

**Teachers' 2-day Workshop -
Foundations of Classical Technique
Featuring the Preparatory Syllabus for Vocational Students
Course Description**

The Foundations of Classical Technique is a new Preparatory Syllabus released in Australia in 2016, and designed for young vocational students of classical ballet. A teacher's course to introduce this syllabus and associated methodology to teachers by its creator, **Mr. JOHN BYRNE**, has been given in all capital cities in Australia and in Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Singapore, Italy, London, and we now have the chance to learn from Mr. Byrne when he presents this course to teachers in Hong Kong.

The **PREPARATORY SYLLABUS FOR VOCATIONAL STUDENTS** is similar in standard to Intermediate Foundation. It has a strong, underlying emphasis on basic training. Exercises have been crafted in a simple and logical way, unencumbered by choreographic overlay or unnecessary complication. This means, in effect, that students, (and teachers) have an opportunity to concentrate on the particular technical element being studied in each exercise and are able, therefore, to derive a positive training effect each time they study the exercise -- time in class is therefore spent as productively as possible in each lesson. The overall aim is to establish sound fundamentals; to get the basics of posture, weight placement and turn-out well established so that students are given a solid structural platform on which to build a genuine technique for the future. Too many students struggle with their bodies and their technical development all the way through the vocational levels because they have not resolved issues at the basic level.

In this syllabus, all of the technical elements are studied individually in their basic form rather than in combinations with other elements. This gives the young dancer, at this level, the best chance of acquiring a sound, authentic technique. Classical ballet is the most challenging technique to learn, and to teach, and in this environment, complicated settings are counter-productive. All of the allegro steps appropriate for this level are studied individually, in their basic form, in a series of technical enchaînements. In addition, there are also several dance enchaînements in which flow of movement, co-ordination, floor pattern and exploration of space are emphasised in "dancey", more choreographed arrangements in various styles.

The syllabus content well balances the acquisition of technique with the development of dance quality, artistry, musicality and the enjoyment of movement. The artistic touches are placed in an unobtrusive way, often at the end of exercises, so that they don't get in the way of achieving the desired technical outcome. There is always an emphasis on elegance, poise, and pure classical style.

One of the important aims of the syllabus has been to align it with the kind of training which takes place in the major vocational schools in the world today.

There is an **emphasis on épaulement** throughout the syllabus. This emphasis is based on the belief that if épaulement is not introduced as an integral part of the technique from the outset it will probably not be established at all, and will remain an "add on option" whenever the student remembers to apply it, or whenever the teacher insists on it! The use of épaulement makes all the difference to how a dancer looks. Apart from adding elegance and poise, it also adds another dimension to poses and movements. One can

think of it as dancing in 3 dimensions of space (3D) rather than in the flatter 2 dimensional space which characterises work which lacks épaulement. The use of épaulement also has a broadening effect and helps to unlock the expressive possibilities of the upper body by mobilising the spine and opening the eyelines. There is a whole world above the waist and it is a world which is often not given appropriate emphasis in the training of young classical dancers. In this syllabus **the upper body** is given constant attention. The aim is to make the upper body dance; to encourage young dancers to dance with their whole body, so that a battement tendu, for example, is much more than an isolated movement of the leg, and port de bras is much more than the isolated movement of the arms.

There is also an emphasis on **port de bras** in this syllabus, not only because well- schooled and musical port de bras adds so much in expressive and artistic terms to the performance, but also because the correct shaping, support and control of arm placements is essential to the correct execution of all poses and movements. The arms are involved in every stage of movement - they lead us into the movement, they are moved in to various positions during the movement, and they also complete the movement. Indeed, in a very real sense, the arms orchestrate the movement of the legs. The legs can work more confidently if the arms are used correctly and in a co-ordinated way. Their involvement in movement should be a very positive one. If they are weak, then movement quality and strength of execution inevitably suffer. Both halves of the body deserve equal attention if we are to produce an integrated dancer with a strong sense of co-ordination. The development of co-ordinated movement - legs, arms, and eye lines - is therefore a strong focus of this syllabus.

The syllabus also seeks to extend **the range of eye lines** typically used by the young classical dancer and to develop the free and easy movement of the head. Extending the visual field opens up a whole new world and makes an enormous difference to how a dancer looks and moves. Restricted and regimented eye lines often leads to a narrow, “boxed in “style of performance. This syllabus seeks to produce a dancer with an open, expansive style; one who presents to the world with easy lines of communication and strong projection.

The role of **music** in all successful syllabi cannot be overestimated. The music for this syllabus has been composed, or arranged, as part of the process of creating the work itself. The exercise came first, not the music. Constructing exercises to pre-existing music is basically a choreographic process in which the music dominates and unduly influences the shape of the exercise which comes out of it. The music for this syllabus has been composed and arranged by Larissa Oberfeld, a Russian pianist on the staff of the Australian Ballet School, Melbourne, one of the world’s leading vocational schools, serving the Australian Ballet Company. It is steady, rhythmically incisive, and it is supportive of good dynamic and technical development. It is fit for purpose in that it seeks to match musical dynamics with movement dynamics in the most direct way possible for any given exercise. It is not complex, tricky or over-written - none of these qualities are helpful in the training of young dancers who are still trying to acquire basic technique. Some repertoire pieces have been used in the dance enchainment section.

The syllabus is for girls and boys; it includes a pointe section, and it has separate work for boys

The syllabus is the first part of a 3-part project. The second part of the project involves a DVD on the subject of POSTURE, PLACEMENT, and the BASIC ELEMENTS OF TECHNIQUE. The third part of the project involves another DVD on the subject of THE ART and ANATOMY OF PORT DE BRAS. These DVD’s are under active preparation and will be released in due course. The next level of the syllabus is also under active preparation (equivalent to Intermediate), and an updated and revised Body Basics Booklet is in the works.

When completed all of this material will form a comprehensive training resource for teachers for this crucial stage of training on which all further training depends. In the meantime, material which will be included in both DVD's will be included in teacher's courses thereby offering teachers much more than simply learning a syllabus. This syllabus course is also a course in methodology - on how to produce a sound classical technique for the vocational student.

The syllabus is "non- denominational" and does not follow any existing "method" in any substantial way. Mr. Byrne has incorporated his knowledge of the English School (RAD), the CECCHETTI syllabi and the principles of the VAGANOVA system, plus his nearly 40 years' experience in teaching classical technique into this work.

Attendants for the 2-day course will receive the syllabus book, the CD of the syllabus music and the DVD of the syllabus for the course fee. All inclusive.

This syllabus and associated training material may be used in various ways according to the teacher's choice - as a training resource to be used alongside another syllabus; as content which can be used for free work, or as a syllabus and training methodology which can be used as a stand- alone syllabus, complete in itself. Some of the material is suitable for the more able Grade 4 student; more of it is suitable for the grade 5 student, but essentially it is most applicable to the Intermediate Foundation student for whom it was specifically designed. Intermediate students have also used it profitably. Classes with a combination of grades 4 and 5, or a combination of Intermediate Foundation and Intermediate have been successfully undertaken by teachers. Other combinations are, of course possible. It can also be studied over a two- year period. The work has been very well received everywhere it has been presented, as shown by comments from teachers who have attended a course.