



Robert Thomas
DANCENTER

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Pointe Training: Now or Wait ?

When to start:

There are four items that need to be addressed to start pointe

- (1) Body weight (Size)
- (2) Foot Strength & Construction
- (3) Mental Focus
- (4) Skill level (Technique)
- (5) Desire

These are a better measuring tools than age. Age tends to cover all children as if they were all the same and they aren't. Age tries to cover all these same issues but with such a broad stroke that there is much left to be considered on a case by case basis. Some dancers should never try pointe. Some are ready at a very early age.

Miyoko takes a look at each dancer before we offer them pointe training to see if they are ready

Once training has begun it is necessary to maintain a good fit in your pointe shoes and replace them when they lose their strength. Pointe shoes are built hard for support and when they soften they need to be replaced. Additionally, the style and size of shoe needs to be appropriate for each dancer's foot and construction. Miyoko does the fitting and selection of their shoes. Our back office is full of all sorts of different sizes and styles. Additionally, we may send her to another vendor if we don't have access to what she needs. Miyoko will supervise the fit for at least her first pair (and for as long as the dancer needs Miyoko) wherever we acquire the correct shoe for her. After a time the dancer will develop her own knowledge and be able to pick and size herself.

It is also important for a dancer attend all their ballet and pointe classes and wear their shoes.

Training is slow the first year. Some would call it more pre-pointe than pointe. The dancers get used to their shoes, the fit, how to pad their toes, tie their ribbons, sew their ribbons and elastic. Some darn their shoes for extra stability. There are numerous modifications dancers make to their shoes. Beginning pointe dancers spend more of their time on their bottoms adjusting and getting used to the shoes and how they fit on their feet than they do on their toes. Once on pointe, they hold onto the barre with both hands and stand on both feet. There is no recital piece or participation for beginning pointe. Pace is slow as feet strengthen and the dancer gets used to the new world of pointe. There is a constant dialogue and observation of the dancers by the instructor. Dancers discuss any discomfort with instructors. Instructors are constantly looking at

the comfort level of the dancer on pointe. Instructors are non-threatening and give the dancer a safe environment where they may discuss issues without fear of criticism.

Problems may occur if the dancer's size becomes too much of a burden for the strength of her feet. This is more of an issue of the older girls even after a few years of pointe as they get bigger and sometimes miss their classes, dance on wore out shoes or try to do too much without steady training. (i.e. Nutcracker and no pointe classes). Staying strong and healthy on pointe is like loosening weight. We all know what we need to do, we just don't always do it. To stay strong and healthy as an older dancer on pointe, the dancers should take regular ballet and pointe classes on pointe. They should put their pointe shoes on after regular ballet classes and execute a few pointe exercises. A little exercise every other day goes a long way to maintaining good pointe health.

Should we wait a year ? Miyoko would have to check the dancer again and compare foot strength to size. There comes a time when the foot is as strong as it ever will be before pointe training. Pointe training (done correctly) will strengthen the foot in a way nothing else will. With that strength, the foot will support greater weight. A dancer can become too large to begin pointe training. A beginning dancer would need to train with that year's class of beginners for at least the first year or two.

Sincerely,
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