

# The Technique and Execution of the Perfect first Arabesque

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## I. Introduction

The word “Arabesque” originates from a type of moorish ornament or style made of an intricate pattern of interwoven lines. It is perhaps the most well known and frequently used position in classical ballet(For example, it is used to great effect in the “Rose Adagio” in The sleeping Beauty). It has many forms and variations, but here we will concentrate on the First Arabesque.

In this position the dancer stands on one leg with the other extended behind her. The arms are elongated, one in front of the body and one behind, with palms down. The fingers of the hand in front are extended to create as long a line as possible through the body and to the very tip of the extended foot.

The arabesque is a dangerous pose for the dancer and makes considerable demands on her whole body. As we will see good posture, hold turn out strength abdominals, upper body, use of hamstring and strong back especially thoracic spine and limbs are important for the successful execution of the position, and to avoid injury.

The correct placement of the supporting leg, and the balance of the dancers weight is paramount importance. it is the supporting base of the arabesque. Therefore when teaching this position the teacher should start with the supporting leg and work up. Incorrect use of this will among other things(of which more later) lead to tension in the shoulders and neck. As a consequence the dancer will have to reposition her head(incorrectly for the pose) to balance its weight, which will have been mistakenly placed. Stand on a straight leg first, even if the position will eventually involve knee bend. The leg must not be hyper-extended or bent. The body weight must be though the centre of the foot. The most important muscles for this support are the hamstrings, particularly for supporting the back of the knee. The quadriceps should work to hold the knee straight. Once the leg is correctly placed it will encourage more use of the thoracic spine.

It is necessary to hold turn out, which becomes more difficult when the back leg is raised higher as this causes the pelvis to tilt forward and slightly rotate. The hips should be open, and pelvis tilt and rotation allowed, but in control. With the pelvis tilted forwards, the supporting leg properly placed, and the hamstrings working effectively it will be possible to hold the dancer's weight forwards. The muscles controlling the tilt and rotation of the pelvis are the rectus abdominals, the obliques and transverses therefore to understand how a good

Arabesque can be performed we must first examine in detail which parts of the body and which it employs.

## **II. Structure of the Foot**

Strong feet=basis of a good posture and good technique.

Need to be strong supple, as sensitive as the hand to produce movements out of their natural range. Good, careful training it produces balance and strength and flexibility. Bad training it makes weakness dancer's body and causes injuries.

Bony Structure - 3 parts, the tarsus, metatarsal, digits.

The malleolus, talus articulates with tibia and fibula calcaneus, cuboid, navicula and three small cuneiform. Ankle joint is hinge joint. The movement permitted at these joints are flexion, extension, abduction and adduction, similar to corresponding joints of the hand.

Interphalangeal and Tarsometatarsal joints permit inversion and eversion it determines shape of arches of foot. If arches function properly feet can work properly in weight bearing, shock absorbing, elevating the body, gesturing.

Early training: spreading toes, holding ankles in the correct centred pulled-up position. As muscles of cover leg strengthen, slight extra turning of foot to take secure 5th position.

If this encourage in a restricted body, in early training, it will keep turn out from the hip joint.

Poor alignment and over turn out are rolling foot and unequal weight bearing on either side of the foot it leads to stress in ligaments, calves, shins.

Due to muscle weakness, incorrect placement, overturning, not controlling turnout.

### III. Turn Out

Turnout is the basis of classical ballet technique. We turn out from the hip and from no other level of the leg below it.

The vertebral column ends with the sacrum. The sacrum joined with the two innominate bones at the sacro-iliac joint, forms the pelvis. The pelvis plays a major role in the functioning of the entire body; it is the root of dancer's the stability.

The spine which determines the use functioning of the lower limbs. Anteriorly the innominate bones meet one another at the symphysis pubis, where very little movement takes place. Each of these two bones is consisted of three other bones fused together; the ilium, the ischium and the pubis at the sides of them, the hip joints are found from where active external rotation(turn-out) initiates. These are ball & socket joints and therefore allow a free range in all directions(It is here that the weight of the upper body is supported in the pelvis and transferred in a vertical line to the knees, ankles and feet). The head of the femur(ball) in the acetabulum(socket) and forms a very strong and extremely stable joint. The femoral neck joins the head of the femur with the shaft.

Several ligaments bind the head of the femur into the hip socket, two of them; the pubo-femoral and the ilio-femoral ligament which is the most powerful. The ilio-femoral ligament or Y-shaped limits the excessive range of work at the hip joint and therefore works as a

stability but also limits the turn-out particularly at the backward extension of the leg.

A group of small muscles: around the hip joint; the obturator internus, gemellus superior, gemellus inferior, piriformis, quadratus femoris, obturator extends mainly as stability the hip joint. The most important hip flexor is the iliopsoas muscle. The most important lateral rotator of the femur is the adductor group which with the assistance of gracilis pull the two thighs together; they occupy the inside part of the thighs.

The abdominal muscles in cooperation with the gluteus maximus establish the placement of the pelvis. The gluteus maximus is the most powerful in the gluteal region and is the most important hip flexor.

It basically covers all the other muscles of the gluteal area; the gluteus medius, gluteus minimus and Tensor Fascia Latae, that act as abductors and the deep outward rotators; the quadratus femoris, obturator internus, obturator externus, piriformis, gemellus superior and inferior predominantly, they work as stability of the hip

Four groups of muscles control the actions of the thigh. They act on the pelvis to stabilise it and they are responsible for flexion or extension of the leg at the hip joint. The balance of each group with its opposite group is a prime factor in controlling the stability of the pelvis when the dancer is standing on one leg weakness in any of these muscles limits the range of motion at the hip.

The quadriceps femoris occupy the front part of the thigh and they are powerful hip flexors and correctly placed pelvis and habitual lengthening of the lumbar spine will facilitate proper usage of the iliopsoas which is a principal flexor of the hip.

The muscles at the back of the thigh are universally known as the

hamstrings; extender of the hip, bringing the thigh and pelvis into alignment. The lateral hamstring has an important role to play in accomplishing and maintaining turn out. By helping to turn the outside of the thigh backward. it works with the adductors as they bring the inside of the thigh forward. The medial hamstrings are inward rotators; turn out is restricted if they are tight.

A good balance between the quadriceps and hamstrings is of prime importance.

Incorrect positioning of the pelvis if it contributes weight too far back that will contribute to weakness in the hamstrings which are not easy muscles to stretch.

The muscles running down the inside of the thigh are known as the adductors that pull the two thighs together. When the dancer is standing on one leg they help to stabilise the pelvis by acting against the abductors.

The Tensor Fascia Latae works cooperatively with the anterior fibers of the gluteus medius; they abduct the thigh and also they are powerful inward rotators; if tight they will prevent turnout. Although “sitting” in the hip can be produced by imbalance in any of the opposing muscle groups, weak abductors, especially, the Tensor Fascia latae is the most frequent cause.

## **IV. Upper Torso**

Dancers often put all their focus and emphasis on the movements of the lower limbs and ignore the positioning and alignment of the torso and upper limbs.

Port de bras movements occur all the time as the legs perform various steps, it is important for the arms to be placed correctly so they can support the back, keep the weight towards offer balance, control to the movements.

While carrying the arms through different positions, a lot of dancers tend to think of these movements taking place only at the shoulder joint. They should actually be thinking more of moving their arms in relation to the shoulder girdle and the musculature holding this structure; in this may better aesthetic can be achieved and a greater use of the arms how the back can be encouraged.

The shoulder girdle(one in each side and the upper trunk) are composed of two bones; that is the scapula, a triangles flat bone.

The clavicle; this is along bone which lies horizontally across the upper trunk.

The scapula forms the posterior part of the girdle as it lies at the back of the thoracic. A bony ridge is found across its upper end is known to be the spine of the scapula; it ends with the acromion process to articulate with the clavicle.

The clavicle helps to keep the scapule in position. Throughout the port de bras, the clavicle remain calm, giving the opportunity to the scapula to move freely.

When the shoulder girdle is correctly alignment, it should hang with no tension. It is an extremely mobile structure as it joins with the trunk only at the top front of the breast bone. For this reason the muscle balance and co-ordination this area, is important to be achieved.

The trapezius muscle is the most necessarily in stabilizing the scapule. It originates how the spinous processes of the clavicle and thoracic cerebral. It is divided in upper, middle and lower fibers

therefore allows different movements.

upper fibres insert into the outer part of the clavicle and produce elevation of the shoulders. Dancers tend to overuse these when tension or attempting difficult work. Middle fibers insert into the acromion process and pull the shoulders backward. The shoulders are depressed by the lower fibers of the trapezeus, which insert into the spine of the scapula; in co-operation with the latissimus dorsi muscle(originates from the lower six thoracic vertebrae, the lumbar vertebrae and the iliac crest and insert into the humerus), they hold the shoulder girdle down to give support to the back.

As the arms are being raised in 5th position, the upper fibers of the trapezius pull up slightly the outer tip of the scapula; as the movement is being completed the middle fibers offer powerful stabilization to the girdle.

The deltoid muscle originates from the outer third of the clavicle the acromion process and the spine of the scapula, it inserts into the lateral surface of the humerus. It is a most significant muscle to abduct the arms, an action required in all rounded positions.

Pectoralis major arises from the inner half of clavicle, the sternum and the upper six costal cartilage. It has different angled fibers which insert into the bicipital groove(on the humerus). Its anterior fibers co-operate with the deltoid muscle to raise the arm forward; its posterior fibers work with the latissimus dorsi muscle to pull the arm backward.

The pectoralis major is a prime mover in adduction. Beneath it, the pectoralis major muscle lies; this acts as a counter to the trapezius since it pull the scapulae forward. A good balance is required between these two muscles to keep the blades in position.

Two opposing muscles, the anterior serratus and the major and

minor lie on opposite sites of the shoulder blades holding them in place against the rib cage.

The rhomboids pull the scapula and the anterior serratus pulls them outward. If the rhomboids are used excessively, it can result into elevated shoulders. If the serratus anterior is weak, this can result to winging of the scapula.

As the arms are being raised to horizontal line, serratus anterior helps to move the blades upward, outward and forward along the rib cage; at the same time the upper medial edge is being pulled down.

The scapulae muscle is another muscle to consider. It lies beneath the upper trapezius assisting it on weight bearing as it is attached to the first four cervical vertebral and the top of the scapulae, it helps to create a well structured neck (when the shoulder girdle is stabilized)

The bony placement of the shoulder girdle is important to be correct, enabling the arms to move properly : but it's the ligament and weight the muscles around it that have to offer both strength and flexibility.

The base, that is the feet and legs, needs to be correct first of all; otherwise it is impossible, to achieve the best position for the upper body. Only then, can the shoulder girdle be fixed accurately to free the trunk and upper limbs from any tension.

Movements should occur within a wide range, acquiring at the same time strength and control. The whole body both lower and upper body, should be able to work together; they should co-operate in a harmonious co-ordination and response to each other.

It is important for the teacher to remember when teaching the younger student that the arabesque should be kept square. As when any position or movement, the individual capabilities and limitations of the pupil must be taken into consideration to avoid injury, turn-out,

extension, the height of the rear leg. And the lack of “squareness” of the arabesque are all features which can lead to problems if they are attempted too soon or too ambitiously. As the dancer matures and progresses. So will technique and ability.

The dancer must lift out of the supporting hip, using gluteus medius and minimus. The quadriceps must be fully activated allowing lengthening at the front.

The extending lumbar spine should be protected from absorbing too much of the movement the amount of movement in the spine should be limited. Extension is important for the shape and balance of the position, but over extension will cause tension and imbalance. The use of the thoracic spine plays a vital role in success here. Where most of the extensions should be spreading the load throughout the spine. For this a healthy strong spine is required. Remember that the thoracic spine is the stiffest part and the lumbar spine is the most mobile. It is easy to damage the lumbar spine by putting too much stress on it going in to movements with bad position or without using the right muscles correctly. Proper use of the abdominal muscles will prevent too much movement in the spine through will need control thoracic spine exercises to strengthen the erector spine. In the young child the teacher should first encourage and develop flexibility in the thoracic spine and then strengthen

Another area of necessarily important strength is the shoulders, in particularly the latissimus dorsi. The lower fibers of the trapezius also hold the shoulders down.

The head is placed in line with the spine. It must not break this line. If the back and shoulder muscles are used correctly the neck should be free. Tension here, which could prevent from incorrect position of the

supporting leg will disable the head from maintaining the line. There should be no retraction of the head nor any poking or retraction to the chin. Good use of the back will discourage these possible faults. The eye line is out beyond the line of the arabesque arm. The front arm should be absolutely in front of the shoulder, at varying heights, but never lower than the shoulder. Projection of the eye line and front arm is very important.

The back leg must be extended and lengthened, with the knee fully extended. The back foot must be fully pointed with no fishing particularly when teaching young children never take the foot out of alignment. There should be a line from middle finger of the front hand to middle toe of the extended foot. Intrinsic muscles must be used in the back foot to help the length of the line, plus calf muscles and hamstring. The leg should be directly behind the hip. The abductors are an important indicator here - if the leg goes out dance will have to use the abductor muscles more.

## **V. Conclusion**

In conclusion we can say that the overall impression of the first arabesque should be of grace, balance and ease. The length of line from middle finger of the front arm to the middle toe of the rear leg are what give grace to the position. The eye is also drawn to the curve of the back and the neck, and the position of the head and chest in flowing harmony with the arms and the extended leg. The whole effect will be lost if there is tension in the arms neck and shoulders.

When teaching this position, therefore, the student must be taught to

realize how crucial the position of the supporting leg is and exactly how the weight of the rest of the body should be balanced over it. The dancer also needs to understand the way the spine works and be given suitable exercise to encourage and develop suppleness and strengthen thoracic spine.

The younger student should be taught to maintain “squareness” in the arabesque - progressing only as physical maturity develops. Supporting by practice and a gradual mastery of technique and expression which are necessary for the professional dancer.

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## 국문초록

### 완벽한 1번 아라베스크의 수행과 테크닉

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본 연구의 목적은 1번 아라베스크를 수행하는데 있어서 각 신체 부위의 정확한 위치와 자세를 강조하고 완벽한 1번 아라베스크를 위한 해부학적인 설명을 토대로 테크닉이 향상될 수 있도록 하였다.

그리고 올바른 턴-아웃이 없이는 클래식 발레의 테크닉이 존재할 수 없을 뿐만 아니라 무리한 턴-아웃은 심각한 부상을 초래하고 신체의 정렬이 무너짐으로써 모든 근육이 제대로 발달하지 않는다. 그 결과 잘못된 근육의 발달은 물론 무용수에게 필수불가결한 근육은 오히려 약해짐으로 신체적으로 모든 움직임을 생산하는데 있어서 건강하고 생명력이 넘치는 무용수가 탄생하기 어렵고 또한 아름다운 신체의 선을 생산하기 어렵다.

따라서 다리, 상체, 발의 구조를 해부학적 측면에서 이해한 후 가장 정확한 자세에서 올바른 근육 사용으로 클래식 발레의 대명사인 아라베스크를 가장 효과적으로 표현하고 테크닉적으로 향상할 수 있도록 제안하였다.