

Style Sense and Sensibility: Design Choices to Flatter Every Shape

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In the dance world it seems there's nothing teachers and choreographers like better than those lovely open-backed costumes. However, most people don't realize these designs require dancers to perform without the proper undergarments. At too many performances the audience sees a definite number of dancers trying to concentrate on footwork, hand movements and facial expressions while their breasts are not fully supported in their costumes. This is not only distracting, but also unfair to the dancers whose attributes are, however unintentional, being put out on display.

Health and fitness first

Aside from aesthetics and personal comfort, there are health issues to consider as well. When breasts are not properly supported, the Cooper's ligaments, a structure that keeps the breasts from sagging, are broken down.

Now imagine the wear and tear on these ligaments during a rigorous dance routine. For more developed dancers, the weight of the breasts when unsupported can cause back strain, severe headaches, and even a condition affecting the jaw muscles. These are just a few more reasons to make sure your dancers' costumes give them all the support they can.

Another point to remember is that all of the dancers in a group must be comfortable with the costumes. This goes for bust line as well as any other figure related issues. Bare midriffs may be very stylish, but do all of your dancers have perfectly toned abs to show off?

Excellent dancers come in lots of shapes and sizes, so it's best to mentally picture them in the costumes you are considering ordering. If nothing else, these students pay lots of money for the opportunity to dance and compete. They shouldn't be embarrassed by the selection of an inappropriate costume. Don't forget the negative self-images adolescent girls are prone to, and try to select costumes to flatter as many dancers as possible in each group.

Form fitting options

Obviously for younger dancers, who have not developed breasts, an open back does not cause any problems, but if your dancers are more mature, you have to make different decisions about costuming. Start by choosing a style with a modest back that can accommodate (read cover up) a good bra. Then work with your dancers to find dance bras that will provide support and give the costumes a good line without restricting

movement. To fake the look of bare skin, "fill in" open areas with sheer stretch fabrics in nude tones. Some are opaque or can be lined: Dancers appear to have lots of skin showing, but can still wear supportive bras underneath.

Some Dance costumes are cut to work with certain specialty bras to give even more options, like A-Line halters that can be worn with a halter bra to compensate for this design's loose cut. For most dancers, styles that fit tightly around the chest are the best choice.

For open-backed costumes, dancers have a few limited alternatives, such as form-fitting costumes, built-in shelf bras, stick-on bras, pads or cups sewn into the costume or even (ouch!) duct tape; most, however, only work well for those who wear A or B cup bras. Less successful options include strapless bras in the corset style often worn by brides. These contraptions are uncomfortable to stand in, let alone dance; they also shape the body unnaturally and are usually so bulky they are visible under fitted costumes. A few dancers do wear sport bras under backless costumes - a look that is very unattractive. Despite the fashion of showing off underwear as outerwear, it's still not appropriate for performance costumes.

Yes it's time-consuming to consider each dancer's body individually when making costume choices, but by paying attention to this important issue, you make it possible for dancers of all shapes and sizes to perform with confidence and pride - the necessary elements for any winning performance.

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