

The Differences between the Classical Ballet and the Contemporary Ballet

‘Jody was one of the ballet dancers at the American Ballet Academy; however, no matter how hard she had tried, she just could not reach the expectations from teachers, the techniques of the classical ballet in particular. And it was no surprise that Jody was not chosen as one of the dancers in the periodical performance. On the other hand, Cooper who was a talented ballet dancer discovered Jody had the potential so he decided to choreograph a tailor-made program for Jody. Cooper mixed the classical ballet and the contemporary ballet in the program and it made a round of applause burst out in the periodical performance.’¹ Although the classical ballet and the contemporary ballet both belong to the ballet, they are quite different from their dance movements, the choreography, the modeling, the music and so on.

First, the classical ballet and the contemporary ballet differ from their dance movements. The classical ballet came from the social occasions of the noble in Italy during the fifteenth and sixteenth century and was named ‘Ballet de cour’ which means ‘the royal ballet’ at that time. On the other hand, the contemporary ballet derived from the classical ballet in the early twentieth century. In addition to the classical ballet, the contemporary ballet includes modern dance, jazz dance, tap dance and so on. Therefore, the classical ballet is more traditional and formal than the

¹ Nicholas Hytner, *Center Stage* (Columbia Pictures Corporation: 2000)

contemporary ballet. Moreover, the classical ballet is regarded as the pure art of dance while the contemporary ballet pays more attention to the beauty and power of the movements. In order not to just attach importance to the techniques of the classical ballet, such as spinning and jumping, the contemporary ballet improves itself by adding some more natural movements and original stories about daily life or choreographers' thoughts. Most of all, all of the movements of the classical ballet do not touch the floors but the contemporary ballet does.

Different from the classical ballet which often performs renowned stories, Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, and The Nutcracker in general, the choreography of the contemporary ballet comprises choreographers' thoughts. Because the performances of the classical ballet depend on famed stories, it is not too hard to realize the programs, but the immutable stories make the audience feel bored easily. On the other hand, the contemporary ballet shows not only original stories which contain choreographers' imaginations or things happen at the time but also what choreographers want to express. Although it is tougher for the audience to figure out what choreographers want to express by dancers' movements, it is more interesting and meaningful.

Another difference between the classical ballet and the contemporary ballet is the modeling. In order to let necks look longer which are thought of as beauty, female classical ballet dancers are asked to wear their hair in buns but the contemporary ballet dancers are allowed to wear any type of hair styles. Furthermore, the clothing of the classical ballet is the famous tutu for female and bodysuit for male, yet the contemporary ballet dancers can wear any kind of clothing. Also, the decorations or colors of the accessories for the classical ballet dancers are simpler and plainer than those for the contemporary ballet dancers.

In addition, the music of the classical ballet and the contemporary ballet is different as well. In the performances of the classical ballet, they always use classical music, for example, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky composed the music for Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, and The Nutcracker. However, any sort of music is used in the performances of the contemporary ballet, country music, blues, and even pop music, for instance. Furthermore, sometimes the music of the classical ballet is played by the orchestra on-the-spot but the contemporary ballet is not.

In fact, there are still other differences between the classical ballet and the contemporary ballet. First, there is nearly no background decoration in the performances of the classical ballet. On the contrary, there are background decorations in the performances of the contemporary ballet. Second, there is almost

no stage property in the performances of the classical ballet. On the other hand, there are stage properties in the performances of the contemporary ballet. Last but not least, although there is no dialogue permitted in the performances of the classical ballet, the contemporary ballet dancers are allowed to have a little conversation with each other. Take the film called 'Center Stage' as an example, because the story of the contemporary ballet program was set in a city, the background was the scenery of a bustling city. Moreover, due to the plots of the program, there were a motorcycle, a bed, and other stage properties on the stage in the film. Since the contemporary ballet is about expressing choreographers' thoughts, sometimes it is not enough to use dancers' movements only to give choreographers' voices to the audience. Thus, in the film, the contemporary ballet dancers communicate with each other by dialogues timely.

The contemporary ballet was from the classical ballet and the new coming from the old is better than the old because the contemporary ballet is more creative and multiple. In the performances of the contemporary ballet, we can enjoy not only the classical ballet but also other kinds of dances, such as modern dance, jazz dance, and tap dance. Additionally, the stories of the contemporary ballet are original while most of the stories of the classical ballet are from those well-known stories, Swan Lake in particular. Most of all, background decorations and stage properties are used more and

dancers even have conversations in the performances of the contemporary ballet, as a result, the stage effect is better than the performances of the classical ballet. Even though the classical ballet is one kind of the ballet and so is the contemporary ballet, they are distinct each other from more than four aspects, the dance movements, the choreography, the modeling, the music, and so forth.

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The difference can be made between classical ballets: Swan Lake, La Sulphide, Sleeping Beauty, etc. and modern ballets, which may be choreographed using any number of difference dance styles: classical, jazz, tap, modern, etc. Two very beautiful modern ballets choreographed with classical dance are "Romeo and Juliet" and "Spartak," both choreographed by Grigorovich with music by Prokofiev and Khachaturian, respectively. Both exemplify the mature form of the School of Classical Dance. But even classical ballet borrowed themes from folk dances and contemporary styles, so a question of "what is pure ballet?" would receive many different answers!