

Maricelle Peeters

BALLET RECIPES

The ingredients of classical ballet technique





“ This book has all the ingredients you need for beginning ballet. Ballet Recipes explains classical ballet technique in a clear, fun and visual way. It gives enthusiastic children the chance to immerse themselves in ballet and start for themselves. Informative illustrations and apt metaphors help children to learn everything: from the importance of a good posture to doing spectacular leaps. This book means they don't have to wait any more for their next ballet class to learn what a 'grand plié' or a 'rond de jambe en l'air' is – they can do so at home. And even more importantly, the book also teaches them how to do the steps correctly.

I've worked a lot with young dancers and I believe that this book can really help children to learn classical ballet technique. And the metaphors used in the book will remain in readers' minds for years to come.

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Publisher

Balletstudio Le Rêve

www.balletstudiolereve.nl

Printed by

Amazon

Design

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Illustrations

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ISBN 978-90-828701-1-4

NUR-code 675

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WELCOME TO BALLET RECIPES!

My name is Maricelle and I really love classical ballet. I first came into contact with it as a girl of six. My neighbour Anja went to ballet classes and I really wanted to go with her. I'd no idea what to expect. Like many little girls, I thought the pink leotards were gorgeous and I wanted to wear one. After that first ballet class, I never stopped – and not because of the pink leotards. Everything appealed to me: the exercises, the structure, the discipline, the music, the freedom of dance, the emotion and later on also the opportunity to dance on stage in a beautiful costume.

Before long, I got my first ballet book as a present and at a certain point I knew it by heart. I read about the basic positions, the barre exercises, working in the centre, dancing on pointe, working with a partner, the costumes, the choreographer, the choreologist and mime gestures. The book also had stories

of various ballets. And there were lots of illustrations. From that moment on, I wanted to learn more and more about classical ballet. So now, many years later, I have several bookcases filled with all sorts of different ballet books.

Recently, a new ballet book was added to the shelves, entitled Ballet Recipes – the first ballet book I've written myself. In it, I'll take you on a journey through the principles of classical ballet technique. What does it feel like to do a demi-plié, a battement tendu, a pirouette and a jump? You can only do them if you use the right ingredients. It's just like cooking. A recipe only works with the right ingredients. So to do a ballet step properly, you also need the right ingredients.

Scales are an essential piece of kitchen equipment for ballet recipes. In order to do a ballet step correctly, you're always

trying to balance your body. If something goes up, then something else has to go down to stay in balance. And if something goes to the front, then something else has to go to the back. And if something goes to the right, then something else has to go to the left. How? That's what you'll find out, feel and experience step-by-step in this book. Make sure you're well prepared. Tie your hair back neatly, take off your jewellery and put on suitable ballet clothes. If you respect the traditions of classical ballet, a whole world of special, beautiful and interesting things will open up to you.

Enjoy reading the recipes!

Maricelle Peeters

Rotterdam, 2018

01

A pot filled with magical things,
to make the tastiest recipe ever.

So let's get started!

But don't mix too fast.

Don't let it spill out of the pot.

Keep stirring gently
and don't forget anything,
then you'll have a recipe
for the rest of your life.

POSTURE

Good posture is the basis of classical ballet. Do you know what good posture is? Is it the way you stand in everyday life? And does everyone have the same posture, or can you see differences? Take a good look around you – on the street or in the shopping centre. What do you see?

BLOCKS

Good posture is like piling up blocks. If you don't put the blocks right on top of each other, then the construction starts to wobble and the blocks fall over. It's just the same in dancing. A dancer is always trying to keep in balance.

In the first lesson,



After walking around, stand still and feel a straight line running through your body.

FISH BOWL

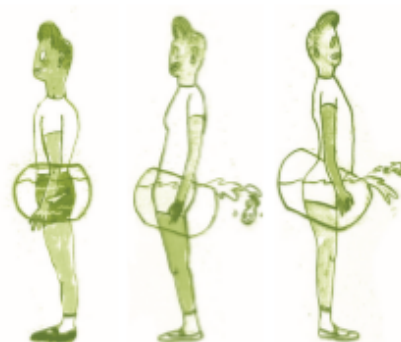
Now that you're standing, you can position your pelvis as well. Your pelvis is like a fish bowl, filled with water with a goldfish swimming in it. You can guess what happens if you move your pelvis backwards or forwards. So you should keep the fish bowl completely level.

BUTTOCK MUSCLES

To keep the fish bowl level, you have to tense your buttocks. To learn this feeling, lie on your tummy with your hands on your buttocks. They feel soft – a bit like a loose ball of wool.

Lift up your head and shoulders and you'll feel your buttocks tense and get hard. Now they're like a tight ball of wool. You'll notice two hollows appear in your buttocks.

Another way to practice tensing your buttocks is to



A SPONGE FINGER BELT

Sit on the floor again with your legs stretched out in front and feel your long back and neck, keeping the fish bowl level. Put your hands by your sides to feel whether you're really sitting up straight. It feels like you're wearing a belt made of sponge fingers. If you slump, the sponge fingers will break and you'll get crumbs all over the floor. Don't let that happen!

Make sure your shoulders stay down. This is the scales again, keeping everything in balance: stretch up and press the shoulders/shoulder blades down. Can you feel that you automatically want to lengthen your neck?

Sitting in this position, you can also tense your buttocks. Then you'll feel like you're sitting a bit higher up on a smaller surface area. Or you could feel as if you're water at the bottom of a glass being sucked up a straw.

You can do the same thing lying down on your back. Tense your buttocks and keep feeling the air between your vertebrae. Keep breathing gently, so that your ribcage doesn't go up and your back doesn't get hollow. Your shoulders/shoulder blades



02

With your muscles tensed,
shoulders down and head held high.

You'll stand there
proud as a peacock.

MUSCLE TENSION

In lesson 1, you already worked a bit on muscle tension. You learned to tense your buttocks and you became aware of your tummy muscles.

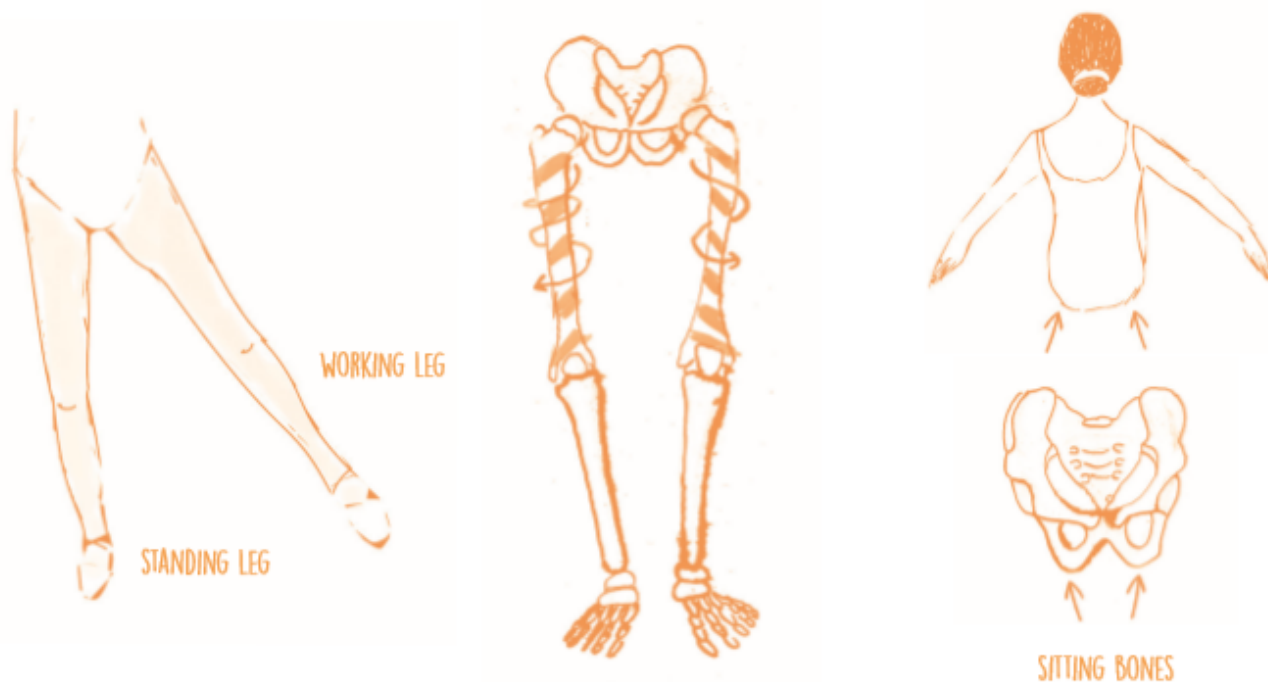
To tense is a verb. In the case of muscle tension, this means that your muscles are always active. A wooden doll stands up better than a rag doll. Without tension, it's difficult to keep standing at all, let alone to do all those beautiful ballet steps. So you need to tense your muscles correctly in order to balance your body and make the beautiful lines of classical ballet.

In classical ballet, this means you're always actively tensing your muscles, whether you're doing a movement or standing in a pose. It's as



ing leg is the leg that's moving.

Just like tensing and holding, turning out is also a verb. That means it's an active movement that never stops. If you're standing still, it may seem like you're a statue. But inside, you're actually continually turning out and growing. Remember 'cycling'. Turnout begins with the thigh in the hip joint. From there, the whole leg turns out at the same time.



In the third lesson, you start off sitting on the floor with your legs stretched out in front, like you did in the first two lessons. Flex your feet and stretch your legs as far as you can. Sit up as high as possible on your sitting bones. You should be able to feel your sitting bones if you rock from side to side.

CONCLUSION PART I

Now you've learned the six ingredients that form the recipe for the basics of classical ballet technique. But we still haven't learned a classical ballet step. Is that what you'd expected?

It's just like building a house. First you have to lay the foundations on which the house is built. So while you're laying the foundations, you can't see the house yet. You can also think of it like planting a seed in the ground. First the root system has to develop enough in the soil and then the plant can continue to grow above the ground.

So the best is yet to come. That's why I'm asking you to be patient and to enjoy each new step you do. Then you'll be able to experience and appreciate the beauty of every detail.



Before you go on, I'd like to ask you to go back to lesson 1 and go through it again, and then do lessons 2 to 6 as well. Take your time for each lesson. Now you can do them using your knowledge of the six ingredients. How is it different to the first time? And which ingredient gives you the feeling that you're dancing?



07

What time is it?

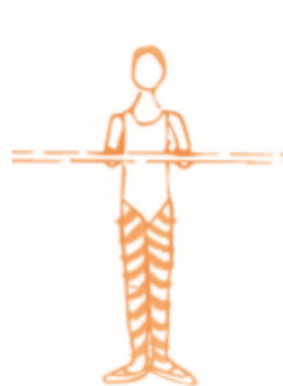
Are they showing the exact time?

Or have your feet lost their way?

FOOT POSITIONS

Classical ballet technique has five turned-out positions of the feet. In lesson 3, you learned why classical ballet dancers turn out. And you also learned first position of the feet in lesson 3, along with its checklist.

Here, you'll see first position again. In the first drawing, the first position is less turned out than in the second drawing. That's fine. But the same checklist applies to both of these positions. Although it isn't good for your body to turn out too far, that doesn't mean you have less work to do! Always approach the foot positions with your whole leg, from the hip socket. So actually, you could call them turned-out positions of the leg.



09

Breathe in,
and let the air flow through your lungs.

Let your feelings rise up
from within you.

Let your eyes speak,
and your body will follow
automatically.

PORTS DE BRAS

The literal meaning of *ports de bras* is carrying/transporting the arms. So once again it's a verb! Put simply, ports de bras are arm movements. In classical ballet, arm movements and leg movements are equally important. If you walk like a crab with your belly button pointing to the ceiling, you'll feel that your arms and legs are equally important.



If you imagine your body as an orchestra, then the instruments include two arms and two legs. Your eyes conduct the direction of your movements, but also their quality. But as a dancer, you're also part of an orchestra when you dance in a ballet. And if you don't all dance together, it's like an orchestra playing out of tune.

*1, 2, 1, 2,
a good conductor
keeps the whole orchestra playing together.*

stretches to the front in pointé à terre. It's elastic, but with resistance. It should feel like you're pushing against a metal spring. Your toes draw a line straight to the front. It should feel like your working leg starts to stretch a fraction sooner than your standing leg.



Feel the lengthening, the counterpull, your buttock muscles, the keys turning even further out and the smiley looking to the front. Then bend both legs. It should feel like your working leg starts to bend a fraction sooner than the stand-

ing leg. That's because of the lengthening of your standing leg. Your legs arrive back at the same time: the standing leg in a deep demi-plié and the working leg in sur le cou-de-pied devant. Your toes travelled back along the same straight line. Here too, feel the metal spring.

Then stretch the working leg to à la seconde in the same way, with your toes drawing a straight line again. On the inwards movement, when you bend both legs, you should feel the foot of your working leg curving under even more, like a digger or an ice-cream scoop. Feel your standing leg lengthen just a bit more before going into demi-plié. Feel both keys turning open. Now you've brought your foot to sur le cou-de-pied derrière.



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Slowly lifted, but just as strong.

A tree needs to work hard
to support its branches,
through wind and rain,
by day and by night.

RELEVÉ LENT AND GRAND BATTEMENT JETÉ

In *relevé lent* and *grand battement jeté*, you'll see that your legs take the same route. The difference is the way you do the movement: one's slow and flowing, and the other's like an energetic throw.

RELEVÉ LENT

Relevé lent means 'lifted slowly'. The exercise is done at 45° and at 90°, from first and from fifth position and in all three directions: front, side and back. Remember that relevé lent is a slow and flowing movement.

- 1 Feel an active first or fifth position.
- 2 Feel the lengthening, the counterpull, the active candy cane stripes, your buttock muscles and your breathing.
- 3 Feel that your standing leg is pulled up to the maximum.
- 4 Feel that your tendu is stretched to the

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File the blocks up straight,
hold tight to the fish bowl
and make sure your high heels
fit snugly...

Because once you're turning,
you mustn't let go of anything.

TURNS

Turning means doing movements in a circle. In classical ballet, there are various techniques for turning. For instance, you can turn on two legs or on one leg. There are also movements that are done while turning. You can turn on the spot, but you can also move while turning. Turning movements can be done on the ground, as well as in the air. On the ground, you have both fast and slow turns. The fast turns are done on demi-pointe and the slow ones are usually done on the whole foot. You can turn en de hors and you can turn en de dans.

SPOTTING

Turning also involves the word 'spotting'. In classical ballet and in many other dance styles, spotting means that you look at a single point at eye level. This helps prevent dizziness when you turn.

Don't underestimate spotting.

*If you don't spot,
the walls will play games with you,
and you won't know where you are.*

Imagine you're standing in your square, looking at wall 1. Then turn your body via corner 2 to wall 3. Your eyes are still looking at wall 1. Now turn your body past wall 3 and turn your head really fast to the right, to wall 1. Your body follows on, a fraction later. So you keep looking at wall 1 for as long as possible and then your eyes are the first to face wall 1 again. Whereas your body is the first to leave and the last to arrive.

Practice this with a stick in your hands, which points straight forwards from your tummy button:

- 1 Your elbows are raised and pointing to the sides, just like in first position.
- 2 Do an *elevé* to wall 1 and press down your shoulders and shoulder blades.
- 3 Now follow the instructions above. Do the turn taking little tiptoe steps. It's important that the stick keeps

pointing straight forwards all the time.



Other important checklist points during the turn are:

- 1 Feel the line from lesson 1, like an axis around which you turn, and feel your placement.
- 2 Feel the blocks, feel another stick at the back, and feel the picture frame.
- 3 Feel your tail bone pointing down, and feel the air between your vertebrae.
- 4 Feel the fish bowl, and feel your buttock muscles.
- 5 Feel your shoulders down and your tummy button pulled up, and feel the sponge finger belt.
- 6 Feel the air between your neck verte-

SHOPPING LIST

A hundred and eighty, à la seconde, above, accent, Achilles tendon, active, adagio, aesthetic, air, Alice in Wonderland, allegro, allongé, along, alongside, and, ankle bone, ankle ligaments, ankles, appreciate, arabesque, arc, arch, arch of a bridge, arm position, arms, arrow, art, articulation, artist, artistry, ascend, assemblé, at the same time, attitude, attributes, au milieu, audience, awareness of movement, awareness.



Back, back of the knee, backwards, balance, balancé, ball, ball and socket joint, ball of the foot, ball of wool, ballet,

ballet arms, ballet performance, ballet steps, ballet teacher, balletic walk, balloon, barre, basque, battement, beam of energy, beat, beaten, beautiful, beauty, behind, belt, bend, big, big pose, big toe, bigger, blocks, body, body parts, body weight, bones, book, bottle, bourrée, bras bas, breathe in, breathe out, breathing, breathing moment, bring together, brush, build, bun, burn, bus shelter, butterfly pose, buttock muscles, buttocks.

Calm, calves, cambré, cambré de côté, candy cane stripes, careful, cat, cat's paw, ceiling, centre, challenge, change, changé, changement de pieds, character, chassée, chat, checklist points, cheeks, chin, choreography, Christmas bell, circle, ciseaux, clapper, classical, classmates, clear, clock, close, closed, closer, closing, clothes peg, cobweb, cog mechanism, coin, colour, colours, communication, compasses, complete, concentration, conduct, connected, continuous, control, convey,

CONCLUSION

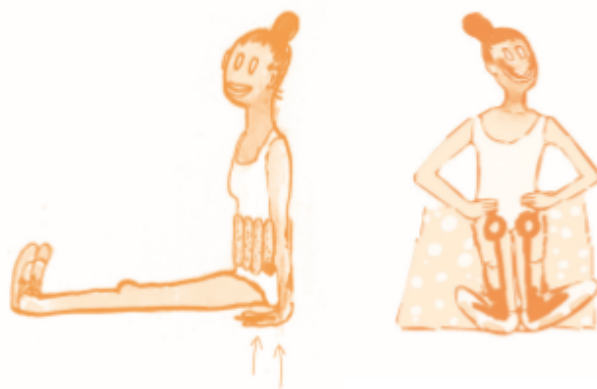
As you've probably noticed, your main focus has been on learning to feel and understand the basic principles of classical ballet technique. Learning to do the first movements and steps with the correct ingredients right from day one. And discovering that they're always linked to a particular feeling.

All the examples in this book are based on my own experience. I hope that you've acquired a taste for it and that from now on your eyes will be bigger than your stomach. I hope that you've discovered food for your soul.

I hope that I've touched you in your development as a dancer and that you've found more depth in your experience of classical ballet technique. I also hope that you'll continue to add to this book through feeling and experiencing every movement and every step in your own personal way. My examples are certain-

ly not the only ones.

And the way I approach classical ballet technique may also differ from the approach in your classes. I believe that many roads lead to Rome and that tastes differ. It's also fine to hold your arms above your tummy button in first position or to place a *sur le cou-de-pied devant*, rather than around the ankle. As long as you know why you do something, how you should do it and which ingredients you should use. That will lend your movements and steps a certain quality that radiates feeling, strength, precision and passion.



Anyone who loves ballet can learn this!
Of course, pupils at a dance academy

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maricelle Peeters is a teacher of classical ballet, character dance and floor barre. She trained as a dancer at the Nel Roos Academy in Amsterdam, and as a teacher at the Rotterdam Dance Academy and the State Choreographic School in Sofia, Bulgaria. She has danced with various folk dance companies in the Netherlands and in Macedonia.

In 1995, she started her career as a freelance teacher. She went on to establish her own ballet school, alongside giving classes as a guest teacher with the Dutch National Ballet Academy (formerly the Nel Roos Academy).

She currently teaches the junior levels (ages 11-13) at Codarts (formerly the Rotterdam Dance Academy). As the owner of Ballet Studio Le Rêve, she gives private classes/coaching and guest classes/workshops in the Netherlands and abroad. In recent years, she has ob-

served classes and taken refresher courses at the Royal Ballet School in London, the Vaganova Academy in St Petersburg and the Moiseyev School in Moscow, among others.

She is making her debut as an author with the book 'Ballet Recipes – The ingredients of classical ballet technique'.



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BALLET RECIPES

With a generous dash of **posture**, 500 grams of **muscle tension**, 4 tablespoons of **turnout**, 2 teaspoons of **weight transfer**, a clove of **placement** and a pinch of **lengthening**, this book contains all the ingredients of classical ballet technique.

An activity book that involves you right from the first lesson, through doing and feeling every movement for yourself. There are no ready meals. Instead, there are kitchen cupboards filled with ingredients you need for preparing and making the best ballet recipes. Once you've understood and mastered the ingredients from part 1 of the book, part 2 teaches you how to apply them to the principles of classical ballet technique. And once you've discovered this 'secret', you'll be able to improve your ballet technique time after time and get lots of enjoyment and satisfaction from this never-ending voyage of discovery!

“ This book has all the ingredients you need for beginning ballet. Ballet Recipes explains classical ballet technique in a clear, fun and visual way, and the metaphors used in the book will stay in its readers' minds for years to come.

Ernst Meisner – Artistic coordinator of the Dutch National Ballet's Junior Company, artistic director of the Dutch National Ballet Academy.