



PACIFIC
NORTHWEST
BALLET



Behind the Scenes

For teachers and students

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About Pacific Northwest Ballet

Pacific Northwest Ballet (PNB) dancers are full-time professional ballet dancers. The Company is comprised of 48 dancers- 22 men and 26 women. The dancers dance in over 100 performances each year at McCaw Hall. Approximately 40 of the performances are PNB's Stowell/Sendak *Nutcracker*. The remainder of performances is comprised of both full length and mixed-repertory ballets from the vast PNB repertory- ranging from classic Balanchine works, seminal works by influential choreographers, and new works created for PNB by contemporary artists. The Company also tours and has performed in Europe, Australia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Canada, and throughout the United States, with celebrated appearances at Jacob's Pillow and in New York City and Washington DC.

PNB is a relatively young company for its size and stature as one of the best companies in the United States. It was founded in 1972 as part of the Seattle Opera. 1977 marked the appointment of Artistic Directors Kent Stowell and Francina Russell and the shift to Pacific Northwest Ballet as it is now known. During their extended time at PNB, Stowell and Russell grew the company and its reputation. In 1977, Pacific Northwest Ballet was comprised of only 18 dancers (today there are 48). PNB is home to the second-largest collection of works by George Balanchine and one of the nation's top three ballet training schools- Pacific Northwest Ballet School. Over half of PNB Company dancers have received training at PNB School.

In 2005, Peter Boal was named artistic director of the Company and School. Under the direction of Mr. Boal, PNB has continued to expand and diversify its repertory to include works by Ulysses Dove, Jiri Kylian, Jean-Christophe Maillot, Mark Morris, and Twyla Tharp, as well as additional works by George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins.

A Dancer's Day

The dancers at Pacific Northwest Ballet are professionals. This means not only that they are very good at what they do, but also that dancing is their job. Their work is to dance, rehearse, and perform ballets. PNB dancers work full time and have busy schedules. No one day is ever the same, but most days follow a similar routine.



9:30-10:00am: Arrive at PNB

Dancers arrive early to work in order to change into ballet clothes, stretch their muscles, and prepare for a full day of dancing.

10:15-11:45am: Company Class

All of the dancers in the Company start each day with a ballet class together. The class starts with warm-up exercises at the ballet barre and transitions to longer combinations that move around the room. The class is usually taught by a ballet master; someone who is a retired dancer. The goal of Company class is to warm up the muscles, continually improve technique, and work on steps that may be used in rehearsals later.





12:05 - 3:00pm: Rehearsal

After a short break, the dancers begin their rehearsals. Unlike Company class, rehearsals are a time to practice what will be performed on stage. Rehearsals are usually for smaller groups- perhaps everyone who is learning a specific role, or working on a small part of a ballet.

3:00 - 4:00pm: Break

The dancers get a one-hour break to eat, cross train, or relax. Although dancers get a 5-minute break every hour, this is the time when they really get to unwind, review what they've learned earlier in the day, and prepare for any following rehearsals.



4:00 - 7:00pm: Rehearsal

The last three hours of the day are dedicated to more rehearsals. It's not unusual for a dancer to be learning 5 or 6 ballets during the same week. However, not every dancer will have rehearsal every hour. Some dancers may have rehearsal from 12-1, then 2-3, and finally 5-7. Every day is different!



7:30pm: Performance

PNB presents over 100 performances each year. On performance days, when the dancers are on stage at night, their work day will start later. Typically, they arrive for class around 1:00pm and have less hours of rehearsal so they can rest before the performance, which may not end until 10:30pm. Dancers arrive early backstage in order to warm up, put on make-up, and get into costume.



Dancers, like athletes, must make a serious commitment at a young age to become professionals. Most dancers train for at least 10 years for a professional career, and careers usually last less than 20 years. Most ballet careers end when dancers are in their thirties. Like athletes, eventually the body can no longer “keep up” and injuries may become more frequent.

Photos (top to bottom):

Page 4:

PNB company dancer Stacy Lowenberg at the barre;
Photo © Angela Sterling

PNB company dancers in class;
Photo © Angela Sterling

Page 5:

Mimi Paul coaches PNB principal dancer Maria Chapman for her role in George Balanchine's *Emeralds*
Photo © Bill Mohn

Founding Artistic Director Kent Stowell rehearsing PNB Company dancers
Photo by Kerri Kellerman

Page 6:

PNB principal dancer Kaori Nakamura preparing for a performance of *The Sleeping Beauty*
Photo © Angela Sterling

PNB principal dancer Kaori Nakamura as Princess Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty*
Photo © Angela Sterling

Jobs at the Ballet:

Dancer: learns and performs ballets

Choreographer: creates and teaches ballets

Artistic Director: selects dancers and ballets to perform

Stager: a former dancer who teaches ballets when a choreographer is unavailable

Pianist: plays piano for classes and rehearsals

Conductor: leads the orchestra musicians during performances

Orchestra: group of 60 musicians who play the music during performances

Stage Manager: coordinates backstage activity- gives directions to the stage crew and calls the dancers to the stage

Stage Crew: changes sets, lights, and curtains during performances

Set Designer: designs set pieces, backdrops, and props for performances

Carpenter & Painter: builds and paints the set pieces

Costume Designer: creates designs/drawings for costumes

Seamstresses: sews and fits costumes

Lighting Designer: decides what types of lighting to use for ballets

Marketing Staff: creates posters and ads for performances

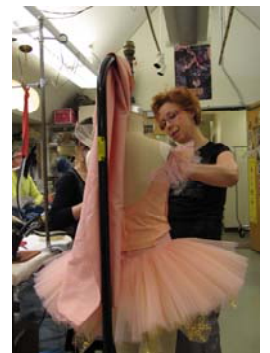
Development Staff: raises money for the ballet



Choreographer



Stage Crew



Seamstress



Costume design for *Swan Lake*

Photos (top to bottom):
PNB School Faculty Sonia Dawkins with School dancers. Photo © Bill Mohn
PNB Stage Crew working at McCaw Hall. Photo by Jill Hanson
PNB Draper Victoria McFall. Photo by Kayti Bouljon
Costume design sketch for *Swan Lake* by Paul Tazewell.

About Costumes

The PNB Costume Shop staff sews many things by hand- including detailed trim, headpieces, masks, and sometimes footwear.

On average, tutus take 100-200 hours of labor and cost upwards of \$2,000.

Due to high cost and time, costumes are used year after year and will be fitted to more than one dancer with multiple sets of hooks and eyes.

After performances, costumes are cleaned, repaired, and then carefully stored and filed until the next time they are needed.

When creating a large-scale evening-length ballet it is not uncommon to start planning and creating costumes a year in advance.



Images (left to right):
Costume sketch for George Balanchine's *Coppélia* (Villager, Act III); Design by Roberta Guidi de Bagno
Fabric rolls in the PNB Costume Shop; Photo by Kayti Bouljon
PNB Costume Shop Manager Larae Hascall fits a tutu on former PNB principal dancer Patricia Barker; Photo by PNB Costume Shop staff

About Sets, Backdrops, and Props

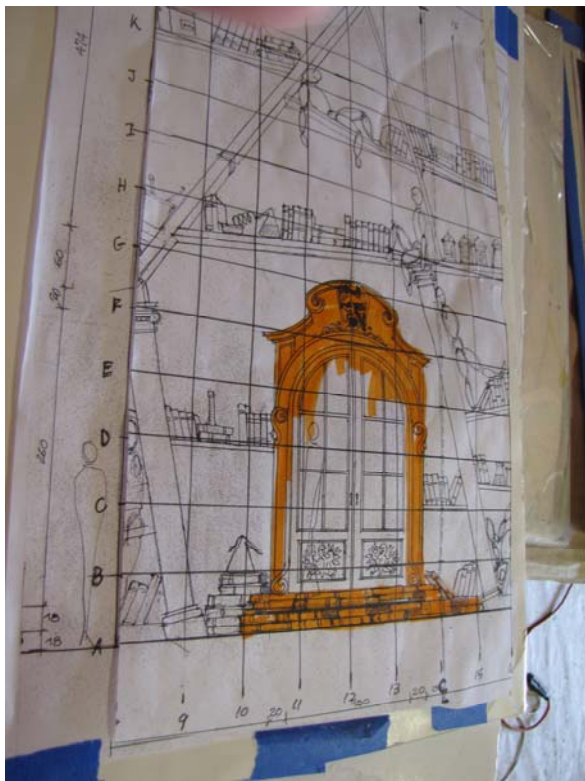
There are nearly 40 backstage crew members responsible for set changes, lighting changes, backdrop and curtain changes, audio, and preparing props. There are over 112 ropes backstage, operated by the crew members, that raise and lower backdrops and scenery, and at McCaw Hall.

The Stage Manager is responsible for coordinating all of this activity as well as calling dancers to and from the stage. A system of headsets and microphones ensures that all of the cues are heard backstage.

It takes over one year of planning, drawing, painting, and building to create the set for a full-length ballet such as *The Sleeping Beauty* or *Coppélia*. The creation of a set is a highly collaborative process involving the artistic staff, choreographer, designers, and technicians. The most useful tool in this endeavor is a model or models constructed to facilitate discussion. Props and scenery are difficult to create because they must not hinder the choreography in any way.



The PNB stage crew poses in front of the Act II scenery of *Nutcracker*.
Photo by Jennifer Steiner



Sketches for the design of Coppelía sets
Photo by Kayti Bouljon

Lighting, set, and costume designers must work together to achieve a unified whole. The best set is one born of such a collaborative effort.

Interesting Facts about PNB sets and props:

- The tree used in PNB's *Nutcracker* weighs 950 pounds and is made of airplane construction materials. It was created in a Boeing flight hangar.
- Props are objects that are held by dancers while performing. There are over 100 props used in *Nutcracker*.
- Cinderella's filigreed 23-foot carriage took two carpenters six months to build.
- One of the twelve scenic drops in *Cinderella* was painted by a computer.



Creating backdrops for *Coppelía* in the PNB Scene Shop
Photo by Kayti Bouljon



The PNB Scene Shop
Photo by Kayti Bouljon

About Music

PNB has their own orchestra, consisting of approximately 65 musicians.

PNB Orchestra was established in 1989, with prior performances performed by independent musicians.

All scores are kept in the PNB music library and are maintained by a music librarian.

The PNB Orchestra plays for all PNB Company performances, although some ballets include, or exclusively use, recorded pieces of music.



The PNB Orchestra in performance.
Photo © Angela Sterling

About Shoes

All dancers begin training in soft shoes.

Men only wear soft shoes.

Once a girl's feet, legs, bones, muscles, and technique have strengthened, they begin to dance on pointe (approximately age 11).

Pointe shoes are dangerous if worn or used improperly, and dancers must be careful to always be sure their shoes are offering enough support.

PNB dancers wear pointe shoes made by the company named Freed, which is located in London. Freed has many cobblers, which make all the shoes by hand. Many dancers have a favorite shoe maker.

The tip of the shoe (box) is made of layers of burlap, cardboard and glue (no metal, plastic, or wood). The construction is similar to papier maché.

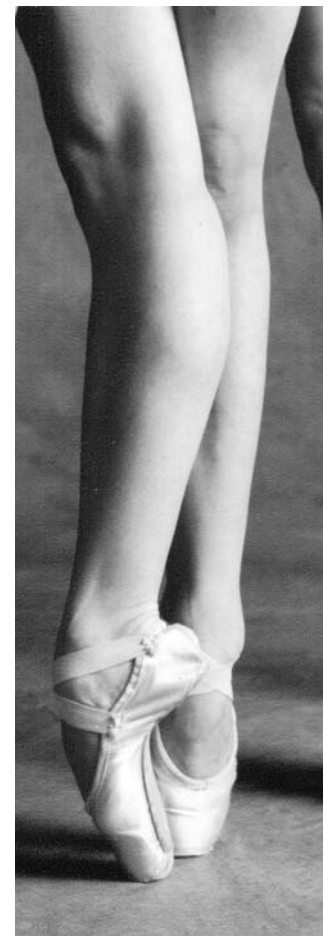
The end of the shoe is flat, providing a surface to balance.

Shoes wear down considerably, depending on the amount of use. Once shoes are worn too soft, they are no longer safe to dance in and must be replaced.

PNB Company dancers typically use 100 pairs of pointe shoes per season. Depending on the ballets they are rehearsing and performing (some ballets do not require pointe shoes) a dancers may use anywhere from 1-6 pairs per week.

The average cost of pointe shoes is \$60-\$80 per pair.

Men's shoes/ women's soft shoes last much longer and cost \$20-\$45 per pair. Dancers use 20-30 pairs of soft shoes per year.



Top: PNB principal dancer Maria Chapman prepares her shoes for a performance.
Photo © Angela Sterling

Bottom: Former PNB dancer Kara Zimmerman en pointe.
Photo ©Angela Sterling