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Ballet on Ice

This article focuses on ballet on ice. Specifically, the authors describe ice ballet theaters, their performances on ice as combining of the grace of figure skating with the excitement of theater and dance. The article focuses on a comparison between the ballet and ballet on ice shows.

Key words: ballet, ballet on ice, ice theatre, dance, performance.

I. Introduction

Ice shows have an undeserved reputation as lowbrow entertainment.

Ice theatre (also known as theatre on ice, TOI, and ballet on ice) is a branch of figure skating which merges the technical jumps and spins with unique choreography, ice dancing, pairs moves, synchronized skating, and theater to tell a story or act out an emotion or idea. It is a relatively new branch of figure skating, but it is also growing quickly. Ice theatre can be enjoyed by the youngest to the oldest and brings out the more artistic side of figure skating [5].

The classical ballet syllabus is comprised of well over 400 exercises, steps and poses not all of which are necessary or even beneficial for skaters. Most ballet teachers are not familiar with the needs and demands of skating and often criticize skaters unfairly (inaccurately) as they are not equipped to properly analyze why skaters do what they do or how to “fix” it [19].

II. Formulation of the problem

This article is indented to bring general information on ballet on ice.

III. Results

Ballet is a type of performance dance, a timeless dance style that tells a story. It originated in Italy in the 15th Century, later developing into a concert dance in France and Russia. It has since become a widespread, highly technical form of dance with its own vocabulary. Ballet dancers are very strictly taught and have to have the best fitness, flexibility and gracefulness. The most popular moves include Arabesque,

Chasse, Plie and Pirouette. Point footwork is particularly key in this dance genre, with point shoes helping achieve this. Point shoes have blocks of wood at the bottom of the shoe, enabling the dancer to balance on a full pointed toe. Famous Ballet productions are *Swan Lake* [13; 14] and the *Nutcracker* [10].

While ballet is often thought of by skaters as one more thing to do, it is the ballet that teaches the skaters how to perform. Ballet can teach a skater how to interpret and express their music by telling a story or conveying an emotion through the connecting steps of their program. This is what makes the difference between a program that is all jumps with a lot of crossovers or stoking between the jumps, and a program that is interesting and artistic [4].

Ballet for skaters is an extremely important component to training for figure skating. While many ballet schools focus on recitals during the year, ballet designed specifically for figure skaters focuses primarily on how to use the arms, legs, and head in coordination with skating movements. As the skater progresses in ballet, core strength, power, and quickness are learned and adapted towards use on the ice [2].

Ballet on ice combines the grace of figure skating with the excitement of theater and dance. Teams consist of between eight and 30 skaters. Solo skating is discouraged, but is permitted in limited amounts if it enhances the overall telling of the program's story. The programs are judged by regular U.S. Figure Skating judges and are evaluated on technical merit and presentation with emphasis on originality, costuming, artistry and musicality [1; 16].

Skaters, both competitive and noncompetitive, can learn and grow on a theatre team. Best of all, a team can draw club skaters together and increase club spirit. Both skaters and clubs can experience great rewards from forming and /or joining a Theatre On Ice team [9]. Skaters receive the following benefits: more competitions when performing in competitions and shows; a chance to develop the dramatic side of their skating; a chance to be part of a team while continuing to use their technical skills; a chance to travel both locally and internationally; a chance to make new friends both in and out of the club; a chance to relax while performing and competing for competitive skaters [18].

As a skater progresses in dance and skating both disciplines focus on details of the basics – extension of body lines, flexibility while maintaining body alignment, quality of movement, and development of strengths and confidence.

The skater learn to perform to different music rhythms and tempos, to count the beats of the music and how style and carriage change with the mood or theme of the music, thus establishing a dynamic range in presentation [4].

A comparison between the ballet and ballet on ice shows that it is dance [6]. For example, *Swan Lake* [13; 14] is a ballet about dance. Dance is how its characters – not just the performers who play them – communicate with each other: it is how the beautiful Swan-Maiden Odette wins Prince Siegfried's heart, and it is how Odile, daughter of the evil Count von Rothbart, seduces him. And director of ice show has gently re-worked Tchaikovsky's original plot so that this theme is brought to the fore. Using dance, the traditional language of courtship, the women play out their feelings

and prove their grace, fidelity and passion. Using dance, the traditional language of courtship, the women play out their feelings and prove their grace, fidelity and passion.

In fact, we are surprised by how expressive the ice-skating is. And it's not all gracious gliding either (although the synchronised swan entourage is lovely) – there is as also a lot of energetic scraping and clattering, as the performers carve up the stage, halting abruptly a fraction of a millimetre short of its edge. The baddies even kick the ice off their heels into the audience [12; 7].

A.Thomas presents fundamentals of alignment and Classical movement for figure skaters [17]. A.Thomas' approach infuses the fundamentals of classical ballet training with dance kinesiology, massage therapy, mind-body integration and her own years of extensive research and experience as a teacher, artist, athlete and dancer. The author stresses that figure skating is often referred to as both art and sport, but let's compare the teaching and learning approaches used by each. All sports training involves measurable, quantifiable actions and results. Music is based on mathematics, painting on color theory and perspective, classical ballet on biomechanical accuracy in classical forms. But art and sports diverge considerably when it comes to respecting and applying the intuitive sense to further the scientific process. Sports training often ignores or disdains the intuitive sense whereas fine art training has always understood that cultivating the intuitive sense actually improves scientific comprehension.

A good ballet instructor can see a “million” things “wrong” with a skater's alignment and execution of any particular ballet exercise, but only a ballet instructor well versed in why a skater does what he/she does (in particular the use of edges and movement direction) can discern what is germane to the demands of skating technique and if it is even necessary to “fix” something [19; 2].

A comparison between the sport figure skating and ballet on ice shows that in taking classical ballet lessons specifically geared for skaters, the skater is more engaged in the lessons because they recognizably have immediate relevance to their needs. The skater doesn't have to guess at what might work or help, doesn't come in with a bad attitude or an incorrect (myopic) notion as to why they are there... to improve “grace”, fix posture and arms; for “style”...etc. Ballet for figure skaters lessons are usually offered at rinks making it much easier to attend and facilitating on site communication between the coach, the ballet instructor, the skater and the parent. Good communication is a major factor in the success of the ballet program as continual cooperation between members of the training team is imperative to the success of the skater. The skater, coach and parent can have confidence that everything the skater is learning in class is for the sole purpose of becoming a better skater. When the skater knows that the coach and ballet instructor are in frequent contact with each other and “on the same page”...the skater is much more likely to be fully on board with the program [15].

Finally, we focus on the best performances of *Ice theatres* like the Saint-Petersburg State Ballet on ice (former the Leningrad State Ballet on ice) founded in 1967 by the outstanding choreographer Konstantin Boyarsky, is the successor of the

remarkable traditions of the St.Petersburg school of the classical ballet. The Ballet is headed by its Artistic Director, former soloist of the world-famous Mariinsky Ballet, Merited Artist of Russia Konstantin Rassadin, a school-mate of Rudolf Nuriev. He participated in the performances jointly with Mikhail Baryshnikov and Natalia Makarova. The multiple World and European champions, double Olympic champions Ludmila Belousova and Oleg Protopopov [3] and now Oleg Protopopov is at 80, Ludmilla is at 76! We've been speechless at them and their art for half a century. No one will ever equal them [8]; multiple World and European champion, Olympic champion Alexei Ulanov; multiple prize winner of the World and European figure-skating competitions and Olympic games Lyudmila Smirnova danced in the Ballet at different times. There are about 20 dancers in the company who have the honorable titles of the Masters of Sports of Russia for the victories at the all-Russia and international figure-skating competitions [15; 11].

Next ice theatre is the Imperial Ice Stars [7] where work the 26 Olympic, World, European and National Championship skaters, who between them hold more than 250 competition medals, continue to break new ground in the genre of ice dance with their daring and graceful feats – some of which are so complex they haven't yet been named – in the intimate setting of a frozen theatre stage.

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