

This Woman Knows the Secret to Long-Lasting Makeup

The makeup artist for the American Ballet Theatre, home to principal dancers Misty Copeland and Herman Cornejo, uses some of the best makeup tricks in the game to create her dancers' high-performance looks. Learn how you can apply her onstage artistry to your daily makeup regimen for ballerina-worthy vibes that last all day long.

By Chanel Parks



American Ballet Theatre principal dancer, Misty Copeland, during the 2015 performance of “Giselle.” Photograph courtesy of Hiroyuki Ito/Getty Images

Ballet dancers are extraordinarily athletic—somehow, they can stand on their toes, perfectly pirouette, and execute seamless jumps, all while wearing extravagant costumes and heavy makeup (and under the unforgiving heat of stage lights, no less). And of course, as with any high-intensity activity, ballerinas sweat. A lot. And yet, their makeup is always immaculate, from the opening act to the final reverie. If these athletes can keep their makeup on during these extreme conditions, it should not be hard for us everyday folk to keep foundations and eyeliner intact.



American Ballet Theatre dancers at a rehearsal of “*The Nutcracker*.” Photograph courtesy of The Washington Post/Getty Images

Rena Most, the wig and makeup supervisor for American Ballet Theatre in New York City, is the keeper of all of the company's cosmetic secrets—from what products the ballerinas use to the techniques they employ to keep their painted faces in good shape. And when we say “painted,” we mean it. “In the ballet, we actually use this really—for lack of a better term—old-school pancake makeup,” Most says. “It’s literally called Pan-Cake. It’s a pure pigment in a pod. You activate it with water, and it paints on really strong.”

While that may sound uncomfortable, at least for everyday use, ballet dancers use the antiquated makeup because it’s actually surprisingly easy to manage. “It really gives strong coverage and goes on really fast,” she says. “If they’re sweating, they can still just reapply it because it is water-based, so the sweat is actually just reactivating it, in a sense.”



Some brands have capitalized on the “pancake” formula. Pan-Cake Wet Foundation, \$34, [makeupforever.com](https://www.makeupforever.com).

Another reason why they love the formula? “The Pan-Cake is also very much kept in the ballet world, especially at ABT, because that’s how the women paint their pointe shoes,” Most says. “If they need a skin tone or a matte, they use the Pan-Cake to adjust it to their skin color,” she adds. Another fun ballet tip!

Most is technically the makeup artist at hand for the dancers (including ABT principal dancer Misty Copeland), but the ballerinas often apply stage makeup themselves—with the exception of strong character looks, like the one for past and current productions of *The Firebird*.



An April 2016 performance of “*The Sleeping Beauty*” ballet at the Teatro Alfieri in Italy.
Photograph courtesy of Pacific Press/Getty Images

“For the most part, almost all of the women do their own makeup unless it’s a special paint,” Most explains. “If it’s just regular stage makeup, they’re applying it themselves and they use whatever they wish.” She notes that while Pan-Cake makeup is definitely a staple, the makeup artists have introduced modern cosmetics to their dancers, and both women and men tend to use MAC Cosmetics or Make Up For Ever—both brands that have full-coverage products, along with a wide range of neutral shades and bright colors that work well with a variety of skin tones.



All The Right Angles Contour Palette, \$40, maccosmetics.com.

Now that you know a little bit about the history behind ballet dancers’ makeup looks (they’ve been practicing the same methods for about 40 years!), Most explains how stage makeup techniques can apply to your everyday routine.

Tip No.1: For Smooth Application, Make Sure You Exfoliate

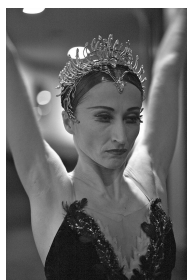
Most says that ballet dancers tend to be makeup-free when they aren't on stage, which makes sense if you consider that they'd probably like a break from the layers upon layers of product they wear during work hours. But it's also a way to let skin breathe between applications, so that skin has a chance to recover.

"We always recommend first and foremost, exfoliating and then moisturizing," she says. "A lot of people actually don't realize the importance of exfoliating. Even if you're just washing your face. I recommend doing it two to three times a week, depending on your skin type. If you have very dry skin, you could probably do it three times a week, and if you're on the oilier side, twice a week."



Sugar Face Polish, \$62, [fresh.com](https://www.fresh.com).

Ballerinas most often have glowing skin due to regular facials and the simple fact that they embrace their skin's natural oils. "As much as everybody tries not to have oily skin," says Most, "the oils in your skin actually make you stay younger- and fresher-looking." She also recommends applying natural butters and oils like cocoa butter at night, so that in the morning, your face is a smooth canvas for foundation.



The intricate makeup look from the English National Ballet's 60th anniversary performance of "Swan Lake." Photograph courtesy Robert Griffin/Getty Images

Tip No. 2: Apply Your Makeup in Order

The dancers have a strict routine in which they apply their cream-based makeup, and it includes adding other layers of powder. Of course, you're not going to sit in front of your mirror every morning slathering products on top of more products, but you could benefit from paying attention to the order in which you apply them.

"Makeup is not a set science, there is no one way to apply it," Most says. "At the same time, there are certain things that tend to work better for most people. If the eyes are going to be very heavy, and if you're using a lot of powder, I actually start there," she says—mostly because powders often fall onto cheeks. That way, you can wipe off the powder without ruining the base makeup.

When eye makeup is minimal, put on your foundation and concealer. "I personally do a foundation and then concealer, then blend the two. However, if there's something that really needs a lot of attention—like a big scar—I will do very detailed application of a concealer first," Most notes. For more coverage, she suggests this order: concealer, foundation, concealer—just to smooth out the rough edges.



Smoothing Translucent Setting Powder, \$16, [sephora.com](https://www.sephora.com).

Tip No. 3: Always, Always Set Your Makeup

"If you don't set makeup, the second you touch your face you're going to smudge it," Most says. Translucent powder will become your best friend, especially if you tend to sweat more.

"Translucent powder is most commonly used to take away shiny noses, but it truly does set anything—it's used a lot in theater."

Tip No. 4: Utilize the One Eyeliner Trick Ballerinas Swear By

Since a dancer's face has to be dramatic (so even those seated in the back of the theater can read the emotions on their faces), they often overdraw their lines. The one thing they do that's

applicable to everyday wear is a small, simple adjustment to their eyeliner—which opens up the eyes, making them look more awake and bigger.



A dancer applying her own eyeliner backstage at the London Coliseum. Photograph courtesy of Robin Griffin/Getty Images

“If you put eyeliner right under your eyelash line on your bottom lid, that’s going to make your eyes bigger,” Most says. “We never put eyeliner right against the eye on stage because it closes it, and that would translate to the same on the street.”

Now all we need to do is work on our dance moves.