

**NEWS FROM
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Jerome Robbins

ST. INTAKES AND PRO





Gordon Parks photographs original *Fancy Free* cast members Muriel Bentley, Janet Reed, Harold Lang, John Kriza, and Jerome Robbins during a Times Square reunion in 1958. Photo: Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

Robbins and His Muse

by Julia L. Foulkes

When we speak of muses in the history of the arts, it's usually intended to shine light on women who have inspired men: Picasso and his mistresses; Balanchine and his four wives (plus others). Jerome Robbins does not fit into this pattern. There were certainly influential loves, men more often than women, and the relations between people was a fundamental theme in most of Robbins' dances. But Robbins did not often find inspiration for his creativity in *particular* relationships or *particular* loves.

Unless we consider New York his muse.

Robbins was born in Manhattan but his family moved to Weehawken, New Jersey, when he was two. As a young adult, he came back to Manhattan in 1940 and never left. He traveled the world, had homes on Long Island and in upstate New York, but Manhattan remained his home base. New York was not always the overt subject of his observations and analysis, though; most often, it was himself. In journals, diaries, on loose leaf paper, scrawled or typed, Robbins observed, described, reflected, and commented upon his inner state of mind, outer surroundings, and relations with others. All of that also captured New York.

Many times, however, the observation of the city was overt. Robbins detailed the first place he lived as an adult in New York, at the corner of 6th Avenue and 31st Street, complete with a sketch of the façade of the building, a layout of the small apartment, and the scrunched-up positions he might have to take in the bathtub. "But its [*sic*] home," he ended. Shortly thereafter, he had to visit a hospital clinic. He outlined the process for the ordering of patients in the waiting room but mostly observed others waiting with him, imagining their worry—"nowhere was there to be seen a smile." Two sketches reflected a resignation to their fate, "behind their dazed and blank eyes," to wait.

More internal—and negative—thoughts also incorporated the city. One particular nightmare Robbins wrote about featured a runaway subway careening through the streets and plunging into the East River. In his ballet *Age of Anxiety*, inspired by W.H. Auden's poem of the same name, the Flatiron building in the backdrop, designed by Oliver Smith, placed the protagonists' journey, fear, and anxiety in New York.

But it is the city-as-muse, rather than as background, that sparked Robbins' choreographic ideas. One passage he wrote from the early 1940s became my guide in curating the exhibition *Voice of My City: Jerome Robbins and New York*:

My city lies between two rivers – on a small island. My beautiful city is set on rock between two flowing paths of water that run to the sea. My city is tall and jagged – with gold + slated towers. My city is honeycombed with worm tunnels of roads. My city is cut + recut + slashed by hard car filled streets. My city chokes on its breath, and sparkles with its false lights – and sleeps restlessly at night. My city is a lone man walking at night down an empty street watching his shadow grow longer as he passes the last lamp post, seeing no comfort in the blank dark windows, and hearing his footsteps echo against the building + fade away –

He ends on a proclamation: "Have you heard the voice of my city – the poor voice the lost voice – the voice of people selling + swearing – cursing + vulgar, the shrill + the tough – the wail complaint + the defiance – have you heard the voice of my city fighting + hitting + hurt." (Jerome Robbins Personal Papers, b.25 f.6) The passage renders the contrasts of the city from beauty to ugliness and throbs with loneliness and pain – and possession. This wounded, contrary place is *his* city.

So, when working for Ballet Theatre and seeking a chance to choreograph, Robbins looked to New York. He based most of his dance ideas in the 1940s on a story rather than an abstract idea and sketched out narrative outlines, characters, and places. "New York Ballet," for instance, is set on a well-known city street or area, such as Times Square, and involved the interactions of cops, prostitutes, young lovers, and a shoeshine boy. A ballet on the history of New York takes the idea of a Living Newspaper – developed in the Federal Theatre Project in the late 1930s – putting headlines into theatrical action. "A story of four young people," on the other hand, depicts the difficulties that young artists in the city face – less about the city *per se* than the drive for creative expression. "Like a little town" tries out different scenes of misery by describing different people: a homeless man ruthlessly roused by a policeman; vacant souls on a subway; a blind man shuffling through the crowds of Times Square. Another idea, "I don't know if I'll be able to tell you this well," is a more atmospheric description of a fall day in the city. Even when away from the city on tour with Ballet Theatre, Robbins was thinking of New York. On his first trip to Mexico in 1942, he sketched an idea about a conversation with a Mexican man who says about New York: "I'd like to live there some day." "War Babies" was one of his most extensive ballet ideas that combined his attentiveness to city life and his interest in the striving of his generation. These were people born during the first world war and headed to serve in the second. He declared that "this cockeyed city is THEIRS."

These ideas would come to brilliant fruition in *Fancy Free* – and also in *West Side Story*, *N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz*, and *Glass Pieces*. The exhibition features these New York stories but also sketches, paintings, journal after journal, photographs and home movies – all as fodder for his choreographic work on Broadway and in ballet. There are also examples of how that work then seeped into the city itself. The documentary *Black Fiddler: Prejudice and the Negro*, for instance, narrates how *Fiddler on the Roof* had an unexpected resonance in the midst of the 1968 public school teachers' strike. A middle school production of the musical in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville neighborhood of Brooklyn further heightened tensions between Jews and African Americans. This documentary, shown on television in 1969, features interviews with teachers, parents, students, and community members about what it means for African American and Latinx children to play Jewish characters facing prejudice and exile, questions of identity and representation that continue to resonate.

Connecting stylized ballet and everyday life in the city is a Robbins' hallmark, indicative of the ways that the city served as a muse. Robbins' dances about New York are the fruitful intersection of his private subjective inner life and his ability to be an analytic, objective researcher. He went out to Central Park and shot movies of people reading on a bench, dancing on the lawn, playing a guitar, riding a bike around and around Bethesda Fountain. New York became the meeting ground between self and world. With New York as his muse, Robbins found his place in the artistic echelons of ballet and Broadway.

Julia Foulkes is a professor of history at The New School and the author of *A Place for Us: West Side Story and New York* (2016); *To the City: Urban Photographs of the New Deal* (2011); and *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey* (2002). She is currently researching the rise of New York as a capital of culture in the twentieth century

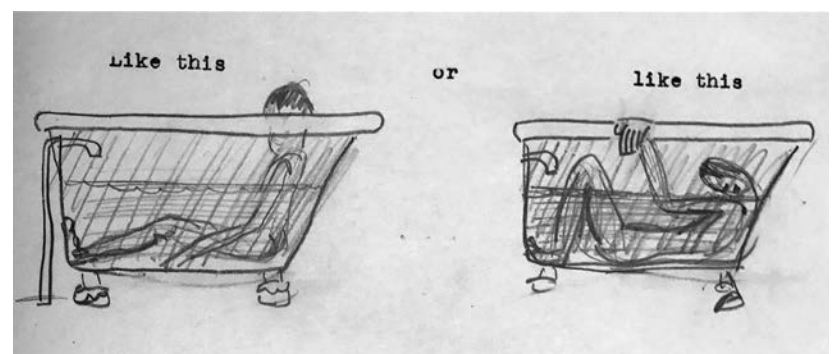


Illustration by Jerome Robbins in his 1939 diary. Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

On the Town on the Intrepid

In celebration of the Jerome Robbins Centennial, the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum explored his enduring legacy through a live performance and a discussion on August 9 at the Intrepid Museum located at Pier 86 in New York City.

Tony award-winning choreographer Joshua Bergasse presented *On the Town's* opening sequence on the *Intrepid's* flight deck, staged specifically for the setting. Following the performance, a discussion took place exploring Robbins' timeless artistry with Bergasse, along with Grover Dale, original cast member of *West Side Story* and co-director, with Robbins, of *Jerome Robbins' Broadway*; Adam Green, *Vogue's* theater critic and writer, currently working on a memoir about his father, playwright Adolph Green; Daniel Ulbricht, principal dancer with New York City Ballet; and moderator Amanda Vaill, author of *Somewhere: The Life of Jerome Robbins*.

Celebrating Jerome Robbins: From Street to Stage was supported by the Jerome Robbins Foundation. The program was also made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts, with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

The Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum is a non-profit, educational institution featuring the legendary aircraft carrier *Intrepid*, the space shuttle *Enterprise*, the world's fastest jets and a guided missile submarine. The Intrepid Museum fulfills its mission to honor our heroes, educate the public and inspire our youth by connecting them to history through hands-on exploration while bridging the future by inspiring innovation.



Panel discussion with Amanda Vaill, Daniel Ulbricht, Joshua Bergasse, Adam Green, and Grover Dale.



"Celebrating Jerome Robbins: From Street to Stage," onboard the U.S.S. Intrepid Museum, 2018. On the cover and above: Clyde Alves, Tony Yazbeck, and Manny Stark perform "New York, New York." Photos by Erika Kapin.

“Robbins’ Love Lessons” at NYPL by Hiie Saumaa

“Let’s do an event on Robbins’ writings—what do you think?” Evan Leslie, the artistic producer at New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, asked me at the Jerome Robbins Symposium in January 2018. My contact with Robbins’ materials began in the summer and fall of 2017, when I was selected as one of the Library’s Dance Fellows. Euphoric at the success of the symposium where I had given a talk on Robbins’ diaries, and excited about a new creative endeavor, I immediately said yes.

“Robbins’ Love Lessons,” a lyrical evening of words, music, images, and movement, took place in August 2018. The actors Amelia V. Anderson and Marc Castle, the dancer Harrison Coll, and Tanisha Jones, Kathleen Leary, Cassie Mey, and Arlene Yu, members of the Dance Division, read Robbins’ childhood poetry and excerpts from his diaries. Pianist Joanne Kang and cellist Madeline Fayette performed pieces by Frédéric Chopin and Johann Sebastian Bach, both of which Robbins used in his choreography. In projected images of his diaries, we saw Robbins’ handwriting and illustrations as a boy and as an adult. We heard the conviction in his tone as he announced having found his faith, the faith of dance. We saw excerpts from his home movies. The audience heard different shades of his voice as a writer; the voice of the 9-year-old boy composing poems, and of the famed choreographer, anguished but exalted, deep in the process of creating his next ballet. Words, visual images, and dance, from different parts of the archives came together. In one striking example, we heard an excerpt in which Robbins wrote about his time at the Long Island hamlet called Water Mill, followed by his home movie of his time there, followed by an excerpt from the ballet *Watermill*. We got a glimpse into the state of his mind as he was gazing at the sky, the beach, the shells, and the plants on the Long Island beach.

Evan and I were pleased: not only because the event was fully booked but also because many of the audience members were inspired—to live their lives more artfully, to pick up their writing again, to go back to painting, to listen to some more music. Robbins would have been pleased too, we hope.

The following is one of the pieces I presented at this event.

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Bridgehampton

by Hiie Saumaa

In one of my writing classes at New York University this past spring, we read a chapter from Philip Gerard’s *The Art of Creative Research: A Field Guide for Writers*. I gave my students an assignment: find three words, sentences, or paragraphs that inspire you in this reading and write about them in your notebooks, or what I call “wisdom books.” Reflect more broadly: What does inspiration mean to you? What does it feel like to be inspired? Do you see your research for your writing project for this course as a creative act? I like doing these kinds of writing exercises with my students. I too began reflecting in my “wisdom book.” The author encourages writers to travel to places to gather evidence and stories, and to recharge their emotional batteries.

After my students had shared their ideas, they turned to what was more urgently on their minds: the spring break the following week. “What are your plans, professor?” they asked. “I want to do some creative research. I am writing about the choreographer Jerome Robbins. I am planning to go to Bridgehampton in Long Island where he had a summer house. I want to breathe in the air there. After all, the word ‘inspiration’ comes from the Old French ‘inspiracion’ – ‘inhaling, breathing in.’ From Latin, ‘in’ + ‘spirare,’ to breathe in.” The etymology of this word tells us that inspiration is a physical phenomenon.

In the 1960s and 70s, Robbins rented several houses in the Hamptons, and in the 1970s he bought an unassuming cottage house in Bridgehampton. There, he relaxed, wrote, drew in his journals, and walked on the beach, collecting stones, shells, pieces of wood, and feathers. He visited a nearby hamlet called Water Mill and created a ballet by the same name, which premiered at the New York State Theater in February 1972. This ballet is one of Robbins’ most experimental and puzzling pieces.

I stepped off the train from New York City on an early Saturday morning in March. “What direction is the town?” I asked a stranger. “That way.” I started walking, slowly, my senses alive. The air was crisp and fresh. Rays of sun were bouncing off of my cheeks. My eyes moved not just vertically, up, up, like they do among the skyscrapers in New York, but horizontally, into width, tracing the

landscape and its earthy hues of soft brown and green. I looked at and touched the branches and barks of the trees. My mind felt spacious, like the land around me. My pace was calm and steady.

I met up with a friend in Bridgehampton and we set out to find Jerry’s house. The night before I had texted another friend, a principal dancer with New York City Ballet, and asked him where the house was, as he had been there before. He said, “Darling – if you are heading out that way the house is on Dune Road in Bridgehampton. I believe the number is 31, but I really only know it by sight. It’s the smallest, oldest house on the beach side of Dune Road. Cedar shingles and a Japanese fish flag flying. Hope you find it!”

There was no house by that description at that address. But the friend I was with said, “Wait a second, I think I know the house you’re talking about. My friend and I often walk on the beach and there’s one house that stands out from the rest. It’s small and humble. Come, let’s go.”

We parked the car in front of a house that matched the description. Suddenly a handsome man in his thirties appeared on the doorstep. “Oh, hello, I’m sorry to be on your property. You see I’m here on a spirit quest of sorts. Is this the house of Jerome Robbins?” I asked. A brief pause. “Yes. Do you want to see what it looks like from the inside?” he said. Yes!

My friend and I climbed up the stairs leading to the deck, where we saw a bronze sculpture of the three sailors from *Fancy Free*, Robbins’ ballet that brought him to limelight in 1944 and led to the musical *On the Town*. The bronze sailors were in their iconic pose: their arms over each other’s shoulders, their bodies relaxed, their mood carefree.

Inside, an abundance of light greeted us. So many windows! The colors of brown, tan, white, blue—the beach, the ocean, the sky—right there in the living room. *These views from the windows feel so familiar. They’re just like the drawings of the sky and the sand and the dunes that I’ve seen in his diaries!* I thought. I stepped further into the room. “Oh is this the desk behind which he would write? There’s a beautiful picture of him writing behind this desk. Can I touch it?” “Yes go ahead,” the young man smiled. “This desk and this lamp were his. The rest of the furniture is not.” “Oh look at these photos! Of *West Side Story*. Look, there’s a photo of my NYCB dancer friend! Many portraits of Jerry smiling. Jerry among his friends.” We walked around some more and chatted with the host, who turned out to be a ballet dancer as well. “Thank you so much for letting me see the house! This feels so special. Unexpected,” I said as we departed.

My friend and I took a long walk on the beach. Once again I had a sensation that I’d seen these dunes, plants, colors, and the light of the air before, in Jerry’s diaries, in his delicate watercolor drawings in soft pastel colors. The wind was strong, it was cold, my step in my winter boots was heavy in the sand, but none of that bothered me. The wind and the sound of the waves flushed through me, as if cleansing me. I felt free. Like Jerry, I picked up some stones—in different colors and patterns of yellows, browns, whites, pinks, and blacks. I put them in my pocket. “I’ll put them on my writing desk when I get back to New York,” I whispered.

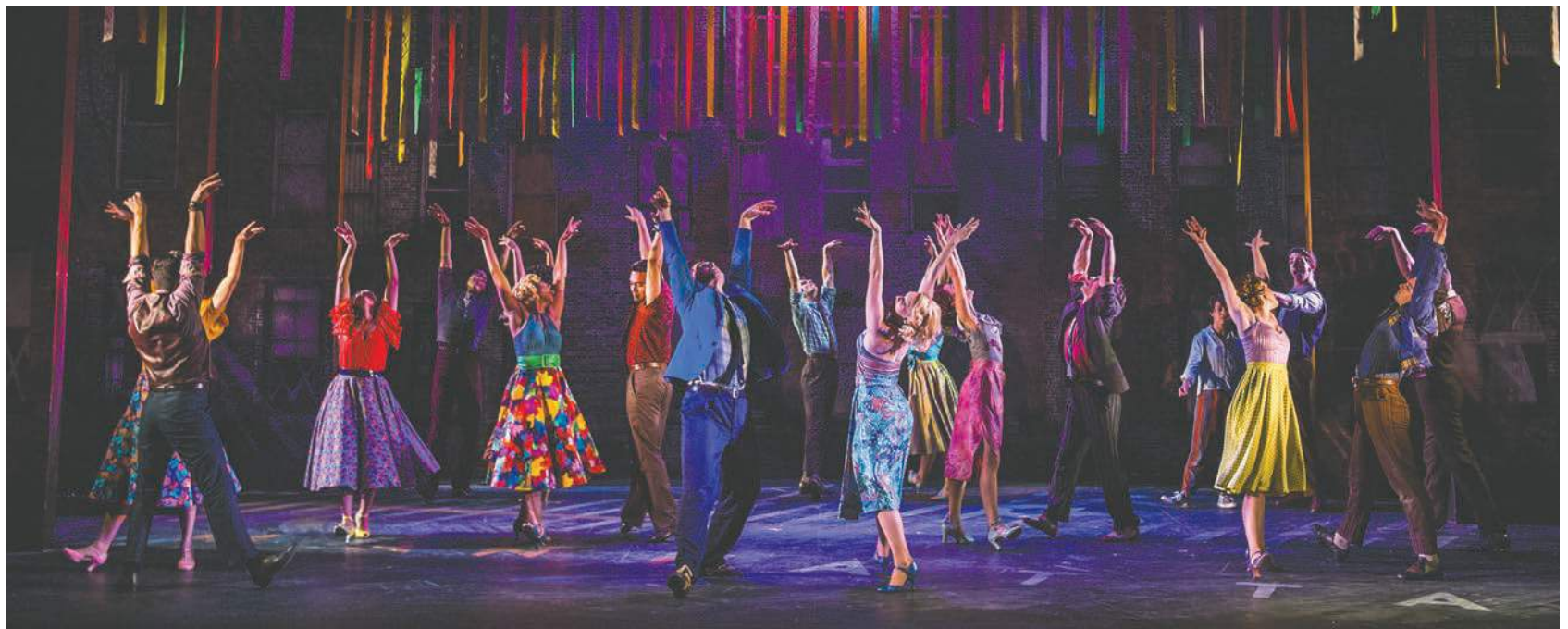
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“How was your spring break, professor?” my writing students asked when we resumed our classes. “I did some creative research. I went to Jerome Robbins’ house,” I said and gave a shortened version of my trip. As I was telling the story, I felt how special the trip had been. I’d felt like Jerry opened the door of his house and welcomed me in. I felt how strongly this experience connects me to the writing and research.

Looking at my students’ slightly surprised faces, I added, “In writing classes, we’re not just learning about the skills of locating resources online and of crafting sentences. We also learn how places, people, and texts open up our imagination. How they impact us. We learn how to look for inspiration when we’re starting to run out of steam. Creating something long form—a research essay, a novel, a musical composition, a ballet, a movie—is a process of returning to the work daily, weekly, monthly: it is a matter of connecting to it, again and again. And sometimes that inspiration might come to us when we move—when we leave our habitual environments and breathe in the air in new places.”

Hiie Saumaa, PhD, is a Fellow at Columbia’s Institute for Ideas and Imagination in Paris, where she is working on a book manuscript on the unpublished writings of Jerome Robbins. Saumaa was a Dance Fellow at the New York

Public Library for the Performing Arts in 2017. Next to courses in writing and the humanities, she teaches classes in somatics, mind-body movement arts, physical awareness, and mindful strength training.



Directed by Julianne Boyd, musical direction by Darren R. Cohen, with Jerome Robbins' original choreography reproduced by Robert La Fosse.

Barrington Stage Company
West Side Story 2018

Performances of *Fancy Free* at American Ballet Theatre

When the old Metropolitan Opera House curtain rose at Ballet Theatre's premiere of *Fancy Free* on April 18, 1944, both choreographer Jerome Robbins and composer Leonard Bernstein were almost unknown. By April 19th they had become the toast of the town. Their first collaboration, the ballet would go on to become one of the milestones of American dance.

Robbins and Bernstein, both only 25 years of age then, were determined to create a work that captured their own moment in time. Together, their artistry erupted and the rest is history. It has been one of the most frequently performed works in American Ballet Theatre's history. The ballet about three sailors on a 24-hour shore leave has been thrilling American Ballet Theatre's audiences for almost seventy-five years now.

American Ballet Theatre's 2018 Fall Season [October 17–28 at the David H. Koch Theater] will feature centennial tribute performances of Robbins' *Fancy Free* as well as *Other Dances*. Performances of *Fancy Free*, which will also

commemorate the centennial of composer Leonard Bernstein, begin Thursday evening, October 18, 2018. The ballet features scenery by Oliver Smith, costumes by Kermit Love, and lighting by Jennifer Tipton, after Nananne Porcher. *Fancy Free* is staged for ABT by Jean-Pierre Frohlich.

Other Dances returns to the repertory on Saturday evening, October 20, 2018. Set to a waltz and four mazurkas by Frédéric Chopin, *Other Dances* features costumes by Santo Loquasto, and original lighting by Nananne Porcher. The plotless, classical character pas de deux was created by Robbins for a Gala evening for the Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center at the Metropolitan Opera House on May 9, 1976, and was performed by Natalia Makarova and Mikhail Baryshnikov. Staged for American Ballet Theatre by Isabelle Guérin, *Other Dances* will receive three performances during the season.

For more information, please visit ABT's website at www.abt.org.



Jerome Robbins, John Kriza, Harold Lang, Janet Reed, and Muriel Bentley, 1944. Photo by Maurice Seymour. Photos on this page courtesy of American Ballet Theatre.



Danilo Radojevic, Robert La Fosse, and Ronald Perry, 1981. Photo by MIRA.



Karena Brock, Vane Vest, and Terry Orr, 1970. Photo by Arks Smith.



Ethan Stiefel and Julie Kent, 2011. Photo by MIRA.

In celebration of Leonard Bernstein's and Jerome Robbins' centennial, The Glimmerglass Festival, in Cooperstown, New York, presented *West Side Story* during July and August, 2018. The production featured direction by The Glimmerglass Festival's Artistic and General Director Francesca Zambello, the original Jerome Robbins choreography (reproduced by Julio Monge), and music conducting by David Charles Abell, student of Leonard Bernstein. This staging is a co-production with Houston Grand Opera and the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

The Glimmerglass Festival *West Side Story* 2018

Photos: Karli Cadel/The Glimmerglass Festival.



Amanda Castro as Anita.



Vanessa Becerra as Maria and Joseph Leppek as Tony with members of the ensemble.

Not-thinking about *The Cage* by Mindy Aloff

In the decades since I saw the first of the many performances I've witnessed of this Jerome Robbins dance-drama, most of them by New York City Ballet, it never occurred to me to ask why it's called "The Cage." Today, I'm wondering. Cages are manmade structures—put together from metal, wood, bamboo—to restrict the motion of whatever creature is contained within; and the word 'cage' is often used as a synonym for 'prison.' But what we see in this 1951 ballet isn't, at least apparently, constrained by inanimate materials. Instead, we seem to find an entirely self-controlled matriarchy, its individuals clustering together in instinctual military patterns under the dominance of a queen. Furthermore, it's a tribe of entirely female insects—an artisanal species that seems to be built from, for instance, wasps crossed with preying mantises. From the amazing, overhead webbed set (devised by NYCB's genius lighting designer, Jean Rosenthal, a favorite Robbins collaborator), it would seem that the colony also possesses a monster spider's ability to generate a jungly roof for itself. Is that the cage? But a tiny detail that begins the ballet calls that conventional meaning of the skeins into question. When the stage is bared, we see the web—which had been lying relaxed on the floor—to be heaved up in full tension on a count, like a circus tent. Robbins insisted on that detail when he was making the ballet and saw the dynamic look of the heaving into place after a stage rehearsal. It seems to say to the audience "Now the story begins" and so pulls us virtually into the action, making us in some way a part of it, as if we are also responsible for the existence of whatever we understand "the cage" to signify.

Furthermore, for the first time I'm wondering what the ballet could mean to us if its female and male cast members were reversed. Would the paradigm of its world shift from Robbins' comparison of *Giselle's* Act II to Kenneth Brown's 1963 anti-military play, *The Brig*, and its famous original Living Theater production? Did Kenneth Brown, in fact, see *The Cage*? Was Robbins, in that anxious post-War era of HUAC and of his own attempts to work out his private fears and intuitions concerning societal norms and deviations in such ballets as *The Guests* (1949) and *Age of Anxiety* (1950), embattled by the possibility that he could use the bodies of female dancers to realize a nightmare of what could happen to him if he went to jail—in the spirit of Edwin Denby's observing that, when considering the tragedy of Odette and Albrecht in *Swan Lake*, that he had experienced in life both sides of the story? It was in *The Cage*, Robbins said, that he felt he could give full rein to his imaginings.

On the surface, this ballet would seem to be founded in strictly male-female division. But is it? In a *Rolling Stone* interview with the poet Jonathan Cott, Balanchine himself disdained the idea that men and women in his ballets always equal men and women literally, rather than, for instance, raindrops on a crystal roof. Suppose the wild Amazonian hair and toe shoes of the female dancers in *The Cage* function as masks for a more profound terror related to masculinity? The one thing *The Cage* does not offer is a feminine radiance in the sense of either sexual desire or maternity. What it substitutes in both cases are tensions between dominance and submissiveness. The reason we read the duet between the Novice and the second Intruder as affectionate is that the Intruder begins their relationship by decisively overpowering her, and she is transformed as un-powered; they become a couple because they complement one another on these terms. As Tanaquil Le Clercq pointed out in a letter to Robbins when he expressed uncertainty about whether "Love" exists in this ballet, no, there is none. Love leads one to want to help and protect the beloved; these figures have, so to speak, other fish to fry.

As for maternity, again the mother-child relationship is defined exclusively as dominance and submissiveness. In addition, the tribe evinces no apparent way to perpetuate itself sexually, apart from parthenogenesis, since the group murders every male Intruder it encounters before sex takes place. (The animal kingdom does account for such reproduction: Over much of the past century, what are essentially virgin births—that is, mother-daughter clones—have been demonstrated in all major vertebrates except mammals. However, there's no evidence I've encountered that Robbins was aware of this intellectually.) We're way removed from *Giselle* here, which makes a clear distinction between *Giselle's* solicitous mother, Berthe, of Act I, and Myrtha, the queen of the Wilis, in Act II. Myrtha is not the Wilis's mother; she is their leader, and everyone has to observe rules and regs to maintain that relationship. We know that *Giselle* will take her place as one more integer in the line, but she is not presented as Myrtha's eventual replacement. In *The Cage*, however, it is suggested that the Novice has a privileged position, possibly as a queen-in-training. This is not a republic of equals. When the Novice appears to drop out of the queen's body in the act of being born, the former becomes an instrument of the latter, not an applicant to the sorority to which the Novice already belongs. And, although the Novice—like the spirit of *Giselle*—protests the dominant figure's demand for the kill, the unloving



Novice submits to the demand whereas Giselle, the eternal feminine, saves Albrecht's life. Giselle disappears at the end of her transition to eternity but the Novice has passed her test and improved her future, lover be damned. By the end of the ballet, Novice and queen face one another as celebrating power equals. (It is unclear whether this ballet's representation of a mother figure prompted Robbins' own mother, Lena, to abandon the theater in the middle of *The Cage* at its world premiere.)

Wendy Whelan, whom Robbins cast as the Novice quite soon after Whelan joined NYCB, has spoken of how Robbins told her that her character doesn't think but is driven by animal instincts. She also said that he must have seen in her "a very modern edge," which he encouraged her to develop in the role. That edge is crafted in the placement of the character's body: Her exaggeratedly pronated hips both give her spine a pronounced arch and present her buttocks with exaggeration. I've seen perhaps ten casts of the Novice over the years, and all are delicately built with exquisitely arched feet, small in stature, and cuttily sharp in the impetus of their movement. What the part may have provided for Robbins was an index, a test, of the dancer's potential for physical focus and stylistic exactitude—for her dancerly ambition.

The original Novice was Nora Kaye, an American Ballet Theatre principal who was on the NYCB roster for a few years early in the 1950s, and, at the time Robbins was working on *The Cage*, his sometime girlfriend. One day, he saw her emerge from the shower with her hair slicked back and her bangs plastered to her forehead, and that became the hairstyle for the wig that every subsequent Novice wore. Allegra Kent tells an amusing story of how once, when she danced the Novice, the wig came loose and flew into the wings to land at Balanchine's feet. Terrified that Mr. B would be angry, Kent was relieved when his comment was that she should lose the wig at every performance. (Balanchine was not a fan of *The Cage*, but he recognized that it stimulated NYCB audiences.)

Deborah Jowitt, one of Robbins' biographers, remarks, though, that Robbins told Clive Barnes in 1973 that long before he thought of Kaye in the lead role he wanted his friend and muse Tanaquil Le Clercq: "her long, thin legs, her coltishness, her youth." And there is at least one studio photograph of Le Clercq posed on point in the costume by NYCB dancer Ruth Sobotka—a nude-colored leotard with squiggly black patterns on it, supposedly to show that the creatures had translucent exoskeletons with their guts showing. However, Robbins and other observers have noted that Balanchine, married to Le Clercq at the time and the man she told Robbins she was in love with, refused, as NYCB's ballet master, to permit her to dance the Nora Kaye part. Perhaps Balanchine didn't want to see Le Clercq the way Kaye performed the Novice. In Robbins' words: "She didn't ever play human or have human responses. She was much more terrifying, unearthly. She performed the role quietly, with a beetle's eyes and no expressiveness."

Balanchine's own *Metamorphosis*—his 1952 ballet in which Le Clercq was costumed as a dragonfly—has been lost; critic Doris Hering dubbed it "a sort of hotcha version of *The Cage*." Both Robbins and Balanchine, though, looked to inspiration from Asian dance traditions to represent their respective insects. Balanchine seems to have used flexions of the hands and feet to key into a Chinese melody in his Paul Hindemith score, and Robbins made the point to his biographer Christine Conrad that his work on the 1951 Broadway show *The King and I*—with its "splayed fingers, hyperextended elbows," and other allusions to Southeast Asian court dancing—"spilled over" into his work on *The Cage*. (Balanchine did not object when Robbins choreographed his 1953 Debussy masterpiece *Afternoon of a Faun* on Le Clercq; in fact, Mr. B. offered a suggestion about how Le Clercq should "break" upon coming down from a lift that Robbins adopted. Was the problem, perhaps, the way Robbins used the score by Stravinsky?)

Robbins wrestled with the Stravinsky score, Concerto in D for string orchestra—his first use of Stravinsky for a ballet—and won on his own terms, that is, accounted for every bar by analysis of what Robbins thought was the dramatic through-line of the music, persuading audiences that the dramatic way he heard the concerto was as valid as the purely formal terms on which Balanchine met Stravinsky's compositions. Indeed, despite the many facets of the brilliant staging of the concerto by Robbins, there is about the work overall a disagreeable quality of gotcha-where-you-live I.S. [Igor Stravinsky], a sort of subtextual Q.E.D. gloating. There was a lot riding on Robbins' choice of this score for an NYCB

< Dancers of English National Ballet in Jerome Robbins' *The Cage*, 2018. Photo by Laurent Liotardo.

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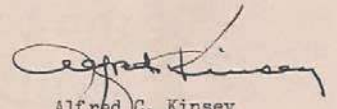
November 30, 1951

Mr. Jerry Robbins
c/o New York City Center
130 W. 56th Street
New York, N.Y.

Dear Jerry:

Just a word to thank you for giving me a moment backstage at the ballet a couple of weeks ago when I was in New York. I am glad to have met you personally, and particularly to have seen your production of *The Cage*. From our biased sexual standpoint, and I hope also from some basic interest which I have in the arts, I think it was a high spot in the evening. I very much hope to see the ballet again. Certainly I congratulate you on the quality of the thing that you are doing.

I hope our paths may cross again, some day.



Alfred C. Kinsey
Professor of Zoology

ACK:elr

A letter from Alfred Kinsey to Jerome Robbins, 1951. From the Jerome Robbins Collection at the New York Public Library.

premiere just a couple of years after joining the company. Robbins explained that he first heard the Stravinsky concerto perhaps eighteen months before he choreographed it: The concerto was on the back of a recording of Stravinsky's 1928 *Apollon Musagète*, the first Stravinsky music that Balanchine had staged, with the composer's advice, for Diaghilev. The Concerto in D for string orchestra (1946) was only the second composition Stravinsky wrote for that orchestral force. It was not expressly intended to be a ballet; however, the rhythms are almost physically descriptive: One hears pattering steps, plunging marches, a bittersweet interlude as from a ballroom, intensely buzzing sonorities (as one might associate with mosquitoes), and other passages that are almost visceral. (The first variation for *The Novice* immediately after her birth also contains movement details that are reminiscent of the first dance for the newly born Apollo, part of the section that Balanchine cut in the late 1970s.)

Before Robbins devised the map of the action for *The Cage*, he worked on what the social world of the ballet would be. Was it the squeaky string tones of the concerto that led him from human Amazons to insects? Was it Balanchine's advice to dancers "Don't think; do" that, in some way, was being addressed by Robbins' advice to the cast that their characters should not think but act on instinct? Was it at all possible that one of the interpretations of the Novice was that she represents Robbins himself vis-à-vis Stravinsky—that her triumph was metaphorically his? Stravinsky apparently did not care for Robbins' staging, but he did like that it created such a stir among audiences both Stateside and in Europe (where, during a tour, it was so controversial that it was almost banned at The Hague). As Robbins wrote to his friend the pianist Robert Fizdale about how Stravinsky—who had always been cool and standoffish toward Robbins—changed his tune after the reception of *The Cage*: "I got 'Jerry'!" Robbins wrote of how Stravinsky had greeted him. He had conquered Stravinsky—at least for the nonce. What horizons were there possibly left to explore?

Mindy Aloff is the Dance Editor of The University Press of Florida and a longtime consultant to The George Balanchine Foundation. In October of 2018, Library of America will publish *Dance in America*, an anthology covering several centuries of writing, which she edited and in which Jerome Robbins has an author's entry.

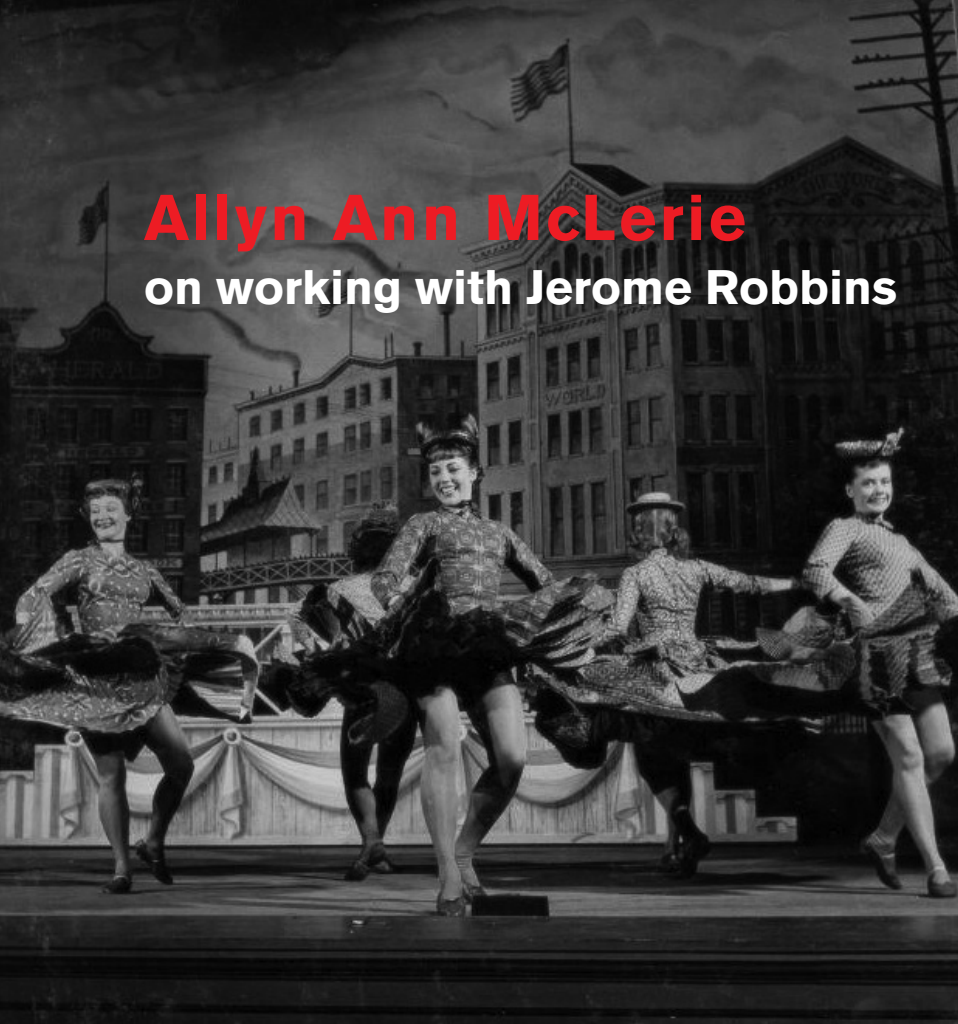
Patricia McBride in Jerome Robbins' *The Cage* at New York City Ballet, 1972. Photo by Martha Swope, © Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.





Allyn Ann McLerie

on working with Jerome Robbins



Allyn Ann McLerie (center) in *Miss Liberty*, 1949. Photo from the collection of Jerome Robbins.

Allyn Ann McLerie (1926–2018) first danced on Broadway in the ensemble of *One Touch of Venus* (choreographed by Agnes de Mille). In 1944 Jerome Robbins cast her in his choreographic Broadway debut, *On the Town*. Ms. McLerie went on to perform Robbins' Broadway choreography in *Miss Liberty*, and *West Side Story*. She also appeared on Broadway in *Redhead* and *Where's Charley?*, and in various film and television projects, including several seasons as the title character's mother in television's *The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd*. In 2010, Bernard Carragher interviewed Allyn Ann McLerie as part of the Jerome Robbins Foundation's Oral History Project. What follows are excerpts from that conversation.

Allyn Ann McLerie I first met Jerry at the first rehearsal of *On the Town*, in the dance rehearsal studio. I was a dancer in the chorus of *One Touch of Venus*, and I stood by for Sono [Osato], so I got to do her number. Then I auditioned for Jerry. He took me and I was in the dancing chorus.

Somebody said to me, "Oh, great, Jerry took you!" and I said, "Yeah, I guess he likes bangs." Everybody laughed, and I didn't know why they were laughing so hard. You know, I had those bangs on my head. Well, I guess people took it the other way.

Every little bit, he would give to me and say, "Oh, Allyn Ann, if there were only ten of you!" He liked what I did, and he kept giving me things.

First, we rehearsed at the Labor Stage, way down on 32nd Street and 8th Avenue or something. During the Depression, it had been the studio that everybody used, so we went down there. We were in this big studio and Jerry came in and he said, "Hello, my name is Jerry. Not Mr. Robbins. I'm Jerry. And I can be late, and you can't. Okay, let's start." So we got in a line and we started doing something that looked like the subway. We were in a line, facing upstage, and we did little movements that were like the shaking of the subway. We did that in a line for quite a while. And we all loved him.

Bernard Carragher So you opened in *On the Town* and then you took over for Sono Osato?

AAM I stood by for her for awhile. I learned her dance, and then I went on for her a couple of times.

BC How did you learn it?

AAM I watched her in the wings. When you're young, you learn everything right away. It just soaks in. Then, I replaced her as Ivy Smith. I guess I became the understudy first, and that's how I rehearsed.

BC What did you do after *On the Town*?

AAM I went on the road and I played Ivy Smith.

BC And then you worked with George Balanchine after you had worked with Jerry?

AAM That was in *Where's Charley*?

BC What was the difference between the two?

AAM Different styles, but when you're a trained dancer you just go from one style to the other. It depends on who's telling you what to do. But it wasn't hard... it wasn't on point or anything. Doing Jerry's choreography, you could use your acting talent. It wasn't just technique.

BC How did you get the job in *Miss Liberty*?

AAM I had to sing for Irving Berlin. He said, "Can you sing like Doretta Morrow?" We had both been in *Where's Charley*. I said, "No, not really," but I could sing somewhat. *Miss Liberty* was a difficult one because it was written so badly. The book was terrible.

BC Robert Sherwood.

AAM He used to just come into the rehearsal, and we'd be sitting around, and he would get down on his knees and he would grab my foot, and kind of cuddle it and sing, "When the red, red robin comes bob, bob, bobbin' along..." And he would be fondling my foot, and I thought, *This man is strange*.

BC The show was damned. So how did Jerry work on it? They always said about *Miss Liberty* that "the stew is too rich." You had Moss Hart, Irving Berlin, Robert Sherwood—Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright—you had Jerry Robbins, Oliver Smith...

AAM A lot of egos. They were all congratulating one another all the time, and I used to think to myself, *Why don't they just try to do their work instead of saying, "You're so wonderful," "No, you're the best," "No, you are..."* They were massaging each other's ego all the time, and I thought, *They'd better get to work!*

BC Jerry did the choreography. There was a train number.

AAM We were all in a line, and we all just choo, choo, chooing along. It was a silly kind of a train thing.

BC What else did he do for you?

AAM He did "Mr. Monotony."

BC Right.

AAM But that got cut out.

BC I haven't seen the show, but it seemed like it was a sophisticated number. It was nice to see that this woman who posed for the Statue of Liberty had another dimension to her character.

AAM But she hadn't! She was a fake.

BC Oh, she was a fake.

AAM There were two newspapers that were vying for this story. I don't remember which one of them, but they got this girl and they made her this model for Bartholdi, who was a Frenchman. He'd never seen this girl. It was all fake. But the publishers of the newspapers used it as a rivalry, sort of. They made a big fuss over this girl, Miss Liberty. I remember being lifted by boys, as they sang, "Miss Liberty, Miss Liberty, we welcome you here to our shores..." And I was a fake model for Bartholdi.

BC Did they find out at the end that she was a fake?

AAM Didn't she get married to Eddie Albert? He was in it. He was a reporter, and so was Mary—

BC McCarty.

AAM McCarty. She was also a reporter. She was in love with him, but he was in love with me. It was a silly story, but there was some really good dancing in it. And they cut "Mr. Monotony" out. I think it was Rodgers and Hammerstein who came to Philadelphia and said, "Guys, you've got to cut this song out," because how'd this little girl get so sexy? They said it was unbelievable. It was a seduction piece, with a girl and two boys. It was a very good number. All the cast, and even the old lady came to the wings to watch it.

BC Ethel—

AAM Ethel Griffies, who could really do the high kicks.

BC Really?

AAM She was pretty tough. She knew what she was doing.

BC But *Miss Liberty* wasn't much fun? Didn't Jerry say that you had gotten the starch out of him?

AAM I was supposed to have this big number in Act Two, and I said something to Moss at some point. I said, "I have nothing to do," and he said, "You have that big ballet!" I said, "Oh, really? Maybe you should come to rehearsal." Jerry was doing a big ballet on Maria Karnilova, who was his good friend, and I wasn't in that. Moss said, "Wait a minute. *This* is Miss Liberty!" But Jerry was reluctant. So I called him up, because this was my friend Jerry, right? I said, "Hey, Jerry. What's going on? I thought we were good friends, and there seems to be some sort of thing going on." He said, "Oh, I don't know, Allyn Ann. You know, times have changed. I've changed. You've changed. I don't know. You just take the starch out of me." I said, "I take the starch out of *you*?" Anyway, we patched it up somehow.

BC Did he give you the ballet?

AAM Yes. That was "Mr. Monotony." The ballet was wonderful. It was a show-stopper. There was acting, too, because it was a seduction while these two guys threw me around.

BC Jerry seemed to love trios.

AAM I guess. Well, he liked conflict, because that's drama. But it was too sexy, so they cut it out. Then he tried to put it in other shows. Nora Kaye got to do it in a revue, I think, with Bette Davis. Muriel Bentley got to do it in *Call Me Madam*. But they cut it each time. It was a wonderful number but I guess it was inappropriate. It didn't fit, somehow. Both Jerry and I were very upset when it was cut.

BC Then it finally got into *Jerome Robbins' Broadway*.

AAM Sort of.

BC Sort of?

AAM No. That wasn't it. Because he asked me to come and try to remember it. I didn't remember it much, but when I looked at it, I said, "Well, that wasn't it. I don't remember what it was, but that wasn't it."

BC Then you didn't work with Jerry again until *West Side Story*.

AAM *West Side Story*, right. He auditioned me. Bobby Griffith called and said, "We want you to come in for Anita." I said, "What? Have you looked at me lately?" He said, "Well, that's alright. We have wigs and things... Come in and sing for us." So I went in and I sang, and they said, "Oh, okay." And I said to Jerry, "Are you serious? Anita?" And he said, "Why not?" So I sang, and I read. I was doing the dialogue in the car going into Los Angeles, with a Puerto Rican accent.

BC Who helped you with that?

AAM Once I got hired, I got coached by Jaime Rogers' sister.

BC Did Chita come see you in it?

AAM Chita did come. She came one day, and I knew she was in the audience. When I got onstage, I saw her. She was in the third row. I was terribly nervous. I thought I was going to die. But when it was over, she came backstage and she was so sweet. Lenny came one night and he came backstage and he said, "In that final scene, you were insane! You're doing too much! Pull it back a little." And I was. I was overdoing it. I was so nervous, I didn't know what I was doing. So I brought it back a little.

BC Did Jerry work with you on the part?

AAM No, Arthur Laurents did. Arthur Laurents put me in.

BC Interesting. Jerry allowed him to do that.

AAM He was the acting coach, and Arthur was very good.

BC Did Jerry see you in it?

AAM Yes.

BC What did he have to say?

AAM He came back and I looked at him. And he giggled, and said, "You were wonderful. I just think you've got a little too much shadow on your cheeks. A little too much." I said, "That's it?" He said, "That's it."

BC Was that the last time you worked with Jerry?

AAM Yes, but we used to meet, in that little hotel across from the 46th Street Theater. We'd go in there before a show. Where was it that Jerry had a chair with his name on it? It was near Lincoln Center, across—

BC O'Neals'?

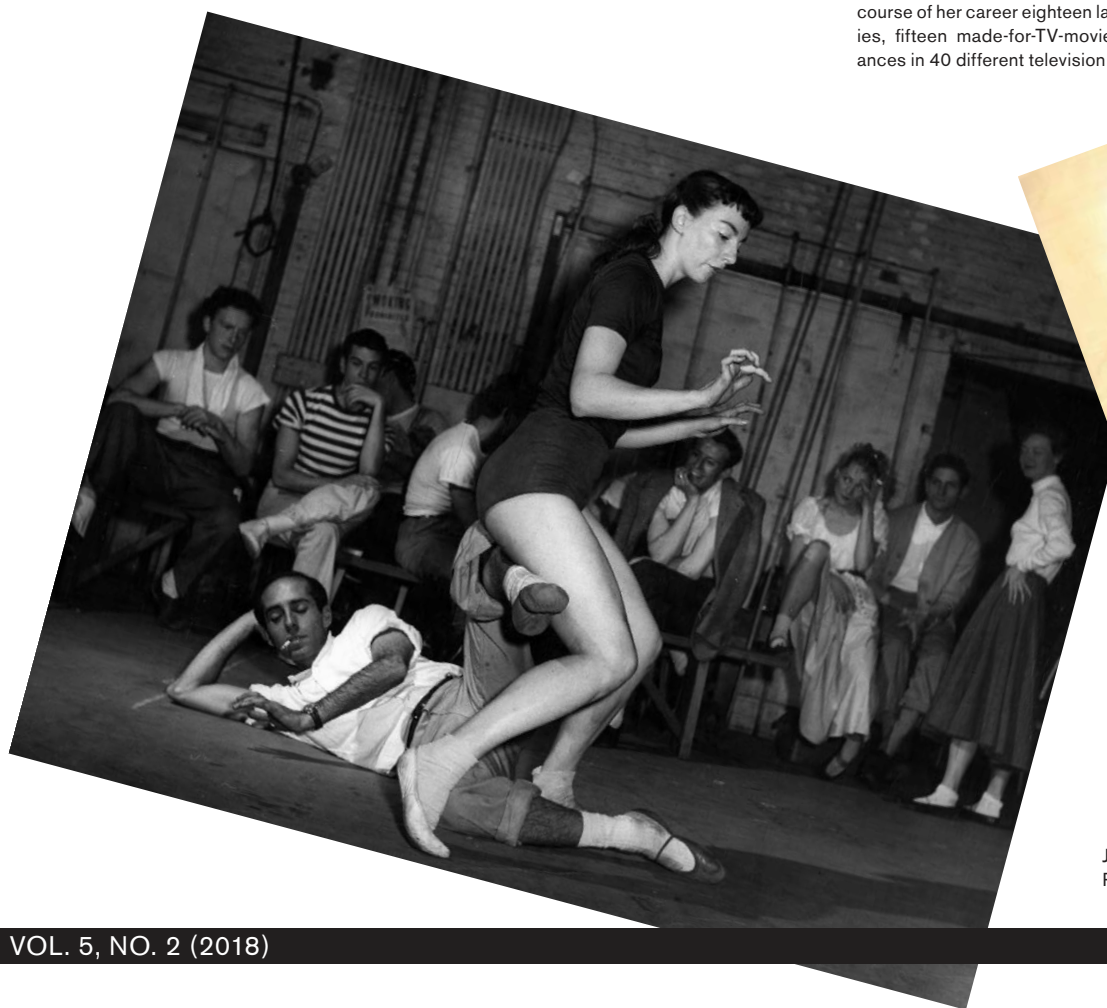
AAM Next to O'Neals'. An Italian place. There was a plaque in the corner, in the bar, and right in the corner was Jerry's chair. We used to see him there a lot. He was always very friendly.

BC What do you think his genius was?

AAM He was very bright, and he had a wonderful sense of humor. When he would work from a character, it was correct. He was psychologically there. Then he had this quixotic sense of humor. He was so musical, and he was such a wonderful dancer. You wanted to be just like him. He could be tough with people, but he was so gifted. He was a special creature.

Actress, singer, and dancer **Allyn Ann McLerie** (1926–2018) worked in the musical theater of the 1940s and '50s with the most outstanding of Broadway's choreographers and directors: Jerome Robbins, Agnes de Mille, George Balanchine, Bob Fosse, George Abbott, and Moss Hart. In the mid-fifties she turned to dramatic roles in film and television, filming over the course of her career eighteen large-screen movies, fifteen made-for-TV-movies, and appearances in 40 different television series.

Bernard Carragher is a theater critic for *New York Theater News* and *The Catholic Transcript*. He has written for the *New York Times*, *Playbill*, and *Show* magazine. He was one of the producers of *My One and Only* and *Chita Rivera: The Dancer's Life*.



Jerome Robbins rehearses Allyn Ann McLerie in *Miss Liberty*, 1949. Photo from the collection of Jerome Robbins.

Watermill at BAM

A Design Meeting

article by Clifton Taylor

Luca Veggetti and Clifton Taylor discuss the upcoming reimaging of Jerome Robbins' rarely performed Noh-inspired dance work *Watermill* for the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival in October at the Fishman Space.

CT Luca, how did you start conceiving this project?

LV I started thinking about creating a production of *Watermill* that would engender a different perception of the work. The work has been very influential to me in terms of what a theatrical experience can be. I've had this dream of presenting it in a non-traditional configuration that would engender a different perception, that would move the work from the ballet stage to one that could expose its theatricality in a new context. For this production we're going to place the stage in a central configuration, with people all around. The audience will be on three sides and the fourth side will be occupied by the cast, who will be seated and visible when they are not performing.

CT We will be presenting the work in a new configuration but otherwise maintaining the Robbins choreography.

LV Exactly, we are searching for the essence of the work, maintaining the Robbins choreography as it is. There are two ballet masters (former New York City Ballet dancers Diana White and Kipling Houston, who know the work) coming to help set the work on a company of dancers from the Conservatory of Dance at SUNY Purchase dance program, together with the Ballet Master for the work at New York City Ballet, Jean-Pierre Frohlich. The work is a theater piece that is

enacted by dancers, rather than something that would fall into a more traditional ballet genre. The boundaries of the work are somehow of a different nature and, in this production, there might be some sections or patterns that are rearranged because the space is different. It is an adaptation both in terms of the stage and the timing of the piece. Even when it was made, the choreography's relationship to the musical structure was not fixed and that is true today as well. As in Japanese Noh theater, the musical structure and the choreographic structure are both based on spatial parameters and they form an interdependent dialogue.

CT The stage that we are making at the BAM Fishman Space is a perfect square and that's a very different proportion from the stage at the New York State Theater [renamed the David H. Koch Theater] at Lincoln Center, where the ballet was originally created. Because the audience will be on three sides, we're also going to alter the arrangement of the sheaves of wheat.

LV Yes, of course, because at the Koch it is a frontal image.

CT: So we will have to adapt the position of the scenic elements to the new space for the sight lines alone.

CT Why did you want to do this now? What is the connection of *Watermill* to the world today?

LV Well, it's an image of life that is very personal but also universal at the same time. So I think it is important to revisit it. The piece presents, in a profoundly ritualistic way, an image of how we experience life on earth. It is not entirely a coincidence that this project got funding during the Robbins Centennial year, but that was not the main reason why we started discussing it with the Trust. I believe in theater as an experience and not as a piece of archeology. So my objective is that it will live as a work of the present and not something that we are watching from another time.

CT Something I talk about when I teach is that the purpose of design in the theater is to create a frame for a work to be seen within. In a Western-style opera house, it is easy to imagine this frame as an extension of the proscenium arch, but here we are talking about a larger concept of a frame. In this production, we are re-framing this great work of art in a way that makes sense for our present age and culture.



LV Yes, it's exactly as you say. This will give us the opportunity to look at the work in a different way. That is what is at the core of the project, to reframe this piece into a different theatrical context, which in this case is also a different cultural context because the Next Wave Festival, as you know, is one of the most important avant-garde festivals in the world. It is important also to know that when we started on the project we didn't have a preconceived idea of how to do this.

CT You and I have been working on the possibility of this project for several years now and we've considered several different venues around New York. Each one of those venues was a unique architectural space and would have pushed the perception of the piece in different ways.

LV Yes, of course. There was an impulse to create a new context for it but I didn't have a specific venue in mind. Everything that we might do stems uniquely from the particular condition of the space in which it is being presented. It will be a unique experience at the Fishman Space at BAM and the resulting production will be nothing that was necessarily conceived in advance.

CT I'm quite happy we've ended up at the Fishman Space. For one thing, it is technically very capable which gives us the ability to control the entire event.

LV I'm also very happy about this because for a number of years I had an image in my mind of this work isolated within a very vast space. We talked about the Armory and some other venues and I was stuck with that image. And then I went to the Fishman Space and I was happily surprised by how well it could work there. It was a totally different idea: an intimate space but without having the feeling of being constricted because it has a great height. In this space, the audience will be a part of the ritual because they will be so near the stage and will see other audience members through and past the stage space.

CT I think that the intimacy will bring the ritualistic nature of the work to the forefront.

LV It is a very beautiful work at the Koch Theater, I'm not questioning that. Now, though, we are shifting and changing the perspective in this new context. I hope it will engender a fresh consideration of the work as a piece of theater.

CT One other thing about the architecture is that the musicians will be situated on a balcony level above the action. I think that is very beautiful as an image. Above, but also in the room with everybody and connected to the event.

LV Absolutely. From a purely acoustic point of view, my hope is that the sound will be more intimate and even more present here. In the original production the musicians were placed on a side of the stage. Here they are just above the space and they'll be seen by almost everybody as a part of the image.

CT I want to talk about lighting in a minute, but perhaps first we can talk about the costumes. In the original 1972 production, many of the costumes were derived from rehearsal clothes.

LV It was a mix of a few featured costumes and practice clothes of the time.

CT To me, it seems to be connected, on a conceptual level, to some of the ideas behind *A Chorus Line*—where the dancers also were costumed in “rehearsal clothes”—since they were made in a similar time period. Of course, the musical premiered three years after the ballet. It is an interesting set of ideas, I think somewhat radical at the time: exposing the dancer as a performer and as a thinking human being, as well as a character worthy of study and consideration. I think that these ideas were emerging at that moment of time in our history.

LV I feel that Robbins, throughout most of his oeuvre, but especially with *Watermill*, strove to connect two apparently opposite theatrical visions: Noh, a dance theater form with extraordinarily complex movement and sumptuous visual elements, and the experimental paths opened in those years by a master like Jerzy Grotowski, who proposed a “poor theater” based uniquely on the skills of the performer—extremely spare and, in fact, practically devoid of sets, costumes and music, and of a text with a narrative nature. It is important to remember that the work takes place in a dreamlike state and is a mix of different realities. It can be seen as a way of connecting the inner world of the main character to the outer world, and that kind of tension is vital to the cause. My ambition is to keep that tension, but not to reproduce the practice clothes from the 1970s. Instead I propose to have the most simple and schematic version of dance attire from today. My guiding principle is elimination, to let go of unnecessary things to find the core of the idea. The performers are different dancers than they were and they will be very close to the audience, so I want to create the most neutral possible image without any particular connotation. Because I'm not Jerome Robbins, I must be careful to create a neutral world for the piece to live within.



Photographs taken by Jerome Robbins in the Arashiyama district of Kyoto, Japan in 1964.

CT If people remember some stagecraft from the incredible original production it is the moon, which traverses the stage and in that path also goes through all of its phases. It is such an arresting and haunting image: a very beautiful and mysterious moon. It works so perfectly on a proscenium stage but we've had this dilemma about what we're going to do in this new configuration and so we should talk about that solution a little bit.

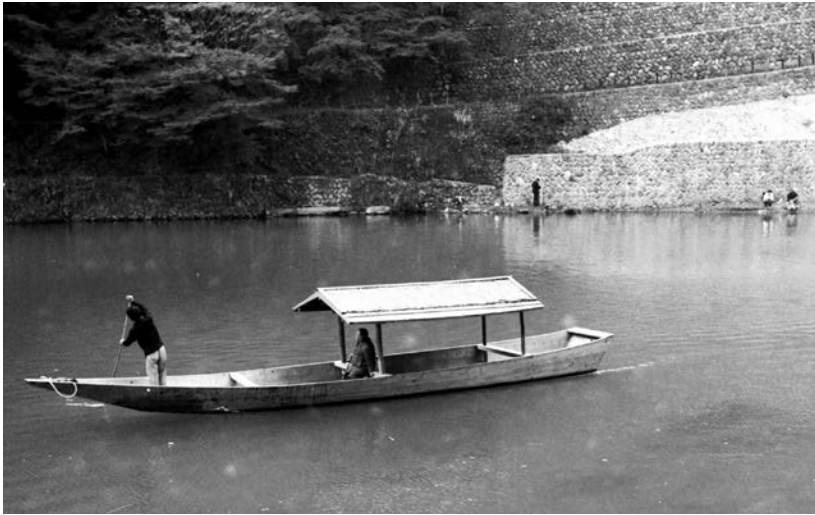
LV The moon in the original production was a mechanical object that changed shape and location on the stage. It has a mechanism built into it that morphs the shape into the different lunar phases. In this new space the idea of a mechanical moon prop didn't make any sense on any possible level, not least the technical one. In this production, everything will be exposed. Stage illusion dictated and made possible by a proscenium stage doesn't make sense in the black box of the Fishman Space. After much thinking, I decided to have a projected image of the real moon, and show the real cycle of the moon on a wall of the room. The film will be a kind of timepiece, or a clock. There is a danger here, because video has become so ubiquitous in today's theater, but I'm trying not to substitute something for something else simply because that is just how we do it today. I am very interested that the moon transcends itself and achieves a different relation to the work. The moon should be a central object and have a place and scale that doesn't vary. It is a timepiece like a ticking clock and as it is obviously a projection on the wall, it is not an illusionary effect. It's something that is there.

CT I understand the difference in that statement. I think the fact that it will not travel across the stage is extremely important to making the idea work.

LV Absolutely. Otherwise we would somehow be trying to reproduce a tableau.

CT I think it gets back to your earlier statement about elimination, which here is to find the essential reason for something to be onstage and expose that reason and let go of the other things.

LV Yes, exactly.



CT Now to the question of the light: the original production (with lighting by the great designer Jennifer Tipton) is actually realistically atmospheric in the travel of the moon and also in its conception of light. What do you think about that and what do you think is our relationship to natural light to be in this production?

LV The project is to bring and adapt the work to different space and the light will play a crucial role because we will be creating a new lighting dramaturgy for the piece. When Robbins and his collaborators made this piece he was exploring the notion of the elasticity of theatrical time: both the speeding up and slowing down of time within the period of a performance. That idea of theatrical time was also achieved through the use of light, which referenced natural sources. This concept of the light is not what we want here because we are inside a different architecture, seeing the event from all sides and we will perceive the angles of the light in a totally different way than if we were on a proscenium stage.

CT The original production uses a cyclorama in it and the lighting references time of day and seasonal changes. I'm feeling that the light here might have a different role altogether.

LV Let us consider the possibility that the light isolates things in a certain way. But here, we get to isolate actions and generally create a different balance between the light and the action unfolding. It is implicit in everything we have said but it bears repeating that our entire cast is in the space from the beginning to the end. Because of that, the tactile experience of the work will be different. Robbins, who was very interested in theater that has a ritualistic origin and nature, spoke often about ritual and how dance is a ritual of exorcism that starts with the first day of rehearsal and is exorcised in the performance. This idea was very important to him. So in this production we will be looking at the presence of the entire cast in the space as we walk in, and the rules for how lighting choices are made are actually quite different because of it as well as the nature of the architecture surrounding the event.

CT We must also be conscious that theatergoers who come to the event today come with a different set of experiences and pre-conceived notions. This requires a different response. Positioning the moon as an idea of a clock relieves the lighting of that responsibility. The moon is talking about that kind of time, and so the lighting doesn't also have to have that conversation.

LV The work is not actually 'realistic'. It is rather a mix of dreamlike situations.

CT We had the incredible experience last year on your production of "Left, Right, Left" where we were working in a Noh theater space in Yokohama, Japan. Traditional Noh performances have never used lighting to create an illusion of a described place or time as is the tradition in Western theater. In usual Noh practice there is no cueing or alterations in the clear and flat white light at all. For our production, which was a contemporary meditation on the Noh works "Okina" and "Hagoromo," we considered the potential of lighting within this context and created a design that was relevant both to the work and, importantly, the traditions of Noh. It was also deeply connected to the architecture of Noh theater and its origins as an outdoor performance space.

LV Yes, that experience informs this project tremendously.

CT The lighting choices that we make need to be connected intimately to the action, without collapsing into an attempt at illusion.

LV Yes, absolutely.

CT That's a big idea for a work of Western theater: that the lighting design is released from an attempt of creating an illusion of a nonpresent space. This is a very big and important choice to make.

LV I'm happy you said this. You analyzed it in a way that for me is intuitive. Our intention in regard to the role of the light should not be to create an image of life in an illusionistic sense, but rather to engender a deeper kind of magic, not one achieved through a trick. This kind of magic is present when, perhaps for less than a quarter of a second, we are lifted from the soporific and passive state we live in most of our time, including in the theater, and awoken to a deeper connection. *Watermill* is to some extent a very personal dream world, for it to be believable as a theatrical experience, we cannot use images that are grounded most obviously in reality, as much as we cannot wander too far astray and create a wacky world to which an audience would have problems connecting. We can achieve it by being extremely careful with the details. If we make perfect every detail of this seemingly absurd world—where it snows in the summer and women are picking potatoes while a demon torments a solitary naked man—then we will be inside a dream that we not only believe but also trust.

CT Like at Shakespeare's Globe Theater, where the physical space of the performance is freed from the requirement of being an illusion of the described space, this change from the role of light that we more traditionally see in our theater involves the audience in a critical action and asks them to put all of the bits of information of the performance together into a synthesis of meaning that is relevant for their own experience.

LV To me theater lives through suggestions. If you create an illusionistic image it is somehow a fixed image. It might be very beautiful but it doesn't necessarily open any doors. I'm interested in choices that open many doors. And so the language of light goes into that too because if we were to create an illusionistic image we would be saying that is the way you should see it too. I don't want that.

CT I agree with you wholeheartedly. And I guess that's why I love our collaborations because of this possibility for a different kind of visual language in the light and throughout the other production choices.

LV This leads me to think about a philosophic relationship between Merce Cunningham and Robbins. I do find, in a way that might surprise many, a point of contact between the ideas of these two creators. They were both concerned about creating an experience of that very moment. Of course you might say, "that's what everybody's trying to do" but I feel that they were both searching for a way to create a kind of metatheatrical world that reached beyond illusion. I think that he did that by finding an incredible balance between gestures and movement. It points to the idea of a sacred theater that Peter Brook so beautifully expressed. Robbins was exploring in a different way than Cunningham, but both, were striving for that. I want to create the condition for an experience to happen. I want for people to be most completely present for the experience.

CT I think that is a beautiful beginning to our coming work in the theater. Thank you Luca. I look forward to continuing this discussion through rehearsals and into the theater in October.

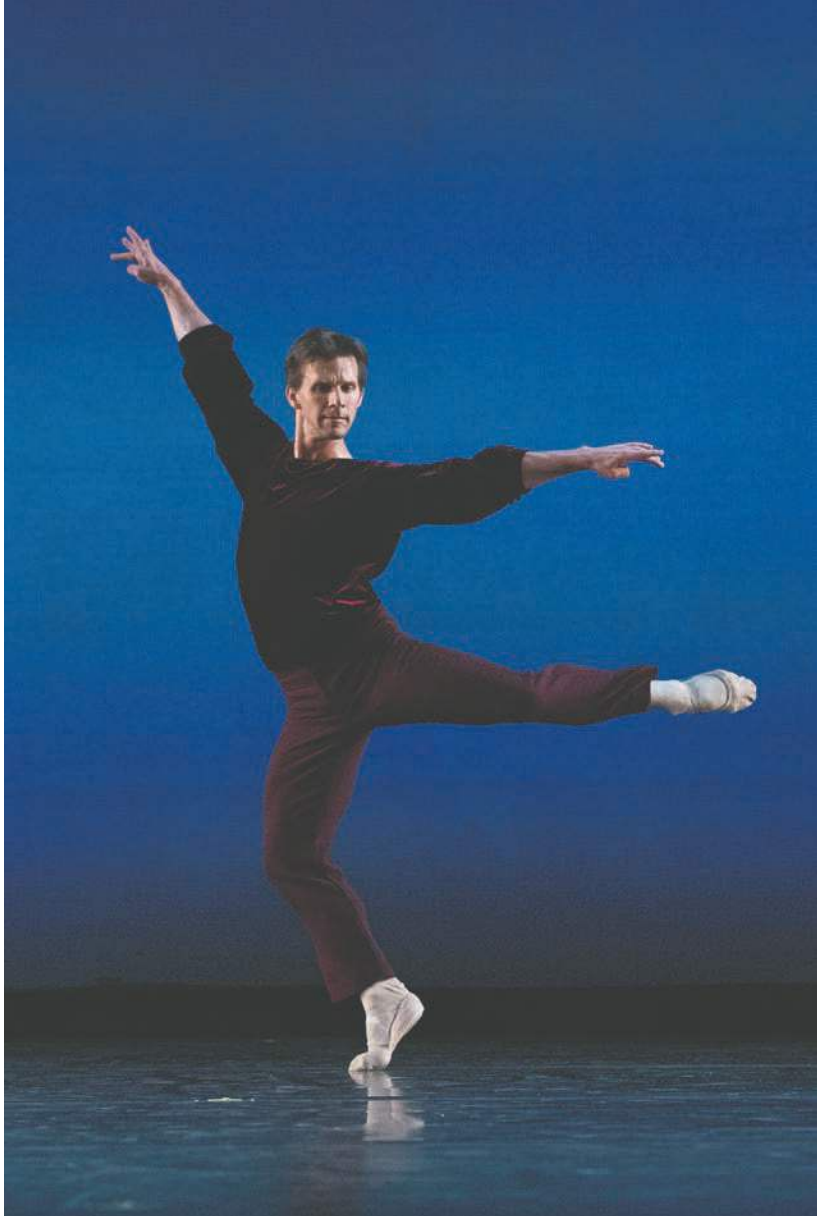
Watermill is being performed at the 2018 BAM Next Wave Festival from October 24 to 27. Directed by Luca Veggetti with lighting by Clifton Taylor.

Luca Veggetti is a director-choreographer. His work has been produced and presented by leading companies and institutions throughout the world.

Clifton Taylor is a scenic and lighting designer, who, in addition to frequent collaborations with Mr. Veggetti, designs for dance, theater and opera companies here and abroad.

Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre
In the Night 2018

Stars of American Ballet
A Suite of Dances 2018



Daniel Ulbricht of Stars of American Ballet in Jerome Robbins' *A Suite of Dances*, 2018.
Photo: Christopher Duggan.



Right: Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre dancers in Jerome Robbins' *In the Night*, 2018.
Top: Hannah Carter and Cooper Verona.
Bottom: Marisa Grywalski and Corey Bourbonniere. Photos by Rich Sofranko.

THE BUSINESS OF SHOW

A Primer for Trustees

by Barbara G. Fleischman

The Acting Company • American Associates of the National Theatre • American Craft Council • Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution • British Museum • Detroit Institute of Arts • The Frick Collection • The Juilliard School • J. Paul Getty Trust • The Metropolitan Museum of Art • Museum of Broadcasting • New York City Art Commission • New York Public Library • Planned Parenthood of New York City • WNET, Channel 13

Barbara Fleischman has served as a model trustee on many boards of high-level institutions, including The New York Public Library, Planned Parenthood of New York City, The Frick Collection and the J. Paul Getty Trust. She has also volunteered for scores of cultural institutions such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Juilliard School, The Acting Company, the British Museum, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Museum of Broadcasting, and the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. As both trustee and volunteer, she has been indefatigable, dedicated, hardworking, full of original ideas, and generous of her time and purse. She has excelled in helping major institutions function at their fullest capacity. She has written this text in order to help those seeking to serve on non-profit boards better understand the role and expectations of trustees, including issues concerning governance, rights, and obligations. I am delighted that Barbara Fleischman has produced this succinct yet important and informative guide. In writing it, she has done a great service for the independent sector. – Vartan Gregorian, President, Carnegie Corporation of New York

SOME GENERAL THOUGHTS ABOUT BOARDS OF DIRECTORS

Institutions find new trustees in a variety of ways to serve as their advocates and supporters:

- From their volunteer pool.
- Adding professionals and experts in the field of the institution, i.e. scholars, historians, performing artists, scientists, etc.
- Community citizens who are interested, committed, and ready to support the organization with their means, advocacy and knowledge of the history of the institution.

A mission statement, the original charter, by-laws, and last annual report should be made available.

New trustees must be made familiar with each department and its role within the organization.

Institutions must guard against selecting trustees ONLY for their financial means. Interest in the organization and its mission must be a key factor!

Institutions must continually find imaginative and creative ways to attract and encourage the participation of young people for the growth and health of the organization.

The board and the administration must have an open, working relationship in order to ensure a successful institution.

There should be opportunities for board members to meet in a social atmosphere and become better acquainted with each other, evolving as a “team.” This is the best way to learn how the board works and succeeds in its mission.

A wise organization keeps former trustees enthusiastic, involved and “in the loop.” A thriving institution cooperates and communicates with its sister institutions.

YOU HAVE BEEN ASKED TO SERVE ON A BOARD OF AN INSTITUTION. QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

1. Does this institution and its mission interest and matter to me? On how many boards do I serve and will I have the time for this institution?
2. Am I enthusiastic and knowledgeable about its mission, goals and history?
3. Am I willing to commit enough time, energy, experience, talents, advocacy, and means to its goals? Do these mesh with the goals of the institution?
4. Can I commit myself to attending its meetings either in person or, if necessary, by telephone?
5. Am I able to take on the responsibility of a committee membership consistent with my experience and talents?
6. Can I commit myself to attending as many of the public functions of the institution as I can where my presence is an important show of moral support as well as trustee visibility? This is valuable for me to learn more about the institution. Also, importantly, one's appearance at events shows the general

public who the trustees are in person and how much they care about their organization.

7. Do I wish to accept this invitation to add to the institution's success and really help the community?
8. Is there anything in my personal dealings that could create a conflict of interest? Many boards require one to sign a conflict of interest form each year.
9. Am I clear about the length of the term and able to serve?
10. Am I comfortable with the expectation that I will participate in the institution's fundraising and give financial support to possible future Capital Campaigns?
11. Will I be comfortable encouraging friends and acquaintances who might share my interest in the institution? Am I willing to encourage their participation and solicit their donations?

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INSTITUTION:

1. Why am I particularly being asked to join this board?
2. What is the financial status of the institution? What are its budgetary projections?
3. Can you give me a clear statement of the institution's mission and goals?
4. What is the expected minimum yearly financial commitment for each board member?
5. What is the size of the board and what is the governance process?
6. What is the role of the Executive Committee?
7. Is there a strong and active Finance Committee and do they provide complete transparency? Is there a five-year plan and budgetary projection? Are outstanding financial commitments made clear to the trustees and what is their personal responsibility to meet these obligations?
8. Will I be given an orientation session and learn about each of the organization's departments?
9. Does this institution have clear-cut guidelines for accepting donations and naming opportunities which are explained to the board?
10. How many years comprise a board term and are there term limits?

If all of these questions have been answered both by yourself and the institution satisfactorily and you have decided to join the board, it is essential to follow some GUIDELINES.

A hierarchy exists within each institution. By and large, professional staffs consist of skilled, dedicated, and intelligent members. Working with such people can be a learning experience, enjoyable and rewarding. The staff is the backbone of the institution! However, it is important to realize that an invisible but clear line exists between a volunteer/ trustee and a professional, and it is vital never to cross that line! For example, in dealing with a staff member, if one observes incompetence, venality, inappropriate behavior or any other unpleasantness, there is only one recourse – to share the concern with the chairman of your board. After that, if it is deemed necessary, the next step is to share it with the head of the institution. It is never appropriate to attempt to solve the problem on one's own!

Trustees represent the integrity of the institution! A trustee must be precise and careful that there is no quid pro quo attached to his or her presence on the board. The board member's personal interests should play no improper part in trusteeship.

If a trustee sees or knows of a deep problem or situation facing the institution, this should be dealt with internally within the institution itself and confidentiality must be the rule. Gossip with outsiders and speaking with the press are inappropriate and counter productive.

When joining a board, it is wise to use the first meetings one attends to LISTEN! That is the only way in which one can observe the dynamism of the institution and the way it functions.

When things are not clear, a responsible trustee ASKS QUESTIONS!

There are a variety of ways in which a new trustee can begin to work well, depending on one's interests, talents, skills, previous experience, and professional status. So, for example, fundraising, legal counsel, financial counsel, development and outreach provide excellent avenues for participation.

One of the most positive things a long time trustee can do is to encourage new and young leadership. So, after serving the institution well, at the appropriate time one can comfortably become a trustee emeritus while continuing to provide leadership, wisdom, one's experience, and knowledge of the organization's history while continuing to serve.

Always remember that what unites all trustees, administration, and staff is the goal of making the institution work and succeed.

SO, NOW, JOIN THE BOARD and prepare yourself for having an enriching, educational, pleasurable, lively, and interesting experience knowing that, all the while, you are contributing to the community AND making a difference!!!!

Having served all of my adult life as a volunteer or a trustee, perhaps my observations and experiences might be helpful.

Geography Lessons by Amanda Vaill

"Doing a ballet," Jerome Robbins once told an interviewer, "is like knowing that there is an island out there that you want to explore but you don't quite know the shape of it, or the details of it, or the dimensions of it, or the geography, or what you'll find on it. And only by approaching it and getting closer and closer does it begin to define itself... Until then, it's like going toward it a little bit in the mist and not being sure of what it will be like until you get there." If this description is true of Robbins' creative process, it's also true of his life—as I first discovered when doing research for my 2006 biography, *Somewhere: The Life of Jerome Robbins*, and have learned all over again in assembling *The World Opened Up: Selected Writings of Jerome Robbins*, which will be published in 2019.

When I began the biography I knew the rough outlines of Robbins' story: his childhood as the son of striving immigrant parents; his conflicted relationship with his Jewish heritage; his artistic apprenticeship in the Borscht Belt, on Broadway, and in Ballet Theatre; his explosion into stardom in 1944, at the age of 25, with the twin successes of *Fancy Free* and *On the Town*; his controversial appearance before the House Un-American Activities Committee during the 1950's; his complicated but reverential relationship with George Balanchine, who made him Associate Artistic Director of New York City Ballet when he was only thirty; his extraordinary, even revolutionary, career on both Broadway and in the ballet, which continued until his death in 1998, bare months before his 80th birthday. But I didn't yet know the shape, or the details, or the geography, of his life. On my first day in the as-yet-unprocessed Robbins archives, which were then still contained in filing cabinets in his 81st Street townhouse, I thought I would look for an entrance point, a place to begin exploring. Knowing that he and Leonard Bernstein, his then-unknown collaborator on the 1944 *Fancy Free*, had been separated by the demands of their professional lives during the creation of that work, and that—as both Robbins and Bernstein had said—they had carried on their creative dialogue via letters and recordings of the score, I thought this might be a good place to begin, with documents that would bring alive Robbins', and Bernstein's, emergence as mature artists.

So I asked Christopher Pennington, who had assisted Robbins and would become executive director of the Robbins Foundation and the Robbins Rights Trust, where the *Fancy Free* documents were filed. The answer filled me with dismay. "We've never found them," he told me. "We assume they're lost."

Disappointed but resigned, I set myself a different entry point, and began going through the Robbins papers, file by file, transcribing and making notes. For a man who dealt in the kinetic and visual, Robbins was a surprisingly prolific and varied writer, and in addition to correspondence from a Who's Who of 20th century culture, there were his own letters, journals, essays, memoirs, even fiction, all adding unexpected dimensions to my understanding of him.

Months, even years passed. The house was sold, the archives—and the Robbins office—moved to new quarters. I kept going through file drawers. One day, looking for a break, I paused in my labors, pointed to a huge movers' carton in the corner of the office, and asked Chris Pennington, "What's in there?" "Duplicate scripts of *The Poppa Piece*," he said, referring to an unproduced autobiographical theater piece Robbins had written in the 1980's and workshopped at Lincoln Center Theater in 1991. "I don't know why we're keeping them around."

Maybe it was boredom that made me do it. "Let me just take a peek in there," I said. The carton was the size of a washing machine. As Chris had said, it was filled with photocopied scripts, held together with elastic bands. I pulled out the top layer of scripts, then the next, then the next, all the way to the very bottom. And there lay a leather box crafted to look like a book, the kind of box people used to put important documents into. On the spine was a paper label bearing Robbins' distinctive back-slanting handwriting. "Fancy Free," it said.

Inside the box were letters from Bernstein and Oliver Smith (*Fancy Free*'s designer), and a little paper cut-out of the barroom set, and letters Robbins had sent to his collaborators—and they had seemingly returned to him—one of them illustrated with pen-and-ink sketches of the sailors in the ballet. The whole thing was like a time capsule containing the essence of who Robbins and his collaborators were at that moment in 1944, just before they became indelibly famous. Apparently, knowing how important this trove of material was to his own history, Robbins had sequestered it in the box, possibly intending to draw on it for the autobiography he contemplated but never completed. And now, quite by accident, I had found it. It was my first surprise, but not my last.

This past spring, as I completed the manuscript of my selection of Robbins writings, I discovered something unexpected. I had arranged Robbins' letters, diaries, memoirs, and critical and creative writing as a chronological narrative,

a kind of autobiographical mosaic that would tell the story of his life as he had seen and experienced it. And there was one important episode that he had never spoken or written about—not in letters, not (except obliquely) in his journals, not in his memoirs: his 1950 questioning by the FBI over his Communist associations in the 1940's, and his subsequent testimony as a "friendly witness" before HUAC, for which many people held him in contempt, or worse.

He had, however, written several versions of a surreal trial scene—in which his stand-in Jake Whitby, or Witkovitz, is brought to judgment for his political associations—for *The Poppa Piece*. And I'd decided to use that scene to stand for Robbins' encounter with HUAC. Although I'd put one version of it into the manuscript, I thought I'd seen another in his papers that was more emotionally vivid and dramatic. So I went back to the Performing Arts Library and started reading through permutations and duplicates of the script. In among them I found an uncatalogued 9-page typed memorandum, dated 1950, that Robbins had prepared for his own files, a memorandum describing his grilling by the newspaper columnist and television host Ed Sullivan, and by the FBI, for whom Sullivan evidently acted as a kind of unofficial tipster. Robbins must have written the memo for legal reasons, to set down the details of what had happened while they were fresh in his mind in case he needed the information later; then, in the 1980's, when he was writing his dramatic version of those events, he'd used the memorandum to refresh his memory, and it had been mistakenly filed away, unlabeled. Now, from those forgotten pages, a frightened and confused young man spoke, and the geography of his life became a little clearer.

Shortly before this, another part of the island that is Jerome Robbins revealed itself. One of the great questions about Robbins, to those who worked with him or wrote about him, was what he thought of his own gifts. Perhaps because he frequently changed his mind about which way he was going with a work in progress, or (once the work was finished) was insistent that it be replicated exactly as he had set it, many people thought him insecure. And indeed, in his letters and journals, he was often doubtful about the quality of individual works—he complained to one correspondent about his dances for *Call Me Madam*, and to his diary about *Glass Pieces*, a ballet now widely considered a masterpiece. How, then, would he sum up his own career? The answer, like so many other elements of his story, was hidden in the mist.

In 1989 he directed his last Broadway show, an anthology of dance (and song) numbers from a career of musical hits that began with *On the Town* and ended with *Fiddler On the Roof*. Begun as an almost archival exercise, an effort to capture and record his revolutionary musical-theater output before it passed from memory, *Jerome Robbins' Broadway* would become a Robbins hit on its own terms, winning six Tony Awards, including for direction and Best Musical. But going into rehearsal, Robbins was anxious and depressed: "It will break me; either mind or body," he wrote in his journal. "I don't want to do it—no fun, no joy, no help." One night, after supervising a preview performance, he came home to his townhouse on 81st Street and wrote himself a letter, on his "Jerome Robbins" stationery, in which he poured out his feelings about the show and about his own creative legacy. He put the letter in an envelope, addressed it to himself, sealed it, and put the envelope in between the pages of a souvenir program from the show. This program, in turn, found its way into a valise; the valise found its way into the basement of his house; and then, after Robbins' death, a member of his household preserved the valise without looking at its contents. It wasn't until later that the valise was opened, the contents examined, and the letter found.

What's written there, what Robbins had seemingly secreted away until an opportune time, was his last surprise. To find out what he said, you'll have to wait until the publication of *The World Opened Up*; suffice it to say that it lifts the mist from the island and lets us see it clearly at last.

This article originally appeared on the New York Public Library blog [<https://www.nypl.org/blog>].

Amanda Vaill's books include the bestselling *Everybody Was So Young: Gerald and Sara Murphy—A Lost Generation Love Story*; *Somewhere: The Life of Jerome Robbins*; *Hotel Florida: Truth, Love, and Death in the Spanish Civil War*, and the forthcoming *The World Opened Up: Selected Writings of Jerome Robbins*. She is also the author of the Emmy-nominated screenplay for the Emmy- and Peabody Award-winning documentary, *Jerome Robbins: Something to Dance About*; and

her journalism and criticism have appeared in numerous periodicals. A finalist for the National Book Critics' Circle Award, a 1999 Guggenheim Fellow, and a 2017 Fellow of the Center for Ballet and the Arts at New York University, she is currently a Fellow at the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library, where she's at work on a biography of the Schuyler sisters, wife and sister-in-law of Alexander Hamilton.

News from The Jerome Robbins Foundation

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Jerome Robbins will be sent upon request.
Please send all correspondence by email to:
newsletter@jeromerobbins.org

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The directors of The Jerome Robbins Foundation thank the many individuals and organizations who have and are putting their creativity and energy into the celebration of Jerry's 100th birthday. This year could not have been what it is without you.

Jerome Robbins celebrated his 71st birthday during a rehearsal of *Jerome Robbins' Broadway*, 1989. Photo by Martha Swope, © Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

UPCOMING JEROME ROBBINS PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

OCTOBER 2018

2(e), 3(e)

WORKS & PROCESS

Pacific Northwest Ballet's

Jerome Robbins Centennial Celebration:

Male Solos with Peter Boal

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City

11

100TH ANNIVERSARY OF JEROME ROBBINS' BIRTH

11

WEST SIDE STORY film panel discussion

Paley Center, Los Angeles, California

11(e), 12(e), 13(m), 13(e)

FANCY FREE

Charlotte Ballet, Knight Theater,

Charlotte, North Carolina

20(e), 26(e), 28(m)

OTHER DANCES

American Ballet Theatre,

David H. Koch Theater, New York City

18(e), 20(m), 21(m), 27(m)

FANCY FREE

American Ballet Theatre,

David H. Koch Theater, New York City

24(e), 25(e), 26(e), 27(e)

WATERMILL

Brooklyn Academy of Music,
BAM Fisher, Brooklyn, New York

29(e), 30(e), 31(e)

FANCY FREE, AFTERNOON OF A FAUN,
GLASS PIECES, A SUITE OF DANCES
Paris Opera Ballet, Palais Garnier, Paris

NOVEMBER 2018

1(e), 2(e), 3(e), 6(e), 7(e), 8(e),
9(e), 10(e), 11(m), 13(e), 14(e)

FANCY FREE, AFTERNOON OF A FAUN, GLASS PIECES, A SUITE OF DANCES

Paris Opera Ballet, Palais Garnier, Paris

5

JEROME ROBBINS AND TELEVISION

Paley Center, New York City

6(e), 7(e), 8(e), 9(e), 10(e), 11(m)

IN THE NIGHT

Richmond Ballet, Studio Theatre,

Richmond, Virginia

16(e), 17(m), 17(e)

THE CONCERT

Sarasota Ballet, Sarasota Opera House,

Sarasota, Florida

DECEMBER 2018

18(e), 19(e), 20(m), 20(e)

THE CONCERT

Royal Ballet, Main Stage,
Royal Opera House, London

JANUARY 2019

2(e), 4(e)

THE CONCERT

Royal Ballet, Main Stage,
Royal Opera House, London

11(e), 12(e), 13(m)

DANCES AT A GATHERING

Miami City Ballet, Adrienne Arsht Center,
Miami, Florida

18(e), 19(m), 19(e), 20(m)

DANCES AT A GATHERING

Miami City Ballet, Kravis Center,
West Palm Beach, Florida

26(e), 27(m)

DANCES AT A GATHERING

Miami City Ballet, Broward Center,
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

MARCH 2019

7(e), 8(e), 9(m), 9(e), 10(m), 16(m), 16(e),
17(m), 23(m), 23(e), 24(m)

AFTERNOON OF A FAUN / FANCY FREE

Carolina Ballet, Fletcher Opera Theater,
Raleigh, North Carolina

7(e), 8(e), 9(m), 9(e), 10(m)

FANCY FREE / THE CAGE / THE CONCERT

Houston Ballet, Wortham Center,
Houston, Texas

22, 23(m), 23(e)

THE CONCERT

Indiana University,
Musical Arts Center,
Bloomington, Indiana

29(e), 30(m), 30(e), 31(m), April 2(e)

GLASS PIECES

Rome Ballet,
Teatro Costanzi, Rome

ONGOING THROUGH MARCH 2019

VOICE OF MY CITY:

JEROME ROBBINS AND NEW YORK
NYPL for the Performing Arts