

Artistic Director

The Artistic Director is responsible for conceiving, developing, and implementing the artistic vision and focus of the organization. They are the ones that select which ballets to perform and the dancers that will play each role. The Ballet Mistress, Costume Designer and Production Manager all report to the Artistic Director. An Artistic Director must be able to work under deadlines, possess excellent people management skills, and be able to work within a defined budget. Most artistic directors have been professional dancers or have had many years of dance training but they also need skills learned in school and college to handle the administrative side of their job.

Dancer

The career of a dancer is relatively short and it is not unusual to spend more years training than dancing professionally. The professional training period usually consists of at least eight to nine years of intensive, precise work with training starting around the age of nine. Training is a very progressive process. The young professional student begins with daily classes, practicing the basic ballet positions and movements, learning body placement, correct carriage, balance and artistry. As the student progresses, time spent in classes each week increases, as does the difficulty and extensiveness of the skills taught. As well as the daily class in classical technique, students are required to receive instruction in variation (solo) work, pointe (dancing on the toes), pas de deux (a dance for two), character, jazz and modern dance. Students who graduate to a professional ballet company usually begin



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dancing as a member of the corps de ballet (ensemble). After a few years, corps de ballet members who demonstrate growth in artistry, technical ability, musicality and ability to communicate with the audience, may be promoted to the rank of Soloist or Second Soloist. Finally, the highest achievement in the company, the position of Principal Dancer or Ballerina, is attainable by only a few gifted dancers.

Ballet Mistress

Ballet Mistress is the term used for an employee of a ballet company who is responsible for the level of competence of the dancers in their company. Ballet mistresses (or ballet master for a male) are former dancers. They are generally charged with teaching the daily company ballet class and rehearsing the dancers for both new and established ballets in the company's repertoire. The artistic director of a ballet company may also be called its ballet master.

Production Manager (PM)

The PM is the head of the production department. It is a managerial bridge between the artistic and administrative side of an organization. Most of the time, this is a very high level position in the organization just below or equivalent to the Artistic or Executive Director. This person has the job of overseeing all of the lighting, scenery, set design and construction, staging, theater selection, and contracts for all of these areas.

Costume Designer

The Costume Designer creates, finds, makes, and/or coordinates costumes for the cast. They report to the Production Manager, but should also communicate well with the Artistic Director to ensure that the costumes are consistent with his/her concept of the show. The Costume Designer may also be called upon to provide makeup assistance. For some shows, the Costume Designer may primarily select costumes from their stock, or locate others that can be borrowed or rented from other theater groups. Usually a few costumes must be sewn from scratch, but the rest only need to be fitted to the performers. Other times, the Costume Designer may design most of the costumes to be worn on stage, and organize a team to sew them. In this case, it is helpful to have a Master Seamstress (or stitcher or tailor) who manages the majority of the actual construction, and a large team of people to help.

Take-Aways

Only a small percentage of dancers pursue a professional career in dance and even then, a dancer's profession may be short lived. However, a dancer develops many skills beyond dance technique and performance presence that can be applied to other dance-related and non-dance-related careers. What are the skills that a dancer develops that you think could be applied to other careers and life?