In classical dance, jumping movements play a very special role. Allegro is the summit of male dance and an integral part of female dance. A successful mastery of jumping movements in class is essential for their effortless execution on stage, which helps to create a memorable and multi-faceted artistic portrayal. The specific nature of modern art in the new millennium lies in the broadening of choreographic language and transformations in the aesthetics of executing jumping movements.

There can be no dance without jumps. Jumps adorn most female variations. Not a single male dancer can do without them. All forms of classical dance, whether it be pas de deux, pas de trios, pas de cinq or grand pas and pas d’action end with a coda where jump combinations are necessary and validated by time and tradition. The coda reveals and definitively establishes further artistic details of of individual characters and entire groups of the corps de ballet (Swan Lake Act II, Giselle Act II, Paquita Grand pas).

Ever since the thirties of the XIX century, jumps have been actively used by ballet masters in both male and in female dance, setting aside their level of difficulty. There is particular diversity in the combinations of well-known Allegro elements in variations. However, the set of jumps in classical dance is concrete and clearly defined.

Indeed, the variation is the height of the artist’s performance mastery, and it always includes jump movements. Agrippina Vaganova asserted that the female variation based on Allegro demonstrated the pinnacle of a ballerina’s technical mastery. But it is not necessary to focus excessively on the desire to surprise an audience with technical skill. Jump execution should not become an aim in itself. The goal is not merely to jump higher and further (it is possible to see such jumps in many sports), but to portray the character or emotional state of one’s hero or heroine with the utmost musicality and expressiveness. In the tradition of the Russian school of classical dance, “the soul-filled flight” is inherent not only to ballerinas but to male dancers. In this way, the jump becomes a strong and laconic artistic tool.

Let’s examine the use of different groups of jumping movements in depicting the nature or emotional state of characters in ballets of the classical repertoire. Small movements and batteries define the character as young, agile, restless and playful. Recall the first appearance of Giselle, which is based on elementary jumps pas balonné, pas chassé, and pas balloté. These small easy movements emphasize an image of a young and carefree girl.

The second variation is from the pas de trois (Grand pas “Paquita”) and is impressive in its virtuosic intricacy of dance. This dance consists of various delicately interwoven small jumps and batteries entrechat quatre, pas de chat, pas brisé dessus dessous, entrechat royal. These movements, adorning and enlivening the variation, facilitate the portrayal of a graceful and coquetting young woman.

Sometimes a choreographer uses small jumps and batteries to demonstrate the comicality of a character. An example is the luckless Alain from the ballet La Fille mal gardée. The absurd and somewhat silly nature of this character is revealed through deliberate uncoordinated classical movements, with pas-entrechat six serving as a recurrent leitmotif. These periodically appearing jumps characterize the young man as a harmless, ingenuous fool.

We see another illuminating example in a character from The Sleeping Beauty. The enchanted prince appears in the form of a fantastical Blue Bird, whose flight is weightless, aerial and whimsical. It all concludes with a joyful coda, the hero dexterously executing pas brisé and spraying bright sparks of batteries onto the stage. This fluid and joyful dance affirms the fairytale’s happy ending.

The great soaring Allegro combinations, which circle around the full space of the stage or cut across it with diagonals, also serve to define a protagonist’s character and feelings (emotional experiences). These jumps contain within a great range of emotions, from positive to sharply negative. We will discuss some of the positive emotions and characterizations.

In Aurora’s first appearance, she is “light and active, cheerful and charming.” This is how many generations of audiences have seen the princess. This impression is created through quick, scintillating pas de chat and flying grand pas de chat. Their function here is to show the triumph of youth and happiness, delight, the ecstasy of life and dance.

Whether it is the regal and sweeping sissonne fondu of the Lilac Fairy in the prologue to The Sleeping Beauty or the magnificent and strong grand cabriole and grand pas de chat in Ganzatti’s variation from the third act of La Bayadere, these jumps work to develop characters that are specific and cannot compare with any others. In the first case the result is a good and powerful fairy, in the second – a proud, arrogant beauty.

The variation of Basil from the Don Quixote consists entirely of the most complicated jumping pas. Double grand cabriole, sissonne simple en tournant, pas jeté en l’air en tournant into arabesque in a circle – characterize him as strong, courageous, deft, and in the
context of the plot as the jovial and resilient joker. We base our conclusions about the attributes of various characters entirely on such examples of jumping movements, used by choreographers to create these characterizations.

This example shows how jump combinations allow a colorful, memorable characterization to take shape from the first moment of a character’s entrance onto the stage. And if the character is a villain, the big jump combinations can reveal hidden danger, and authoritative strength that tolerates no objection, and ruthless power...

For example, the variation of Myrtha, the Queen of the Wilis, is saturated with various jumps: cabriole en effacée, grand jeté, jeté en tournant, jeté entrelacé. These movements create an incorporeal and airy image. At the same time, despite the visual lightness of the character, the audience feels the weight of her inexorable imperiousness. It manifests even more distinctly in the coda, which concludes with saut de basque in a circle. Myrtha soars in her jumps like a menacing bird, affirming her might and power.

Sometimes it is possible to create a portrayal that is expressive and memorable even using minimal technical means. But this requires the performer to have complete mastery of transformation as an actor. Recall Rothbart’s whirlwind entrance in Swan Lake. In order to create an image of a powerful wizard, confident in the boundlessness of his evil force, the ballet master uses grand jeté, jeté entrelacé, grand pas de chat, which are supplemented with sweeping, flying steps (nearly a chain of jeté).

Let’s note also that the same jump executed to different music can portray completely opposite emotional states and temperaments. For example, the grand cabriole double is present in the variations of both Solor (La Bayadere Grand pas) and Young man (Chopiniana), but the goals of the ballet masters were quite different. In the first case, Solor is someone who easily overcomes difficulties. He is young and strong and demonstrates an entire cascade of difficult jumps. The youth from Chopiniana is, on the contrary, contemplative and reserved by nature, lost in his dreams. Here, grand cabriole double serves to reveal the daring of this starry-eyed romantic.

Let’s consider one more example of the use of the same jump with differing artistic aims. In the aforementioned Blue Bird coda, an entire diagonal pas brisé is performed. In that scene the jumps are perceived as the graceful flight of a fantastical bird, light and whimsical in its movement. Meanwhile, the exact same flying-headlong diagonal brisé is involved in the characterization of Albert (Giselle). As it is performed, the hero experiences a great range of emotions, from the tragic realization of the irreversibility of his transgression, to despair and grief, to the ecstasy of dance.

The given examples demonstrate the great role of Allegro in creating the choreographic image. Combinations of certain jumps help to define the specificity of a character, his emotions, as well as the nature of the psychological components of the performance as a whole and of the flying jumps in particular.