Mission Statement

The mission of San Francisco Ballet is to share our joy of dance with the widest possible audience in our community and around the globe, and to provide the highest caliber of dance training in our School. We seek to enhance our position as one of the world’s finest dance companies through our vitality, innovation and diversity and through our uncompromising commitment to artistic excellence based in the classical ballet tradition.

Yuko Iino in Yuri Possokhov’s Firebird
(© Andy Blatt)
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This guide is meant to inform, spark conversation, and inspire engagement with San Francisco Ballet’s production of Yuri Possokhov’s *Firebird*.

The guide is divided into a number of sections that include information about theater etiquette, essential ballet vocabulary, ballet history, and answers to common questions about ballet. It also includes information about SF Ballet, the San Francisco Ballet School, and the San Francisco Ballet Center for Dance Education, which produces this guide.

This guide also offers questions to consider and activities to experience, before or after viewing these ballets. The content of the guide is designed to enhance and support your ballet-going experience. You might consider copying portions of it for your class and/or bringing it to the theater. There is even room in the margins to take notes.

*Ikolo Griffin leads a San Francisco Ballet Family Workshop*  
(© SFB Center for Dance Education, 2007)
What is Dance?

Bending, stretching, jumping, and turning are all activities dancers do. They work hard to transform these everyday movements into the language of dance, using each step as a word to compose first a phrase, then a sentence, a paragraph, and finally a story. Dance can also be a medium for expressing a feeling such as joy, sadness, anger, or love. Dance is one of the greatest forms of communication we have available to us.

Through movement and facial expressions dancers learn to convey emotions, and sometimes even entire stories, without needing to speak. Because dance uses no spoken words, people around the world understand and respond to it. This is why dance is sometimes called a universal language.

Movement to music is a natural response to our enjoyment of sounds. Even an infant begins bobbing its head to music it enjoys. There are many different types and variations of dancing: from tribal dances to swing dancing, and from hip-hop at a party to a classical ballet on an opera house stage. Dance is a wonderful way of expressing our joy of life.

You might explore how to communicate an emotion through movement yourself. Notice how different music inspires unique motion, especially in children.

All dance is a valid form of expression.
Scene I: The Firebird

While out in the forest one day, Prince Ivan catches a glimpse of a beautiful bird with dazzling feathers that glow as if they were aflame. He chases after her and finds himself in a magic garden beside a castle owned by a demon named Kastchei, who has secretly hidden his soul inside an egg so that he can remain immortal.

In the garden, the prince captures the Firebird, but when she pleads for her freedom, he reluctantly allows her to go free. In return for his kindness, one day, Prince Ivan, while hunting, sees a bird whose plumage shines with the brilliance of flame. He follows it, and it leads him to Kastchei's magic garden where he succeeds in capturing it. The Firebird pleads for him to let her go, and reluctantly he agrees to do so. In return, the Firebird gives him one of her magic feathers, telling him that it will protect him from harm and that if he should ever be in need, he should use the feather to call her to him.

She then flies away, leaving Ivan alone in the garden.

Scene II: The Princesses

In the castle, Kastchei has enchanted thirteen princesses, who must remain his captives. In the evening, they are allowed to play with golden apples from the silver tree in the middle of Kastchei's garden.

Ivan falls in love with one of the princesses and promises to find a way to break the spell. But when dawn begins to break, they are forced to return to Kastchei's castle and they warn Ivan not to try to follow them.

However, Ivan ignores their warnings, and throws open the gate to the castle. A terrible peal of bells sounds and Katchei's servants, demons and ogres stream out of the gates.

Scene III: The Infernal Dance

Monsters and evil creatures swarm and trap Ivan and in the midst of them is Kastchei himself, who prepares to turn Ivan into stone.

Just in time, Ivan remembers the feather and uses it to summon the Firebird. She appears and casts a spell on Kastchei forcing him and his minions to dance until they are exhausted and fall into a deep sleep.

Scene IV: The Lullaby

As the monsters sleep, the Firebird explains to the Prince that Kastchei remains immortal because he has hidden his soul in a giant egg. She leads him to it and Ivan smashes the egg, which breaks Kastchei's power, causing his servants and the castle to vanish.

Scene V: The Spell

The princesses, and all the others whom Kastchei has bewitched over the years, are freed and everyone rejoices that good has triumphed over evil.

Composer: Igor Stravinsky  
Choreographer: Yuri Possokhov  
Scenic Design: Yuri Zhukov  
Costume Design: Sandra Woodall  
Lighting Design: David Finn  
Music: L'Oiseau de feu Suite (1945)  
World Premiere (Fokine chor.): June 25, 1910—Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, Theatre National de l’Opera, Paris France  
San Francisco Ballet Premiere: February 1, 2007—War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco, CA
Yuri Possokhov
Choreographer-in-Residence

After receiving his dance training at the Moscow Ballet School, Yuri Possokhov danced with the Bolshoi Ballet for ten years, working primarily with Ballet Master Yuri Grigorovich. During this decade, he was promoted through the ranks to principal dancer. In 1992, he joined the Royal Danish Ballet as a principal dancer, at the invitation of Ballet Master Frank Andersen. The following December, Possokhov was cast as Prince Desiré in Helgi Tomasson’s *The Sleeping Beauty* and after being invited to perform in San Francisco Ballet’s opening night gala, he moved west. In 1994, he joined SF Ballet as a principal dancer.

As a choreographer, Possokhov’s credits include *Songs of Spain*, choreographed in 1997 for former SF Ballet Principal Dancer Muriel Maffre; *A Duet for Two*, created the same year for former SF Ballet Principal Dancer Joanna Berman; and *Impromptu Scriabin*, for former San Francisco Ballet Soloist Felipe Diaz. In 2000 he completed a new work for a dancer at the Marinsky Ballet, as well as *5 Mazurkas* for the Marin Dance Theatre.

Possokhov’s *Magrittomania*, inspired by the paintings of René Magritte, was commissioned for SF Ballet’s Discovery Program in 2000, and in April 2001, Possokhov received an Isadora Duncan Dance Award for outstanding choreography for the work. For the 2002 Repertory Season, Possokhov created *Domned*, based on Eurpides’ play *Medeea*, which the Company also took on tour to New York City Center in fall 2002. In 2003, Possokhov collaborated with Tomasson on a new staging of the full-length *Don Quixote*, which was also performed on subsequent seasons and on tour to Los Angeles and Paris.

Possokhov’s *Study in Motion*, set to the music of Alexander Scriabin, premiered on the Company’s 2004 Repertory Season, and was also performed on tour to London that same year and during the following season. Also in 2004, Possokhov’s *Firebird* premiered at Oregon Ballet Theatre to critical acclaim, and was later staged by SF Ballet in 2007. The following year, he created another work for Oregon Ballet, *La Valse*. For SF Ballet’s 2005 Repertory Season, Possokhov created *Reflections*, set to the music of Felix Mendelssohn. In February 2006, the Bolshoi Ballet premiered Possokhov’s *Cinderella* and it was subsequently performed by the company in London and Washington, D.C. In spring 2006, Possokhov created *Ballet Mori*, which marked San Francisco’s earthquake centennial, in collaboration with Maffre. Following his retirement as a principal dancer from the Company, Possokhov was named choreographer in residence in May 2006.

Arguably the most influential and important composer of the 20th century, Igor Stravinsky was born Igor Fyodorovich Stravinsky on June 17, 1882 in Oranienbaum (later Lomonosov), Russia. The son of a singer at the Maryinsky (Kirov) Theater, Stravinsky grew up in St. Petersburg, and originally planned to become a lawyer, but became interested in music and studied under the great Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. At the age of 27, Stravinsky received his first major commission, for a full-length ballet Serge Diaghilev planned to mount, entitled L’Oiseau de feu (Firebird). Although he was not the first choice for composer, Stravinsky nevertheless had already achieved notoriety for his orchestrations, and his score for Firebird is now considered a daring and innovative composition for its time. The ballet’s premiere in 1910 was a rousing success and Stravinsky followed this work with two others, Petrouchka in 1911 and The Rite of Spring in 1913, which would rank among his most famous works. In a time when the art world was undergoing a revolution, Stravinsky embraced the challenge of creating music that encompassed a broad range of cultures, styles, and genres, from primitive to neoclassical, to what would be called “serialist” works. Although he often wrote his music in the framework of a classical form, such as an opera or symphony, he would also experiment with chamber music as well as jazz. One of a generation of cosmopolitan Russians in his time, Stravinsky is considered by many in both the West and his homeland to be the most influential composer of 20th-century music, and indeed, he was named by Time magazine as one of the most influential people of the century. Like many composers, choreographers, and artists in the Ballets Russes, Stravinsky had a consuming interest in all the arts, literature, and culture. Under Diaghilev’s direction he became the principal composer for the Ballets Russes and would later collaborate with Pablo Picasso on Pulcinella (1920), Jean Cocteau on Oedipus Rex (1927), and most famously with George Balanchine on a number of ballets, beginning with Apollon Musagete (1928). Married at the age of 23 to his cousin, Katerina Nossenko, Stravinsky lived for many years in western Europe, mainly in Paris and in Switzerland, until Katerina’s death from cancer in 1939. That same year, on the eve of World War II, he emigrated to America, where he married Vera de Bosset, who would remain his wife for the rest of his life. Stravinsky became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1945, and though he returned to Russia to give a series of concerts in 1962, he made the West his home. An urbane and cultured figure, Stravinsky maintained connections with many Russian expatriates who had also come to America, among them George Balanchine, with whom he would collaborate on the famous Agon. But he also cultivated relationships with other leading figures of the 20th century, from poet W.H. Auden to rock musician Warren Zevon. With a career that spanned most of the 20th century, Stravinsky was at the forefront of some of the most important developments of modern music. From his neoclassical Symphony of Psalms,
to the Serialist works of the 1950s, he would put a fresh spin on traditional forms—such as the Russian folk song, or the French court dance—using unusual instruments or orchestrations in ways that are still considered innovative today.

Stravinsky died in New York at the age of 88 and, in accordance with his wishes, was buried in Venice on the cemetery island of San Michele, only a few yards away from the tomb of Serge Diaghilev.

He has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame at 6340 Hollywood Boulevard.

**Music by Stravinsky Written for Ballet**

- Agon
- Apollo
- Le baiser de la fée (The Fairy Kiss)
- The Firebird
- Histoire du soldat (The Soldier’s Tale)
- Jeu de cartes
- Monumentum pro Gesualdo
- Noah and the Flood
- Les noces
- Orpheus
- Petrushka
- Pulcinella
- Requiem Canticles
- The Rite of Spring
- Scènes de ballet
Yuri Zhukov began his dance training at the legendary Vaganova Academy in St. Petersburg in Russia.

In 1982, Zhukov joined the Maryinsky (Kirov) Ballet and performed under the direction of Oleg Vinogradov for seven years. In 1989, he joined San Francisco Ballet as a soloist, where he was known for his Classical and Romantic repertoire. It was during this time that he met former Bolshoi dancer and principal dancer with San Francisco Ballet Yuri Possokhov, with whom he would later collaborate on the production of *Firebird*.

Zhukov remained with San Francisco Ballet until 1995 when he moved to the United Kingdom to join the Birmingham Royal Ballet.

Zhukov began his choreographic career in 1993, creating *Dances from Carmen* and *The Story in Five Pictures* for the San Francisco Ballet School and San Francisco Ballet Workshop. He has also contributed pieces to the Dancers Care concert as well as the annual Resolution Dance season at London's The Place. While dancing with the Birmingham Royal Ballet, Zhukov created “Winter” from Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*, and *No Time Jazz* for the BRB’s Changing Stages Program. In 2001, he choreographed *Till the last sound and after* for the Royal Swedish Ballet Workshop.

In demand as a teacher and repetiteur, Zhukov has taught at San Francisco Ballet School, as well as for the Royal Swedish Ballet and the Royal Birmingham Ballet. He has designed sets and costumes for numerous ballets, although his work for Yuri Possokhov’s production of *Firebird* at Oregon Ballet Theater marked his first major production.

Zhukov was a ballet master at the Royal Swedish Ballet, and a guest teacher with Cullberg Ballet, Gothenberg Ballet, Carte Blanche, Monte-Carlo Ballet, and San Francisco Ballet. His choreography has been performed by 59 North (touring group of the Royal Swedish Ballet); the Royal Birmingham Ballet, the English Dance Youth Company, Company C, and City Ballet in San Francisco. His set designs have been featured in San Francisco Ballet and Oregon Dance Theater productions including *Firebird*, *La Valse*, and *Classical Symphony*.

In 2007, Zhukov founded Zhukov Dance Theatre (ZDT), dedicated to the research and development of fearless, original choreography and to bringing world-class dancers and choreographers to audiences in the Bay Area and beyond. Since its founding, ZDT has created seven world premieres and worked with dancers from Iceland, Sweden, Brazil, Israel, Germany, Japan, Canada, and the United States.
The recipient of numerous awards for her design work, Sandra Woodall is both a talented costume designer and skilled visual collaborator, whose sets and costumes have delighted audiences in opera, ballet, and theater around the world.

Born in the Bay Area, Woodall grew up in Oakland and studied painting at the San Francisco Art Institute. Working out of her SOMA district studios in San Francisco, Woodall and her workshop have designed and executed creations for more than 200 productions for dance companies such as San Francisco Ballet, Ballet West, Joffrey Ballet, Houston Ballet, and Stuttgart Ballet. She has worked with San Francisco Opera, and also created the scenery and costumes for the San Francisco Symphony’s production of Rimsky-Korsakov’s Mlada. In the theater world, Woodall designed costumes for the Eureka Theater’s landmark production of Angels in America, as well as for American Conservatory Theater, Magic Theater, and Kronos Quartet.

A gifted visual artist, Woodall received a Fulbright Scholar appointment for study in Taiwan from 1999 to 2000, where she taught at the National Institute of Arts in Taipei. While in Asia, she designed costumes for Shangri-La, a story of man’s battle with the natural elements, and she also worked as a visual collaborator on Stan Lai’s eight hour production of Dream Like a Dream at Hong Kong Repertory Theatre.

Woodall’s attention to small details makes her one of the Bay Area’s most sought after costume designers, and her organic natural motifs, such as autumn leaf patterns or Russian folk designs, are always carefully selected to integrate with the concept of each work.

Drawn to images and objects found in nature, Woodall often collects small items—plants, shells, stones—for inspiration. While in Washington, D.C. one autumn, she began picking up the fallen leaves, which later evolved into the set design for the ballet Lambarena.

From the earliest concept sketches to fully realized sets and costumes, Woodall’s exacting craftsmanship extends to the selection of each distinctive element, colors, fabrics, and textures that will make up the complete visual picture.

For her work on San Francisco Ballet’s Lambarena, Woodall received the third of five Isadora Duncan Awards for design. She has also been honored with several Bay Area Theatre Critics’ Circle Awards.

Princess costume for Yuri Possokhov’s Firebird (© Sandra Woodall)
History of Firebird

After an enormously successful first season in Paris, Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes began to prepare the repertoire of new works to premiere during the 1910 season. Given the success of Mikhail Fokine’s earthy and exotic ballet *Prince Igor*, to the music of Alexander Borodin, Diaghilev decided to commission another work drawn from Russian sources. He settled on the legend of the Firebird, a magical creature of Russian folktales, such as *Ivan Tsarevich and the Grey Wolf*. This time, however, he wanted completely new music, and he requested a score from a composer named Anatol Liadov initially.

Liadov was unable to complete the commission, and so Diaghilev turned to the young composer Igor Stravinsky, a talented student of the great Russian icon Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, who had never created music for a ballet before.

Stravinsky completed *The Firebird* in early 1910, and the ballet, with choreography by Mikhail Fokine, had its world premiere on June 25, 1910 at the Paris Opéra. Diaghilev also commissioned elaborate costumes designed by Leon Bakst and exotic sets created by Alexandre Golovine, and on opening night, Fokine himself danced the role of Prince Ivan, with Tamara Karsavina as the Firebird.

The ballet, and its unusual score, were an immediate hit, although Stravinsky continued to refine the music, creating a shorter concert version in 1911; another suite, which is most often performed today, in 1919; and a fuller version of the music in 1945, which is the one used by Yuri Possokhov for his version of *Firebird*.

What Did You Learn?

1) Who choreographed the first *Firebird* ballet?
2) When and where did *Firebird* premiere?
3) Who danced the original *Firebird*?
4) How many versions of the music did Igor Stravinsky create?

See page 35 for answers.
The San Francisco Ballet Center for Dance Education

Famous Firebirds

1910

The original production of Firebird was choreographed by Mikhail Fokine for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. First performed in Paris, it featured scenery and costumes devised by Alexander Golovine with the lead costumes designed by Leon Bakst. Tamara Karsavina danced the title role with Fokine himself dancing Prince Ivan.

1954

Tamara Karsavina taught the role of the Firebird to Margot Fonteyn for the Sadlers Wells revival of the Firebird. Her Prince was Michael Somes, and this is one of the few versions of Firebird that is still available commercially on video.

1949

In 1945, Igor Stravinsky produced a new orchestral version of the ballet as a suite. George Balanchine used this 1945 suite for his New York City Ballet production of the Firebird in 1949. It starred Maria Tallchief as the magical bird and Francisco Moncion as Prince Ivan. The fantastical sets and costumes were originally designed by artist Marc Chagall for a different production at American Ballet Theatre.

1970

George Balanchine returned to the Firebird in a collaboration with Jerome Robbins. For this version, completely new sets were created by Marc Chagall and Barbara Karinska modified the costumes. The role of the Firebird was danced by Gelsey Kirkland, with Jacques d’Amboise playing Prince Ivan.
Instruments in *Firebird*

One of the things that makes Stravinsky’s score for Firebird so unusual is his expert use of each instrument in the orchestra. As you listen to the music for the ballet, see if you can pick out particular instruments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Flute</strong></th>
<th><strong>Clarinet, Oboe &amp; Bassoon</strong></th>
<th><strong>Horns</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listen for the flutes in the Firebird’s theme music. When she first appears onstage, the flutes create a bird-like sound.</td>
<td>The woodwinds carry the main theme of the Firebird’s Princesses’ dance, and you may also be able to pick out the solo bassoon in the lullaby as the demons fall asleep.</td>
<td>The horns, especially low ones like the tuba, create the deep notes of the chaotic dance of the demons. The French horns, however, also play the beautiful regal theme at the finale.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Strings</strong></th>
<th><strong>Drums &amp; Timpani</strong></th>
<th><strong>Xylophone</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The strings (violins, violas, cellos and bass viols) provide “body” for the voice of the orchestra. Listen to how they build tension just before the Firebird’s entrance, or add to the grandeur of the finale.</td>
<td>Listen for the drums and timpani especially in the dance of the demons, where they give the pulsing rhythms of Kashchei’s servants a savage feeling.</td>
<td>The unusual sound of the xylophone, along with cymbals and triangle, appear in effects throughout the ballet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You can listen to the various instruments play their individual parts at:

http://www.braunarts.com/firebird/intro.html
Many different kinds of birds appear in classical ballets, from the Swan Queen in *Swan Lake*, to the Firebird, to the Bluebird in *Sleeping Beauty*. Dancers use all kinds of movements of the arms, neck, head, and legs to give the impression of a bird-like quality.

If you were choreographing a ballet about birds, what steps would you use?

### Create a Ballet about Birds

Ask your teacher for a copy of the music from *Firebird*. Using the music from the very beginning of the Firebird's entrance, make up your version of the story of a captive bird.

Try to imagine how you might give the illusion of being a bird.

- Do you think the Firebird is a small bird like a sparrow, or a large one like an ostrich?

- Take some time to look at the birds you see around you: pigeons, sparrows, ducks, crows. How do they move their heads? Their wings?

- If you wanted to give the impression of flying, how would you move your arms? How would you use your legs? What if the bird were swimming or walking?
Color an Exotic Bird

Pictures of the fantastical creature of the title character in Firebird sometimes have looked like peacocks, sometimes like birds-of-paradise and sometimes like a purely exotic and purely imaginary creature. What colors would you choose for a Firebird?
Set the Stage

In any story ballet one of the most important elements is the set. Scenery and backdrops provide the atmosphere which tells the audience what kind of story to expect. The original *Firebird* had elaborate sets that were inspired by the feeling of a Russian fairy tale.

In the space below, create your own design for the scene in the garden of the demon, Kashchei the Immortal. The choreographer would like you to remember to include a few things:

- First, your set must let the audience know that they are in the magic garden of a demon.
- The set should include a tree for the golden apples that the Firebird steals.
- The overall look for this ballet should be colorful, so feel free to experiment with lots of different and unusual shades of color.
People have danced since the beginning of civilization. Dance can be a form of celebration, or part of religious ritual, and it can be performed as entertainment. Ballet is a particular kind of dancing which requires a very special technique that has developed over 400 years.

Ballet began in the form of lavish entertainment spectacles during the Renaissance in the courts of Italy and France. In fact, the term ballet and the word ball are both derived from the Italian verb ballare, which means “to dance.” Early ballets were performed in ballrooms and contained speaking and singing as well as dancing, and the performers were mostly the nobility or members of the courts. These court ballets reached their height of popularity under King Louis XIV, who was an accomplished dancer himself. He formed the first official ballet school, L’Académie Royale de Musique et de Danse, known today as the Paris Opera Ballet. To this day, all ballet vocabulary is in French. From this time, ballet evolved away from court ballrooms into a more structured theater environment. The performers began to be trained professionals rather than amateurs dancing for their own enjoyment.

At first, all of the dancers were men. The first women appeared professionally in 1681. In the early 1700s, one ballerina shortened her skirts so that her brilliant footwork was visible and removed the heels from her shoes to make the movements easier. Another, concerned with dramatic expression, removed her heavy hoop skirts and fashionable wigs to make her characters more believable.

Women became the most popular dancers when they began to dance en pointe (on the tips of their toes, wearing special shoes). This period, the Romantic Era, was a time when most ballets were about supernatural creatures and the contrast between reality and imagination. Advances in theater technology, such as gas lighting and more realistic sets, helped create an atmosphere of fantasy.

After 1850, the center of the ballet world shifted from Paris to St. Petersburg, Russia. There, a great ballet master and choreographer, Marius Petipa, produced the famous ballets Swan Lake, The Sleeping Beauty, and Nutcracker in collaboration with composer Peter I. Tchaikovsky.

By 1900, the very best dancers were trained at the Imperial Russian Ballet School. In 1909, a group of these dancers, including Vaslav Nijinsky and Anna Pavlova, came to perform in Paris where they made a tremendous impression and revived interest in classical ballet. The Ballets Russes toured Europe and America, presenting a varied repertoire and showcasing outstanding dancers for the next 20 years. Anna Pavlova formed her own company and traveled to every corner of the world, introducing ballet to people who had never seen it before.

Americans became enthusiastic about ballet in the 1930s when many of those dancers settled in America. One of these, George Balanchine, began a major ballet school and eventually directed New York City Ballet. Another, Adolph Bolm, was the first director of San Francisco Ballet, the first professional ballet company in the United States, founded in 1933.

Today, every major American city has a professional ballet company and good training schools. Thanks to the influence of superstars like Rudolf Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov, male dancers are again as prominent as the ballerinas.

Contemporary ballets contain movements that are influenced by modern dance, and many performance pieces tell no story but are abstract. And so, the art of ballet continues to evolve.
Ballet Timeline

1661 Louis XIV (Sun King) founds the Academic Royale de la Musique, later the Paris Opera Ballet.

1789 Jean Dauberval produces La Fille Mal Gordee, making it the oldest ballet still extant in modern-day repertoire.

1828 Marie Taglioni makes her debut at the Paris Opera, dancing for the first time on pointe.

1890s Marius Petipa (1818-1910) choreographs the great classics of ballet, including Sleeping Beauty (1890), Swan Lake (1895, with Lev Ivanov), and Raymonda (1898).

1909 Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes holds its first Paris season at the Theatre du Chatelet.

1933 Adolph Bolm, former partner of Anna Pavlova, forms the San Francisco Opera Ballet. Willam Christensen joins the Company as ballet master in 1938 and produces the first U.S. versions of Coppelia, Nutcracker, and Swan Lake. Brothers Lew and Harold later join him to direct, respectively, the Company and its school.

1940 Ballet Theatre (American Ballet Theatre) presents its first season.

1948 George Balanchine and Lincoln Kirstein found New York City Ballet.


1653 Louis XIV dances the Sun God in Le Ballet de la Nuit. His teacher, Pierre Beauchamps, formalizes the terms we use as vocabulary in ballet today.

1726-1727 Marie Camargo and her rival, Marie Salle, make debuts in London. Camargo shortens her skirt to show her feet, paving the way for the modern tutu.

1841 Giselle is choreographed by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot, starring Carlotta Grisi.


1915 Anna Pavlova premieres California Poppy in San Francisco.

1938 Eugene Loring choreographs and stars in Billy the Kid for Lincoln Kirstein’s Ballet Caravan. It is the first work created by an American choreographer to represent an American theme.

1938-1962 Denham’s Ballets Russes and Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, tour America and create a national audience for dance.

1960s-1970s Defections of former Kirov Ballet stars such as Rudolf Nureyev (1938-95), in 1961; Natalia Makarova, in 1971; and Mikhail Baryshnikov, in 1974, bring new excitement to classical ballet in Europe and America.

2008 San Francisco Ballet celebrates its 75th anniversary.

1. Louis XIV as Apollo
2. Marius Petipa
3. Carlotta Grisi as Giselle
4. Lew Christensen in Filling Station © Estate of George Platt Lynes
5. Rudolf Nureyev
Essentials of ballet

Just as sports, math, construction, and many other activities have their own vocabulary, so too does ballet. Because much of ballet’s early development occurred in France, many of the words are French and have been handed down since the 16th century. Here are some common terms and their applications.

accent To call attention to a particular movement or note in a phrase of dance or music

adage [ah-DAHZH] Slow sustained movements in ballet

audience Spectators at a performance

audition To try out for a role; a trial performance where a dancer is judged on their ability to dance

balance Maintaining the stability and equilibrium of the body

ballet [BA-lay] A classical dance form originating in European Courts during the 17th and 18th centuries that is characterized by grace and movement with intricate gestures and codified footwork

ballerina A female ballet dancer of highest ranking

ballet master/mistress An individual (usually a retired dancer) with varying responsibilities including teaching, coaching, and rehearsing ballets.

barre The place where a dancer goes to begin his/her class work; the barre is a long pole securely attached to a wall, to give the dancer support. After the dancer has done barre work to warm up, he/she will move to the center of the classroom or studio to practice increasingly complex steps.

beat The underlying pulse which measures time; beat is part of rhythm

choreographer The visionary of the dancing in a ballet, he/she is responsible for creating the ballet for the stage and integrating the dancing, music, decor, story, costumes, and lighting.

choreography The art of creating and arranging steps to create a dance

composer A person who creates music

concert A public dance or music performance

continuous Movement that is uninterrupted in time

conductor The leader of the orchestra

corps de ballet A group of dancers who work together as an ensemble; they form the background for the ballerina and her partner and are the backbone to any ballet company.

costumes The clothing performers wear to help set the mood a choreographer wishes to create, allowing for freedom of movement for dancers and actors alike

dancer One who translates the choreographer’s vision to the audience through technique and interpretation

demi [duh-MEE] Half

divertissements A variety of short dances inserted in certain ballets as entertainment

dress rehearsal Final practice before a performance

dynamics The force, energy, and intensity with which motions are executed, ranging from soft, slow and fluid to hard, fast and sharp

draws Feelings expressed in dance such as joy, sorrow, hate, love, etc.

draws A unit of force in movement

ensemble A group of dancers working together on a performance

freeze A halt in movement at any given time

grand [grahn] Big

interpretation Deciding the meaning or concept of a dance or movement

isolate To focus on one body part at a time

jeté [zhuh-TAY] To leap

leap To jump from one foot to the other
### Essentials of ballet

**level** A position or movement in space that occurs on the horizontal plane, such as high, medium, or low.

**lighting design** Is used to enhance scenery and costumes, as well as give a sense of time.

**narrative** A dance that tells a story.

**parallel** A primary position in dance where the feet are flat on the ground with toes pointing forward.

**pas de deux** A dance for two people, traditionally a ballerina and a premier danseur.

**pattern** An ordered arrangement which repeats itself.

**pantomime** The art of telling a story, expressing a mood or an emotion, or describing an action without words.

**performance** The presentation of a dance, play or theater piece for others.

**phrase** A series of dance movements forming a unit in a choreographic pattern.

**plié** [plee-AY] To bend the knees.

**pointe shoes** Shoes worn only by female dancers that enable them to dance on the tips of their toes; the area covering the toes is made of layers of fabric glued together in the shape of a “box,” covered in satin, and hardened. The sole of the shoe is made of hard leather to prevent the shoe from breaking when bent and to help support the foot. To keep the shoe on tightly, the dancers sew satin ribbons and elastic to the sides and tie the ribbons securely around their ankles. A pair of pointe shoes costs $50 to $80 wholesale and lasts from one hour to eight hours of work.

**port de bras** [pawr deh brah] Movement of the arms.

**premier danseur** A male ballet dancer of the highest ranking.

**principal dancer** A male or female dancer of the highest ranking.

**proscenium** The part of a modern stage directly in front and framing the curtain.

**rehearsal** The practice of a dance before performing.

**relevé** [rehl-VAY] To rise to the balls of the feet.

**repertoire** [rep’ er-twär] The collection of dances performed by a ballet company.

**rhythm** The pattern of music or movement through time.

**sauté** [soh-TAY] To jump.

**set designer** A person who creates the scenic design.

**scenic design** Like costumes and makeup, scenic design helps to tell the story or set the mood of the ballet. The set must be designed so that the dancers can enter and exit the stage according to the choreographer’s wishes.

**shape** A specific design of the body at rest or in motion.

**solo** A dance performed by one person.

**space** Area occupied by the dance or dancer.

**stretch** To elongate or extend one’s muscles.

**studio** The place where artists study dance, practice, and rehearse.

**technique** The method and procedures of classical ballet training used to achieve desired results; a dancer’s ability to perform all steps and movements correctly.

**tempo** The speed at which a rhythm moves.

**tendu** [tahn-DEW] To point or stretch the foot.

**theater** A place for the presentation of performances—an essential in ballet.

**turnout** The ability of the dancer to turn the legs outward from the hip joints to a 90-degree angle.

**tutu** Ballet skirt, usually made of net; tutus may be of varying lengths. While the style and mood of the ballet help to determine the preferred tutu length, the dancer’s technique is most clearly visible when she wears a short tutu. Tutus are very expensive; the cost of a jeweled tutu ranges from $3,200 - $4,200.
1. What is a ballet?
It is dancing to music on stage using the classical ballet vocabulary in front of an audience.

2. How do ballet dancers make up the steps they do?
They don’t make up the steps. Dancers learn the basic ballet steps in ballet class. Ballet steps are like words. Just as you combine words to form a sentence and then a paragraph, choreographers combine hundreds of steps to express a feeling or idea or to tell a story.

3. What do dancers do when they aren’t on stage?
They practice exercises in daily ballet class to stay in shape and improve their skills, and they spend a lot of time learning and practicing dances taught by a choreographer. A ballet dancer’s day is similar to a professional athlete’s. Can you imagine what would happen if the 49ers or the Warriors did not have training camp or daily practices?

4. How long does it take to become a ballet dancer?
It takes about eight to ten years of training to become a professional ballet dancer. Training ideally begins when a student is between the ages of eight and 10. Beginners go to ballet class once or twice a week; by the time a student is 15 years of age, he or she will be taking 10-15 lessons a week. While ballet classes can provide exercise, discipline, and enjoyment for all, the hope of a professional career is limited to very few people. Those who will enter professional ballet companies have worked long and hard to develop their superior skills and are dedicated to their art.

5. Why does it take so long to become a ballet dancer?
Part of a ballet dancer’s job is to make the difficult look easy. Ballet dancers must spin around many times without getting dizzy, lift their legs above their ears, and jump high in the air. It takes a lot of training to do things like that.

6. Can children dance on stage?
Children who take ballet classes are sometimes invited to dance with professional ballet companies. There are 74 children’s roles in San Francisco Ballet’s production of Nutcracker. All parts are double cast so there are at least 148 ballet students involved. Some ballet schools also give a performance each year at which all the children perform and show what they have learned.

7. Is ballet just for girls?
No. Every year more and more boys are taking ballet lessons. Ballet is hard work and requires great coordination, strength, and athletic ability. Boys have to learn to jump high, turn very fast without getting dizzy, lift girls, and make it all look easy.
Common Questions about ballet

8. When do girls learn to dance on their toes?
Girls usually begin to wear pointe shoes when they are 11 or 12 years old. They have to wait until their bones are hard enough and their muscles in their feet and legs are strong enough to support their full weight en pointe.

9. Don’t dancers get dizzy when they turn?
No, they don’t get dizzy because they are taught a trick called “spotting.” Before they begin turning, they pick something to look at—a clock, a door, a light. Then they try and keep looking at it as they go around and around. Go ahead and try it.

10. Do dancers sometimes fall and hurt themselves?
Just as athletes are vulnerable to certain injuries, so are dancers. Ballet is very demanding on a dancer’s body; it has even been said that “ballet is a contact sport.” Dancers hurt their backs and shoulders, necks and knees. They pull muscles, sprain ankles, twist joints, and break bones in their feet and legs. Ballet dancers take many steps to prevent injuries including taking class every day to keep their muscles strong, loose, and warm, performing warm up exercises before they dance, and putting a special powder on their shoes, called rosin, to prevent them from slipping. Even so, there is always the chance that a dancer will get hurt.

11. Do dancers get nervous before a performance?
Even though professional dancers perform before thousands of people, every time they perform they still get a little nervous. But when they begin to dance, the nerves subside and they just perform the best they can.

12. When do dancers have to stop dancing?
Dancing is a very hard life. Dancers work from almost the moment they get up in the morning until the time they go to bed at night. As a result, most dancers stop dancing when they are between 35-40 years old—about the time many professional athletes have to retire.

13. Do professional ballet dancers get paid a lot of money?
A very few famous ballet dancers make a lot of money. Most professional ballet dancers, however, are not rich at all.

14. If dancers have to train so long, and work so hard, and make so little money, and are prone to injury, why do they do it?
Ballet dancers dance because they love dancing and because it brings them great joy.
The performance will begin promptly at 11:30 am and lasts approximately one hour and fifteen minutes, without an intermission.

Let your students know in advance what behavior is expected of them. This is a LIVE performance. Unlike television or the movies, the people on stage are there at that moment and are dancing for the audience’s pleasure. Any noise distracts them. The performance will be exciting, but let your students know that they will be required to sit quietly in their seats for a fairly long period of time.

School clothes are appropriate dress, however, some students may choose to “dress up.”

Please plan to arrive at the Opera House at least 30 minutes prior to the performance as latecomers cannot be seated once the performance has begun.

By now you should have received your tickets and a seating chart. Please show the tickets to the usher, and he or she will help you locate your seats.

No food, drink, chewing gum, skateboards, cameras, or recording equipment are allowed inside the theater. If you plan to bring any of these items, please have your students leave them on the bus until after the performance has ended. We do not have provisions for storing these items at the Opera House.

Cell phones, iPods, electronic games, and other devices should all be turned off or set to “silent” mode.

It is important to have your students visit the restrooms before the performance begins. It is inappropriate to visit the restrooms during a live performance. At all times, children must be accompanied to the restroom by an adult. Ushers will direct you to the restrooms.

Bus parking is limited. For more information on bus parking, please call 415.865.2000.
We recommend that you provide your students with some guidelines of what to look and listen for during the performance. You may also want to encourage your students to add to this list.

**Students should be encouraged to:**

A. Watch the dancers.

B. Listen to the music.

C. Look at the costumes and set designs.

D. Laugh when they see the dancers do something funny.

E. Clap to show the dancers and musicians that they are enjoying the performance when the dancing has finished. It is customary to applaud when the dancers take a bow.

**Students should be encouraged NOT to:**

A. Talk or make noise because they might miss something important.

B. Chew gum or eat because it is disruptive to others and makes a mess in the theater.

C. Leave their seats before the lights go on because this is very disruptive to their neighbors.

D. Use their iPods, cell phones, or CD players in the theater because this is disruptive to the dancers and other members of the audience.
Helgi Tomasson has held the position of artistic director for San Francisco Ballet since July 1985. Since then, the Company has evolved from a respected regional troupe to an international company praised for its broad repertory, dancers of uncommon range and skill, and a vision that continually sets the standard for the international dance world.

SF Ballet is dancing better than it has at any point in its history. As a choreographer, teacher, and coach, Tomasson has fostered an uncompromising classicism that has become the bedrock of the Company's training. The dancers are energized and inspired by this rigorous training and continue to rise to new heights with each passing year.

In 1969, Tomasson entered the First International Ballet Competition in Moscow as a United States representative and returned with the Silver Medal (the Gold Medal was awarded to Mikhail Baryshnikov). The following year, Tomasson joined New York City Ballet as a principal dancer and over the course of his career became one of the finest classical dancers of his era. He was one of the foremost interpreters of George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins, and both men created several roles expressly for him. In 1982, Tomasson choreographed his first ballet for the School of American Ballet Workshop, which elicited encouragement from Balanchine to continue choreographing.

Tomasson accepted the invitation from SF Ballet to become artistic director of America's oldest professional ballet company in 1985, drawing to a close a glorious performing career. Since assuming this role with the Company, Tomasson has choreographed over 40 ballets, including stunning full-length productions of Don Quixote (co-staged by Yuri Possokhov), Giselle, Romeo & Juliet, The Sleeping Beauty, and two productions of Swan Lake (1988 and 2009). His intricate and varied works, such as 7 for Eight, ChinLin, Concerto Grosso, The Fifth Season, Handel—a Celebration, Meistens Mozart, Nanna’s Lied, and Sonata, showcase the unique qualities of individual dancers. Tomasson’s Prism, which debuted in 2000 at New York City Ballet, received rave reviews and was deemed a “triumph” by The New
Helgi Tomasson

York Times. In 2004, his new production of Nutcracker, created in collaboration with an internationally recognized design team, debuted to enthusiastic critic and audience response. The New York Times proclaimed, “This is a Nutcracker on a grand scale... striking, elegant and beautiful.” On December 17, 2008, Tomasson’s Nutcracker was broadcast nationally on Great Performances on PBS, in partnership with KQED Public Television in San Francisco.

The strong classical base instilled by Tomasson enables the dancers to effortlessly navigate a myriad of styles by a range of internationally distinguished choreographers. Those invited by Tomasson to create works on the Company have included David Bintley, Val Caniparoli, William Forsythe, James Kudelka, Lar Lubovitch, Mark Morris, Paul Taylor, Stanton Welch, and Christopher Wheeldon. Tomasson has also continued to expand SF Ballet’s repertory through acquiring works by renowned choreographers such as Sir Frederick Ashton, George Balanchine, August Bournonville, Hans van Manen, Wayne McGregor, Agnes de Mille, Nacho Duato, Flemming Flindt, Roland Petit, Jerome Robbins, and Antony Tudor, among others. Tomasson’s own works have been performed by New York City Ballet, Royal Danish Ballet, Houston Ballet, Alberta Ballet, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, Ballet Estable del Teatro Colón, and Asami Maki Ballet. In Denmark, Tomasson’s 1993 staging of The Sleeping Beauty was the most lavish production ever produced in the Royal Danish Ballet’s history and was filmed for Danish public television in April 1995.


Tomasson’s vision, commitment, and dedication to the art of classical dance were demonstrated when he conceived UNited We Dance: An International Festival, produced in San Francisco in May 1995. Created to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Charter, it included 12 international companies of the highest caliber that Tomasson had invited to present new works created by native choreographers. Never before had a dance event brought together over 150 artists for an unprecedented two weeks of creative exchange and inspiration. In spring 2008, as part of its yearlong 75th anniversary celebration, SF Ballet presented a New Works Festival of 10 world premieres by 10 of the dance world’s most diverse and acclaimed choreographers. The festival was called “ambitious and unprecedented” by The Washington Post and the San Francisco Chronicle hailed it as a “daring onslaught of fresh work... this is what the ballet world needs now.”

Tomasson’s achievements have garnered him numerous awards and honors, and he has participated as a judge for ballet competitions in Italy, Russia, France, Finland, and Japan. During the 1970s in his homeland of Iceland, he was named a Knight of the Order of the Falcon for his achievements as a dancer. In June 1990, Tomasson was named Commander of the Order of the Falcon by Ólafur Ragnar Grimsson, the president of Iceland, for his continuous achievements in the arts. In 1989, he received Dance Bay Area’s Isadora Duncan Award for his outstanding choreography of Swan Lake. In recognition of his artistic excellence,
Helgi Tomasson

Tomasson received the Golden Plate Award from the American Academy of Achievement in 1992. That same year, he received the Dance Magazine Award in recognition of his contributions to the dance world. In 1995, Tomasson joined the Artistic Advisory Board of The Ballet Theatre in Prague, directed by Jana Kurová. Also in 1995, Tomasson was honored with the Cultural Award of The American-Scandinavian Foundation. In 1996, he was presented with a Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa, from Dominican College of San Rafael, in recognition of his value as a role model, his extraordinary career, and his community-service accomplishments. That same year, he was awarded the Isadora Duncan Special Award for United We Dance: An International Festival.

Currently, Tomasson serves on the Board of Directors of the School of American Ballet and the Artistic Committee for the New York Choreographic Institute, and has served as a member of the National Endowment for the Arts Dance Advisory Panel. In May 2001, Tomasson was granted the rank of Officier in the French Order of Arts and Letters, established in 1957 to recognize those who have contributed significantly to furthering the arts in France and throughout the world. Hugues Gall, then director of the Opéra National de Paris, presented the award in a ceremony attended by Grimsson, following SF Ballet’s triumphant opening at the Palais Garnier. In spring 2002, the Board of Trustees of New York’s Juilliard School unanimously voted to bestow an honorary doctoral degree upon Tomasson, as one of five doctorates given annually in different artistic disciplines. Other recipients include playwright Edward Albee and actor and comedian Bill Cosby. In 2005, Tomasson was awarded the prestigious Lew Christensen Medal in honor of his 20th anniversary as artistic director of SF Ballet. In spring 2007, Tomasson won a sustained achievement award from the Isadora Duncan Dance Awards, also in recognition of his 20 years as artistic director. In May of the same year, during a tour to Iceland’s Reykjavik Arts Festival, Grimsson awarded Tomasson the Grand Cross Star of the Order of the Falcon, the country’s most prestigious honor. In 2008, he was awarded the Commonwealth Club of California’s Distinguished Citizen Award. In January 2010, the Company’s Opening Night Gala, Silver Celebration, honored Tomasson’s remarkable achievements to date.

In addition to his role as artistic director and principal choreographer of the Company, Tomasson is the director of the San Francisco Ballet School. For Tomasson, the School is central to the life and development of the Company. Just as he expects the finest dancing and most meticulous attention to detail from his dancers, he demands the highest standards for training the students in the School.

Tomasson lives in San Francisco with his wife, Marlene, who was dancing with The Joffrey Ballet when they met. They have two sons, Erik and Kris.
San Francisco Ballet, the oldest professional ballet company in America, has emerged as a world-class arts organization since it was founded as the San Francisco Opera Ballet in 1933. Initially, its primary purpose was to train dancers to appear in lavish, full-length opera productions.

William Christensen arrived in 1938 and choreographed the Company’s first full-length production, Coppélia, the following year. In 1940, he staged the first American full-length production of Swan Lake. On Christmas Eve 1944, Christensen launched a national holiday tradition with the American premiere of Nutcracker, the first complete version of the ballet ever staged in the United States.

In 1942, the Company became a totally separate entity from the opera and was renamed San Francisco Ballet. William Christensen was artistic director, and his brother Harold was appointed director of the San Francisco Ballet School, a position he retained for 33 years. A third brother, Lew Christensen, America’s first premier danseur, joined William as co-director in 1951, and took over the Company the following year. Under Lew’s direction, the Company made its East Coast debut at Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival in 1956 and toured 11 Asian nations the following year, marking the first performances of an American ballet company in the Far East.

In 1972, after performing in various San Francisco theaters, the Company settled permanently in the War Memorial Opera House for its annual residency. The following year, Michael Smuin was appointed associate artistic director and celebrated his new partnership with Lew Christensen by collaborating on a full-length production of Cinderella. In 1976, Smuin’s Romeo and Juliet became the first full-length ballet and the first performance by a West Coast company to be shown on the PBS television series Dance in America. In 1981, Smuin’s The Tempest—the first ballet ever broadcast live from the War Memorial Opera House—was nominated for three Emmy Awards (Willa Kim received the award for Outstanding Costume Design). Three years later, Smuin received an Emmy Award for Choreography for the Dance in America national broadcast of A Song for Dead Warriors.

In 1974, San Francisco Ballet faced bankruptcy, but its supporters and the community responded with an extraordinary grassroots effort called “Save Our Ballet,” which successfully brought the Company back from the brink. That same year, Dr. Richard E. LeBlond, Jr. was appointed president and general manager of the San Francisco Ballet Association. He developed the first long-range plan for an American dance company, and in 18 months San Francisco Ballet was in the black financially.

Helgi Tomasson’s arrival as artistic director in July 1985 marked the beginning of a new era for San Francisco Ballet. Like Lew Christensen, Tomasson was, for many years, a leading dancer for the most important ballet choreographer of the 20th century, George Balanchine.

Less than two years after Tomasson’s arrival, San Francisco Ballet unveiled its fourth production of Nutcracker in December 1986. Tomasson has since staged acclaimed full-length productions of many classics, including Swan Lake (1988, 2009); The Sleeping Beauty (1990); Romeo & Juliet (1994); Giselle (1999); Don Quixote, co-staged with former Principal Dancer and current Choreographer in Residence Yuri Possokhov (2003); and Nutcracker (2004).

In 1991, San Francisco Ballet performed in New York City for the first time in 26 years, returning in 1993, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2006, and 2008. Following the initial tour, The New York Times proclaimed, “Mr. Tomasson has accomplished the unprecedented: He has pulled a so-called regional company into the national ranks, and he has done so by honing the dancers into a classical style of astonishing verve and purity. San Francisco Ballet under Helgi Tomasson’s leadership is one of the...
spectacular success stories of the arts in America”.

In May 1995, San Francisco Ballet hosted 12 ballet companies from around the world for UNited We Dance: An International Festival, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Charter, which took place in the War Memorial and Performing Arts Center in San Francisco. Never before had a dance event brought together over 150 international artists for two weeks of creative exchange and inspiration.

San Francisco Ballet continues to enrich and expand its repertory and presents approximately 100 performances annually. The Company’s vast repertory includes works by Sir Frederick Ashton, George Balanchine, August Bournonville, Christopher Bruce, Val Caniparoli, Lew Christensen, Nacho Duato, Flemming Flindt, William Forsythe, James Kudelka, Jirí Kylián, Lar Lubovitch, Wayne McGregor, Agnes de Mille, Sir Kenneth MacMillan, Hans van Manen, Peter Martins, Mark Morris, Rudolf Nureyev, Marius Petipa, Roland Petit, Jerome Robbins, Paul Taylor, Antony Tudor, and Christopher Wheeldon.

In recent years, the Company’s touring program has become increasingly ambitious. In fall 2008, as part of its year-long 75th anniversary celebration, San Francisco Ballet embarked on a critically acclaimed four-city American Tour with engagements at Chicago’s Harris Theater for Music and Dance, New York City Center, Southern California’s Orange County Performing Arts Center, and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C.

San Francisco Ballet has also enjoyed frequent overseas tours, including engagements at prestigious venues such as the famed Opéra de Paris-Palais Garnier in Paris (2001); London’s Sadler’s Wells Theatre (1999, 2004) and the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden (2002); Athens’ Megaron Theatre (2002) Herod Atticus Amphitheatre (2004); Tivoli in Copenhagen (1998, 2010); and the Edinburgh International Festival at the Edinburgh Playhouse (2003).

Notably, on the second day of the Company’s London engagement in 2004, Sadler’s Wells’ box office experienced the second-highest single sales day in its history. Of the engagement, David Dougill of The Sunday Times wrote, “Helgi Tomasson’s outstanding artistic direction...has transformed a regional American troupe into one of the world’s top ballet companies.”

In 2005, the Company returned to Paris, participating in a three-week inaugural engagement at Les étés de la danse de Paris, a new outdoor dance festival. In fall 2009, San Francisco Ballet made its first trip to the People’s Republic of China, performing Tomasson’s 1988 production of Swan Lake, as well as a mixed-repertoire program, in Shanghai and Beijing.

In 2004, San Francisco Ballet was the first American ballet company to present the evening-length Sylvia, with all-new choreography by Mark Morris. The Company also performed a two-week Centennial Celebration to honor the 100th anniversary of the birth of Master Choreographer George Balanchine. In December 2004, San Francisco Ballet debuted Tomasson’s critically acclaimed new production of Nutcracker, hailed by The New York Times as “…striking, elegant and beautiful!” In 2005, Tomasson was awarded the prestigious Lew Christensen Medal in honor of his 20th anniversary as artistic director of San Francisco Ballet, and that same year, the Company won its first Laurence Olivier Award, for its 2004 fall season at Sadler’s Wells Theatre. In 2006, in a readers’ poll conducted by Dance Europe magazine, San Francisco Ballet was the first non-European company to be voted “Company of the Year” by the publication. In 2008, San Francisco Ballet was one of the recipients of the Jerome Robbins Award for excellence in dance.

2008 marked the Company’s 75th Anniversary Season and highlights included the revival of former San Francisco Ballet Director Lew Christensen’s Filling Station, one of the oldest American folk ballets; an all-Robbins Program, commemorating the 10th anniversary of the master choreographer’s death; the San Francisco Ballet premiere of West Side Story Suite; a tribute to San Francisco Ballet from three international companies (Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo, The National Ballet of Canada, and New York City Ballet); and a New Works Festival of 10 world premieres by 10 of the dance world’s most diverse and acclaimed choreographers including Julia Adam, Val Caniparoli, Jorma Elo, Margaret Jenkins, James Kudelka, Mark Morris, Yuri Possokhov, Paul Taylor, Stanton Welch, and Christopher Wheeldon. Other anniversary initiatives included a commemorative book, San Francisco Ballet at Seventy-Five; special exhibitions; an alumni reunion weekend; and the broadcast of Tomasson’s Nutcracker in December 2008 on Great Performances’ Dance in America series on PBS, produced in partnership with KQED Public Television in San Francisco. In January 2010, the Ballet’s Opening Night Gala, Silver Celebration, honored Tomasson’s 25 years as artistic director of San Francisco Ballet.

The San Francisco Ballet School, overseen by Tomasson, attracts students from around the world, training approximately 350 annually. In addition to filling the ranks of San Francisco Ballet, graduates have gone on to join distinguished ballet companies throughout the world.
San Francisco Ballet, the oldest professional ballet company in America, was also one of the first dance companies to have its own permanent body of musicians. In October 1975, the San Francisco Performing Arts Orchestra was founded to serve as the Ballet’s official orchestra, and in 1983, the group’s name was changed to San Francisco Ballet Orchestra.

In the preceding years, a pickup orchestra made up largely of San Francisco Symphony members had served San Francisco Ballet. Later, the Oakland Symphony served in this capacity, but an expanded schedule and additional concert dates made commitment to San Francisco Ballet increasingly difficult. Today, the ensemble enjoys the distinction of being one of three major orchestras in one city, along with the San Francisco Symphony and the San Francisco Opera—a rarity in this country.

In the 1970s, an ever-expanding repertory of new works required the dedication and talent of a permanent ensemble. Ballet management, including Co-Directors Lew Christensen and Michael Smuin, along with then-Music Conductor Denis de Coteau and Alex Horvath (violinist and eventual Orchestra personnel manager), made this a top priority. The first step was to retain Jean-Louis LeRoux as associate conductor, and the process of negotiating with the musicians’ union began immediately. Auditions were held with over two hundred musicians trying out. By 1975, the Orchestra, made up of 38 musicians, was officially formed. The Performing Arts Orchestra had its premiere during San Francisco Ballet’s Nutcracker in December. Following the first Nutcracker rehearsal with the Orchestra, the dancers came downstage and applauded both the musicians and de Coteau. During ensuing repertory seasons, the Orchestra, under the leadership of newly appointed Music Director Denis de Coteau, was met with both audience and critical acclaim.

In 1978, the Company returned to New York for the first time since its 1965 engagement at Lincoln Center. The Company’s 12-performance series, which included accompaniment by the Performing Arts Orchestra at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, was an unqualified success. During the engagement, the late critic Byron Belt hailed the Orchestra as “one of the best in the business.” The Orchestra continued to accompany the Ballet on tour until 1984, when it ceased touring for two reasons: the cost was increasingly prohibitive, and as the Company gained stature, it performed in larger, more prominent venues that often had their own orchestras. Staying local, however, had rewards. Over the years, the Orchestra has accompanied a number of prestigious international ballet companies who have toured to the Bay Area, performing in venues such as San Francisco’s War Memorial Opera House and the Berkeley Community Theatre. Some of these companies included The Royal Ballet, the Royal Danish Ballet (1979), Stuttgart Ballet (late 1980s), the Bolshoi Ballet (1987), Paul Taylor Dance Company (1990), American Ballet Theatre (1991, 1992), and the Paris Opéra Ballet (2001).

The ensemble’s early objectives included a strong commitment to educating students and aspiring musicians in local schools, as well as offering music concerts that helped establish it as a professional orchestra of the highest caliber. In May 1979 the Orchestra had its debut concert, performing works by composers such as Haydn, Ives, and Vivaldi.
about
San Francisco Ballet Orchestra

at Herbst Theatre in the War Memorial Veterans Building. The Orchestra also had the distinction of accompanying the Company in an evening performance for the Solemn Opening Ceremony for the 1984 Olympic Games, at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles.

With a highly capable Orchestra, the Ballet was now able to perform new and commissioned works without concern that the new music scores would be too difficult. These new ballets included Smuin's *The Tempest* (music by Paul Chihara), *Medea* (music by Samuel Barber), and *Romeo & Juliet* (music by Sergei Prokofiev), among others. Some of these works proved so musically successful that the Orchestra eventually recorded them. Of the 1981 recording of *The Tempest*, a Classical Records review read, “This inordinately handsome set brings us a sample of San Francisco Ballet’s wonderful orchestra. The sound…is first rate. Highly recommended!”

With the appointment of Helgi Tomasson to the position of artistic director of San Francisco Ballet in 1985, the Company’s reputation evolved from that of a regional troupe to a world-class dance company. As the Company’s acclaim grew, so did the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra’s, and by the 1990s it was generally regarded as one of the finest ballet orchestras in the world. Notably, in 1995, the Orchestra accompanied 12 international dance companies, as well as San Francisco Ballet, during the ambitious, weeklong UNited We Dance Festival, which promoted international communication and understanding.

In 1998, due to failing health, Music Director Denis de Coteau stepped down reluctantly, after over twenty years in this capacity. Conductor Emil de Cou, who had been with the Orchestra as conductor since 1993, assumed the title of acting music director and conductor in de Coteau’s place. For the next three years, until 2001, de Cou led the Orchestra, before joining Washington D.C.’s National Symphony Orchestra. After he departed, Jean-Louis LeRoux returned to the Ballet as interim music director for two years. In May 2003, Andrew Mogrelia was named music director and principal conductor; he left in 2005 to focus on his music director duties at San Francisco Conservatory of Music as well as international conducting and recording engagements. That same year, Martin West, who had guested frequently as a conductor with the Orchestra, assumed the position.

Today, the Orchestra accompanies the Ballet for the entire run of the annual Nutcracker production and throughout each repertory season. The existing Orchestra can be expanded for ballets requiring fuller orchestration, such as the full-length *Romeo & Juliet*. In addition, the ensemble’s vast repertory includes hundreds of works, spanning four centuries of music history, from Monteverdi and Mozart to film scores. Notably, the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra has made critically acclaimed recordings of composers from Handel to Goldenthal, as well as four televised recordings for the PBS series “Dance in America” (Lubovitch’s *Othello*; Smuin’s *The Tempest*, *Cinderella*, and *Romeo & Juliet*). Of the 1999 recording by San Francisco Ballet Orchestra entitled *Debussy Rediscovered*, ClassicsToday.com and Amazon.com music critic Robert Levine wrote, “The playing throughout is exemplary and the performances leave nothing to be desired. Very highly recommended.” The year 2005 marked the 30th anniversary of San Francisco Ballet Orchestra’s founding. In late 2007, the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra released a self-produced recording of the full score of Tchaikovsky’s *Nutcracker*.

What Did You Learn?

1. How many musicians were in the first official SFB Orchestra?
2. When was the San Francisco Performing Arts Orchestra founded?
3. Name two ballets that the Orchestra has recorded.
4. Who is the current music director?
The San Francisco Ballet Center for Dance Education

San Francisco Ballet and the San Francisco Ballet School were both established in 1933 as a single institution by Gaetano Merola, founding director of San Francisco Opera. Merola recognized the need for a thriving academy that would train dancers to appear in opera productions.

San Francisco became the only city in the country, other than New York, to claim a ballet school as an auxiliary to an established opera company. Adolph Bolm was appointed director and ballet master for the Company, which occasionally presented all-dance programs. But San Francisco Ballet truly began to take shape as an independent entity when William Christensen became Company ballet master. Two years later he appointed his brother, Harold, director of the School.

In 1942, William and Harold Christensen bought the School from San Francisco Opera, which could no longer provide financial support to the ballet operation. As a result, the San Francisco Ballet Guild was formed in order to maintain the Company as an independent performing unit. William Christensen was named artistic director of San Francisco Ballet, and Harold continued on as director of the School.

Harold directed the School for 35 years, developing many dancers who went on to careers with San Francisco Ballet and other prestigious companies.

When Harold retired in 1975, Richard Cammack became the new director of the School. Cammack oversaw the School’s move into its current state-of-the-art facility in 1983. Helgi Tomasson assumed leadership of the School after becoming artistic director of San Francisco Ballet in 1985. In 1986, Tomasson invited former San Francisco Ballet ballerina Nancy Johnson to head the School, a role she held until 1993, when he appointed Lola De Avila to the School’s newly established position of associate director. De Avila left the position in 1999 at which time Gloria Govrin was appointed the School’s associate director. In July 2006, de Avila returned to the position of associate director. De Avila stepped down in 2012 and Patrick Armand now serves as associate director of the School.

Today, the School boasts a distinguished international staff, a Trainee Program for advanced-level students, a dedicated student residence, and an extensive scholarship program. Of the current Company, over 50 percent of the dancers received all or part of their training at the School, and many San Francisco Ballet School students have gone on to dance with professional companies nationally and internationally.

Now, more than 80 years after its founding, San Francisco Ballet has, indeed, achieved Gaetano Merola’s original goal of elevating San Francisco to a “high position in the realm of dance.”
As a vital cultural contributor to our community, the San Francisco Ballet Center for Dance Education (CDE) has programs that reach wide audiences from diverse populations throughout the Bay Area; approximately 35,000 people benefit from these programs each year. Though the Center for Dance Education is fairly new, there is a long history of free programs administered by SF Ballet.

The highly popular pre-performance discussion program, known as Meet the Artist interviews, spotlights the specific SF Ballet repertory program to be performed that afternoon/evening. These informative talks feature Company dancers, guest artists, choreographers, and conductors in conversation with a moderator. Meet the Artist Interviews last 30 minutes and take place in the War Memorial Opera House one hour before the performance on select evenings and Sunday matinees, as well as opening nights of all repertory programs. They are free to all ticket holders.

Dance scholar and educator Mary Wood, along with other guests, hosts the Pointes of View lecture series: salon-style interviews with SF Ballet dancers, guest artists, choreographers, musicians, and designers. These hour-long informative discussions give attendees an in-depth look into the SF Ballet repertory program to be performed that evening. These programs are free and open to the public. Beginning in 2014, Pointes of View events will be held on the orchestra level at the War Memorial Opera House.

The San Francisco Ballet Center for Dance Education is also proud to offer new and expanding programs that serve children, youth, and families throughout the Bay Area, providing important avenues of access, education, and opportunities in dance.

SF Ballet offers two Community Matinee performances of selections from the current repertory season. These matinees feature educational behind-the-scenes lecture demonstrations. All Community Matinee performances are held at the War Memorial Opera House. Discount tickets are offered to approximately 6,000 school-aged children, teachers, and seniors annually.

Family Connections is a program that brings dance workshops and lectures to venues such as the San Francisco Public Library Main Branch and the Asian Art Museum. This program gives children and their parents a shared experience of dance and, when available, free tickets to see the SF Ballet in performance at the War Memorial Opera House.

The Dance in Schools and Communities (DISC) program is SF Ballet’s most long-standing outreach program. This celebrated program reaches nearly 3,700 elementary school children each year, with 10-week dance residencies in 37 elementary schools in the San Francisco Unified School District. DISC is a multicultural dance and music program celebrating the historical, traditional, and
folkloric dance traditions of diverse cultures. DISC provides all participants complimentary tickets to SF Ballet Community Matinees. Annually, DISC awards approximately 50 students with full one-year scholarships to the prestigious SF Ballet School. Select DISC students are also given the opportunity to participate in the annual Performance Project. During this multi-week program, children experience the process of creating and performing a dance/musical presentation. Performances take place at various venues throughout San Francisco.

Ballet 101 is a class for adults who are curious about the art of ballet and the world of dance. This adult education course is designed to give participants a hands-on, interactive learning experience. The program harnesses the talent and experience of SF Ballet employees and faculty who staff this program. The course consists of a series of lectures and experiential activities that build on the course's previous teachings.

The Community Circle Dance Camp is a week-long summer day camp that provides instruction in dance, music, and art for children from all over San Francisco. Targeted toward inner-city youth, the camp is based in the Tenderloin neighborhood and is offered free of charge for children of low-income families. A wide variety of classes are offered to students, ranging from hip hop and salsa, to circus arts and visual arts, providing children a well rounded experience in arts education.

Online Educational Resources are designed to educate and excite users about SF Ballet and dance in general. Downloadable study guides enhance the theater-going experience for students attending Community Matinees, with tailored information, specific to the ballets being performed. Study Guides include articles, stories, music clips, and links to online resources. Visit sfballet.org to access these resources.

The Visiting Scholar Program brings nationally known scholars to SF Ballet to lecture on a variety of topics that are meant to educate and inspire balletomanes of all levels and ages.

Visiting Scholars:
- 2014 Professor Stephanie Jordan
- 2013 Professor Tim Scholl
- 2012 Professor Beth Genné
- 2011 Doug Fullington, Dance Historian
- 2010 Professor Richard Tarushkin
- 2009 Professor Janice Ross
- 2008 Professor Jennifer Fisher
- 2007 Professor Lynn Garafola
- 2006 Professor Deborah Jowitt
Answer Key

Firebird (p. 12)
1. Mikhail Fokine
2. June 25, 1910 at the Paris Opera
3. Tamara Karsavina
4. Four versions

San Francisco Ballet Orchestra (p. 32)
1. 38
2. 1975
3. The Tempest, Nutcracker, Othello
4. Martin West
San Francisco Ballet wishes to share a love of dance with the broadest possible audience. Each year the organization offers students and seniors the opportunity to obtain group tickets for performances at discounted prices. We offer two spring Community Matinees during the repertory season. Performances take place at the War Memorial Opera House.

Community Matinees offer a behind-the-scenes look at San Francisco Ballet, including open set changes, a music education component, and special demonstrations featuring students from the San Francisco Ballet School.

To add your school to our mailing list to receive information on Community Matinees, please call San Francisco Ballet Ticket Services at 415.865.2000.

Further Resources


**San Francisco Ballet Books & Recordings**


Broadcast (TV/Video/DVD) – Helgi Tomasson’s Nutcracker, Martin West, conductor. Produced by KQED (San Francisco) for the PBS series Great Performances, aired on December 17, 2008.

Broadcast (TV/Video/DVD) – Lar Lubovitch’s Othello, music by Eliot Goldenthal; Emil de Cou, conductor. Co-produced by KQED (San Francisco) and WNET (New York) for the PBS series Dance in America, recorded June 18, 2003.


CD – Suite from the ballet Othello, music by Elliot Goldenthal; Emil de Cou, conductor; Varese Sarabande recording, VSD-S942, 1998.


Websites about Ballet

Check out these websites to learn more about SFB, see video of ballet steps, and read about ballet performances.

- [sfballet.org](http://sfballet.org)
- [abt.org/education/dictionary](http://abt.org/education/dictionary)
- [criticaldance.com](http://criticaldance.com)

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