



THE GREAT GATSBY

STUDENT MATINEE PACKET

ABOUT BALLET ARKANSAS



Ballet Arkansas traces its origins to the Little Rock Civic Ballet, founded in 1966 by Lorraine and Donald C. Cranford. Incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 1978, the organization has, over the course of its 47-year history, touched the lives of more than half a million Arkansans through its performances, education programs, and community engagement initiatives. Today, Ballet Arkansas stands as the only professional ballet company in Little Rock and is widely recognized as the state's premier ballet organization—serving audiences across every region of the Natural State.

Under the visionary leadership of Michael and Catherine Fothergill, Ballet Arkansas has grown into one of the 75 largest ballet companies in the United States, according to the Dance Data Project. The company of 17 world-class dancers presents an annual season of vibrant programming that spans classical masterpieces, landmark works of American dance, and world premieres by some of the field's most innovative choreographers. With a performance and broadcast reach extending to all 50 states and over 60 countries worldwide, Ballet Arkansas engages nearly 50,000 audience members each year and serves as a powerful cultural ambassador for the state of Arkansas.

Ballet Arkansas is proud to serve as the official dance presenter of the Robinson Center, Little Rock's most prestigious performing arts venue, and to hold the distinguished designation of Arts Partner Company in Residence at the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts. These partnerships amplify the company's capacity to deliver high-caliber, multidisciplinary programming to diverse audiences while deepening its integration within the state's broader cultural ecosystem.

A recognized statewide leader in dance education, Ballet Arkansas is home to a thriving School for Dance that provides exceptional instruction to hundreds of students from diverse backgrounds. Led by a distinguished faculty, the School is complemented by the organization's robust educational outreach initiatives, which engage more than 10,000 K–12 students annually. In addition, over 300 young dancers participate each year in Ballet Arkansas's celebrated Community Cast productions, cultivating meaningful access to the performing arts and nurturing the next generation of artists and arts patrons across Arkansas.

THE LIFE OF A PROFESSIONAL BALLET DANCER



Ballet Arkansas's company of 17 professional dancers are full-time, salaried employees who receive employment benefits and work a standard Monday–Friday schedule. Many are graduates of the nation's most prestigious university dance programs, while others have trained at some of America's finest ballet institutions.

Each day begins with a 90-minute ballet class to condition and prepare their bodies for the physical demands ahead. The remainder of the workday is dedicated to rehearsals, where—on average—it takes 25 hours of practice to learn just one hour of performance material. Once choreography is “staged,” dancers devote the rest of the rehearsal period to refining every detail for the audience's enjoyment. While they are artists, they are also professional athletes, balancing artistry with peak physical performance.

In addition to mastering thousands of intricate dance steps and precise musical phrasing, company members must memorize hundreds of light cues, navigate shifting formations, and bring each character to life with theatrical nuance. Producing any Ballet Arkansas production requires hundreds of hours of meticulous rehearsal.

In fact, a 2020 ranking by InsuranceProviders.com and the U.S. Department of Labor identified dance as the most physically demanding job in the United States. The intensity of the profession often leads dancers to retire from performing in their mid-thirties, transitioning to other roles within the arts.



AUTHOR

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald (September 24, 1896 – December 21, 1940) was an American novelist, short story writer, and one of the most celebrated authors of the Jazz Age. His 1925 novel, *The Great Gatsby*, is widely regarded as one of the greatest works of American literature, exploring themes of ambition, love, wealth, and the pursuit of the American Dream during the Roaring Twenties. Through its unforgettable characters and richly imagined world, the novel has inspired countless adaptations for stage and screen. Ballet Arkansas's production of *The Great Gatsby* draws inspiration from Fitzgerald's iconic novel, transforming its timeless story into a compelling work of dance that captures the glamour, romance, and tragedy of an extraordinary era.



THE STORY

The glittering world of the Roaring Twenties comes alive as Nick Carraway arrives on Long Island, where wealth, ambition, and extravagance define society's elite. Settling into a modest home beside the opulent mansion of the mysterious Jay Gatsby, Nick is drawn into a world of lavish parties, glittering champagne, and endless celebration. Across the bay lives his cousin, Daisy Buchanan, and her wealthy but unfaithful husband, Tom, whose marriage is strained by secrets and betrayal.

As Gatsby's legendary soirées captivate guests from across New York, their true purpose slowly comes to light: Gatsby longs to reunite with Daisy, the woman he has loved since before the Great War. Hoping to rekindle their lost romance, Gatsby enlists Nick's help in arranging an unexpected reunion. As old feelings resurface and dreams once thought impossible seem within reach, the dazzling façade of wealth and glamour begins to conceal the heartbreak, longing, and illusion that lie beneath.



CAST OF CHARACTERS

Ballet Arkansas's professional artists are cast in roles such as party guests, socialites, flappers, jazz dancers, servants, chauffeurs, entertainers, and members of Gatsby's extravagant soirées, bringing the vibrant energy of the Jazz Age to life. They also portray the production's principal characters, including Jay Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan, Nick Carraway, Tom Buchanan, Jordan Baker, Myrtle Wilson, George Wilson. Together, they create a sweeping theatrical experience that captures the glamour, excitement, romance, and tragedy of F. Scott Fitzgerald's enduring masterpiece.

QUESTIONS

TO ASK YOURSELF

1. What are the overarching themes of *The Great Gatsby*?
2. Was the story of *The Great Gatsby* clearly portrayed through the dancers' movements and performances?
3. How did the performers use movement, expression, and partnering to bring their characters to life?
4. How did the choreography tell the story without spoken words?
5. Which scene was your favorite and why? Describe what happened and what made it memorable.
6. What impact did the costumes, scenery, lighting, and special effects have on your experience as an audience member?
7. How did the lavish parties, elegant mansions, and Jazz Age atmosphere come to life on stage?
8. How might dancers, choreographers, costume designers, scenic designers, and stage technicians use principles of STEM to create a successful ballet production?
9. What words or emotions would you use to describe the choreography throughout the ballet?
10. Describe the patterns, symmetry, and geometric shapes you noticed in the dancers' formations.
11. Which character was your favorite (Jay Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan, Nick Carraway, Jordan Baker, Tom Buchanan, Myrtle Wilson, or George Wilson)? Explain why.
12. How did the music enhance the story? Which musical moment stood out to you most?
13. How did the music, movement, and staging work together to capture the glamour, excitement, and emotion of the Roaring Twenties?
14. Describe the sights and sounds of attending a live ballet performance in a theater.
15. What examples of theater technology (lighting, scenery, stage effects, costumes, props, projections, or sound) did you observe during the performance?

ETIQUETTE 101

RULES FOR THE THEATER



Attending a ballet performance is much like going to the movies—only the magic is live. The lights will dim before the performance begins, and the theater will remain dark until the end, except during intermission. Audience members are expected to sit quietly while the dancers perform, with applause warmly welcomed at the conclusion of each scene. However, loud expressions such as shouting, whistling, or screaming are discouraged, as they can distract both performers and fellow audience members.

Guests are encouraged to dress comfortably, keeping in mind that food, beverages, and chewing gum are not permitted inside the auditorium. Restroom visits are allowed as needed, but should be done quietly and with minimal disruption. Because all performance material is protected by copyright, photography and video recording are strictly prohibited.

Rules of the Theater

- Avoid Distractions – Silence or turn off your phone and give the performers your full attention.
- Open Your Mind – Immerse yourself in the sights and sounds of the performance, and enjoy forming your own interpretations.
- Be a Courteous Participant – Follow audience guidelines at all times to ensure an enjoyable experience for everyone.
- Enjoy the Show!



SHARE THE GLAMOUR OF THE JAZZ AGE WITH YOUR STUDENTS!

Friday October 23, 2026 • 10:30 a.m.

Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts, Little Rock

One of the most enduring stories of the twentieth century, *The Great Gatsby* is transformed into a sweeping ballet that captures the elegance, excess, and heartbreak of the Jazz Age. Ballet Arkansas's original production combines expressive choreography, richly atmospheric music, lavish costumes, and striking theatrical design to bring Fitzgerald's timeless novel to life. Through dance, audiences are immersed in a world where love, ambition, and the pursuit of the American Dream collide.

Tickets: \$5 Student & \$10 Educator