

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Shall we dance?

Dance is a part of life going back to ancient times. Whether to express pure pleasure, to participate in a ceremony, or to take part in a religious festival, the desire to move to sound and rhythm is basic in all of us.

A Ballet Dancer

The Havemeyer Galleries,

19th-Century European Paintings and Sculpture, 2nd floor

The young dancer portrayed here is Marie van Goethem, a ballet student at the Paris Opéra in France. Edgar Degas, who created this sculpture (as well as some of the paintings and smaller sculptures nearby), enjoyed the ballet and spent many hours sketching the dancers as they rehearsed their parts, adjusted their costumes, and relaxed backstage at the theater. Marie and her sisters studied dance—as many young girls did—starting at the age of six. She caught Degas's eye, and he sketched her many times. In this sculpture, her feet are shown in the fourth position of classic ballet. Her head is tilted back, and her hands are clasped behind her body. This sculpture, originally made of wax, was later cast in bronze. In order to look more realistic, the metal of the bodice and the slippers were colored and a cotton skirt and satin hair-ribbon were added.

Can you stand in this position?

How would you want an artist to portray you in a sculpture?

What do you think Marie is thinking?

Edgar Degas (French, 1834–1917), *The Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer*, cast by A. A. Hébrard in 1921 after a sculpture of about 1880; France (Paris); bronze, partially tinted, with cotton skirt and satin hair-ribbon on a wooden base; 41¼ in. high; H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929 (29.100.370)



A Dancing Maenad

The Mary and Michael Jaharis Gallery
Greek and Roman Art, 1st floor

The ancient Greeks and Romans worshipped many gods—both male and female—who had distinct personalities and domains. Dionysos [die-o-NY-sus] was the god of wine and theater. Among his followers were a group of women called maenads [MEE-nads]. Together they roamed the land, singing and dancing, often lost in a trance. Sometimes they wore animal skins, but this maenad is wearing thin and flowing clothing. She wears an ivy wreath and earrings. She has sandals on her feet, and she holds a thyrsos [THUR-sus] (a stalk of a plant called fennel, topped with ivy leaves and berries) in her right hand. Her body sways to music; she lifts her left heel, and with bowed head dances as though lost in her own world.

**This sculpture was once painted;
how can you tell?**

(Clue: how would this maenad have kept her sandals on her feet?)

How has the sculptor shown us that the maenad is moving?

Do you think her movements are big and fast or small and slow?

What musical instrument might accompany her dance?



Relief with a dancing maenad, Roman, Augustan period, ca. 27 B.C.–A.D.14; copy of a Greek relief of ca. 425–400 B.C., attributed to Kallimachos; marble, 56 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. high; Fletcher Fund, 1935 (35.11.3)

Opposite: Luc-Olivier Merson, designer (French, 1846–1920), Eugène Stanislaus Oudinot, maker (French, 1827–1889), *La danse des fiançailles (The Engagement Ball)* (three-light window for the Bell apartment, New York City), 1885, France (Passy); stained glass, 8 ft. 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. high; Bequest of Adelaide Mott Bell, 1901 (06.292a–c)



Dancers at a Ball

The Iris and Gerald B. Cantor Galleries,
European Sculpture and Decorative Art, 1st floor

About a hundred years ago, the Bell Family lived in the Knickerbocker on Fifth Avenue at Twenty-eighth Street, the first apartment building to be built in New York City. To fill a bay window in their apartment, the head of the family, Isaac Bell, had these stained-glass panels made in France. The imaginary scene shows the celebration of a betrothal, a contract made in medieval and Renaissance times (about 1200s to 1500s) by noble families for the future marriage of their children. Dressed in clothes of the period, the young couple lead their friends in a *pavane*, a slow, courtly dance accompanied by musical instruments. They proceed down the flower-strewn steps to where their family and guests will receive them and the celebration begins.

The setting appears to be a villa, or country house, outside the walled city of Florence, Italy, which is seen in the background. Parts of the window are made up of many pieces of brightly colored glass, which form the costumes, instruments, and much of the architectural setting. However, the details in the faces and some of the building decorations are painted on. Can you see the difference?

How has the designer made the young couple the most important part of the window?

What other types of buildings would have stained-glass windows? Have you seen any before? What are the three signs that Venus, the Roman goddess of love, is part of this scene? (Look for a flower on the steps, a statue in the garden, and a woman's head in a circle up above.)

Fun fact: The symbol of Florence is the lily. Can you find it on one of the instruments?



CREATE YOUR OWN STORY!

In the space below write a short story. You might choose to begin by completing these sentences:

Once upon a time there was a young girl and boy. Their names were . . . and . . .

They went to a costume party to celebrate the . . .

The party was held at . . .

She wore . . .

He wore . . .

They danced to the sound of . . .

There were lots of good things to eat. She liked the . . . He liked the . . .

When the clock struck midnight, they . . .

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