

Tips for Stage Makeup

Please use this merely as a guide! If you have any other questions, feel free to ask!
This article is taken from Dance Magazine.

The Foundation

For a solid underpinning, follow these steps. Moisturize your face (use an oil-free moisturizer for acne-prone skin, a thicker one for dry skin) immediately after washing so that the makeup floats on the surface instead of settling into crevices. Then apply a base (MAC and Makeup Center versions are popular) over the entire face, neck, and upper-chest with a sponge or brush followed by translucent or neutral-tone powder to set the foundation. Make sure you blend the base without harsh lines. Next, sweep blush on your cheek apples and dust powder on the jawbone, temples, and high forehead to contour bone structure.

Highlights

From this clean canvas, you can now accentuate your features. Highlight directly below the eyebrow with a white shadow followed by a deep brown (or purple, grey, etc.) on the mid-lid and crease. Then add a lighter brown on the lid from the crease to the upper lash. Draw a thick black line (with pencil, gel, or liquid liner) along the lash line, following the natural shape of your eye and extend it just past the eye. Coat your eyelashes with mascara. Fill in brow hairs with brown or black brow powder, shaping as you go. Complete the picture with a plum-red lipstick and a neutral-tone lip liner.

Varying Shades

Although many dancers use some version of this routine, each may also have a unique regimen. For traditional contouring, brown streaks highlight the bones (cheekbones, jawbone, temples) so that the audiences in larger houses can discern features. This is also beneficial for performers with smaller, receding features.

However Valerie Madonia, a freelance dancer formerly with American Ballet Theatre, Joffrey Ballet, and Lemon Sponge Cake Contemporary Ballet, says, “When I was younger I contoured from my brow line down the bridge of my wide nose on each side to try to thin it. But as I have gotten older and gotten more feedback, I don’t think that the contours are really noticeable by anyone past the third row. The approach that I have embraced is rather than trying to change the way you look, accentuate what you already have.”

Eye Variations

Many young dancers opt for the dramatic effect of the extended sideways “V” that continues far past the outer eye corner. Gillian Murphy, a principal with ABT, dislikes that overzealous liner. Instead she focuses on the eyebrows “because they really frame the face.” The shape you draw with a pencil or eyebrow shadow can influence and support your portrayal of a character.

And for the Guys

For Uri Sands, formerly of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and now co-artistic director of TU Dance in Minneapolis, his approach has been gleaned from snippets (instead of reams) of advice and by observing the women around him. “As a man, I am not extravagant,” he says. “But even though it is minimal, makeup is essential preparation for performance. I learned my simple routine after Tracy Inman of Ailey took it upon himself to teach me. Other than that I just watch the ladies and sometimes borrow their products.” He uses powder for a smooth base, eyeliner pencil and mascara on his eyebrows.

The Power of Powder Past the Footlights

Murphy points out that in a huge theater like the Metropolitan Opera House, makeup can illuminate facial expressions that might otherwise be washed out by the lights and distance. Since the main purpose of performing is to deliver the artistry past the apron lights to the audience, the trick is to be wise yet bold with your makeup choices.