

Specific training methods in the art of classical dance

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Abstract: Arts performers, especially actors, dancers, choreographers, show directors, are increasingly involved in the optimization of physical training and motor skills techniques to help them improve the interpretive performance during the shows. As well the scenic expression forms progressively require the improvement of physical capacities, such as: strength, velocity, endurance and coordination. In fact the examples described stimulate the ability of the human body (or the individual body segment) to perform a certain type of physical action (by engaging and stimulating effort) in the shortest time (velocity), as long as possible (endurance), to overcome a greater weight (force) in the most effective development of motor skills (coordination) - which includes several factors as: mobility, agility, motor memory, etc. – all determined by the artist`s physical training practice.

Keywords: methods, dance, physical training

Foreword

The *Technical Manual and Dictionary of Classical Ballet*, edited by Gail Grant, defines ballet as “A theatrical work or entertainment in which a choreographer has expressed his ideas in group and solo dancing to a musical accompaniment with appropriate costumes, scenery and lighting”¹. The foundation of this reference claims that ballet is primarily an art form and describes it as an expressive non-verbal communication also practiced in the entertainment of the audiences. Although this definition is still relevant, at the present moment the world of classical dance is much more demanding as it became a more physical form of expression, fact that determined the adaptation of the ideology both for the dancers and for the audience.

Until recently dancers were considered strictly artists. Often, when ballet dancers were asked about their profession they stated that the body is an instrument that they use to express emotions, feelings, thoughts and ideas. Today`s practice of

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¹ Grant, Gail, *Technical Manual and Dictionary of Classical Ballet*, New York, Pub: Dover Publications, 1982, Ed. 3, p. 29,

https://books.google.ro/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ykWbaRbtH7QC&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=definition+of+ballet+dance&ots=SWJXQE0rVZ&sig=kJmCQfrHNAals6eVxlPM0AZQiQc&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=true Accesat în 2.01.2022.

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classical dance is much more than just an expressive art. For example, physical and complex choreography merged with rehearsals equate classical dance with performance sport. Yiannis Koutedakis and Athanasios Jamurtas from Thessaly University from Greece, state in a sports medicine journal that „The physical demands placed on dancers from current choreography and performance schedules make their physiology and fitness just as important as skill development”² in sport. This theory of classical dance allowed the audience to look at it in a different perspective. By summarizing the article written by Samuel Lee Roberts from the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in the journal *Dance Consortium*, the physical ability and motor skills expected from a dancer can be correlated with the capabilities of performance athlete³. Even if they are considered to be athletes, we can say that dancers are unique athletes because they are distinguished by the practice of a complex range of movements, excessive elasticity and the manner they interpret a role through body movements. Likewise compared to those of a performance athlete the mentioned skills can augment the dancer body degree of mishap. As the dancers movements are choreographed with more technical elements they need to understand the preconceived ballet specific physical training methods as those described in this article such as the *Vaganova Method*, the *Bournonville Method*, the *Cecchetti Method* and the *Balanchine Method*.

Vaganova Method

Agrippina Yakovlevna Vaganova was born on June 6, 1879. She was a classical dance teacher who devised a dancer specific physical training method derived from the Imperial Ballet School pre-existing training structure design by the French choreographer Michael Victor Marius Alphonse Petipa. Currently the Vaganova method is among the most famous dance specific physical training. A. Vaganova perfected and cultivated this form of training into a functional program for the dancers who wanted to improve their own qualities.

Taught in the first year of study, the practice of the exercises within the Vaganova method demands the dancers` concentration and physical condition to cope the complex movements as designed and structured. The purpose of practicing this exercises is to develop the specific movement technique which also allows the dancers to easily express himself through his own body. For example, after 8 years of practicing the Vaganova method the dancers are mentally and physically matured. A proper, quality training such as the Vaganova method, continued for a number of years enables the student to become a professional dancer, to achieve his dream with

² Koutedakis, Yiannis, Jamurtas, Athanasios, *The dancer as Performing Athlete, Sports Medicine*, Vol. 34, Nr. 10, 2004, pp. 651-661, Pub: Springer Link;

³ Samuel, Lee, Roberts, *Dancers as Athletes*, Pub: Dance consortium, 2012; <https://danceconsortium.com/features/article/dancers-as-athletes/> accesat în 02.01.2022;

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confidence and the ability to practice correct physical movements from an aesthetic perspective. The specific movements composed by the Russian origin ballet teacher Agrippina Vaganova mediate the dancer to become aware of their own body and gives them a foundation for exploring other dance styles.

Similar to piano lessons or learning a foreign language progressive specific physical training can augment the stimulation of the dancers` technique skills and can prevent mishaps. Applied in the first year the purpose of the Vaganova method is also to „provide the practitioner with a body assessment scheme by which his progress can be measured”⁴. Daily progressive and in-depth training is an important part of this teaching method. For example, the young dancers` muscular, joint and skeletal system requires a time period to develop specifically the aesthetics of classical dance. By applying the Vaganova method to the dancer the training coordinator can highlight the fundamental principles and the manner the body aligns itself and it moves in space (body dynamics). The structure of this training method is to form a harmonious and strong dancer body so that later he can develop his lower limbs in a correct position specific to classical dance aesthetic. The initial exercises are practiced facing the bar to give the dancer the necessary stability during the dance moments. At the further discretion of the training coordinator the dancers are encouraged to grasp the support bar with one arm then to continue the training at the dance hall center.

The Vaganova method emphasizes the carried out movements during the practice of the bar or center exercises for stimulating the coordination of the body segments and the artistic interpretation of music and physical gesture. The simple merge of bar movements are often repeated at the center. For example when the training coordinator decides that the dancer lower limbs are aesthetically aligned, the necessary strength and the balance developed during the practice of pirouettes (body rotation movements) the allegro component can be approached characterized by jumps and landings of/on the ground (detachment movements). Likewise the initial specific training for detaching from the ground is carried out facing the bar where the hands are placed.

In conclusion the Vaganova method movements can determine the augmentation and assimilation of this specific physical training technique by which at the end of years of practice the dancer is mentally and physically prepared to express easily during the performances through his own body.

Bournonville method

The Bournonville method is named after the creator August Bournonville and is a specific physical training technique practiced in classical dance. A. Bournonville

⁴ <https://www.istd.org/documents/imperial-classical-ballet-syllabus-outline-revised-2019/> Accesat 02.01.2022;

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was born on August 21 1805 in father`s hometown of Copenhagen, Denmark⁵. For almost 50 years the 19th century`s great dancer and choreographer of the Copenhagen`s Royal Theater led the ballet department providing it with a movement foundation adapted from the French specific physical training method present in the repertoire spectacles. With this innovation a few years later August Bournonville was integrated into the Danish literature and music.

The movements practice style rendered by Bournonville`s specific physical training method have been adapted at least three times to improve them. This actions always occurred when the dance company returned home from abroad. According to the synthesis of the *The King`s Ballet Master: A Biography of Denmark`s August Bournonville* book written by Terry Waler for example after a series of performances in Berlin the first adaptation occurred in 1830; the second adaptation was noticed after the dance company returned from Paris in 1834 and the third consist in a developing of a personal and consolidated style that occurred in 1842⁶. The improvements made in the choreography of the dance moments became favorable to the Bournonville`s own style and technique. Therefore his French classical dance academic style evolved through the detailed analysis of physical merged movements later presented in the designed performances.

Comparative choreographic notes studies have demonstrated that the French dance style and the symmetrical choreographies contributed to the specific physical training method concept highlighted by the following characteristics identified in the practice of the stated method and specialized articles:

- At the Bournonville method foundation we identify the stimulated body harmony by musicality;
- Compared to the direction of the supporting member position we identify the antinomian angle of the shoulders position in the physical posture assignment to *épaulement*;
- The graceful practicing of the perpetual carried out movements accompanied by a fast musical rhythm;
- Repeating the practice of detachment movements carried out by the calves extension (forward/backword/side) through the concealment of the stimulated effort;
- Through the contrast emphasizing by the lower limbs movements practice carried out in a fast rhythm simultaneously with the of the upper limbs movement practice carried out in a moderate musical rhythm the elegance of the dancer is determined;

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/August_Bournonville Accesat 09.01.2022;

⁶ Terry, Waler: *The King`s Ballet Master: A Biography of Denmark`s August Bournonville*, New York, Pub: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1979;

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- Often identified in the preparatory specific position of the classical dance (the arms forms a circle located before the pelvis) the upper limbs movements unfolds to the height of the shoulders and slightly forward;
- The active leg position is located on supporting ankle due to the kilt (Scottish traditional clothing);
- To perform of a *en dedans pirouette* (a full body rotation movement on the outside of the supporting member) it is recommended that the active member initiate a transition movement through the unfolded calf extension to the side of the trunk followed by the return to the initial position on supporting ankle;
- The Bournonville style is dominated by fast musical tempos;
- To highlight the anticipation of the returning to the initial position the movements are practiced on the descending musical accents;
- To highlight and mediate the viewers vision of the choreography dancer's head and gaze position follow the active limb movements.

The Bournonville method reveals the manner in which the dance style and technique were directly submitted from Auguste Vestris the legendary French dancer and coordinator to determine the authentic reconstruction of the original body aesthetic form and training content as it was practiced a century ago. After various revisions applied and published in the Bournonville school book by Kristen Ralov in 1979 through the form developed by Rudolf von Laban of the grading system the exercises from this method became the only teaching model in the Royal Danish Ballet Company and are internationally known. The purpose of this specific physical training method is reflected in the creator's choreographic creed: "The artistic skill pinnacle lies in the concealment of the mechanical effort stimulated by muscular contractions under a harmonious calm"⁷.

In conclusion even though the described exercises and movements were specially designed today the Bournonville's style and technique is characterized as similar to the 19th century Romantic era dance style. Currently the Bournonville method is constantly improved without distorting the essence and the identity by which it was conceived and it is still practiced. A solid foundation of this specific physical training method that can be promoted was established through the efficiency of a long period of time.

Cecchetti method

Enrico Cecchetti was born in June 1, 1850 in the booth of the Tordinona Theater in Rome, Italy and is the son of the dancers Serafina Casagli and Cesare Cecchetti. E. Cecchetti debuted as a dancer in the show entitled *Il Giocatore* (The

⁷ August Bournonville, *Etudes Choregraphique*, Pub: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1848, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25598087> accesat în 21.01.2022;

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Player) conceived by the Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev, later invited in America for the inauguration of the Music Academy from Philadelphia next to his parents as part of the Italian ballet company called *La Scala*.

After a 12-year period with the Russian Imperial Ballet in 1890 E. Cecchetti accepted the coordinator position in the Imperial Theater Ballet School. Nikolai Gustavovich Legat the disciple of the school noted that the dancers `flocked` to Cecchetti`s classes to learn the Italian technique⁸. Later the method devised by E. Cecchetti was approached in the system of all Russian dance schools.

The Cecchetti specific physical training method has been widely analyzed and discussed by dancers, critics and dance historians but nevertheless the Italian ballet master Enrico Cecchetti behavior as well the dancer`s personality opinions and his effectiveness as a teacher have been exemplary. We recognize E. Cecchetti as a ballet coordinator who organized his own dance specific physical training systematically and scientifically. First and last E. Cecchetti was known as a disciplined person which is why the training method approach denotes his own nature highlighted by features such as:

- An intelligent person determined by the manner his physical training method is designed;
- A motivating temperament, statement supported by the dancer`s descriptions.

By stating the known and accepted characteristics we have discovered the fact that the Cecchetti method of physical training includes three fundamental biomechanical notions such as effort cycles, movement alternations and physical effort diversification. For example all exercises returns in favor of the body awareness and exploration during the choreographies performance through the concealment of the stimulated effort. The fundamentals repetition is stimulated by the barre movements practice in their simplest form consists a reserved procedure for the classical dance schools since they can maintain the elemental and essential accuracy and purity of the carried out exercises; Regarding the movements diversity we can claim that thanks to the movement alternation and the return cycles the dancer stimulates and increases the initial movement principle of coordination and awareness. By applying the Cecchetti method the practitioner can improve their current movement technique and their own training potential to convey and interpret the subtleties of the musical rhythm and movement phrases that accompany them through his body. For example as a dancer trains through the Cecchetti method practice he can master skill such as movement coordination awareness by which the practitioners can perform a show as stated by Mihail Mihailovici Fokin (Russian coordinator) which “involves ... emotions and imagination”⁹. The practice of the

⁸ Terry, Walter, *Great male Dancers*, Pub: Anchor Press, 1978, Pg. 25;

⁹ Zoe, Anderson, *The Ballet Lover`s Companion*, Pub: Yale University Press, 2015, p. 76;

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Cecchetti method consists a form of physical training and a movement repertoire that has persisted over time through which the dancers can conceive visible and safe results.

In conclusion the thankful fact that he was associated with Serge Diaghilev`s Ballets Russes dance company and developed a worldwide reputation through classical dance the specific biographies and analyzes elude Enrico Cecchetti`s role rarely mentioning it. Currently this method is practiced in ballet schools and dance companies structured on assimilation levels for people who wish to practice the classical dance art similar to a hobby.

Balanchine method

The dancer, instructor, choreographer and dance company director Georgiy Melitonovich Balanchivadze¹⁰ knows as George Balanchine name given by Sergei Diaghilev was born in 1904 in Saint Petersburg, Russia by his mother Maria Nikolayevna Vasilyeva and the son of Meliton Balanchivadze. Although his parents had planned a military career in 1914 G. Balanchine was enrolled at the Imperial school in St. Petersburg where he was initiated into the classical dance art. As a student starting from 1920 G. Balanchine independently designed dance moments and performances. After graduating due to his own conceptual choreographic style he was invited to join the Mariinsky Theatre ballet from St. Petersburg also known as the State Academic Theater for Opera and Ballet.

In 1933 G. Balanchine was selected by Lincoln Kirsten as the choreographer who can implement his theoretical ideas into practical ones. For example regarding the choice he made the German author Elizabeth Souritz mentioned in her book *Ballet and Dance in America* a confession made by L. Kirsten: “(...) because I was in love with the dance and saw the Cat in the year 1927 and Apollon Mussaget (Apollo) next year. (...) in my view Ballet is exactly what Balanchine has been doing, because Balanchine`s ballet is a collaboration of dance and music, and not the painting and pantomime”¹¹.

Compared to the choreographed movements that describe the narrative subject thread to the audience through his own dance specific physical training method G. Balanchine created the neoclassical dance style in America which aspires to highlight the practiced movements without a subject. For example during the training the exercises practiced in the structure of the Balanchine method includes ballet specific movements such as *battement tendu*, *fendu*, *développé*, *enveloppé*, *adagio*, *center floor exercises* and *pointe technique*. The main specific characteristics of this dance physical training method and his personal chorographic style are summarized by the following:

¹⁰ George Balanchine - Wikipedia 29.01.2022;

¹¹ Souritz, Elizabeth, *Ballet and Dance in America*, Pub: The Urals University Press, 2004, p. 137;

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- The developed of simple movements practice on a lively musical rhythm and in the classical dance initiation classes environment can amplify the spectacular level;
- Enjoying the movements elegances by distancing them from the show plot;
- The Balanchine method practice of upper limbs position are less flexed and the wrist forms a 90^0 angle compared to the practitioner`s forearm and limbs position from the previous described dance specific physical training methods. To determine the apparently tall dancer image beneficial in practicing intermediate movements Balanchine implies asymmetry to the development of the genuflexion movement and certain fixed positions.

In conclusion the mentioned aspects identified in the Balanchine method of dance specific physical training are beneficial for the dancer`s movement awareness due to Balanchine`s extended, unbalanced positions, ingenious pointe technique currently applied in the amateur practitioners, actors and professional dancers training from the New York City Ballet Company.

Conclusions and specific features

The information stated by the physical training or show`s rehearsal dancers coordinator ideally consists the principles of the human body anatomical and biomechanical basic knowledge. For example some of these cues are identified in the fundamental biomechanics information that can render body movement anatomical or physical possible instructions or descriptions. Deeply anchored in dance anthropology the descriptions found in the ballet specific physical training principles were given in an unscientific form from a generation to another in favor of lively movement assimilation. Although the practical training theories and indications longevity and frequency succeed as coordination methods.

We notice four technique fundamental principles identified in all six¹² internationally known dance specific physical training methods:

- a. Active knee hyper-extension also during the initiation of the lower limb calf extension movement;
- b. Unfolding the lower limbs twisting movement;
- c. Body alignment (Posture);
- d. Space physical location.

a. By synthesizing the applied studies on this aspect we identify that the professional and amateur dancer initiate the knee hyper-extension during the calf extension movement. For example we identify a deeper hyper-extension at the professional dancers compared to the classical dance beginners. In relation to the daily

¹² The French method, The Royal Academy of Dance method, The Vaganova Method, The Bournonville method, The Cecchetti method, The Balanchine method;

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knee movements practiced by a non-dancer the professional dancer knee are within the theoretical principle characteristics determined by the calf extension movement. Over a period of time the knee hyper-extension can form the theoretical aesthetics described in the specialized literature which is why it is recommended to pay close attention to the practical coordination and review perspective of the lower limbs. For example due to the tension applied to the lateral posterior ligament constant knee hyper-extension can affect the anterior ligament¹³¹⁴. Regarding the safety of the knee some instructors and clinical therapists believe that any degree of weight bearing knee hyperextension places undue stress across the knee joint and is therefore potentially injurious, while others feel some controlled knee hyperextension is acceptable¹⁵. Often the knee hyper-extension is also visible during the lower limbs unfolding in the second specific classical dance position described by the side placement of the lower limbs at a one foot interval between the heels. These ascertainment indicates that the body position can determine the knee hyper-extension degree. Although in the last decades a potentiated percentage has been determined by the dance practice safety awareness. Such knowledge can mediate the injury elimination or prevention and at the motor skills efficient learning.

b. Compared to amateur dancers specialized studies highlight the development of the professional dancers lower limbs lateral twisting movement by 5⁰ more extensive. This finding agrees with the theoretical maximum twist movement principle. Determined by the dancer twist movement and practice the average value is identified at 50⁰ below the specialized literature ideal value – 60/90⁰. Thus it is possible that the theoretical ideal is beyond the professional dancers reach. To keep the dancer healthy and fit for performance the twisting movement principles are very important. For example in striving to create the desired aesthetic dancers often force their hip rotation and knees beyond the limits of their personal safety, sometimes resulting in injury¹⁶. From the dancers perspective mastering the physical movement development morphology and biomechanics knowledge can determine a healthy professional career.

¹³ Fornalski, Stefan, et al, *Biomechanical and anatomical assessment after knee hyper-extension injury*, *American Journal of Sports Medicine*, Pub: PubMed, 2008, Vol.36, Nr.1, Pp.80-84, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17932409/> Accesat 03.02.2022;

¹⁴ https://dancespirit.com/understanding_knee_trauma/ Accesat 03.02.2022;

¹⁵ Grieg, Valerie; Rosenblatt, Naomi, *Inside Ballet Technique: Separating Anatomical Fact from Fiction in the Ballet Class*, Pub: Princeton Book Company, 1994;

¹⁶ Negus, Vicki, Hopper, Diana. & Briffa, N.Kathryn, *Associations between turnout and lower extremity injuries in classical ballet dancers*. *Journal of Orthopaedic and Sports Physical Therapy*, Pub. PubMed, 2005, Vol.35, Nr.5, Pp.307-318, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15966542/> Accesat 04.02.2022;

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c. Compared to the vertical position described in the specialized literature through the classical dancers applied analyzes it was identified that maintaining the chest extension position is beneficial for stabilizing the practitioner balance and posture. Dancers learn this information through the arching spine movement and the trapezius muscle contraction. For example a useful recommendation for the dance specific physical training practitioners consists in the conscious development of the chest extension movement or through the trapezius muscle contraction because it stimulates the awareness augmentation potential during the trunk movements and coordination. It has also been discovered that by practicing the spine bending or arching movement dancers avoid the theoretical principle when it is functionally useful. Reflected by theory and practice this discrepancy was identified during jumps and landings movements. For example initiated through the hip extension movement the dancers jump can increase and stimulate the lower limbs muscle strength. As well by limiting the trunk bending or arching movement during the jump initial stage it is functionally contradictory. By introducing the clearly described body movements biomechanics principles the dancer can be more aware of the practical, theoretical and aesthetic demands. For example dancers can stimulate the cardio-respiratory system awareness through the described principal adaptation beneficial during performances involved effort.

d. In the classical dance technique aesthetics practice the space physical placement is identified through the movement adaptation of the hip position. For example the practitioners involved in the dance specific physical training methods initial stage they have shown improvement in the hip movement. This ascertainment supports the minimal adaptation theoretical idea determined by the hip position. In relation to the lower limbs or trunk musculature through the dancer movement experience he can stimulate the hip isolated muscle contraction ability. For example in determining the hip movements by stimulating the abdominal and lumbar muscle through the sports physical training the dancer can increase the muscle contractions awareness.

The Vaganova method

- Dance technique conceived through the fusion the classical French dance style, the Italian method dynamics and the Russian ballet drama;
- The use of upper limbs symmetry and elegance interpretation through body movements that can amplify the lower limbs mobility and muscle strength;
- Classical dance specific physical training based on dancers stability strengthening and slow musical rhythm segments coordination.

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The Bournonville method

- Dance specific method characterized by the diagonally trunk placement (*épaulement*), lower limbs agility, dancers state of weightlessness during the jump movement, composed through lively legs movements, accentuated by the dancers gaze and head position to express kindness;
- Due to the costume (the kilt) the rotation movements (*pirouette*) are practiced by the active calf side extension often with the upper limbs placed at the specific classical dance initial position;
- Dance technique defined by the lower limbs rhythm, the upper limbs melody, all to harmonize the body movements in the musical performance.

The Cecchetti method

- Dance specific physical training method that mediates practitioners in the comprehensiveness of body anatomy and science;
- Implement daily planned exercise routines and ensure that the whole body is symmetrically stimulated;
- Dance technique that emphasizes the lower limbs movements to increase the dancers balance, flight, agility and strength.

The Balanchine method

- Dance specific method adapted from the Russian Imperial ballet School to increase the dancers body movement agility and stage space dynamics;
- Balanchine's neoclassical dance style is seen as a reaction to romantic anti-classicism characterized by dancers asymmetric movements and position;
- Dance technique that highlights the acrobatic movements to increase the spectacular level, the lower limbs genuflexion amplitude movement and the upper limbs position which often form a 90⁰ angle between the dancer palm and forearm. Compared to the body movements identified in other dance specific physical training method the Balanchine method implies a variety of movements developed in a less elegant manner.

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