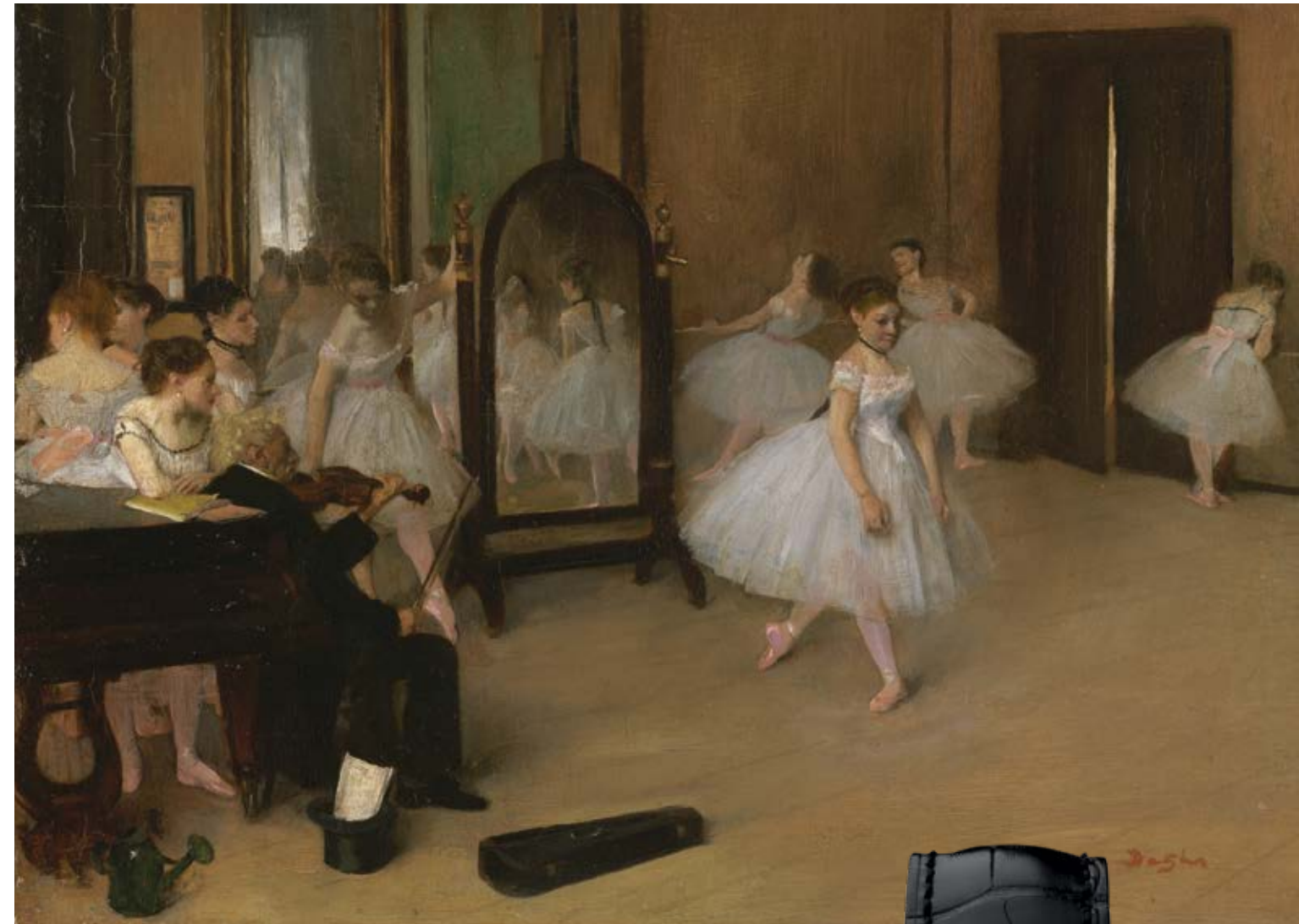




Poise, Passion, Precision

In the words of Maya Angelou, "Everything in the universe has a rhythm, everything dances." Of course some are blessed with better rhythm than others, able to make dancing look absolutely effortless. Ballet dancers in particular are revered for their incredible skill, discipline and grace. The centuries-old art form of ballet originated in the courts of the 15th century Italian Renaissance, though only formalised into a concert dance form in France and Russia many years later.





On 11 January 1713, King Louis XIV signed a decree instituting the first ballet school, and in doing so, laid the foundations of the French choreographic style. An interest in establishing a dance technique had already emerged more than 50 years prior, in 1661, when the court ballet was at its peak. Based on the model of the National Academies of sculpture and painting, King Louis created the Académie Royale de Danse, which raised dance to the rank of an art while providing an official framework governed by the values of education, and a determination to pass on knowledge.

During these same years, Pierre Beauchamp, Ballet Master at the Opéra National de Paris, himself a brilliant dancer and director of the Académie de Danse as of 1680, steadily directed the institution's activity towards a focus on teaching, and established the rules of ballet, most notably the five positions. Louis XIV officially formalised the existence of the school in 1713. Ever since, the Opéra National de Paris and the École Française de Danse have been inseparably linked, forming a single entity that has been writing the history of ballet for 300 years. In fact, the École Française de Danse is the world's only company in which 95 percent of the dancers, soloists and Corps de Ballet were trained at the École de Danse de l'Opéra de Paris.

Typically there are four styles of ballet: Romantic, Classical, Neoclassical and Contemporary. It is out of the first two that many of the world's best-known ballets were born. Classical ballet is most known for its meticulous technique, which includes pointe work, high extensions and turnout, and a precise, flowing aesthetic. Romantic ballet places strong emphasis on emotion as the basis of the visual experience, with ideas of Romanticism from art and literature acting as strong influences. It was in the Romantic style that the ballerina came to be considered a central component of ballet; until then men had dominated performances. Romantic ballet's movements were soft and flowing, with ballerinas rounding their arms and tilting their upper bodies forward in a display of elegance. *La Sylphide*, the 1827 work, is considered the first Romantic ballet, and the 1870 *Coppélia* the last. *Giselle*, first performed in 1841, and *Ondine*, first performed in 1843, are other ballets of the Romantic style.

The works of Russian-born George Balanchine, who was later hailed as the father of American ballet, exemplify the Neoclassical style, which first made an appearance during the 1920s. While the simplicity of this style echoes the Classical period, and was based on the standards and techniques that Balanchine acquired during his Imperial Ballet School education, it is bolder and

Photos: © Vacheron



more confident, stripping ballet to its bare bones and focusing on the dance above all else. Balanchine's style, as it matured, saw traditional tutus and large dramatic sets giving way to open stages and simple leotards, allowing the movement of the dancers to become the main artistic medium of the ballet.

In 1948 Balanchine, together with arts patron Lincoln Kirstein went on to found the New York City Ballet (NYCB). The NYCB quickly became well-known for its athletic, contemporary style, as well as a repertoire of original ballets, which has forever changed the face of classical dance. Currently under the leadership of Ballet Master in Chief Peter Martins, who took over in 1983 following Balanchine's death, the NYCB is one of the foremost dance companies in the world. It has a roster of 90 dancers, making it the largest dance organisation in America. Its repertoire of modern masterpieces is unparalleled, comprising some 150 works, many of which Balanchine himself choreographed. The School of American Ballet, the official school of the NYCB, sees an annual enrollment of over 350 aspiring dancers from all over the world.

For the beautiful spectacular that is ballet, the old Indian proverb, "to watch us dance, is to hear our hearts speak" –is most certainly true. ■ Lindsay Grubb





Vacheron Constantin Métiers d'Art Hommage à l'Art de la Danse

Vacheron Constantin founded in 1755 in Geneva, is the oldest watchmaking manufacturer in the world, with an uninterrupted activity of some 260 years – the Manufacture celebrates this milestone birthday in September this year. It is also a company that has generously supported the arts. In 2007 it became a patron of the Opéra National de Paris, and in 2013 it started sponsoring the NYCB. It also revealed, on the occasion of the 300th birthday of the École Française de Danse, the new Métiers d'Art Hommage à l'Art de la Danse collection, which beautifully reinterprets several Edgar Degas paintings, and revisits the ages-old art of Grand Feu grisaille enamelling. Three Degas paintings inspired the timepieces: Ballet Room at the Opera in Rue le Peletier, 1874, Ballet Rehearsal, 1873, and Two Dancers on Stage, 1874.

Each piece in the collection has been entirely handcrafted with meticulous patience and intense concentration, and every detail revealed, from the tiniest folds of the tutus and the lace adorning the dancers' décolleté, to the smooth velvet of the ribbons around their necks, and the petals of the flowers in their hair. Entirely crafted in the workshops of the Manufacture, the dials are an exquisite expression of elegance: set within a white gold frame, the dainty ballerinas glide gracefully beneath the hands of the watch.

The timepieces feature the self-winding Calibre 2460, wholly developed and crafted by Vacheron Constantin. The watches also bear the elusive and exclusive Poinçon de Genève (Hallmark of Geneva). Instated by the Grand Council of the Republic and Canton of Geneva in 1886, the Hallmark is a guarantee of origin, quality of workmanship, durability and of expertise.

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