

ACCOMPANYING BALLET CLASSES

- I. Why learn it?
 - A. Dancers need to know and understand music and musical rhythm and timing;
 - B. Supports the ballet teacher so that they do not have to rely on cd or audio resources for music, saves valuable class time not having to start and stop the cd player, and the teacher can control the direction of the class by telling the pianist what he/she needs in a certain step or technique exercise;
 - C. Aids the accompanist in learning to phrase the music better and count measures.
 - D. It can be very profitable financially and open up doors that many musicians don't have – there are not a lot of accompanist for ballet.

- II. Learn what a ballet class is.
 - A. Barre – Students are lined up at the barre, facing it in the beginning, and moving to one hand as they begin to learn and master the fundamental exercises. All exercises are learned both right and left. Barre work begins often with a simple tendu warm up exercise, followed by plies and many progressive technical exercises culminating with Grand Battement.
 - B. Center – The center work is usually a repeat of many exercises begun at the barre and progresses to developing the strength of dancing independently of the barre. This part of the class takes the barre technique teaching the student to move slowly with great control in the Adagio, transfer of weight with tendu, pirouettes, small jumps to Grand Allegro and other combinations that train the dancer to move across the floor. Then the final slow movement might be Reverance, which is a slow 3/4 or 4/4.

- III. Tools needed to begin accompanying ballet classes:
 - A. Music
 - 1. Classical music training is essential
 - 2. Ballet music from ballets; variation music.
 - 3. Poplar show tunes music
 - 4. Ragtime
 - 5. Spanish music: tangos, etc.
 - 6. Mazurkas
 - 7. Polonaises
 - 8. Tarantellas
 - 9. Duple and Triple Meter Music...A MUST!!!!
 - B. A working understanding of rhythms, beats, and how music relates to dance (copy dance patterns).
 - C. Good sight-reading techniques.
 - D. Good improvisational skills. This is very helpful in taking a written piece and playing an alternative “bridge” or “variation” on a particular theme. Having the ability to make up a piece that is completely new to you and others is an added asset, also.

IV. Learning to work with a teacher.

- A. At the beginning of each exercise, the teacher will say “5,6,7,8” or “prepare”, or “thank you”, or simply “and”.
- B. Each exercise will normally require an introduction of 2 or 4 bars (depending upon the teacher’s discretion). The introduction should reflect the mood of the piece, so as to give the dancers full preparation for the exercise. Some teachers like the accompanist to go “straight in”, but usually the teacher will want an introduction.
- C. After the barre exercises have been completed, and before going to the center, some teachers may ask for a stretch at the barre. A slow 3/4 or 4/4 would work well for this.
- D. In the studio, the accompanist’s role as ballet pianist is to support the teacher at all times. The teacher is the final word on decisions about a piece of music “fitting” or the tempo.
- E. If any difficulties arise between the teacher and pianist during class about tempos or songs, it is always best to “iron out” any misunderstandings AFTER CLASS. It takes time to develop a good teacher-pianist relationship
- F. It is very helpful to have a good sense of humor and well-being. Don’t take anything the teacher might say like “Can you play another selection?” or “Can you slow it down?” or “Can you speed it up a bit?” as criticism of you or your musicianship. Don’t let your facial expression show your frustration about anything or make comments to the students about a certain combination. Keep an honest and pleasant expression on your face at all times, even if you may be serious or upset.

V. Doing the work.

- A. Watch a pianist play for a ballet class.
- B. Listen to ballet cd’s - Some famous ballet class pianists are:
 - 1. Lynn Stanford
 - 2. Josu Gallastegui
 - 3. Douglas Corbin
 - 4. Steven V. Mitchell
 - 5. Katarina Baptiste
 - 6. Patience Clements
- C. Watch YouTube videos of ballet classes. Royal Academy of Dance-London and the Vaganova Ballet Academy are excellent!
- D. Talk to ballet teachers to see what they feel they need with a ballet accompanist.
- E. You can’t learn too many different styles of music - BE CREATIVE AND HAVE FUN!!!!

BARRE WORK

| <u>Exercise</u> | <u>Meter</u> |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Plies' | 3/4 |
| 2. Slow Tendu | 2/4 or 4/4 |
| 3. Fast Tendu | 2/4 or 4/4 |
| 4. Slow Degages | 2/4 |
| 5. Fast Degages | 2/4 or 6/8 |
| 6. Rond de Jambe a terre' | Slow 3/4 |
| 7. Frappes with Relevés' | 2/4 |
| 8. Fondu' | 2/4 (Tango) or 3/4 |
| 9. Rond de Jambe en L'air | 3/4 |
| 10. Adagio | Slow 3/4 or 4/4 |
| 11. Grande Battements | 2/4 (March) |

CENTER WORK

| <u>Exercise</u> | <u>Meter</u> |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Adagio | Slow 3/4 or 4/4 |
| 2. Tendu | 2/4 or 4/4 |
| 3. Fondu with Rond de Jambe a terre' | 2/4 or 4/4 (Tango) |
| 4. Pirouettes | 3/4 (Waltz; Mazurka works well) |
| 5. Petite Allegro | 2/4 (Rag) |
| 6. Medium Allegro | 2/4 (Polka) |
| 7. Grande Allegro | 3/4 (Big Waltz) |
| 8. Pirouette Turns | Fast 2/4 |
| 9. Fouettes | Fast 2/4 |
| 10. Reverance | Slow 3/4 or Slow 4/4 |

Ballet Composers

Leo DeLibes

Jacques Offenbach

Jules Massenet

Georges Bizet

Charles Gounod

Aldophe Adam

Peter I. Tchaikovsky

Sergei Prokofiev

Ballets

“Coppelia”; “Sylvia”

“Le Papillion”; “Gaité Parisienne”

“Le Cigale”; “Manon”

“Carman”; “Palais de Cristal”

“Faust”

“Giselle”; “Le Corsaire”

“Nutcracker”; “Swan Lake”; “Sleeping Beauty”

“Romeo and Juliet”; “Peter and The Wolf”