

Shopping

New ballet pointe shoe better for feet, experts say

Toronto dancer, husband own firm

Footwear offers more support

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Behold the paradox of the ballet dancer's pointe shoe.

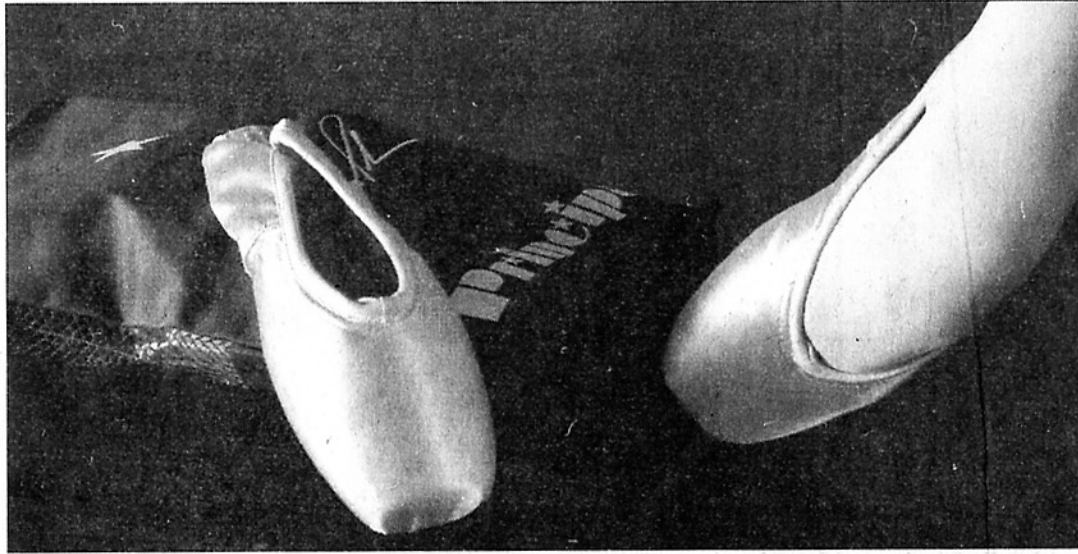
Traditionally, it is both a thing of great beauty for the audience, and an instrument of torture for the dancer.

A newly designed shoe, the Diamond Pointe, aims to narrow the gap in a healthy way, for both the professional dancer and the many aspiring ballerinas just beginning pointe work.

Pointe shoes make a dancer's line almost impossibly long, graceful and gorgeous. But they hurt to dance in.

Some professional dancers sit with their feet in buckets of ice to kill the pain after a demanding performance en pointe. Reputable dance schools are extremely cautious about the age at which they introduce pointe work to budding ballerinas: Starting too early adds a lot of stress to the body and may lead to physical damage.

Medical professionals who



The Diamond Pointe shoe is intended to reduce the wear and tear on dancers' feet.

work with ballet dancers know the grief that often accompanies pointe work, not only the corns, bruises and bunions, but the injuries.

"Dancers can do a lot in a pointe shoe that they can't do otherwise, but going en pointe focuses the entire body weight on 1½ square inches," says Toronto physician Julia Alleyne, medical director of sport care at Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Centre, and medical

consultant to the National Ballet of Canada.

Chan Hon Goh, a principal dancer with the National Ballet, and her husband Chun Che, dance instructor and former principal dancer with the National Ballet of China, have worked for years designing dance shoes for their Principal Shoes company.

Their most recent introduction, the Diamond Pointe shoe, was created with advice from

medical professionals including Alleyne, and aimed at the greatest possible support of the foot and the avoidance of injury.

"I got involved because of the injuries I see," says Alleyne. "I'm very pleased with the results. This is an excellent shoe.

"I see injuries in younger dancers as well as professional dancers. A shoe like this is most important in the developing dancer because it can help them improve their alignment and foot

placements. They don't develop alignment issues. The shoe itself helps to guide them through their movements."

The Diamond Pointe shoe has more support in the arch than traditional designs, Alleyne says. The shank has a rigid part, and a semi-flexible part. The shoe has a strong wing block. The toe box comes in different heights and widths so it can be customized for more precise fit. It is hand-sewn for the traditional slipper feel, but is more supportive through the shank and toe box than many other varieties of pointe shoe.

Scott Forhan, director of biomechanics for Strategics, an exercise and rehabilitation studio, consulted on the design of the Diamond Pointe shoe, then studied it in comparison with three other popular brands.

"For me, it's simple physics," he says. "This one, the Diamond Pointe shoe, is better.

"It has better structural integrity, and provides for better alignment of the joints as they stack on top of one another. It's less likely to lead to injuries."

Forhan says the shoe's design leads to less degenerative mechanical wear on the contact surfaces of joints.

"That reduces the incidences

of the onset of arthritis," he says.

Diamond Pointe shoes are sold at several outlets in southern Ontario, including, in Toronto: Malabar Ltd. at 14 McCaul St.; Danceshoppe at 50 Sheppard Ave. W., Suite 200; and P.S.B. Dance Store, 91 Rylander Blvd., Unit 9B, Scarborough. Lynne Wilson, 416-921-3517, fits the shoes for Paper Things, a Yorkville boutique operated by the Volunteer Committee of the National Ballet of Canada.

The Diamond Pointe shoe is also available at Gabie's Boutique, 47 Main St. S., Newmarket; Sequins Plus, 377 Wilson Rd. S., Oshawa; Starburst Dancewear locations at 1175 Wilson St. E. in Ancaster and 4155 Fairview St. in Burlington; the boutique at the Ballet School of Woodbridge, Market Lane, 140 Woodbridge Ave., Woodbridge; and Elite Performance Wear, 1837 Lansdowne St. W., Peterborough. The suggested retail price is about \$80.

A complete list of places to purchase them is available at www.principalshoes.com

"A dancer who is well-conditioned and who has a well-fit shoe has fewer injuries and is more free to express and to move with artistic style," says Alleyne.