Pain in Performance: Abuse, Starvation, and Exploitation of Women on the Ballet Stage

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Introduction

Pain, sexual abuse, and exploitation of women have plagued the institution of ballet since its creation, but these are not merely unfortunate circumstances. Ballet, through pursuit of being considered a high art, has cultivated these abuses, depending on them for funding, aesthetics, and publicity. We cannot separate ballet as an art from these truths when the ballet canon is entrenched in violence against women. To continue performing and praising these works without acknowledging their pasts and the abuses that took place, only serves to continue a culture of shame and silence that forces dancers to accept trauma as a norm.

In the last century, ballet has transformed and evolved but not in all ways for the better. Changing body standards for dancers that began here in America and travelled the world have caused an epidemic of eating disorders in the profession, as well as stigma against dancers who are seen as past their prime or are above the weight desired by their directors. Additionally, issues of consent and ethics have always surrounded the industry, with schools and ballet companies becoming prime locations for harassment, grooming, assault, and rape. If a dancer has not experienced these traumas themselves, many know someone else who has. The expectation for ballerinas to accept abuse as something they must endure if they want a successful career has prevented the community from making necessary changes to the way it functions and treats the women who keep the art alive.

By delving into two specific eras that highlight these issues the most, we can see the effects and outcomes of abuse in ballet history, and observe the evolution of these from one period to another. Content and analysis specifically covers France's national Paris Opera Ballet during the Romantic era and its practice of prostitution, as well as general treatment towards

conditions facing the female dancers employed at the company. The other primary focus of this paper is the United States from the 1950's until present day, discussing George Balanchine's part in the eating order epidemic, the issue of grooming and assault in high level American companies and schools, and other dominant male figures in the community who have contributed to and reinforced the problems facing the ballet community today.

If ballet is to survive in a society that is shifting towards progress, ballet dancers and makers must commit to changing how they talk about, participate in, and profit from dance. It is not enough to simply believe that inclusivity and safety matter; the people involved must actually take steps towards accomplishing those goals, even when it might go against their own interests or those of a colleague. Progress demands dignity and transparency above all else, and these traits should become the basis of dance education. Without them, we are only carrying on the traditions of the past without looking towards the future.

Background

Before the age of our modern-age ballerina, ballet began in France and Italy as a male sport where nobles, and even Kings, dressed as soldiers and performed long, elaborate shows. Eventually female nobles were allowed to participate, but only in a very modest form. Lifting the legs away from the floor was prohibited. These "terra-à-terre" movements, designed to work with the restrictive quality of heavy dresses, laid the foundation for what we now consider the basic ballet positions and travelling steps, such as a *chassé* (Kelly 5). The dances, far from what an audience would see at the ballet today, were shows of decadence, a past-time for the richest class.

Then, in the 18th century, ballet-óperas, mostly performed on the stage of the Paris Opera due to funding by the French government, rose in popularity over court dances (Homans 39). For the first time, ballet dancers came mostly from outside of nobility, hand-picked and trained by Jean-Baptiste Lully, who served as director at the ballet (Kelly 11). It is in 1830, then, that we find ourselves at the origin of ballerinas as we know them now. The rise of King Louis-Philippe I established a new era of French nationalism, determined to leave behind political instability and bring economic growth to the French people. In order to bolster the arts, Louis-Phillips privatized the Paris Opera and placed it under the ownership of Louis Véron, who broke from traditions of the past to market ballet to a wider audience and increase profits (Homans 143).

Marie Taglioni, daughter of Italian dancer and ballet master Filippo Taglioni, danced lead roles in *Robert le Diable* as well as several other ballets at the Paris Opera beginning in 1827 (Homans 145). It was not until 1832, when her father created *La Sylphide* with Marie as the star, that she became a cultural icon in Paris. Taglioni was considered the pinnacle of grace and femininity, and is now generally remembered as the poster child for the Romantic ballet, alongside other notable female dancers such as Fanny Elssler and Carlotta Grisi (Reyna 98).

This type of ballet highlighted female dancers as the subject of visual appeal over men and became the standard for ballet over the course of the following twenty years. Though male characters held the power in these stories, the real attraction for audiences was the female body. Additionally, ballet had decidedly moved away from opera performances and embraced dance as a sole vessel for storytelling (Homans 170). The body itself and the exciting things it could do became the primary focus. Other works that followed these trends during the Romantic era included Taglioni's *La Fille du Danube* and Corrali's *Giselle* (Arkin and Smith 249-250). In them, the primary female characters only have one motivation, which is to be wed to the man

they love. Giselle and Fleur-des-Champs (of *La Fille*) both die in a fit of madness at the end of the first act and leave their lovers to emerge as the real heroes of their respective stories. This type of plot, which seems to present the woman as the protagonist early on but later reveals her to have little agency in the story, was extremely common during the Romantic era.

As the ballerina became paramount, men overwhelmingly began to leave the occupation. Critics openly mocked male dancers who remained in the profession. Marie Taglioni, while a supporter of men in ballet, proclaimed that a man should not be considered the star above the women's talent (Engelhardt). These ideas have not only persisted in the modern age, where the pool of female ballet hopefuls far outweigh their male counterparts, but they inform the way we view the gendered division of labor in ballet. Women have remained the stars of the stage in the eyes of the audience, while men have dominated creative roles, including choreographers, directors, composers, as well as set and costume designers. Though fewer in number in the field, men are generally considered more fit when it comes to creating ballets.

In the beginning of the 19th century, the two most forefront countries in ballet innovation were Italy and France. There was a cultural exchange of talented ballet dancers and choreographers between them, constantly pushing the limits of the style and creating new, exciting works for audiences. Despite the success of the previous era, ballet's popularity in France began to die off near the middle of the century. Schools still existed in Italy, but there was very little interest from the public and few new works being created (Reyna 121). During this time, Italian ballerinas began leaving for St. Petersburg, where ballet was thriving. The Russians were introduced to ballet through performances by Western European companies in the 1700's, but most of the top level ballerinas there had been foreigners in the following years. This was the case until the establishment of the Imperial Ballet School, when Russian dancers slowly

rose to the same technical level and gained recognition for their skill (126). Among the premier choreographers for the Imperial Ballet were Arthur Saint-Léon, Jules Perrot, and Marius Petipa, all having left Western Europe where the boundaries of ballet were no longer being pushed. Petipa's works became the epitome of classical Russian ballet and were enshrined in the ballet canon (Scholl 3).

Petipa's most famous works which are still performed today are *Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, Don Quixote, Le Corsaire,* and *La Bayadère*. Many of his ballets featured themes popular from the Romantic era, such as female characters who suffer a tragic fate and then return later as a ghost during the final act. Pointework was the primary focus of his choreography, with advancements having been made to the original shoes, which allowed for more virtuosic steps. The ballets themselves were also much longer than what was previously the standard, often including four acts (Scholl 4). A large quantity of the ballets in repertoire currently consist of classical Russian works.

Russian ballet was monopolized by the Imperial Ballet until 1882, when the government repealed a previous law and decided to allow private theaters to exist. This caused a substantial surge in the nation's ballet community and competition between ballet companies to continue innovating the art (Scholl 17). During uncertain years of war in Russia, the patron Serge de Diaghilev brought a company of Russian dancers to perform in Europe for summer months away from the Imperial Ballet, and the company was later named the Ballet Russes. In its early years, choreography was done by Michel Fokine, who studied with Petipa but disliked the narrative structure of his ballets and abandoned most story elements to favor abstraction and dramatic moments. The company also highlighted male athleticism in the choreography, featuring the company's star male dancer Vaslav Nijinsky (Reyna 138). This period is one of few in ballet's

history when male performers were favored visually. The Ballet Russes had several primary choreographers over its existence, but it was George Balanchine, who choreographed for the company in its later years, that laid the groundwork for American Ballet.

George Balanchine, a native Georgian, received his dance training at the Imperial Ballet before leaving Russia to escape the war. He became a choreographer for the Ballet Russes in the 1920's, until Diaghilev's death when the company dispersed (Reyna 151). With the encouragement and financial support of arts patron Lincoln Kirstein, Balanchine came to the United States and founded the New York City Ballet (NYCB) in 1948. Balanchine's work at NYCB led to him becoming known as the father of American ballet. Though at first the company struggled to fill seats, the premiere of Balanchine's *Nutcracker* and a sizeable grant from the Ford Foundation allowed the ballet to flourish. NYCB was soon joined in the American ballet scene by the Joffrey Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, and many more (Homans 463). To this day, New York remains one of the global capitals of ballet, and the United States is home to more than one hundred and fifty professional ballet companies. Among them, the NYCB — and its training academy, School of American Ballet (SAB) — is one of the most prestigious.

Starvation and The Aging Ballerina

> *Through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity… female bodies become docile bodies – Susan Bordo, Feminist Philosopher*

Traditionally in the ballet world, before a dancer can hope to earn the title of a professional, they must have natural talent and physical propensity, privileged economic access, and a narrow range of physical attributes that fit the "ballet body" to train at elite programs

starting from a young age. Some of these academies, including SAB, offer dorm residency to students and partner with certain high schools in order to maximize the dancer's time spent training. There are exceptions to this historical trend: Misty Copeland, who started ballet at the age of thirteen and later became the first Black principal ballerina at the American Ballet Theatre, spent only four years training before becoming part of the company (Copeland). However, the vast majority of dance students who receive contracts with a ballet company spend their childhood and adolescent years training at elite schools, vying for openings that are few and far between. Similar to the odds of an athlete going to the Olympics, a very small percentage of ballet students will ever become professionals. This fact is drilled into the minds of students at a young age, which reinforces the idea held by so many ballet hopefuls of scarcity in performance opportunities. When the pool of competitors is so large in comparison to the pool of winners, dancers feel they must take certain actions or tolerate certain treatment in order to reach what they see as perfection. This opens the door for normalizing or downplaying abuse in many various forms.

Competition for placements in these schools has varied over the decades, often depending on cultural popularity of ballet as an art form. In the early 1900s, as it was in Balanchine's case, a child could simply come into a school with no dance experience or audition and be accepted because a teacher sees potential and interest. For others, especially in the last fifty years, it's much more difficult. Dancer Alice Robb wrote a memoir about her time at SAB and says she auditioned for the school three times before she was finally accepted in 2001, at the age of nine (Robb 4). These programs are extremely rigorous, and many dancers with dreams of becoming professionals will leave before their final years. Body expectations to be thin and have certain proportions and dimensions make the training process even more challenging.

Linda Hamilton and Michelle Warren visited the training school for the New York City Ballet in the 1990's in order to study the rates of disordered eating amongst the dancers. Out of forty participants, about two thirds refused to participate in the study and answer questions about their experience (Dunning C11). Although the reasons for this are not listed, one possible explanation could be the fear of being made to take time away from dance. A dancer may recognize that they have an eating disorder but be unwilling to admit it to others because recovery would pull them away from training and they view taking (necessary) breaks as falling behind their peers. This is also often the case when a dancer has an injury such as a sprain or strain. Additionally, they might see their eating disorder as the only thing preventing them from gaining weight, which is a considerable fear for many dance students due to expectations of being thin in order to succeed.

A 2022 study by Magdalena Leonkiewicz and Agata Wawrzyniak of female dancers and gymnasts aged ten to twelve produced results that suggest the problem is greater than many expected. When sixty athletes were compared to an equal number of school peers from the same area, the athletes weighed an average of 16% less and 33% had less body fat than recommendations for healthy children of this age. Further, the study found that the dancers reported wanting to change their bodies, avoided eating food as means of control, and believed themselves to be overweight, even though all members of this group fell into either the underweight or normal range for their age group (Leonkiewicz and Wawrzyniak 6). Even years before they could be auditioning for companies, young ballet dancers feel pressure to conform to thinness.

Ballet schools and the teachers they employ, many of them retired professionals themselves, have long been accused of body-shaming students. Students at the Royal Ballet

School and Elmhurst Lower Ballet School in the UK reported many occasions in which they witnessed favoritism towards the thinnest students and were encouraged to lose weight in order to succeed. A dancer at Elmhurst, Grace Owen, said that a teacher once ordered donuts to be provided after class, then announced that only the thinnest student deserved to have one. Another student, Ellen Elphick, recounted a time when her instructor stood her in front of the class, and demonstrated which parts of Elphick's body she would like to cut off with a knife. These included, "my entire bum… half my thigh, basically, and then a third of my calf" (M. Daly). Extreme diet culture in and outside of ballet schools places desserts and other traditionally 'unhealthy' foods as something that must be earned, rather than something that can be consumed as part of a balanced and varied diet. Especially at the age of puberty, girls are looked down upon for normal developmental growth. Dancers are taught these lessons from people whose career paths they idolize, and thus they internalize the message that they must always have the healthiest or lowest calorie options. At the adolescent age, such views often manifest as eating disorders.

When ballet schools do attempt to combat the harm of body expectations and eating disorders, they cannot prevent students from being exposed to these ideas in the broader dance world or through naturally occurring comparison to peers. The director of the Joffrey Ballet School complained that intervention through counseling did little to encourage dancers to eat more, while a teacher at the Dance Theatre of Harlem noted that spending years standing in front of a mirror makes it difficult to teach young dancers not to compare their own bodies to their peers' (Dunning C15). After all, pressures to be thin are not just coming from teachers; "women and girls are being 'trained' by images in the media, by parents, by role models, and peers to conform to cultural ideas of femininity" (Oliver 40). Although it is still important for ballet

schools to be cautious about the messages they are sending to students, we cannot deny the inherent challenges to body positivity that are present in the ballet world, which raises the question of whether it is possible at this point in time to separate ballet from the toxic beauty standards it is entrenched in.

Once dancers have made it into a professional company, weight expectations hardly disappear – if anything, they become more extreme. A dancer must attempt to maintain the weight they were as a student well into their adult life, chasing an impossible standard that ultimately contributes to the stereotypically brief career of a professional ballet dancer. A 2006 pilot study by Ringham et al. sought to begin research on this topic… "five dancers were recruited from a professional dance company, two were recruited from an apprenticeship school designed to train dancers for professional ballet companies, and 22 were recruited from a collegebased dance conservatory" (504). Results found that from the 29 participants, 83% had symptoms of anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, both, or other eating disorders (503). In their research leading up to this study, the authors reported that 27% to 47% of ballet dancers overall experience issues related to irregular, absent, or difficult menstruation cycles. 40% fall below three quarters of their healthy human bodyweight range — a statistical marker used to identify anorexia. Bulimic behaviors including binging and purging are also present in ballet dancers, despite not being discussed as often as behaviors of anorexia nervosa (504). A desire to be thin exists in every level of ballet, from beginner to seasoned professional.

According to Jennifer Dunning, a dance critic for the New York Times, being thin was not always a priority for ballet dancers. She describes one successful dancer from the Romantic era, Louise Fitzjames, whose weight was commented on by critics for being not thin at all (Dunning C15). Neither was Fanny Elssler, and yet both accomplished quite successful careers.

For a long time, the ideal ballet body shape followed European beauty standards, especially shorter legs and long torsos with curves (Gottschild 65). This body type was not only considered beautiful, but also indicated that a woman could afford enough to eat.

Following George Balanchine's depart from Russia in the 20th century, he became enamored with the bodies of Black women, finding preference for their features over the established White dancers. Balanchine's ideal dancer had a short torso, endless legs, very little body fat, and a specialty for speed, power, and precision. Despite the fact that these were characteristics often attributed to Black bodies, Balanchine was able to appropriate them by seeking White dancers who fit the bill, thereby ridding himself of any necessity to hire and empower Black dancers (Gottschild 65). This trend can be seen across nearly all outlets of American popular culture, with White people in power stealing attractive aspects of Africanist bodies or culture, then placing them on other Whites either in the interest of higher profitability or for their own racist aesthetic preferences. In the case of the "Balanchine body", we can see that the fetishization of the 'other' goes hand in hand with suppression of non-white cultures by those in positions of power.

Beyond aesthetics and fetishism, some have noted that being thin is regarded as a moral virtue — proof that one is in not only in control over their eating behaviors, but also that they are resisting their body becoming more mature, which would be undesirable. Further, these traits are seen as being connected to masculinity, something that is a compliment in a world which tells us that femininity is demeaning. Wendy Oliver, a professor of dance at Providence College writes, "Ballerinas do strive for empowerment, not by consciously striving to look more male, but in reducing their curves and training their muscles. They embody the presumably masculine 'self-containment, self-mastery, control' that are keys to success in both the ballet world and the

culture in general" (41). Balanchine's body standard closely reflected changing attitudes towards women's bodies in popular culture, but there is an important difference here. The broader society often equates a woman's size to her inherent worth or value, and the ballet world goes a step further by tying career success to this package. Ballet dancers are taught that they cannot not achieve their dreams or have a successful career if they are even slightly over the desired weight. This fact is reflected by rates of anorexia in ballet dancers that far exceed the general population.

Although the expectation for ballerinas to be ultra-thin is largely associated with Balanchine during his career at the New York City Ballet, the image of the skinny ballerina is not new by any means. Deirde Kelly describes the most impoverished members of the Paris Opera corps de ballet during the Romantic era, mostly girls searching for a way out of poverty; "…Scores of these bedraggled, malnourished, sexually exploited girls in the corps de ballet had almost no chance of dancing out of the misery they were born into. They were popularly known as *les petits rats*, for how they seemed to gnaw at everything in sight, desperately hungry for life and its material goods" (Kelly 55). Thinness, then, has grown from a tragic consequence of poverty, something to be looked down upon with pity, to something desirable that girls are starving themselves to achieve. This is not to say that every thin body is a result of unhealthy behaviors or circumstances, but that ballet has nearly always had a relationship with starvation, and that the attitudes we adopt towards weight and moral worth have the ability to promote health and prosperity, or suffering.

Aside from the impacts on body weight, mental health, and body image, disordered eating habits can have drastic effects on reproductive/menstrual health as well as the ability for a female athlete to prevent and recover from injuries efficiently. Amenorrhea, or the lack of a

menstrual cycle for women who have not yet reached menopause, is a common symptom of restriction in female athletes, often occurring alongside a loss of density in bone mineral, also referred to as osteopenia. This combination of eating disorders, amenorrhea, and osteopenia are referred to as the female athlete triad, which can leave dancers more susceptible to stress fractures. When the body recognizes a reduction in caloric intake, it slows down "endocrine function, thermoregulation, and cellular maintenance" in order to reduce the resting metabolism and avoid starvation, often causing a delay or pause in the menstrual cycle (Lanyi 253). Nearly 70% of female ballet dancers experience one of the two forms of amenorrhea during their career, far higher than the 5% rate found in the total population. Bone mineralization does not occur until a woman or teenager menstruates, even when the skeleton has grown, which means that dancers who did not menstruate during adolescent years are left at a heightened risk for stress-related fractures (254). These factors can have devastating impacts on the health of dancers during and after their careers.

A 2012 study of Birmingham Royal Ballet dancers catalogued all injuries sustained by the company's fifty-two dancers over the course of one year (Allen et al). Female dancers reported an average of 6.3 injuries during the year, with an average recovery time before returning to dance of four days. The highest number of injuries resulted from activities related to jumping, which involve repetitive stress on the ankles, knees, and lower leg area. Additionally, 68% of injuries in the female group stemmed from overuse rather than a traumatic event (783). Clearly, dance as a career involves certain risks based on the amount of time spent training and contorting the body, however we must also note the impact of eating habits on injury incidence. The most common stress fracture for ballet dancers is to the second metatarsal due to muscle fatigue during busy rehearsal or performance periods. Typically, exercises that bear weight will

increase bone density, except in cases where calorie consumption is too low (Lanyi 255). Rather than strengthening the muscles of the foot by standing en pointe, the exercise will cause stress on the joints. The female athlete triad is thus considered one of the primary causes of injury in ballet dancers, with some other factors such as fatigue and improper technique being influenced by unmet nutritional needs. By encouraging dancers to eat enough to properly support their training, ballet companies could reduce the frequency of injuries and extend the performance life of dancers.

The American ballet scene's desire to control the bodies of female dancers began with Balanchine's reign. His now famous line "Must see the bones," was spoken to a sixteen-year-old corps member who then weighed not even one hundred pounds. "He did not merely say, 'Eat less.' He said repeatedly, 'Eat nothing'" (Kirkland and Lawrence 56). This girl was Gelsey Kirkland, who was a star dancer for Balanchine and later American Ballet Theatre. Having suffered with tendonitis for most of her career due to her training, Kirkland decided to stop taking class with Balanchine and instead studied with another teacher who helped her with proper placement. This angered Balanchine to the extent that he began refusing to cast her in any new roles as punishment for her gleaning knowledge from anyone that he didn't approve of (71). It was not the case that Kirkland was forbidden to seek other training under contract, but Balanchine felt his ballerinas should belong to only him. His dancers should obey every word, not think for themselves, and look and act as he had instructed them to do.

Of course this kind of controlling behavior was not limited to Balanchine; in 1989 Kim Lightheart faced criticism from National Ballet of Canada's new director Reid Anderson because he took issue with the size of her breasts; she further offended him by gaining seven pounds and was promptly fired. Then, in 2003, Anastasia Volochkova was offered (and rejected) a contract

from her job with the Bolshoi Ballet which would reduce her then-esteemed role within the company due to her weight. Because of this, she was fired. Although she eventually won her job back due to a lawsuit, the company neglected to cast her in any roles going forward (Kel1y 155). Stringent weight requirements permeated all corners of the world and made the personal and professional lives of ballerinas more difficult.

Even today, this type of behavior still occurs in ballet companies. Kathryn Morgan is a ballet dancer who performed with NYCB for six years until she was forced to leave due to her struggles with Hashimoto's thyroiditis, which not only deteriorated her health, but caused weight gain. During a several yearlong break for recovery, Morgan gained a following online, speaking about her life as a professional dancer and teaching classes on YouTube. This fame led her to be featured on the covers of Pointe Magazine, Dance Spirit, and Dance Magazine, being praised as an inspiration for all dancers who don't fit the size 00 mold (Morgan 16:38). In 2019, Morgan returned to dancing professionally with the Miami City Ballet, who had been made fully aware that weight loss would be impossible due to her autoimmune disease. She was promised, in writing, roles in several ballets including *Firebird*, *Sinatra Songs*, and *Don Quixote*, but as the season progressed, the company decided not to let her perform after rehearsing, or in other cases did not cast her for the roles at all. The ballet did not come out and say that she was too heavy, but instead cited reasons such as Morgan "not looking her best," not representing the company well enough, and that they did not see her as being an inspiration until she "looked like a ballerina again," despite critics and audiences lauding her comeback performance in Balanchine's *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue* (7:02). Companies now know that it is unacceptable to shame dancers' bodies outright but still insist that all their employees to fit a certain mold, so

instead they use subtle manipulation in order to maintain certain bodies are seen and featured on their stages.

In this case, what Miami City Ballet wanted was to portray to the dance community that they were progressive by hiring someone who didn't have the "ballet body," and capitalize on Morgan's fame. When Kathryn Morgan finally decided to leave the company after her health started to again deteriorate from trying to lose weight, Miami offered her unpaid leave so that she would remain on the company roster (Morgan 23:50). They would be able to keep their reputation while providing her with nothing in return.

As society's view on weight and body image takes a turn for the better, ballet directors, critics, and audiences alike have continually resisted change. Perhaps the nearly unattainable bodies of ballet dancers are what impresses audiences the most; they unconsciously measure their respect and admiration for the arts depending on whether it seems that the artist has suffered enough to earn it. Why shouldn't we allow dancers to be talented and skilled without expecting them to sacrifice their health for it?

Mikhail Baryshnikov, who himself danced at the New York City Ballet for many years, became director of the American Ballet Theatre in 1980. Baryshnikov frequently sought to replace dancers over the age of thirty with younger, and therefore better, women, in his eyes. Marianna Tcherkassy and Leslie Browne, both nearing thirty, were cast aside for twenty-three year old Susan Jaffe, who was forced to whittle her weight down to 102 pounds in order to earn her place. It was extremely common for Baryshnikov to reduce the roles given to older dancers, even when they were still in peak shape and able to dance. In 1999, the average age of retirement for ballet dancers fell from forty to twenty-nine (Kelly 150). Part of this statistic is the notoriously low pay that dancers receive, leading them to pursue more lucrative careers after life

on the stage, however it is also important to acknowledge how stigma against older dancers influences the age of retirement, whether voluntary or forced. There have been many successful ballerinas who danced into their fifties or even later, casting doubt onto claims from those who believe dancers should gracefully fade away before they reach forty.

We cannot consider ballet a lost cause, rather that these are symptoms that can be alleviated by working to change the system that produces them. Instead of serving the aesthetic tastes of past ballet masters, the body standards of ballet must be completely uprooted and replaced with practices that promote the physical and mental health of dancers, extend the life of performers, and tear down the barriers that exclude talented students from the career. Further, our culture must abandon the idea that one type of body is worth more than another.

Exploitation, Grooming, and Rape

> What the dancing female body could do fired the audience's imagination as to what else it might do, behind closed doors… Bolstered by advances in stage craft, [ballerinas] represented sex, the vital here and now of the flesh: erotic playthings exciting emotions… - Deirde Kelly, Dance Critic

It seems that over the course of ballet's history, it has become almost inseparable from the idea of sex. Whether it is being portrayed onstage romantically or violently, permeating through the dancers and the audience, or forging its way through professional relationships, it is important to acknowledge the role that sex has played in the shaping of the ballet canon. Sexuality and desire exist in every area of society, however the performing arts such as dance and film have had a special relationship when it comes to the portrayal of sex on stage or onscreen against the existence of sexual relationships happening behind the scenes.

In every era of ballet we can see its effects — from Romantic productions that portrayed a façade of innocence while prostituting ballerinas, to works in recent history that proudly display sexual themes while at the same time promoting a culture of shame around the sexual activities of female dancers. Directors, choreographers, and teachers expect full access to the bodies of dancers to mold them to their standard, so it's no wonder that this power dynamic often lends itself to sexual abuses. When man is the artist and woman is the art, consent has been disregarded historically and in present context considered an issue worthy of some concern but still ultimately second to the art being made.

In the 18th and 19th centuries European ballerinas, especially those at the Paris Opera, were expected to engage in sexual relationships with rich male patrons. These men provided financial support, in the absence of living wages from the ballet companies and lobbied their dancer's status within the ballet to secure the most sought-after roles. This culture of prostitution painted ballerinas as objects of male desire that could be attained and controlled, for the right price and level of support of the ballet company.

Some consider this prostitution a symbol of empowerment, giving female dancers control over their choice of lovers and finances, but I find this interpretation to be ignorant of the factors at play in such relationships. These were women with a passion for dance who loved the art form. Had prostitution not been a necessary step towards success in their careers, would so many still have participated in it? The Paris Opera offered few contracts, leaving dancers in constant employment limbo, and men of the ballet were paid more than the women (Kelly 17). It is difficult to imagine the glamorous and exciting lives being led by ballerina-courtesans when the alternative to prostitution was, in many cases, poverty and failure to succeed within the company. Very few successful dancers at this time had the financial security to abstain from

courtesanship (18). To assert that these dancers enjoyed prostitution dismisses the importance of poverty and the hierarchal structure of the ballet company at this time.

If courtesanship did, in fact, give any modicum of power to female dancers, that would soon disappear. Dancers of the following Romantic era were instructed from a young age that they must seduce the audience. Wealthy members of the Jockey Club de Paris used their money to exert control over the dancers as they pleased, with boxes at the Paris Opera often being used for sex (Kelly 50). The ballet would become a means of selling sex, and it certainly was not the dancers who reaped the benefits of this transactional culture.

Depravity and desperation at the ballet was so pronounced that when the director of the Royal Danish Ballet visited the Paris Opera during the 1840's and acquired an inside view of the institution, he immediately increased the pay of his own dancers to prevent this culture of prostitution and patron dominance and control over dancers at the Royal. It was not just backstage before and after the show that such behavior took place; in 1873, a new training school was built which housed the "foyer de la danse," where male patrons could pay a yearly fee for the privilege to walk freely through the studios and observe dancers taking class. This private access allowed them to harass the women and arrange sexual encounters between classes, rehearsal, and performances, leaving little privacy for young dancers (Kelly 51).

The façade of female empowerment could be seen this early in ballet history. Through the process of courtesanship, "…the female who was elevated to the position of a goddess was demeaned to the status of a possession, a sexual object" (Chapman 35). Although worshipped as something of beauty onstage, these women and girls were given no respect or autonomy in their craft. Dancers were treated as something to be exploited and profited off of, not as human beings worthy of dignity.

Marie Taglioni had been saved from the fate of courtesanship arrangements because she, unlike most other members of the ballet, was born into a family of dancers with inside connections. It was not necessary for her to be prostituted, because she had the support of her father who opened doors for her in the business (Engelhardt). Nonetheless, Taglioni was not free from societal pressures on women. Jennifer Homans describes Taglioni's discomfort towards her vulgar role in the aforementioned *Robert le Diable*: "She asked to be released from the production, but Meyerbeer and Véron held her to contract and would not let her go, at least not right away. They understood that the power of her performance lay precisely in her discomfort: 'too angelic' was part of her allure" (150). Additionally, pertaining to rigid expectations placed on the dancers, Filippo Taglioni is quoted as having said "If I heard my daughter dance, I would kill her" (Reyna 97). Even the most celebrated and successful ballerina of the generation could not escape the high pressure to perform for others while silently suffering.

Even in more modern times, many of the same attitudes towards women in ballet remain. In the 1950's, American culture placed utmost importance on the nuclear family; women were expected to get married young and stay at home raising children. Despite this societal norm, the practice of treating a corps de ballet as a harem re-emerged at the NYCB. During his lifetime as a choreographer, Balanchine entered romantic relationships with a number of dancers, including Tamara Geva, Alexandra Danilova, Vera Zorina, Maria Tallchief, Tanaquil LeClercq, and many more (Gottlieb 285). Outside of these relationships, it was common knowledge among members of his company that those who were intimate with Balanchine were given special consideration — Gelsey Kirkland recalls, "I knew he had his way with a number of fellow dancers. The question of the week with my girlfriends was whether Mr. B preferred blondes or redheads" (Kirkland and Lawrence 50). Being chosen as the object of Balanchine's romantic affections

was seen as an honor; proof that one might become his next muse. The fact that he was decades older than the dancers was rarely acknowledged as a problem.

LeClercq, Balanchine's fourth wife, was twelve years old when Balanchine first noticed her. Having been trained by a former Bolshoi Ballet dancer, LeClerq was awarded a scholarship to the School of American Ballet, and danced in her first Balanchine work, *Resurgence*, at fifteen years old. She was twenty-three when the two married, and twenty-seven when Polio ended her dancing career. Balanchine, at this time, was nearly twice her age (Kisselgoff B7). As Balanchine continued to grow older, the ages of the women (or girls) he pursued could never catch up.

While he was still married to LeClerq, Balanchine was attempting to seduce Suzanne Farrell, then forty years his junior. Admitted during a personal audition when she was fifteen, Suzanne quickly rose in the ranks at the School of American Ballet and joined the company the next year, immediately dancing soloist and pas de deux roles (Robb 28-29). Alice Robb writes, "His 1963 *Meditation*—an intense pas de deux between Suzanne, looking virginal in a white chiffon dress, and an older man, danced by Jacques d'Amboise—was seen was a public declaration of his love" (30). Balanchine was both unashamed and unconcerned with his affection, being so powerful in his company that nobody would dare criticize him (although this did not prevent other dancers from hating Suzanne for her position as the director's favorite).

Balanchine's pursuit of Suzanne intensified, inviting her to dinner after each show and showering her in gifts, all of which did not make her interested in becoming his lover. She eventually decided to marry fellow dancer Paul Mejia, which led to both being fired immediately. Farrell was unable to find work with other companies in the United States, where Balanchine held immense influence. The couple eventually moved to Brussels to dance (Robb

31). Farrell's worth in the company rested on her artistic director's ability to feel ownership over her body.

Although time eventually brought Suzanne Farrell back to Balanchine and the NYC Ballet, where she continued to work at for years to come, we cannot ignore the sinister manipulation that took place toward Farrell as a young woman. I do not wish to imply that Suzanne Farrell is a victim when she herself does not claim that label, but this kind of behavior is unacceptable regardless. A workplace in which an employee's position is dependent on their perceived romantic loyalty to their employer is exploitative and should not be tolerated. The normalization of sexual exploitation by powerful male figures in the entertainment industry is what ultimately laid the groundwork for the prevalent behavior in every sector exposed during the #MeToo movement. In the past several years, this movement has touched the ballet world but perhaps not as deeply as it may deserve.

In fact, reverence for Balanchine ran so deep that despite his pursuit of young dancers being public knowledge, many saw this as proof of his dedication and passion to the craft — and the female body — rather than as something predatory. In 1998, Robert Gottlieb wrote in a Vanity Fair article, "So explicit a statement of love for such a newcomer could not go unnoticed, and soon what everyone suspected was confirmed: Balanchine had completely surrendered to Farrell's powers…This was both a coronation… and a declaration of personal worship" (286). The statement of love he refers to is the previously mentioned *Meditation*, in which Farrell had just turned eighteen. His words imply that Farrell instigated or chased Balanchine's obsession, and simultaneously absolve Balanchine of blame: he was just a man falling helplessly for a woman — all of this is despite it being public knowledge that Farrell consistently rejected Balanchine's romantic pursuits.

Balanchine's behavior did not only extend to dancers whom he intended to pursue romantically. Dancers were routinely punished for getting married without his permission. When principal dancer Patricia Wilde scheduled her wedding without consulting Balanchine, he then insisted upon a rehearsal on her wedding night, keeping her until after 10 P.M. (Kelly 132). Any kind of fraternization outside the studio was seen as an act of disloyalty — Gelsey Kirkland wrote, "To have a boyfriend jeopardized the possibility of dancing for Balanchine. Marriage was the kiss of death" (41). The culture of NYCB demanded one-hundred-percent devotion, to give every piece of oneself to the company.

George Balanchine was certainly not the first choreographer to have romantic engagements with his dancers, nor was this a solely male issue. However, it is unsurprising that a man who devoted his life to the promotion of female beauty would not be overly concerned with ethics of sex and monogamy. Balanchine was in a position of total power over his dancers, having been so celebrated as to make dancing with the New York City Ballet a dream come true. Few dancers would be tempted to reject his affections, in or out of the dance studio.

In any industry, relationships between employer and employee are frowned upon due to the exploitative potential and power imbalances inherent in those relationships. These situations can lead to favoritism in the workplace, or worse, abuse against the employee. When romantic or sexual relationships become intertwined with financial security and career progression, it becomes increasingly difficult to leave a situation that is unhealthy or undesired. The dynamic grows even more complicated in physical arts such as ballet, where the line of bodily autonomy between dancer and choreographer is already blurred. No employer should have the ability to claim possession over the bodies of those that work for them, especially when it concerns consent and sexual liberty.

In addition to a precedent of grooming by choreographers, there have been recent allegations of rape, sexual harassment, and other forms of assault against influential members of the ballet community. In 2017, it was announced that NYCB and SAB would launch an investigation related to claims of sexual harassment by Peter Martins, the successor of George Balanchine who served as artistic director beginning in 1990. Long before this, claims had come out that Martins had beaten his wife, Darci Kistler, one year into their marriage. Additionally, two members of the ballet witnessed Martins slamming ex-girlfriend Heather Watts against a wall, and on another occasion, throwing her down a flight of stairs. Many other dancers reported physical abuse, and one claimed that Martins exposed himself to her in his dressing room during a show. At the end of their internal investigation, of which the details were not published, NYCB did not find Peter Martins guilty of any wrongdoing (Acocella 86). Martins took advantage of the precedent set by Balanchine, confident that he would face no consequences. And, right up until the end of his career, when Martins resigned during the investigation, he was right.

Only a few months after this occurred, Alexandra Waterbury, a nineteen year old who had attended SAB, opened her boyfriend Chase Finlay's laptop to find nonconsensual pornography of herself and other girls taken by Finlay, all being shared with several other men. Finlay was twenty-eight years old at the time. These were followed by messages detailing the ways in which they wanted to abuse the girls as well as descriptions of previous sexual encounters. Three of the men: Finlay, Amar Ramasar, and Zachary Catazaro were principal dancers at NYCB. Waterbury, with the help of the lawyer who had taken down the infamous Larry Nassar, sought a settlement from the company because she alleged that they had the opportunity to stop the behavior of these men and neglected to take action. "The suit described a party that Finlay and other members of City Ballet had recently thrown at a hotel room in Washington, D.C.,

inviting underage girls, whom they 'plied with drugs and alcohol'" (Acocella 84). After the party, whose damage cost the company $150,000 to the hotel, the dancers were not punished and instead asked only to keep a lower profile. This attitude from NYCB allowed and encouraged disruptive and predatory behaviors in exchange for the ballet being able to keep its stars. Although Finlay retired and Ramasar and Catazaro were fired, NYCB denied any responsibility and discredited the lawsuit (84).

Even if NYCB had no knowledge of the men's treatment of their female colleagues, their response to these events showed a lack of care for victims of sexual assault and no desire to make their company an agent for good. As one of the most famous ballet companies globally, NYCB has the power to acknowledge ballet's history of abuse towards women. When this abuse is uncovered today behind their own doors, it is disheartening that there has been no movement towards safer practices or transparency. Instead, they issued vague statements about the importance or morality and dignity in dance while shirking responsibility, essentially casting perpetrators off as "bad apples." In this way, they signal their virtue to the public, keep their profits, and continue to look the other way when women are being abused. After all, Martins' spousal abuse was public knowledge for decades before any internal investigation or the possibility of repercussions began (Acocella 86).

A 2021 case surrounding the Boston Ballet is another example. Female corps dancer Sage Humphries came out with allegations against Mitchell Taylor and his wife Dusty Button (a principal dancer who was beloved by three hundred thousand fans on Instagram). Humphries' lawsuit claimed that after she joined the company as an apprentice in 2017, Button "lured Humphries into an increasingly abusive and controlling relationship with herself and her husband," and that the two continually raped her during the course of this relationship, as well as

controlling nearly every aspect of her life (Mason). Several other dancers accused Taylor of sexual assault and grooming when he was their ballet teacher at Centerstage Dance Academy in Florida. One reported him to the police in 2012, another in 2018, but no action was taken until Humphries' lawsuit emerged in July of 2021 and opened the door for other victims to speak up (Jacobs C3).

Soon after this information became public, Boston Ballet released a statement on their website which voiced support for Humphries and confirmed that they had terminated Button's contract in May of 2017 (although the reason was not disclosed). A section of the statement read "Employees of the Ballet are encouraged to come forward and report any incidents of harassment, violence, or abuse of any kind... Boston Ballet employees also have access to an anonymous whistleblower hotline… Each report is investigated fully without retribution or retaliation" ("A Statement from Boston Ballet"). Sage Humphries eventually returned to the Ballet after having left of the abuse, and she still dances for the company today. There has not yet been a date set for a trial.

Although it is impossible for employers to completely vet dancers, especially considering that Button had not yet married Taylor when the alleged incidents at Centerstage occurred, the speed at which Boston Ballet not only acknowledged the claims, but aligned themselves with the victim shows a commitment to the principles that they claim to uphold. It is certainly possible for any field, not just dance, to become home to sexual predators. However, it is the responsibility of companies to be a safe place whenever possible, respond swiftly and respectfully when incidents do arise, and set a standard for other companies to follow. This is the only way to limit abuse within the hierarchical structure of ballet, where it is so easy for a

teenage apprentice or young corps member to become prey for older, more successful dancers and choreographers.

There have been other cases of abuse from the last two decades that have surfaced, though none that received public attention at the scale of those previously mentioned. In 2017, Katie Wee came forward with allegations that her former ballet teacher Victor Kabaniaev groomed her into a sexual relationship that started when she was twelve and lasted for four years. Eleven years later, she recognized the situation for what it was and reported her experience to the police, which eventually led to two other women, including world-renowned dancer Miko Fogarty, admitting that he had done the same to them. Although he eventually confessed and was sent to prison after two separate trials and three years, the initial response from the ballet community was disheartening. When the allegations were brought forward, there was an outpouring support for Kabaniaev from schools that he worked at and disbelief from female jurors. Kabaniaev's attorney countered the victim's claims by implying that the sexual encounters (between a twelve-year-old and a thirty-eight-year-old) were consensual and attacked her character by claiming that she had been a sexually promiscuous teenager (Wee). There is no action made by a child that could ever justify such an egregious abuse of power to inflict sexual violence. When the ballet world jumps at a chance to protect a potential abuser, they are telling children everywhere that a man's career is more important than their safety.

Yat-Sen Chang, a teacher and former principal dancer at the English National Ballet was found guilty of several counts of sexual assault and rape against underage students in 2020 and received a nine-year sentence (Quinn). In the same year, Alexander Boitsov was found guilty of molesting two young male dancers, one at the Dance Conservatory of Dover, and the second at International Ballet Theatre Academy. Boitsov had previously danced with ballet companies in

Russia and traveled to various schools to teach ballet. The mother of one of the boys claimed, "My son reported the sexual abuse and the ballet studio kicked our entire family out… I still have to repeat that to myself periodically because the injustice of it is incomprehensible" (Wild). Society's response to these kinds of tragedies has in some ways improved and made it easier for victims to speak out about what they experienced. The dance world, not only those in the ballet sphere, just cannot seem to keep up.

Perhaps the nature of ballet and competitive Western dance forms that demand total obedience from students has created the kinds of conditions that deny victimhood at all costs. Issues of autonomy and authority are rarely discussed with young dancers. It is deeply engrained that dancers should listen rather than speak, do rather than question. Further, the culture has pushed talent and success as an aim above all else that the community is willing to look past a person's morality. The most talented and influential dance professionals are elevated above the standards we would apply to anyone else.

Another main form of dance training in the United States lies in the competitive dance world for children aged from as young as five up to eighteen. Many of the competitive styles are either rooted in or contain elements of ballet technique, so there is a significant amount of crossover from students who do ballet training. In 2021, accusations were brought against faculty members at Break The Floor, a company which owns three elite dance conventions and competitions in the United States. Specially, the accusations named Travis Wall, who made his start on the TV show 'So You Think You Can Dance' in 2006 and had since become one of the most sought-after choreographers in contemporary dance. Victims said that Wall had groomed them or otherwise made sexual advances during dance conventions (Maas). He was suspended from Break The Floor, but now just over two years later, he is still being paid to travel to dance

studios and choreograph solos for young dancers who want to stand out at competitions. Just a week before writing this, the Ohio State University Dance Team won their category with Wall's choreography at the Universal Dance Association's College Nationals. Coaches and studio owners are willing to give money to alleged predators in order to have a winning number, thus discounting these crimes and disregarding the safety of their students. Talent cannot and should not be the "end-all-be-all" when there are concerns over the safety and well-being of youth performers.

Conclusion

When we view ballet on the proscenium stage, we see only the final product — not the classes, rehearsals, and "blood, sweat, and tears" that went into producing it. But ballet performance does not exist in a vacuum. The end result of a dancer's toil is the culmination of everything they experienced up to that point, and any kind of mistreatment takes its toll. Abuses such as encouraging eating disorders and malnourishment, age or body shaming, and sexual assault or harassment have dire effects on the body and mind of a dancer. In addition, the dance community as a whole is harmed. Countless talented and passionate dancers have been pushed out of a career in ballet either by force or because they were unwilling to be subjected to abuse from teachers, choreographers, and even peers.

Mistreatment of women has become a long-standing of pillar of ballet since its early years, and over time companies have become better at hiding this fact while allowing it to continue. Sexual exploitation of ballet dancers began with the practice of 19th century Paris Opera dancers becoming prostitutes to supplement the low wages and opportunities afforded to

them by the ballet. In the United States during the 2nd half of the twentieth century, ballet became an opportunity almost exclusively for thin, conventionally beautiful white children, and turned suffering into a cornerstone of what it means to be a ballerina. These patterns of abuse have survived through the pervasiveness of grooming, harassment, and assault by powerful men of ballet companies. Many of these companies are unwilling to admit that their hierarchal organizations cultivate this breeding ground for abuse. Ballet companies today are still eager to offload blame to individual perpetrators rather than take accountability and reform their own systems.

Some ballet schools are making an effort to reduce eating disorders and crack down on body shaming from teachers. However, artistic directors still have the ability and agency to avoid hiring dancers based on size or any other physical attribute, and it does not seem that global movements to erase the stigma of larger bodies are changing these hiring practices overall. Though some companies will try to look progressive, most ultimately continue to follow the status quo set by Balanchine and others discussed in this research over the last century. When it comes to sexual abuse, results seem to vary. Companies are torn between clinging to the artistic genius of powerful men who make them money and doing the right thing. Unfortunately, what is right is not always the favored option. As society continues to have difficult conversations about the pervasiveness of rape culture, ballet companies can either willingly follow suit or be forced to. Unless this happens, there is little hope for making ballet companies a safe place to work and learn in the foreseeable future.

The institution of ballet holds a unique position in society as an art whose leaders have historically highlighted women, but have rarely respected them. Events of the past cannot be erased, but the ballet community can acknowledge the crimes and dedicate themselves to

consciously changing their organizational cultures. No person of any age or gender should be forced to suffer in order to be worthy of making art. Perhaps in the future, young girls and boys everywhere can fall in love with and pursue a ballet career while being protected and nurtured as artists with equal body autonomy.

Choreographing My Research

In order to work with this research choreographically, I made the decision to create two solos each representing women during specific eras of ballet history. The movement choices of each highlight issues of abuse and how this would influence their dancing. The first soloist is from the Romantic era, and the second is an American neoclassicist dancer in the modern age.

The first piece of music, entitled "Mélodie nº2, op.4," and composed by Fanny Mendelssohn, called to me because it contains a softness similar to scores from the Romantic Era cannon in *La Sylphide* and *Giselle's* female variations. This quality highlights the almost exceeding gentleness of this solo. In the choreography, I sought to replicate the feeling produced by viewing a Romantic ballet: the sense that one is viewing the stereotypical etherealness of the female body. The Romantic technique, developed by Jean-François Coulon and his son Antoine Coulon, emphasized soft and quiet landings out of jumps, weightlessness in the jumps themselves, and rising so far onto the toes that it would appear as if the dancer were floating (Reyna 96). These qualities can be seen in abundance throughout the solo.

In this first piece, the stage is empty, lit with mundane lighting as if set for a rehearsal. One dancer enters from the backstage wing, stopping facing the back as she adjusts her clothing, warms up, and prepares herself for rehearsal. Suddenly, the dancer flinches and looks offstage,

seeing that one or her fellow dancers is being sexually abused. She brings her hand up to her face to block the light and see better, not yet believing her eyes. Visibly shaken, she begins to make her way to stage right to begin the first run of her solo, having no ability to speak or act on the backstage abuse she has witnessed. She is expected to do her job and nothing else. Still, she is distracted and struggling to commit to the dance in these circumstances.

The solo begins as many variations do, with a travelling pattern across the stage that is repeated to both sides. As she rounds the corner to start her second pass, we can see her look over her shoulder to the spot in the wings where the abuse took place, still trying to catch a glance and reassure herself that the other dancer will be alright. She steps and turns with grace, until this second pass brings her to the upstage right corner, where she rests with her hands caressing her cheeks, a position which conveys sadness or tears. The solo she is dancing portrays some sense of grief, part of a larger ballet. The dancer tackles her given story not from a complex, human perspective, but with a delicate and feminine technique, how a male choreographer might have imagined. She, much like female characters of Romantic ballets, is not allowed to be more than an idea.

As she continues her solo, the dancer falls out of a jump, still distracted and unable to focus. The music stops for about ten seconds, as the dancer collects herself and tries to tend to some pain in her ankle. She prepares to begin again, and attempts to put all of her effort into perfecting the choreography. This time, she is determined to put everything else behind her and dance. She doesn't have a choice — not if she wants to keep her livelihood.

The rest of the solo builds to bigger turns, jumps, and leaps in a moment of crescendo, before winding down to gentle extensions of the legs. In the final moments, the dancer *chaînés* to the corner, extends into one final arabesque, and descends to the floor in a position

reminiscent of *Swan Lake,* gently extending her arms over one outstretched leg, a final resting place. The lights fade as the dancer breathes heavily, worn down by her dance and the reality of this life. The lights go out on the end of her story; not one of hope or opportunity but a sad acceptance of what she must endure as a dancer.

The second soloist begins where the first ended, but rather than delicately posed, she is crumpled on the floor. She too is at her place of work, soon to begin a rehearsal. She wakes up, disoriented, and begins to take in her surroundings. As she takes stock, she realizes that she has been the victim of a sexual assault at the hands of her own director. At first she is scared, shaken, disgusted, but her emotions turn to anger over the ways she has been taken advantage of. Not only in this horrific moment, but after a lifetime of small abuses by an industry that she has made countless sacrifices to. Slowly she stands, becomes resolute, and makes her decision.

As she takes the beginning position of the solo which she is meant to perform, this anger takes over and transforms the way she performs the dance. As the first notes of the music begin, — "A Summer Place," composed by Max Steiner — choreography that is meant to be fun and flirty becomes bitter and vengeful. This run serves as her final farewell to the company, a symbol for her decision to choose safety and happiness over this oft-glamorized life. Perhaps she could dance elsewhere, or become a teacher herself inspiring a new generation of dancers informed by her own experience with trauma. This decision was one that the first soloist did not have the freedom to make because of women's position in society then. As this woman finishes her dance, she gives a scathing look towards the audience and her director, and leaves the theatre through an exit door.

Movements in this solo are inspired by neoclassical ballet, which emphasizes speed, athleticism, and stark lines. Flexed palms, unconventional arm placements, and quick directional

changes each provide a light and playful feeling to the choreography, which contrasts with the emotional qualities of rage in the dancer. Many of the movements, such as the *piqué* turns that transition into a *soutenu*, commonly referred to as the *Dewdrop* turns, are a nod to Balanchine's choreography. Other stylistic choices, such as spotting the audience during all turns, as well as the overall speed and precision were also inspired by the Balanchine method.

Portraying the modern woman, this soloist has seen the strength of other victims speaking out against their abusers and prioritizing themselves. She is able to make the difficult decision to choose a new life for herself and leave ballet. The first soloist deserved to be able to make the same choice, but was not able to. It is a product of changing times, not the ballet itself, that awarded these two women different paths. In some ways, these two women are the same: both fighting for their passion and finding themselves beat down by the abuse of those in power. Although the story of the first soloist has ended, life for the second is just beginning.

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