

# CHAPTER FIVE

## *Fundamentals of Classical Barre-work*

<b>OVERVIEW</b>	5-3
What is Classical ballet?	
Main Schools	
Finding a teacher	
Russian Teaching Method: Why it is different	
<b>THE BARRE EXERCISES</b> (with artistic and technical purposes given for each)	5-9
Order of exercises and glossary	
<b>TIPS ON TAKING THE BALLET BARRE</b>	5-10
Correlation between holding the barre correctly and gaining lower back strength	
1 Preliminary Internal warm-up	
Introduction to <i>plié</i> for the figure skater	
An Important Word of Caution Concerning "Turn-Out"	
2 <i>Demi-plié</i> [demee pleeyay] "Half bend" (First, Second, Third and Fourth)	
3 <i>Grand plié</i> [grahn pleeyay] big or full knee bend (in First, Second and Fifth)	
4 <i>Cambré</i> [kahn-bray] to arch or bend the torso (front, back and sides)	
5 <i>Relevé</i> [rhul eh vay] to lift or rise up	
6 <i>Battement tendu</i> [baht mahn tahn diu] "beating stretched"	
7 <i>Battement tendu jeté</i> [baht mahn tahn diu zeh tay] "beaten stretched thrown"	
8 <i>Rond de jamb par terre</i> [rohn d' zhanb pahr tair] circling of the leg on the floor	
9 <i>Battement fondu</i> [baht mahn fohn diu] <i>par terre</i> [pahr tair] and at 45°	
10 <i>Battement frappé</i> [baht mahn frah pay] meaning "to strike"	
Russian Method with one hand on the barre	
Cecchetti Method with one hand on the barre	
11 <i>Rond de jamb en l'air</i> [ahn lair] means "in the air"	
12 <i>Petit battement sur le coup de pied</i> [p'tee baht mahn siur le koo de peeay] small beats on the neck of the foot	
<b>BASIC ELEMENTS OF ADAGIO:</b> <i>retiré (passé), attitude, développé, relevé lent, arabesque</i> and <i>penché</i> .	5-46
13 <i>Attitude</i> [ah-tee-tewd] means "a pose of the body"	
14 <i>Développé</i> [dev'loh-pay] means to develop or unfold	
15 <i>Relevé lent</i> [ruhl eh vay lahn] literally means rising slowly	
16 <i>Arabesque</i> [ahrah besk] literally a term referring to intricate Eastern architectural motifs	
17 <i>Grand battement</i> [grahn baht mahn] "large beating"	
18 Optional Barre Stretch	
<b>BARRE AT THE BOARDS:</b> On-ice ballet warm-up for feet and legs	5-60
1 <i>Plié</i> and <i>relevé</i>	
2 <i>Battement tendu jeté</i> with flex and point	



*Whether beginner or professional,  
the traditional ballet lesson  
always opens with “the barre.”  
The equivalent of practicing figures,  
or now “Moves in the Field,”  
its main purpose is to perfect  
the foundations – and it is  
only perfection in the foundations  
that can lead to mastery of the whole.*

# Overview

## What is Classical ballet?

Classical ballet is a fine art form which has been developed and perfected through the course of over 300 years. It combines biomechanically and kinesthetically accurate movement to music with the aesthetic lines inspired by sculptural poses from the classical era. It is classical ballet which transformed the common seven movements of dance: spins, leaps, darts, jumps, bends, stretches and glides into a measurable qualitative science so that each of these movements could be attained to their fullest capacity by any given individual and repeated by that individual with fluid grace, consistency, confidence and accurate control.

Unlike the modern “lyrical ballet,” and even some professed classical ballet taught in what is often referred to as “business studios,” true classical ballet is a method, an exact teaching procedure which is based not on outer choreographic style, but on a precise, progressive training of the internal workings of the body and mind. Classical ballet’s gradual and precise training molds the bones and muscles, correctly identifies biomechanical difficulties, strengthens the body against injury and creates the neural pathways which will free the dancer to pursue expressive and artistic excellence.

Although true classical body lines and movement patterns can only be achieved by those who take six lessons per week at a good technical school for the 6-8 years of study required, studying the basic elements is never the less an accessible and important ingredient to good figure skating technique. Whether you are eight-years-old or 60 and only taking 2-3 lessons per week, learning classical ballet technique will not only improve your “artistry” it will help you develop long range skills such as accurate mind/body connections, an understanding of the origins of movement, injury prevention and a heightened kinetic and spatial awareness.

Distinct from other dance forms classical ballet can be seen as a systematically precise, progressive and highly detailed exercise program for both body and mind which culminates in a fine art.

## Main Schools

There are three main schools of classical ballet taught in the United States: Vaganova (Russian teaching method) RAD (Royal Academy of Dance) which is the English technique and the Cecchetti Method which is Italian. They vary slightly in their stance, character and particular emphasis but each one is based on biomechanically sound principals of movement developed over the centuries. Most large ballet company schools will tell you which method they use most. Often teachers within the same

accredited school will vary in their methodology but a well versed teacher should be able to teach elements from other than their own primary method.

### **Finding a teacher**

It is difficult in this day and age to recognize that accurate training needs to take precedence over the personality of the teacher or the “fun” a student may be having. Often we get caught up in the ambience of a particular studio or the charm of a particular instructor, and although these attributes are a plus if they can be had, quality of instruction needs to be the deciding factor.

It is a wide spread assumption that if an instructor has been a professional dancer or has taken ballet lessons for much of their lives that they will automatically be a good teacher, but this is not always the case. All serious classical ballet instructors take courses in how to teach called pedagogy classes. These classes contain the syllabi of a particular school of classical dance which delineate in minute detail what, when and how to teach each movement on a monthly and sometimes even weekly basis. Instructors are also encouraged to stay current with any new findings or developments in their particular syllabi so that their teaching methods reflect contemporary scientific findings in light of current artistic demands. If a syllabus is not being followed with daily lesson plans being written out by the instructor, this is your first sign that the instructor is giving classes based on the choreographic patterns of a dance lesson rather than the technical (neuromuscular) development of the student.

A skater may have fun at a recreational dance studio and they may even learn to have some sense of “style,” but they will not be acquiring the technical, neurological and truly artistic training they would receive from a classically trained instructor educated in pedagogy. Equally important is the fact that a skater can easily become injured by taking recreational dance lessons as all movement training needs to be embarked upon with intelligence and forethought.

Getting quality dance instruction for the already expensive sport of figure skating is something every parent and skater needs to consider.

### **Russian Teaching Method: Why it is different**

“Publication of Vaganova’s Basic Principles of Classical Ballet in 1934 signified a new period in Soviet ballet instruction. Professor Vaganova unified the experience of generations and offered a clear and concise system of an infallible way of teaching and performing the entire ‘alphabet’ of classical dance.”<sup>1</sup> Vera Kostrovitskaya, who was one of Vaganova’s closest disciples, and most trusted assistant, was one of the leading figures to further develop Vaganova’s method of teaching. Incorporating the best techniques from French, Italian and Danish ballet schools, the Vaganova or

## *Classical Lines Attitude*



Katherine Hadford, Gold Medalist 2005 South Atlantic Regional Championship, in a layback spin.

*Sarah S. Brannen photo ©2006. Used with permission.*



Natalia Makarova's "Swan."

*Dina Makarova photo ©2006. Used with permission.*

*Sustained beautiful lines and smooth transitions are what make the music and the thought behind it look as though it is projecting from inside of you. It becomes a picture and a feeling held in the memory of the audience.*