

PETER BRANDENHOFF



HOW I TEACH BOURNONVILLE

Peter Brandenhoff has just announced to his Ballet Arts students that he'll be taking it easy this class, because he recently tore his calf muscle. "I'm going to sit here like an old Russian," he says in his faint Danish accent, as he moves a chair to the front of the cavernous New York City Center studio and sits down. But before the opening barre stretch is finished, he's already up and circling the room—prodding a hamstring for lengthening, lightly brushing a student's shoulders so that she drops them.

Brandenhoff's class is something of an anomaly in New York, despite the city's vast selection of dance schools and styles. He teaches the technique of 19th-century Danish choreographer August Bournonville, known for exceptionally difficult demands, coupled with an expressive ease. Brandenhoff says the technique consistently produces strong, versatile dancers and offers a welcome contrast to the more common French and Russian styles.

"There's a naturalness to the Bournonville dancing—it wasn't just about going out and showing technical brilliance," he says. "You had to create a character. From an early age, you're onstage as a fishing boy in *Napoli* or some random kid in *La Sylphide* at the wedding."

Brandenhoff brings high energy and humor to his teaching. He's fond of dramatically conducting the accompanist's introduction to each barre exercise and uses gentle teasing to encourage his advanced-beginner students. "Be careful not

to throw your legs out the window," he warns before grands battements. Later, before transferring the adagio to the left side, he asks, "Would you like an intermission between sides?"

His playful approach to teaching is partly influenced by Bournonville technique and repertoire, which emphasizes buoyancy and exuberance. He isn't interested in cultivating the stern teaching persona common in ballet training. "You can have that absolute discipline and respect for the artform and, at the same time, have a sense of humor," he says.

And a sense of history—Brandenhoff peppers his classes with tidbits of Bournonville trivia. When he includes a Bournonville grand jeté—typified by its easy, loping quality, with the back leg in attitude and palms facing upward—in an across-the-floor phrase, he explains that the jump was born of necessity. "The stage was small, but there were still high ceilings," he says, explaining that the jeté can be performed with little travel. "It's important for students to learn this, because if you don't know what came before you, it's difficult to move forward," he says.

"Bournonville is a phenomenally brilliant technique," he says. "And with the exception of the last 30 years or so, the passing on of dance was only done mouth to mouth—actually, mouth to body. That's something I think we should safeguard." **DT**

BY RACHEL RIZZUTO

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KYLE FROMAN

A photograph of a male ballet instructor, Peter Brandenhoff, and a female student, Irene Pacl, in a dance studio. Peter is wearing a black long-sleeved shirt and black pants, and Irene is wearing a maroon leotard and white tights. They are performing a ballet pose, with Irene's right leg extended horizontally to the side and her arms raised. Peter is supporting her from behind. The studio has large windows in the background showing a city view, and a wooden ballet barre is visible. A red arrow points from the text box to Irene Pacl.

Peter Brandenhoff was born in Denmark and graduated from the Royal Danish Ballet School, where he studied the Bournonville method. In his 23-year career, he danced with Royal Danish Ballet, Boston Ballet II, Hamburg Ballet and as a soloist with San Francisco Ballet. After an educational outreach trip to South Africa with SFB, he committed to a teaching career and became a ballet master at Ballet San Jose. After moving to New York City in 2011, he held teaching positions at Peridance Capezio Center and Ballet Academy East before joining the faculty of Ballet Arts and The Alley School and Extension.

Irene Pacl is a student at The Alley School.

Brandenhoff and Pacl
at DANY Studios in
New York City

technique

Step-by-step: Bournonville grand jeté

The Bournonville style is marked by its use of *épaulement* and quick footwork. Bournonville teacher **Peter Brandenhoff** explains that at the peak of the grand jeté, it should look as if the torso is sitting atop the legs, unaffected, and the narrow second position of the arms should be presentational—like you're "giving a little tray of petit fours to the teacher," he says. —RR



Preparation: Start in tendu devant with the right foot, arms en bas.

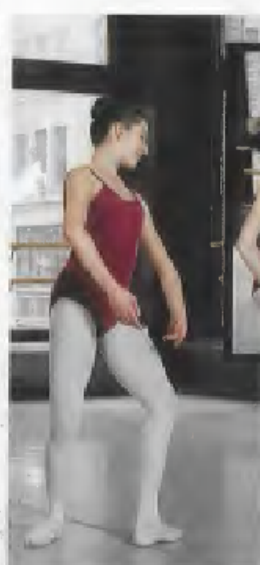


Step 1: Chassé forward, keeping the arms in first position.

TIP: Don't lean forward in the chassé or lose the position of the arms.



Step 2: Step forward with the right foot.

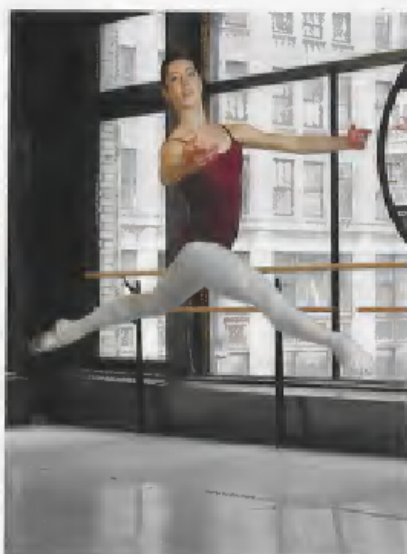


Step 3: Step forward with the left foot, twisting the torso away from the right side of the body.

TIP: Your eyeline should be on the downward left diagonal.

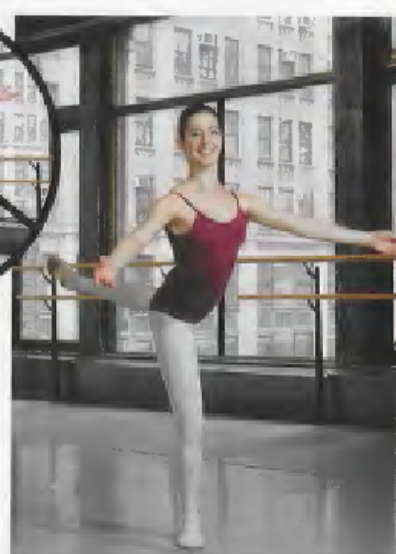


Step 4: Throw the right leg into a grand battement, leaning backward.



Step 5: Spring into the air with the back leg in attitude, opening the arms to a small second position, with the palms facing up, at the height of the jump.

TIP: Never open the arms to a full, open second position.



Step 6: Land on the right foot, with the left still in attitude derrière, elbow up and arms still presenting forward.

To see Brandenhoff and Paci in action, go to dance-teacher.com.

See Here in August: <http://www.dance-teacher.com/category/teaching/>

final pose



The effortless grace of
Bournonville technique

Peter Brandenhoff and
student Irene Paol
New York, New York

Photographed by Kyle Froman