

BARRE ASTIE

**EFFECTIVE FLOOR BARRE
FOR DANCERS**

**SAFE PHYSICAL METHOD
FOR ALL**

Lecturer

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Lecture Outline

1. What is Barre Astié?

- A. Why was the method created?
- B. Whom does it concern?
- C. Alain Astié, the creator of the method

2. The purpose of the method

- A. Multidisciplinary approach
- B. The benefits of the method

3. The class

- A. The basics of the technique
- B. The structure
- C. The artistry
- D. The body conditioning class
- E. The style

4. The Barre Astié internationally

- A. The book → «Grammar of the Bodies»
- B. Diplôme Barre Astié
- C. Barre Astié trainers
- D. The personal experience of the lecturer

1. A. BARRE ASTIE is a floor barre designed originally to meet the needs of today's dancers. This means that the purpose of the class is to help the future dancer take consciousness of his/her body's articulations and muscles and feel how these function rather than inforce the body into certain dancing positions.

B.It is not adressed to ballet dancers only but is designed to reinforce other techniques too such as Contemporary, Jazz or any Modern technique.

C. The name 'barre' refers to the traditional floor exercises for dancers corresponding to the barre work of everyday's ballet class. It also reveals the identity of its creator, mr Alain ASTIE, who grew up in the world of the art, being part of a generation that marked the history of dance like Serge Lifar who offered him the first prize of the Paris Conservatoire Competition, Harald Landler who was one of his teachers, Rudolf Nureyief with whom had the honor to dance when a soloist in Oslo Opera, Maurice Bejart who employed him as a dancer and Carla Fracci who offered him roles in her ballets. For this generation the barre is the dancers'path to the centre and finally on stage and floor barres are now and then being developed by many ballet teachers wishing to improve the posture, the positions-mainly the turn out- and increase the flexibility of their students.

This was also Mr ASTIE's purpose when in 1980's wished to train professional dancers and started developing his method which now is much more than a barre, it's a physical-a somatic- method that can be applied to everyone - dancer, non-dancer, professional or beginner- and keeps evolving thanks to the constant research of Mr ASTIE and to the participation of more than a hundred Barre ASTIE trainers throughout the world. These trainers are mainly dance professionals, ex-dancers and teachers, but there are also physiotherapists, physical education instructors, actors and musicians.

2. A.What is the link between us? The fact that **the B.A. method gives the possibility for a different approach depending on the working field.**

The dance teacher will use it for flexibility, strength, core stability and enhancement of dance positions and movements.

The actor and the musician will be more interested in the breathing pattern, the posture amelioration and the coordination of movement.

The physical education instructor has the opportunity to give a class with artistic elements such as music, rhythm, flow of movement, variety of energy and use of space and the physiotherapist will use specific exercises and rehabilitation routines or could use the artistic aspect for psychological equilibrium.

B. Depending on the needs of our trainees we will plan our class or personal session based on **different aspects of the technique** following certain rules:

- Respect each individuals'physique and help him/her to unblock his/her body without injuries or any type of strain nor stress
- Help the individual gain awareness of his/her body's functions and physical abilities and inspire him/her to be engaged in the act of going beyond them without muscular or articular overcharge.
- Start by simple movements to unblock the different parts of the body and get rid of any tension - the breathing pattern is very important here.
- Give a balanced session that progresses in a different order depending on the situation, level of work, climate, where the trainees can get beyond the will to "do well" and be in search of the well being.

3. A.How is a Barre ASTIE class constructed?

In Barre ASTIE we make the whole body move fluidly and rhythmically in different spatial pattern but in order to achieve that we focus

- on the scapular belt which is the adult's particularly stressed/strained area
- on the hips and the coxofemoral joints which are crucial to the dancer's technique
- and on the spine which connects the two.

The scapular belt consists of the sternum, the clavicle and the shoulder blades and its carriage determines the breathing capacity as well as the aesthetics of the upper part of the body: the way we carry our head-the position of the chin and the neck in relation to the shoulders- reflects our personality and our personal preoccupations.

The pelvis consist of the sacrum, the coccyx and the iliac bones. "The slight mobility of the pubic symphysis is very important to Barre ASTIE- it gives 'breath' to the pelvis movement which is vital source of energy". <*Grammaire des corps*>

Actually it all started from the pelvis and the effort to loosen up the coxofemoral joints in order to deliberate the lower limbs for better turned-out positions in ballet and greater flexibility.

A term that we use in a series of B.A. exercises is the 'dehanché' which means to unclasp the femur from the hip socket. We try to elongate, consciously lengthen the distance between the ball of the femur and the hip socket to avoid abrasion and to get the maximum mobility in the hip articulation. It should all happen easily and to avoid tension we let the instep and the knee in a semi-relaxed position-very difficult for the trainee classical dancer who is so anxious of lines. We work a lot with elongated legs-not overstretched ones.

We approach the work of the shoulder joints in the same way: the trainee must gain consciousness of their mobility and position them right in order to have the upper limbs moving freely. As I mentioned above very important here is the carriage of the head which is heavy, not just technically speaking : we all have this image of a very troubled person dropping the head forwards, which is a common/natural 'fault' of the non-trained adult. It's true that the upper back and the back of the neck suffer a lot in our days. The dancer needs to free his head and arms and the non-dancer is in search for the relief of cervical tension and neck pain.

Mr ASTIE often repeats a French proverb/saying: a person that holds his head over his shoulders, meaning someone who is reasonable and, although it's a

different approach, he uses this imagery to place the head in the right position where the cervical vertebrae are in line with the thoracic ones, the ear rings would drop between the acromion and the base of the neck and the chin is parallel to the ground.

This correct balance of the head between the shoulders let the trapezius in a neutral/relaxing position, deliberates the neck and permits the elongation of the spine up to the crown of the head. Then by placing the shoulder blades correctly we can move our arms independently from the shoulder articulation.

B. A Barre ASTIE class consists of 3 parts:

One part is the sitting position, another one is the supine position and the 3rd one is the stretching/cool down part. The trainer can start the class sitting or lying down depending on the situation, the 3rd part will conclude the class with controlled lengthening exercises and/or static or PNF stretches and/or cooling down exercises to reduce intensity depending on the needs of the students.

As the method is adapted to different groups – pre-adolescents, adolescents, dance students and adults (beginners or experienced in movement), the trainer will plan his class accordingly with the target to establish a relation of communication and trust with his trainees in order to get them to know their body, feel their articulation's mobility, wake-up the deeper muscles and interiorize the movement instead of copying it.

A beginners' class will usually start in the sitting position for spatial awareness. The eyes will command the body and they will control/correct the movement if there is a mirror or just copy/follow the trainer's instructions. The correct axe of the spine is crucial here: balancing on the sitting bones in a vertical line from the coccyx to the crown of the head.

The same carriage of the vertebral column we will find in the lying on the back position where the body balances on the head, the thoracic vertebrae (4th to 7th), the lower part of the sacrum and the feet. It's not a comfortable position, it's a balancing position where the body is not sunken in the ground and the extension in the lumbar region gives the feeling of suspension and lightness.

Here there is not the visual perception of the movement, the approach is rather sensorial. This is a part of the method that would initiate a class for more experienced students able to follow instructions, memorise and absorb more complicated movements. Both parts are necessary in any level, the order will vary.

C. What makes the B.A. an artistic class?

- The importance of music which is not a background but an inspiring element giving the right energy for each movement
- The use of space
- The way we combine our movements to create combinations more or less complicated depending on the standard. It `s this possibility that makes the B.A. unique as a floor barre: we use more than 150 movements to create uncountable combinations because, as we dancers know, even the simplest gesture or combination will be a different one by changing the directions in space, the breathing pattern, the rhythm, the order that different parts of the body get involved.
- Last artistic element, the fluidity of movement, a flow of energy that gives grace, emotion and contentment.

D. What makes the Barre ASTIE a pleasant body conditioning class?

- the right balance of stretching and strengthening movements
- the well placing of the spine and the upper body that relieves from neck and back pains
- the stimulation, the relaxation and elimination of tensions that our breathing pattern permits. In fact, "in Barre ASTIE, breathing is the tool to leave our body to an inner perception...the medium to learn how to isolate our limbs and accept to relinquish their weight." <Grammaire des Corps>
- Last, the contact with the art of dance.

E. What is the "style" of the class?

The style depends on the class leader. Mr Astié, as ex-classical dancer and ballet teacher, uses more classical and neoclassical lines. Contemporary/modern dancers teaching Barre Astié will also use their proper lines and vocabulary giving a different style and so on. The differentiation between B.A trainers according to their personality and professional status is reflected on their sessions and makes them unique.

- 4. A.** The first effort to analyse and note down a Barre Astié class gave the creation of the book : **"Grammaire des corps" ("The Grammar of the bodies")**, written by Mr ASTIE and edited in France in the year 1990. It is the proposition of a complete Barre ASTIE class with all the necessary information for the trainer. It was translated in Japanese and later in Greek and it is the basic tool of our educational programme for Barre ASTIE teachers which was initiated in 2009.

B. The official programme is called "Diplôme Barre ASTIE", it is delivered in one or two years and it's the necessary qualification in order to give Barre ASTIE classes.

Apart France, the programme is delivered in Greece, in Italy and in Japan. It consists of 6 modules covering the basic syllabus, intermediate and advanced levels, the pedagogy of the method and the practical teaching considering the age, the level of ability and the aims of the trainees. There is a proposition of various training programmes depending on the disposed timing and purpose of the class and a special notation to mark the different barre ASTIE positions and transitions.

C. 2017 will end with 120 Barre ASTIE trainers who take part in continuous professional development courses named 'ateliers', organize festivals and travel to transmit the method.

D. I have been teaching this floor barre for many years using it as the basic conditioning class for my dance students from 12 years on. The aim was to give them all necessary information and skills in order to be fit for their dance classes, conscious of the fundamentals of various dance techniques and aware of safe dance practice. Gradually there were beginners of all age coming to try because, they said, it was a full gym class where they felt like dancing. Therefore I decided to create different levels, basic, intermediate and advanced, considering that the basic class would refer to people with no dancing experience and intermediate/advanced for dance students of different standard. Then I discovered that even with more experienced dancers I had to go through the basics for a considerable amount of time because dancers learn to perform and are emotionally involved to movement: they tend to force their body into positions and movements without always being well prepared so they risk to overwork, overuse and even injure their bodies.

Each of our students entering the room needs first to leave everything behind- daily routine, thoughts, trouble, self-judgement... Therefore the class should start easily, in a comfortable position, breathing with gentle lengthening movements, mobilizing the spine and the major joints to warm-up physiologically and mentally. The loosening of the back, shoulder and hip articulations, the conscious strengthening of the core muscles, the introduction of the breathing pattern and of the use of space will ensure the passing to more complicated and artistic combinations that encourage the trainees to reach their full potential.

"The Barre ASTIE is a way to acquire knowledge of our musculature, skeleton as well as joints and their mobility. It reveals our personal ability to move using flexing movements, stretches, spirals and bends of the spine through a functional concept that allows to form a proper image of ourself." <Grammar of the Bodies>

References

Astié, A. (1990). « Grammaire des Corps »