Behind the Scenes
For teachers and students
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This study guide was created by Pacific Northwest Ballet’s Community Education Programs staff for use by teachers and students. Reproduction of this guide in its entirety is allowed and encouraged, when proper credits are included.

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About Pacific Northwest Ballet

Pacific Northwest Ballet (PNB) dancers are full-time professional ballet dancers. The Company is comprised of 47 dancers—21 men and 26 women, who dance in over 100 performances each year at McCaw Hall. Approximately 40 of the performances are George Balanchine’s The Nutcracker®. The rest of the season is comprised of both full length and mixed-repertoire 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 Francia 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. PNB is home to one of the nation’s top three ballet training schools—Pacific Northwest Ballet School. Over two-thirds 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, Crystal Pite, 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. For a video of A Day in the Life of a PNB Dancer, visit: http://bit.ly/295rZdi.

Dancers, like athletes, must make a serious commitment at a young age to become professionals. Most dancers train at least 10 years before embarking on a professional career, and careers usually last less than 20 years. Many ballet careers end when dancers are in their thirties. Like other athletes, eventually the body can no longer “keep up” and injuries may become more frequent.
8:30 - 9:00am: Arrive at PNB
Dancers arrive early to work in order to change into ballet clothes, stretch, and prepare for a full day of dancing.
9:15 - 10:45am: Company Class
All dancers in the Company start each day with a ballet class. Class includes warm-up exercises at the ballet barre, then longer combinations around the room. In Company class, dancers warm up, improve technique, and practice steps that may be used in rehearsals.
11:05am - 2:00pm: Rehearsal

Rehearsals are when dancers learn and practice what will be performed on stage. Rehearsals are usually for smaller groups—perhaps everyone who is learning a specific role, or working on one scene of a ballet.
2:00 - 3:00pm: Break
The dancers get a one-hour break to eat, cross train, rest, and prepare for any following rehearsals—including prepping new pointe shoes.
3:05 - 6:00pm: 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 11:00-12:00, then 1:00-2:00, and finally 4:00-6:00. Every day is different!
On performance days, when the dancers are on stage at night, the work day will start later. Typically, they arrive for class around 1:00pm and have less 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.
Jobs at the Ballet:

**Dancer:** learns and performs ballets  
**Choreographer:** creates and teaches ballets  
**Artistic Director:** selects ballets and dancers 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 56 musicians who play music for 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  
**Carpenter and Painter:** builds and paints the set pieces  
**Costume Designer:** creates designs/drawings for costumes  
**Costume Shop Staff:** creates patterns, sews and fits costumes  
**Lighting Designer:** decides what types of lighting to use for ballets  
**Marketing Staff:** advertises performances, sells tickets, and creates print materials and programs for performances  
**Development Staff:** raises money for the ballet  
**School and Education Staff:** teaches classes for ballet students, school programs, and audience education events
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 one year in advance.

Costume sketch for George Balanchine’s Coppélia (Villager, Act III); Design by Roberta Guidi de Bagno
Tutu for George Balanchine’s Coppélia (Waltz of the Golden Hours, Act III) mid-construction
Fabric rolls in the PNB Costume Shop
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 who raise and lower backdrops and scenery 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. This highly collaborative process involves the artistic staff, the choreographer, designers, and technicians. The most useful tool in this process is a model or models created to facilitate discussion. Props and scenery help tell the story or evoke a feeling but must not hinder the choreography in any way. Lighting, set, and costume designers must collaborate to create a unified whole.
Interesting Facts about PNB Sets:

- In each performance of George Balanchine’s The Nutcracker®, 30 cubic feet of “snow” are deployed during the Act I Snow scene. That’s more “snow” than would fit in most refrigerators.

- It took 400 hours to build the tree in George Balanchine’s The Nutcracker®. It stands 40 feet at its full height and there are 450 lights on it.

- In Carmina Burana, Ming Cho Lee’s spectacular Wheel of Fortune hovers above the stage even though it weighs one ton.
About Music

PNB has its own orchestra, consisting of 56 musicians. The 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. In addition to performances, all PNB classes are accompanied by piano.

Score for Afternoon of a Faun
PNB Orchestra members in rehearsal
PNB Orchestra in performance
About Shoes

All dancers begin training in soft shoes.

At the majority of ballet companies, 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 offer enough support.

PNB dancers wear pointe shoes made by a company named Freed, which is located in London. Freed has many cobblers, who 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 paper maché.

The end of the shoe is flat, providing a surface for 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 dancer may use anywhere from 1-6 pairs per week.

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

Soft shoes last much longer than pointe shoes and cost $20-$45 per pair. Dancers use 20-30 pairs of soft shoes per year.