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**BALLET COSTUME:
THE EVOLUTION AND
CONSTRUCTION OF THE
TUTU**

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Abstract: This article presents a study on ballet costumes, from the emergence of the tutu, through its evolution to its construction. Through the bibliographic review, the objective of this research is to understand the creation of ballet costumes, for later conception of a costume project.

Keywords: Costume; *ballet*; Tutu.

INTRODUCTION

This article is an excerpt from the research carried out for the conclusion work of the fashion course, whose theme is the *ballet* and your costumes. Aiming to understand how the construction of these costumes occurs for the basis of the creation of a costume project for the classical *ballet* of Nutcracker repertoire.

The present research seeks to understand how this creation takes place, through the study of the tutu's trajectory until reaching the different variations of the costume, its anatomy, construction and importance. Based on this, the research is justified by the importance of surveying the historical documentation and the constructive process of the costumes that are essential in the composition of a show of *ballet*.

Through the methodology based on Prodanov and Freitas (2013) we opted for the technical procedure of bibliographic review, based on the reading of scientific articles, theses, dissertations, among others.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE TUTU

The image of the female ballerina in a soft white dress - tutu - is widespread to this day. The history of the tutu begins with the emancipation of ballerinas from the restrictive costumes used in the *ballet* of cut, which were composed of corsets and long, heavy dresses. According to Potter (2016, our translation), in 1734, the French dancer Marie Sallé appeared in *Pigmalion*, and caused a stir because of the attire he wore which was considered

scandalous for the period. She shortened her skirt so her ankles could be seen and removed some of the restrictive cut *ballet* attire she used to wear, so she had more freedom to move.

In 1832 Marie Taglioni debuted at the Paris Opera in her lead role for *La Sylphide*, crystallizing the archetypal image of the ballerina. She danced in a romantic tutu, an outfit composed of a diaphanous tulle skirt with a low-cut bodice, fashionable attire of the time (O'BRIEN, 2014, our translation).

While the tutu's origins can be traced back to Taglioni's performance, the term doesn't emerge until nearly 50 years later. The shorter classical tutu emerged in the 1880s with the birth of iconic Classical *ballets*, including *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*. Greater technical demands meant shorter skirts to showcase the dancer's increasingly complex work (TOMSHINSKY, 2010).

First, the tutu retained its bell shape, although the bodice became more tightly fitted, emphasizing the fit of the dancer's waist. Slowly the tutu began to lose some of its softer shapes and the skirt began to extend, sometimes very stiffly, off the hips. Since then, costume designers have approached the tutu in different ways. Some choose a traditional approach and do so with a conscious eye on the costume's history, while others maintain a recognizable form of the costume, but look in different directions, using more contemporary materials as inspiration (POTTER, 2016).

According to O'Brien (2014, our translation), the tutu is an esoteric costume, an evolution of theatrical pragmatism and ephemeral fashion. Through its lightness, brightness and elegance, along with the planning and dedication during its construction, it embodies everything that *ballet* stands for. If classical *ballet* is about movement, theatrical performance and storytelling, the tutu becomes one of the only material evidence of the spectacle while dance

itself remains an ephemeral art form, leaving no discernible record.

The tutu is an explicit tool that is synonymous with the ballerina, woven into the fabric of a dance company, evident in its rehearsal rooms, dressing rooms and costume departments. It changes the dancer's experience of her surroundings, amplifying her bodily influence while restricting it. The tutu dictates how the dancer moves, how much space she needs and how others see her (O'BRIEN, 2014). Therefore, what is this fundamental costume for ballet, along with its main elements, will be discussed below.

COSTUMES OF BALLET

All that survives when a *ballet* show ends is its design, sets and costumes. There is no text or booklet to read next. That's why the costumes are highly valued, since they represent the visual impact of a *ballet* (DUTHY, 1983 apud HODGSON, 2001, our translation).

Costumes are an essential part of every ballet production. According to Carpio (2017) it is through him that the dancer becomes a dramatic figure, putting aside his identity and transforming himself into a character, therefore, his relationship with the performing arts. Oliveira et al. (2017) adds that the costume consists of all the clothes and accessories of the characters, however it is more than a simple outfit as it carries a statement, a list of information contained, with specific functions within the context of the show. Therefore, it has the function of transforming the dancer, of telling a story, transmitting feelings and inserting the spectator in the context of the work.

In *ballet* costumes, the rules of costumes are even more precise, above all, due to the ergonomics necessary to adapt the dancer's movements, as dance demands a high performance from her body. Therefore, when developing a specific costume for dance,

the costume designer must be careful not to limit the movements, to enhance the piece, in addition to contributing to the beauty of the presentation (OLIVEIRA et al., 2017).

Ballet costume design is a specialized field as costumes are difficult to design and execute. Each costume is assembled for an individual wearer and each has its own personality, which comes from the costume designer's vision. The planning and execution of these suits also requires extensive subject knowledge and minimal engineering to make the designed concepts three-dimensional. The costume is literally assembled from the inside out with a variety of materials (ELLIOT, 1984 apud HODGSON, 2001, our translation).

In classical *ballet*, the most commonly used clothes are tutus, thin tulle skirts, a characteristic element of the ballerina. However, it is also the most difficult costume to make. Technically, the tutu is just the skirt, but the name is also used to describe a complete *ballet* attire, which includes the attached skirt and bodice.

According to Tomshinsky (2010, our translation), there are five main styles of tutus based on the type of skirt it presents. The romantic tutu is usually three-quarters long and has a bell-shaped skirt made of several layers of tulle. Its hem falls anywhere between the knee and ankle and flows freely to emphasize the lightness and ethereal quality of romantic *ballets*.

The classic pancake tutu consists of a very short, stiff skirt made with layers of tulle that extend outward from the hips in a flat pancake shape, and has a body molded bodice. The pancake style has more layers of tulle and usually uses a wire hoop and lots of hand pleats to keep the layers flat and stiff.

The classic bell tutu is short but longer than the pancake, rigid and made of several layers of tulle of the same length and features a bodice molded to the body. The tulle layers

are not supported by a hoop, so they fall in a slight bell shape.

The dish tutu is very similar to the pancake tutu in that it sits straight from the dancer's waist. However, this style has a completely flat top that comes straight from the dancer's waist, unlike the pancake, which has this region fuller. The top layer of the tutu is flat and decorated rather than pleated.

Finally, the Balanchine tutu, is a short skirt, without hoops and with fewer layers of tulle than the ones mentioned above. The skirt is loosely pleated to give it a softer, fuller look, which makes it move more with the dancer. This style was originally designed for the ballet version of the *Symphony in C*, created by Balanchine. In table 1, it is possible to see a montage with the image of each of these five types of tutus.



Table 1 - Types of Tutus.

Source: Prepared by the author (2019).

Basically the tutu is composed of three parts: the skirt, the waistband and the bodice. This composition exists in the most diverse forms of construction of a tutu. However, in the Russian structure of a tutu, the bodice is sewn directly onto the top of the skirt, making it one-piece. This way, the bodice needs to be more elongated and follow the curve of the waist, tightening and shaping the body. The skirt turns out to be simpler than the classic version, since the waistband, previously more elaborate, will disappear under the bodice (SCHNEIDER, 2013).

The main difference between a Russian tutu and a traditional tutu is that, unlike the Russian form, in the traditional form, the waistband follows the body to the waist, is nailed to the skirt and made with the same fabric and materials that will be used in the bodice. The bodice, in turn, is short and goes a little past the waist, at the front it has a tip that goes down almost to the height of the top of the skirt and is not fixed to the skirt (HARRISSON, 1998 apud SCHNEIDER, 2013, p. 10).

The tutu must fit like a glove while giving the dancer the freedom to perform a full range of motion. All tutus are individually designed so no two are alike. Tailor-made costumes feature impeccable construction qualities and techniques on top of the six main elements of a typical tutu (HODGSON, 2001, our translation). In figure 1, it is possible to see a diagram of the anatomy of a tutu, highlighting the main elements that will be discussed below.



Figura 1: Anatomia do Tutu.

Source: Hodgson (2001, p.45).

According to Hodgson (2001, our translation) to create a tutu, in the case of

the pancake model, but which can be applied to the others, some essential elements are needed. Being them:

Bodice (corpete): The bodice is the top part of the tutu, which covers the body from bust to waist. It is usually made up of numerous shapes shaped to suit the contour of the body. The bodice must be well fitted, but it must have some small slacks since dancing is an aerobic activity and dancers need to be able to breathe easily. Therefore, seamstresses often cut the side pieces on the bias of the fabric to take advantage of its elastic nature and allow the dancers to breathe. The bodice usually features the use of fins at the front and side seams for better structuring and is often heavily decorated.

Basque (cós): The waistband is the part of the tutu that connects the bodice and the plate. Although it is usually separate from the bodice, it matches the bodice because it is made from the same fabric. Correct adjustment of the waistband is the key to a well-made tutu, if the waistband is too tight the suit will rise and be very uncomfortable, if it is too loose it will fall off. So it's the basis of the costume, it's made first and the rest of the costume is built on top of it. The waistband has two parts, the top and the bottom, the top waistband extends from the waist to the hips and can be seen while the bottom waistband is the panty part and forms the basis for the tulle layers. The waistband is tailor-made for ballerinas by trial and error.

Panty/Brief (calcinha): This lower part of the suit is rarely seen. Panties must be cut large enough in the back to keep them from riding up during the move. They are made of tulle or cotton and can be plain or ruffled.

Frills/Ruffles (pregas/plissado): There are several layers of tulle gathered in the lower waistband, composing the voluminous part of the skirt. When making a tutu, care needs to be taken when attaching the ruffle or ruffle so

that they are parallel to the floor. If they don't have parallels, the tutu will appear skewed and may become unstable for the ballerina. These layers are usually adjusted for each dancer. The outer edge can be left straight or cut into pointed or rounded shapes.

Plate (prato): It is the last layer of the tutu skirt, often made of the same fabric as the bodice and waistband. Care must be taken to avoid a heavy fabric for this layer or the skirt will sag. The bodice and plate are usually highly decorated. When decorated, the same principle must be considered, too much decoration will cause it to sag, so heavy decorations must be placed near the waistband and not near the outer edge of the plate.

Headpiece (enfeite de cabelo): The head accessories are a fundamental part in the characterization of the costumes. Hardly any classical ballerina dances without an accessory of Head, and they are created thinking about the representativeness of each montage.

According to Schneider (2013), there are several construction elements used in the production of costumes, and each of them has singularities explored to meet the needs of *ballet*. A single tutu can wear over thirteen meters of tulle and can be up to sixteen layers thick. Some tutus are constructed using more than twenty different types of fabrics and materials and take at least one hundred and twenty hours, by various trained professionals, to complete (MINOR, 2011, our translation).

As a final process in the construction of a costume, we have the ornamentation, where various materials are used such as crystals, mirrors, stones, embroidery, sequins, cords, ribbons and other accessories that in the hands of a costume designer become adornments, being part of the creation process. design the ornamentations that will be applied to the costumes (SCHNEIDER, 2013). The author adds that:

This customization enriches the costume,

adds value to it, and under the stage lighting, the applications reflect and make visible the details created by the costume designer. However, many of these materials used in the applications are heavy, and if used too much, they can leave the costume with a weight that will certainly hinder the dancers' ease of movement on stage (SCHNEIDER, 2013, P.9).

Therefore, as can be seen, the ballet costume is a very complex costume, but essential for the composition of the show. According to Schneider (2013) a show that is made up of parts, and it is necessary to work each one with reference to the meaning of the work. It is impossible for the costumes, the text or the choreography to conform without being based on the same context, one is not less important than the other, and certain montages can receive more or less emphasis, according to the focus of the project, but that does not mean they cease to exist or cease to be worked on.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The costume is considered a dancer's second skin, as it complements what will be represented, transmitting symbologies and contributing to the story that will be danced. During the first part of the research, we had the opportunity to familiarize ourselves with the emergence of the *ballet* costume, and understand how the tutu came to be as it is today, the dancer's identity.

In a second moment, it is possible to understand the different ways that the same costume can be built, from the technical structures already established in *ballet*, but with variations in the type of skirt, hair ornament, ornamentation, among others. When creating such a fundamental costume, such as the tutu for *ballet*, it is important to understand its peculiarities and difficulties, thus valuing the creative process and the workmanship that make possible the presence

of these costumes on dance stages.

The historical and procedural documentation made in this article was fundamental to understand what is essential in the creation of a costume, structures that, regardless of variation or costume designer, will not change. Therefore, this study will become the basis of the creative process of the costume project that will be elaborated in the future, since it is from these structures that the costume designer is able to incorporate his artistic license.

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