### Colouring Fun

# AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DANCER

#### **Ideas for Teachers**

Everybody knows that the best way to teach children is to make learning fun. So here's a colouring sheet to stimulate children's awareness of ballet's lively past while teaching other important lessons.

Teachers can use this sheet in class to complement specific activities and as a take-home handout to remind students of what they have learned.

Here are a few suggestions for integrating this colouring sheet into your teaching. Don't be afraid to try other ideas according to the age of your students and the syllabus you are following.

#### **Visualising movement: Walking**

When young children are learning to walk like dancers, they must practise pointing their toes and moving smoothly. This colouring sheet can be used to help young children visualize walking gracefully. The dancer in the picture has a big plume of feathers on her head and a large, swaying dress. Invite your students to imagine they are gliding as they move—don't let those feathers bounce about or let that dress swing from side to side!

Show the children the picture before they begin practising, then let them take the sheet home at the end of the lesson.

#### **Creative dance**

If your classes include time for children's creative dance, then you might like to give them this sheet to fire their creativity and imaginations. The colouring sheet is based on a picture showing a dancer costumed as a princess. But she could be many other characters as well.

- What type of character is this dancer? Is she a fine lady?
   A queen? Or perhaps a fairy-godmother?
- What sort of dance might this character perform?
   Will her steps be quick and small? Or large and heavy?
- Can you make up a short dance for her?
- · What music would you choose for this character?





#### A little history for your class

If you'd like to introduce this colouring sheet as a picture of a specific dancer (Adelaide Simonet) then here are some intriguing facts you might like to tell your students.

While Adelaide Simonet was performing on the stage, scientists were experimenting with the first hot air balloons.

One of the most famous aeronauts of the day was Jean-Pierre Blanchard. In 1784 he visited London to demonstrate his balloon and

he met Adelaide Simonet and her family. In fact, Adelaide's daughters (who were learning ballet) took turns travelling in the balloon with Monsieur Blanchard. They were among the very first people ever to fly!

You may like to share this story with your students to inspire them to visualize floating movements and landing gently when jumping.

As for Monsieur Blanchard...well, he didn't land too gently. After successfully crossing the English Channel by 'airboat' in 1785, he fell from his balloon in 1808 and died of injuries. Ouch!

#### Caring for dancewear

Is your end-of-term concert approaching? You might like to give out this sheet to reinforce messages about costume care. Here are some questions you might gently ask your students:

- Who do you imagine made this dancer's dress?
   Who makes yours?
- How does this dancer put her dress on? How does she take it off? Is there a correct way for you to take your costume on and off?
- This dancer must have taken good care of her dress.
   Where might she have kept her costume? How do you look after yours?
- What's the worst thing that could happen to her lovely dress?! Who should you tell if something happens to your costume?





AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY **DANCFR** 



his colouring sheet is based on an image of the 18th-century dancer, Adelaide Simonet. Adelaide (or Madame Simonet as she was usually known) was a popular ballet dancer, who performed at London's opera house between 1776-1784. Her career coincides with the American War of Independence (1775-1783) and the lives of composers Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Adelaide's greatest success as a dancer came late in her career. For several years she danced regularly at the opera house, often partnered by her husband Louis in divertissements. But in 1782 the celebrated choreographer Jean-Georges Noverre visited London and chose Adelaide to play the leading role of Medea in his acclaimed ballet, *Jason et Medee*.

Her powerful portrayal of the jilted, murderous sorceress earned Adelaide huge praise. Her dramatic acting was even compared to that of Britain's leading actress of the day, Sarah Siddons—an amazing accolade for a French dancer in England!

Some years earlier, in 1779, Adelaide placed a notice in the *London Courant* advertising herself as a dancing mistress. It was an unusual step in an era when dance establishments were usually run by men. A few days later, an anonymous paragraph appeared attacking Adelaide's plans and her character. Possibly it was written by a rival teacher who knew Adelaide was well-respected and highly qualified.

In response to this attack, Adelaide wrote a determined, eloquent letter to the newspaper, defending her reputation. She challenged her assailant to appear with her on the stage of the opera house. She also dared the author by proposing they both give a public lesson to their students and be judged by 'the most skilful Dancing Masters in London'.

Although we don't know how many students she attracted, it seems Adelaide's school was a success. During the next few years, other women began advertising as dance teachers too, including several who were also leading ballet dancers at the opera house.

Today, Adelaide's determination to run her own school is an inspiration for the countless women who teach dance. She was also one of the last dancers to wear heels and the large, pannier skirts of the day. Shortly after Adelaide retired, fashions in Britain and France changed radically as a result of the French Revolution. Dancers began to wear light-weight, free-flowing dresses—much to the dismay of moralists, who thought them rather too revealing!

MANCING ACADEMY for LADIES ONLY.

ADAME SIMONET, at the folicitation of feveral persons of the first rank, to whose opinion she will ever pay the strictest deserence, begs leave to acquaint the Nobility and Gentry, that she will open a Dancing Academy for Ladies only, at her house No. 5, Dover-Street, on the 29th instant. To continue every Wednesday and Friday to the latter end of June 1780.

The price is the same as at the other academies: as for her talents and capacity, both as to gracefulness and execution, Madame Simonet humbly submits to the judgment of her kind and respectable patrons, the

public.

N.B. On Mondays and Thursdays Madame Simonet will attend abroad those Ladies who will honour her with their commands, No. 5, Dover-Street, Piccadilly.

Read more about Noverre's *Jason et Medee* on **Wikipedia**.

You can also **download** a satirical illustration of the ballet, showing Adelaide and fellow dancers, Giovanna Baccelli and Gaetan Vestris, from the British Museum's website. The illustration depicts Adelaide on the right holding a dagger.



#### **Further Reading:**

Judith Chazin-Bennahum, *The Lure of Perfection: Fashion and Ballet 1780-1830* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

Curtis Price, Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London: The King's Theatre, Haymarket 1778-1791*, vol. I, II vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreography and Narrative: Ballet's Staging of Story and Desire* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996).

'Simonet, Adelaide' in Philip H. Highfill, Jr, Kalman A. Burnim and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800*, vol. 14, 16 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973-1993).

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