

Explanations and Supplements for Lessons 1-9 of the First Year
Gisela Ronecker-Wiesenaus, AlChor.

Lessons 1-9 arranged by: Vera Kostrovitskaya
Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet, St. Petersburg
(Formerly Leningrad's Vaganova Choreographic School)

Based on: *100 Lessons in Classical Ballet: The Eight-Year Program of
Leningrad's Vaganova Choreographic School*
Originally published in Russian by Iskusstvo, Leningrad, 1972

A. General Comments

Vera Kostrovitskaya was a student and protégée of the great Russian pedagogue, Agrippina Vaganova. Kostrovitskaya originally taught the lessons at the Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet (formerly the Leningrad's Vaganova Choreographic Institute), St. Petersburg, following the precepts of her famous mentor.

In August 1994, Valentina Tsiruljova, also a student of Vaganova, first came to the state-recognized school for artistic dance Balletfachschole Ronecker, Fellbach (suburb of Stuttgart). Here she taught the young students classical ballet, pointe, and variations from the repertoire of the Vaganova school.

Tsiruljova's lessons and the methodical classes by Kostrovitskaya were notated in Benesh Movement Notation™ (BMN) by Gisela Ronecker-Wiesenaus from 1994 to 2006, under the guidance of Tsiruljova.

Since 2021, Ronecker's students have been revising the first-year lessons in BMN with support from Robyn Hughes Ryman and Rhonda Ryman-Kane, who have advised them on notation theory and checked their recordings.

These BMN scores are intended for students and teachers who are familiar with Russian technique and pedagogy developed at the Vaganova school throughout the 20th century. The scores may also be of value as a historical document for ballet practitioners worldwide.

B. Special Usages:

1. Music:

For these lessons, specific music is not set, but is at the teacher's discretion, based on an understanding of the appropriate quality. The exercises at the barre and in the center are almost entirely accompanied by musical improvisation. An improvisation can be inspired by a personal musical thought, or the pianist may subjectively interpret any written musical composition. The music must strictly adhere to the dancing pattern proposed by the teacher and contain a definite rhythm corresponding to the character of the step. While the movements build through the stages of preparatory exercises, the rhythmic design is simple. At the end of the year, the exercises are simply combined, and the music becomes more

varied. At the beginning of training, the student should be introduced to the time signatures—2/4, 3/4 and 4/4—simply by listening to the music. For example, the student can walk on a march, making sure that the steps coincide with the musical beat. When the pupils have mastered a simple march in 2/4 time, it is necessary to introduce them to other time signatures, varying the musical accompaniment, speeding up and slowing down the tempo, strictly observing the structure of the musical phrase.

In a BMN score, it is usual to write the tempo or musical quality at the start of each exercise or enchaînement. Since there is no set music for the first-year lessons, this information is not included. Rather, based on music recordings, a metronome beat (e.g., "30 BPM," indicating a metronome marking of approximately 30 beats per minute) is shown at the start of each exercise to suggest a suitable tempo, which can of course be varied. For each lesson, a list of the exercises and the suggested metronome beats is provided.

For the first half of the first year, it is recommended to carry out the transitions within individual exercise sequences (e.g., in the plié exercises, changing from one position to the next position) with 4 chords (i.e., in 4/4 time this would be an extra bar).

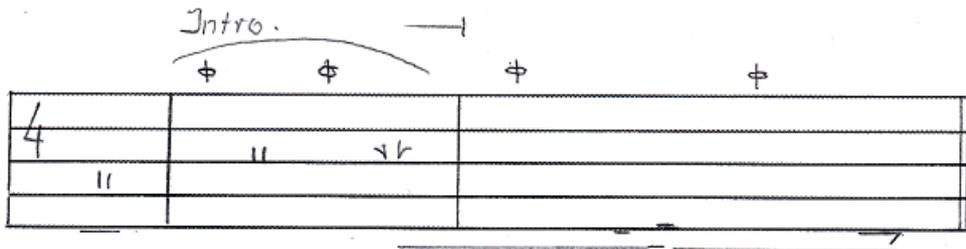
Tsiruljova recommends a step-by-step buildup in the technical and musical-rhythmic structure of all exercises in the elementary classes. The following example shows one possibility in the execution of battement tendu.

Example: battement tendu

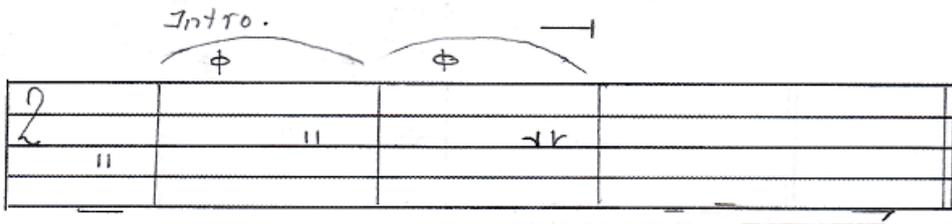
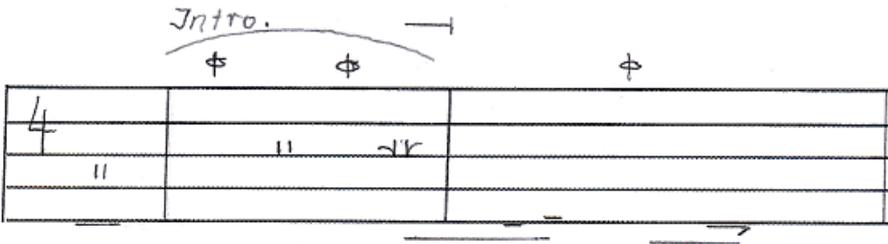
In 1st or 5th position, also en croix, and with one hand on the barre (30-40 BPM):

a) 4 counts:

b) 2 counts:



c) 1 count:



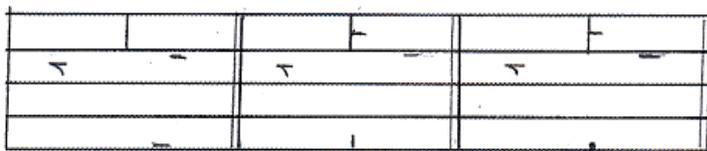
The level of training of the young students always determines the pace. A slow pace is the basis for the gradual buildup of technique.

2. Barre:

It is usual to write the word "barre" above the notation frame showing the hands supported (an unqualified support sign means that the body part is supported by the floor). In this BMN recording, the word "barre" is omitted in each exercise under the heading of BARRE EXERCISES.

3. Head positions:

For the first half of the first year, no head movement is performed in barre exercises done en croix. Starting in the second half of the first year, head positions correspond to leg movements, as illustrated below:



tendu to the side tendu to the front tendu to the back

4. Structure of individual exercises at the barre and in the center of the room:

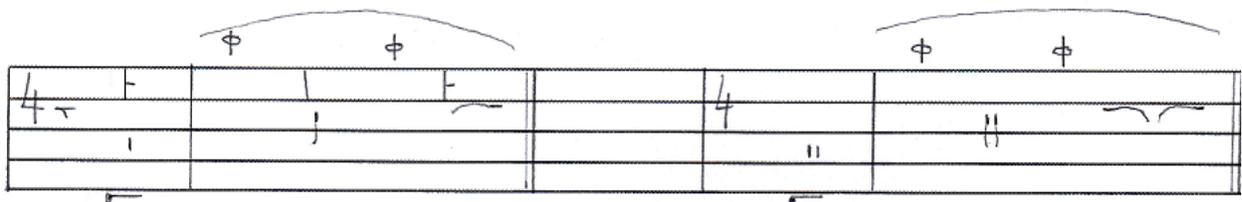
In the first year, the barre and centre exercises are done on the whole foot (i.e., not on demi-pointe). All exercises are executed with the right and with the left leg. To master the turnout of the legs, a series of exercises is first taught to the side, and afterwards to the front and to the back. At the beginning of training, exercises are taught facing the barre, holding it with both hands. Later, the same exercises are executed standing side to the barre and holding it with one hand; the other arm is opened to the side in 2nd position. The exercises start from the 1st or 5th position and are executed with the toe on the floor, and in the air: with the leg at an angle of approximately 22.5° (toe at the height of about mid-calf), 45° (toe at knee height), and 90° (toe at waist height).

For exercises that are performed with the leg extending sideways at or above a height of 45°, it is recommended to work facing the barre. For exercises with the leg extending forward, it makes sense to stand with the back to the barre, with the hands resting on the barre at the sides. For exercises with the leg extending backwards, it is recommended to work facing the barre.

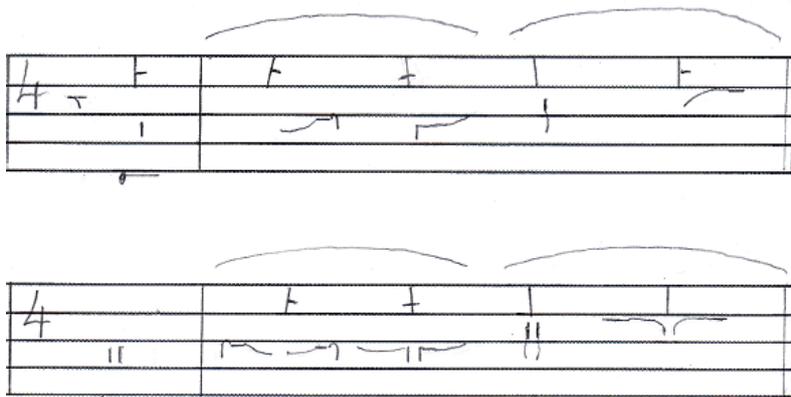
5. Participation of the arms during the preparation:

In BARRE EXERCISES, in the first year, maintain the arms in a static position: one on the barre, the other in 2nd position. The 2nd position is the most comfortable and useful one in which to work. In CENTER EXERCISES, working with both arms opened in the 2nd position helps to keep the balance.

In the first half of the first year, the preparation at the barre and in the center is done on the introductory measure of 4/4, in the following manner:

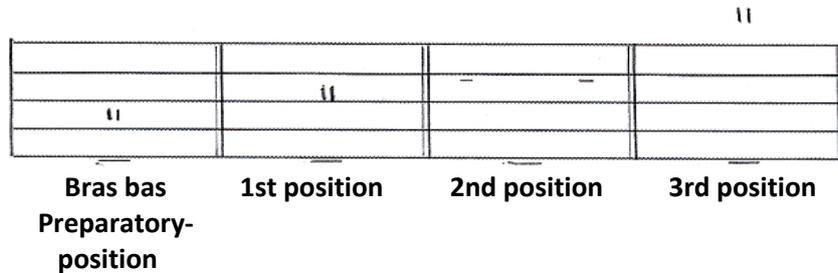


Starting in the second half of the first year, one or both arms are prepared in the desired position, e.g., allongé or "tutu position," before starting the exercise at the barre and in the center with an introduction (played with chords) in the following manner:



Note: In certain barre and centre exercises (e.g., battement développé and fondu), one or both arms may initiate the movement simultaneously with the legs at the beginning of the musical phrase and finish it simultaneously with them at the end of the phrase. This develops co-ordination of the arms with the legs.

6. Positions of the arms:



Bras bas or Preparatory position:

The initial position of the arms is the preparatory position. The shape of the arms is oval.

1st position:

The shape of the arms is round. The arms are raised in front of the body so that the hands are on a level with the stomach. They should be slightly bent, so that when they open into the 2nd position, they unbend and open to their full length.

2nd position:

The arms are opened at the side, very slightly rounded in the elbows. The elbows should be well held up by the same tension of the muscles of the upper part of the arms. The hands extend the line of the forearm and must not hang down.

3rd Position:

The shape of the arms is oval. The arms are raised over the head, the elbows rounded, the palms face inward, with the fingertips close to each other but not touching. It must be possible to see the hands without lifting the head.

Order of learning the arm positions:

Bras bas = preparatory position; 1st position; 3rd position; 2nd position.

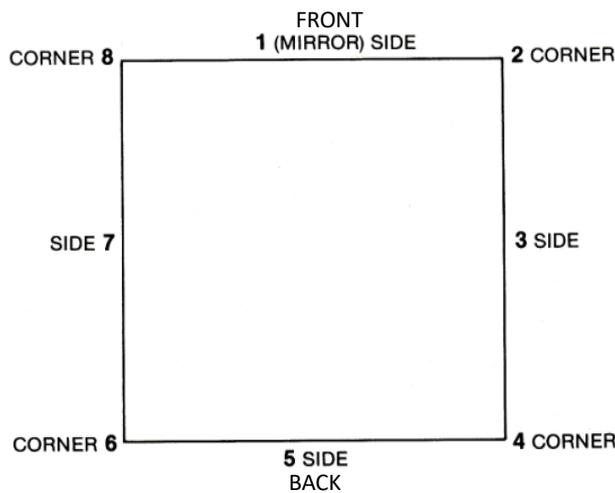
When the 2nd position is taught, the arms perform an allongé before being lowered to bras bas (preparatory position). That means that, when lowering the arms, the hands remain a little behind and only at the end of this movement gradually adopt the bras bas (preparatory position). Allongé means "to lengthen." In order, as we say in class, to "intake a breath with the arms" they must be used as follows. When the arms arrive in 2nd position, continue to extend the forearms into the hands. Taking a deep, quiet, but not exaggerated breath (without lifting the shoulders), turn the hands palms down, and as you exhale, bring them smoothly down, allowing the fingers to "trail" slightly behind, but without overemphasizing, and without too much break at the wrist. Using the so-called "tutu position," bring your arms to bras bas. Allongé applies to the position of the hand or hands, extended from the wrist through the fingers.

7. Posture of the hands and fingers:

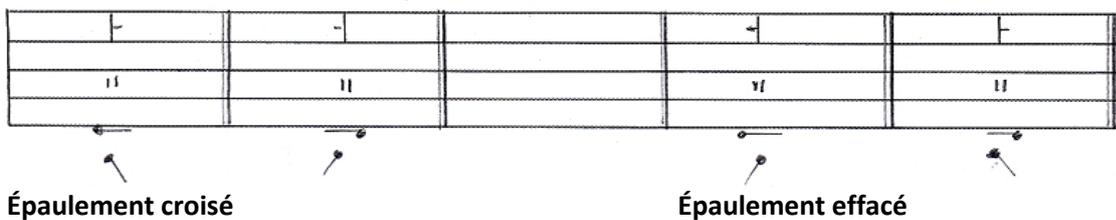
All fingers are grouped freely, and they are soft in their joints; the thumb must lightly touch the 2nd phalanx of the middle finger. The remaining fingers are less rounded and therefore slightly open. This grouping of the fingers may be modified as the pupil progresses. The hand is not broken in the wrist but continues the general curved line of the arm from the shoulder.

8. Épaulement croisé and effacé:

There are two types of épaulement in classical dance: épaulement croisé and épaulement effacé. Explaining the épaulement positions to the students, one should make use of the class diagram.

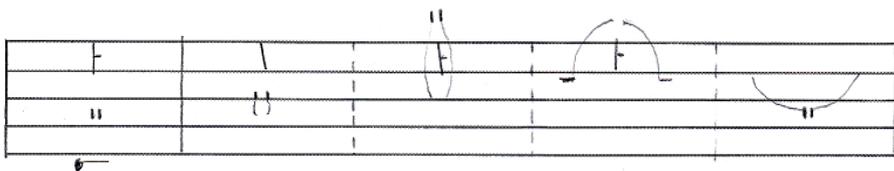


The fundamental character of croisé is the crossing of the legs, with the head turned over the shoulder towards the front. In the beginning of the second half of the first year of the curriculum, it is the starting position for the CENTER EXERCISES. In effacé, the legs are open to the viewer with the head turned over the shoulder towards the front, softening the contours of the pose.

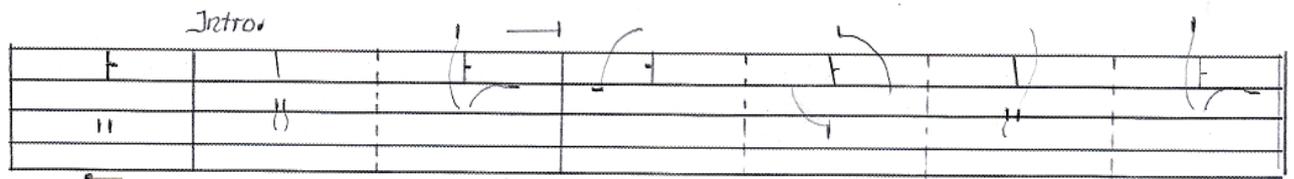


9. Port de bras:

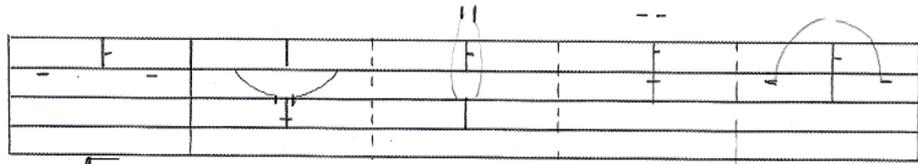
After mastering the arm positions and épaulement, one should proceed to study port de bras, which develops coordination in arm movements.



First port de bras



Second port de bras

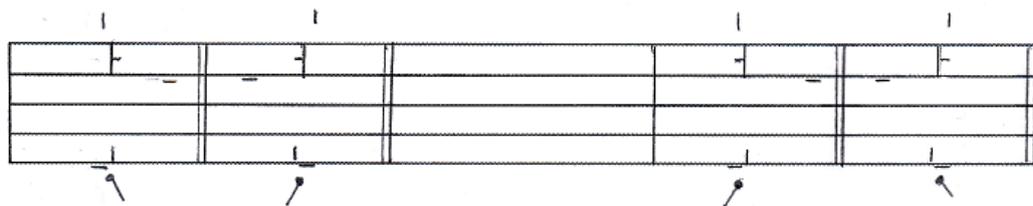


Third port de bras

10. Poses of the classical dance:

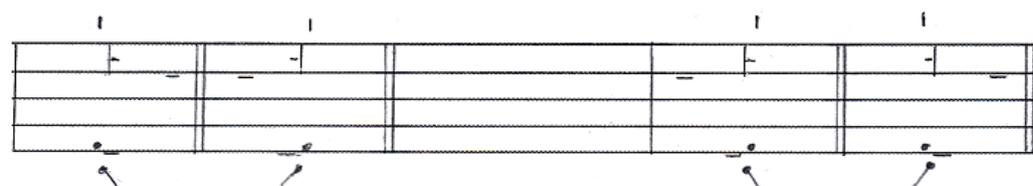
In the first year the poses croisé, effacé, and écarté devant and derrière are studied with the toe pointed on the floor.

The poses of the classical dance are as a rule executed from épaulement croisé as the initial position.



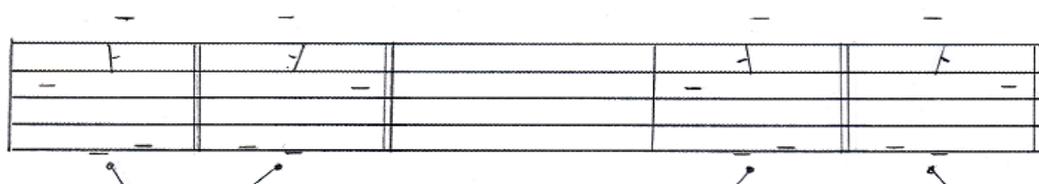
Big
pose croisé devant à terre

Big
pose effacé devant à terre



Big
pose croisé derrière à terre

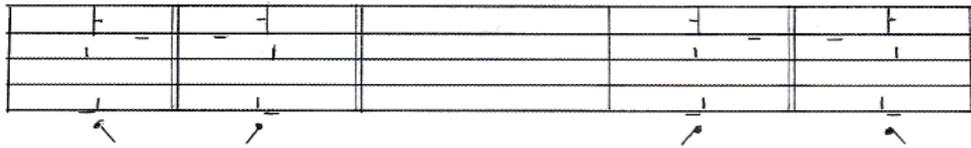
Big
pose effacé derrière à terre



Big
pose écarté devant à terre

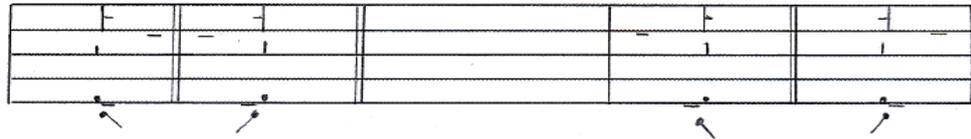
Big
Pose écarté derrière à terre

Together with the basic poses of the classical dance, one also studies the so-called "small pose," which is utilised in a number of movements in the exercises of the classical dance.



**Small
pose croisé devant**

**Small
pose effacé devant**



**Small
pose croisé derrière**

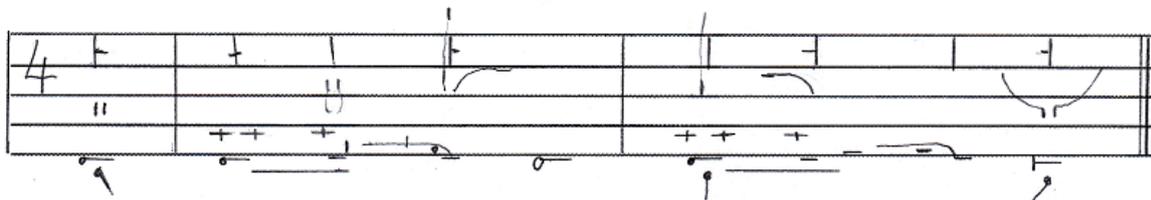
**Small
pose effacé derrière**

Note: Port de bras and poses are taught first in the center of the room. Then port de bras and poses are added to the end of the exercises on the barre.

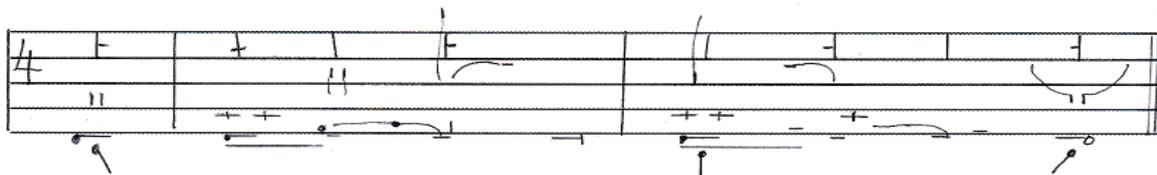
11. Temps lié en avant and en arrière:

Having obtained expressiveness of the body in the poses and port de bras, temps lié is immediately studied in the centre of the room (au milieu). It should be clear that a complete flow of movement is necessary. This is a widely used combination which starts in beginners classes and gradually increases in difficulty.

Temps lié combines a series of poses and is extremely important for the coordination of arms, legs, and head.



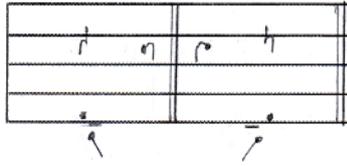
Temps lié en avant



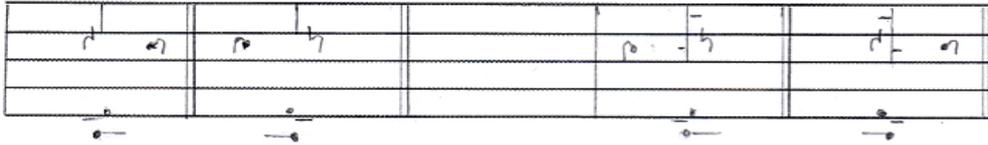
Temps lié en arrière

12. 1st, 2nd, and 3rd arabesque:

The 3rd arabesque is taught first, taking care that the arms and legs are well placed, especially in the big pose croisé derrière à terre. This is followed by the 1st and 2nd arabesque. The working leg in this case is not raised off the floor, which is why the arabesque does not have the expressiveness that belongs to it, introducing only a sketch of the pose.



3rd arabesque



1st arabesque

2nd arabesque

Note: For the 1st and 2nd arabesque, a half-turned-out position of the supporting leg is sufficient.

13. Adagio in the center of the room:

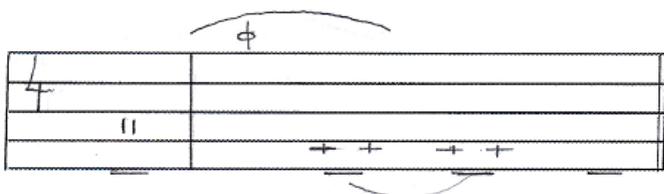
The movements of adagio are learned gradually. In the elementary classes throughout the first year, for example, at the barre and in the center of the room, the adagio consists of the simplest forms of relevé lent to 90°, développé, and port de bras, done at a slow tempo and on the whole foot. Here one dedicates oneself particularly to the poses of the classical dance and their different connections par terre. One example is the temps lié. In the first year there is still no set adagio.

14. Allegro:

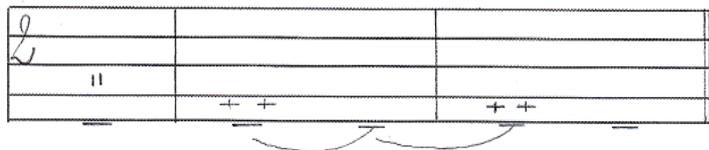
In the first year, jumps are not studied until the student has sufficiently developed the organisation of the body, the turn-out of the legs "en dehors," the elasticity of plié, etc., through practice of barre and centre exercises. In all classes, the first jump combination must consist of little jumps from two feet to two feet, like temps levé sauté. All new jumps are taught first at a slow tempo with two hands on the barre; then in the centre of the room.

1. When jumps are first taught, they are practised initially at the barre and then in the center of the room en face.
2. In the second half of the first year, the jumps begin and end in épaulement croisé.
3. At the end of the first year, the jumps are repeated up to three times in a row (in series). The execution takes place en face, with the head always turned to the front leg. The last jump ends in épaulement croisé.

14.1 The following examples are set training sequences, end of the first year:



Temps levé



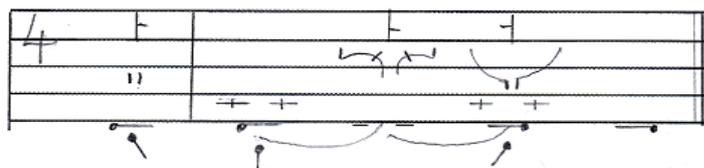
Temps levé

Note: Temps levé is the very simplest jump from two feet onto two in 1st, 2nd, 5th, and finally 4th position.



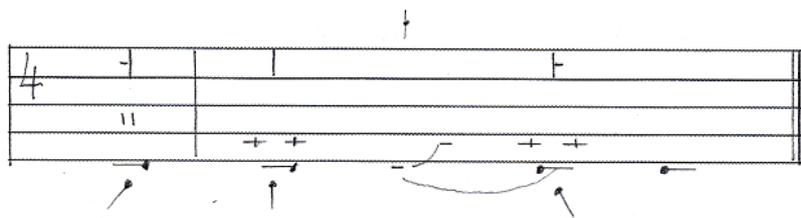
Changements de pieds

Note: Changing the position of the feet at the end of the jump. Changement en face in succession ends with the last jump in épaulement croisé.

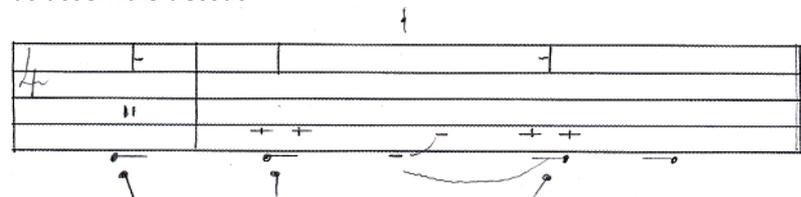


Pas échappé changé

Note: Pas échappé can be done with or without changing the feet. Pas échappé en face in succession ends with the last pas échappé in épaulement croisé.

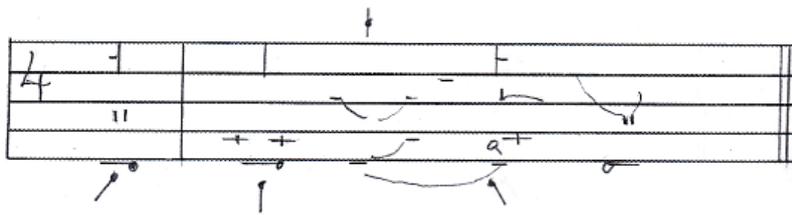


Pas assemblé dessus

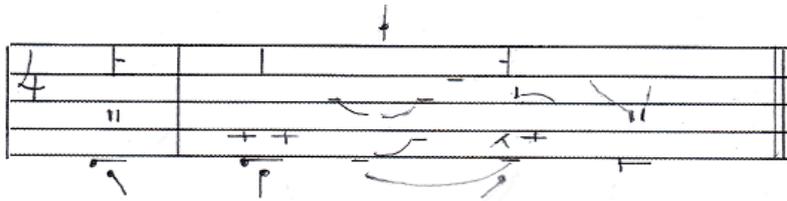


Pas assemblé dessous

Note: Pas assemblé en face in succession ends with the last assemblé in épaulement croisé.

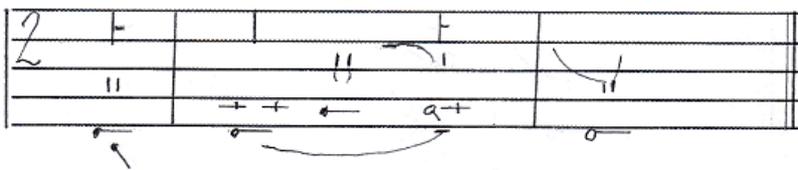


Petit jeté derrière

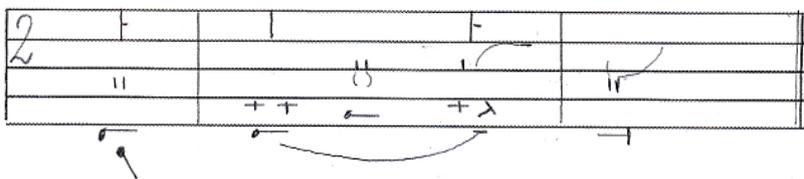


Petit jeté devant

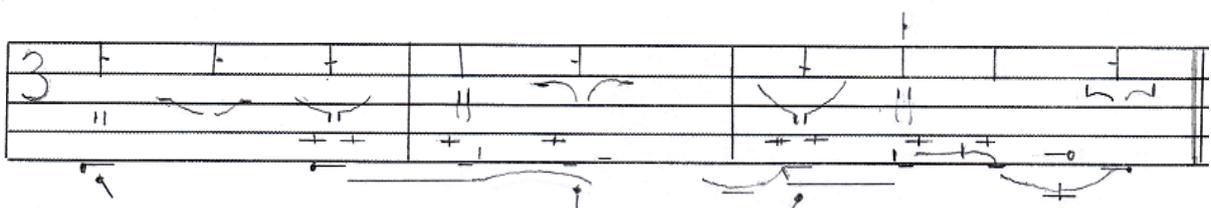
Note: Pas jeté en face in succession ends with the last jeté in épaulement croisé.



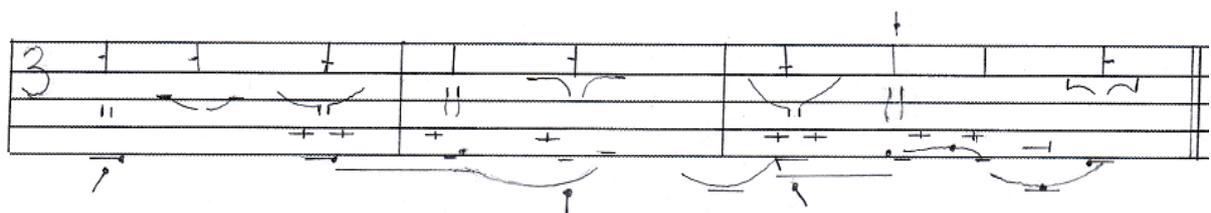
Petite sissonne or sissonne simple derrière



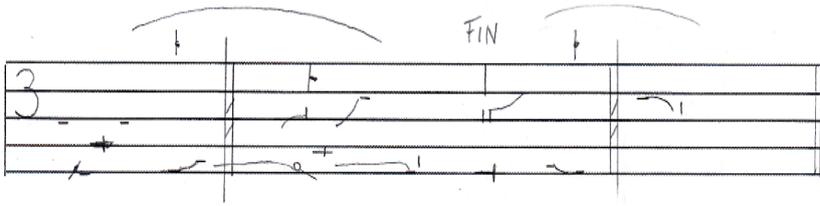
Petite sissonne or sissonne simple devant



Pas de basque en avant



Pas de basque en arrière



Pas balancé

Note: It is done from side to side traveling forward or backward in a straight line, or on a diagonal line.

15. Pointe work:

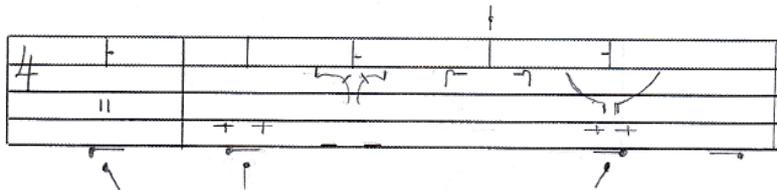
For the student to be able to stand on pointe correctly and with stability, it is necessary to prepare the legs by performing exercises on demi-pointe (relevé in 1st, 2nd, 5th, and 4th positions). These are done in the first half of the first year.

The simplest exercises are taught on pointe on two legs with both hands on the barre (relevé in the 1st, 2nd, 5th position). Then the relevé is taught on pointe in the middle of the room. This is followed by pas échappé, assemblé soutenu, pas de bourrée en dehors and en dedans, pas suivi, and pas couru. In the second half of the first year, a lesson on pointe is given (after the barre and centre exercises) twice a week.



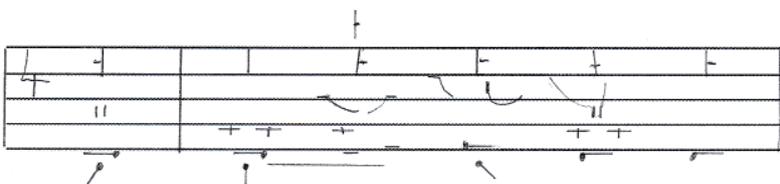
Relevé in 1st, 2nd, and 5th positions

Note: Relevés are done with a small leap on pointe in the first year, not yet with the gradual transition from half to the whole pointe. Coming down from pointe, one must not fall into the plié.

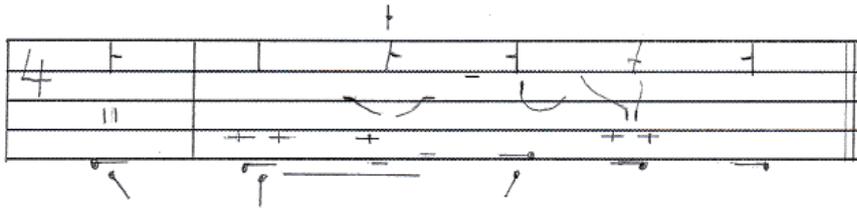


Pas échappé in 2nd Position

Note: Pas échappé is initially done en face. At the end of the year, épaulement is introduced.

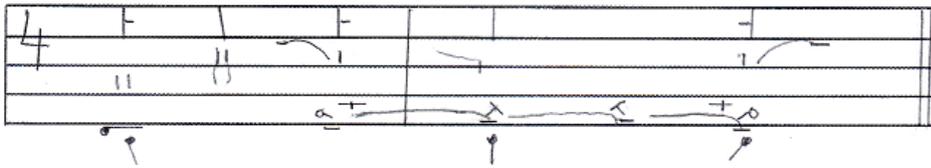


Assemblé soutenu dessus

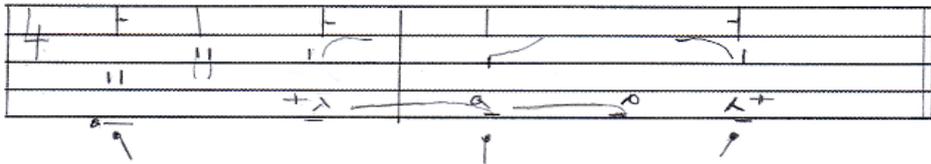


Assemblé soutenu dessous

Note: The character of the musical accompaniment combines the flow of the demi-plié with short, brisk soutenu.

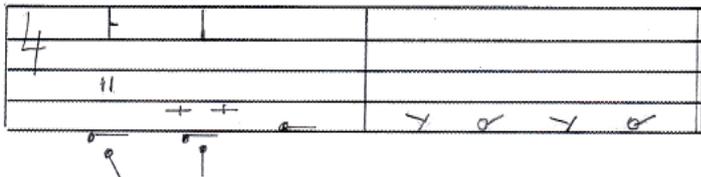


Pas de bourrée en dehors



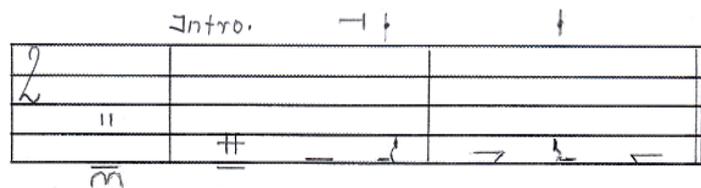
Pas de bourrée en dedans

Note: Pas de bourrée develops the mobility and liveliness of the feet, and gives a sharpness and adroitness to the movements of the legs.



Pas de bourrée suivi in 5th position

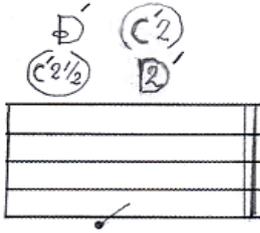
Note: In the beginning of the first year a simplified form of pas suivi is studied sur place (on one spot).



Pas couru

Note: Pas couru is a run on pointe, but, differing from pas suivi, it is executed in a parallel position. In the beginning of the first year a simplified form of pas couru is studied sur place (on one spot).

16. Detailed Notes for sur le cou-de-pied position:



The working foot clasps the ankle of the supporting leg approximately 2.5 cm above the ankle. The heel is placed in front and the tip of the foot goes back towards the Achilles tendon; the instep and toes are stretched. The sur le cou-de-pied position described above is performed in the following exercises: Battements frappés; Battements doubles frappés; petits battements.

17. Dance step for the 1st year:

March, Polka, Waltz, Polonaise, and Mazurka

Literature:

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Nadezhda Bazarova, Varvara Mey
Dance Books – London

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The textbook of the Vaganova Choreographic School,
Leningrad, USSR
V. Kostrovitskaya, Alexei Pisarev
Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
English translation 1978

Schule des Kassischen Tanzes

Vera S. Kostrovitskaya
Die Waganowa-Methode in der Praxis
Verlag: Henschel

Basic Principles of Classic Ballet

Russian Ballet Technique

Agrippina Vaganova

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Soho Square London W. 1948

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Die Schule des Tänzers

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Methodik des klassischen Tanzes

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