(bă’lă, băl’ā) [Ital. ballare = to dance], classic, formalized solo or ensemble dancing of a highly controlled, dramatic nature performed to music.

See also dance; modern dance.

**The Development of Ballet in Western Europe**

Foreshadowed in earlier mummeries and lavish masquerades, ballet emerged as a distinctive form in Italy before the 16th cent. The first ballet that combined movement, music, decor, and special effects was presented in France at the court of Catherine de' Medici in 1581. Organized by the violinist Balthasar de Beaujoyeux, it had a classical theme, lasted six hours, was performed among the guests (there were no elevated stages), and was entitled *Le Ballet comique de la Reine*. This production was the first *ballet de cour*, the ancestor of the modern ballet, which influenced the English court *masque*, a 16th-century entertainment with dance interludes. The first treatise on ballet dancing was the *Orchésographie* of Thoinot Arbeau (1588).

The 17th cent. saw the major development of ballet in France. At first a court entertainment, the simple entrées were extended c.1610 and joined together to form scenes, called divertissements, which culminated in a *grand ballet*. Ballet also became a court pastime and a royal obsession. Louis XIV himself studied with ballet master Pierre Beauchamps for 20 years. The “Sun King” founded the Royal Ballet Academy (1661), the Royal Music Academy (1669), which became the Paris Opéra, and the first National Ballet School (1672). All parts were performed by male dancers; boys in wigs and masks took the female roles.

The first ballet using trained women was *The Triumph of Love* (1681) with music by Lully. Ballet remained a court spectacle and included opera or drama until about 1708, when the first ballet was commissioned for public performance. Thereafter the form, infused with new ideas, developed as a separate art (although the court ballet continued its historic traditions). Choreographic notation came into being, and mythological themes were explored.

With the increased influence of the Italian school of ballet, movement became elevated and less horizontal, and the five classic positions of the feet, which form the base for the dancer's stance and movement, were established by Pierre Beauchamps. The costumes, which had been cumbersome with decoration, long skirts, and high heels (for both men and women) were newly designed to allow greater freedom of movement. The virtuosa dancer Marie Camargo, who introduced the entrechat (elevation) for women, shortened her skirt to the middle of the calf and wore tights and what were to be the first ballet slippers (heelless shoes). Her rival, Marie Sallé (who was also the first female choreographer), was the first dancer to wear a filmy, liberating Grecian-style costume, made popular two centuries later by Isadora Duncan.

Jean Georges Noverre, a revolutionary 18th-century *maître de ballet*, established the determining principles of the ballet d'action, which he described in his *Lettres sur la danse et les ballets* (1760). He wanted the ballet to tell a story, aided by the music, decor, and dance; he wanted the performer to interpret his role through the dance and through his own body and facial expression. In stressing

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naturalism, Noverre simplified the costume and c.1773 abolished the mask. Other important innovations came from the great artists of the period, Gaetan and Auguste Vestris, Salvatore Vigano, and Charles Didelot. Technical innovation in dance movement was increased after further modification of the ballet costume.

The Romantic Period and Ballet's Eclipse

In Milan in 1820 Carlo Blasis first set down the technique of ballet as we know it today—with its stress on the turned-out leg, which permits great variety of movement. With the production of *La Sylphide* (1832) the romantic period formally began, ushering in a new era of brilliant choreography that emphasized the beauty and virtuosity of the prima ballerina. In this production Maria Taglioni first wore the filmy, calf-length costume that was to become standard for classical ballet. The great ballerinas of the era included Taglioni, Fanny Elssler, Carlotta Grisi, and Fanny Cerrito. In keeping with the literature and art of the romantic movement, the new ballet concerned the conflicts of reality and illusion, flesh and spirit. Love stories and fairy tales replaced mythological subjects.

At the same time dancing *sur les pointes* [on the toes] had come into favor. By the end of the century the blocked toe had appeared, and the tutu, a very short, buoyant skirt that completely freed the legs, had come into use. The male dancer functioned as partner to support the ballerina, the central focus of the dance and drama. Ballet declined progressively after 1850 with the ballet d'action giving way entirely to divertissements; finally the great stars had retired, and the sets, costumes, and choreography had become stereotyped and uninteresting. The naturalistic trend in the theater had all but destroyed the imaginative touch necessary to ballet.

The Modern Ballet Renaissance

**Russian Ballet**

The renaissance in romantic ballet began in Russia after 1875. The Russian Imperial School of Ballet had been founded in 1738. During the early 19th cent. the Imperial Theatre housed more than 40 ballet productions staged by the celebrated Swedish master Charles Didelot. Marius Petipa, who created a powerful sense of unity by rigorously training his corps de ballet as had not been done before, indicated in his choreography the direction of intensified romantic drama that the newly revived art was to take. Petipa contributed many of the classic ballets still considered to be the greatest expressions of the form, including *Don Quixote*, *La Bayadère*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Raymonda*, *Harlequinade*, and restagings of *Giselle*, *Coppélia*, *La Sylphide*, and, with Lev Ivanov, *Swan Lake*.

In 1909 the celebrated impresario Sergei Diaghilev took his Russian company to Paris, and for 20 years it dominated the world of dance, displaying the creative talents of such choreographers and dancers as Michel Fokine, Léonide Massine, Vaslav Nijinsky, Bronislava Nijinska, Anna Pavlova, and George Balanchine. The brilliant performances by Nijinsky also helped to reemphasize the importance of the male dancer. After Diaghilev's death in 1929, offshoots were formed by René Blum and Col. W. de Basil, which kept the Diaghilev tradition alive during the 1930s. The company merged with Blum and de Basil's Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, which nurtured the talents of Alexandra Danilova, André Eglevsky, and Igor Youskevitch.

Russian dancing has been maintained at the highest level of excellence to the present day. Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet, which brought fame to Galina Ulanova, Maya Plisetskaya, and V. M. Gordeyev, and the Kirov Ballet (since 1991 the St. Petersburg Maryinsky Ballet), whose dancers have included Rudolf Nureyev, Natalia Makarova, and Mikhail Baryshnikov, are the two foremost Russian companies and are

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ranked among the finest in the world.

**British Ballet**

In England around 1918, Enrico Cecchetti, who had taught many great dancers including Pavlova, Nijinsky, Massine, and Danilova, set down his method of training (which is still in practice) in collaboration with Cyril Beaumont, proprietor of “Under the Sign of the Harlequin,” a world-famous bookstore specializing in the dance. The Cecchetti Society was founded in 1922 to preserve and protect that system.

In 1930 Marie Rambert founded the Ballet Club, the first permanent ballet school and company in England. A year later Ninette de Valois established what became the Sadler's Wells Ballet (now the Royal Ballet). This company has drawn international attention to the work of Alicia Markova, Anton Dolin, Frederick Ashton, Margot Fonteyn, Robert Helpmann, Rudolf Nureyev, Antoinette Sibley, Svetlana Beriosova, and Anthony Dowell. Nureyev, both a choreographer and a dancer, was instrumental in moving beyond the changes wrought by Nijinsky and altering the traditional supportive role of the male dancer to a far more significant, dynamic, and athletic place in the ballet; many other contemporary choreographers have similarly given their male dancers a more flamboyant showcase.

**American Ballet**

In the United States, Lincoln Kirstein and Edward Warburg founded the American Ballet company in 1934. Under the direction of George Balanchine, its chief choreographer, the company established the first major school of ballet in the country, developed the talents of many notable American dancers (including Maria Tallchief, Todd Bolender, Suzanne Farrell, Patricia McBride, Jacques d'Amboise, Arthur Mitchell, and Edward Villella), and influenced enormously the evolution of an American ballet style as parent company to the New York City Ballet (founded 1948), one of the world's outstanding companies. Other celebrated choreographers who created ballets for the New York City Ballet are Eugene Loring, Jerome Robbins, and Peter Martins.

The other major American company, the American Ballet Theatre (formerly the Ballet Theatre), was founded in 1939 as an offshoot of the smaller Mordkin Ballet. The company's principal dancers have included Lucia Chase, Anton Dolin, Nora Kaye, Alicia Alonso, Michael Kidd, Scott Douglas, Royes Fernandez, Sallie Wilson, and Mikhail Baryshnikov, performing in works designed for them by Michel Fokine, Léonide Massine, Antony Tudor, Jerome Robbins, Michael Kidd, Agnes de Mille, Herbert Ross, Eugene Loring, Glen Tetley, Twyla Tharp, and many others. Through numerous tours both the New York City Ballet and the American Ballet Theatre have earned international reputations of a high order. Other American companies of note include the Joffrey Ballet (founded 1956) and the Dance Theatre of Harlem (founded 1970). In addition to these, there are many active regional ballet companies throughout the United States.

Using traditional formal training and movement, American choreographers have designed a new sort of pure, abstract ballet, far less dependent on literary plot, often using modern rock and electronic music, and have developed greatly simplified decor and costuming (e.g., Balanchine's *Agon*, Robert Joffrey's *Astarte*, and Glen Tetley's *Chronochromie*). Many modern choreographers have also designed dances for stage and film musicals (e.g., Jerome Robbins's *West Side Story* and Agnes de Mille's *Oklahoma!*). In the late 20th cent. ballet was increasingly receptive to techniques and music from many dance forms. It grew in popularity, international touring expanded, and, particularly with the collapse of the Soviet Union, international exchange was encouraged.

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