

## Five great Russian ballerinas

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### **Anna Pavlova**(1881-1931, St Petersburg Ballet)

The begetter of the Russian ballerina legend. A fine-limbed, bewitchingly ethereal individualist who found neither the Imperial Ballet nor Diaghilev's breakaway Ballets Russes to her liking.

She toured the world freelance, casting a spell, inspiring Ninette de Valois with "her abandon, her frailty, her ecstasy" and "injecting" Frederick Ashton "with her poison".

### **Galina Ulanova**(1910-1998, Kirov and Bolshoi)

The ultimate ballerina's ballerina, whose intense, poetic performances established her as a super-artist long before she was first seen in the West in 1956.

Short and relatively dumpy off stage, Ulanova deceived the eyes with the softness and purity of her movement, and brought a heartbreaking simplicity to her characters. Best known for Giselle and Juliet.

### **Maya Plisetskaya**(b 1925, Bolshoi)

Tall and thrillingly brilliant, the red-headed Plisetskaya was at first kept in Ulanova's shadow but emerged defiantly to make a global reputation alongside her turbulent Soviet career.

Best known for Carmen and Don Quixote, Plisetskaya was almost Ulanova's opposite – sexy, flamboyant and outspoken.

Thanks to a wonderful body, she was still performing at nearly 70.

### **Natalia Makarova**(b 1940, Kirov)

Tiny, exquisite, bird-boned, with an extreme suppleness and control in very slow music which stamped another-worldly new look on classical ballets.

The only leading ballerina to defect (in 1970), she became an international star, unleashing her emotional temperament and exotic glamour on modern ballets and the theatre.

**Altynai Asylmuratova** (b 1961, Kirov)

An exceptionally musical dark-eyed eastern beauty who fused both the exquisite and the brilliant bloodlines of Russian ballet in her dancing. She had not only perfect physical gifts but also an expressive artistry that ranged from greatest poetry to irresistible, sexy charm.

Now head of the Kirov's ballet school, the Vaganova Academy.

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