



Candidate session number			
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Examination session (May or November)	MAY	Year	2007

# Sample B

## EXTENDED ESSAY COVER

Candidates must complete this page and then give this cover and their final version of the extended essay to their supervisor.

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: <u>DANCE</u> (For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)
Title of the extended essay: <u>How did George Balanchine impact the world of American classical ballet?</u>

## CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

If this declaration is not signed by the candidate the extended essay will not be assessed.

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate Organization).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, or oral.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

Candidate's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 16.1.07

## SUPERVISOR'S REPORT

*The supervisor should complete the report below and then give this cover, enclosing the final version of the extended essay, to the Diploma Programme coordinator. The supervisor must sign this report; otherwise the extended essay will not be assessed and may be returned to the school.*

Name of supervisor (CAPITAL letters)

### Comments

*If appropriate, please comment on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion H. Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate.*

I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

I spent  hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

Supervisor's signature:

Date: 16.02.07

How did George Balanchine impact the world of American Classical Ballet?

School code:

Dance

## Abstract

This paper will help demonstrate how George Balanchine impacted the world of American Classical Ballet. Beginning with George Balanchine's background, the reader can develop a clear understanding of why Balanchine became the man he was. His childhood and early years are important in his later successes. Balanchine defected to the United States with a certain zeal and ambition. George Balanchine is well known for his starting of the School of American Ballet, with Lincoln Kirstein, in New York. He is also famous for his choreography and creative ideas, which were exposed through the company he formed, the New York City Ballet. His style of teaching students and choreographing is what stands out, and makes George Balanchine a unique ballet figure. Although George Balanchine felt that proper classical ballet technique was a necessity for a dancer, he also felt that actually 'dancing' was just as important. Using emotions and your body to 'dance' with feeling, not just perfect technique, was imperative. George Balanchine has made a drastic impact on Classical Ballet in America. This includes the fact that Mr. Frank Ohman, a former Soloist with Balanchine's New York City Ballet, has opened a ballet studio to teach Balanchine technique and teach his students about his experiences with George Balanchine. George Balanchine has not only passed on his classical technique, but also his choreography, his metaphors, and most importantly his knowledge of how to 'dance'.

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## I. Introduction

George Balanchine changed the world of classical ballet through his ingenious techniques and dedication towards this beautiful art form. Many dancers who have worked with Mr. Balanchine love to share stories about how Balanchine used metaphors and demonstrations to illustrate how he wanted ballet to be portrayed. His focuses on musicality and clean technique, positively influenced classical ballet throughout America and his colossal amount of ideas will keep changing worldwide classical ballet for the better. A special man, he was truly a pioneer of change and he demonstrated this through hundreds of famous choreographed ballets and works that have been staged worldwide. This will convey how George Balanchine saved, and reconstructed classical ballet in the United States, for Mr. Balanchine developed the style for American Ballet, and he changed the way the world will speculate classical ballet forever.

“We must first realize that dancing is an absolutely independent art, not merely a secondary accompanying one. I believe that it is one of the great arts...” These honestly spoken words revealed by legend, George Balanchine, express his uniqueness and explain why he ended up greatly impacting the world of classical ballet. Classical ballet involves beautiful flowing, yet precise movements and is based on conventional technique. That is why, George Balanchine, for all intentional purposes, *is* classical ballet; he transformed the basic dance steps into an art form, so fluid and tranquil, that he captures one’s emotions in the audience beyond their expectations. Never before has one witnessed such elegance and grace on a live stage. Audiences around the world were in awe on how this man could combine a dance step, music, and art as if he was conducting a symphony of musicians. One can see, why George Balanchine *is* classical ballet.

## II. Beginnings: *La Nuit*

George Balanchine, famous ballet teacher and choreographer, is a native of St. Petersburg, Russia, born Georgi Melitonovich Balanchivadze on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1904. George Balanchine grew up with a strong musical background and was surrounded by a musically talented family throughout his childhood; Balanchine's father was a composer. Mr. Balanchine's sister was the ballerina of the family and had dreams of becoming a prima ballerina. In fact, it was because of his sister he was accepted into the Imperial Theater School, located in St. Petersburg, Russia, at the age of 9, which is where George Balanchine's 'dance journey' began. Although he loved, and focused mainly on music, he eventually choreographed a pas de deux *La Nuit* while still attending the Imperial Theater School. His true talent is shown here through this choreography considering he was on fourteen years old when this piece was innovated. *La Nuit* was the first of many masterpieces that would be created over the course of Mr. Balanchine's life. In 1922, a couple of years after *La Nuit* was created, the Young Ballet was formed by Balanchine emphasizing experimental dance. George Balanchine was renounded as one of the most exciting, and brightest choreographers in Europe. He had a certain zest and zeal, which was his driving force for success. He brought this ambition and fire within when he came to America. As explain above, George Balanchine was born dedicated to his passion of ballet, which impacted the world of classical ballet, as well as the lives and souls of others.

### III. New York: "But first, a school..."

Classical ballet in America was never the same again when George Balanchine came to New York in 1933 when asked by Lincoln Kirstein. Lincoln Kirstein is a writer and executive of American theatre and dance. He and George Balanchine met on his trip Western Europe, which is where Balanchine fled to from the Soviet Union. George Balanchine left the Soviet Union with a couple of other dancers because they were given the permission by the Soviet Union to leave for a dance tour. At the time, Balanchine had been dancing in the city Paris with the Ballet Russes, a famous ballet company within the city of Paris established in 1909, choreographing pieces for Royal Danish Ballet, and the Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo. Despite all of this, he even found the time to form his own ballet company in 1933. This ballet company, located in Paris, was known as Les Ballets. Some of the ballets that Balanchine choreographed while in Europe include, *Prodigal Son*, in 1929, and *The Seven Deadly Sins*. The *Prodigal Son* has been performed in America through the New York City Ballet as well. Lincoln Kirstein had seen ballets created by George Balanchine, and wanted to bring Balanchine to America to form a ballet company because at the time, the United States did not have a major ballet company. He believed that Balanchine would be able to achieve great things in America, and in 1933 Kirstein was in London and asked George Balanchine to move to America to start teaching and choreographing there.

"But first, a school..." ([www.balletmet.org](http://www.balletmet.org)), a famous quote by George Balanchine, nothing could sum up his values more than this statement, which represents the beginning of the various projects he took on in America. He was able to reach his goals once in America because of the help he received from many people. George



Balanchine's charm and charisma made it easier for him to receive help to promote his projects. Also, Lincoln Kirstein, being the wealthy man he was, knew a lot of wealthy people who aided with finances for the School of American Ballet as well as the ballet companies created. When Mr. Balanchine spoke, his strong personality and excitement about his projects made people feel like they knew him, thus earning people's respect very quickly. The people of America and people worldwide, even other teachers and choreographers supported his goals and projects because of their strong respect towards him.

George Balanchine's ballet classes were based on a protocol. Rigid structure, and perfect technique formed the foundation of a beautiful dancer, and a successful ballet. Branching off of this foundation comes the heads, the arms, and the fluidity of these arms and hands. A last injection of musicality makes this dancer, or performance complete. Most teachers and choreographers from around the world are able to tell a 'Balanchine trained dancer.' His ultimate goal was to teach his interpretations of classical ballet and his musicality to others. He had a vision, and he was not selfish by any means, for if he were, his main focus would not have been to develop a school to train students. In 1934, George Balanchine and Lincoln Kirstein opened the School of American Ballet in New York City. How much foresight did this man have to come to America during the Great Depression, and have the perseverance to open up a school when the nation's economy was at its worst? How unique was his personality to entice students to come to his school during this period of anguish. George Balanchine knew in a young country the opportunities that would be available. He had the freedom to express himself through ballet and choreography.

In the School of American Ballet, George Balanchine accepted students from around the world to better their technique and help them learn the meaning of the word 'dance.' His ideal dancer had perfect technique, fluid movement, which had to come naturally, and he wanted his dancers to focus and know what he was looking for, even if it was impossible. Expression was key; the audience had to feel the emotion. He did not want dancers to just do what he was looking for to get a lead role in an upcoming production; he wanted his students to learn something. For Mr. Balanchine, just having perfect ballet technique was not good enough; he wanted his dancer to use expressions and flow across the stage rather than resemble robots on the stage, for that is the beauty of *dancing*. In an interview with Mr. Frank Ohman, former soloist with the New York City Ballet, he states, "He taught us how to dance." Dancing is more than just technique and extension of the dancer's legs. Dancing is the emotions and musicality along with the steps.

Musicality was paramount in Balanchine's eyes, this reflecting back to his childhood. While most choreographers around the globe felt that music was a separate part of ballet and performances, George Balanchine believed just the opposite. He found music to be one of the most important parts of ballet, and conveyed this through his classes and works created. Balanchine took an individual interest in each one of his students and wanted them to look unique and angelic while performing on and off the stage. He began with these individual interests because when he first opened The School of American Ballet, he did not know who would show up for classes each day. In fact, his first choreographed piece in the United States was created for his students attending the School of American Ballet.

Balanchine composed *Serenade* in 1934 for his accomplished students, resembling a typical class given at the school. Simple as the choreography and costumes were in this ballet, this did not take away from the artistry or expertise usually found in Balanchine's works. He wanted the audience to focus on the ballet and music themselves, so he did not want the scenery or costumes to be involved. This interest in the individual dancer never died, for when he choreographed from then on, he would have the dancer there with him so he would be able to make changes to the choreography depending on the dancer. Every dancer had certain strengths and weaknesses.

A year later, in 1935, George Balanchine boldly went one step further and commenced his first company, American Ballet. Although twenty-three operas were created by Balanchine under American Ballet, because of a lack of financial support, this ballet company soon collapsed in 1938. Only a strong person could handle such struggle, but affirming his outstanding character traits, George Balanchine persevered through this troublesome chapter in his life; for the School of American Ballet was running as smoothly as before and he still put his heart and soul into teaching. His students were still an important part of Balanchine's life, and this tragedy did not effect his attitude, as would be expected of him. His shining qualities shown through, for not only did he continue with the School of American Ballet, but he also began working on Broadway. He choreographed musicals, and he also choreographed a piece with fifty elephants for the Ringling Brothers Circus. All of these projects he became involved in were successful.

George Balanchine never limited himself to the successes he could achieve, no matter what he was partaking in. He just loved to choreograph, and it showed through all

that he has accomplished. His classical ballet and teaching techniques had expanded to other areas of dance, principally being Broadway, and further gained admiration from America. Balanchine influenced all of America in that he brought his style of ballet to Broadway, which led to film as well. For instance, the film version of *On Your Toes* was choreographed in 1939 by George Balanchine himself. Some of the Broadway productions Mr. Balanchine worked with during this time include *Slaughter On Tenth Avenue*, and the 1936 *On Your Toes*. George Balanchine was the first in America to make dance have a plot and story line.

Eventually, in 1946, George Balanchine formed another ballet company with Lincoln Kirstein, called the Ballet Society. Remaining successful, the name soon changed to the New York City Ballet. Later becoming the most recognized and famous ballet company in the world, the New York City Ballet still remains efficacious today. Beautiful masterpieces were created by Balanchine under the New York City Ballet, and included musical scores by great and renowned composers including, Peter Tchaikovsky, Igor Stravinsky, and Johann Sebastian Bach. This was the beginning of a new age in classical ballet. "He was light years ahead of all of them..." said Frank Ohman during an interview on September 9, 2006. The term 'them' is referring to other teachers and choreographers at the time. Balanchine is very special in everybody's eyes.

#### IV. "A Real Teacher"

George Balanchine's ballet classes ran differently than most given around the world, and no two classes were ever the same. Although he interpreted dance different to his students than most teachers worldwide, he still used the technique he learned as a young boy in St. Petersburg at the Ballet Imperial School. He treated students at the School of American Ballet, and company dancers with the New York City Ballet with the same level of respect in ballet classes. He always found musicality to be important, yet he would also focus on a different ballet step to perfect each class as well. George Balanchine's goal for the School of American Ballet was to improve the technique and performance ability of both female and male dancers from around the world. According to former soloist with the New York City Ballet, Frank Ohman, Mr. Balanchine's classes were fairly basic, focusing on perfecting arms, hands, legs, and feet; only the main focus was teaching how to dance.

Although Balanchine is a very accomplished choreographer, to most he is known as a *real* teacher, for his students always came first. Before every ballet class, Balanchine would choose a specific ballet technique to concentrate on that day. Giving various combinations throughout the ballet class the focal point was used differently each sequence, allowing the students a vast array of classical ballet. These steps would be given at all different speeds, both fast and slow, although George Balanchine is known for the quick speed at which preferred combinations to be given. Speed was another one of his main focuses, along with musicality and *dancing*. For instance, one example of a fast paced combination is known as *petite allegro*. *Petite* meaning little, and *allegro*

meaning fast, this step involves rapid movements of the feet and legs and a graceful upper body.

Mr. Balanchine never felt superior to his students. In class, while in street clothes and sneakers, he would demonstrate combinations if it would help his students better understand how to portray each movement. The dancers admired that he would look so perfect and graceful while illustrating a combination even if he wasn't even dancing full out. Balanchine preferred visual demonstrations and metaphoric analogies to explanations and theories. The students were able to learn better this way and as a result admired Balanchine even more. When a student asked how a given step should be done, Balanchine would always have an answer and make it clear, so every dancer always understood what he meant. He related many steps and characters in ballets to real life things every student and company dancer would relate to. For example, he would commonly tell students to have certain steps resemble an elephant's trunk. According to Robert Gottlieb's *George Balanchine: The Ballet Maker*, Balanchine would say, "The way an elephant picks a peanut off the floor..." This enables the dancer's to envision exactly how to portray certain steps. One step in particular that is known as resembling an elephant is pas de chevalé. <sup>? horse</sup> Pas de chevalé is when the working leg acts with a small développé against the standing leg. Not only did dancers ask how to portray given steps, but they also would ask Mr. Balanchine how to portray certain characters in a ballet, or how they should use their expression. He also uses metaphors and situations in life to help with these situations as well. George Balanchine took his ballet classes very seriously and felt they were very important. In fact, he liked to keep his ballet classes

private, and he rarely let outsiders in to watch class. It was important for the students to concentrate.

## V. Balanchine's Ballets

George Balanchine's ballet classes were very important to him, yet he also influenced the world of ballet through his ballets, choreography, and how we interacted with his dancer's. Ballet was not an important part of American culture at the time when George Balanchine moved to the United States. It is incredible that when he was showing performances and ballets, everybody came to the theatre. His company, the New York City Ballet, performed at Lincoln Center in Manhattan. Most of his ballets were created with no plot. By doing this, Balanchine wanted the audience to focus more on the dancing itself rather than try to follow a story line. Of course not all of his ballets were this way, but one can see most of them are.

Also noticeable through most of his ballets, George Balanchine did not like focusing on busy scenery or very abstract costuming. Some of the ballets where this is the case are, *Agon*, *Apollo*, and *Who Cares?*. The music in *Agon* is different than most ballets also. Mostly strings, the music was composed by Igor Stravinsky, and the ballet seems more modern and contemporary ballet rather than classical. George Balanchine incorporated intricate partnering combinations with the female and male dancers. He also added impressing combinations done in rippled effects. This allows for greater entertainment for the audience. This ballet is completed with a simple black backdrop, and the dancers wear ballet class attire. The females wear a black leotard with pink tights, and the men wear a tight fitted white shirt and black tights. The ballet *Who Cares?* has more of a jazz feel to it. The choreography is not strict classical ballet, and the music sounds less classical. These costumes, though not ballet class attire, are still basic for the most part. The females wore a simple camisole leotard with a skirt attached,



still showing off the body and lines. The males wear black shirts and black pants.

*Apollo*, includes a basic background of solid light blue, and the male wears ballet class attire while the females wear a white leotard with an attached white skirt. These are some of the ballets that demonstrate the ballets choreographed by George Balanchine with out a plot. Even though these ballets do not have a plot, all of Mr. Balanchine's ballets had themes to them, making each one unique and exciting.

George Balanchine has also choreographed and set many ballets with some type of plot, or story line. One example includes *The Nutcracker*. Balanchine has also experienced story lines when he worked with Broadway.

Although for most choreographers this may be the case, George Balanchine did not find the principle roles in a performance the most important. He expected dancers to treat every role with respect and put the same amount of effort into a smaller role, for it is of the same importance. According to ballerina Helen Alexopoulos in an interview for "The Balanchine Celebration" video, it didn't matter what role you were playing in a ballet, whether it be a pig or a prima ballerina, he always appreciated a dancer's integrity for his or her work. As long as you put equal effort into everything, and were the best you could be, George Balanchine treated everybody with the same level of respect.

## VI. Balanchine's Legacy

George Balanchine has been deceased since 1983, yet his ideas and lessons live on. Not only did he affect classical ballet in America, he also indirectly taught his dancers about life. In an interview with Mr. Frank Ohman, he stated that Mr. Balanchine taught him "to love and respect my work, ballet, the arts in general, and see what a great impact it can have on the world, and how beautiful the art is." After twenty-three years, his ballets are still performed, and people still show the same respect towards him as they once did. Many of George Balanchine's former ballerinas and dancers have opened up ballet schools of their own, including Mr. Frank Ohman; the Frank Ohman School of Ballet located on Long Island was created to help share what Mr. Ohman has learned from George Balanchine through the New York City Ballet. Not only does Mr. Frank Ohman teach proper classical ballet technique, he also talks about his life and teaches every one of his students' life lessons for the real world, many of his ideas coming from George Balanchine himself. Other schools are open around the nation with former students and dancers teaching all that they have learned from George Balanchine. His metaphors, his technique, his choreography, his musicality, and most important his knowledge of how to 'dance', all live on through those who respected and loved George Balanchine. The School of American Ballet, and the New York City Ballet remain running, and are just as successful as they were when George Balanchine was alive. Thanks to Mr. George Balanchine, ballet will forever be different in the United States and around the world.

## Works Cited

### Secondary Sources

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Video: The Balanchine Celebration: Part Two. New York City Ballet. The Balanchine Library. Nonesuch, 1993.

**ASSESSMENT FORM (for examiner use only)**

Candidate session number	0	0						
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**ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL**

First examiner      maximum      Second examiner

**General assessment criteria**  
Refer to the general guidelines.

A Research question	2	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
B Approach	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
C Analysis/interpretation	2	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
D Argument/evaluation	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
E Conclusion	2	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
F Abstract	2	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
G Formal presentation	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
H Holistic judgement	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
J	2		<input type="checkbox"/>
K	2		<input type="checkbox"/>
L	2		<input type="checkbox"/>
M	2		<input type="checkbox"/>

**Subject assessment criteria**  
Refer to the subject guidelines.  
Not all of the following criteria will apply to all subjects; use only the criteria which apply to the subject of the extended essay.

TOTAL OUT OF 36

26
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Name of first examiner (CAPITAL letters):

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