

“The Pink Slipper”

By Emma Frieze

Pink leather, worn and scuffed, takes the shape of a collapsed foot. The shoe is smashed on top of clothes in a full duffel bag, carelessly placed and perhaps no nicer in appearance than a worn, old rag. A wide elastic band connects the shoe’s caved-in sides. Tiny pink stitches keep the elastic taut although the elastic resembles an overstretched rubber band.

The shoe is only a few months old, but ballet slippers are worn down quickly when they are frequently beaten and scraped against a floor made of black sheet vinyl. The scars from this beating are most apparent on the shoe’s underside, where scratched leather has peeled to reveal an asphalt gray sublayer. The center of the shoe’s bottom is least exposed to the harsh floor and retains its blush shade. However, it is wrinkled with horizontal creases created by an arching foot. Near these stretch marks, pink seams meet perpendicularly near the heel.

Gray split soles, tarnished black, interrupt the pink. The front sole, which provides cushion to the ball of a foot, is shaped like a squished-in circle. Meanwhile, the back sole, designed for a dancer’s heel, is shaped like a teardrop.

The inside of the shoe is moist from sweat that never dried. A foam insert barely clings to the white fabric that lines the inside. The shoe’s drawstrings are knotted tightly to force a foot to stay locked-in. There is a thin spot where a big toe has strained to break from its entrapment.

The shoe was expensive, but it is replaceable. With enough wear, it may be perceived as worthless, with frayed strings and torn leather. In a few more months, it will rest from its toil in a closet’s back corner until it is given or thrown away, valuable only in terms of nostalgia.

In general, ballet is a tortured expression, effort controlled to look effortless. The illusion of effortlessness comes from *épaulement*, the graceful movement of neck, shoulders, and head. With this gentle flow, a dancer can mimic a swan drifting down a stream.

Épaulement is a distraction from the harsh realities happening beneath, where the legs are strained from hip to toe in intense athletic movement. A foot does not take a break in ballet; neither does a shoe. A slipper is constantly strained as it is slammed, slid, and struck against the floor. Thus, it has a difficult and short life.

However, there is beauty in vulnerability and in impermanence. There is beauty in challenge and in adversity. We cannot help it: we live to dance, and we dance to live. We change shoes as we change ourselves, continuously growing and developing as dancers and as people. We are artists, and we are athletes. No one ever said it was easy, or without pain or sacrifice. Despite it all, the grind is worth it ... so we get up, dust ourselves off, and put on our wonderfully worn shoes each day. We embrace it all, and we dance again.