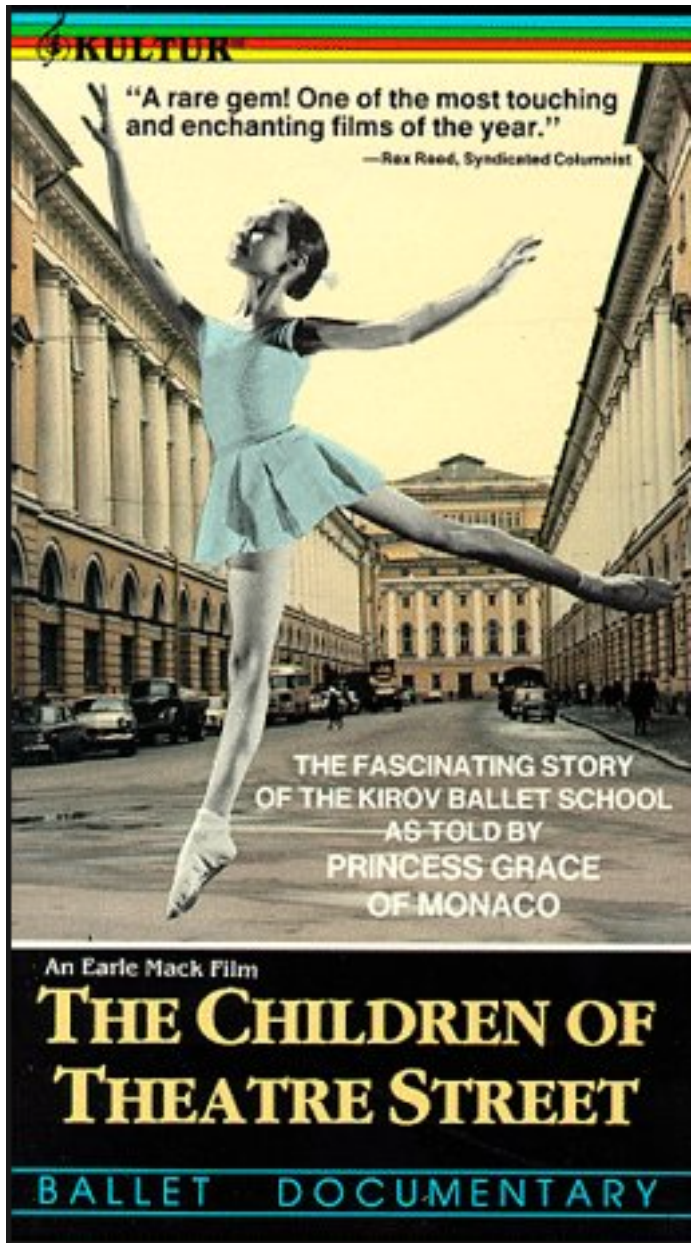
This tape presents three of her better-known works. Before each piece, Martha Graham herself gives a brief description of the work and its development.

Conquering fear, particularly undefined fear! was Martha's focus on *Errand into the Maze*. On tour in Iran, a plane carrying her company had severe weather difficulties and almost crashed. Before the plane landed safely, she danced the piece 3 times in her mind. This gave her the strength to address her fears and bear the stress of the trip. Such is the power of this piece.

*Cave of the Heart* "...is a passion we all understand and possess, this impulse in ourselves--it's envy, it's covetous, it's maliciousness, it's the untamable thing of fire; it dominates when the laws of the heart and the body are interested." This is the ancient story of Medea and Jason and their curse of jealousy.

The third and final piece, *Acts of Light*, evolved from a Carl Nielsen musical composition celebrating the coming of spring light to northern Denmark.

Anyone interested in dance should consider this tape for their collection. Without question, this is one of the best examples of modern dance that is commercially available.



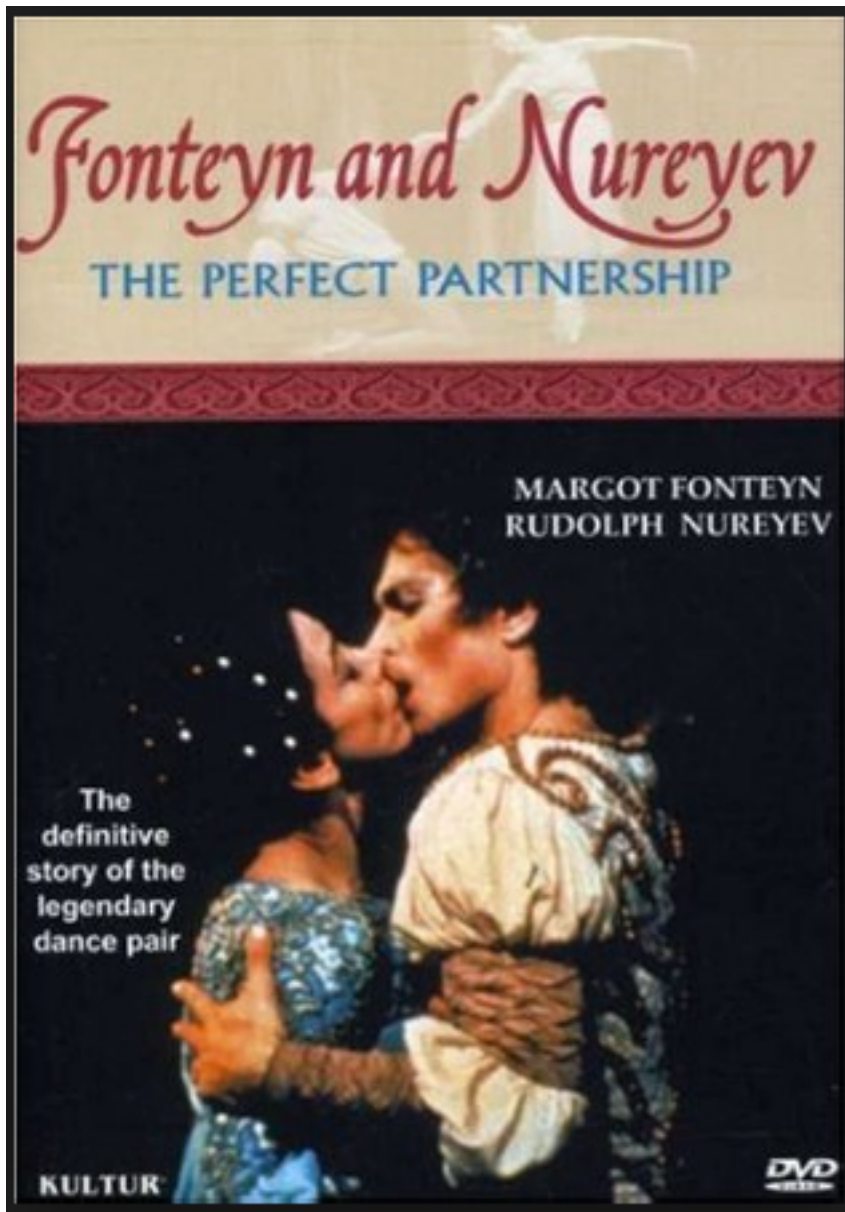
CHILDREN OF THEATRE STREET  
Kulture Video #1111

It's an unforgettable image: young children, aged 9 to 12 being critically appraised by the admissions board of the Vaganova Choreographic Institute, the school of the Kirov Ballet. Wearing simple shorts and T-shirts, they're asked to turn out their feet and jump and they're examined to see if they meet exacting physical proportions. Out of thousands of applicants from all over the Soviet Union, less than 20 are accepted yearly to start the rigorous 9-year ballet training.

The daily regimen is presented through the lives of two of the children - a boy and a girl. Short excerpts of their classes, dormitory life and competitiveness of the school are shown. Older teenagers are shown in rehearsal and their first performing efforts.

Of special interest is the differences in training for boys as compared to girls. Big jumps and turns highlight the boy's classes. The girls, of course, develop strong feet during point work.

Finally, the students graduate and give a commencement performance. Those who successfully complete the training are virtually guaranteed a job with the Kirov Ballet and effortlessly demonstrate why the Vaganova school produces the world's best classical ballet dancers.



FONTEYN & NUREYEV  
The Perfect Partnership  
Kultur #1151

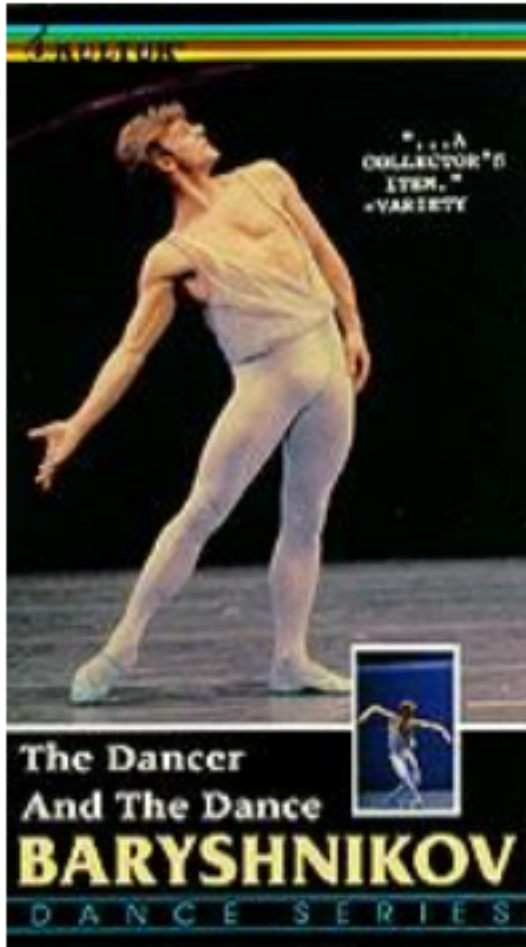
Margot Fonteyn & Rudolf Nureyev . . . perhaps the greatest partnership in the

history of ballet. For the first time, their most acclaimed performances, which have thrilled audiences worldwide, have been captured together on one videocassette. The program traces their partnership from its glorious inception in 1962 (in "Giselle" at Covent Garden), to its grand finale some 17 years later. It is unique in that it includes rare, behind-the-scenes footage of both dancers.

Marguerite & Armand, their showcase ballet (specifically written for Fonteyn & Nureyev by Sir Frederick Ashton), is based on Alexander Dumas' famous novel "La Dame aux Camelias," Fonteyn is the young Lady of Camelias, dying of consumption. Nureyev is her adoring and adored lover in this romantic and emotionally charged ballet. This performance, which is "tailor-made" to fit their individual talents, is one that every admirer should have in their private collection to be enjoyed again and again.

In one of their most highly praised performances, as the ill-fated lovers in Romeo & Juliet, Fonteyn and Nureyev dance the death scene with more emotion and intensity than ever before seen. This very touching and beautifully performed scene has literally mesmerized audiences everywhere. This is the very same production that has prompted theater audiences to rise to their feet and applaud for as long as 40 minutes. It is indeed, one of the most magical ballet performances of all time.

Robert Powell narrates and ballet personalities such as dame Ninette de Valois, founder of The Royal Ballet, provide their thoughts and memories on the lives of Fonteyn, Nureyev and their association. The synergy of their partnership was electrifying, and their impact on the world of ballet remains unmatched. This collector item is an intriguing visual biography of the greatest ballet partnership of all time.



BARYSHNIKOV  
The Dancer and The Dance  
Kultur #1137

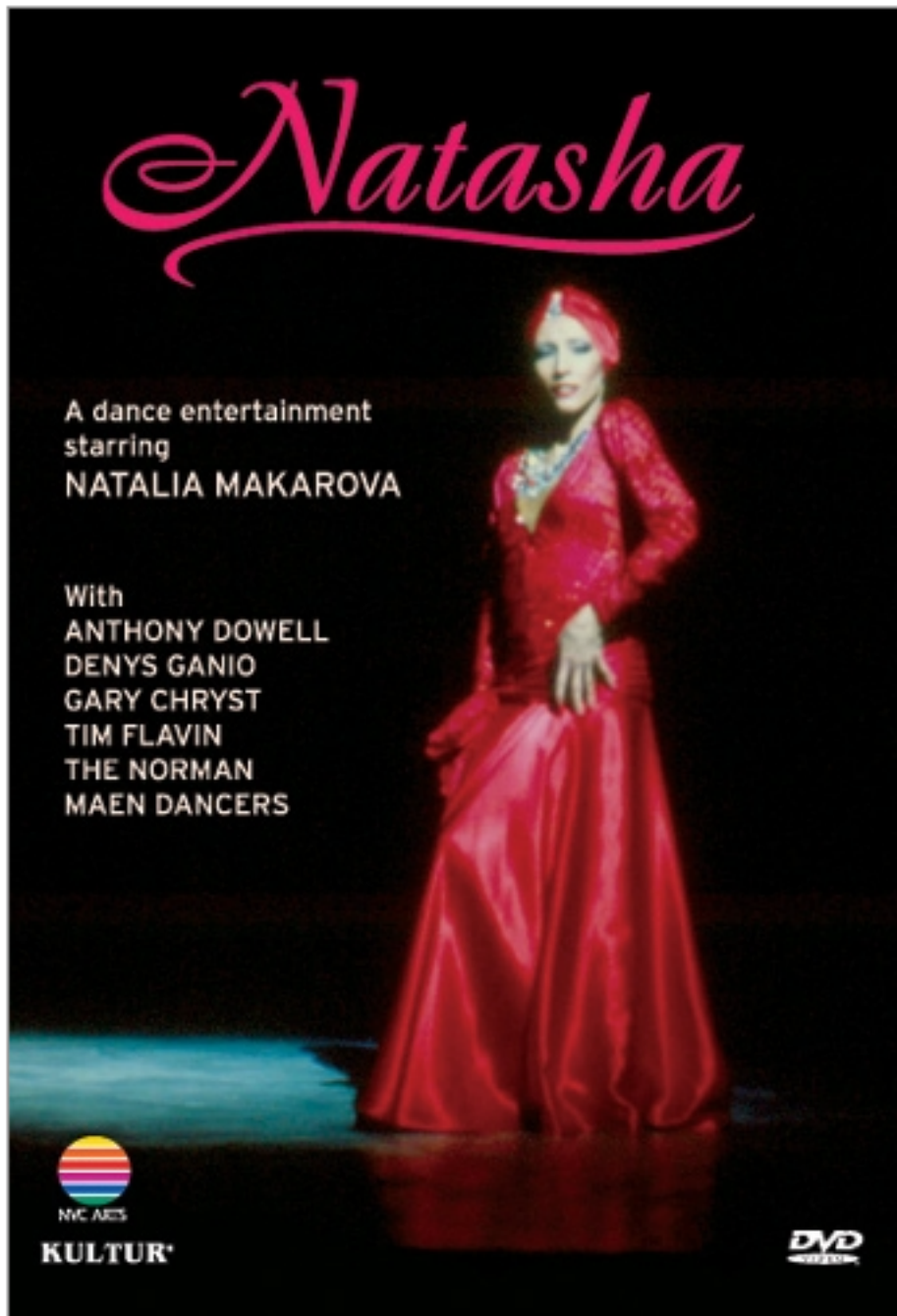
Mikhail Baryshnikov has been an elusive superstar, despite his prominence in the public eye. As narrator Shirley MacLaine says, Baryshnikov “has captured the imagination of people who had never before been interested in dance.” This is the first intimate profile he has allowed.

Filmed in 1983 by London Weekend Television under the direction of Tony Cash, the tape opens with Baryshnikov performing a virtuoso solo from his commissioned ballet “Configurations” choreographed by Choo San Goh to the music of Samuel Barber. We see that same solo two more times--in rehearsal with the choreographer and again within the context of the ballet filmed at its premiere at Brooklyn Academy of Music. Baryshnikov admits in one of the many interview segments that “theater is a wonderful gamble, but much more fun than playing money.” As we witness the rehearsals, hear the dancers’ comments, and learn from pianist John Browning the complexities of the score, we gain an insider's perspective of the world of ballet.

It’s a dense tape, not only revealing the many sides of Baryshnikov, but also the secrets of success for any artist. There are moments of reflection on his early training in Russia and stunning excerpts are shown from “Corsaire” and other Baryshnikov

performances. His hunger for experience of all kinds, as exemplified by his roles in the films *The Turning Point*, *White Nights* and his television special *Baryshnikov on Broadway* with Liza Minnelli, is strongly evident in the way he approaches his role as dance, coach and artistic director of American Ballet Theatre. At the peak of his form, Baryshnikov, as Antoinette Sibley from the Royal Ballet says, “uses the air the way most of us use the ground.”

## Natasha: Natalia Makarova



NATASHA  
Kultur #1146

Natalia Makarova is universally acknowledged as one of the greatest ballerinas of our age. Hailed as a peerless interpreter of such traditional roles as Giselle and

Odette/Odile in *Swan Lake*, Makarova has also triumphed in the modern repertory. Among her most acclaimed interpretations are Natalya Petrovna in Sir Frederick Ashton's *A Month in the Country* and the title roles of Sir Kenneth MacMillan's *Manon* and *Romeo and Juliet*, all featured in this program in a celebrated partnership with Anthony Dowell. Three years ago she created a sensation when she appeared on Broadway in the musical comedy *On Your Toes* and her performance as the eccentric ballerina Vera Baronova won her no less than seven awards.

As a complete contrast, Makarova is also seen in a number especially created for her and Gary Chryst in New York by Peter Gennero to *Begin the Beguine*. As a finale, Norman Maen has devised a Showcase with which Makarova closes this self-portrait in dance.

The program is linked by Madame Makarova herself and her charming personality, fascinating life and love of dance shine through to create an intriguing visual biography of the greatest female dancer of our time.