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Where Technique Becomes Poetry

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Among the many highlights of the Paris Opera's 2025–26 ballet season, the Paris Opera Ballet School Demonstrations at the Palais Garnier are perhaps the purest expression of what classical dance really is: a daily craft, patiently honed at the barre and in the centre, long before the glamour of opening nights. From 6 to 14 December 2025, the students of the School, under the direction of Élisabeth Platel, open the doors of their studio work to the public in a 2h30 performance (with one interval) that traces the entire arc of academic training in the French tradition.

Crucially, these Demonstrations are not a gala of "party pieces", but a carefully curated pedagogical journey and a pivotal moment in the School's year. The programme is conceived to show how knowledge is transmitted: exercises at the barre, adage, pirouettes, petit and grand allegro, all presented with their musical and stylistic logic laid bare. The students appear accompanied by their teachers and pianists, so the audience witnesses the living dialogue that shapes a dancer's technique and artistry. The codes of the French school—purity of line, exacting footwork, understated épaulement, and refined musicality—are not merely displayed as a finished product.

But revealed as a foundation that, once fully internalised, grants the young dancers remarkable freedom and individuality. One of the most admirable aspects of the Demonstrations is the breadth of choreographic culture they encompass. While classical technique remains the backbone, the programme also opens onto contemporary dance, folk and character work, baroque dance, mime and "musical expression" classes, all of which form part of the School's curriculum. This range is not decorative; it is a statement about what it means to train a complete artist in the 21st century.

Character dances sharpen musicality and rhythmic attack; baroque and folk styles refine the use of the upper body and spatial imagination; contemporary movement demands a different relationship with weight and floor. Seeing these disciplines side by side allows the audience to understand how versatility and stylistic sensitivity are now integral to the Paris Opera Ballet's identity, even as it remains rooted in the classical canon.

The dramaturgy of the Demonstrations is built around progression: from the youngest divisions, who present the essential grammar of placement, turnout and articulation, to the most advanced students, whose work in adage, batterie, pas de deux and variations reveals the full sophistication of the School's training.

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Earlier seasons have explicitly alternated “first levels” with “advanced levels”, and the current format preserves that spirit of ascent through the ranks. For the public, this is deeply moving: in a single afternoon one sees the entire life-cycle of a classical dancer, from the first careful tendu to the secure, open arabesque of a near-professional.

For the students, it is a rite of passage—an opportunity to test their classroom work against the unique acoustics, space and atmosphere of the Palais Garnier’s legendary raked stage. All of this unfolds within one of the most opulent opera houses in the world, a theatre whose architecture was conceived to celebrate spectacle and whose 150th anniversary the Paris Opera is currently honouring.

The contrast between the simplicity of class attire—tunics, leotards, soft shoes or pointe shoes—and the gilded balconies and ceiling frescoes of Garnier creates a powerful visual metaphor: behind every grand production lies this humble, disciplined work. The format of “Classes en scène”, as Paris audiences affectionately call these Demonstrations, offers something uniquely intimate: the chance to sit close enough to hear pointe shoes brush the floor, to see corrections absorbed in real time, to sense the collective concentration of an ensemble of young dancers utterly committed to their craft.

For ballet lovers and newcomers alike, the Paris Opera Ballet School Demonstrations are far more than an attractive seasonal event; they are a masterclass in what makes the French school so admired internationally. Tradition and innovation are held in productive tension: a vocabulary codified over centuries is used to prepare artists who will dance the widest possible range of repertory. Under Élisabeth Platel’s watchful guidance, the Demonstrations affirm that excellence is not an abstract ideal but a daily practice, taught, learnt and generously shared. For anyone wishing to understand how future étoiles are made—not only the technical brilliance, but the musicality, taste and discipline behind it.

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