

## ADVANCED BALLET

For many dancers, reaching the Advanced levels of study is as important a goal as getting pointe shoes. The important thing for students to realize at the Academy is that reaching Advanced does not mean that you are at the top of the ballet “ladder,” but that you have moved to the bottom of an entirely new ladder. At the top of this new ladder are the world-class dancers in famous companies all over the world. A student’s desire to move into advanced work is much less a matter of reaching a pinnacle of success and resting upon one’s laurels, as it is making a commitment, with considerable passion, to the time and energy that are required to become a professional dancer.

### Advanced I Dance Classes

Consent of instructor is required for all classes at the Advanced levels.

#### **Required:**

The **minimum** number of technique classes to maintain skills and fitness at the advanced level is THREE – two of which must be ballet. Students wishing to take Advanced I pointe must take a minimum of three ballet technique and two pointe classes. **Students will make more rapid progress if they take more than the minimum requirements.** These requirements are actually less than for Intermediate II and III, that also require one modern dance class per week.

Any exceptions to these requirements must be approved by the director before registration. Students must have regular attendance at these minimum levels to be eligible for *MOMENTA*, and/or for featured parts in the June recital – and to continue to study at the Advanced I level.

### Advanced II Dance Classes

Consent of instructor is required for all classes at the Advanced levels

#### **Required:**

**Advanced II dancers must take a minimum of five technique classes per week; three of these classes must be ballet. If the dancer is taking pointe, she must take three pointe classes per week.** Teachers prepare Advanced II classes for those students planning to major in dance in college, and/or to pursue a professional career in dance. These students will need to maintain this commitment if they expect to compete at auditions with serious dance students from other schools. By the time the student with professional goals is in his/her junior or senior year of high school, he/she should be taking more than one technique class per day – several days per week. Older high school students are encouraged to take additional

classes downtown. In order to be eligible for *MOMENTA* and Academy performances, the student must show proof of enrollment in a reputable school elsewhere, and must still be enrolled in a minimum of two classes per week at the Academy. **Casting and repertoire for major roles in *MOMENTA* and in the Academy's June recital will be drawn from those who show excellent attendance.** Continued absences from Advanced classes, and failure to meet minimum requirements will result in 1) a warning from the director that the student is on probation for two weeks, and 2) if absences continue, the student will be asked to move to a lower level.

### **Important Considerations and Priorities**

Many students reaching the advanced levels are not so sure about making this commitment. The dance world is a competitive place; performing careers are short and pay for performing is often low and not something a dancer can truly live on. When a student has a true passion for dance, he/she will find a way to survive – performing, teaching, working a second job – because life without dance is inconceivable. Dance becomes the highest priority. Being a dancer is more of a vocation and a total identity than most careers or just a job. Along with that vocation is the necessity of a commitment to build and maintain the physical instrument, the commitment to almost daily technique classes. The dance world places a high priority on youth, particularly in ballet, and it is necessary for students to train hard during their adolescence if they want to be ready for the professional dance world, or for a competitive dance program at a university. More and more dancers are continuing their training at a university level; many dancers in modern dance companies and on Broadway have college degrees. Ballet dancers are more likely to have gone from high school directly into performing companies.

There are many styles of dance and many kinds of careers in dance. Most young children starting ballet are lured by the “Three T’s – tutus, tiaras and toeshoes” and want to become ballerinas. This is an unrealistic goal for many dance students. The standard for the professional ballet dancer is a very limited range of height, weight, strength, flexibility and body proportion. Almost all other styles of dance employ dancers with a much greater diversity of body types. There are many companies of modern and jazz dance, touring and Broadway shows, and work available with opera companies and in the television and film industry. There are also dance careers based in a university setting for teachers, writers and historians, and careers in public and social service for dance therapists, and physical therapists. All of these careers require a university education.

Most Academy students, as they enter the advanced levels of study, are finishing middle school or beginning high school. Oak Park and River Forest High School is a very large school. Finding an identity there is a challenge and getting involved in school activities is a way to ease the process. Most Academy dancers are excellent students academically, the kind of students enrolled in all honors classes with lots and lots of homework. Most of the Academy dancers seem to be Type-A personalities and want to “do it all.” They may find high school a very frustrating and stressful time because there are often not enough hours in the day, and/or days in the week. Many students work on homework until very late at night (or early in morning!) and some have difficulty maintaining their health and are plagued with chronic colds, strep and even mono.

Orchesis at the high school, and the annual musical, are fun, exciting activities for students. They are a good way to gain an identity with a focal group in high school. Students with years of dance training are highly successful, even as freshmen, in getting into Orchesis, the musical or on drill team. Academy families need to understand the realities of joining these groups, and balance these realities against any goals in dance that the student may have. Rehearsals for Orchesis, the musical and drill team are all like playing a varsity sport. The long practices are usually after school, frequently from 3:15 – 5:30 PM, sometimes later, and, for a student very active and successful in being cast in many dances or a big role, rehearsals can be five days per week for a minimum of six weeks, with extended hours during the week or two before the shows. Students who have had two or more hours of rehearsal usually don’t have the energy and motivation to cross the street and come to a hard technique class in the evening hours, especially if there is a pile of homework to finish. A student doing both Fall and Spring Orchesis and the musical may have this challenge for 18 – 20 weeks of the Academy’s 39 week year. In order to maintain technique, students need to limit the number of dances/days in Orchesis, which is possible. The musical is less flexible in scheduling.

The human body likes routine and symmetrical training. Choreography and rehearsal do not provide the same kind of systematic warm-up and balance of activities that builds and maintains technique. In order to be interesting, choreography is usually very asymmetrical, and dancers often prefer to turn to one side, balance on one leg rather than the other and/or have a stronger leg for jumping or on pointe. Without class, dancers in just rehearsals begin to develop asymmetries in their bodies that can lead to traumatic or chronic injuries. Orchesis and the musical do not provide warm-up activities, not at all or not challenging enough to prepare dancers for advanced steps and working on pointe. High school students are notorious for thinking that they are immortal and invulnerable, but advanced dancers without proper warm-up and frequent classes are at serious risk of injury. It

is also not advisable to attend advanced class erratically, coming when it is convenient. The work is too difficult, and, if the student is not in advanced “shape”, once again injuries can occur.

The Academy feels caught between recognizing the achievement of its dancers who are sought for high school activities and derive considerable self-esteem and enjoyment, and trying to prepare these same dancers for success in getting into fine college dance departments and pursuing careers as dance professionals. **The requirements for Advanced level work are minimum requirements, and cannot guarantee significant progress, but only hope for good maintenance. We have reduced our requirements in acknowledgement of the academic pressures most of our students are experiencing, and knowing that many of our students are not yet sure about how dance will fit into their lives. Those dancers who wish to pursue a professional career in dance must dance more frequently than the minimum.**

When a student spends so much of the year dancing at the high school, rather than taking technique classes, he/she will be much less likely to be well-prepared for auditions for competitive dance departments. In recent years, because the high school moved the dates of Fall Orchestral and the musical, they have conflicted directly with *MOMENTA* concerts, which have, for more than a decade been the first two weekends of November and the first two weekends of March. Many parents and high school deans will encourage students to be active at the high school on the basis that this is looked upon favorably for college admissions. However, for a student looking at a prestigious dance program, *MOMENTA*'s repertory and the Academy's technical classes are a better guarantee of admission. Students with a single-minded focus on dance should seriously consider that they may do well to spend the last two years of high school at the Chicago Academy of the Arts. That school has had more graduates accepted at Juilliard - or arranging their OPRF HS schedules so they can get downtown for early afternoon dance classes at Conte's. We have had two of our own students at Juilliard and assisted a third, but of the three, both attended both the Chicago Academy and our Academy, often taking 3 or more technique classes daily.

We realize that many of our students are uncertain about dance as a career; we just want to be sure that they realize what it takes to be successful. We are here to help, to the best of our ability, any student who really wants to pursue a life in dance. We would also like to make sure that those students who wish to dance simply for pleasure are able to do so without injury.

The Academy and *MOMENTA* both love to show off, in performance, the students who have done well and are the visible embodiment of what training here can achieve. The students love to have challenging opportunities, however, we have had to warn dancers that if their attendance is less than they need to maintain strong technique, they will not be considered for major roles in the Academy's June recital, particularly in roles in the great classical ballets. This is not intended as a punishment, but rather is a warning, that, without the technique, a dancer cannot do the required steps. Valery's knowledge of the classical repertory is vast and he regards it with deep respect. Watering down famous choreography to accommodate a dancer's lack of strength and skill does a disservice to the great ballets and reflects poorly on the school and Valery's knowledge. For many years, the students have wanted Valery to set part or all of "Swan Lake"; however he has never yet felt that enough of the students were ready to dance such demanding choreography. One reason is that many students have difficulty maintaining attendance at an advanced level.

So it is up to the students and their families to make choices and to learn to budget time and energy, to think carefully about goals and to be sure that they are making good choices to realize those goals. For an Academy student who wants to be an oncologist or a marine biologist, having a good time in high school dancing with Orchesis is a fine choice – but this student should not feel compelled to try to fulfill the requirements for Advanced II level classes. It is unfair to the students who are fulfilling those requirements to have others in class that cannot keep up with the difficult work.

It is probably a very good idea for students dancing at the Academy during their high school years to have at least an annual conference with the director and/or teachers to talk about goals and strategies, rather than to get caught up in the stress of trying to "do it all". For those students planning to dance in college, we will assist in preparing resumes, letters of recommendation, audition solos and DVDs needed for college applications.

# *Academy of Movement & Music*

## *Parent Handbook for Dance Pre-Professional Division Advanced Levels*



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# **THE ACADEMY IS A PEANUT/NUT-FREE ZONE**

**We have a number of children enrolled who have life-threatening allergies to peanuts, tree nuts and all nut-oils. Even the residue of peanut oil left on a mat or a ballet barre can trigger anaphylactic shock in some of these children.**

**NEVER SEND ANY SNACK WITH YOUR CHILD CONTAINING PEANUTS, NUTS OR PRODUCTS MADE FROM THESE!!**

Many students come straight from school and bring snacks. After a long day at school, students need to eat something before beginning a strenuous activity like dance. String cheese, fresh fruit, yoghurt, light quick snacks are best. **NEVER SEND ANY SNACK CONTAINING PEANUTS, NUTS OR PRODUCTS MADE FROM THESE WITH YOUR CHILD!!** Please read labels on granola bars, chips and other packaged snack foods. If your child loves peanut butter and eats a sandwich in the car on the way to the Academy, your child needs to wash their hands thoroughly with soap before going into class.

**No Gum in the Academy at any time.**