

WE'RE GLAD YOU ASKED!

A random sampling of Pacific Northwest Ballet FAQs



Lindsay Dec in Company class.
Photo © Angela Sterling.

HOW DO YOU BECOME A PROFESSIONAL BALLET DANCER?

Professional ballet dancers, like professional athletes, have to make a significant commitment to training at a young age. In addition to expressive gifts and a physicality that lends itself naturally to the requirements of ballet, most ballet dancers train intensively for at least ten years in pursuit of a performing career. PNB dancers are full-time

professionals, whose schedules start with a daily 90-minute technique class followed by up to six hours of rehearsal and/or performance, as well as personalized conditioning regimens and periodic physical therapy. Due to physical wear-and-tear, performing careers usually last less than 20 years.

WHERE DID BALLET COME FROM?

Ballet emerged from the 15th-century court culture of Italy as a dance interpretation of fencing, developing into formalized performance dance in the 17th-century court of Louis XIV, hence its largely French vocabulary of terms. The art form continued to develop in England, Italy, and Russia as a concert dance form, and ballet schools around the world have informed the art with their own culture and politics. Regarded as the foundation for many other dance forms, ballet experienced an enormous technical expansion in the 20th century and has continued to expand itself stylistically by incorporating modern and contemporary dance.

WHAT DO "ACTIVE REPERTORY" AND "MIXED REPERTORY" MEAN?

PNB's active repertory consists of dance works the Company has available for production at any time: those that have been previously acquired, rehearsed, and performed. A mixed-repertory performance can also be described as a mixed bill: several different works are performed in the same program, much like an art exhibit that includes multiple artists.

HOW CAN MY SON/DAUGHTER BE IN NUTCRACKER?

The children's roles in the Stowell/Sendak *Nutcracker* are performed by PNB School students who audition at the end of September. To learn more about PNB School enrollment, visit our website or call our Seattle or Eastside School locations, 206.441.2435 or 425.451.1241.



PNB School students backstage at *Nutcracker*.

WHO MAKES PNB'S COSTUMES?

Most of our costumes, including headpieces, accessories, and masks, are made right next door in PNB's Costume Shop. One tutu, for example, can take up to 200 hours of labor and cost up to \$5,000, but once constructed, it will be used year after year and fit to many dancers with multiple sets of hook-and-eye closures. When creating a large-scale, full-length ballet, such as PNB's upcoming production of George Balanchine's *Coppélia*, it is not uncommon to plan and start costume construction more than a year in advance.

HOW IS THE SCENERY MADE?

Just like our costumes, most of the scenic design seen on PNB's stage is built by our Production crew right here in Seattle. Large floor-to-ceiling "drops" are painted on canvas curtains that are lowered from McCaw Hall's fly tower via pulleys. Scrim, painted on semi-transparent material, achieve different effects depending on how they are lighted. Other canvas and solid wood pieces are secured

to frames so they can be moved around on and off the stage. Occasionally, PNB rents production elements from—or co-produces a work with—another ballet company. All scenery, props, and lighting effects are hand-operated by our backstage crew, which numbers more than 40 during *Nutcracker*.



Painting Act 2 drop for George Balanchine's *Coppélia*.

CAN I BUY PNB DVDS IN YOUR GIFT SHOP?

PNB doesn't produce recordings for purchase for many reasons. The resources needed to film and edit ballet performances are significant, and once royalty fees are paid to composers (or copyright holders), choreographers, designers, and performing artists, PNB would not be able to recoup its investment. A movie version of the Stowell/Sendak *Nutcracker*, not owned by PNB and long out of print, was created in 1983. The company that owns the rights has no plans to re-release it, but it plays intermittently on cable TV during the holidays and VHS copies can occasionally be found on Ebay. Amusements gift shop does sell DVDs of PNB's acclaimed production of George Balanchine's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, filmed by the BBC when the Company toured to London in 1999.

HOW OLD SHOULD MY CHILD BE TO COME TO A PERFORMANCE?

Although the work(s) we are performing may determine level of interest, it mostly depends on the child. Parents know best if/when their child can sit quietly focused for up to an hour, without a snack or bathroom break. Families and educators often tell us that PNB performances offer the most expansive theater experience available: world-class dancers, live orchestra, exceptional production standards (costumes/scenery/lighting), and a vast spectrum of choreographers and composers.

IF I MAKE A DONATION TO PNB, HOW WILL IT BE USED?

Ticket sales account for only 70% of what it actually costs to produce all you see and hear at Pacific Northwest Ballet, whether in performance or by means of PNB's many School and community

outreach programs. As a non-profit organization, PNB depends on the generous support of many wonderful individuals, in addition to corporate funding, employer matching programs, and foundation and government grants, in order to maintain the standard of excellence that has attracted the finest dancers, musicians, choreographers, designers, artistic staff, faculty, and students to our organization. From the acquisition of new works to providing leotards for our DanceChance students to payment of our shoe bill, every dollar donated is essential to the final product you enjoy in performance.

WHY DON'T YOU DO MORE CLASSICAL WORKS? (OR) WHY DON'T YOU DO MORE CONTEMPORARY WORKS?

The best answer (to both these questions) is "We do!" Tastes differ, but one of the great purposes of art is to expand perspectives through a thorough understanding of timeless brilliance. From Tchaikovsky to Arvo Pärt and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to *Mopey*, PNB patrons enjoy an incredibly varied view of the art of dance: past, present, future. Most remarkable (in our opinion) are the artists on and off the stage and in the orchestra pit, who accomplish any and all challenges with the same commitment and brilliance.



Jeffrey Stanton in Kent Stowell's *Swan Lake*. Photo © Angela Sterling.



PNB shoe room.

HOW ARE POINTE SHOES MADE?

Every pair of pointe shoes is made by hand; many of PNB's are made by Freed of London and customized for individual dancers by the cobblers there. The tip of the shoe (box), made of layers of burlap, cardboard, and glue (metal, plastic, and wood are too inflexible), is flat, providing a surface for balance. Shoes wear down depending on the amount of use, but after becoming too soft, they cannot safely support dancers' feet and legs. Typically, our Company women each use 100 pairs of shoes per season at an average cost of \$60–\$80 a pair. Depending on what they are rehearsing/performing (some works do not require pointe shoes), a dancer may use anywhere from 1–6 pairs a week. Used pointe shoes, signed by some of your favorite dancers, may be purchased at McCaw Hall's Amusements gift shop.

WHAT SHOULD I WEAR TO A PNB PERFORMANCE?

Some patrons enjoy making their visit to the ballet a dress-up occasion—especially if they are bringing children—but many others dress casually. Most importantly, wear something you are comfortable in, and enjoy the performance!

WHAT IF I WANT TO BE A PNB SEASON SUBSCRIBER, BUT CAN'T AFFORD IT—ESPECIALLY IF SOMETHING COMES UP AND I CAN'T ATTEND?

Subscribers are the backbone of our audience, so please call the PNB Box Office to explore options with a customer service representative! Prices vary considerably depending on subscription day/time, and both full and partial season packages are available. Consider sharing subscription seats

with someone else (sports fans do this all the time), or put PNB on your gift wish list. Should something come up, subscribers benefit from free, easy exchanges and missed-performance alternatives.

AREN'T ALL NUTCRACKER PRODUCTIONS PRETTY MUCH THE SAME?

Not at all! There is probably not another ballet that has been performed so many times, in so many different ways. In addition to the scale of the production and skill of the dancers, almost every *Nutcracker* has an individual interpretation. The Stowell/Sendak *Nutcracker*, created exclusively for Pacific Northwest Ballet, had its world premiere in 1983. Together, Founding Artistic Director Kent Stowell and famous children's author and illustrator Maurice Sendak explored E.T.A. Hoffman's original story, "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King," and found inspiration for this completely unique production that showcases both Company dancers and PNB School students in more than 200 roles, in addition to the musical expertise of our 65-member PNB Orchestra.



PNB School students with Company dancer Jessika Anspach. Photo ©Rex Tranter.

HOW CAN I BE MORE INVOLVED WITH PNB?

Becoming a part of PNB opens doors to new friends, more knowledge about the art form, and enjoyment of the Company from a behind-the-scenes perspective. PNB has plentiful volunteer opportunities, ranging from assisting students in the School to administrative tasks to working in Amusements gift shop. You can expand your social life and offer support at the same time by joining a PNB group like Backstage Pass or PNB League, or by taking the significant step to become a PNB Membership donor. To find out more about getting involved with PNB, visit pnb.org/support.