

History of the Tutu

The tutu has been called one of the greatest costuming inventions of all time. It is just that, a brilliant "invention"--unlike any garment otherwise known. Confused about the parts of a tutu and confused about the different tutu types? Well, we're going to help you make your way through the world of tutus.

"Tutu" is French Baby Talk for Your Bottom!

According to *Wikipedia*, The word tutu is a corruption of *cucu*, French baby talk for *cul-cul* meaning roughly "botty-wotty" (for bottom). **Legend has it that** the term was first used by commoners who, unlike the wealthy sitting in the upper levels of the ballet theatres, were seated in the lower levels. These commoners would look up at the dancer and had a very different view of the ballet. "Tutu" refers to the area seen under the ballerinas' skirts. The derivation of the name not nearly as elegant, beautiful and romantic as the garment itself!

Anatomy of a Tutu

Before we look at the different tutu styles, let's get the "anatomy" straight.

A tutu presents major construction challenges:

- The tutu must be beautiful—yet durable.
- The tutu must fit like a glove—yet allow a full range of freedom in movement.

So, some really brilliant costumers developed a way to piece together different elements to overcome both of these challenges.

Bodice

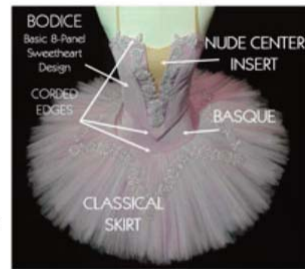
The tutu bodice can use from 6 to 15 panels of fabric. Some of these pieces are cut on the bias (the diagonal) which gives fabric some stretch. The bodice is a separate piece of the costume attached at the waistline or high on the hip; sometimes it's put together just with elastic tabs to allow for movement.

The Basque

This is the piece that sits from the waist to high on the hip. It can be continuous with the bodice or a separate, tight fitting fabric "band."

The Skirt

Tutu skirts determine the shape of the tutu and generally define the style: Romantic, Classical or Bell. These different tutu styles will be explained in the next section.



Tutu Styles

The Romantic Tutu

The first tutu is credited as appearing in Paris in 1832 on Marie Taglioni in *La Sylphide*. Her skirt (see right) was cut above the ankle to show her famous legwork. This first tutu style was dubbed, "The Romantic Tutu". **This romantic style occurred during the "Romantic" period in ballet history.**

Romantic Tutus are long, floating and ethereal. They are usually 3 – 5 layers of soft tulle.

There are 2 types of Romantic Tutu. In the first type of Romantic Tutu, the skirt begins at the waist. The second type of Romantic Tutu is a dropped waist version. The skirt begins at the high hip and is called a **Romantic Tutu with Basque**.

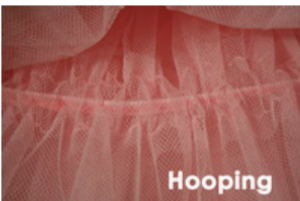
The Classical Tutu

Historically, after the Romantic Tutu, came the Classical Tutu. **The Classical Tutu was born from the viewers' request to see more of the intricate movements that dancers were starting to perform.** The Classical Tutu jutted out horizontally from the dancer's hips and showed more of the leg. This style of tutu was first worn by the Italian ballerina Virginia Zucci in the 1880s. This first "Classical" style tutu ended just above the ballerina's knees and looked more like the current "Bell" or even "Romantic" style of tutu.

As the years went by the Classical Tutu shrank to show more and more of the feet and legs. Today, there are two main styles of what is known as the "Classical" Tutu: the very flat Pancake / Platter / Plate or Russian design (this tutu goes by many different names!) and the softer Powderpuff or "Balanchine" style of Classical Tutu.

The skirt ruffles on Classical Tutus are placed on a panty. The pancake style Classical Tutu has a wide, flat skirt, is hooped, and is tightly tacked. It is made of stiff tutu netting.

Hooping is stiff petticoat wire inserted into a casing in one of the central ruffle rows. Hooping aids in keeping the tutu's flat, stiff shape.



Powderpuff Classical Tutu

The "Powderpuff" style of Classical Tutu has a softer look. It is not hooped, has a shorter skirt and is tacked more loosely. It can be made of softer tulle (like the romantics) or a combination of net and tulle. (photo credit: *Symphony In C Tutu*, From Bentley, Toni, Costumes by Karinska, 1995, Harry N. Abrams, Inc, p. 104.)

Bell Tutu

Another tutu fashion is the Bell Tutu. The Bell Tutu is named for its bell like shaping and is combines features of the Romantic and Classical tutu. The Bell Tutu has shorter, more numerous skirt layers than the Romantic and longer and less numerous skirt layers than the Classical Tutu. The Bell has no hoop and is very loosely tacked. It can be made of softer tulle like the Romantic or net like the Classical or a combination of both. Like the Classical Tutu, it has ruffles that are stitched onto a panty.

Final Thoughts

In spite of the fact that the tutu has just a few pieces, the shaping, lines and combinations of fabrics and colors are endless. Hopeful you'll find [help](#).

