

Allycia Coolidge wearing a romantic tutu inspired by the costumes of the Pas de Quatre ballet of 1845. Photograph by Joanna Lupker.



MAKING HISTORY: A ROMANTIC TUTU

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In our *Making History* project, we chose to analyze and recreate a Romantic tutu inspired by the *Pas de Quatre* ballet. This ballet was first performed in London, England during the Romantic era on July 12, 1845 and choreographed by Jules Perrot. This ballet featured four prima ballerinas of the Romantic era: Lucile Grahn, Taglioni, Carlotta, and Fanny Cerrito. They were icons of the time and often appeared in each other's benefit performances, but this was the first performance to showcase all four leading female dancers in a single ballet.

Prior to the Romantic period, female dancers wore heavy constrictive dresses resembling court fashion that weighed them down and limited their ability to dance. The key change in ballet costuming was the rise of skirt hems, which was seen as quite scandalous at the time (Mida 37). The changes allowed ballerinas to show off their much improved and intricate footwork. This new shortened ballet skirt fell to just below the knee.

The Romantic tutu endures as a classic costume of ballet that continues to be featured in performances of major dance companies around the world. Each element of the costume emphasizes the femininity of the dancer.

When this ballet was presented in 1845, the bodices of the costumes were constructed very similarly to those seen in regular clothing. Like the corsets of the time, they were tight (Bicat), with low cut necklines to put the dancer's long necks on display (Victoria and Albert Museum). This was further emphasized by sloped shoulders, mirroring the fashions of the period (Cargill 6). **The bodice also followed the the 19th-century ball gown style through V shaped waistlines, aligned close to the waist** (Mida 37).

Our recreation of this ballet costume was inspired by the illustration of the Pas de Quatre ballet shown above. Our process included visual analysis of the illustration, research into ballet costumes and fashions of the Romantic period, object-based analysis of the tutus in the Fashion Research Collection and a visit to the wardrobe department of the National Ballet.

The bodice of the costume is a structured garment resembling the corset worn in the Romantic era. This bodice can lay under or over the skirt depending on the design of the costume. In analyzing the illustrations of the Romantic tutus and bodices worn by the original troupe in 1845, we determined that the bodice should lay on top of the tutu. The bodice was constructed with a center front seam and stylized front princess seams. These seams narrowed toward the center front and formed a point at the waistline. We drafted the pattern for this area by manipulating a petite size eight women's bodice block. The neckline of the bodice was horizontally lowered and slashed across the top and the waistline angled down toward the center front. We split and rotated the fullness of the waist dart into the shoulder of the bodice in order to create princess seams. We used buttons to fasten the bodice to the skirt since the elastic that would be used by costume departments today had not been invented in 1845.

As the back of the costume was not shown in the illustrations, we inferred the design of the back bodice. **Similar pattern drafting techniques were used to alter the back bodice as were used for the front bodice.** We chose to use princess seams in the back bodice panels, as it is very uncommon to have princess seams sewn only on the front of a garment. We concluded the bodice had a center back opening in which a line of clasps was sewn. This was also a feature found in each bodice that we examined from the Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collection and The National Ballet of Canada.

The pattern piece for the sleeve was slashed and spread to create the flowing effect seen in the illustration. Space for gathers and pleats was added into the sleeve pattern and a shoulder strap was drafted to provide support. This design feature prevents the sleeve from falling completely off the shoulder when dancing. The final bodice design has three front seams, two side seams and two back seams, which adds up to eight panels in total.

A Romantic tutu is a tulle skirt that falls to just below the knee. It is made up of several layers of fabric that have been gathered, pleated, or a combination of techniques used to cinch in the fabric at the waist (Fielding). After discussing the options with the head of National Ballet of Canada's costume department, we chose to gather the waistline since this is a quick method that is suitable for



Pas de Quatre (1845) Lithograph of Carlotta Grisi, Marie Taglioni, Lucile Grahn and Fanny Cerrito. Photograph from The V&A Theatre Museum.

beginners. The tutu was drafted as seven rectangles with a gathering ratio of 3:1. Based on the illustrations, we measured the length of the tutu to fall to just below the knees and used seven layers of tulle to capture the desired level of opacity. We used two pink tulle layers amongst the five other white layers.

We chose a woven white cotton for the bodice paired with white piping and plastic boning. Shiny white polyester organza was used for the sleeves. Polyester tulle was used in white baby pink, and also white with shimmer for the tutu. Webbing and two-holed buttons were used along the waist to attach and detach the bodice from the skirt.

In this project, we learned that the desire for a freer flowing garment to dance in sparked the need and creation of the romantic tutu. Being dancers ourselves, we loved learning about the history and magic associated with this costume. Now we also appreciate the work, time and effort that is required to make the romantic tutu.

Note from editor: This Making History project was part of an assignment for Dr. Alison Matthew David's Costume History class at the Toronto Metropolitan University School of Fashion. The assignment submitted by Allycia Coolidge & Joanna Lupker was condensed and edited for clarity, and has been posted with their permission.

This post was edited by Dr. Ingrid Mida.

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