

New Ballet notes
Sara Porter Teaches at b Ballet FAB
Formerly basic Ballet for All Bodies

23 November 2022

Hi – I'm Sara. I am not a ballet specialist, though I do have a couple of academic degrees about dance. I have been a professional contemporary dancer and choreographer for 30 years. I tend to be a bit impulsive, and sometimes I think too much. I love fancy stuff, dressing up, playing at goofy things. In dancing terms, these days, I am mostly an improviser. I perform my own work.

So then: Why do I want to teach a ballet class?

I am a white person and grew up in a Protestant community, and in church. I was an athlete - gymnastics, high jump, volleyball, ran track and played basketball. I played music, sang in a choir. In that environment dancing, as a white girl, meant 'ballet'.

I took my first dance class at age 6 and hated it. It was strangely confining. I resented the rules, and felt I got things 'wrong' and wasn't allowed to move much. My ballet teacher got pregnant and left. So did I. (leave, that is...)

So then: Why do I want to teach a ballet class?

I returned to dance at age 16, first in jazz, then 'modern', and decided (again) that I needed to learn ballet. At age 17, I took another beginner class – and towered over the 8 year olds as we stood at the barre. Again, I didn't last long. And I left town soon after. Finally, after a couple of university degrees (starting in biochemistry, travelling through theatre and ending up in Dance Studies), it became clear the dancing life was going to be mine and I moved to Montreal and enrolled in a Ballet for Modern Dancers class in Montreal (Thank you, Martha Carter!) and learned some Very Useful Things that helped me accomplish what I wanted to do in dancing. The training basics – strength, articulation and flexibility – were what I wanted to master. (But still – that girl-y thing. It just didn't sit right.)

So then: Why do I want to teach a ballet class?

In my experience, many white people (like me) when they want to learn to dance, think ballet is the door that will take them where they want (are supposed?) to go. It is a fundamental piece of our colonial past and carries its legacy of princes and girls that believe they need saving. Like so many pieces of cultural baggage that just keep hanging on – it still permeates much of what people do, say, think, feel, and expect from Western European versions of theatre or what we call stage dancing. Or formal dancing. Or 'professional' dancing.

Legs high! Back straight! Flexible bending! Impressive feats! Turning, jumping, dressed up faeries! (*Sara! Grow up! Get over this bad attitude. I need a better attitude...*).

So then: Why do I want to teach a ballet class?

Ballet has provided some things to my dancing that I value: a kind of precision, clarity, and direct simplicity about moving. It offers an articulation of the legs, and a distinct spatial clarity. It helps develop long muscles. And (for me), it slows me down, which can be important help to feel every nuance of movement as you do it. Sometimes, the athlete in me kicks in, and I need the careful simplicity of ballet to calm my body down, and make me focus on the beautiful simplicity of its form.

As for the girly bit - I discovered in my 20s that, if I 'pretend to do ballet', it actually helps me DO the ballet. Dancing engages our body's imagination, and that's my way of getting the job done! If I can

pretend I'm wearing cloak / gown / jewels / scarves / wreathes of florals and ribbons – then it all comes together in a glorious fantasy of fantastical beauty.

And so – I'd like to share this with you. Bring your sad stories, your fear, your insecurity and your rage. We'll don some frocks, and plié our way to freedom. Not everyone was meant to leave the ground for long periods of time. Let's bend our knees and get right back up.

B Ballet FAB Class will help you learn:

foundational Foot positions
foundational Arm positions
terminology for ballet exercises (choreography)

B Ballet FAB Class will help you Practice:

Plié
Tendu
Dégagé

Port de bras

aka moving your arms

Travelling

Triplets (waltz)
A bit of Swan Lake
Chassé (basically a gallop)
Balancé - balancé

Pirouette - From a [Gallo-Roman](#) root **pir-* („peg, plug“, hence [Italian](#) *piruolo* (“peg top”)) and [-ette](#) (diminutive suffix). The word originally meant a “spinning top” (15th century).¹¹

END – Stretching – cool down

Reverence
Fancy bowing
Touch the floor and say Thank You. It held you up all this time and kind of took a pounding.