

NEWS FROM
**THE JEROME
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Jerome Robbins



In memory of SUSAN HENDL

This issue of the newsletter is lovingly dedicated to our friend Susan Hendl (1947–2020), a dancer and Répétiteur at New York City Ballet for more than 50 years, who staged works by George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins at New York City Ballet and around the world. Her profound knowledge and artistry, and her generous sharing of them, inspired generations of dancers.

Top right: A photograph of 12-year-old Susan Hendl that appeared in the *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader* newspaper in 1959, when it was announced that she had been accepted as a student at the School of American Ballet.

Bottom right: Susan Hendl, Susan Pilarre, and Diane Bradshaw relaxing on the set while filming *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (choreography by George Balanchine) at New York City Ballet, 1964. Photograph by Martha Swope.

Cover: Susan Hendl and Sean Lavery in Jerome Robbins' *Dances at a Gathering* at New York City Ballet, 1979. Photograph by Martha Swope.

The tributes that follow are but a glimpse into the range of those who experienced Susie's gifts firsthand over the years in her life and career. How many lives she touched and influenced! These contributors include friends, those who performed alongside her as dancers, dancers who were coached by or learned roles from her, artistic directors of ballet companies for whom Susie staged ballets around the world, and off-stage colleagues with whom she worked in all aspects of her career.

Susan Hendl, Susie to all who knew her, was my dearest, oldest friend. We had known each other since we were candy canes in *The Nutcracker* back in the days of City Center. How many people have a friend they have been close to for over sixty years? We had so many adventures together on- and offstage back then. Susie was a beautiful dancer. She was a very quick learner and so musical. Mr. B recognized her talent and took her into the Company when she was just 16.

She had a difficult home life and often said that Mr. B's bringing her into the Company at that time saved her life. As it was for so many of us, the Company became her family.

We danced together in so many ballets that Mr. B choreographed on us. In 1972 he promoted us at the same time to be soloists. He even gave us our own dressing room, which we shared for eight years until I retired. We shared a lot of laughs and tears in that room. Mr. B picked Susie to dance the lead in *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue* when it was brought back into the repertory in the late sixties. He choreographed the "Do Do Do" duet for her in *Who Cares?* and the spinner variation in *Coppélia*. She danced many principal roles in his most beautiful ballets including *Emeralds*, *Serenade*, and *Liebeslieder Walzer*. Jerry Robbins also loved Susie's dancing. He made the second pas de deux in *Goldberg Variations* (Part 2) on her and she danced both Pink and Blue Girl in *Dances at a Gathering*.

In 1965, the Company went on a three-month tour to nine European cities and Israel. It was our first chance to see the world. If there was a free day, Susie and I, now just 18 years old, would run off to see some nearby sight or city that was not on the tour. I am not sure we told anybody. We even went to Florence and Rome alone. We were so young but had so many wonderful adventures. Now, all these years later, I cannot believe we even did that!

In the fall of 1982, after we both retired from performing, Susie and I worked with Peter Martins to revive the two iconic ballet numbers in the revival of *On Your Toes* that Mr. B had originally choreographed in 1936. Mr. B had already taken ill but we would visit with him often to get his input on everything, even costume designs and casting decisions. He was extremely excited about all of it, and we, of course, loved to keep him in the loop. The revival was being directed by the legendary George Abbott, who was an amazingly spry 102 years old. Everyone called him Mr. A, so Susie and I always joked that we got to work with both Mr. A and Mr. B. It was a time of transition for Susie, and I know she really enjoyed it!

The fact that Susie staged and rehearsed ballets for both the Balanchine and Robbins Trusts is just another indication of how these men felt about her ability to pass on exactly what their choreography required. As dancers and friends across continents can attest, she was passionate about her work and compassionate for those with whom she worked. Her musicality and attention to detail were extraordinary. She demanded a lot and got not only remarkable results but mountains of respect and love in return. She was simply the real deal in every sense of the word.

Susie was my treasured friend and I will miss her terribly. To know Susie was to love her. I am certain that our entire New York City Ballet family feels the same and all of us will cherish her memory forever.

Susan Pilarre

Faculty, School of American Ballet / Répétiteur, The George Balanchine Trust / Former Soloist, New York City Ballet

The first time I met Ms. Hendl, I was 14 years old, auditioning for my first SAB summer program in Salt Lake City, Utah. I don't remember much about the audition except that I was intent on impressing her, despite being sick enough to stay home from school that day. She collected me and a couple other students after the class to tell us we would be awarded a scholarship to the summer program. My journey to New York City Ballet and more hours in the studio with Ms. Hendl was on its way, and I had no idea at the time the great impact this woman would have on my life.

As a young Company member I saw her working with the principals and soloists and developed a great respect for her as one of the people who put the finishing touches on the most important ballets. She only worked with the people dancing in featured roles, so you knew if you were in the studio with her, it was something special and important.

The first time I worked with her in the Company was for the pas de trois in Robbins' *Piano Pieces*. My other female colleague and I were ready to do anything to impress this woman we held in high esteem. It was 18 years ago, and I don't remember much about the rehearsals except that I was pushing myself to my absolute limit to implement every correction she gave.

We started working together much more when I was in my early 20s, as I learned how to become a proper ballerina. I had been promoted early, and while I maybe had the technical ability to be doing the roles I was doing, I was lacking the inspiration and imagination that one needs to really develop as an artist. At some point in a dance career, you have to transition from diligent student to experimental artist, and Susie was the person who helped me get started on that path. We worked almost completely on my port de bras. I was barely able to keep up with the technical demands, but there was Susie in the front of the room pushing me to also be an incredible artist.

Very quickly she gave me the nickname Meg. For some reason the effort to become familial made me feel at home, and she was quickly the Ballet Master whom I was drawn to. For *The Nutcracker* we were all divided out to different Ballet Masters, and Susie was my coach for Dewdrop. It was the perfect drawing board for her to help me develop my artistry. Early in my career, something dramatic like the entrance or exit for Dewdrop was not as important in my mind as the scary steps that happened in the middle. But Susie prioritized how I ran on and off the stage. To this day I always think of her in that last grand exit when I part the line of the corps de ballet with my arms and run to the back wing. It's not just a dramatic moment, it's a ballerina moment, done with class and sophistication.

I have other great memories of working with her on *Allegro Brillante*, *Theme and Variations*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake*, *Tschaikovsky Pas de Deux* and the Divertissement pas in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Every time I revisit those ballets, she is in the forefront of my mind as I work to shape my version of the ballet. She is the person that helped me transition from capable dancer to ballerina, and just even thinking about these specific roles changes my posture into ballerina quality as I sit here and write this. That's how much she affected my approach.

Her coaching style, as well as her conversational style, was blunt and refreshing. She called it like it was, and there was no beating around the bush when you weren't looking your best and you needed to adjust something. Her expression when she saw something she didn't like was so straightforward in its show of distaste that you never wanted to make that mistake again. And for that honesty we all adored and loved her. She helped people make good choices, and we knew we were always showing our best angles with her in our corner.

Pleasing her was the greatest pleasure of my career. She soon realized that cuing me with one word, and one word only, brought out the effect she wanted to see in my dancing. Just simply saying, "Jewelry, Meg, jewelry," as she touched her collarbone and turned her head over her shoulder would bring out exactly what she wanted in my dancing. She had a beautifully long neck, and just the image of her doing that, and saying "jewelry" changed my posture in a way that seemed to fix a long list of things we were always working on with my upper body. I guess that word will always carry a certain importance in my dancing.

We got closer outside of the studio as she got sicker. Albert Evans, another principal with the Company and also another Susie Hendl summer course find, would organize us to go visit Susie in the hospital. Upon arriving on her floor, we would tell the nurses' station that we were there to see Susie and they would immediately say, "Oh, she told us all about you guys. How she found you in your hometowns, discovered you, and brought you to have these successful careers in New York." Just hearing that she was so proud of us made us both so pleased.

These last couple of years when her presence in the theater wasn't as strong, I don't think a performance went by that I didn't have her in the forefront of my thoughts as I placed myself in the wing ready to enter the stage. Most dancers say a little prayer or have a superstitious thing they might do. I have developed the comforting habit of saying to myself, "Do it for Susie." I am devastated that we will never be able to have another blunt and refreshing conversation, but I know that she is embedded in my instincts as a dancer, and the very essence of who I have become, and for that, she will never feel far away.

Megan Fairchild

Principal, New York City Ballet





Susie was not only my best friend, she shaped my life both professionally and personally. She was beyond generous, caring and compassionate, and I can only hope to be a small reflection of who she was as a person. She filled my life with love, happiness, and so much laughter; I will always be grateful.

When she shall die, take her and cut her in little stars, and she will make the face of heaven so fine, that the world will be in love with night, and pay no worship to the garish sun. (William Shakespeare)

Ben Huys

Répétiteur, The George Balanchine Trust and The Robbins Rights Trust /
Member of the Advisory Committee to The Robbins Rights Trust /
Former Soloist, New York City Ballet

My first lasting memory of Susan Hendl was seeing a very beautiful sensuous woman interacting with other dancers in the hallway of SAB in the late 70s. Later, when I joined NYCB in 1980, we connected through work and developed a friendship that lasted ever since.

She was a rare dancer of exceptional feminine delicacy and musicality. When she later started to stage ballets and became a Ballet Master at NYCB, she found a place for her love of Balanchine and Robbins, and for helping dancers become the best they could be. She had that very rare eye that saw what was missing and had the ability to make anyone believe that they could achieve anything. Her extraordinary memory for details (she could tell you what we ate, wore, or said going back 30–40 years) made her perfect for staging ballets. Her taste, elegance, intuitive intelligence, love for life, and most of all her passion for ballet were much appreciated and will be greatly missed.

Ib Andersen

Artistic Director, Ballet Arizona /
Former Principal, New York City Ballet

I knew Susie for over 60 years. We met at The School of American Ballet. I was introduced to adoring cats by Susie—she gave me my first kitten. Susie had a very distinctive voice and charm when she danced. She was adorable in *Who Cares?* and her variation in *Coppélia* was difficult, but with those eyelashes fluttering and her sparkling smile, she lit up the stage.

Susie loved dancing, but I think her second career as a Ballet Master for New York City Ballet was her most fulfilling. She loved the ballets of Mr. Balanchine and Mr. Robbins; she loved the dancers and always wanted them to look their best and the ballets to be danced as best they could be danced. Susie taught with a generosity of spirit. Her eye was sharp and when she taught it was not just the steps and counts—the skeleton—it was the essence, musicality, nuances, style, spirit, and the perfume, as Violette Verdy might say. Each dancer she taught did not have to fit a cookie cutter, one-size-fits-all profile dancing the ballet. She helped them make it their own. A very unique talent, Susie will be missed terribly.

Kay Mazzo

Chairman of Faculty, School of American Ballet / Trustee,
The George Balanchine Trust / Former Principal, New York City Ballet

I first met Susie during the 1979–80 winter season at New York City Ballet, when she had a knee injury and Dr. William Hamilton asked me to work with her and get her back to dancing shape. We became fast friends during that process. I had just graduated from the Columbia University Program in Physical Therapy and this was her first “real” injury! Once she was back in the studio, I got to watch her work in class and in the studio restoring her trust in herself and in her refined sense of movement. I was very honored to be able to guide her in this recovery as well as to learn from her how to watch a dancer move through the choreography. Susie had an amazing “eye” and was able to tell a dancer how to improve whatever they were doing. Some of my favorite memories were in Saratoga, where we would live together for three to four weeks during the summer seasons of NYCB. We would all work during the day and watch the ballets in the evening and then discuss them when we got home over dinner and very good wine! Thank you Susie for always being my friend, for making me welcome in your world, for helping me become the person I am today.

Marika Molnar

Founder and President, Westside Dance Physical Therapy /
Director of Physical Therapy, New York City Ballet

Susie Hendl passed away only weeks ago. She was a very close and dearly beloved personal friend of mine. She had an enormous influence on me. Susie translated and conveyed the world of New York City Ballet to me when I first joined that magnificent company many years ago. I know that she, in her role as Ballet Master at NYCB, had an indelible and utterly important influence on so many dancers in the Company. I shall miss her greatly, as a truly intimate friend as well as an astounding artistic consultant and guide. Her dry wry humor, her honest talk, her astute pinpointing musicality, her down-to-earth frankness, and her spot-on knowledgeable eye—all these qualities made her a brilliant Ballet Master.

Susie's gift for teaching and staging the ballets by Mr. B and Jerry brought her all over the world. Right after she died, I contacted several dancers and directors in Europe whom I thought should know of her passing. Each and every one of the people I contacted spoke of how much they had benefited from working with Susie. They all talked about her passion for dance and music. She touched so many people in the ballet business.

Susie Hendl! I'm grateful to have met you. And I salute you with all my heart and love!

Nikolaj Hübbe

Artistic Director, Royal Danish Ballet /
Former Principal, New York City Ballet

This loss hit me hard! I truly loved Susie. Working with her was such a gift. She really was brilliant and special and my absolute favorite to work with. I begged Peter to let me work with her every chance I could because she really understood me like no other and knew how to get the best out of me and everyone she worked with. Working with her was truly a transcendent experience!

When I transitioned into teaching it was definitely a journey to figure out how to be selfless and of service to the dancers I work with. Teaching doesn't have

Far left: David York, Susan Hendl, Renee Estopinal, Sara Baxter, and Ellen Sorrin at the wedding reception of Christine Redpath and Bill Soleau, 1995.

Center left: Ib Andersen and Susan Hendl. Photograph courtesy Ib Andersen.

Near left: Ben Huys and Susan Hendl. Photograph courtesy Ben Huys.

Right: Jerome Robbins, Susan Hendl, and Anthony Blum rehearse Jerome Robbins' *The Goldberg Variations* at New York City Ballet, 1971. Photograph by Martha Swope.



the same kind of selfishly personal gratification as performing and it takes some time to figure out how to find and support another dancer as you mourn the loss of not being able to physically experience it anymore for yourself. Susie was my inspiration and shining example for finding my passion for teaching and staging.

I am truly glad I stepped away from the art form for a while so that I could rediscover my love for it from this new perspective and fully support those I am working with to discover themselves through this beautiful art form that I love. I hear Susie's voice in my head every day when I teach and I remember the feeling she gave me in the room when we worked together, with her unwavering belief in me on and off the stage; that's what guides me.

I'm sad I won't be able to share my teaching/staging experiences with her and seek her advice, but I will always do my best to honor her amazing spirit. I think that she and I saw ourselves in each other, and it was a unique and special connection that I will always treasure!

Miranda Weese

Faculty, Boston Ballet School /
Former Principal, New York City Ballet

Losing our Susie is hard. Very hard. We all loved and adored Susan "Susie" Hendl. She was a wonderful, lovely, kind, spicy and musical dancer, and a dear friend who was central to the NYCB family. Possessing beautiful line and strong technique, Mr. Balanchine and Jerry favored Susie in their casting, and they both also chose to use her knowledge, mind, and talents to teach their ballets to the next generations. Susie went on to stage and coach numerous Balanchine, Robbins, and Martins ballets around the world with great distinction and care, and she also auditioned countless students across the country for the School of American Ballet. Her innate understanding of the differences between dances and how they should be thought about was incredibly deep, along with her sense of style and appropriateness. She was an important authority and asset to the New York City Ballet in the decades after Balanchine's passing.

I remember her in Stanley Williams's class before I joined NYCB. She was a stunningly beautiful, tasteful yet spunky, and particular dancer. My first rehearsal at NYCB when I joined in 1970 was with Jerry himself for the not-yet-premiered *The Goldberg Variations*. I was suddenly understudying Susan Hendl and Tony Blum in the Allegra Kent Pas de Deux. Susie extended herself during the five-minute breaks, showing me the choreography and helping my partner David Richardson and me catch up. She was already helping and mentoring the other dancers in the room while in her early twenties and a rising dancer herself. Five years later we were colleagues, logging a lot of bumpy, bumpy cart rides in

Coppélia's third act, with Susie as the Spinner, Christine Redpath in the Prayer, and me as Dawn. Our boisterous male colleagues and friends jostled and teased us as they pulled us around the stage, yet somehow Susie kept those wild and crazy guys firmly in line without losing out on the fun. She easily commanded the room she was in—always with authority and kindness.

"Noooooooooooo, Heather..." in a raspy and loving way. "Careful of your shoulders..." "Is that a flexed foot on purpose??" "Are you up on that leg??" "I think *maybe* we ought to try that again." And again and again. She coached us one and all, in parts she had performed and ones she had not, and I respected her and loved her. I remember her Dewdrop, her *Divert*, her *La Valse*, her Pink Girl and her Blue Girl in *Dances*, *Serenade*, Fourth Movement Bizet, *Liebeslieder*. Oh, the memories! But most of all I remember watching her "Do, Do, Do" in *Who Cares?* with sweet Frank Ohman. Balanchine made that insouciant and witty pas all about our sweet and beautiful Susie. She shone to the top of the fifth ring of the New York State Theater with her light touch, deep musicality, and teasing feminine presence.

Over the years I watched her shine light on many, many, many dancers. She was a fantastic role model for so many of us, teaching us to pass on what we knew. She represented the best and most full-hearted life in dance. She tirelessly taught legions of dancers across decades and many companies. We were all so fortunate to have her in our lives. You were the real deal, Susie, and you will always be missed. Thank you dear.

Heather Watts

Former Principal, New York City Ballet

Susie Hendl never called me Perry. She decided long ago that my name was Perrita. She pronounced it with a lilt—a musical sequence of three notes, something like do-sol-mi, but slightly off-key—a cheerful greeting that always made it sound like she was glad to see me or hear from me.

Not long ago I was standing outside, in the air of the Catskill Mountains, and heard a bird call that I had never noticed before, and it was those exact notes. The bird repeated it several times—"tweet-tweet-tweet"—but all I could hear was Susie's voice, singing, "Per-ree-ta." Now I am not saying that Susie and the bird were working together, but I will never be able to hear those notes without thinking of Susie exclaiming "Perrita!" I will always have her voice in my head.

Perry Silvey

Member of the Advisory Committee to The Robbins Rights Trust / Former Production Stage Manager and Technical Director, New York City Ballet

The first time I ever saw Susie, she was rehearsing Miranda Weese and Peter Boal in the third act of *Swan Lake*. I paused on my way to Krammy's class (already late, no doubt, but he did always say, "Better late than never!") and stood in the doorway to watch. I remember the tone of the room so well. It felt special and private. They were quiet, serious, and focused, but the mood wasn't heavy. They were just working without any inhibitions, no self-consciousness. It felt like the three of them were all trying to get somewhere together.

Susie wanted you to look your best, but also to fill your movement with conviction and the right intention. For me, that often meant stopping the music even before I had begun a solo. Then came an emphatic and drawn out, "Tyyyyyyyyyyler! Go back, go back, go back. Come in again and show me how you are going to start," said with a quick present of her hand and a flick of her chin upward. I always took that to mean, "If you're gonna do it, do it!"

Once, fifteen minutes before a studio complete, Andy Veyette sprained his ankle and couldn't dance. Susie saw me in the stairwell, "You know *Allegro [Brillante]*, right?" she asked. "Yes," I lied. I learned Andy's spot from Craig, Christian, and Adrian in the back of the studio before the rehearsal and flew to Copenhagen with the Company the next day. She thought I could do it, and I wanted to do it because she had that confidence in me.

Whether she was reminding you, "Just listen to the music," or "Think of yourself wearing fabulous jewelry" (mostly for my ballerinas), or simply "Think of me smacking that right cheek every time you come around in the pirouette," Susie was always willing to help you work through your demons, physical or mental. She helped me find myself as a dancer, and there are so many roles that I became comfortable in with her help and guidance.

When she wasn't walking so well, she would put a stool in the second wing and watch our performances from backstage. I always danced better with her in the wings, and I will always keep her in my mind and in my heart, watching from that second wing. Love you Susie.

Tyler Angle

Principal, New York City Ballet

Susie was an amazing friend. She was catlike in her fiercely guarded independence and innate class and style. She always looked sophisticated and pulled together. I got to know her when we were both dancing for Mr. B and Jerry in the '70s. I didn't know her too well at that time since I was newer in the company, but I so respected her and admired her clean, precise musicality and beauty. She was always generous and helped me if I asked any questions about the repertoire, and we started a friendship when I moved to the second-floor dressing rooms. She and Suzy Pilarre shared the room next door.

It was after I returned to NYCB in 1985 as Jerry's assistant that our friendship got going. She right away gave me her handwritten notes for the ballets of Jerry's that I took on, and always helped out on clarifying a tricky musicality if I asked. As a Ballet Master, Susie was truly one of the best in the world. Every dancer was so happy to work with her. She had an innate wonderful way of being supportive and encouraging, yet demanding, and every dancer improved by working with her and deepened their own musicality and understanding of the ballet, and probably themselves in general.

So many wonderful times! Spending time together at the Paris Opera staging Jerry's ballets, and our sister-like deep friendship with Ghislaine Thesmar, and when Susie and I staged *Who Cares?* for Pacific Northwest Ballet for Kent Stowell and Francia Russell and shared wonderful dinners in Seattle with them.

For about ten NYCB Saratoga seasons, we rented, with Victor Castelli, a great Victorian house on North Broadway from Peter and Carol Kurto, where we cooked sumptuous dinners together and frequently invited the whole Company over on a free day. People would drive by the great porch, see us, and stop in. Susie's guacamole is still unsurpassed.

Susie always loved cats. And they found her too. At the Saratoga house was a neighborhood cat named "Sprout" that lurked around but was wary of people. Susie was able to coax him out and he would come to her when we were there and twine himself around her leg and purr. Her own black-and-white cat "Miton" was adored by her; he left an enormous hole in her life when he passed away, until she found "Carly" later on.

We tried pottery classes downtown on Mondays for a while thanks to Ben Huys, but more often than not we'd be talking or laughing and miss the stop, and so go for dinner down there instead. And we never achieved the qualifying "pinched pot"—instead doing some dubious freeform clay things we both chucked in the incinerator after they were fired in the kiln—but we laughed a lot.

Her decline was a profoundly sad thing to witness these last ten years. I felt completely helpless, and she stubbornly refused any offer to lift her leg or

anything. Just like a cat that swipes when it doesn't want the attention. It helped me learn I wasn't her "messenger" and all I could do was be there, watch TV with her, and let her know how much I loved her and our friendship.

Her presence at NYCB is still felt in the dancers and all of the people in the theater who knew and valued her knowledge, clarity, generosity, humor, work ethic, everything. Thank you, Susie. Love you.

Christine Redpath

Repertory Director, New York City Ballet / Member of the Advisory Committee to The Robbins Rights Trust / Répétiteur, The Robbins Rights Trust / Former Soloist, New York City Ballet

Susie's eyes could take in an entire room. They glinted with a clarity that made you know she absorbed everything. She saw you as you were—equally weighing your strength and weakness, your vanity and ambition. She let you know there was space for all of it within the repertoire, within reason. Susie held the keys that unlocked the music, the style and technique and she shared them with straightforward generosity. She was a kind of medium in that way: transmitting a lifetime of knowledge and observation through simple directives. When you faltered in a pirouette during the finale of Bizet she'd say, "Just keep going up," and then, "Maybe we should try that again." Susie's "may-be" had the lilt of a song and left no room for ambiguity. *We would* do it again. And this time, as your head would spot—1, 2, 3—you'd hear, "Up, up, up," at the front of the room. It worked. The rotation would rise and suspend, delivering you to a moment of musical clarity. "Better," she'd say (for the work was never done). These were the gifts Susie brought to the studio: simple and honest and precisely what you needed. Now that Susie has left us I find myself repeating her correction: Just keep going up. However the spirit may travel from here, I hope Susie's goes *up, up, up*.

Adrian Danchig-Waring

Principal, New York City Ballet / Director, New York Choreographic Institute

My first impression of Susie Hendl was of a beautiful, sweet waif. When she joined New York City Ballet she was a lovely, painfully young dancer and a good addition to the Company, but she had little to no self-confidence and clung to the furthest corner of the studio. My then-soon-to-be husband Kent Stowell and I took her under our wings and she began calling us "Mom and Dad," a testament to her need for a family after a sad and lonely childhood. The Company became her family for the rest of her life.

From the beginning Susie was a joy to work with. Always dedicated, always prepared for rehearsals. With her intelligence and musicality, it was no time before she understood Mr. B's work processes and was often chosen to feed back to him the choreography he had just created. It was no surprise that she became a versatile soloist, a favorite of Balanchine and Robbins, and that she had a stellar, enviable career as a dancer.

It may be a subjective opinion, and I never asked her about this, but I always thought Susie believed her second career as a Ballet Master/Répétiteur was even more significant, for herself and for our art form, than her first as a performing artist. She had that great wealth of experience gained through working closely with Mr. B and Jerry, and her fidelity to their work was complete and totally without ego. She had been "at the creation" of so many of their ballets that their intentions had become part of her DNA.

Another equally impressive feature of her work as a Ballet Master was her devotion to dancers. Every dancer in the studio got her full attention; not only the most gifted or hierarchically important, but also those in the back of the studio trying hard and continuing to struggle. Dancers knew Susie would do everything in her power to help them fulfill their potential and faithfully present the work she was teaching them as the choreographer would have wanted. One hears over and over that she inspired them as artists and that, in return, they loved her.

Susie's life was not an easy one, from a difficult childhood to a long illness, but there were many, many good times. Most importantly, she used her intelligence, her experience, and her capacity for empathy to give generously of herself in a life of true value to others. Now that her friends and colleagues are revisiting our memories of her, I suspect Susie would be amazed to hear the depth of love and grateful respect we will always carry with us.

Francia Russell

Répétiteur, The George Balanchine Trust / Former Artistic Director, Pacific Northwest Ballet / Former Soloist, New York City Ballet



Susan Hendl and her beloved feline Miton. Photograph courtesy Christine Redpath.



Susan Hendl and Kipling Houston in Balanchine's *Serenade* at New York City Ballet, 1977. Photograph by Martha Swope.



Susan Hendl (seated) and Tiler Peck in a New York City Ballet rehearsal studio. Photograph courtesy Tiler Peck.

The first time I set my eyes on Susie was when I was a student at the School of American Ballet performing in *The Nutcracker*. At that time, who would have thought that we would create this personal bond of friendship? I could go on about so many wonderful memories of being in the studio together when I was a dancer and later working as co-workers. Even spending time with friends outside of the workplace, which just put a smile on my face as I thought about it. Thank you, Susie, for your trusting friendship and your honesty. It has always meant so much to me, and to many generations of dancers around the world. What you have taught me will stay with me for the years to come.

Jean-Pierre Frohlich

Repertory Director, New York City Ballet / Member of the Advisory Committee to The Robbins Rights Trust / Répétiteur, The Robbins Rights Trust / Former Soloist, New York City Ballet

Where do I even begin? Susie was and will always be one of the most important coaches throughout my career. I trusted and respected her every thought. She had such a unique and special eye and I loved how she ran the room with dignity, grace, and honesty. I will never forget one rehearsal when I started walking out for the grand pas in *The Nutcracker*, and after two steps, she clapped her hands and said in her Susie way, "Now, Tiler. We're not going to walk out like that, are we?!" I giggled and replied, "No, we are not. Let me try that again for you, Susie." I love that she was never afraid to speak her mind and never let me off the hook for one second. She expected so much of me at every rehearsal, which I always appreciated, and I wanted to make her proud.

Susie and I had a special bond that I can't really describe. She not only pushed for me early on—like seeing I was right for the Pink Girl in *Dances at a Gathering* before I or anyone else felt I was ready—but also knew how to push me every day in the studio and help develop my artistry. Susie looked at the bigger picture; she paid attention to details but wasn't insistent on it being only one way. She focused more on the individual and what looked best and worked for the person in front of her. She wanted us to be individuals and not look like one another. I looked forward to being in the studio with her every day.

I will never forget the first time I met her. We met in the airport, as a tour to California was my first introduction to New York City Ballet. There were just four of us flying out to meet the rest of the Company that had previously been in Japan, and Susie was one of the four. She walked over and introduced herself saying, "Hi, I am Susie, a Ballet Master, but I work mostly with the Principals so I won't be seeing you much in rehearsals." Little did I know then that I would have the pleasure of getting to spend so many years and so many hours in the room with her. I treasured every single moment.

There are too many memories to mention, but I wanted to share a few that really stand out to me. From my first rehearsal with her, when she taught me the Fourth Movement principal role in *Symphony in C*, I knew she was unlike any other. She talked to me about feeling like I was wearing jewelry, and immediately I started carrying myself differently. That image is something I still use to this day, and whenever I teach, I try to pass that advice on. I remember learning the "three sister" walking dance in *Dances...* from her, and she had just the two of us walking around for an hour in the Main Hall together. She was teaching me the importance and simplicity of just walking in a Jerry ballet and how he wanted the ballerina to walk naturally and off the music. She taught me the most challenging roles—Swanilda, Aurora, Odette/Odile—from the absolute beginning and we

always focused on the musicality and telling the story from start to finish. I will also never forget when she decided to teach me *Other Dances*, a ballet I knew was sacred and one not many ballerinas were given the opportunity to dance. Susie worked with me daily to make sure I felt ready, and it was through that process that I felt my dancing drastically changed, and for the good. I was learning to shade my dancing and Susie was guiding the way.

When Susie fell ill and wasn't coming in to the studio anymore, I felt like something inside me was missing. I needed her guidance, I needed her eye, I needed her support. I always felt confident walking onstage for a performance because I knew that she had been completely honest with me in the studio. If I had gotten Susie's stamp of approval, that was good enough for me. As a result, when I would feel stuck in a rehearsal, I would call her at the end of the day and say, "Susie, what do you think about this?" Or, "I am having trouble with this step in *Swan Lake*, what do you suggest?" Normally her answer would be, "Tiler, you know what to do. Stop focusing on the little things and just dance it." And isn't that the truth?! As ballerinas, we have the tendency to be perfectionists. Sometimes all I needed was the little reminder to just do what I love and dance it out. Among many gifts, that was Susie's. She knew how to get us out of our own way and become the best versions of ourselves.

I still am having a hard time knowing I will never get to talk with her in detail about any of our favorite ballets, but I am forever thankful for our last visit in her apartment. Heather Watts and I went over for a visit and Suzy Pilarre was there and the three of us just chatted about ballet. It was incredible to look around the room and see the different generations of ballerinas she touched. I will never forget how excited we were to see each other and to dive into all of the roles that I was working on at the moment while she had been away. The ballet was her life. We were her life. And I am just forever grateful that she was in my life.

Tiler Peck

Principal, New York City Ballet

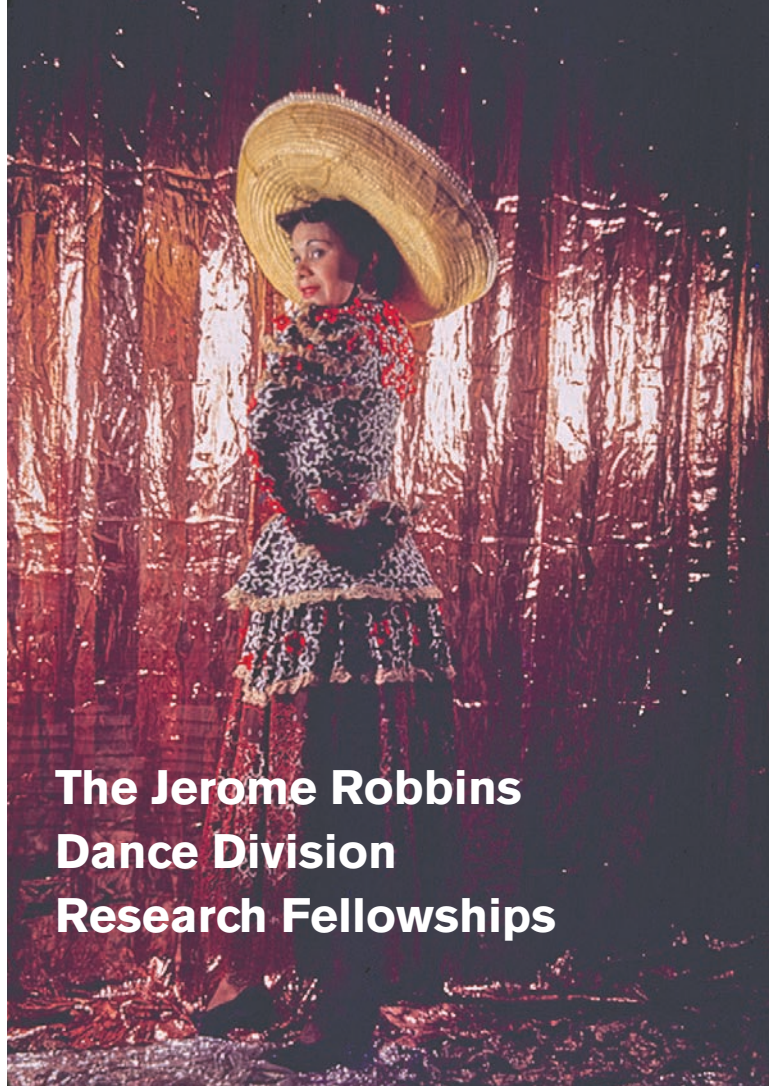
Susie gave great dinner parties. She was a wonderful cook, but that's not why we were there. We were there because we all loved Susie. There was always stimulating conversation, differences of opinion, lots of laughs, and a warm feeling in her beautiful living room. I met some of my favorite people to this day at Susie's dinner parties. Chrissy Redpath, Stephanie Saland, Marika Molnar, Ben Huys, Nikolaj Hübbe—to name a few—who all became part of my life. Susie was generous with her friends, taking great pleasure in their liking each other and becoming more than dinner guests to one another. Some knew Susie as a Ballet Master rehearsing them for Balanchine and Robbins ballets; some as fellow Ballet Masters who had danced with her at New York City Ballet; some as teachers at the School, where Susie traveled the country auditioning young students for entry into the world of Balanchine; and others, like me, who worked with her on special projects and fell under her spell.

She was my friend. I will miss her voice, her laugh, her sense of humor, her values and her devotion to the art of ballet, always foremost in her thoughts. She was a unique and extraordinary individual who deserved all the loyalty she garnered.

Rest well, my dear friend. We will carry you in our hearts, always.

Ellen Sorrin

Administrator/Foreign Licensing, The George Balanchine Trust / Director, The Jerome Robbins Foundation, and Trustee, The Robbins Rights Trust



The Jerome Robbins Dance Division Research Fellowships

Katharine Dunham in Brazilian costume, 1940. Photo by Carl Van Vechten. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library Digital Collections.

The Jerome Robbins Dance Division runs an annual fellowship program designed to increase scholarship in the field of dance. Six months in duration, the fellowship traditionally relies heavily on the class of fellows spending significant amounts of time in the Library reading rooms working directly with primary materials. However, this year the fellows have had to conduct all of their research remotely with divisional staff creating digital surrogates of the necessary items. The researchers have overcome this obstacle valiantly and six incredibly exciting projects have emerged all centered around the theme of Dance and Immigration, the binding focus for this year's cohort. The final projects of the group will be presented at the Dance Division's annual symposium, taking place on January 29 and live streamed in lieu of in person attendance because of COVID-19 restrictions.

Kiri Avelar is researching under the title *Descubriendo Latinx: The Hidden Text in American Modern Dance*. Her work positions the invisibilized presence of Latinx in the early American modern dance canon as central to the retelling of our absented dance histories. Avelar's project identifies specific works by pioneers of early American modern dance that pulled on the cultural practices of the Latinx diaspora and investigates through research and creative practice how those seeds and appropriations continue to be generative and foundational to modern dance. Specifically, she examines choreographic works that Doris Humphrey, Martha Graham, and Lester Horton created in their post-Denishawn careers. In conversation with Humphrey, Graham, and Horton, Avelar also examines the specific choreographic works of pioneers José Limón and Katherine Dunham that investigated hybrid identity and the diversity within the Latinx diaspora. Avelar further explores how Limón and Dunham themselves created from a space of simultaneous cultural traditions that expertly infused the beginnings of modern dance in America and *las Américas* with myriad styles. As an interdisciplinary artist, educator, and scholar, Avelar focuses her work around collaborative community expression designed to further provoke thought around the artistic, physical, and cultural borderless experience of Latinx artists in America.

Ninotchka Bennahum's project is *Border Crossings: Léonide Massine and Encarnación López Júlvez, 'La Argentinita' Studies in Transnationalism, Self-Exile, and Art, 1935–1945*. Bennahum's starting point is the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and the rise of fascism in Western and Eastern Europe that threatened the lives of millions, in particular those deemed “valuable individuals,” i.e.,

artists and intellectuals who escaped. Some were forced to adopt temporary, émigré status. For the great majority, permanent exile and loss of homeland forced a reckoning with new national identities and, consequently new frameworks in which to experiment with exilic modernist experience.

An inextricable bond existed between the noted Leftist and anti-fascist Spanish dance artist La Argentinita and Russian émigré modernist Léonide Massine. Their artistry, flourishing between 1935 and 1945, refocuses and deepens our critical understanding of Spanish modernism as embedded in their choreographic process. How exile shaped these artistic processes and the effect it had in shaping the contemporary trajectory of their aesthetic alliance into global forms of contemporary ballet and Roma-Flamenco is at the heart of Bennahum's research.

American dance was shaped profoundly by the brutality of the twentieth century. The inextricable link between immigration and exilic experience produced some of the most important moments in American contemporary performance. Bennahum's central premise resonates with the most basic principles of contemporary ballet: spatiality, temporality, and resistant acts of performance.

With *Dreams of the Orient*, arts educator and advocate **Phil Chan** explores how “the Orient” has been portrayed on the ballet stage from 1600–2020 within a larger geo-political context, while highlighting the problems today with presenting an outdated and exclusively Eurocentric view of Asia and Asians in classical ballet for a diverse American audience. In the absence of choreographers of Asian descent, the imaginations of ballet choreographers with limited knowledge produced dancing images of Asia filled with exquisite harem spectacles, romantic Hindu temple dancing girls, demure geishas, dramatic suicides, unbridled sexuality, savage barbarism, opium fantasies, shirtless men, and heathen mysticism that defied Christian logic—in a dynamic that exists to this day.

Sergey Konaev's project documents the teaching activities of prominent immigrant female dancers as part of the broader women's struggle for self-determination following their retirement from the stage. Between the 1930s and the 1960s, the female performers who faced the harshest post-retirement realities came from the Russian Imperial Theaters. They were pushed out of Russia following the 1917 Revolution. At the end of their dancing careers, many of these artists fell from high-paid international stardom into the lower depths of refugee existence—often without the needed language skills, financial aid, and access to social or legal services. For some of them, the hopes not only to find a safe new home but to become a founder of the national ballet were destroyed in the 1930s because of the outbreak of World War II. The situation was especially dire for progressive female artists—those who did not want to sacrifice themselves to patriarchal patronage. To survive, immigrant artists taught privately, opened dance schools and advertised private lessons in newspapers. The project aims for the publication of key archival documents with an introduction and commentary.

With specific focus on the period 1960–2020, **Yusha-Marie Sorzano** and **Ferne Regis** peruse the staged work of selected choreographers with the intent to chronicle the iconography and movement employed with themes of hierarchy, rebellion and/or hope as they are presented in relation to minority and immigrant groups. Sorzano and Regis map these representations in an effort to determine whether a common standard exists or whether nuanced variations persist throughout the period under examination. These findings will be used as a point of entry into Sorzano's interpretation of said themes as she continues to craft *Threat*, her newest work-in-development.

Finally, **Pam Tanowitz** investigates three distinct tracks in researching for her next dance, *Song of Songs*. The first track is a study of Jewish folk dances. Learning various dances from archival records and sharing them with her dancers, Tanowitz and her company absorb the steps and patterns into their bodies. She examines these dances outside of their political and geographic context, investigating the culture embedded within the dances. By reducing the steps to their base aesthetic, she reveals how they communicate with ballet and her own movement ideas, giving her the ability to reweave them into a contemporary context. The second aspect is research into Jewish choreographers and how they relate to their Jewish identity in their work. The research examines: the dances of Anna Sokolow—including her *Song of Songs*; David Gordon's *My Folks*; along with dances of Anna Halprin and Hanya Holm; books by Fred Berk, Dvora Lapson, *Dancing Jewish* by Rebecca Rossen, *How to Do Things with Dance* by Rebekah Kowal; and the personal papers of Fred Berk, Jerome Robbins, and Hanya Holm. And the third and final tract for Tanowitz is introspective—processing all this research and considering what it all has to do with her. How, ultimately, will she express her Jewish identity?



Hopi Eagle Dance painting by Fred Kabotie, a component of Doris Humphrey's *The Dance Score: A Project for Dance Notation*, 1936. Part of the *Archive in Motion* exhibit at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Virtually visit exhibitions at the New York Public Library for the Arts

Archive in Motion: 75 Years of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division and Voice of My City: Jerome Robbins and New York

Although the New York Public Library is offering only “grab-and-go” service at 50 locations as part of their gradual reopening, visitors to the Jerome Robbins Foundation website may view online versions of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Division's recent exhibitions. For those who may have missed them or for those who wish to view them again, both *Archive in Motion*, in celebration of 75th anniversary of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, and *Voice of My City*, honoring the Jerome Robbins Centennial, may be viewed virtually.

From July 2019 through January 2020 the Jerome Robbins Dance Division celebrated its 75th year with an exhibition that charted its history and the establishment of international dance archival practices through the display of significant items from its collections. Curated by Linda Murray, head of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, *Archive in Motion* included items from the first five collections acquired by Genevieve Oswald, first curator of the dance collection, including material from Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman. These artists' collections helped create a foundation for the archive in modern dance. *Archive in Motion* also showcased images, costumes, set designs, and audio and video materials from the Dance Division's original documentation projects, including oral histories with dance luminaries.

Voice of My City traced Robbins' life and dances alongside the history of New York, inspiring viewers to see the city as both muse and home. Jerome Robbins was an inveterate observer, seeker, and creator. In diaries, drawings, watercolors, paintings, story scenarios, poems, and — especially — in dance, he reimagined the world around him. New York dominated that world. Robbins put the city at the center of his artistic imaginings. From *Fancy Free*, his breakout hit ballet in 1944, to the musical *West Side Story* on stage (1957) and screen (1961), and the ballets *N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz* (1958) and *Glass Pieces* (1983), Robbins explored the joys, struggles, grooves, routines, and aspirations of New York. “New York served as a laboratory for Robbins, where he observed people, buildings, traffic—how movement in space could carry meaning and beauty,” explained Julia L. Foulkes, exhibition curator.

To explore both digital exhibitions, go to www.jeromerobbins.org, scroll down, and click on *Archive in Motion* and *Voice of My City*.

Out of the turbulence of their emotions, a kaleidoscopic terror of the events pour over them and a chaotic tumbling covers the stage surging about and tearing at the levers and trying to carry them apart. Desperately they cling to each other and cry out for a better life — there must be a better world and a better place — things must go well for them somewhere! Out of the storm — like reaching an island — comes a sudden stillness — a quiet — a refuge.

The scene is a field. A horizon of tall grass — green, sunlit open-air earth. A place of no buildings, no corners, no walls, no doorways, no traps. A place with enough room. Warm air and clear sky.

The field is empty. A figure runs on and stops. It is a member of the gang dressed in his usual city clothes, not idealized. Finding himself suddenly in this open, unoppressed world, he stops. He looks carefully about. He allows his body and senses to react to all strange newness. Another enters, a third, and more and more from both groups, each separately and unrelated, each sensing and testing this different, alien atmosphere. They examine it, react to it and finally begin to use it. Their movement changes. From the tight, bent-knee, into-the-earth movement, the kids, using the light, air, sun, smell, and most of all the space and peace, open up and extend themselves in movement which are not out of character, but suddenly released from the tensions of their realistic city problems. Their innate poetry comes forward, expressed in their own terms. Expressed with humor, poignancy and an elation, there is an opening up, a building of movement, a development and heightening of their use and growth of it, a rising elation and ecstasy.

At the height of it, a running Tony and Maria enter and join them and unconsciously a transfigured restatement of their meeting in the dance hall in the promenade is performed — the running in a circle and a speeding to meet each other and the final arrival and acceptance and joining, a completion.

Now Tony and Maria, in a short pas de deux, express their love in most idealized terms, freed from the pressures of hurried time, the gang warfare and all the circumstances and prejudices, they can be together, unhidden, fully and openly declared, a Utopian dream wish.

When they finish, they turn to the others who have been watching. There is an atmosphere of love and harmony on the stage. Tony and Maria offer their hands to the other members. At first hesitantly and then more decisively, the gangs accept each other's friendship and join in the forming of one group. At this point Riff and Bernardo enter from opposite sides. There is a moment of terrible tension. Tony and Maria offer their hands to the dead who accept them. They join the group.

Now in complete serenity and simpleness and dignity they form a procession which walks around the stage together. They're at peace on this journey and secure with each other, joined together and looking out at the world. After this circling, they open up to cover the whole stage, each person has his own secure place.

They begin some wide swinging movements, evoking this love of peace and space that they find themselves in. But subtly the light and the atmosphere begin to change. The dimensions alter and, gradually, to stay in the light the individuals start to move toward each other. Restrictions are being imposed, the buildings start to re-enter, the space becomes more limited. The movement quickens, tightens, becomes tougher as the groups are pushed together more for lack of space. Tougher and jazzier, the accelerating and hardening; the individuals are crowded more and more together until finally the complete tempo and horrors of the cage of the city is upon them.

Finally, a member of one gang crashes into an enemy member and the volcano erupts. Rapidly, nightmarishly, there is a dividing of sides; a chaotic reprise of the hostility, an insane condensed repeat of the rumble murders of Riff and Bernardo involving Tony and Maria — a montage of the horror and anxiety and events that have occurred. This whirls around the stage, boiling over into the initial turbulence that the ballet started with. The kaleidoscopic storm reappears, the room re-enters and Tony and Maria cling to each other, sobbing on the floor.

Now they know what it is they must face, the reality of the situation. And they realize that only their love for each other will hold them together, and that only in that love, completely given and fulfilled and strengthened, can they stand with strength up to the events of the world.

This scenario was written by Jerome Robbins in 1957 in preparation for choreographing the second act ballet in *West Side Story*, known as the “Somewhere” ballet (Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library, Digital Collections).

Carol Lawrence and Larry Kert in Central Park in a publicity photo for the original Broadway production of *West Side Story*, 1957. Photograph by Friedman-Abeles.







Natalie Wood and Jerome Robbins congratulate Anne Bancroft backstage on her opening night of *Mother Courage and Her Children* on Broadway in 1963. Photograph from the collection of Jerome Robbins.

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*.

From the Archive: Eric Bentley

ERIC BENTLEY (1916–2020) playwright, critic, and translator, was born in Lancashire, England. He attended Oxford University and received his Ph.D. from Yale in 1941. He succeeded Harold Clurman as drama critic for *The New Republic* in 1952, where he became known for a blunt style of theater criticism. Mr. Bentley was the first English translator of the plays of Bertolt Brecht and introduced Mr. Brecht's work to American audiences. As a playwright, Mr. Bentley's works include *A Time To Live & A Time To Die* (1967), *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been: The Investigations of Show Business by the Un-American Activities Committee, 1947–1958* (1972), among others. He wrote several books on theater criticism, the most notable being *The Playwright as Thinker* (1946). His biography, *Bernard Shaw* (1947), received great acclaim. Mr. Bentley assisted Mr. Brecht with his production of *Mother Courage and Her Children* in Munich (1950) and directed the German-language premiere of Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*. Mr. Bentley's translation of *Mother Courage* opened on Broadway in 1963, in a production directed by Jerome Robbins. Mr. Bentley received an Obie Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2006.

In 2009, Bernard Carragher interviewed Eric Bentley as part of the Jerome Robbins Foundation's Oral History Project. What follows are excerpts from that conversation.

Eric Bentley In 1959, I'd been in a lawsuit with Stefan Brecht, the heir of Bertolt Brecht, over a production of *Mother Courage*. I had authorized a Broadway production of *Mother Courage*, starring Katina Paxinou. My right to do so was challenged in court by Stefan Brecht, the author's son. He didn't win the lawsuit, but neither did I. It was settled out of court... A little time passed before anything new happened, when Cheryl Crawford expressed an interest and said she could finance the play—I think we are into the early 1960s now—and she teamed up with Jerry Robbins, who was to be hired as both co-producer and director. Stefan Brecht talked to them and said that he would only cooperate under certain terms and asked what they would like to do. One of the questions was, which adaptation should they use, the one that Stefan Brecht had sponsored, by Marc Blitzstein, or mine? After some arguments, Stefan Brecht allowed Cheryl Crawford to choose

between those two adaptations, and in a controversial move she chose mine. He was allowing the production that he fought a lawsuit against to be done. However, he came in, with the degree of control that he had, and he wouldn't let her use the score that my producers had commissioned from the French composer Darius Milhaud. This was serious to me because my lyrics were written for that score—he didn't write the score for my lyrics. Thus, my lyrics were really not meant for any other score. Anyway, we went ahead. He used the version still favored by the Brecht family, which Brecht himself had used, by Paul Dessau. They immediately found that I had done lyrics earlier, for the Dessau score, but the lyrics in the version they'd bought, didn't fit. So that was the source of some misunderstanding.

I have to say, in hindsight, it was a doomed production from the start because of the lack of communication between the creative elements and the show. From the start, I felt never trusted by him. At the first rehearsal, the director usually speaks to the actors. Jerry was getting ready for that occasion and he asked me to be absent from it. Well, I cheated. I was absent from the table, but I was listening through an open door. This was going to be a big Broadway success, blah, blah, blah. He concentrated on that, for the most part, while occasionally wanting to get ahold of the Brecht theories, and so on, which he never grasped. I never even wanted him to. If they acted it simply, I would have been happy. Although in the dance field he didn't need lessons from anybody—because he's one of the top people and nobody denies his gift—when he was doing straight theater, drama, he thought he should take lessons, not from Mr. Brecht or me, but from Lee Strasberg, some of whose sessions he'd attended, apparently. He tried to use an Actors Studio approach with the actors, and they didn't appreciate it. They were all unhappy during rehearsal. When I got to the rehearsals, I tried my best to cooperate and help it. He was working very hard, as he always did. Conrad Bromberg was rehearsing a song he had, which was a song-and-dance. He had to dance while singing. Of course, Robbins was very happy going up onstage and showing him the steps. It was very well rehearsed. But Robbins came to me and said the song was too long. I said, "Well, you could cut the whole song, but it's in three verses and it tells a story. The only verse you could cut would be the middle verse, but then you'd miss the middle of the story and the continuity, so I maintain it cannot be cut." Cheryl Crawford, who was sitting behind me in the Martin Beck Theatre, whispered in my ear, "Do you realize you're working with the

greatest director of musical theater in the world?" Jerry, presumably, didn't hear her say that, but he heard me say that it couldn't be cut unless you cut the whole thing. He thought for one minute about cutting the whole thing, then realized that people—all the Brechtians in the opening night audience—would complain that he cut out one of the best songs in the show, so he said, "Okay, we'll try rehearsing it again." This time I was very suspicious of Robbins and I thought he would rehearse it to demonstrate to me that it was too long. I realized then that the man was a great pro because he went up onstage and did the dance with Conrad, making it faster and lighter. He improved it a lot. When he was done, he never looked at Cheryl, but he looked at me and asked, "What do you think?" I said, "I like it very much. You improved it. It's wonderful." He said, "Well, I don't agree, but I'll keep it in." The man had shown me that he would try. In fact, it was good. It was certainly the best that Conrad could do. He wasn't a singer, he wasn't a dancer, but he did quite a good job on it. That's really the only positive memory that I have of rehearsals.

Anne Bancroft didn't give the best performance that she could because of Robbins bowing to her while bullying and threatening all the others with being fired and so forth. In the last week of rehearsal, he realized that he didn't have a hit on his hands. Jerry Robbins was obsessed with the idea that his name meant it was a hit. When he got the idea that it wasn't going to be, he said, "We have to shorten it." I said I could do a general shortening of the whole thing in the two or three days that were left. He said, "We'll do a dress rehearsal and you'll stand with me in the wings, and every speech that's too long"—which is most of the speeches in *Mother Courage*—"you'll do a shorter version of, right away. You'll speak it to my assistant, who'll record it." And I remember standing there and actually *doing* that. It was awful. I hadn't time to scribble it myself. I think somebody was taking it all down. I don't know to this day whether the actors got those changes. I only knew the script they'd begun rehearsals with. Since that time, I had consented to many small changes, without seeing a new script. I don't have a current copy of the stage manager's script, and I don't know if he entered all the changes or if the actors got them or not. I've never seen the final script that was spoken on opening night.

I went on opening night. I, of course, saw the opening performance. It wasn't bad. It just was cool—in the old-fashioned sense, not in the modern sense. It followed the Brechtian theory to an excess and said, "Brecht isn't emotional." But *Mother Courage* is very emotional, as a play. It was choreographically staged beautifully. Everything was always in proportion, and it was very finished. Anne Bancroft could have made a better *Mother Courage* than she did, but there was something in her personality which militated against it, which was that, as a woman, she came across as something of a tomboy, not as a mother. Some of the actresses who have played *Mother Courage* had a very motherly look, which helps because, after all, she's that and nothing else throughout the play, attending to the death of her three children. Helene Weigel was the mother of Brecht's two children and is alleged to have said to Lotte Lenya, "You can't do this part because you're not a mother," which was rather insulting. I did my best to be positive about the show and not be a drag. I hadn't seen the dress rehearsal, but I saw the show from out front on opening night and I thought, *Well, it's the neatest, most polished Mother Courage I've seen, but it doesn't have the life of the writing, by Bertolt Brecht and then me, as the adapter.* Jerry Robbins had a great sense of humor, but it wasn't a Brechtian sense of humor.

One of the characteristics of *Mother Courage* in Germany was a lot of scenes with pauses between them. Ten scenes with a pause of 30 seconds, maybe a minute, after every scene. The German audience will accept that. Robbins, probably correctly, noticed that this wouldn't do in America because the audience

The following excerpt is from Jerome Robbins' journal, written during the pre-production period of *Mother Courage* on Broadway. It is dated Monday December 3rd [1961].

I've been very depressed because it seems to me that working in the theatre, for the creative people, is like being a terrible workhorse who slogs his way or plods his way to get to a certain point. Thrown over him are the nets and luggage of everyone making money on his effort because when you come right down to it, the only thing that really keeps theatre going is that workhorse.... In between the need to create and the need to see it, is a whole vast intricate merciless industry and business and I now feel it's a business just like in Hollywood, which is a business. I suppose up to now I've been unaware of it or blind to it.... In a way it really is like *Mother Courage*.



Gene Wilder and Anne Bancroft in the Broadway production of *Mother Courage*, 1963. Photograph from the Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library.

won't accept that amount of a gap. The reason for the pauses in Europe was they changed a lot of scenery. What he should have done was to design the show so it could continue, like a movie. Ming would have done it. "No, no," he said, "This is Brechtian. We'll do it the right way and I'll fill it with something." I asked, "What are you going to fill it with? I don't have any lines for you, and I don't want to write any." He had a terrible idea. In the eyes of a modern New York audience, they would have to relate *Mother Courage* to what they knew about war, which at the time was World War II, so he got some photographs from World War II, and had slides made of them, and projected them on the little front Brecht curtain that he used. They showed displaced persons in camps, for instance. I said, "That's the worst way to tell the audience that the play is relevant. You want it to dawn on them that the play is relevant, not *show* them, for God's sake." There were these terrible pauses. Worse than blankness. He tried to make it interesting in America, but that wasn't the way. It had many of the virtues of professional theater, except the key virtue of all—that the thing would be alive and emotional. Besides which, Brecht took great pride in the fact that, even though it was tragic, there were a lot of jokes in it. I don't think we ever got a laugh. Anne Bancroft, who would be perfectly capable of delivering those, didn't. Anne Bancroft wasn't yet married to Mel Brooks, but they were together, and Mel would come to rehearsals. At one rehearsal, Mel came up to me and said, "Why are you giving Annie all these long speeches? Why don't you give her a one-liner?" I've thought to myself since, *If I'd only heeded his advice, I'd probably be as rich and famous as Mel Brooks by now!* But I loyally translated her long speeches, which Jerry Robbins hadn't helped with at all, so the laugh lines in *Mother Courage* didn't come through. It was grimly serious, but not emotionally moving. That's fatal.

Later, he said he wished he'd done it as one of his own Broadway musicals, and with a new score by Leonard Bernstein. Of course, he wouldn't have been allowed to do that because Stefan Brecht wouldn't allow any score but the Paul Dessau score. But Jerry did end up thinking that he should have done it as a show of his own, with an American composer he was used to working with. Whereas the Dessau score seemed somewhat introverted, a Bernstein score would have been very extroverted, and might have saved the show along Jerry's lines. It wouldn't have been very Brechtian, but it might have given him the good show that he didn't really get.



Beryl Towbin, Jerome Robbins, Christine Mayer, Erin Martin, and Gwenn Lewis upon the arrival of Ballets: U.S.A. at Stockholm's Bromma Airport, 1959. Photograph by Herman Ronninger, from the collection of Jerome Robbins.

Ballets: U.S.A. Dancing the Nation during the Cold War by Stacey Prickett

Situated within a period of rich choreographic creativity on Broadway, film and ballet stages in the late 1950s, Jerome Robbins established Ballets: U.S.A., a small company whose impact was felt long after its three years on the touring circuit. Launched at a time of fluctuating Cold War tensions, cultural diplomacy through the arts had become an increasingly powerful political weapon. Ballets: U.S.A. included performers who Robbins worked with in ballet and musical theatre, and, significantly, offered a racial mix amongst its sixteen dancers. Two of the dances commissioned for the company continue to be performed internationally today; *N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz* (1958) and *Moves* (1959; subtitled *A Ballet in Silence About Relationships*) were included in the 2018–19 New York City Ballet Robbins centenary season. Robbins' visions of youthful, vibrant Americans who revelled in a mix of musical and movement styles helped advance perceptions of the superpower that celebrated democracy, innovation, and inclusivity. Archival documentation of funding decisions illuminates artistic imperatives that became politically expedient for the U.S. government to support in the 'battle for hearts and minds' in the fight against communism. The overview of the company's tours in 1958, 1959, and 1961 examines Ballets: U.S.A. repertory, foreign press coverage, and the political capital the tours achieved.

In the late 1950s, the U.S. government strengthened its cultural diplomacy policies in response to the highly successful Soviet-sponsored tours by the

Bolshoi Ballet and the Moiseyev Dance Company, which achieved worldwide acclaim.¹ President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Emergency Fund for International Affairs was instituted in 1954 to support touring artists, and soon became a permanent fund. International dance tours were managed through the U.S. State Department by the American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA) based on recommendations from its Dance Panel comprised of experts who included choreographers, artistic directors, and dance journalists. Rather than compete with classical ballet spectacles and folk dance performances of the USSR, the Dance Panel turned to Robbins to offer up visions of urban America. A visual art style that celebrated abstraction was promoted in exhibitions while classical and jazz musicians toured internationally in the Far East and Africa as colonial rule was cast aside and new nations emerged.² Although government funds supported existing dance company tours, the ANTA Dance Panel felt Robbins' work addressed perceived gaps in representation.³ There was an urgent need to respond to negative perceptions of the U.S., particularly as foreign press coverage focused on racial inequalities and hypocrisy in how the government criticized human rights abuses in non-democratic countries.

Supported in its first year by the State Department and Philadelphia's Catherwood Foundation, Ballets: U.S.A. came into being in response to an invitation to Robbins to perform at the inaugural Spoleto Festival of Two Worlds in Italy. Appearances at the Maggio Festival in Florence, shows in Trieste, and at the Brussels Universal and International Exhibition were added to the tour. Arts festival events offered high exposure to elite audiences, and extensive critical coverage in mainstream periodicals and in specialist dance journals, particularly in Britain. Existing ballets in the Robbins repertory were included that encompassed his stylistic range, including the duet *Afternoon of a Faun* (Debussy, 1953) and the satirical *The Concert, or, The Perils of Everybody* (Chopin, 1956). New commissions brought jazz syncopations and instrumentation to the fore with Robert Prince's scores for *N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz* (1958) and *Events* (1959). A short curtain-raiser, *3 x 3*, was danced to George Auric's music on the 1958 tour.

Although a home tour was abandoned due to poor ticket sales, Ballets: U.S.A. garnered rapturous reviews throughout Europe. The company received extensive exposure in the U.S., however, through the broadcast of excerpts of *N.Y. Export* on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1959 and 1960. The coverage occurred between the Broadway premiere of *West Side Story* (1957) and its release as a film (1961). *N.Y. Export's* five scenes echoed the style and atmosphere of the 1957 musical theater masterpiece, with Keds-clad dancers moving in front of Ben Shahn's backdrops that evoked New York City skyscrapers, television antennae, and the city's energy and colors. Writing in the British *Dance and Dancers*, critic Clive Barnes identified "behaviour patterns" he labelled as American: "Here you see the 'gang' – the American desire for 'togetherness' and shelter – you see the conventionalised and ritualistic society, the dancers keeping up with the Joneses, then suddenly each one breaks away from the group to make his or her variation on a common theme. This to European eyes is that American Way of Life which makes all seem to want the same car in different colours, with differently shaped chrome fittings; this is the personality cult in a rigid society."⁴ Moments of competition, friendship, violence, and romance flowed throughout. Through expressions of individuality and community, virtuosity and spontaneity, Robbins' dancers encourage and provoke each other. Bonds are established as they gather in a round dance, or challenged as they line up in gendered groups to compete and flirt, interweaving swing dance partnering with show-off leaps. Balletic steps are interwoven with parallel jazz-style syncopated turns, low pulses of the knee with snapping fingers, encapsulating the *West Side Story* style. The longevity of the choreography and its adaptability to contemporary times is seen in the 2010 film by New York City ballet dancers, set within New York City landscapes.

New dances were commissioned for the second tour, which had an expanded company of 18 and performed in 19 countries across Europe, Iceland, and Israel.⁵ In 1959, Aaron Copland composed a new piece for Robbins that arrived as Robbins was preparing the Broadway musical *Gypsy*. Robbins turned down the opportunity to choreograph to Copland's score, explaining that he did not have adequate time to develop the dance to the level it deserved. While waiting for the music, Robbins had worked in silence to create movement with the dancers, ultimately deciding that he liked the results. In 1959, *Moves* premiered without accompaniment at the Spoleto Festival. The lack of music was innovative, an avant-garde departure from the rich musicality that underpinned his other dances. A contentious power struggle emerged between Robbins (with company manager Leland Hayward's support) and ANTA's General Manager Robert Schnitzer. While the Dance Panel expressed confidence in Robbins' casting decisions, they vetted the dances in the repertory as they did with all companies approved for funding. Schnitzer argued that *Moves* was too abstract to be appreciated by

some European audiences, recommending that the 1945 dance *Interplay* be performed in five countries whose audiences would have had limited exposure to more abstract dance. The debate played out in multiple letters and telegrams as Robbins stood his ground and, except where logistical concerns or casting issues arose due to injury, the company performed *Moves*.⁶ Danced in practice clothes (leotards and tights) and the women in pointe shoes, groups merge in and out, break into duets, trios, and quartets, display virtuosic leaps, intricate footwork, and at times quirky lifts that break from a classical vocabulary. In *Moves* the codified dance vocabulary is interrupted by pedestrian activity, as dancers stand back and watch each other or engage in playground games such as tag.

The company gave 88 performances in front of a total of 145,965 people during the 1959 tour, with a repertory that spanned Robbins' choreographic range—comedy in *The Concert*, group interactions and lightness among the dancers in *Interplay*, quiet but dramatic intensity and the potential for romance in *Afternoon of a Faun*, avant-garde contemporaneity in *Moves*, with episodic drama combining musical theater and social dance styles in *N.Y. Export* and *Events*. Six soloist musicians supplemented local orchestras while the décor and costumes were worlds away from the tights and tutus of classical ballet companies populating the burgeoning arts festival circuit on European stages. There had been discussion of Ballets: U.S.A. adding the USSR to its tour, however, its repertory was perceived as too 'jazzy' by the Soviets. Other ballets by Robbins were danced behind the Iron Curtain—in 1960 by American Ballet Theatre and in 1962 by New York City Ballet.⁷ Travel between the 19 countries was a logistical feat, exacerbated by a plane crash off the coast of Greece. The opening night at the Edinburgh Festival was danced on a bare stage with donated outfits due to the loss of the sets and costumes when the plane went down. Reorganizing transportation arrangements to avoid traveling through East Germany circumvented a diplomatic incident.⁸

After a year's break from performances when policy shifts impacted U.S. government funding decisions, the Rebekah Harkness Foundation supported a 1961 tour. Joining some of the original company members, Kay Mazzo danced her first professional performances on the tour. She was featured in many publicity photos partnered by African American John Jones who studied ballet and worked with Robbins on Broadway. Press interest in the inter-racial duets replicated that seen in earlier tours, when Jones partnered Wilma Curley in *Faun*, and in the 'Passage for Two' duet in *N.Y. Export*. Some critics also commented on the racial conflict in *Events*, an episodic dance that was compared to *N.Y. Export* in style, in which Jones was confronted by a group of white male dancers.⁹ The overall assessment of the company's success was that U.S. cultural diplomacy objectives were achieved, as the foreign critics shifted focus from real life racial conflict on U.S. city streets to the visions of harmony onstage. The period of the tours coincided with the battle against discrimination, racism, and police brutality at home, as the Civil Rights Movement generated force for change through landmark protest actions such as the 1960 Greensboro, North Carolina lunch counter sit-ins.¹⁰ Robbins explained his inspiration which drew from Black and Latin-American "form and style" in creating *N.Y. Export*: "[Teenagers have] strong unconscious emotional kinship with those with minority roots...Feeling very much like a minority group in this threatening and explosive world, the young have so identified with the dynamics, kinetic impetus, the drives and 'coolness' of today's jazz steps that these dances have become an expression of our youth's

outlook and their attitudes toward the contemporary world around them."¹¹ The cultural diversity of the company included dancer Patricia Dunn, although her Korean American heritage was not commented upon by the foreign press.

Ballets: U.S.A. was perceived as representing the nation, one forged of multi-ethnic influences as Black artistic expression became more prominent within mainstream culture through popular music and dance. Elements of social dance are seen in Robbins' partnered swing breakouts, a sense of improvisation, and the evocation of a 'cool' attitude that embodied the zeitgeist of the time, somewhat rebellious and very self-confident. Robbins also drew on his Jewish heritage in integrating folk dance elements. Moments of pedestrian interactions had the potential to bring narratives to life in dance scenes that offered vivid emotional resonances. Foreign critics celebrated a sense of democracy in Ballets: U.S.A.'s lack of a star system, while noting that its racial mix would have been prohibited onstage by Jim Crow laws in the southern U.S. states. Although recognisably American in style, Robbins achieved an aura of universality, one that transcends the time in which the new commissioned dances were created.

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Notes

1. Naima Prevots analyzes the American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA) Dance Panel decisions in *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998). Clare Croft investigates dance as soft power in U.S. cultural diplomacy policies since World War II in *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).
2. U.S. government support of jazz musicians is analysed by Penny M. Von Eschen in *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors play the Cold War* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004).
3. The ANTA Dance Panel Minutes are located in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Collection 468, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville, Arkansas.
4. Clive Barnes, "N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz," *Dance and Dancers* (November 1959), p. 13.
5. The 1959 cast included Tom Abbott, Bob Bakanic, Jamie Bauer, Muriel Bentley, Wilma Curley, Patricia Dunn, Lawrence Gradus, John Jones, Gwen Lewis, Erin Martin, Jane Mason, Michael Maule, Christine Mayer, Barbara Milberg, James Moore, Jay Norma, Bill Reilly, Douglas Springler, Beryl Towbin, and James White. A *Ballets: U.S.A. Tour Analysis* offers extensive detail of the performances and critical responses.
6. Details of the debate between Robbins and ANTA are found in Ballets: U.S.A. correspondence files held at the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
7. Both companies danced *Interplay* in the USSR, which makes an interesting connection to the ANTA debate. David Cate, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Diplomacy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). See also Croft, *Dancers as Diplomats*.
8. See also Deborah Jowitz's chapter on Ballets: U.S.A. in *Jerome Robbins: His Life, His Theatre, His Dance* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005).
9. Much darker in atmosphere than *NY Export*, *Events* was not restaged on other companies and Robbins' notes refer to an atomic bomb.
10. The significance of the Civil Rights movement to U.S. Cold War policies is explored by Mary L. Dudziak in *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
11. Jerome Robbins' program note in *Jerome Robbins' Ballets: U.S.A. Program*, 1959.



Photographs by Jerome Robbins taken during the 1959 Ballets: U.S.A. tour. Left: Dancing in a plaza in Spain. Right: Dancer Patricia Dunn in Greece.



"Slim" Hayward in Spoleto, Italy, 1959. Photograph by Jerome Robbins.

My Date with Slim

by Brian Meehan

"Did you bring the chicken?" asked Lady Keith when she met me at the door of her apartment at the Verona, a Stanford White pile on 64th Street and Madison Avenue. Though her figure no longer reflected her eponymous nickname, Slim, she was quite tall, and elegantly dressed in a black skirt and bright red silk blouse that matched the color of her bright red lipstick. A handsome woman of a certain age, she wore tortoise shell glasses and her hair was pulled back in the Grace Kelly-ish chignon that Lady Keith, first as Slim Hawks—and later as Slim Hayward—had made stylish. In Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, Slim Hayward is mentioned by the impossibly beautiful Kelly as her lunch companion at "21" earlier in the day. "She was wearing the most divine Italian silk dress..." Kelly's fashion editor gushingly recounts to Jimmy Stewart. So, in this scene, Slim Hayward is portrayed to the movie-going public of 1954 as the mentor of style and beauty to Grace Kelly. In other words, here was a lady who had something going on. And I was going to cook her dinner.

It was through Jerome Robbins that I met Lady Keith. Jerry knew that I knew my way around a kitchen, working my way through grad school as a line cook and caterer. I had made many meals for and with Jerry in the summers on eastern Long Island where both he and my parents had summer houses. I had loved to cook since I was a kid, learning first from my folks and later in restaurants. Jerry was also a great and accomplished cook, and we often made meals together. He told me that a friend was looking for someone who could make the occasional lunch or dinner, and would I be interested? It was making lunch one day with Jerry in Bridgehampton that I first became aware of his friendship with Lady Keith, when the phone rang, and up to his arms in salad, Jerry asked me to answer.

"Hello, darling," purred a voice on the other end of the line.

"Um, this isn't darling. May I help you?"

Suddenly very formal. "Oh, good afternoon. Yes. This is Lady Keith. You can tell Mr. Robbins that the cockamamie number he gave me is *not* Mrs. Ertegun's, but some garage in Southampton, and that that's the last time I'm going to fall

for that trick. Thank you. Goodbye." I soon learned that Jerry and Lady Keith had a long history of playing practical jokes on one another. And, more importantly, shared a deep and abiding friendship.

Nancy, Lady Keith, formerly Mrs. Leland Hayward, formerly Mrs. Howard Hawks, née Nancy Gross, a.k.a. Slim, was one of the most famous and stylish women in America and England during the period that spanned the late 1930s through the 1980s. She had been married to three men who were masters in their respective fields of movie directing, theatrical production, and finance, and who had bestowed upon her not only a life of wealth and luxury, but three fantastic names: Slim Hawks, Slim Hayward, and Slim Keith. She had been an intimate of Hemingway, Capote, Cary Grant, William Paley, and Jerry Robbins, among others. She counted among her great women friends Babe Paley, Irene Selznick, Claudette Colbert, and Lauren Bacall, who was famously discovered by Mrs. Howard Hawks. Leafing through a stack of magazines, Slim suggested to her director husband that the unknown girl on the cover of *Harper's Bazaar* had just the right look for Humphrey Bogart's love interest in the upcoming film of *To Have and Have Not*. When the 19-year-old New Yorker Betty Perske was introduced to the director, he realized that she was a doppelgänger for Mrs. Hawks. She was instructed to get to know the director's wife, and to walk, talk, dress and essentially become her fairy godmother. What we see when we watch the tall, languorous, sultry creature in that film is a virtual impersonation of Slim Hawks as she was in 1945. As an inside nod, the name of Bacall's character is Slim. After the movie came out, thousands of women copied Lauren Bacall copying Slim Hawks.

Knowing that this was the same woman, now a titled lady, whom I was about to meet on a cold clear Sunday in November, I was more than curious about what she would be like. I suppose I expected someone very grand and imposing.

"Do I call her Mrs. Keith?"

"You will call her Lady Keith," he told me.

"Do I bow?"

A chuckle from Jerry. "For God's sake, no! If she extends her hand, shake it, don't kiss it!"

Jerry had a long and loving friendship with Slim Keith. Among the many beautiful things he owned, those he treasured most were gifts from her: The massive Windsor chair he used at his desk, signed and dated in the nineteenth century with Roman numerals along its headrest. And over the fireplace, a charming American folk portrait of a child, a little boy surrounded by his favorite toys. Loveliest of all was an exquisite painting by Tissot of a goateed man smoking a cigarette and languishing on a sofa covered with an oriental carpet. This he kept hanging right beside his bed. These lovely things spoke not only of the exquisite taste of the giver, but of her extravagant generosity. They had all been objects that she herself had owned and lived with and loved before she gave them to Jerry.

I should not have been surprised, then, by the pretty, unpretentious charm of Lady Keith's apartment. She greeted me at the door herself, and did extend her hand as she asked about the meal. A tiny—no, miniscule—Yorkshire terrier was yapping at her feet.

"That's Blossom. Here let's put this away in the kitchen first, and then we can talk."

The typical New York galley kitchen was just off the small foyer. Once we got the ingredients for dinner put in their proper places, she escorted me to the living room, really a living room/dining room/library whose walls were covered in a vibrant red fabric, an English chintz of birds and flowers. The furniture, the objects on the tables, the paintings all spoke of someone who was long accustomed to living with the kind of beautiful, intriguing things I was only just beginning to appreciate. What looked like a small Modigliani was perched upon an easel on a side table. Despite this room's generous proportions, it appeared to have only one bedroom and no servants' rooms.

"I'm just perching here until I find a bigger nest. I'd love to stay in the building." She would, in short order, find that bigger and brighter set of rooms in the Verona, but for now, this small apartment with a grand living room was her only domain. Her houses, Jerry said, had been the most comfortable and stylish he had ever known, which was saying a lot. Whether it was the early American farmhouse she had shared with Leland Hayward in Manhasset on Long Island; or Firefly, the storybook charming house which she acquired from the Frederick Marchs, and which one reached by crossing a little bridge over the Aspetuck River in the woods of New Milford, Connecticut; or the classic English country house named The Wicken over which she presided as chatelaine when she was married to Lord Kenneth Keith, Slim's innate sense of style and her gift for mixing coziness and elegance lent her houses and apartments an ineffable charm. "We all have to feather our little nests," she told Jerry, who himself was most influenced by Slim when it came to his own interiors.

"Mrs. de la Renta lends me her girl once a week, but she doesn't cook. I haven't had a regular cook for some time. She fingered some needlework on the couch beside her. "But I'd like to do more entertaining again. You wouldn't be required to cook for large groups, just a few people, at the most six. Mr. Robbins tells me you know what you're doing in the kitchen. I don't go in for fancy, gussied-up things, just good simple food served well. What will you make along with that bird?"

It had been pre-arranged that I would make a roast chicken. Apparently, this was some kind of a litmus test and Lady Keith's judgment of prospective cooks.

"With the chicken, potatoes Anna and string beans."

"Potatoes Anna, what are those?" She took off her glasses. A close and steady gaze.

"You just slice the potatoes quite thin and overlap them in a skillet. Brush them with a little butter and bake them for about an hour. Then you flip them out on a plate like an upside down cake."

"Oh, yummy," she enthused.

The phone rang. "Excuse me." We both stood up and she crossed to the other side of the room.

"Hello? Oh hello, darling...yes, he's here." Jerry. A glance at me. "Very nice,

lovely manners. The drive tomorrow? You can't drive at night? Then I'll drive. Of course I can see at night, don't be ridiculous. Well then if you're that nervous, we'll get a big white stick and put it on the roof of the car. Bye-bye." She hung up. "Honestly, that darling man can be so difficult to drive with."

"You ought to try cooking with him," I blurted out. She glanced at me and burst into a deep long laugh, making me feel at ease.

Jerry spoke to me once about the first time he had met her, during a rehearsal for *Call Me Madam*, produced by her then husband, Leland Hayward. "I turned to see a woman walking down the aisle of an empty theater. She was tall, beautiful, wearing a gray sweater...and no bra." This was, remember, the early '50s. She took a seat and Jerry went back to rehearsing a number that wasn't going well. He called out for the opinion of the producer who was presumably somewhere within ear shot: "What are we going to do with this number?"

"Cut it," was the terse retort, not from Mr., but from Mrs. Hayward. He turned around to see the producer's wife calmly plying some needlework behind tortoise shell glasses. "Cut it; it's just a big mess," she reiterated. It was all he could do to control his ire at her outspokenness. But he also realized she was right, and he did wind up cutting it. Out of this acerbic meeting, a friendship was formed, enduring decades, husbands, lovers, and continents. She and Leland Hayward were Jerry's mentors in the world of high society, but Slim was a friend with whom he could share the private side of his life.

"I imagine her as the society lady in *Pal Joey*, I ventured to Jerry one day. "Did she buy you a silver cigarette case and take you shopping for beautiful suits at Sulka?"

A chuckle from him. "Oh, no. Much more elegant and discreet than that. She sent the tailor with fabrics to my apartment."

"Listen, before this chicken, I wonder if you would drive me up to Columbia Presbyterian? I'd like to pay a quick call on a friend who isn't well."

"Of course, Lady Keith." She gathered her bag and coat and rang for the elevator. I noticed that she didn't lock the door.

"Aren't you forgetting something?"

"What's that?"

"You didn't lock the front door." I was thinking of the Modigliani.

"Oh, certainly not." Her car had been brought from the garage and was waiting for us in front of the building. No chauffeur driven limo, but a well-used station wagon, the keys to which she handed me. Although Lady Keith was accustomed to driving herself, today I would be her driver.

"I've never had a problem like that in this building. In fact, the only time anything like that ever happened to me was when a man snatched my evening bag out of my hand here on the street. Imagine. It wasn't even dark yet. And all he got was a ten dollar bill and a fake cigarette."

A fake cigarette. Lady Keith had a serious relationship with smoking, and occasionally resorted to fake cigarettes in a half-hearted attempt to cut down. But a cigarette in her hand, often in a holder, had been part of her image, her *manqué*. There are many photographs of the beautiful young Slim Hawks, the elegant Slim Hayward, the dignified Lady Keith with a cigarette poised in her fingertips. Smoking was also a serious bone of contention between her and Jerry, himself a reformed three-pack-a-day man. The more he chided her about it, the more she would resist. And now in the car, she pulled a pack from her bag and lit up. I noticed that when she took a drag, she held it clenched between her teeth, not letting her lips touch the filter. As it was a cold day, the windows were rolled up, and the car was slowly filling up with smoke.

"Please don't tell Mr. Robbins I've been smoking. He thinks I'm on the wagon with them, and he's such a bore about it."

When we approached a gas station in Harlem, she instructed me to stop and fill the tank for her impending trip to the country. I pulled up and waited for an attendant.

"It's not that kind," said Lady Keith. "You have to do it yourself."

How do I explain this? In those days, the early eighties in New York, self-service stations were new on the map. In fact, I had never been to one. Nevertheless, not wanting to appear a complete incompetent, I approached the pump and manfully tried to make gas come out of it and into the tank, unsuccessfully.

Lady Keith rolled down the window. "What in the world are you doing?"

"I'm so sorry Lady Keith, but I've never worked one of these. I don't know how."

A beat. "You're kidding."

"No. I'm sorry."

Lady Keith was a kind and patient woman. She got out of the car and approached me.

"Oh, no, Lady Keith, please! I'll ask the man in the office."

"Don't be silly. Here, I'll show you." And she did. I shall never forget the image of Slim Keith in her camel hair Chesterfield coat and high heels wielding the pump at that service station around 145th Street and Broadway. Yes, Nancy, Lady Keith taught me how to pump gas.

As we continued uptown, Lady Keith told me to pull over at a bodega ("Keep your eye out for one of those little Spanish shops," she said) to pick up a special treat for her friend.

"He adores *café con leche*, and those are the only places that know how to make it right." This was long before Starbucks. "There, that one looks good. Pull over, please."

"There? Are you sure it's... okay?"

"Of course it's okay. I go there all the time." Somehow I doubted this. "Now, remember to ask for it in Spanish. Do you know how to say that? '*Cafe con leche dulce, por favor.*' There's a good boy." She handed me a dollar. The bodega was busy, and I had to wait some time before I gave the order. I may have been the only non-native speaker that day. I finally returned to the car, apologizing for the delay.

"I'm sorry. It was very busy."

"I almost came in after you. I thought perhaps you needed some rescuing. Okay, let's go before this gets cold." I have no doubt that, had I needed rescuing, Lady Keith would have been perfectly capable of doing so.

We arrived at Columbia Presbyterian, and as I watched Lady Keith walk to the entrance, carrying the little cup of *café con leche*, I marveled at how down-to-earth this lady was—a lady in every sense of the word, including her name. Yet she was also a "big breezy peppy broad," like Truman Capote's avatar of her as "Lady Ina Coolbirth" in his short story "La Côte Basque 1965," his reckless barbecue of the glamorous friends who had supported him, his cruel and pointless skewering of Society with a capital S, and his own undoing. It was also, something of an emotional undoing for Lady Keith. "Truman's a darling, but I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw a piano," Slim had confided in Jerry before the scandalous story destroyed not only her relationship with the writer, but compromised some of her friendships with their mutual friends. This, along with the collapse of her marriage to Lord Kenneth Keith, had been the beginning of an emotional and physical decline for this smart, beautiful, witty and original woman who had been such an icon of style in America and England. These setbacks for Lady Keith culminated in the abrupt end of her relationship with Bill Blass, for whom she had been a muse of style. Those in their ken puzzled over the sudden and precipitous end of their friendship.

"Slim kicked Bill's dog," Jerry told me. "Her dog and his had a fight, and Slim tried to separate them. She thought Bill's dog was going to kill her little terrier, so, out of desperation, she kicked Bill's dog." Blass told an altogether different story in his posthumously published autobiography: Slim had fallen in love with him, he had fled, she was devastated.

Lost in my thoughts of Lady Keith and Bill Blass's dog, I was surprised when she soon returned to the car, and sat down with a deep sigh.

"I'm afraid my friend Mr. Baldwin isn't feeling very well today. He helped me with some of my houses, and he's such a darling." On the way to the hospital, we had chatted easily about England, where both she and I had lived, and Manhasset, where I had grown up, and Litchfield County, where I had gone to boarding school. But now Lady Keith seemed lost in her own thoughts, saddened by a hospital visit to her old friend. "You know, I heard that lovely old house in

Manhasset was torn down," she said after a time. At this point in her life, much of Lady Keith's storied life was giving way to the irrevocable past, the deaths of old friends, even the destruction of one of her favorite houses. There was a sadness not far beneath the surface of this lovely woman who had lived so richly, who had, along with other "swans" of the second half of the twentieth century, made a mark on the world of fashion and style and, when it really meant something, a Proustian Society with a capital S. "Those ladies," Jerry said—meaning his friends in high society—"ruled the world."

We were approaching 64th Street, and I was thinking of the impending meal I was to make, my audition as it were. Perhaps Lady Keith sensed my anxiety; perhaps her meeting with Billy Baldwin had reminded her of the passing of a past life, and the inevitable indignities of age. In any event, she turned to me as I pulled up to her building.

"Listen, I'd like to take a raincheck on that dinner. I'm suddenly very tired and not very hungry. I'll just send down to Brown's for a little something later. Here," she opened her purse.

"But Lady Keith, I didn't do anything."

"Of course you did." You drove me all the way uptown on your afternoon off. And you bought that chicken. I insist."

"Thank you."

"You will call me to reschedule?" I want those potatoes."

"Of course."

"Good. Here's Tommy. He'll tell you where to bring the car. Goodbye." A warm smile and a firm handshake and she got out of the car.

"We arranged to meet again. She canceled. And again. I canceled. I got a job teaching, and never did cook for Lady Keith, though I would see her several times again through Jerry before her death in 1990.

One evening, as I was waiting for the curtain to rise on the premiere of a Robbins ballet, I turned to see Lady Keith inching her way across the row to a seat next to me.

"Good evening, Lady Keith. We've met before."

"Have we?"

"Yes, I almost cooked a chicken for you a couple of years ago."

Whether or not she really remembered, she was gracious and kind and we made polite conversation before the curtain went up. She made me wish that I had made her that meal, wish I had gotten to know her better, and grateful for meeting her at all. When I mentioned that I was nervous for Jerry, about to premiere a new work, she gently admonished and reassured me. "Haven't you known Mr. Robbins long enough to know it will be divine?" Although she had been the unrivaled empress of society on two continents when that really meant something, she was down-to-earth and smart and funny. She treated me, a would-be servant, with grace and kindness, as she treated everyone else, be he a prince or a pauper. When Slim Keith died at 72 in 1990, I attended her memorial at the Convent of the Sacred Heart with Jerry. Bacall, among others, expressed her gratitude for knowing this extraordinary woman who picked her out of the blue and set her own glamorous life on track. Her daughter, Kitty Hawks, and two of her stepchildren, Brooke Hayward and Alistair Keith, talked of their mother and stepmother with great affection, the person they described instantly recognizable as the person I met in their loving and funny anecdotes. When Brooke Hayward related a tale of how Slim had essentially guided her—over the phone—in how to deal with a potential family catastrophe on the night of the opening of *Gypsy*, we were on the edge of our seats. When Alistair Keith recalled how he was instantly charmed by his new stepmother upon their first meeting, even after he had crashed the car he was driving her in from the station, I recognized how easily she put one at ease simply by being herself.

She was Jerry's best friend, "Pearl" to his "Gyp," short for Gypsy, their pet names for one another. She had led a charmed life, and enchanted others along the way. I, too, was charmed by Nancy, Lady Keith, and count myself lucky to have spent that afternoon with her, my date with Slim.

Brian Meehan teaches English and Writing at Prep For Prep, a scholarship program for high school students of color in New York City.

Jerome Robbins Dance Division Documents Dance Workers' Experiences of the Pandemic

by Emma Brown

The Jerome Robbins Dance Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts is currently accepting submissions for a new initiative: the COVID-19 Dance Worker Narratives Project, launched in September 2020. The intention of this Project is to document the unique experiences of dance artists and workers in the midst of the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter protests. As part of this project, all members of the dance community are encouraged to conduct and submit peer-to-peer interviews about their personal experiences, which will then be archived at the Library for the Performing Arts. The next issue of this newsletter will feature a look at some of the experiences shared by the Project's participants.

For several reasons, dance artists are a critical community to document during this time. First, the highest nationwide concentration of individuals and organizations in the field of dance is in New York City, which was an early and especially hard-hit epicenter of the disease. Additionally, physical convening is a necessary function of the dance form in both practice and performance. Therefore, nearly all activity in the field of dance was rendered impossible by city, state, and nationwide social distancing orders necessitated by the highly infectious contagion. Those who are still dancing and working on behalf of dance are doing so in new ways. The Dance Workers Narrative Project is interested in these changes, from the daily to the drastic.

The Project gives opportunities to members of the dance community to connect with one another, despite the inability to gather physically, and to create the sort of incidental gathering and oral tradition that is an integral part of the dance field.

In keeping with the intention of generating opportunities for dance artists to connect remotely, the project is open to anyone wishing to participate in either role and the goal is that its growth will continue by word of mouth; an individual may interview a friend, who then interviews a friend, who interviews a friend in turn. The Dance Division is interested in collecting at least two hundred video conversations between dance workers. These interviews will be made publicly accessible on the Library's online streaming platform: Digital Collections [www.digitalcollections.nypl.org/danceaudiovideo].

While the interviews are unrestricted, the following are some possible questions to guide the interviewer:

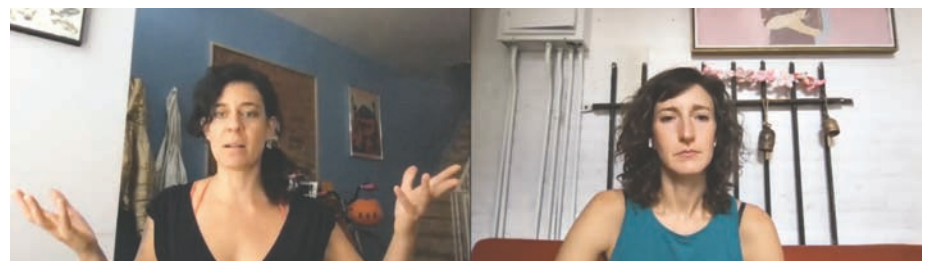
- Can you briefly describe your dance practice and career path?
- Describe the moment(s) when COVID-19 first came into your awareness.
- What have the last several months been like for you?
- What has your relationship to dance and/or others in the dance community been like during the pandemic?
- How have the recent Black Lives Matter protests influenced you as a dance artist or dance worker?
- Could you describe the experience or effect of the last several months on your body?
- Is there anything else you would like to put on the record that we haven't touched upon today?

Please consider conducting an interview or telling someone you know about the project. Instructions on how to participate are provided on the website: www.nypl.org/oral-history-project-dance. To receive the submission form, or for any questions: emmabrown@nypl.org.

Emma Brown is a Queens-based performer, multidisciplinary artist, and audio archivist working in the field of dance. She assists in the preservation and production of the Dance Oral History Project at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.



Photograph courtesy of The Joyce Theater.

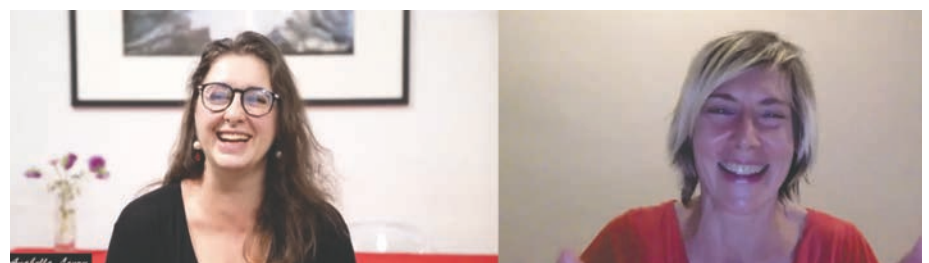


Remote interview with Nicole Binder, conducted by Gabrielle Revlock.



Remote interview with Derick Grant, conducted by Andrew Nemr.

Remote interview with Andrew Nemr, conducted by Derick Grant.



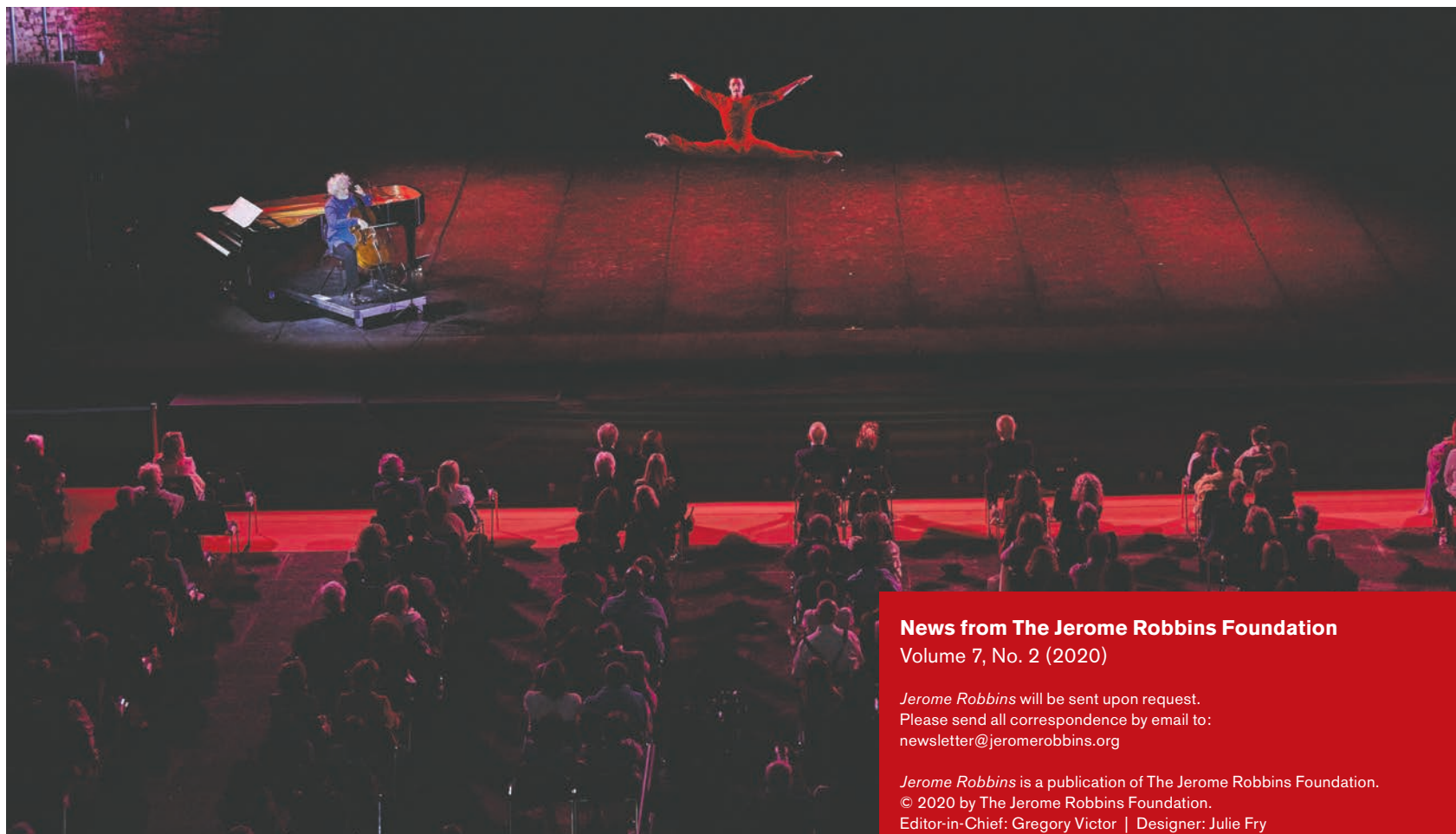
Remote interview with Rachel Cohen, conducted by Annabella Lenzu.

Last July, after the lockdown in France, I was lucky enough to be invited by Daniele Cipriani to perform Jerome Robbins' *A Suite of Dances*, with cellist Mario Brunello, at the outdoor festivals in Ravenna and Nervi, Italy. I hadn't performed onstage since Paris Opera Ballet's tour in Japan in February 2020. I felt so joyful and I realized how much dance means to me. I knew how lucky I was because, at that time, I knew that almost all the dancers in the world were still doing barres in their kitchens.

The first time I had the chance to work on this solo piece, I was coming back from a very serious four-month-long injury. I had broken a metatarsal as well as a ligament. I remember how much I struggled during the rehearsals with Jean-Pierre Frohlich, being scared of twisting my ankle at any second. I could not go through the whole piece because of how exhausting it was. This ballet is brief, but you surely feel like dying at the end. When I gave my debut performance with *A Suite of Dances*, I remember crying at the applause during the bow, because of how emotional and moved I felt.

Soon I will be back onstage in Paris, at the Palais Garnier, with this Jerome Robbins work, accompanied by Ophélie Gaillard on cello. It is as if this solo is always there with me for very special occasions. I am thrilled and cannot wait to dive into the music and into this genius choreography. There is something very spiritual in this piece. Dancing it is a kind of transcendental experience, a journey that I allow myself to go into. I hope that the audience will travel as much as I while watching the performance live.

– **Hugo Marchand, Danseur Étoile,**
Paris Opera Ballet, October 2020



Top: Hugo Marchand in Jerome Robbins' *A Suite of Dances* at the Nervi Festival in Genoa, Italy, July 2020 (presented by Daniele Cipriani Entertainment for Nervi Festival). Photograph © Graham Spicer.

Bottom: Cellist Mario Brunello and dancer Hugo Marchand in Jerome Robbins' *A Suite of Dances* at the Ravenna Festival in Ravenna, Italy, July 2020 (*Duets and Solos*, part of the Ravenna Festival's 31st edition). Photograph © Zani-Casadio.

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