



## PASTOR: FOUR MOVEMENTS



## STUDY GUIDE

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## **Pastor: Four Movements**

Pastor: Four Movements is an intimate documentary that profiles Krzysztof Pastor, the renowned Polish dancer and choreographer affiliated with the Dutch ballet school. The film delves into Pastor's creative process, showcasing his work, his interactions with dancers, and the challenges he faces in the world of ballet. Through behind-the-scenes rehearsal footage and performances, Pastor shares insights into his work and the sources of his inspiration. Divided into four acts, each filmed by a different cinematographer—Maciej Sobieraj, Michał Englert, Jacek Petrycki, and Marek Dawid—the segments present a unique perspective on Pastor's world. The documentary the film offers a compelling look at both Pastor and the intricate workings of the ballet world.

## **About Ballet**

Ballet is a type of performance dance. It originated in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, during the Italian Renaissance. The word "ballet" comes from the Italian word "ballare," which means "to dance." In the late 1600s, ballet developed significantly in the court of French king Louis XIV. The Kennedy Center explains, "Court dances were based on the patterns and steps of peasant folk dances, but they were much more elaborate. They incorporated the manners and grace of the aristocracy, who were well trained in how to move and behave in 'proper' ways. Their erect posture, turned-out legs, and deliberate, elegant arm and hand positions influenced what was to become ballet." It says that King Louis XIV facilitated and encouraged these performances—even dancing himself for a number of years—and was instrumental in helping ballet grow. In fact, it says, "Under Louis' patronage, the first school to train professional ballet dancers was established. That's why, to this day, all ballet vocabulary is in French."<sup>1</sup> Today, ballet is performed throughout the world and has a large following.

Ballet dancers appear effortlessly graceful and gentle, however, this type of dance requires a lot of training. Most dancers spend years developing the strength, flexibility, balance, and technical skill required. Body movement is a critical part of ballet. There are many standardized movements involved in this type of dance, which must be performed in a specific way. For instance, in a plié, the dancer holds their upper body upright while bending the knees outward. For an arabesque, they stand on one leg, with the other leg extended behind them.

## **Types of Ballet**

There are four main types of ballet: classical, romantic, neoclassical, and contemporary. Classical ballet is a formal method that stresses the traditional techniques that have been developed since the court dances of King Louis XIV, such as pliés and arabesques. It usually has a story to it, and is typically accompanied by an orchestra. "Swan Lake" and "The Nutcracker" are examples of classical ballet. Romantic ballet has some similarities with classical ballet, but it is more focused on intense emotion and artistic movement. Dancers also wear longer tutus. Contemporary ballet

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/media-and-interactive/media/dance/ballet-basics/>

follows classical ballet techniques but incorporates some more modern elements. It allows a lot more experimentation.

Neoclassical ballet emerged in 1920s, and is often described as a response to the excesses of the romantic style. Unlike classical ballet, neoclassical ballet often has no clear plot. It is more abstract and less structured, allowing the freedom to incorporate new techniques and ideas. Choreographer George Balanchine is often considered a pioneer in neoclassical ballet. As explained in an article on the website for the New York Ballet—for whom Balanchine choreographed for many years—“Balanchine generally de-emphasized plot in his ballets, preferring to let ‘dance be the star of the show.’”<sup>2</sup>

## **Choreography**

Most ballets are meticulously choreographed. A choreographer invents a series of movements and puts them together to make a dance, working with dancers to teach them this dance. Some of these dances are later passed on through generations of dancers within a dance company. Additionally, many companies continue to have their choreographers invent new dances, and re-invent old ones. A choreographer is not always a dancer too, but this is common. In addition to understanding dancing, most choreographers are also educated in all the other elements involved in a performance, such as sets, music, make-up, and lighting.

Ballets are not just about a combination of movements though. Most are infused with a rich combination of history, emotion, and meaning. Being a choreographer involves expressing all of these things through movement, and most choreographers are very passionate about the ballets that they create.

## **Polish National Ballet**

The Polish National Ballet is the largest ballet company in Poland. According to the Polish National Opera website, Poland’s ballet traditions go back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It says, “For over 170 years the Teatr Wielki [Polish National Opera] has been Poland’s grandest opera and ballet theatre. It was built in 1825–1833.”<sup>3</sup> The Polish National Ballet was established in 2009, as the successor of the ballet company of the Polish National Opera. It still performs in the Teatr Wielki, the Polish National Opera building. It has more than 90 dancers.

## **Krzysztof Pastor**

Krzysztof Pastor was born in 1956 in Gdańsk, Poland. He joined the Polish Dance Theatre in 1975. In 1983, he became a soloist for Le Ballet de l’Opéra of Lyon in France. He then danced with the Dutch National Ballet from 1985 to 1995.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nycballet.com/discover/our-history/george-balanchine/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://teatr Wielki.pl/en/teatr/history/national-opera-in-warsaw/>

He completed his first ballet choreography in 1986. He later choreographed for many years for the Dutch National Ballet. Pastor has also had an international career and has created ballets for ballet companies in many other countries including Sweden, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Australia, New Zealand, and Hong Kong. Pastor has been the director of the Polish National Ballet since 2009. According to the website of the Polish National Opera, “Pastor has since gained considerable recognition as an international choreographer, creating nearly seventy ballets to date, including the highly acclaimed *Do Not Go Gentle...*, and *In Light and Shadow*; and the large-scale, full-length productions: *Kurt Weill, Acid City, Don Giovanni, Tristan, and Dangerous Liaisons*; as well as *Symphonie fantastique* for the Australian Ballet.”<sup>4</sup>

He has collaborated with several dance companies in the United States. For instance, he was resident choreographer for the Washington Ballet from 1997 to 1999. His choreography has been presented as part of the repertoire of the San Francisco Ballet, and his rendition of *Romeo and Juliet* was presented by Chicago’s Joffrey Ballet in 2014.

Pastor is the recipient of a long list of awards, including international awards. The Polish National Opera website says, “Pastor received special prizes from the Polish Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Polish Theatre Artists Union and Polish Society of Authors and Composers and was awarded the Officer’s Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta, the ‘Merit to Culture – Gloria Artis’ Gold Medal. He was also awarded the title of an ‘Outstanding Pole’ from Polish Promotional Emblem Foundation ‘Teraz Polska’ (2017).”<sup>5</sup>

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Why is it important to learn ballet under a master, as explained in the film?
2. As revealed in the film, why is dedication an important part of learning ballet?
3. What kind of things can the choreographer see that the dancers cannot, as shown in the film?
4. As explained in the film, how is choreography about managing your ambitions?
5. How does Pastor use his own experience as a dancer in his work as a choreographer?
6. How does the movements of every single dancer matter, as shown in the film?

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<sup>4</sup> <https://teatr Wielki.pl/en/people/krzysztof-pastor/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://teatr Wielki.pl/en/people/krzysztof-pastor/>

## Additional Resources

- American Ballet Theater, “Ballet Dictionary.”  
<https://www.abt.org/explore/learn/ballet-dictionary/>
- The Kennedy Center, “Ballet Basics: A Quick Guide to Understanding Ballet.”  
<https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/media-and-interactives/media/dance/ballet-basics/>
- Colleen Mcananey And Boston Ballet Staff, “The Four Major Styles of Ballet,” Boston Ballet.  
<https://www.bostonballet.org/stories/the-four-major-styles-of-ballet/>
- Polish National Opera, “Krzysztof Pastor: Director of the Polish National Ballet.”  
<https://teatr Wielki.pl/en/people/krzysztof-pastor/>
- Polish National Opera, “National Opera in Warsaw.”  
<https://teatr Wielki.pl/en/teatr/history/national-opera-in-warsaw/>

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