

AMERICA'S BALLET SCHOOL HANDBOOK

Welcome to the America's Ballet School handbook. This handbook has been developed to answer many of the frequently asked questions about our school.

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STUDIO PHILOSOPHY

America's Ballet School offers high quality instruction in ballet and modern dance. We employ only the finest instructors, and workable class sizes for students to receive personal instruction.

At America's Ballet school, our classes are designed to stimulate the enjoyment of dance while giving pre professional training. As the student advances, the variety and intensity of the class work increases. Many of our students have gone on to find careers in dance, while other students participate in dance for the exercise and pure enjoyment of the art form. We offer classes for beginners through advanced trainees as well as adults.

MISSION STATEMENT

America's Ballet School is a studio dedicated to teaching correct dance technique, theory and terminology for beginning through advanced students of all ages. We believe in teaching the basics of the art form to provide a solid foundation both mentally and physically. This foundation enables the student to understand and perform dance at any level. It allows the student to appreciate the true beauty of the art form.

The teaching staff at America's Ballet School is comprised of vibrant and energetic teachers who were professional dancers. They understand what it takes to be a good dancer and make it a priority to pass that knowledge on to their students.

TEACHING STAFF

The teaching staff at America's Ballet School is chosen with great care. All of our instructors have danced professionally or are currently performing with a professional dance ensemble. We have regular staff meetings where we discuss curriculum and teaching methods. Teachers monitor and discuss student progress across each of the disciplines to make sure that each student is performing to the best of his or her ability. Our staff strives to give each student the individual attention and instruction he or she needs to reach their potential.

Each of our teachers brings a unique perspective, personality and skill set to the classroom environment. Students benefit from these differing approaches and environments as they mirror the professional environment dancers will encounter throughout their dance career.

We are fortunate that the Tampa area is rich with wonderful dance teachers and make a concerted effort to expose our dancers to them. Throughout the year, we offer master classes by local choreographers and dance instructors and encourage our students to take advantage of these classes. Please check out the bulletin boards in each of the studios for information about these opportunities.

CLASS STRUCTURE

All of our classes have a consistent structure with a focus on classical ballet and modern dance. The instructor begins with barre work or center warm ups. This warm up is not the same as stretching. It is the basis of the specific dance technique the student is learning. Similarly to learning to spell, a student first needs to know the alphabet. Each step used in the warm up is used later in the class as part of the center work or part of the work across the floor. For example, pliés (bending of the knees) are done at the beginning of each ballet class. Pliés are then used each time the dancers jumps and as preparation for many types of turns. If pliés are done incorrectly, the dancer risks injury. We, therefore, use the beginning of each class to establish correct placement and execution of pliés. We encourage parents to attend our parent visitation days to learn more about the class structure and ask any questions you may have.

CLASS DESCRIPTIONS

America's Ballet School is a professional dance school. Ballet is the basis for all dance forms. It teaches the strong foundation and terminology that is needed by all dancers. It is danced to classical music. Our curriculum is based on the Vaganova technique.

Below is a brief description of each level. All our classes are divided into different levels based on a student's ability. We believe that it is important for a student to be placed appropriately so they may get the most out of a class. Placement is done by the instructor. New students should take a placement class so the teacher may evaluate them properly.

PRE-BALLET: A program designed for students ages 3 - 4 years. This program takes the basics of ballet technique and through the use of props and imagination, giving the children a fun and educational class. Large motor skills are highlighted and used to stimulate the brain's coordination. All of the pre-ballet classes end with rhythm based exercises. Motor skill routines are emphasized. Children must be 3 years old by the start of the session and fully toilet trained.

Ballet Kids, BALLET 1, 2, and Level 1: This program is the next step in the dance education. Focus is shifted from general preparatory technique to more specific ballet movements and vocabulary. The use of props and imagination is still present in the class, but not as prominently. These classes are offered for students age 5 - 7 years old.

Level 2-9: Emphasis is placed on the enjoyment of dance within the discipline of classical ballet training. Students should be at least 7 years old and are required to schedule a placement class by phone or email. Students in this division are encouraged to enroll in modern classes and audition for the ensemble.

Pre-Professional: This program provides the training necessary to succeed in the professional dance world. Students are expected to act as ambassadors for ABS. Students are also expected to be a part of all performing ensembles. Enrollment in this program is by audition only.

POINTE: A student must reach a certain age and level before they are ready for pointe based on a list of criteria. Pointe shoes are required and must be approved by the teacher. Two ballet classes a week are required to build strength in the legs, torso and ankles. All pointe students must have prior approval of the studio's director.

MODERN/CONTEMPORARY: Modern dance uses a greater range of body movements by the use of energy, breath phrasing, fall and rebound contraction and release. Humphrey-Limon, Cunningham, Hawkins, and Release are among the techniques used. Improvisation is also integrated into this class. Modern dance is wonderful for finding a dancer's center of balance and strength. Various forms of music are used.

WORKSHOPS & MASTER CLASSES are offered throughout the year. We encourage every dancer to take advantage of this opportunity to study with a guest teacher who has exceptional credentials and provides our dancers with the opportunity to learn new and different techniques. We feel it is important for our students to be exposed to different styles of teaching as it makes the dancer more well-rounded. Master classes will be made available periodically throughout the year and registration information and requirements will be posted in each studio.

DRESS CODE

Our dress code was established to promote the student's freedom of movement and the instructor's observation of correct technique. We have differentiated the ballet levels by the color of leotard. Firstly, this color distinction gives the student a sense of accomplishment as the dancer moves up in levels and graduates to a new color of leotard. Secondly, it allows us to choose from a wider color palette for our Day of Dance costumes. Our costumes for the Day of Dance are created by accessorizing the student's leotards. Hair should be worn off the face and neck, in a bun if possible. This enhances the dancer's vision and enables the instructor to observe proper alignment of neck and shoulders.

PRE-BALLET: Pink leotard, pink convertible tights, pink leather ballet slippers.

BALLET 1-2: Pink leotard, pink convertible tights, pink leather ballet slippers.

LEVEL 1-3: White and black leotards, pink convertible tights, pink ballet slippers

LEVEL 4-9 : White, Black, and Royal blue leotard, pink convertible tights, pink ballet slippers, pointe shoes, rehearsal tutus, white and black wrap skirts.

PRE-PROFESSIONAL: White, Black, and Royal blue leotard, black leotard and pink convertible tights, pink ballet slipper, pointe shoes, rehearsal tutus, white and black wrap skirts.

MODERN/CONTEMPORARY...Solid leotard, bare feet, black jazz pants or footless tights

** No baggy t-shirts or shorts allowed in Jazz or Modern. No biking shorts or print leotards allowed in ballet **

CLASS PLACEMENT

CLASSES are divided into levels based on a student's ability, not necessarily by age(except for students under 8 years old). We divide our levels into four categories:

Preparatory (PreBallet-Level 1) Beginning (Level 2– Level 4) Intermediate (Level 5 – Level 8)
Advanced (PreProfessional).

The usual progression is Level 1, Level 2, Level 3...with each number representing a new level. Unlike grade levels in school, students do not necessarily move to the next level each year. We have a great deal of curriculum to cover in each level and we want to make sure that the student is comfortable, strong, confident, and technically correct before moving up. Some students may take one specific level for a couple of years, others may move through a level in less than one year. The decision is made on an individual basis by the instructor. Each student progresses at his or her own pace. Students advance to more challenging levels as they safely master the requisite skills and techniques, not specific combinations. Please be patient and encouraging with your child. Dance is an art form and cannot be rushed.

STUDENT PLACEMENT

We believe that it is important for a student to be placed appropriately so that he/she can get the most out of the class. Our instructors take personal interest in each student. Initial student evaluation involves determining a student's present ability in light of previous dance experience, individual skill and muscle development. New students age 7 and younger should register for a class according to our age guidelines.

STUDIO POLICIES

TUITION is payable in advance and must accompany the registration form. We accept MasterCard, Visa, Discover, Checks. For our specific tuition policy please refer to the class description packet.

CREDITS expire one year from date of issue and are non-transferable.

REFUNDS are not made once a session is underway unless the studio must cancel a class.

ABSENCE/MAKE-UP CLASSES We encourage consistent attendance. The curriculum is ongoing and cumulative. If a student misses too many classes, he/she will fall behind and be frustrated. We understand that conflicts or illness may cause dancers to miss a class and we have established a make-up policy to address this situation. A dancer may make-up a maximum of 3 missed classes in a single class. The make-up class should be in a similar class of the same level or lower. For example, a dancer enrolled in Ballet 2 may make-up in a Ballet 1 class but not a Level 1, as this class is a full level higher. Missed classes cannot be made up in subsequent semesters. Classes not made up will be forfeited. All students attending a make-up class must notify the front desk.

MEDICAL SITUATIONS In the case of medical condition which prevents a student from dancing and exists for 30 days or more, a credit will be issued toward the next semester under the following conditions: 1) a letter must be presented from a doctor stating the medical condition and the number of days a dancer is unable to participate in class; 2) a credit, determined by the number of days as indicated by the doctor, will be issued toward tuition for the subsequent semester only and cannot be carried over to subsequent semesters; and 3) dancers, if physically unable to participate in class, must continue to attend and observe their classes so they do not fall behind in the curriculum.

REGISTRATION is on a first come, first served basis. Returning students are given priority during the first three weeks of fall registration. All registrations are processed in the order received. Class size limitations will be strictly observed and we do not hold spots for returning students, so please register as soon as possible. After the priority registration, ALL registrations (for new and returning students) are processed in the order received. Registration confirmations are not sent. You will be notified only if we cannot register you for the class you requested. We require a minimum of 5 students to run a class.

LOST ITEMS Please label all belongings. A lost and found box can be found in the studio's dressing area. All valuables should be taken into the classroom with you. The studio cannot be held responsible for lost or stolen items.

TARDINESS All students are expected to arrive on time and in the appropriate attire. We understand that circumstances may delay you, sometimes. If you are more than 10 minutes late, you may be asked to sit and watch the class. Classes are designed to warm up muscles slowly and properly. Jumping into a class that has already started may cause injury. If you are tardy, please see the instructor, apologize for your late arrival and ask him/her whether you can join the class or watch. Please respect your instructor's decision in this matter; they are only looking out for the student's best interest.

INCLEMENT WEATHER

The safety of our students, teachers and parents is of utmost concern. If the weather is bad, we may cancel classes. Generally, we follow Hillsborough County weather closures. Sometimes, however, the weather and roads may clear in time for our afternoon classes. Classes missed because of weather closures may be made up in a similar class according to our make up policy. Classes will not be rescheduled and refunds cannot be offered.

Please call the studio or check our Facebook or website www.americasballet.com, for inclement weather updates. We cannot make individual phone calls.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

We encourage parental involvement by sending home regular newsletters with information about important studio news and events. Each semester, parents are invited to open classes. Please remember that this is a class and we ask that you observe discreetly and respectfully. Younger siblings may find it difficult to sit through an entire class, so please consider making other arrangements. If a parent cannot attend the open class, we encourage him/her to make arrangements with the instructor to observe another time. We want parents to observe their child's progress and to offer encouragement and praise for his/her accomplishments. Please check your email regularly as it is our primary form of communication. Observation classes will be held November 13-18 as well as March 5-10

HEALTH

We encourage our dancers to be healthy. Dancers are athletes and should treat their bodies accordingly. A dancer's body is his/her instrument. Please encourage your child to eat healthfully. We are very attuned to the damage that anorexia and bulimia can cause. If a dancer is too skinny from malnutrition, her body can sustain tremendous damage. Damage can occur not only to the skeleton and muscles, but to internal organs as well.

Finally, be sure your dancer gets the appropriate amount of sleep. Muscles are repaired during the REM cycle. Additionally, insufficient sleep reduces the blood flow that can adversely affect the dancer's ability leading to injury.

If a student is sick, please do not attend class. We do not want the dancer to end up sicker and we want to minimize the transmission of disease.

DANCE PERFORMANCE

We conclude each year with a performance, which is modeled in the tradition of the French School of Ballet. Emphasis is placed on the technique and artistry which the students have mastered over the course of their education. The performance consists of short dances choreographed from steps that the students have been working on all year. Students begin learning the pieces after spring break, in the second semester.

Dance is a performance art. The performance is mandatory. We expect dancers to attend class on a regular basis. Good classroom attendance is vital to the choreography of the piece and to developing a strong working relationship with the other dancers in the piece. This relationship helps the student feel comfortable, confident and relaxed on stage.

Only a portion of class time is dedicated to learning the choreography. Learning a routine helps the dancer understand sequencing and timing. The participation in our performance is rewarding and develops confidence.

DRESS REHEARSALS are scheduled prior to the performance and are designed to help the dancer understand the expectations for the performance. It helps the dancer get his/her bearings on stage, develop a level of comfort in front of an audience, and allows teachers to set the lighting, finalize blocking and address any costuming issues. Dress rehearsal should be a priority for every dancer. Please make other arrangements for both younger children and any child who is not scheduled to rehearse at that time, whether or not he/she is a dancer at the studio.

COSTUMES: Every dancer's first costume rental fee is covered by the performance fee. Each additional costume has an additional \$35.00 rental fee.

TICKETS Each audience member is required to purchase tickets for our performance. Ticket sales cover the cost of the theater rental, stage technicians, program printing, and much more.

DanzENSEMBLE

Our ensemble is composed of well rounded, dedicated young dancers over the age of 12 who want to make a commitment to their art. The purpose of the ensemble is to give dancers an opportunity to take what they have learned in the classroom and perform in the area. The ensemble is presented in galas, competitions such as the Youth America Grand Prix, American Dance Competition, and at various local events.

Participation in the ensemble is determined through auditions held in September and requires an additional fee of \$300. Auditions are open to any dancer enrolled in Level 5 or higher. The level of the dancers auditioning will determine the level of experience required to participate in ensemble. All members must take a ballet and modern. in addition to their scheduled ensemble rehearsals that will take place on the weekends. There is an annual fee associated with ensemble that is determined at the beginning of every year. The fee covers the choreography, rehearsals and classes.

Rehearsal times are determined by the individual choreographers. Therefore, a dancer's rehearsal schedule is determined by the pieces in which he/she is cast. Consequently, not all dancers will be called to every ensemble rehearsal. However, dancers are expected to be at his/her designated rehearsal. If too many rehearsals are missed, the dancer will be replaced in the piece.