

BALLET COSTUMES

17 TH – 20 TH CENTURY

17TH CENTURY: THE COURT BALLET

CONTEXT

Birth of a specific costume for performing dance with the **court ballet**.

17th century: ballets were performed in seignorial residencies or at the court, with a recreational function.

Balls were held in court dresses, but on special occasions (visit of a personality, event), **interludes were organized, requiring the use of a costume created for the occasion**, which gave the nobility the pleasure of disguise.

2 purposes of the ballet costume:

- **Demonstrating the wealth and power** of the people who wore it (the nobility or the Royal family)
- **Pleasing the eyes**



At that time, **the costume is not functional to the danced gesture**: on the contrary, it is often the costume which strongly conditions the movements, because of its weight and complexity

DANIEL RABEL (1578–1637)



**Les Fées de la Forêt de Saint Germain
– 1626**

Ballet performed at the Louvre

Masked female dancers in this design preserved in the Louvre are partly in the **costume of the late 16th century**, with **puffed and slashed sleeves and farthingale**, or in the farthingale without the skirt.

Such costumes were no doubt designed for a **humorous ballet**.

SERIOUS BALLETS' COSTUMES

2 major sources of inspiration:

MYTHOLOGY

ANCIENT ROME



But with costumes intergrating:

SIGNS OF WEALTH

- Rich and heavy brocards embroidered with gold
- Priceless lace

TRADITIONAL EMBLEMS OF POWER

- Scepter
- Heavy coat
- Crown or headdress crowned with high plumes

FASHION OF THE TIME

- Wigs
- Red heels

HENRI GISSEY (1621-1673)

Carrousel de Louis XIV – 1662

Equestrian ballet performed at the Tuileries palace

The King appeared as a **Roman Emperor** with attendant warriors and the three other quarters of the carousel sported the supposed garments of the Americans, Turks and Persians.

This display had considerable influence on the later creation of stage costumes in the era of the Sun-King.







PAGES ROMAINS.

LE bonnet étoit de fatin couleur de feu brodé en bandes d'or & d'argent. Les Pages étoient vêtus des mêmes étoffes, & des mêmes couleurs que les précédans Officiers de la Quadrille, à la réserve que le corps étoit de brocart d'or brodé par écailles d'argent, & que les lambrequins tant des hauts des manches que de la ceinture, étoient taillées en écailles de fatin couleur de feu, brodé d'or & doublé de toile d'argent.

Les manches de dessous étoient de toile d'or reliées d'un bracelet couleur de feu brodé d'or, & se terminoient en manchettes de toile d'argent, taillée en festilles.

Les caparaçons étoient de fatin couleur de feu brodé d'or.

Les uns portoient les Lances, les autres les Ecus, où les Devises étoient peintes.

S



Cinquième Quadrille.

TIMBALIER ET TROMPETTE AMERIQUAINS.

LE Bonnet de l'un & de l'autre étoit fait de plusieurs coquilles de corail.

Tout le corps étoit de fatin vert brodé en écailles d'argent, les manches & les extrémités du corps étoient de nageoires de poissons.

Les caparaçons des chevaux étoient de peaux de Tigres, avec des bandes de velours vers, clouées & rebordées en campanes de bandes d'or.



Troisième Quadrille.

TIMBALIER ET TROMPETTE TURCS.

LA Coiffure étoit un Turban de toile d'argent rayé de bleu, & les revers de fatin bleu brodé d'argent.

Les plumes étoient à trois rangs, noires, bleues & blanches.

La veste de fatin bleu bandée de fatin noir aux extrémités, & frangée d'argent; elle étoit doublée de toile d'argent.

La soufeste & les manches de dessous étoient de fatin blanc, bandées de fatin brodé d'or.

Les brodequins étoient de fatin bleu chamarré de blanc, & de noir.

Le caparaçon du cheval & les banderolles, tant de la Timbale que de la Trompette, étoient de fatin bleu bandé de fatin noir brodé d'or, & tous les Croiffans étoient d'argent.

LI

JEAN BÉRAIN (1640-1711)

Le triomphe de l'Amour – 1680

Opera by Lully, firstly performed at St Germain-en-Laye

Bérain succeeds to Gissey as *dessinateur du Cabinet du Roi*.

First opera including female actors.

The costumes have “more than a slight flavour of the Folies-Bergere”, but the bodies were in fact covered with a pink maillot. Ugly women and furies were still acted by men. This costume designer’s work was always **inspired by the period** he lived in, especially with the costumed for women, with **laced corsages suggesting paniers and applied decoration style Louis XIV**.



*Habits des Nymphes de la suite d'Orithie du balet
du Triomphe de l'amour.*

PANIER



**18TH CENTURY:
GRACE & PRECIOUSNESS**

PANIERS



TONNELETS



CLAUDE GILLOT (1673-1722)

Ballet des Elements – 1721

Opera-ballet, firstly performed at the Tuileries palace

After death of Louis XIV reaction against the grandeur of his court, Louis XV was not amused at the idea of having to appear in ballets, the first one of which was the *Ballet des Elements*.

The skirts of the dancers were long and the width was extended even more than ever before using panniers. Gillot reduced the size of the wigs, plumes and sleeves, however.

To the dancers representing the hours of the day were given **butterflies wings**, to those representing the hours of the night were **given bats' wings**. Nereids were clad in scales and shells, Time and Plutus wore turbans.

➔ **These costumes were representative of the shift from the Baroque epoch to the Rococo, the colours becoming discreet, tender pastels rather than the rich tones of the Baroque.**



JEAN-BAPTISTE MARTIN

Dessinateur des habillements de l'Opéra from 1748 to 1756, successor of Boucher (famous painter).

carried on in the vein of **utilizing inspiration from the present fashions for the costumes of his characters, but with added flourishes**, such as a Medea with huge panniers with cannibalistic signs on them or a Neptune covered in shells.

They are all **very Rococo, but not very realistic**. Clothes are much simpler than in the baroque, with **more delicate materials, more tender colours, but with enormous skirts for men and women**. Peasant boys and girls, introduced to the stage for the first time by Martin, were depicted as wearing silks and satins and ribbons.





Martin Inv.

Gaillard Sculp.

Medée
 Dans l'Opera de Jason et Medée



LOUIS-RENÉ BOQUET (1717–1814)

His style dominated the costume design in France from the mid-1700s until almost the revolution.

His best era was the 1760s; the style of his time mixed with his own strong personal style, with **small, powdered wigs adorned with roses**, a **deep, square décolletage** with an almost **pointed corsage** creating a **very narrow waist**. Below that a **billowing skirt** provided a wide canvas for decoration.



Males are also to be found in **ballet skirts, shorter, worn with a vest-like form-fitting garment.**

One costume is described as having “a **base of white satin, draped in a mosaïque of silver and rose, with ‘bouffets’ in rose and silver, artificial flowers and an assortment of gems on the bodice.**





**19TH CENTURY:
HISTORICAL ACCURACY
& DANCERS' BODIES LIBERATION**

2 MAJOR FACTORS OF CHANGE

THE WANT FOR HISTORICAL ACCURACY

The clothes designed by Berain and Boquet were **fantastications of real fashion**, meaning that as fashion changed, so must the costumes for opera and ballet change. But from 19th century, because of **public's growing knowledge**, there was a new search for historical accuracy in costumes.

THE WILL OF LIBERATING DANCERS' BODIES

As ballet steps grew more complicated, so the costumes had to adapt to the dancers. It is Jean-Georges Noverre, a ballet master, who theorizes the need to remove the masks and to free the dancers' bodies from the traditional costumes. He wished to do away with *paniers* and *tonnelets* and introduce instead a **draping of the dancers bodies in cloths of contrasting colours which would reveal the dancers form**. He will realize these ideas with the help of the designer Louis-René Boquet.

Around 1730, two dancers will contribute to the rapid evolution of the female ballet costume: **Marie Sallé** dances in London in 1734 in *Pygmalion* and appears without paniers, without body of skirt, hair scattered and without ornament, dressed in a simple dress draped on the model of the Greek statues. **Marie-Anne de Camargo** performs feats usually reserved for men and shortens her skirt so that the public can enjoy her footwork.

Masks were still kept until Maximilien Gardel, in 1772 in the role of Apollo, dared to go without. The public approved, and so the solo dancers no longer wore such masks, though the corps de ballet kept them for a little while longer.

High heels were replaced with **slippers**, though it would be another entire generation until the **pointe shoe** was introduced. The flimsiness of the female dancer's costumes, which had sometimes left breasts on display, led to the overall introduction of the **maillot**, which was blue in the States of the Church so none could mistake it for nudity.



There were, at this time, three distinct types of ballet:

- In the first, the **serious/noble ballet**, the characters wore light materials, **Greek-inspired styles**; men wore sandals and women buskins (a calf-high or knee-high boot of cloth or leather), the danseuses robe was often dampened to cling to her form.
- In the **demi-caractere** style the costume was **Renaissance inspired** (doublet trunks, long hose, cap with ostrich feather/ cylindrical low-necked dress).
- In the **caractere** style they wore **theatricalized versions of what village people wore**.

The designer of these was **Auguste Garnerey**, who designed the costumes at l'Opera de Paris from 1819 to his early death in 1824.



*Costume designs by Auguste Garnerey
for the ballet Aladin*

E. LAMI & LA SYLPHIDE : BIRTH OF THE BALLERINA DRESS

From 1831 to 1887, **Paul Lormier** took up the seat; he had an “excessive zeal” for historical accuracy, but only in the figurantes, creating an oddly sharp contrast to the tutu of female danceuses. **This is where opera costume and ballet costume began to part ways; opera costume became more and more realistic, while the ballet costume of the premiere danseuse and the corps de ballet became ever more stereotyped.**

In 1832, **Eugene Lami** provided for Marie Taglioni and the corps de ballet performing *La Sylphide*, all of whom were to represent fairies, a **costume of white muslin or tartalan** (fine cotton gauze usually reserved for the inside of hats), a **tight bodice, short sleeves** and a **wide skirt to mid-calf**. It was really just a **theatricalization of ordinary dress**, but it caused a sensation, her dancing success so complete that it was decided that only that costume and no other should be worn for all ballets, no matter the subject.



The tartalan skirt gradually grew shorter until it resembled a powder puff (**the tutu**) became necessary, **the period or land in which the ballet was supposedly taking place was denoted purely by what the dancers wore on their top halves.**

It also became the rule rather than the exception for the ballerina to **wear a diamond crescent or tiara** on her head, no matter if she was supposed to be portraying a simple peasant.

This fashion persisted all the way until the end of the 19th century.

**20TH CENTURY:
FORMS AND COLORS AGAINST
EXCESSIVE NATURALISM**

CHANGE COMING FROM RUSSIA

In the late 19th century, the **tendencies for an almost exaggerated naturalism** were seen all over the continent, but at the same time there was a revolt against it, noted especially in Russia, where at The Private Opera in Moscow the theatre director wanted the costumes to simply be *“artistic compositions of forms and colour.”*

In the opera, this same development took place at first only in theoretical work, with Adolphe Appia writing a book about how stage production ought to be stripped of its false realism and over-the-top stage design, writing that the audience did not need to necessarily see something represented to understand that it was there. He wished for costumes to **suggest a period rather than be exaggeratedly hyper-realist.**

In Russia, this movement was pioneered not only by the theatre director of The Private Opera, but really began to catch on through the work of **Alexandre Benois** and fellow pupils, including Leon Rosenberg, later **Leon Bakst**, and **Dima Filosofov**, whose cousin was Sergei Diaghilev.

LÉON BAKST (1866-1924)

Costume designer for the two following plays, which were performed at the Hermitage Theatre:

1902:*Le Coeur de la Marquise*

The design for the costume of the Marquise was a long white robe with a long sleeved blouse underneath and a green and white belt under the bosom. In the design there is a yellow-green shawl and she wears a bejewelled necklace. The trim of the dress has a design of crowns connected by semicircles and the shawl's edge is frottéed. The hair is curled and half up, she wears a soft hat with a green design of diamonds and a large dark-green bow. The shoes are flat, surrounding the toes and the sole of the foot with bands binding it around the ankle and from the mid-point of the sole of the foot to the point where the ankle bindings join together.



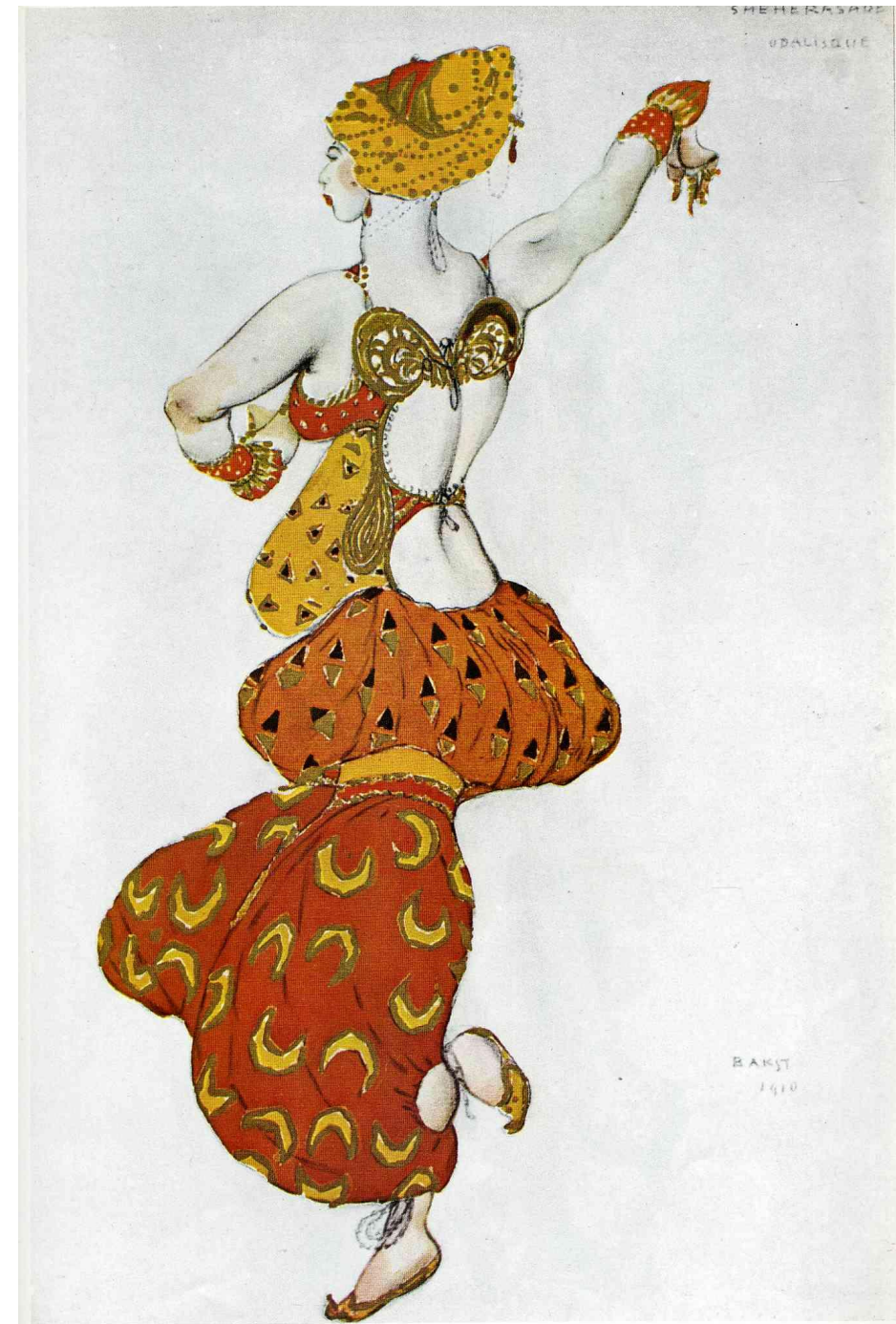
1903: *La Fée des Poupées*

The costume design for the French doll was a white bonnet with blue and white flowers as the trim and a periwinkle ribbon with a dark blue edge tied around the chin. The bodice was very tight and ended in a sharp point, while the sleeves were very wide and tightened at the bottom, where there was a wide trim of dark-blue rimmed periwinkle with dark-blue spots. The skirt was also very wide and ended at the knee, it was of periwinkle colour and had four stripes of dark blue, one at the upper edge and one at the lower edge. The shoes were flat and fitted to the foot and also periwinkle blue.



1910: *Scheherazade*

The most incredible performance of the ballet russe that year was *Scheherazade*, long considered to be **Bakst's supreme achievement**. The hangings, awnings, wall and throne were emerald-coloured, there were barred windows opening on an oppressive harem garden, there were piles of embroidered cushions and mattresses, the dancers were half-naked. **The influence of this production was seen, not only in ballet but in all form of theatre, in women's dress and in interior design.**





1910: *L'Oiseau de feu*,
Paris Opéra

ALEXANDRE BENOIS (1870-1960)

1911: *Petrouchka*, Théâtre du Châtelet (Paris)

