

NEWS FROM
**THE JEROME
ROBBINS
FOUNDATION**

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Jerome Robbins



We dedicate this issue to NANCY LASSALLE

NANCY LASSALLE (1927–2021) devoted her life to the School of American Ballet and the New York City Ballet. After serving on both Boards for many years she continued as Trustee Emerita. A great supporter of the arts, she left an indelible mark on many institutions, including the Jerome Robbins Dance Division at the New York Public Library and Eakins Press Foundation. Tributes from colleagues and friends will appear in our next issue.

Above: Nancy Lassalle with students from the School of American Ballet, in Jerome Robbins' *Mother Goose Suite*, 1991. Photo by Paul Kolnik, courtesy of William H. Wright II.

Cover and page 3: Filming Jerome Robbins' "Cool" (from *West Side Story*) for the online video by American Dance Machine for the 21st Century, directed by Joshua Bergasse, 2021. All photos courtesy of Joshua Bergasse.

A "Cool" Video by Joshua Bergasse

Recently, American Dance Machine for the 21st Century (ADM21) released its virtual video, "Cool" from *West Side Story*, performed by 10 dancers around New York City. The video was directed by Joshua Bergasse (whose choreography was nominated for the Tony Award in 2015 for *On the Town*), with choreography by Jerome Robbins, recreated by Robert La Fosse (nominated for the Best Actor in a Musical Tony Award in 1998 for *Jerome Robbins' Broadway*). ADM21 released the video as a fundraiser in honor of Joshua Bergasse's long collaboration with the organization.

ADM21 was pleased that so many people were moved by the 2020 release of its first virtual video, "The Music and the Mirror" from *A Chorus Line*, performed by 27 singer/dancers coached by Tony-winner Donna McKechnie. The video has been viewed over 50,000 times worldwide and the lyrics "give me somebody to dance for" have taken on new meaning as Broadway looks forward to welcoming audiences back to live performances as soon as it is safe.

The performers in the "Cool" video are Yesenia Ayala (Anita in *West Side Story*—2020 Broadway revival), Darius Barnes (*Mean Girls*), Kenny Corrigan (*An American in Paris*), Alexa DeBarr (*West Side Story*—2020 Broadway revival), Jess LeProtto (*Carousel*—2018 Broadway revival), Alicia Lundgren (*Shuffle Along*), Georgina Pazcoguin (New York City Ballet, *On The Town*), Ahmad Simmons (*West Side Story*—2020 revival, *Fosse/Verdon* on FX), Ryan Steele (*Once Upon A One More Time*, *Carousel*—2018 revival), and Alex Wong (*Newsies*, *The Greatest Showman*, *So You Think You Can Dance*). The video was filmed and edited by Elsa Stallings and produced by Joshua Bergasse and Douglas Denoff.

The film's director Joshua Bergasse said, "It's quite an honor to work with the original Jerome Robbins choreography, which I find so magnificent and dynamic. And in addition, to work with these brilliant dancers at these exciting locations around New York City was truly thrilling! I was a little nervous about recreating this incredible group piece as a series of solos. In a way I think it actually gave people a feeling of connection and kinship, especially in the dance and theater communities. Of course, it was wonderfully inspiring to work with this choreography and these dancers, but what I didn't expect was to fall in love with New York all over again by shooting in the different locations around the city."

Robert La Fosse, the film's Choreographic Consultant, a longtime ADM21 collaborator, and an authorized Jerome Robbins stager, remarked, "This film is a wonderful way, during the ongoing pandemic, to showcase ADM21's important mission, which is to connect artists to staggers who worked with the choreographer themselves and gives them more opportunity to do what they love: DANCE!"

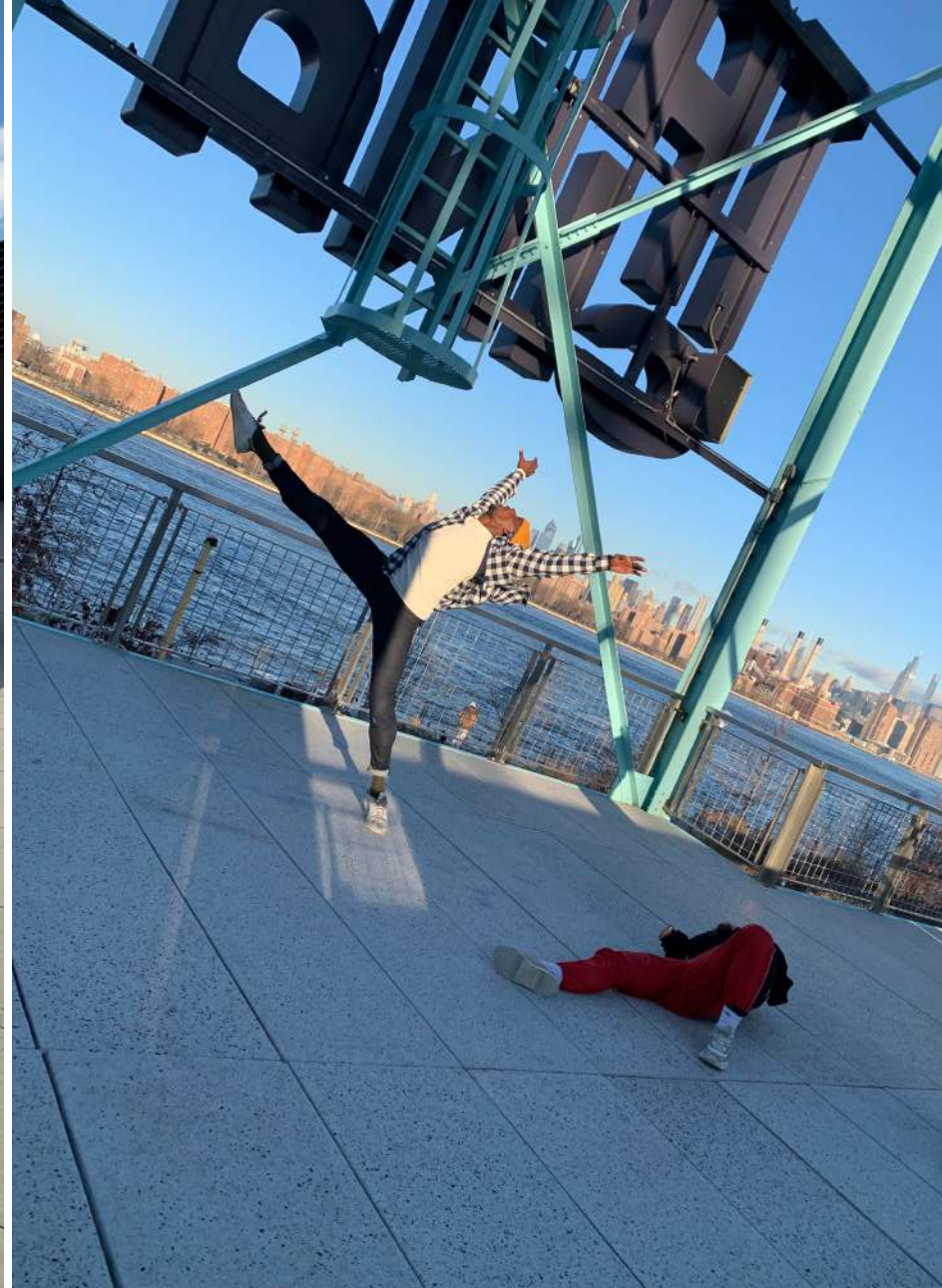
ADM21's Founder and Producing Artistic Director, Nikki Feirt Atkins, commented "We are thrilled that we are able honor the Jerome Robbins Foundation, who have supported ADM21 since our inception, with Josh's innovative virtual video of 'Cool.'"

ADM21 extended thanks to Mark Cavell and Scott Farthing at Sony Music, Christopher Pennington at The Robbins Rights Trust, Garth Sunderland and Marie Carter at The Leonard Bernstein Office, and to Stephen Sondheim, for their assistance in the production of this video.

View the video here: <http://www.adm21.org/cool>

West Side Story was originally conceived, directed, and choreographed by Jerome Robbins with music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, book by Arthur Laurents, and orchestrations by Leonard Bernstein, Sid Ramin, and Irwin Kostal.

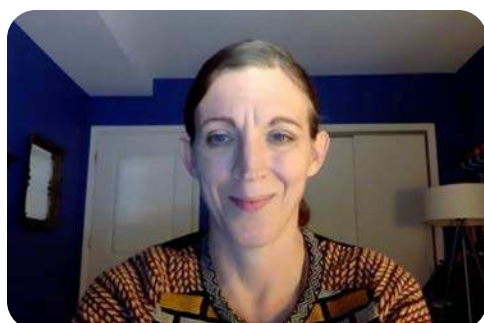




Complicating the Narrative

Dance Workers in their Own Words

by Emma Rose Brown



Aya Saotome
Miro Magliore
Gabrielle Lamb

Derrick Grant
Liana Conyers
Veronica Jiao

Erin Lally
Gabrielle Martinez
Leslie Ann Morales

As each month of the pandemic has stretched on, it has become increasingly hard to track the passage of time. During these 14 months we have been layered with stages, moving backward and forward between closings, openings, and reopenings. Each stage supplies a new set of questions and challenges to every community and individual depending on their unique intersection of identities. As dance is a practice of simultaneously incremental and sudden adjustments, many members of the dance community found themselves no stranger to this kind of uncertainty.

Throughout each of these micro-phases, journalists and news sources have continued to publish hot takes on what artists or members of the dance community are doing, thinking, and making. But these articles often fall short in capturing the larger and messier picture. The narrative is simply more complex.

The Covid-19 Dance Worker Narratives Project, launched by the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of the New York Public Library in the Fall of 2020, has created a space for a more nuanced understanding of the challenges dance workers face. With 37 submissions of peer-to-peer interviews, and counting, the open-ended nature of the project has allowed for a kind of report from the field, assembling widely varied perspectives on the experience of this time.

To date, the Project has collected interviews with self-identified dancers, choreographers, administrators, professors, dance educators, and students.

The array of genres is immense, including commercial dance, ballet, contact improvisation, experimental performance, action theater, aerial and pole work, contemporary, improvisation, Indian classical dance, and tap. Participants are recording from places including, but not limited to, New York City, Upstate New York, Chicago, Salt Lake City, Boston, Philadelphia, and Southern California.

The project is a unique take on the role of the archive. An intervention in the gatekeeping and insularity sometimes found in traditional archival practice, the Project presents a small opening for those not yet represented in institutional collections to have a voice. One particular case in this collection is the handful of submissions from college students, individuals whose names might not have “relevance” to journalists or archivists and therefore whose perspectives may not be taken into account.

Amidst all of the openness and the contradictions brought to the surface by these narratives, we can begin to mark out a series of paths in the vast and tangled field of experience. Dance workers from places where individuals who haven’t met, and may never meet, are in conversation with one another. Although the full interviews, the long-form narratives, are soon to be available in the Jerome Robbins Dance Division’s oral history archive, the conversation has already begun.

The following are quotes selected from the responses the Project received.

Nearly every participant made some reference to digital platforms:

“I tried early on to take a couple of digital dance classes, and I didn’t like it. I realized and saw how people very quickly made moves to adjust. And those moves didn’t seem right to me.” – Josh Anderson

A tension quickly emerged between those who were drawn to act immediately, and those who moved more slowly in crossing the digital divide. Josh was not the only person who didn’t find the virtual format workable:

“I’m not a fan of online dance classes, especially the dance part, I took two dance classes online and I injured myself both times. I’ve stopped dancing in my house.” – Mary Moretti

But this wasn’t always a matter of making a choice. For some it was a necessity, and particularly for teachers:

“I jumped on the online teaching straight away, I had no other option.” – Aya Saotome

“How do we sustain? How do we continue to do our work? And we quickly pivoted.” – Erin Lally

Some were pleasantly surprised by the possibilities afforded by this new format. Miro Magliore speaks about the death of a colleague:

“It was quite an intensive thing, his loss, with the dancers. We had an online memorial one afternoon. I didn’t think it was something that could work.” – Miro Magliore

Many participants began noting the positive and unique qualities of online programming:

“When I go on Zoom to teach – say releasing class – there are people from all over, which I know is a silver lining for a lot of people – people being able to show up to class from Ecuador or Seattle.” – Julie Mayo

These were silver linings for teachers and choreographers:

“It freed me from a lot of the preconceived notions about how I had to present my work—what would be the level of interest that people would have.” – Gabrielle Lamb

“I actually feel, during this time, much more permission. It’s the same with teaching, I don’t need to convince a studio to let me host a workshop.” – Gabrielle Revlock

And this lack of oversight by institutions, also made space for a new economy:

“So, so many people are doing things for free, offering their services, doing classes. One of my students created her own YouTube channel called “Plié for the People.” And she continues to put 40-minute ballet classes on her YouTube channel.” – Kathleen Isaac

“And because this is happening to everyone, not just people in my neighborhood, or in my city, or in my state, or in my country, but the whole world, we all have this kind of free time to connect, if that’s our desire. So I’ve just been creating ways to connect. Without a lot of overhead, without having to work for a studio or rent a studio. I’ve been able to charge very little for classes and feel good about that.” – Derrick Grant

In addition to free classes, this new freedom came in the form of free time:

“This is my time to be able to do what I couldn’t before, what I didn’t have time for because I had work. So I started to work more on myself... I don’t know how to say it, become a more confident person so I can reach my goals... Really do ‘me’ work.” – Mary Moretti

“I speak for myself, but I think many artists are feeling this non-production, reflection, practice time. And so really milking that time, almost like a restful work time of reflection and deep-thinking and moving, but there’s no timeline, because it’s on me.” – Kay Ottinger

But for some, this extra time, away from making work, was more of a loss than an opportunity:

“I felt kind of devastated to a degree... Even if you are making work, will you still be “in”? Or valid? Or accessible to people? All those thoughts came to mind. So I had zero creativity at the time.” – Liana Conyers

And for others, creativity went hand-in-hand with community:

“Our companies are like our families, our creative families.” – Annabella Lenzu

For many, the work shifted starkly with the death of George Floyd, pivoting toward looking inward at the ways one’s own practice could be altered and made more equitable:

“How we, people of color, tell our own stories. Where do they end up? Do they end up in institutions? Are they as equally represented as other stories? Obviously not, otherwise we wouldn’t be having this conversation. I find that this archival work, we do it on the daily now. And we are again, naming it as that, even though it doesn’t have an institution behind it, it’s still very valid, and it will live forever, whether it’s on social media or whether it’s in the New York Public Library.” – Veronica Jiao

Some are rethinking the ways they teach certain forms:

“The things black bodies go through that my body doesn’t understand, contact improvisation doesn’t address that.” – Josh Anderson

“We don’t want this to just be the in-vogue thing to do. We know that institutional racism is something we want to address.” – Erin Lally

Participants expressed the way that this is a space and time to bring inequities to the table with the institutions they work for and with:

“I see it as an opportunity to question them and their values, what do they consider good dance or valid dance. I’d really like to know what they are and how what I am doing is not aligning to those values.” – Gabrielle Martinez

“It’s been a year of working through and naming inequities in the dance field... Artists calling out things that have always existed.” – Veronica Jiao

Some named the ways the events of this year have had an effect on the body and on dancing:

“I’ve thought more about my relationship to my body than I ever have. I won’t go back to not acknowledging this physical thing that I have. Which is a good thing.” – Kathleen Leary

“I’m wondering how my breathing is going to be when I’m back in a studio without a mask. It creates this boundary between you and somebody else. It’s making me see dance very differently.” – Leslie Ann Morales

Emma Rose 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.

LINDA MURRAY (Curator, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, NYPL) expressed these powerful thoughts in her closing remarks at the 2021 Dance Research Fellowship Symposium:

“The trauma of this moment will take generations to comprehend, but I believe that dance will be at the center of our reckoning and our healing. As an embodied practice, dance holds within it all that is needed to lay bare the truth of our lived existences. For this reason, and for so many others, dance-making and dance scholarship must persist, and the Dance Division will remain steadfast in our commitment to protecting and cherishing that most ephemeral of our art forms.”

Jerome Robbins Fellowship Program at New York Public Library Continues

Created in 2014 to support scholars and practitioners engaged in graduate-level, post-doctoral, and independent research using the Dance Division's unmatched holdings, the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of the New York Public Library's annual fellowship program increases scholarship in the field of dance. The binding focus for 2020's cohort was the theme of dance and immigration. In January 2021, the Jerome Robbins Dance Division Public Program "Dance and Immigration: A Symposium Beyond Boundaries" streamed online. The presentation, divided into six hour-long sessions, was led by the 2020 Jerome Robbins Fellows, whose topics of investigation were:

Ninotchka Bennahum Border Crossings: Encarnación López Júlvez, Léonide Massine. Studies in Transnationalism, Self-Exile, and Art, 1930–1945

Phil Chan Dreams of the Orient

Sergey Konaev Teaching to Survive: Immigrant Female Dance Schools and Classes in the 1930s–1950s (France and USA)

Kiri Avelar Descubriendo Latinx: The Hidden Text in American Modern Dance

Yusha-Marie Sorzano & Ferne Louanne Regis Investigating Process: An Immigrant Choreographer's Journey to Discovery

Pam Tanowitz everything is true

For 2021, the Jerome Robbins Dance Division has invited scholars and practitioners interested in investigating the theme of dance and democracy to apply for the Fellowship. The Dance Division will focus on projects that explore dance's site as a civic, social and political space. Additionally, applicants are encouraged to explore dance artists in the Dance Division's archives "who have harnessed kinetic imagination and empathetic power to create inclusive environments where dialogue and democracy thrives." 2021 Fellows will take up residency between July 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021 and will showcase the outcome of their research in a presentation or performance at a day-long symposium in January 2022. Given the uncertainty of the duration of the Covid-19 crisis, the Division is making provision for a virtual version of the fellowship and symposium, should onsite study and practice prove impossible.

Past Fellows include Malaika Adero, Reid Bartelme, Claire Bishop, Yoshiko Chuma, Emily Coates, Adrian Danchig-Waring, Silas Farley, Jack Ferver, Robert Greskovic, Triwi Harjito, Joseph Houseal, Jeremy Jacob, Harriet Jung, Julie Lemberger, Alastair Macaulay, Emmanuele Phuon, Hiie Saumaa, Apollinaire Scherr, Gus Solomons Jr., Victoria Tennant, Justin Tornow, Preeti Vasudevan, Tara Aisha Willis, Netta Yerushalmy, and Elizabeth Zimmer.

Sharing his thoughts at the conclusion of the 2020 Fellowship experience, Phil Chan summarizes his research.

The Problematic Oriental by Phil Chan

What happens when two American immigrants collide—ballet, an art form literally descended from European kings (and their colonialist ambitions) with a long history of orientalism, and Asian Americans, who base their culture on lived experiences that aren't much like the fantasies Europeans once had about them? This tension is at the very heart of my work as an advocate; I co-founded Final Bow for Yellowface (www.yellowface.org) in 2017 which seeks to help ballet companies improve how we as a field represent Asian people on our stages. A large part of these efforts focuses on how to balance dance tradition and artistic heritage with respectful portrayals of people of color that resonate positively with people today.

From the controversies this year alone around Pennsylvania Ballet and Houston Ballet presenting or announcing plans for orientalist productions of "La Bayadère," it's clear that how ballet portrays "other" cultures, however fantastic the setting, must be critically re-examined in light of our field's push for greater equity and inclusion. Central to the question of ballet's survival going forward involves asking ourselves honestly how we are going to transform from an elitist European ethnic dance for the Tsar, to a new diverse art form where the default isn't always (or assumed to be) white. I believe this is the greatest challenge facing American ballet institutions today, and critical to our efforts in regaining support and relevance post-Covid-19.

With this in mind, I went into the Robbins fellowship asking several questions that were critical for moving the conversations around Asian representation forward: Why orientalism? Where did it come from? What does it accomplish? What's the appeal? And, why do we keep reviving orientalism—how Europeans used to see Asians—in lieu of hiring actual Asian creatives to tell the stories of our lives and doings? Are such Asian stories even of interest to a ballet audience, rather than existing only to contrast the familiar with "the exotic" or "the barbaric" in a European-centered manner?

Navigating the research materials request process as the New York Public Library, the world's third largest library system, as it was quickly adapted to the new pandemic realities was very different than other research experiences I have had. I biked regularly over the Williamsburg Bridge to the Tompkins Square branch to pick up books I had on hold. I regularly checked in over Zoom with Arlene Yu, the collections manager at the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, who made sure I had the digitized videos I needed from the archives, as well as PDF scans of anything that under normal circumstances wouldn't have left the library.

I gave a remote lecture and workshop at the Chatham Square branch as part of an Asian American authors series. Probably the strangest part of the fellowship however is that I haven't set foot inside the Performing Arts Library itself. I will admit that it was a treat to review content digitally from the comfort of my own home as thoughts and ideas developed in my work, without having to trek back to Lincoln Center every time I wanted to take a second look at something. My only disappointment with the fellowship this year was that I didn't get more in-person time with the other fellows due to Covid restrictions; I would have appreciated the exchange of ideas only possible when both parties are on the verge of ripping their hair out over something dance research-related.

So—if you're wondering if I spent this past fall watching ballet videos and working on a draft of my next book in my sweatpants with a cat on my lap, the answer is a resounding yes.

My research led me to examine about 100 orientalist ballets from 1700 to 2020 to find common threads and answer to some of my initial questions. My survey covers depictions of Asian people in ballet across Europe, Russia, and North America, taking into account geo-political events that would have informed how Asians would have been depicted in dances made for a Eurocentric audience.

A steady stream of themes and characters began to appear to me as I examined how ballet as an art form continued to twist Asian-ness through history. Indian temple girls, demure geishas, opulent harem fantasies, slaves (so many slaves), transcendental narcotics, deadly snake bites, funeral pyres, magic, taboo, unbridled sexuality, buffoonish Arabs, dopey Chinese, the entire faunal spectrum, page boys in blackface... What a trip.

It isn't lost on me that, to this day, these oriental themes and fantasies are among the most spectacular, well-received, popular, and long-lasting balletic works. Our work with Final Bow for Yellowface already illuminated to me that casual orientalist portrayals are everywhere. As a result, this research process made me question that perhaps orientalism in ballet is not just a stylistic genre, but rather an integral aspect of what defines classical ballet itself.

One could argue that it was Marie Taglioni's raving success in "La Dieu et la Bayadère" in 1830 as an exotic Indian temple dancer (who sacrifices herself on a fiery pyre for her lover, a God disguised as a mortal), and not her acclaim in "La Sylphide" two years later, that spurred the romantic cult of the ballerina.

Or that Vaslav Nijinsky's shirtless depictions of sensual oriental men in the budding 20th century with the Ballets Russes that revived an interest in male dancing (and male dancers, hubba hubba).

If orientalism is indeed such an important pillar of classical ballet, what happens when traditional yet culturally inaccurate or caricatured representations of "orientals" comes face-to-face with Asian Americans who are ballet's students, audience members, subscribers, donors and Board members? We hear the ballet institutions say, Yes People of Color, please join our community—then expect us to be grateful just to be cast as the happy slave, or to see

performed a caricatured version of our heritage that seeks only to preserve how Europeans thought we might have looked hundreds of years ago. I don't think we can approach inclusion this way and really mean it. As the current controversies around "La Bayadère" demonstrate, orientalism in ballet is starting to rot—and in its place must be the inclusion of authentic Asian American creative voices.

After all, it is Asian Americans today that still bear the brunt of the subconscious reinforcement of bygone ideas about their cultures that we dredge up at least once a year (yellowface Nutcracker, anyone? Don't make me throw my slipper at you!). Tropes about hyper-sexual yet hyper-submissive "oriental" women today can be traced back to the French romantic opera, vaudeville, and ballet stages—the major outlets of culture at the time. These tropes have validity too, seen as "high art" and "traditional" and therefore more significant somehow. These stereotypes have a long shelf life and define how we perceive entire groups of people.

Ask your Asian American friends, they've probably experienced some form of public Covid-related aggression this year. It's harder to spit on a stranger, however, if you see them with empathy and nuance. Part of our job in the arts is to build that for our audiences. And we can't do that if we also perpetuate racial portrayals that are outdated, inaccurate, and sometimes just plain offensive. As a creative, advocate, and historian, I am asking: we've been there already, where else can we go now?

As a relatively conservative art form, ballet continues to perform these outdated depictions in the name of preserving history at the expense of people of color truly being included. We're technically holding up the same pointy fingers since 1751 when the grand parade of over sixty "Chinese" performers vaulted across the stage in "Les Fêtes Chinoises," perhaps because a better Chinese hasn't been allowed to come along yet. As a field, we have not historically championed Asian American choreographers, and even in recent years we still rarely commission them. To add insult to injury, as a distinct dance form, ballet receives the lion's share of public and private resources and funding within the overall dance community (compared to other equally "ethnic" dance forms like Bharatanatyam, Flamenco, or Baile Folklorico). It can feel like ballet is the P.F. Chang's chain restaurant putting the immigrant mom and pop Chinese places out of business—the ersatz at the expense of the authentic.

Ensuring that this history provides a broader context for future progress, my fellowship research directly influences three upcoming projects I am working on:

First, the most immediate result of my research will be the release of my second book, "Shades of the Orient." I'm hoping it will be a good resource for helping folks understand how to contextualize performing race and non-European cultures in the "classical" performing arts. And perhaps help Artistic Directors who won't read Edward Said on their own.

Second, I have been collaborating with the brilliant musicologist and dance notation expert Doug Fullington, on new productions of both "La Bayadère" and "Le Corsaire" that will reconstruct the classic choreography from notation

sources, but change the setting to appeal to a contemporary and diverse audience today.

What happens when an outdated and exclusively Eurocentric point of view is de-centered in ballet? Dance Theatre of Harlem did it brilliantly with "Creole Giselle," and so too can we similarly update these orientalist warhorses with a little bit of imagination (especially as ballet companies still seem to want to program them). Our approach essentially acknowledges that the Tsar is dead, and the audience for ballet now is people like you and me (and probably the other folks who are reading this newsletter)—but must include even more people in order to survive.

Our Bayadère takes place on a film studio lot from a bygone era, echoing "Singin' in the Rain," if Nikiya was Debbie Reynolds, Solor was Gene Kelly, and Gamzatti was Lena LaMont; our Corsaire replaces the harem with a seaside casino beauty pageant. Same steps. We're striving for a classical and conservative approach to the choreography paired with a progressive, contemporary staging and setting. Before you cry blasphemy, can you think of any Puccini operas or Shakespearean plays that have been given a different setting than the "original," and in doing so, made the work more alive for today?

If opera and theater can continue to reimagine the context of their repertory to keep their art forms alive (and not just be quaint time capsules), ballet must as well—especially if ballet as a field wants to truly include people of color. After all, what makes a "classic" isn't just a reverence to the past, but also an appeal for the future. If we only focus on "the past" part, the art form becomes irrelevant.

Third, the formation of an Asian American choreographic Incubator. At Final Bow for Yellowface, we've begun discussions with a few other Asian American leaders in the field to develop a pipeline for Asian American creative talent in classical ballet. Following a Ballets Russes model, we're looking to commission works from emerging Asian American choreographers, and facilitate collaborations with other Asian American creatives in the visual arts, music, film, and fashion. This is the natural extension of our work—that racial caricature should be replaced by nuanced character—and can only be accomplished if diverse voices are truly represented. Please do reach out if you'd like to be involved, it will be a herculean effort and we need all the help we can in many skill areas!

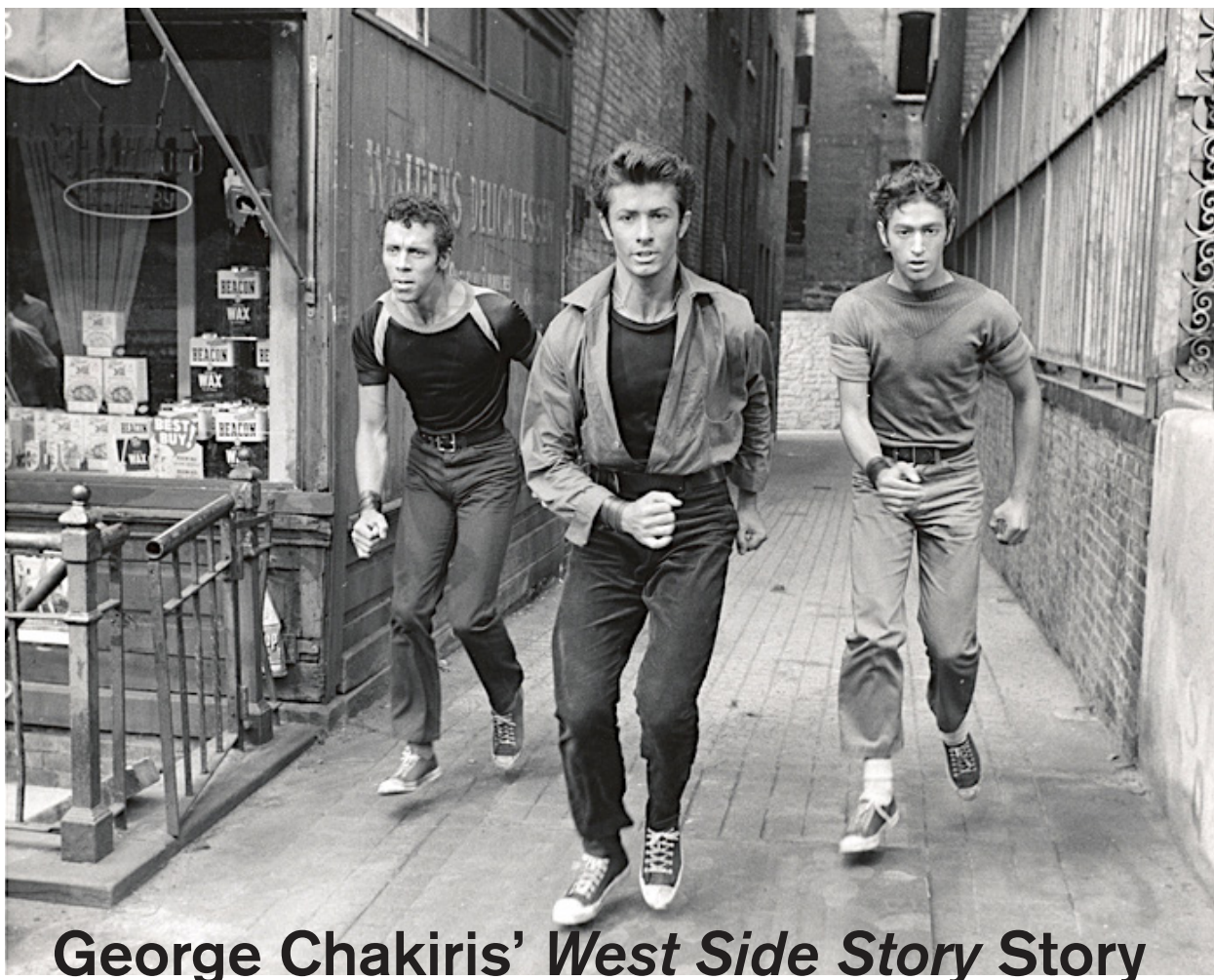
Despite 2020 feeling like the temple destruction scene from the 4th act of "La Bayadère" played on a loop, the New York Public Library Jerome Robbins fellowship truly exceeded my wildest opium-induced dreams. As an advocate, a stronger grasp of history and a larger context has offered me a foundation to make more positive change within the larger dance community; by tracing the steps of the temple dancers, a way forward for more creative contributions from Asian Americans, and more broadly, for people of color, as ballet continues to change in the 21st century—just as it always has. In doing so, it my sincere hope that ballet continues to be a relevant, immediate, and profound way to connect with each other as humans, and not something that binds our feet to history so tightly that we cannot appreciate it as a living art form.



Left to right:
Marie Taglioni as *La Bayadère* ["Dieu et la bayadère"], 1845. Lithographer: Napoleon Sarony.

Adolescent in *Schéhérazade*, design by Léon Bakst, circa 1910. From *Souvenir Serge de Diaghileff's Ballet Russe* (New York: Metropolitan Ballet Company, 1916).

Hugh Laing in costume and makeup for *The Miraculous Mandarin*, backstage at New York City Ballet, 1951. Photo by Frederick Melton.



George Chakiris' *West Side Story* Story

GEORGE CHAKIRIS played the gang leader Bernardo in the film version of *West Side Story* (1961), for which he won an Oscar for best supporting actor. In his newly released memoir, *My West Side Story*, he looks at how this theatrical and cinematic landmark evolved from a conversation in Jerome Robbins' Manhattan apartment between Robbins, Arthur Laurents, and Leonard Bernstein to ten Oscars, three Golden Globes, two Tony Awards, and a Grammy. While also a chronicle of Chakiris's long and distinguished career, the emphasis is on *West Side Story*, including profiles of Natalie Wood, Richard Beymer, Rita Moreno, and director/choreographer Jerome Robbins. Chakiris writes: "I know exactly where my gratitude belongs, and I still marvel at how, unbeknownst to me at the time, the joyful path of my life was paved one night in 1949 when Jerome Robbins sat Leonard Bernstein and Arthur Laurents down in his apartment and announced, 'I have an idea.'"

Excerpts from *My West Side Story* by George Chakiris

I was off to the Winter Garden Theater.

I'll never know if it was pure coincidence or some kind of cosmic sign, but the first person I ran into at the Winter Garden stage door wasn't Ruth Mitchell. It was a friend named Howard Jeffrey, whom I knew from the American School of Dance in Hollywood, where he'd been a star student.

"Howie!"

"George!"

Howard, it turned out, had made the move to New York a few years earlier, and he'd done very well for himself. He had been in Ballet Theatre — and was now assisting choreographer Jerome Robbins on *West Side Story*.

After a few minutes of catching up, he had no problem understanding why I had come to the stage door. He promptly introduced me to stage manager Ruth Mitchell, briefly explaining how we knew each other and that we were friends.

She couldn't have been nicer, and I'm sure I had Howard's endorsement to thank for what happened next: She handed me a copy of the *West Side Story* script and told me to study the role of Bernardo, leader of the Sharks gang, for the upcoming London production.

"You'll be auditioning for Jerry [Jerome Robbins] in about a week. He's rehearsing *Ballets: U.S.A.* at the Alvin Theatre, so you'll read for him there." Once I'd convinced myself that yes, I had heard her correctly, I was going to be auditioning for *West Side Story*, I practically ran back to the apartment to tell

Dru and Marianne the news and start working on that script. Now that I'd seen the Broadway production, I knew what a major, exciting challenge the role of Bernardo would be; I studied very hard that week.

The word on the street was that Jerome Robbins could be extremely difficult to work for but that it was always, *always* worth it. I'd seen his choreography with my own eyes. There was no doubt about it, the man was brilliant. A genius. And I really wanted this job.

So after a week of intensive studying and worrying and doing battle with my insecurities, I arrived at the door of the Alvin Theatre right on schedule, took a long, deep breath, walked inside...and found myself being welcomed by a friendly, gracious Jerome Robbins. He was pleasant. He was encouraging. He seemed to be happy to see me, and he had a fantastic, infectious smile. Okay. Good reminder that you can't believe everything you hear.

• • •

The evolution of what eventually became known as "the best-loved musical of all time" was a long, fascinating, uphill journey. I couldn't help but think of what was going on in my life while *West Side Story* was struggling its way into existence, and how easy it is to forget that sometimes things happen in this world we know nothing about, until they cross our paths and change everything. [...]

The 1962 Oscars were held on April 9 at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium.

Rita looked spectacular in a gown she'd had made in Manila when the nominations were announced. We were hoping against hope that *West Side Story* would win for Best Picture, and we desperately wanted Best Director to go to Bob Wise and Jerry Robbins. As for how we felt about our chances of winning, neither of us had bothered to prepare an acceptance speech, and we didn't try to come up with them on the long drive to Santa Monica. Instead, we devoted our driving time to practicing our "loser faces," those frozen expressions where you show your teeth, hoping it looks like an actual smile, because you know you might be on camera, meant to communicate the improbable message, "I'm glad they won instead of me."

It was so great to reunite with everyone in our "film family," all of us at our most glamorous and looking forward to the evening no matter what happened — it was an honor just to be there as nominees. I was especially moved to reunite with Jerry on a happy night and see that fantastic smile of his again, deserving to be at the Oscars to celebrate *West Side Story* far more than any of the rest of us as far as I was concerned.

After a dizzying whirlwind of pre-ceremonies activities, from the red carpet

to photos to quick interviews to milling around saying hello to old friends, acquaintances, and total strangers who seemed to know me so I pretended to know them, it was finally time to take our seats. Bob Hope, our host for the evening, took the stage, and the biggest night in show business was underway.

I was relieved that the Best Supporting Actor category led off the awards. I just wanted it over with. My heart was pounding, it was hard to breathe, and I kept trying to remember all the “loser face” expressions Rita and I had worked on. I barely even heard Bob Hope when he said, “Here to present the award for Best Supporting Actor, please welcome the lovely Shirley Jones.”

Out onstage walked Shirley Jones, beautiful as always. I sat tight as she read the list of nominees, almost feeling like that little boy in Tucson again, in love with the movies, who’d somehow wandered into a room full of superstars where he didn’t belong.

“Montgomery Clift, for *Judgment at Nuremberg*. George Chakiris, for *West Side Story*. Jackie Gleason, for *The Hustler*. Peter Falk, for *Pocketful of Miracles*. George C. Scott, for *The Hustler*...”

George Chakiris in conversation with Richard Skipper

Richard Skipper interviewed George Chakiris in April 2021 as he prepared to release his memoir, My West Side Story. Here is an excerpt from that conversation. The entire interview may be found on his YouTube channel, “Richard Skipper Celebrates.”

Richard Skipper You made the decision in 1958, rather than staying in Hollywood, that you were going to go to New York to pursue a career on the Broadway stage.

George Chakiris Yes.

RS And, of course, fate had other plans for you.

GC Because work for dancers in Los Angeles was very infrequent, I had friends who had already made the move to New York, so I thought it just seemed logical I should make the move to New York. So, I bought a one-way ticket. My friends who had already made the move put me up on their couch. They also knew everything that was going on.

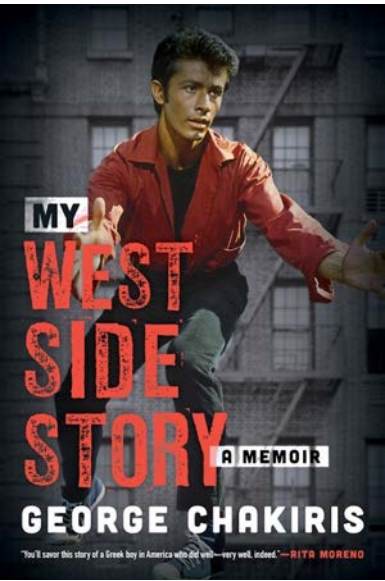
One of them worked for Roger L. Stevens, the big producer. What was going on was that *West Side Story* was just coming to its one-year anniversary on Broadway, so they were looking for replacements for anyone who might be leaving that company. They were also forming a London company, so they were auditioning people for that company...

RS So, you go to London. It's just as big a hit there as it is in New York. And then you hear about the auditions for the film.

GC Right. I did the show in London for a year and a half. The kids were getting clippings from the newspapers and putting them on the bulletin board by the stage door and the first names that we read that were being talked about for the movie were Elizabeth Taylor and Elvis Presley. None of us ever thought that they would consider us. But some weeks later, five of us in the London company got letters from United Artists asking us to do a scene where we played the characters we were playing in the show. I was playing Riff, but my letter also asked me to do a scene as Bernardo. So, on one glorious day we were all driven out to the Elstree Studios, outside of London, to do our movie tests. It was wild. When it was all over, and it was time to go back to the theatre to do the show, we were on a real high. We went back into the show of course and as the weeks went by, we'd pass each other in the hallway and ask if anyone had heard anything. No one had, and after about five weeks nobody had heard anything, so we thought, that's that.

Then, one evening not very long after that, there was a phone call for me at the stage door. It was Jerry Robbins. He said, “We liked your test, but we'd like to test you further. Do you think you could get a leave of absence for a week and come to Los Angeles and do a test?” The theater management let me go for a week. I flew home to see my family. I hadn't seen them for a year and a half. My father met me at the airport, then I went to the studio, where I met Bob Wise for the first time. I don't remember what he said, but he was gracious. It was Jerry who directed the test—this time testing specifically for Bernardo. I tested with a wonderful girl, Barbara Luna, who was a really hot contender for the role. She was really good. I loved her confidence because I didn't have it, but she did. So I did the test on a Thursday and then on Sunday flew back to London to go back into the show. Then, again, weeks went by and I heard nothing. Then, one day, Bob Wise sent me a really nice letter. In the letter he said, “Sorry, but we don't know anything yet. We feel we shouldn't cast Bernardo until we cast his sister, Maria.” That made sense to me, so I continued to wait. I fell in love with tennis,

out at Wimbledon, and I was watching a tennis match one Friday afternoon and I just had this urge to get to the theatre. So, I left my friends and went to the theatre. It was too early for the show that night, but at the stage door there was a telegram waiting for me, telling me that I had the role of Bernardo in the film.



Left: Jay Noman as Pepe, George Chakiris as Bernardo, and Eddie Verso as Indio, three of the Sharks in the film *West Side Story*, 1961. Photo from the collection of Jerome Robbins.

George Chakiris started his acting/dancing career appearing in musicals such as *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), *White Christmas* (1954), and *There's No Business Like Show Business* (1954). After appearing in the London stage production of *West Side Story* for two years, he was selected by Jerome Robbins to co-star in the eponymous film. Since that time, he appeared in dozens of plays, films, and TV shows before retiring in 1996. He lives in Los Angeles, CA.

Richard Skipper is an entertainer, emcee, host, and interviewer. On his show “Richard Skipper Celebrates!” he has conducted over 1,000 interviews with people in the arts. Recently he launched his podcast/live stream, interviewing people from all aspects of the arts and literary worlds. He was nominated for a Broadway World Award for this online series, and was selected as one of the heroes of the theatre by Encores Magazine. Richard hosts a bi-monthly show with therapist Dr. Judi Bloom called “Creativity in the Age of Covid.” He is also writing a ‘living book’ on the history of *Hello, Dolly!*’s central character that focuses on performers from the original star, Carol Channing, to the most recent national tour star, Carolee Carmello.



In 1962, *West Side Story* received 11 Academy Award nominations and won 10, including Best Picture. The film won in the following categories: Best Picture; Best Actor in a Supporting Role (George Chakiris); Best Actress in a Supporting Role (Rita Moreno); Best Director (Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins); Best Cinematography, Color (Daniel L. Fapp); Best Art Direction-Set Direction, Color (Boris Leven and Victor A. Gangelin); Best Costume Design, Color (Irene Sharaff); Best Sound (Fred Hynes and Gordon Sawyer); Best Film Editing (Thomas Stanford); and Best Music, Scoring of a Musical Picture (Saul Chaplin, Johnny Green, Sid Ramin, and Irwin Kostal). Only Ernest Lehman lost in the screenwriting category. In addition, Jerome Robbins received an Academy Honorary Award “for brilliant achievements in the art of choreography on film.”

Photo courtesy of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division. Image taken from the “Voice of My City” exhibit at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts (honoring the Jerome Robbins Centennial in 2018). To view the exhibit virtually, go to www.jeromerobbins.org, scroll down, and click on *Archive in Motion and Voice of My City*.



Jerome Robbins, center, leading dancers (including George Chakiris, left of Robbins) in a rehearsal of "Cool" from *West Side Story*. Photo by Friedman-Abeles © Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.





From the Archive A Conversation with Playwright Joseph Stein

JOSEPH STEIN (1912–2010) won the Tony Award and Drama Critics Circle Award for *Fiddler on the Roof*. His other musicals include *Zorba* (Tony nom., Drama Critics Circle Award); *Rags* (Tony nom.); *The Baker's Wife* (Laurence Olivier Award, London); *June*; *Take Me Along*; *Irene*; *The King of Hearts*; and *So Long, 174th Street*. He also co-authored, with Alan Jay Lerner, the musical *Carmelina*; with Will Glickman, *Mr. Wonderful* and *Plain and Fancy*; with Kander and Ebb, *All About Us*, (based on Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth*); and, with Stan Daniels, the musical adaptation of Stein's play *Enter Laughing*. His other plays are *Before the Dawn* and *Mrs. Gibbons' Boys*. Joseph Stein began his career in TV and radio, writing for "The Sid Caesar Show," "Your Show of Shows," "The Henry Morgan Show" and many others, and for personalities including Tallulah Bankhead, Phil Silvers, Jackie Gleason, and Zero Mostel. He wrote the screenplays of *Enter Laughing* and *Fiddler on the Roof*, for which he won the Screen Writers Guild Award.

In 2009, Bernard Carragher interviewed Joseph Stein as part of the Jerome Robbins Foundation's Oral History Project. The interview took place in Mr. Stein's apartment in the Upper East Side of New York City. What follows is an excerpt from that conversation.

Bernard Carragher When did Jerry Robbins first get involved in *Fiddler on the Roof*?

Joseph Stein I don't remember the exact date, but Jerry Bock, Sheldon Harnick, and I had started looking for a project that we would enjoy working on together. After a while I remembered the Sholem Aleichem stories that I had heard as a

child, and we decided to build a musical around three of those stories. We wrote the first draft of the book and the first draft of the score on our own. We did not have a director or a producer. Eventually we got a guy named Fred Coe who was interested in producing it, but he had a great deal of difficulty interesting anyone in this kind of very unique, very different kind of project. Most people felt it was very ethnic. So, at one point, I was in Europe, doing a French TV show, I got a call from Jerry Bock. He said that Jerry Robbins might be interested. Frankly, I had some reservations because this was the period of the blacklist and Jerry was widely known as having named names, and also he had a reputation as being very tough on actors. But I said, "Listen, the guy's so good, so if he's interested, let's see." That was the beginning. I subsequently learned—and I am not sure that this is true—that during the period when we were trying to interest people in the show, we had a number of readings of telling the story and of the score in my home, with a lot of friends, and at one point Steve Sondheim was there. I understand that at some point Steve talked to Jerry [Robbins] about it, so that when Jerry was approached, I think his reaction was, "What took you so long?"

BC You had never worked with him before?

JS No. I've worked with him since. I worked with him on *Jerome Robbins' Broadway*. That's the only other show I did with him. My relationship with Jerry, from the beginning, was consistently a good relationship. I think he had respect for my work—God knows I had respect for his—and we never had, I don't think, 30 seconds of difference. He used me, sometimes, in rather peculiar ways because his relationship with Zero, as everyone knew, was very difficult. Because I was comfortable with Zero, he would sometimes ask me to bring him messages that he was uneasy about. I would bring messages back and forth. Zero, on the surface, didn't like Jerry, but from his point of view it was a perfectly good reason—because of the blacklist. And, also, because Zero was that type. I mean I don't think he had enormous respect for anybody but himself in the theater. He had limited respect for the writers. I had a very comfortable relationship with Jerry, but I was uncomfortable with the way he treated some members of the cast. I felt uneasy about his relationship with Zero, which was strange. Jerry showed enormous self-control in working with Zero.

BC Jerry was a pretty tough taskmaster with you, wasn't he? In the book *The Making of a Musical: Fiddler on the Roof*, Richard Altman and Mervyn Kaufman wrote that there were five things, according to Jerry, that needed to be done before you went into rehearsal, and that you couldn't argue with Jerry about it.

JS I don't remember that, but before we went into rehearsal, he had certain things he wanted done, which I guess we did. What kind of things were they?

BC I think he said there were cuts that had to be made before you went into rehearsal.

JS Absolutely. This is true of me working with any director. If he feels that certain changes are desirable, I won't fight it. I collaborate with the director as well as I can. I don't think of those things as being arbitrary. I think that's a director's privilege. He wants to direct a show he's comfortable with. From the time we started our meetings—

BC All they would be with all three of you—

JS Yes, the three of us—Jerry [Bock], Sheldon [Harnick], and me—with Jerry [Robbins]. There was no anger or serious disagreement. We kept searching for the meaning of the show. Jerry kept asking, "No. What's it about?" And eventually the word "tradition" kept coming up. I would say, "Well, it's about the breaking of a tradition." Each time, with each of the interlocking stories, a different tradition is being broken. One more serious than the other. The word "tradition" kept coming up, and finally at some point, someone—maybe Jerry, maybe me, I don't remember—said, "Listen. If that's what it's about then let's say so." And that's how the opening was born.

BC Would you all work together? How did you collaborate?

JS By the time Jerry came in, I had a draft of the book, and we had a first draft of the score, so he had something to work with. The essential story never changed. It opened the way it does now. The first act ended with the wedding and the pogrom. The second act opening was kind of different, but it always ended with the exodus to America. The storyline remained the same from the time that Jerry came into the picture. But within it, we made a lot of changes. I had scenes that I thought were adorable and wonderful and would easily win the Nobel Prize, but Jerry objected to them. For example, I had a charming scene between Tevye and Perchik playing chess and talking about their different philosophies. It was

a charming scene and it led nowhere, but we were experimenting with different kinds of things. One of the most interesting pieces of musical comedy magic was the opening of the second act. The first act ended with the wedding and a pogrom. In an early draft, the second act opened with a song called “Letter from America,” when Tevye gets a letter from his brother-in-law. He reads this letter that describes the golden land. He’s living in what is practically a palace—it’s called a tenement. He has his own business establishment—they call it a pushcart. It was very amusing, and then it was the townspeople singing, “Anatevka. Anatevka. Happy-go-lucky Anatevka...” Well, we threw all of that out and instead we opened with the opening we now have, with Tevye describing how they’re so happy they don’t realize how miserable they are and all of that. And that worked fine. But the song that we had for their exodus didn’t work. Somebody—now it may have been Jerry, it may have been Jerry Bock, it may have been Sheldon, or even me—somebody remembered that song, “A Letter from America.” And we asked how it would be if we sang that at a different tempo, and in a different key. We discovered magic. That was in Detroit.

BC Was Jerry there when they were writing it?

JS Oh, Jerry was very involved in Detroit. The basic show was always there, and the audience always liked it, but we had real problems in Detroit. For example, Jerry had a ballet in the second act with the townspeople mocking Tevye because he had a daughter who ran away and tried to marry out of the faith. It went on forever. It literally went on forever and it stopped the second act cold. It took time for the show to revive after that number, and we kept saying—I know I did—“Jerry, it’s just too long. It doesn’t fit.” But he kept fiddling with that ballet. Kept cutting it, changing it. He changed it to another ballet in which people from another town go through Anatevka and they make fun of Anatevka and all kinds of stuff. He kept cutting it down, but it never really worked. Finally I said to him, “Why don’t we try it without it?” And he said, “I’ll try it one night.” All we kept was the end of the ballet, which is that little Chava cross-over, (*singing*) “Little Bird, Little Chaveleh...” That was originally at the end of this very long ballet. And it worked like a charm. Jerry said to me at one point—and I will never forget it—“Aren’t people going to say, ‘Where is the Robbins ballet in the second act?’” I said, “No. I don’t think people are going to say that, Jerry. They’re going to say that they liked the show.”

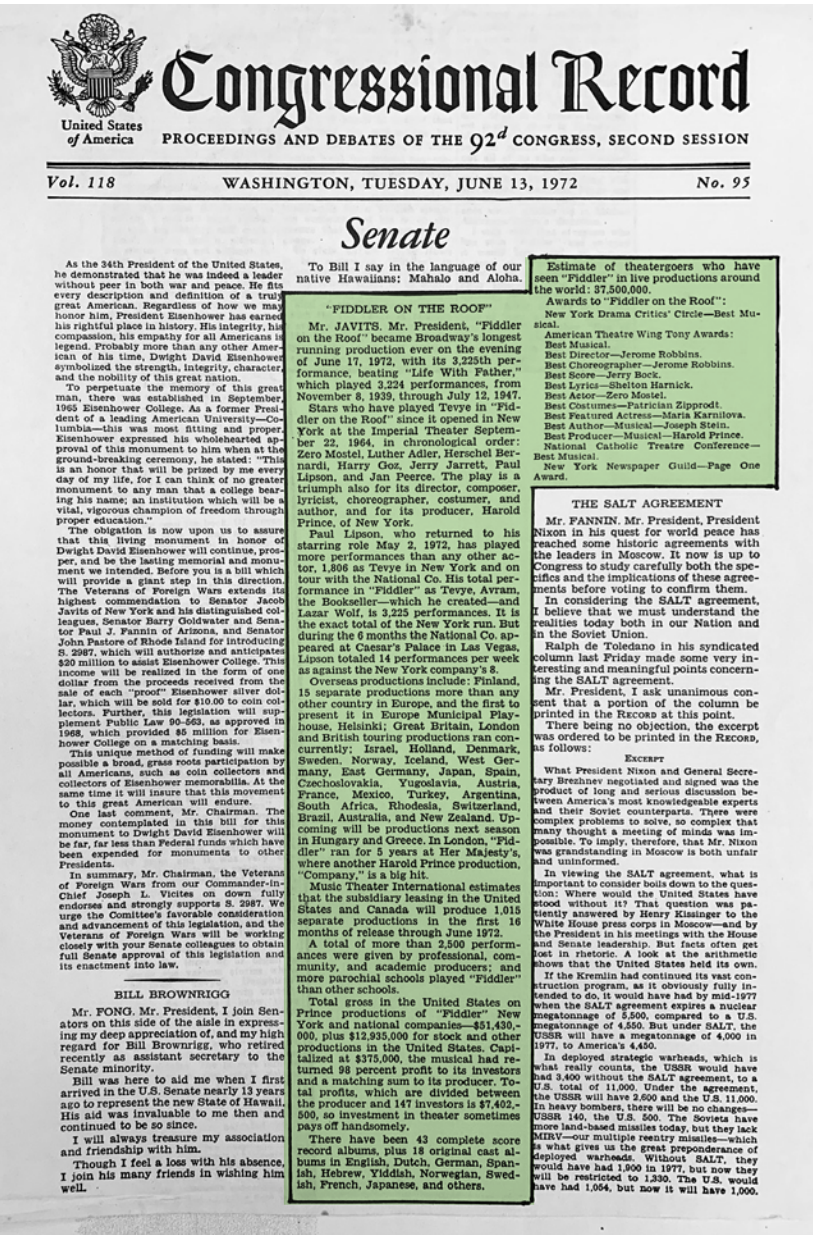
BC After that one performance, did he leave it out?

JS He left it out, and we all discovered that our show now held together like iron. Jerry had trouble with some members of the cast. Particularly, I think, Bea Arthur. In casting her, she was clearly the best to audition. She was amusing, she was true to the character, and so on. And he kept calling her back, but he was not thrilled about having her. I think his image of the Yente was more like Molly Picon. A little woman. And Bea was tall, and Bea was kind of aggressive. But she kept giving us the reading that we loved, and we finally, somewhat reluctantly, hired her. But he kept saying to me, when we were in rehearsal, “In that first scene, she’s got too much to say.” I said, “The thing works, Jerry.” He’d say, “Yeah, but can you cut it down a little bit?” And I said, “If I cut it down more, she has no character. I can’t cut it more.” But he had personal feelings about members of the cast. On the other hand, the guy had an instinct that was genius.

BC Do you think he was a genius?

JS It’s hard for me to define genius. He had a wonderful instinct. But I’ll tell you—I was so comfortable with this material from the very beginning that we were on the same level all the time. I remember Jerry calling me after the show opened—after about a day or two—and he said, “Are you getting these peculiar reactions from your friends about the show?” I said, “I think I know what you mean.” He said, “I mean it’s not that they say it’s very good and they like it. But it’s like a religious reaction. They are in awe of the effect it has on them. Are you getting that?” I said, “Yes, I am. I’m astounded by what the show is doing to people.” But I couldn’t have been more complimented as a writer by Jerry’s reaction... after the show opened.

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*.

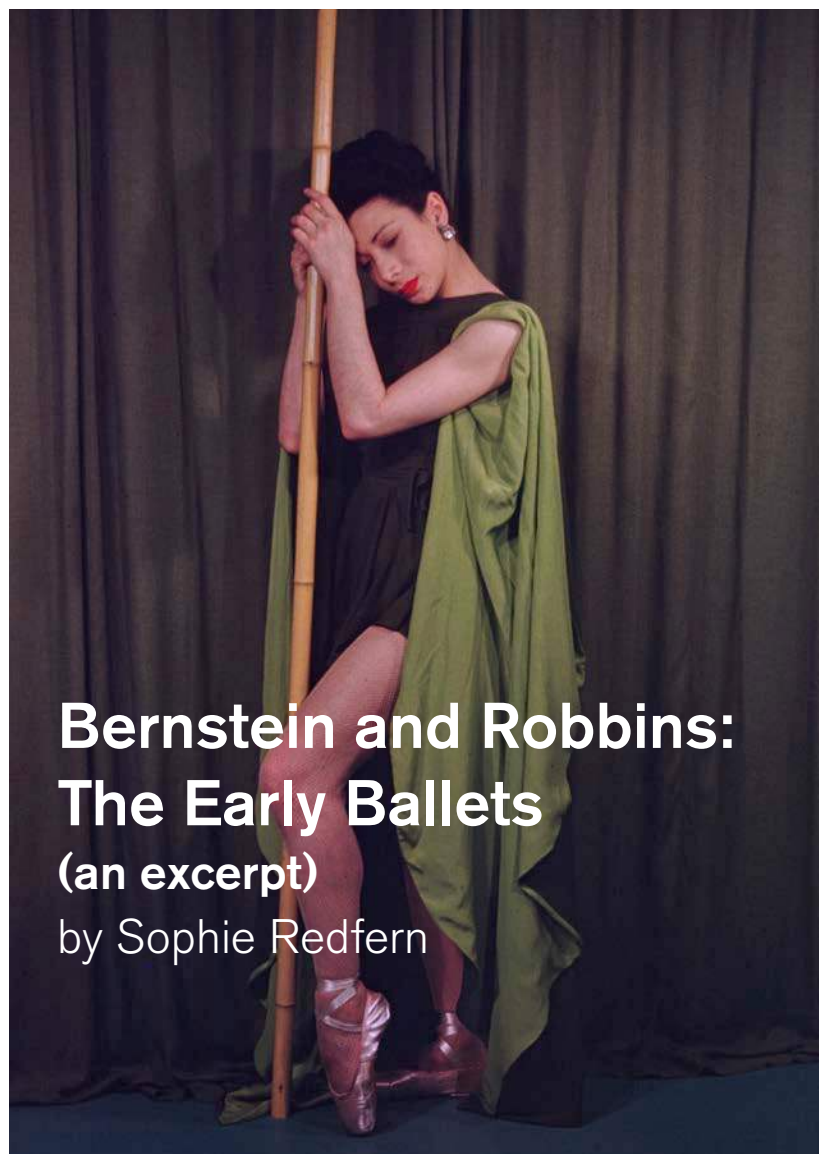


On June 17, 1972, *Fiddler on the Roof* staged its record-breaking 3,225th performance, becoming the longest-running show on Broadway, as noted in the Congressional Record. Image courtesy www.congress.gov.



Crowds lined up outside Broadway’s Imperial Theatre to see a performance of *Fiddler on the Roof* in 1964. Photo from the collection of Jerome Robbins.

Drawing extensively on previously unpublished archival documents, *Bernstein and Robbins: The Early Ballets* (Rochester University Press/Boydell & Brewer, 2021) provides a richly detailed and original historical account of the creation, premiere, and reception of composer Leonard Bernstein and choreographer Jerome Robbins' ballets *Fancy Free* (1944) and *Facsimile* (1946). Here are an introduction and an excerpt, a look at the reception of *Facsimile*, from the book.



Bernstein and Robbins: The Early Ballets (an excerpt) by Sophie Redfern

Facsimile was first performed on October 24, 1946 as part of Ballet Theatre's autumn season. It was the third collaboration of Robbins, Bernstein, and designer Oliver Smith, and in contrast to the comedic hijinks of their previous works, *Fancy Free* (1944) and *On the Town* (1944), it was an altogether darker and more introspective work. Serious in tone, it drew on Robbins's own experiences in its fraught and sexually charged exploration of the futility and fragility of human relationships and intimacy. As his first foray into this kind of material, it was an important step for him as a choreographer, though it would not ultimately be a ballet that remained long in the repertory; it was last performed at Covent Garden in 1950. Still, that it made it to the stage at all is remarkable as on numerous occasions the project faltered or those involved lost interest.

Planned as one of two ballets to be premiered by Robbins in 1946 (the other was to a Vivaldi score and eventually abandoned), it was originally commissioned with Paul Bowles as composer, not Bernstein. As issues began to arise with Bowles in the summer, Oliver Smith, who in addition to his work as a designer had become co-director of Ballet Theatre alongside Lucia Chase in 1945, scouted out Bernstein to see if he would be willing to step in as a last-minute replacement. A flurry of telegrams and letters chart the negotiations, with discussions hampered by Robbins and Bernstein being in London while Smith was in New York. Eventually Bernstein agreed, and when all parties were back in the US, Robbins spent a week with Bernstein in August 1946 mapping out the ballet. The time frame was incredibly tight from this point: Bernstein had three weeks to prepare the score ahead of the resumption of his busy conducting schedule (his sketches reveal he turned extensively to pre-existing music), with Robbins then having just over a month to work on the choreography. A request was made for the ballet to be postponed by a season, but Robbins was granted

only one extra week and so he crammed rehearsals into every spare hour he could find. Significant changes were still being made as the premiere loomed: Robbins asked Bernstein to revise his score with a week to go—something which led to Ballet Theatre intervening and acting as mediator—while the corps de ballet was cut as late as the dress rehearsal. All evidence shows tensions running high ahead of opening night.

This convoluted genesis is charted in detail in *Bernstein and Robbins: The Early Ballets*, but the following excerpt focuses on the ballet's subsequent premiere and reception. The critics who two years earlier had rapturously declared *Fancy Free* a success, now turned their attention to this rather different work.

• • •

Before the Premiere

Expectations for *Facsimile* were high. Robbins, Bernstein, and Smith as a creative team had thus far always produced a hit and there was the added dimension of a well-reported balletic rivalry in the city.¹ The autumn 1946 season saw Ballet Theatre under the co-directorship of Lucia Chase and Oliver Smith in direct competition with former manager Sol Hurok's new project, the Original Ballet Russe. Hurok had secured the Metropolitan Opera House for his company and so Ballet Theatre changed venue and was to make its debut at the Broadway Theatre. Five new works were premiered by the two companies over the autumn and on October 13 dance critic John Martin surveyed the four he had seen in the *New York Times*. Unimpressed by the offerings, he optimistically wrote, "Well, we still have...*Facsimile* to look forward to from Ballet Theatre. The new date is Oct. 24. It better be good!"² As the performance neared it was "The big event of the ballet week" in the *New York Times*, "The week's event" in the *New York Herald Tribune*, and was highlighted in the *Bronx Home News*.³ On October 23, the day before it premiered, an interview printed in *PM* included Robbins acknowledging how the subject was a long way from the comedies he had previously produced: "I don't want to stick to being the great American 'yak' choreographer. I'm trying to rip off the facetiousness that everyone indulges in. I think it packs a dramatic punch and it's a step forward for me whether it comes out successfully or not."⁴ Much of what Robbins said about *Facsimile* suggests he shared some of Smith's view as to the ultimate value of the new work. There is the sense he foresaw that *Facsimile* was not going to be a huge triumph and the subject matter meant it was never going to appeal to the public as *Fancy Free* had. Nevertheless, he wanted to attempt a work in a different mold and so for him as an artist it was a valuable project.

To underline the difference with *Fancy Free*, the audience on opening night were presented with a programme that featured a quotation by Spanish neuroscientist Ramon y Cajal that did little to illuminate what they would be witnessing: "Small inward treasure does he possess who, to feel alive, needs every hour the tumult of the street, the emotion of the theatre, and the small talk of society."⁵ This was printed above the enigmatic description of the setting: "The Scene: A lonely place. The Time: The number of minutes the ballet runs, or that many days, weeks, months, or hours. The Cast: Three insecure people."⁶ From this it would seem Robbins's "choreographic observation" was to exist beyond a recognisable place or setting, and Oliver Smith's design features an ambiguous, open, and sparse setting, complete with wooden posts and light fabric screens.⁷

The setting was actually a beach, with the screens an "improvised bathing tent" and the "pilings, marking the shore line."⁸ Rosaria Sinisi has explained that in its final form it was abstracted, but earlier alternative sketches by Smith indicate experimentation with a more obvious evocation of a beach and shoreline, with large weathered rocks rising out of the sand in one and a cliff edge sweeping round as the sea laps up a narrow beach in another.⁹ In these, the color palette is dark and brooding, the beaches stormy; a stark contrast to the brilliant glare of the chosen design. Bernstein's assistant Jack Gottlieb wrote of the setting and how it suited the subject matter in liner notes for the Columbia release of the concert version:

Facsimile's action occurs, significantly, not in a metropolis but on a beach, that place to which one supposedly escapes from the city. But the emptiness of existence is made even more poignant, in this barren spot, for the "unintegrated personalities" stripped of all the trappings and camouflages of urban life.¹⁰

The bright space was "barren" and unwelcoming, Smith created an environment in which the dancers were devoid of comfort and the familiar; they were to be individuals inhabiting a space that seemed to represent a sense of nothingness.

Irene Sharaff's costume designs saw Nora Kaye wearing a bandage-style striped leotard and the men in simple leggings and long-sleeved bodices featuring torn and tattered patches.¹¹ Knowledge of the ballet's beach setting means Kaye's leotard can be understood as a stylized swimming costume, and the presence of a towel on Robbins's arm in one photo of the ballet directly links to

the action of the second man walking on and positioning the towel on the beach.¹² The extent to which the audience understood the setting and narrative, which was seemingly deliberately hidden in the program, can be gleaned from the first night reviews.

On the night of the premiere, despite creating the role of A Man for Hugh Laing, Robbins danced the part, with John Kriza as Another Man, and Nora Kaye in the central role of A Woman.¹³ Since the corps of Some Integrated People had only been cut at the very last minute, they too appeared on the cast list, which unsurprisingly elicited comment from the critics. John Martin lamented the lack of ensemble that “unfortunately never makes its appearance,” while Irving Kolodin of the *New York Sun* built his review around the group of dancers listed in the program who never stepped onto the stage:

When Jerome Robbins added to the cast of his new ballet ... the line: “Some Integrated People—Ensemble,” and then dropped the curtain without any sign of an ensemble appearing on the stage at all, he told us more about *Facsimile* than the action itself or the words about it in the program.¹⁴

Robbins’s view of the first performance is not documented, but he went on to schedule eighteen further hours of rehearsal over the next two weeks.¹⁵ He clearly saw there was work still to do, though Bernstein was not called upon to amend the score. In total it took 138 hours for Robbins to choreograph the 19-minute ballet.

The Critics

The reviews for *Facsimile* were mixed, with critics grappling with the subject matter and Robbins’s aims: “It was a troubled, complex affair with all sorts of Freudian overtones...the sort of thing that propels you from the theatre vaguely disturbed and fully expecting to be run down by a street-car,”¹⁶ wrote John Briggs in the *New York Post*. John Martin’s first review tried to make sense of the onstage action with him explaining how Robbins was “concerned in a measure with introspection and by and large with the projection of a psychological conclusion,” before commenting on the “terse, honest and unrelieved morbidity” of it.¹⁷ Not all critics responded in such a manner, however. Miles Kastendieck in the *Brooklyn Eagle* described it as the story of “two men and a girl who, apparently bored with life, think that there may be a way out in sex. They stage a choreographic necking party with no holds barred, then go their separate ways.”¹⁸ The casual language used in the review contrasts sharply with the highbrow and enigmatic terms Robbins included in the program. A further cutting summary by Robert Sylvester appeared in the *New York News*:

First Nora Kaye wanders around the stage swinging a rose on a string. Or maybe it was a lobster. Then Jerome Robbins bounces in. He’s swinging a red shawl. Poor Nora is stuffed into a striped leotard...Robbins takes a long look. Natch. Robbins kisses Nora’s hands. He kisses her on the kisser. She kisses back. He kisses her knee. She jumps around and falls down. He kisses her foot. She gets coy. He sulks. She kisses the back of his neck. Then Robbins kisses Nora’s foot while Kriza kisses her on the kisser and runs her around Robbins like he was a maypole.¹⁹

Sylvester’s biting words highlight how tiresome and trite he found the ballet, a view shared by Robert Coleman who rather curiously used his review in the *New York Daily Mirror* to attack modern dance and even modern dance audiences: “[*Facsimile*] is as confused, chi-chi and elusive for the normal balletomane as the usual run-of-mine neurotic choreography aimed at peculiar people. Since Ballet Theatre went modern there appears to be a distinct change in the type of customers it draws. Last evening’s audience was on the weird side.”²⁰ The legacy of *Fancy Free* loomed large and the contrast to that easy-going comedy was often commented on, with Robbins’s move from perky characterization to serious drama perplexing some. In the *New York Journal American* Robert Garland effectively put out a plea: “If you find out what *Facsimile* is about, write and tell me.”²¹ It was left to John Martin and Edwin Denby to scrutinize the work and assess what it said about Robbins’s choreographic path. In Martin’s second review he noted how it was “a considerably less substantial work of art than *Fancy Free*...less reality, less humanity, less comment, and it is more pretentious.”²² The conclusion he drew from this: “actually it has nothing at all to say.” Some positives were found though, and he did recognise it “as a transitional work in the development of one of the most talented young choreographers in the field,” which despite the subject matter still highlighted Robbins’s natural theatrical instinct. Denby also remarked on this particular talent of Robbins: “The stage craftsmanship of *Facsimile* is immensely capable. There is no plodding, no hesitancy, no drop, no blur. Though made up of fragmentary, often constricted gestures, the continuity is unbroken, the pacing sharp, the rhythm bold, the musical tact remarkable.”²³ It was just these qualities that would, later in his career, see Robbins brought in to show-doctor so many Broadway musicals. After the premiere, Denby, no longer at the *Herald Tribune* since Walter Terry returned from military service, wrote an

article discussing the myriad of goings in the New York dance scene for *Dance Magazine*. Since *Facsimile* was the most prominent new work showcased by Ballet Theatre that season he discussed at length Robbins’s development as a choreographer and the subject of the work. Like Martin he found it “a big step forward by an honest, exceptionally gifted craftsman.”²⁴ Both of the leading critics therefore agreed with Robbins’s own assessment before the work opened. It may not have been wholly successful, but it was an attempt at something new by a choreographer who needed to experiment.

In addition to the critical view, some reports acknowledged the audience reaction to the new ballet. It was generally reported to have been well-received by the public at large, though how eagerly the audience responded depended on which critic was reporting. John Briggs, who overall gave a fair review of the ballet, described how “The audience rapturously called dancer and conductor before the curtain afterward.”²⁵ Robert Coleman, at the end of his decidedly less-favourable review, seemed at pains to acknowledge the public’s apparent approval and was quick to state, “our applause meter showed it getting a less enthusiastic reception than *Les Sylphides*.”²⁶ Bernstein, who added a dash of glamour to opening night by conducting his score, also got a mention, with the kiss he blew to the musicians after the final chord, an act Kolodin felt “was the least they deserved” for their efforts.²⁷

1. For example, Louis Biancolli, “Ballet Season Goes into Double-Barreled Rivalry,” *New York World-Telegram*, October 1, 1946. The furor continued throughout the season: see Denby, “Ballet Theatre vs. Hurok: A War of Attrition,” *Ballet Today*, November 1946, in *Dance Writings*, ed. Robert Cornfield and William MacKay (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 351–54. As it was a magazine it was published in October, so still referred to the earlier date of the *Facsimile* premiere.

2. John Martin, “The Dance: Premieres,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1946, 74.

3. *Facsimile* Clippings, JRPP, 39/14.

4. Greg Lawrence, *Dance with Demons: The Life of Jerome Robbins* (New York: Putnam, 2001), 106.

5. Ballet Theatre program featuring premiere of *Facsimile*, October 24, 1946, JRPP, 39/14.

6. Ibid.

7. A rendering owned by Bernstein is reproduced in the book. It can also be seen on the wall of Bernstein’s apartment in photographs of a 1949 party taken by Stanley Kubrick (see Leonard Bernstein series in Stanley Kubrick Collection, Museum of the City of New York, access via www.mcny.org). A reproduction of a slightly different version, with ramps and two plants, can be found in the exhibition catalogue *American Ballet Theatre: Thirty-Six Years of Scenic and Costume Design, 1940–1976* (Ballet Theatre Foundation, 1976), design 60.

8. George Balanchine, *Balanchine’s Complete Stories of the Great Ballets*, ed. Francis Mason (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954), 129.

9. Rosaria Sinisi, email correspondence with author, spring 2016. My thanks to Rosaria Sinisi for sharing material and her extensive knowledge of Smith and his designs. The book reproduces a selection of Smith’s renderings and sketches for both *Fancy Free* and *Facsimile*.

10. Jack Gottlieb, liner note for Columbia Records LP release, reprinted in Gottlieb, *Working with Bernstein: A Memoir* (New York: Amadeus Press, 2010), 217.

11. Unsigned, “Ballet Triangle,” *Life*, January 27, 1947, 65–66. Colors are impossible to deduce from the black and white photographs.

12. Two photos of the ballet in performance are published in Christine Conrad, *Jerome Robbins: That Broadway Man, That Ballet Man* (London: Clibborn-Booth Editions, 2000), 92–93.

13. Laing took over on October 30 and was favorably received: “It is less mercilessly sardonic in his hands, and makes for a somewhat more even balance with the performance of John Kriza.” John Martin, “Hugh Laing in *Facsimile*,” *New York Times*, October 31, 1946.

14. John Martin, “*Facsimile* Ballet Has Premiere Here,” *New York Times*, October 25, 1946, 36; Irving Kolodin, “*Facsimile* Has Ballet Premiere,” *New York Sun*, October 25, 1946.

15. Charles Payne, *American Ballet Theatre* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 155.

16. John Briggs, “Ballet Theatre Presents New Robbins–Bernstein *Facsimile*,” *New York Post*, October 25, 1946.

17. Martin, “*Facsimile* Ballet Has Premiere Here.”

18. Miles Kastendieck, “Ballet Theater Presents *Facsimile* as Its Season’s World Premiere,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, October 25, 1946.

19. Robert Sylvester, “*Facsimile* Is Just Too Much,” *New York News*, 25 October 1946.

20. Robert Coleman, “*Facsimile* A Blend at Ballet Theatre,” *New York Daily Mirror*, October 25, 1946.

21. Robert Garland, “*Facsimile* At Ballet Theatre,” *New York Journal American*, October 28, 1946.

22. John Martin, “The Dance: *Facsimile*,” *New York Times*, November 3, 1946, 69.

23. Edwin Denby, “Ballet Theatre Wins,” *Dance Magazine*, December 1946, in *Dance Writings*, 357.

24. Ibid.

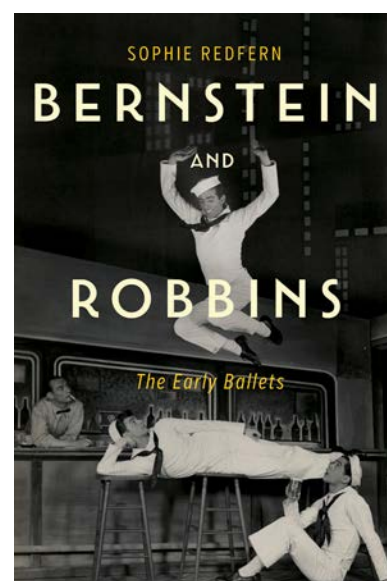
25. Briggs, “Ballet Theatre Presents New Robbins–Bernstein *Facsimile*.”

26. Coleman, “*Facsimile* A Blend at Ballet Theatre.”

27. Kolodin “*Facsimile* Has Ballet Premiere.”

Left: Nora Kaye in Jerome Robbins’ *Facsimile*, 1946. Photo by Carl Van Vechten, © Van Vechten Trust, courtesy of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, NYPL for the Performing Arts.

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Teaching to Survive: Catherine Devillier Black History in Dance. Russian contribution. by Sergey Konaev

Above: Ekaterina Devillier [Catherine Devilliers] as Young Polovtsian Girl (in a costume by Pavel Tchelitchev), circa 1921. Courtesy of Bakhrushin Museum, Moscow, Russia.

Right: Ekaterina Devillier [Catherine Devilliers] (standing), with her friends Maria Gorshkova (sitting in a chair with a book), and an unidentified person (at the piano), circa 1918. Courtesy of Bakhrushin Museum, Moscow, Russia.

1. In her birth record, survived at the Central State Archive of Moscow, the father's line is represented apparently by her half-brother Vladimir Lvovich Devillier (the same patronymic Catherine had), a French citizen, and there's a note on "illegitimacy" but it doesn't mention the name of the father.

2. I'm much obliged to Andrew Foster, who shared with me this information and his copy of the program.

My research project supported in 2020 by the fellowship of Jerome Robbins Dance Division is entitled "Teaching to Survive: Immigrant Female Dance Schools and Classes in the 1930s–1950s (Europe and USA)" and 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 1930 and 1960, 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 and thereafter forced into an itinerant existence, moving from continent to continent, country to country. To survive, immigrant artists taught privately, opened dance schools and advertised private lessons in newspapers. At the end of their dancing careers, almost all of these artists fell from highly-paid international stardom into the lower depths of a refugee existence — often without the needed language skills, financial aid, and access to social or legal services. Their passports were either invalid or expired.

The situation was especially dire for progressive female artists — those who did not want to sacrifice themselves to patriarchal patronage (whether sexual, artistic, or within the business world). The possibilities once offered to them in Tsarist Russia — a reasonable pension and/or professional retraining for the theater and cinema — were not available in Europe, due to a lack of fluency in French, German, or English. When sound films replaced silent films, opportunities to act on film also disappeared. For immigrant female artists who had left their performing careers behind, occasional commissions for choreography, studio-based teaching, and pedagogy were generally the sole, limited means of self-realization and integration.

One such female dancer was former Imperial Ballet star Catherine Devillier (1891–1959). Her name is not unknown to ballet historians in the West, owing to her successful single season, 1920–21, with Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in Paris and London. In 1920, she danced the role of the Miller's Wife in a revival of Massine's *Le Tricorne* and rehearsed the Chosen One in Nijinsky's *Rite of Spring*; the following year, she created the part of the Buffoon's Wife in Léonide Massine's *Chout*, set to a score by Prokofiev. During the London tour of Ballets Russes Devillier appeared in a number of Fokine revivals — as a Young Polovtsian Girl in the dances from *Prince Igor*, as Tamar in *Tamar*, as Bacchante in *Cléopâtre*, and as Zobeide in *Scheherazade*. She was active as a choreographer and dance teacher in Berlin in the 1920s, and then for three decades in London. In 1929, she wrote a short but valuable recollection of Diaghilev for the expat Russian newspaper *Rul* (Steering Wheel) published in Berlin. Announcements in French and British newspapers emphasized that she had been a star of the Imperial Moscow Theatre before leaving Russia, but her name seems never to have appeared in the context of the Black history of dance. Still, she can be considered the first Black principal ballet soloist, as well as a choreographer, teacher, and film star.

Like most Russian Blacks, Devillier was racially mixed, and like many of the students who joined the Imperial Theatre School, she was an illegitimate child. She had a black father, presumably Ludwig Devillier, a French citizen,¹ and a white mother, the outstanding theatrical actress Vera Popova-Vasillieva (a member of the Vasillievs Imperial Maly Theater dynasty). Upon graduating from Moscow's Theatre School, on August 1, 1908, she was appointed to the Moscow Imperial Ballet on order of the Minister of Court. Devillier rose smoothly through the ranks. According to the 1908–09 Yearbook of the Imperial Theatres, she danced 47 times in 14 ballets, including the role of Aya in Alexander Gorsky's *La Bayadère*, as well as 64 times in eight operas and 18 times in a play. The following year, on August 12, 1909, she was made a coryphée. Her salary increased from 600 to 660, and then 720, rubles per year (\$300, \$330 and \$360). On October 9, 1910, she was promoted to the second artistic grade, with a salary of 840 rubles (\$420) a year. Four years later she earned 1,300 rubles (\$650), and then, in 1916, 1,400 rubles (\$700).

Imperial Theatres were overseen by the Ministry of Court. They were founded at the beginning of the 18th century in a radical break from Orthodox Church prohibitions. The church demonized actors, and laws were enacted to punish them. Emperor Peter the Great took an interest in theatre as a means to promote his militaristic achievements and situate the Russian Empire within an enlightened European context. By the end of the 18th century, under Catherine the Second, theatre became fundamental to Russian society with advocates in all classes. Given these origins, the Imperial Theatres were not just theatres in the Western sense. They were a kind of state within the state, both a public and governmental institution, a fulcrum in society and means to elevate one's social status. The court privileged artists in its fight against the idea of theatre as the "devil's amusement," as it was still thought of by some in the mid-19th century. The Imperial stage granted rights and privileges to illegitimate children and former serfs (serfdom existed until 1861 and included more than 1/3 of the

entire Russian population, who lived in powerlessness and were treated like belongings). Blacks, however, were not as a rule discriminated against — “There, they were free men and women,” as Prof. Jessie Dunbar states; some of them reached the highest positions in the state — like Abram Gannibal (1696–1781), who was one of the key figures in the pantheon of those who changed Russia (likewise his great grandson Alexander Pushkin); some could benefit from self-objectifying — since the 18th century there were special positions at the Court for Black people (who were hired to be a privileged part of the Emperor’s personal guard, follow him everywhere, and play the key and most spectacular role in the court ceremonials). Their number varied from 8 to 20, they were free people, christened Orthodox, and received regular salaries, as well as medals, promotions and presents, just like all other members of the Ministry of Court.

Most of Catherine’s ballet dancer colleagues, friends and critics in Moscow adored her, lauding the softness of her dance, her ardor, her chic, her musician-ship, and her kind eyes. In the later recollections, with some comparing her to Josephine Baker, her skin color was never stigmatized but was perceived as a gift which made her unique among other dancers — just as a high elevation or beautiful turnout could make a dancer unique. Her Creole roots received little attention; the theatre administration disregarded it, while treating her equally with other dancers of her rank — especially since she was an excellent employee (not a single fine for a late arrival to rehearsal, according to her personnel file).

The Imperial Theatres gave Devillier regular promotions, a good salary, and guaranteed a solid pension. Another gift, in a sense, was artistic director and choreographer Alexander Gorsky. He broke theatrical conventions by bravely representing poor, suffering, and struggling people on the empire’s most elite stage. He broadly experimented, and he placed pantomime and character dancing above classical virtuosity. Devillier was allowed to tour abroad, and she apparently was the first Black soloist, appearing as one of the leading Swans in *Swan Lake* during Olga Preobrajenska’s London tour in 1910.² A turning point in Devillier’s career, in Maria Gorshkova’s recollection, was also intertwined with a classical repertory and was what might today be called “a rejection of whiteness”:

She [Devillier] fell into despair if cast in ballet blanc scenes, for example, in the Dance of the Hours in the third act of *Coppélia*. Katya despised this dance; she repeatedly asked the ballet director, Vasilij Tikhomirov, to exempt her from it, but he couldn’t countenance her reasons. He refused her request. She then appealed to Gorsky. Initially, he also refused, and laughed while listening to her complaints about how much powder she needed to use to make herself white. She finally couldn’t stand it anymore and burst into tears. The tears helped and Gorsky surrendered to her. She was happy. Soon thereafter she replaced Fedorova 2, who had fallen ill, as the Khan’s Wife in *The Little Humpbacked Horse*. She fit in perfectly and danced very well. After that she was given [principal] parts and became an outstanding soloist.

Devillier’s specialized in exotic and enslaved characters like Gulnare in *Le Corsaire*, Aya in *La Bayadère*, Shakh’s Wife in *The Little Humpbacked Horse* — not to mention the Spanish, Persian, and other “wild” and oriental dances seen in *Swan Lake*, *Raymonda*, *Nutcracker*, and 19th century grand operas. In 1918, when Gorsky cast her as a Norwegian Shepherdess in the revival of his masterpiece *Love is Quick*, set to Grieg’s Symphonic Dances, she was acclaimed. Like other Moscow ballet artists at the time, she also made films. In 1915, she had her cinema debut in *The Dead Man*, a film by imminent theatre director Alexander Tairov based on a play by Alphonse Lemonnier. The film is, unfortunately, lost.

The Imperial Theatre’s administration managed the passports of artists and approved their marriages. We know from Devillier’s personnel file that she married for the first time in 1915 to Nikolai Savvich Mamontov, the son of Savva Mamontov, a rich merchant who became an innovative opera director. After the 1917 Revolution, Nikolai joined the Volunteer Army; in 1920, he was captured by the Red Army and shot. Devillier remarried in London in 1936. But it was a marriage of appearances: in Berlin she had fallen in love and became the life partner of a woman, Princess Dilkusha de Rohan, a friend of Gertrude Stein, Alice B. Toklas, Pavel Tchelitchev, and others. Part of Devillier’s and Dilkusha’s archive is at the Harry Ransom Center of the University of Texas at Austin, awaiting a dedicated researcher.

The reasons these materials once made their way across the Atlantic are dramatically described in the recollections of prominent actor Neville Phillips, who was a friend of Katusha [Catherine Devillier] and Dilkusha: “Katusha ran a ballet company in England during the war [in the 1940s] of which the standard was said to have been very high, but like all ballet companies without permanent subsidy it fizzled out. She taught ballet at the Royal Academy of Dancing and now and then did the choreography for stage shows and operas; she would also arrange ball sequences for big costume films such as *Anna Karenina*, and *Anastasia*, but the glorious days were over. There had been many highs and lows

in their lives, and as the years went by the lows began to outnumber the highs. It was sad to visit their flat in Brunswick Terrace and see the beautiful pictures they had gathered during their Paris years slowly, one by one, vanish from the walls to reappear in the auction rooms of Sotheby’s or Christie’s; and even their wonderful collection of letters, drawings and photographs of the Russian Ballet would end up in the libraries of rich American universities.”

Memory served Philips right, though, in the 1930s–1950s. Devillier didn’t run a ballet company but was hired by various British impresarios for ballet, opera and operatic productions. As a choreographer and theatre director she was extolled for an abundance of invention and followed Gorsky’s principles of dramatizing mass scenes and avoiding symmetry in composition, creating colorful groupings and dances full of life and variety. In 1943, she taught at Pola Nirenska’s School of Dancing. Later, she was appointed by the Royal Academy of Dancing, where she taught character dances and staged ballets for students that were met enthusiastically by critics: “Catherine Devillier’s *Rapsodie Hongroise* provided the most colorful moment of the afternoon. To Liszt’s music her ballet, teeming with incident, enchanted the eye with decorative costumes brilliantly painted to resemble the richest embroidery” (1947); “The ballet [for a production of the opera *Il Mondo de la Luna*], consisting of members of the Royal Academy of Dancing, enhanced the interest of the slender plot, Catherine Devillier’s choreography and grouping being admirable” (1951).

Despite these activities and talents, Devillier remains underestimated, and her contribution to the development of the British ballet is almost forgotten by dance historians — including those who have a focus on female, Black, and queer creators.

In the context of my research, it’s crucial to note that Devillier never experienced discrimination or a glass ceiling dilemma in the Moscow Imperial Theatres. She kept her creativity until her death and, after emigration, as a dance professional trained and grown by that system (represented a very specific and imperfect example of tolerance and equality), she could still rely on her choreographic and teaching skills as a stable source of income.

Exploring the documents of Devillier’s financial situation in the UK in the 1940s–1950s is a further aim of this research. Then, it might be possible to draw a comparison between Catherine Devillier and the other prolific Russian female choreographers and teachers, particularly with those who left Europe for the United States — like Bronislava Nijinska, whose finances are perfectly documented in the statements of income and expenses since 1943 (Library of Congress, Nijinska collection, Box 45, Folder 12) or Alexandra Fedorova, whose bills and financial records survived in her collection in the Jerome Robins Dance Division (Alexandra Fedorova papers, MGZMD 110).





A still from Kiri Avelar's screendance
"A Creative Response to Katherine
Dunham's *Veracruzana*," 2021.

A Jerome Robbins Dance Division Fellowship Reflection by Kiri Avelar

As a Jerome Robbins Dance Division Research Fellow, I wanted to become more familiar with the untold histories of the Latinx/a/o/Hispanic experience in modern dance, a calling my mother had instilled in me as a young child. I hold a strong memory of her in the third grade, as she pointed out to me the histories that were missing in the Social Studies books I would bring home from school. She was infuriated by what she read, and what was left unsaid; she made sure I also knew additional histories, especially of English and Spanish colonialism throughout the U.S. and Latin America, and the assimilative processes of colonization across the Americas. At that time, I felt embarrassed by the scene she made about it and couldn't fully understand why she always had to add more to what my teachers were asking me to read and write about. Looking back, I appreciate her having pointed out these skewed, single narratives, and those who did not have a space to tell their history. I reflected back on this early impression as I headed into the Fellowship, and had yet another epiphany as the Fellowship began. I was now finally seeing the archives firsthand and recognized that my understanding of José Limón's and other pioneers' choreographic works was Eurocentric. It hit me that my perspective as a Latina dance scholar was a valid entry point to the research and that what I would see would be equally as important as what I had been reading before, through a white gaze.

As "Dance and Immigration" was the theme of the 2020 Fellowship, my aim was to visibilize the Latinx diasporic presence in the early American modern dance canon through a re-examination of the archive as a way of retelling our collective dance histories. The outcome of this work, *Descubriendo Latinx: The Hidden Text in American Modern Dance*, would be a continuation of my MFA thesis, which began in 2017, and years of prior inquiry as a hybrid performing artist and teacher.

My research was turned upside down early on in the process when Dance Oral History Archivist Cassie Mey shared with me Jacqueline Shea Murphy's *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories*. Many of the references in Murphy's writing were from primary sources I had built upon for my thesis. However, the Southwestern dance traditions that Murphy described as Native American specifically, I saw instead as contributors to Latinx/a/o/Hispanic culture. This forced me to spend more time with the theories of Latinx studies, and employed the idea of diaspora to conceptualize the large cultural grouping I was working to identify in my account of modern dance.

A second key moment early on in the research was a conversation with Arlene Yu, Dance Collection Manager. I shared with her this struggle to engage both Latinx Studies and Dance History resources in the same space to back up my viewpoints. In response, she brought forward insightful writings about Asian American Studies and Contemporary dance that spoke to my dilemma. Viewing this work affirmed the need for research at the intersection point of Latinx studies and Dance history to make more fully present absented contributions of the Latinx diaspora. Seeing how this has been done in the field of Asian American studies in dance encouraged me to continue reaching across these disciplines to build out my argument and make sense of what I was finding.

At midpoint in the process during a check-in with my research fellowship

cohort, I had the opportunity to present findings around the specific works of the pioneers. As I became clear about the full scope of my work, with Doris Humphrey, Martha Graham, and Lester Horton as the Denishawn legacy in conversation with Katherine Dunham and José Limón as artists in the Latinx diaspora, Dr. Ninotchka Bennahum highlighted the need to now bring these pioneers into conversation with one another. What were the parallels they held in their choreographic processes? What perhaps were different lines of flight they took in their careers? This challenged me to consider how the threads of inquiry could be tied together and my story could weave through some through lines beyond geopolitical considerations.

In preparation for the culminating symposium, Curator Linda Murray and Assistant Curator Tanisha Jones were incredibly encouraging of the hybrid format by which I wanted to present my creative research. Beyond the essay, I chose to use screendance as an additional mode of response to my research findings. As an interdisciplinary artist-scholar, I use screendance often to investigate complex themes in my work and further provoke thought around the artistic, physical, and cultural borderless experience of Latinx artists in America. Employing this artistic practice to present my research gave me, and hopefully my audiences, another level of understanding *what* I was seeing. Through the creative process of layering and extracting movements, gestures, symbols, sounds, and rhythms in screendance, I could see much clearer this cultural hybridity that had been present all along in my examination, and it began to work its way into my writing as a central theme. The screen choreographies expanded and clarified my vocabulary. The body paired together with written language had helped me articulate more of the research. Presenting in a hybrid format resonated with my own experience as a hybrid artist and illuminated/breathed life into the archives in a very exciting way for me.

My creative research responds to the danger of a single narrative, and asks the question, "Who gets to tell our stories?" As we embark on the journey to make absented resources present in our dance histories, we are actively engaging in advocacy, addressing the lack of representation and/or misrepresentation in our field. Enacting a practice of re-examination, of creative research, of collective storytelling in our dance history courses resists the singular lens and dominant white framework of the U.S. educational system. Making dance history accessible to our students, and placing material out there to be questioned, is critical in further shaping a more full, accurate picture of our cultural presence as BIPOC. By continuing to survey these historical choreographic works today, and connecting the pieces of the puzzle, we gain a greater understanding, appreciation, and awe for the contributions of the Latinx diaspora. This can lead to us and our students seeing ourselves more fully reflected in the field. It is important that we as dance scholars, artists, and educators continuously question our history and ask whose work we fail to recognize, and whose voices we have rendered mute. We can only create an inclusive dance history by digging up materials and re-examining the archive through our varied perspectives. These practices will develop the narrative into the complex and accurate story that we as human beings have earned and deserve.



We fondly remember former New York City Ballet principal dancer and ballet mistress SARA LELAND (1941–2020), who originated many roles including Jerome Robbins' *Dances at a Gathering* and *The Goldberg Variations*.



Top: Robert Weiss and Sara Leland in Jerome Robbins' *Dances at a Gathering* at New York City Ballet, 1976. Photo by Martha Swope © Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Bottom: Robert Maiorano and Sara Leland in Jerome Robbins' *The Goldberg Variations* at New York City Ballet, 1977. Photo by Martha Swope © Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.



Ballet de l'Opéra National de Bordeaux performs Jerome Robbins' *The Concert*, 2020. Photos by Julien Benhamou.

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Upcoming Performances of Jerome Robbins Works

A SELECT LIST

4-13 JUNE 2021

DANCES AT A GATHERING
Royal Ballet,
Royal Opera House, London

*Performance livestream
on 11 June. For more
information: www.roh.org.uk*

2021 DATES TBA

**A SUITE OF DANCES
IN THE NIGHT**

Paris Opera Ballet,
Paris

*Please keep in mind that cancellations or postponements
are always possible.*