

The Composition of a Tutu

Courtesy of The National Ballet of Canada's Wardrobe Department

When most of us think of ballet, we imagine lovely ballerinas dressed in beautiful tutus. At the National Ballet, the tutus and other costumes worn on stage by our dancers are handmade by The National Ballet of Canada's Wardrobe Department.

The Bodice

The top part of the costume, called the bodice, is made separately from the skirt. A mock-up or trial bodice is made first, usually from a heavy cotton fabric. The bodice pieces are loosely stitched together with a large machine stitch. The neckline, armholes and hemline are marked in pencil.

The mock-up bodice is fit on the dancer and any changes are noted. After necessary adjustments are made the bodice is taken apart and the resulting pieces become the pattern for the actual bodice.

The Basque

The basque is the part of the garment that covers the hip to waist area. The basque is attached first to the plate and then to the waistband. The bodice is positioned on top of the basque and then sewn to it.

The Panty

The skirt of a tutu begins with a panty. The gathered layers of netting are sewn in closely spaced rows onto it.

The Skirt

The skirt of a tutu gives it its distinctive look. Made up of many layers of net or tulle, it is light but very stiff.

The narrowest (and softest) layer of net is attached closest to the leg openings. Many layers are added, each becoming wider until they reach the hip.

Once all the layers are stitched to the panty and the back is sewn together, the bound leg edges are threaded with elastic.

A wire hoop is inserted in a channel on the centre layer of the skirt to help maintain the correct profile. Each layer of net is then tacked to the next layer to help control the natural fluffiness of the netting.

The Plate

The plate or decorative top of the skirt is placed on the finished net base. Most of the decoration is sewn to the plate before it is attached to the skirt, but often the final touches are done by hand.

Did You Know

- > There are usually 16 layers of netting in a tutu.
- > 1 tutu uses up to 15 metres of netting.
- > A basic tutu without decoration takes a minimum of 120 hours to put together.
- > The average cost of a tutu is between \$1,500.00 and \$3,000.00.