

NEWS FROM
THE JEROME
ROBBINS
FOUNDATION

VOL. 13, NO. 1 (2026)



Jerome Robbins



The Inaugural Dance Hall of Fame Inductees

The inaugural Dance Hall of Fame ceremony was held in December 2025, at the Gloria Kaufman Performing Arts Center in Los Angeles. This new institution honors pioneering legends and innovators who have profoundly influenced the art of dance. Honorees were presented with a limited-edition “Music is Love” crystal heart, originally crafted by Lalique in collaboration with Sir Elton John in support of the Elton John AIDS Foundation.

Each inductee represents a defining era and influence in dance:

Alvin Ailey As founder of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Ailey revolutionized modern dance by infusing choreography with African American cultural roots. Through his educational programs, company, and outreach initiatives, he broke through barriers, championed Black voices, and celebrated human resilience, transforming the landscape of movement.

Mikhail Baryshnikov Hailed as one of ballet’s greatest talents, Baryshnikov’s technical brilliance, expressive performances, and artistic innovation brought ballet to a wide audience. Not only a dancer, but also an Oscar and Tony nominee, he stands as a cultural icon and committed arts advocate.

Stephen “tWitch” Boss “tWitch” began learning hip-hop early on, developing a distinctive style that resonated with a new generation. He gained recognition on *So You Think You Can Dance* and *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*. This led to film roles in *Step Up 2* and the *Magic Mike* series. Returning to *SYTYCD*, he served as choreographer, mentor, and judge.

Misty Copeland In 2015, Copeland made history as the first African American woman named principal dancer at American Ballet Theatre (ABT). Known for her

athleticism and artistry, she has headlined roles in *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, and *Firebird*, recently concluding her stage career with ABT. Offstage, she promotes ballet diversity and accessibility through the Misty Copeland Foundation and Life in Motion Productions.

Bob Fosse Fosse is regarded as one of Broadway and film’s most influential figures. The sole recipient of an Oscar, Emmy, and Tony for directing in a single year, his eight Tony Awards are unmatched by any choreographer. Works like *Cabaret*, *All That Jazz*, *Chicago*, *Sweet Charity*, and *Pippin* defined his legacy, inspiring generations.

Martha Graham Named the “Dancer of the Century” by *Time* magazine in 1999, Graham pioneered a powerful movement language built on contraction and release. Her choreography continues to influence generations of choreographers and performers. The Martha Graham Dance Company remains one of the world’s most respected and celebrated dance companies.

Gene Kelly Kelly reimagined dance in film, changing perceptions of the male dancer’s image in Hollywood musicals. Famous for the classics *Singin’ in the Rain* and *An American in Paris*, he choreographed and directed unforgettable scenes, cementing dance’s role in storytelling through film.

Kenny Ortega Ortega has shaped some of pop culture’s most beloved moments, including *Dirty Dancing*, *Newsies*, *Hocus Pocus*, and the *High School Musical* series. Starting out under Gene Kelly, he choreographed for icons like Elton John, Cher, and Diana Ross, later moving into film and television. He was Michael Jackson’s creative partner and concert director.

Jerome Robbins A towering figure in both ballet and Broadway, Robbins’ genius extended from *West Side Story* and *Fiddler on the Roof* to *The King and I* and *Gypsy*. His precise narrative and emotive choreography earned numerous accolades, including two Academy Awards for *West Side Story*, four Tonys, an Emmy, and a Screen Directors’ Guild Award. He received a Kennedy Center Honor in 1981, and France’s Chevalier dans l’Ordre National de la Legion d’Honneur in 1993.

Twyla Tharp A trailblazing, visionary, modern choreographer, Tharp has produced works blending classical technique with contemporary sensibility. Her innovations span ballet, Broadway, and film, earning her Tony Awards, Kennedy Center Honors, and a National Medal of Arts.

Legendary actress and dancer **Shirley MacLaine** was honored with the inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award. The award, which she described as the most important of her career, will be named in her honor.

Founded by Emmy Award winners Anita Mann and Louis J. Horvitz, the Dance Hall of Fame recognizes dance’s cultural significance and its top contributors. Board members include Adele Yoshioka, Christopher d’Amboise, Jeff Thacker, Jody Gottfried Arnhold, Julia Strickland, Lawrence Jackson, Melinda Soderling, Renae Williams Niles, Stuart K. Robinson, Susan Shields, Terry Lindholm, and Wendy Whelan. ■

above: Mikhail Baryshnikov at the Inaugural Dance Hall of Fame Ceremony. Photos by Alberto E. Rodriguez, courtesy of Getty Images for Dance Hall of Fame.

right (left to right): Noah Fosse, Donna Wood, Twyla Tharp, Connie Boss Alexander, Shirley MacLaine, Allen Greenberg, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Kenny Ortega, Patricia Ward Kelly, Drè Rose, and Janet Eilber at Inaugural Dance Hall of Fame Ceremony in Los Angeles. Photo by Alberto E. Rodriguez, courtesy of Getty Images for Dance Hall of Fame.



Discovering MTI Concert Dance

A conversation between Elizabeth Parkinson and Eric Otto



Founded in 1952 by composer Frank Loesser and orchestrator Don Walker, Music Theatre International (MTI) is one of the world's leading theatrical licensing agencies, granting theatres from around the world the rights to perform musicals from Broadway and beyond. MTI Concert Dance, a division of MTI, is in the business of exclusively licensing the works of a growing roster of choreographers. Starting with the works of Jerome Robbins, then adding the works of José Limón, and recently Lynne Taylor-Corbett, MTI Concert Dance was launched in 2024 and is led by dancer/choreographer/educator Elizabeth Parkinson. MTI Concert Dance works directly with choreographers and companies to protect copyrighted choreography worldwide. "Just as MTI has actively kept musical theater classics alive and thriving, they will use those same talents to sustain the legacy and artistic vision of choreographers worldwide in a way that has never been attempted before," said Allen Greenberg, Trustee of The Robbins Rights Trust.

Drew Cohen, CEO of Music Theatre International, said, "MTI is proud to bring its 70-plus years of experience as a global leader in performing rights licensing to the world of concert dance. After decades representing the theatrical work of Jerome Robbins in great musicals like *West Side Story*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *Peter Pan*, we are delighted to launch MTI Concert Dance by representing the catalogue of one of America's foremost choreographers and a true artistic legend."

Elizabeth Parkinson, Director of MTI Concert Dance, brings unparalleled expertise in professional dance, repertory, and choreography to the world of concert dance licensing. Elizabeth's extensive performance background spans some of the dance community's most prestigious companies — The Joffrey Ballet, Feld Ballets/NY, Donald Byrd/The Group, and Twyla Tharp and Dancers — giving her firsthand understanding of how choreographic works are created, owned, and transferred. Additionally, Elizabeth has had direct involvement in the reconstruction and preservation of historical works by choreographic masters including George Balanchine, Frederick Ashton, Vaslav Nijinski, Paul Taylor, and Twyla Tharp. This has given her the foundational knowledge so important to protecting licensing agreements and choreographic authenticity.

What follows is a conversation between Elizabeth Parkinson, and Eric Otto. As Artistic Director at Toledo Ballet, Eric is representative of the many dance company directors who are now learning of the work that Elizabeth is doing.

Elizabeth Parkinson I was at a performance of a play that I movement directed and sitting next to me was John Prignano, who is the Chief Operating Officer & Director of Education and Development of MTI. We were introduced and I said, "Oh, I know MTI. We license those works at my school." And he said, "I know you. You're Elizabeth Parkinson." Then the play started and we watched the first act. When the lights came up for the intermission, he turned to me and said, "I have a job for you." And I said, "Really? Tell me what it is." MTI has represented the theatrical works of Jerome Robbins for decades. The Robbins Rights Trust

came to MTI and suggested that MTI represent Robbins' ballets as well and start licensing the ballets. That has never been done before in the way that licensing has been done for composers and lyricists and book writers of musicals.

Eric Otto So if I wanted Toledo Ballet to do *West Side Story*—or the ballet version of *West Side Story*—

EP *West Side Story Suite*.

EO — *West Side Story Suite*. Would I go through MTI?

EP You would email me!

EO So is your job striking the deal?

EP Yes. You know, when I told some people about my position, they asked, "Are you going to be staging the ballets?" And I said, "No, I'm not staging the ballets. I'm facilitating the license." When the Balanchine Trust, or the Robbins Rights Trust, or an individual choreographer goes to license, they do it themselves. They have their own lawyer, their own agents, and they reach out in that manner. So the way that MTI Concert Dance works is that MTI has the right to license the choreographic work. A misconception that some people have is that somehow MTI "owns" the rights to the work.

EO So how does MTI have access to the works? Are they acting as a middle person, helping to get the work out there?

EP Yes. The requests come to me directly or to Christopher Pennington, Trustee of The Robbins Rights Trust, and then he sends them to me. I feel like the longer I'm there, I'm accessing more parts of the job.

EO When a choreographer is considering licensing their works through MTI Concert Dance, what sort of artistic control do they maintain? I imagine that a director of a company would want artistic control when it comes to casting.

EP When we enter into an agreement, with a Foundation or a choreographer, they create all of the parameters for the licensing. So there could be a world in which a choreographer would say, "Give this freely to whoever wants it, and I'm not going to place any boundaries on it."

EO But then it would change the piece.

EP Correct.

EO Because if it's a brilliant piece like *Serenade*, there have to be certain parameters placed. The dancing must be at a certain level, as well as the costumes, the lighting —

EP Of course. It's not up to MTI to make those decisions. They are made by the choreographer. For example, with Robbins' works, the licensing is strict. They have an Advisory Committee and there are répétiteurs who handle every detail.

EO It's the choreographer's name on the line. You don't want to send it to a company and if it doesn't measure up, have people think, *Oh! That was a Robbins ballet?*

EP Yes. The licensing is very strict. But there are younger choreographers that I've spoken to, who are interested in stretching the boundaries of their work. They are open to new costume or lighting designs, and perhaps even adjusting the choreography for the specific company licensing, if it means that their work can be seen by a wider audience.

EO Choreographers are trying to build their name and get their work out, and they're willing to accommodate. Whether it means one less dancer, or they don't quite have the budget for the lighting, they might say, "We can make do with what we have."

EP Right. I'm also working with the José Limón Dance Foundation, and they give a little more breadth to things like costumes. They have to be as close as possible to the original designs, but they do not have to be an exact replica. The



Pianist Johannes Piirto in *The Concert* at the Finnish National Ballet in 2019. Photo by Sakari Viika.

boundaries and restrictions on how pieces are produced are all laid out in our agreement with the choreographer or the rights holder.

EO So, would an artistic director of a ballet company come to you with their parameters—how much they could spend, and how many dancers they have?

EP I'm working on a license with the Royal Ballet, and I am also working on a license with Carolina Ballet. There's a big difference in the budgets of those two companies, so obviously our licensing fees are on a scale. We scale them based on the company's yearly budget, and what they can afford. We try to strike a perfect balance that serves both the company and the rights holder. Since I've started this job, I've learned a lot about licensing and one of the main misconceptions when I speak to rights holders is their concern about losing control of the work. Their biggest fear is, "Are we going to lose control of the quality of the piece?" And my answer is no. That is part of my job—to make sure that the artist's boundaries are being adhered to and followed. The répétiteur or the reconstructor is the eyes and ears of the choreographer or the Trust in the rehearsal studio. If any part of the agreement is not being followed, they get in touch with me and we have a conversation and create solutions.

EO Do you license works to schools, in addition to professional companies, so that they get to learn some of these works—or a section—and dance it in a performance?

EP Yes. MTI is very innovative when it comes to educational licensing. They started "Broadway Junior" musicals—adaptations of musicals for schools—and even "Broadway Senior" shows.

EO So is there a "Concert Dance Junior" on the horizon?

EP I'd like to call it "Studio Series."

EO What would that be?

EP Educational programs designed specifically for in-studio learning.

EO Since you've started licensing works, so far has everything gone smoothly?

EP The only issue that I've run across was with a company that licensed Robbins' *The Concert*. They had rented a piano for the ballet. There's a moment in *The Concert* when the pianist wipes away a cloud of dust from the piano keys.

It's at the beginning of the piece and it really sets up the theatrical style of the ballet. They did not want to use the dust, but the répétiteur had to insist. It is part of the choreography.

EO And in the end?

EP In the end, there was dust on the piano.

EO I can understand the concern about the piano, working for the organization that I do—Live Arts Toledo—where it's an established symphony and a growing ballet company. The symphony is not a ballet orchestra, it's a symphony. You'd have to explain to them that it's part of the piece—"We'll Shop-Vac it out of the keys later"—but they get it.

EP Everything can be handled by the répétiteur. The répétiteur is there for rehearsal, and there for the tech, and each license—at least with the Robbins Rights Trust—requires that the company videotape every performance and archive it. So if there are any questions, we can just consult the video and setup a conference call. But the more that I work with these organizations, and these different companies, it's clear that there is just so much good will, and that people are trying to do their very, very best.

Additional information about MTI Concert Dance can be found at:
<https://www.mtishows.com/concert-dance>

Elizabeth Parkinson's Broadway credentials include Tony-nominated and Astaire Award-winning performances in *Movin' Out* and *Fosse*. She worked closely with the Verdon Fosse Legacy, studying repertory with theatre dance royalty Gwen Verdon and Ann Reinking, and is now a reconstructor for the Legacy. This experience has provided her with crucial insights into how choreographic estates manage their most valuable properties for commercial productions and in educational settings. Since becoming Director of MTI Concert Dance in 2024, Elizabeth has been working closely with The Robbins Rights Trust, licensing the legendary ballets of Jerome Robbins to dance companies and educational institutions worldwide.

Eric Otto began his training at the age of seven at the School of American Ballet in New York City, Eric has performed with New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Metropolitan Opera Ballet, Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, and BalletX. He was an original cast member of Twyla Tharp's *Come Fly Away* and appeared in the Broadway and touring productions of Tharp's *Movin' Out*. His Broadway credits also include *The Phantom of the Opera*, and he has toured nationally with Twyla Tharp's company. In addition, Eric is a dedicated educator and mentor. He has served as Artist in Residence in Classical Ballet at Skidmore College and as Rehearsal Director for BalletX. His teaching credits include faculty positions at Ballet Academy East and Peridance in New York City, and guest faculty appointments at The Rock School for Dance Education and the Joffrey Academy of Dance in Chicago. He is an ABT® Certified Teacher, having completed the ABT Teacher Training Intensive in Pre-Primary through Level 6/7 and Partnering of the ABT National Training Curriculum. As a choreographer, Mr. Otto has been commissioned by institutions including Toledo Ballet, Toledo Symphony, Peoria Ballet, Albany Berkshire Ballet, SaratogaArtsFest, The Bruce Museum, Skidmore College, and Bucknell University. Currently, Eric Otto serves as the Artistic Director and Head of Curriculum for the Toledo Ballet, where he continues to shape the next generation of dancers.

Dance Students Speak!

We'd like to share some of the responses of student dancers who have taken the time to write about their experience learning and dancing Jerome Robbins ballets.



"When I was looking for pieces to do for my showing in my second year at the Royal Ballet school, *Fancy Free* felt like a no-brainer to me. The Bernstein and Robbins collaboration make a wonderful concoction of character, wit, and style. As someone who has now transitioned from ballet to musical theatre, it makes complete sense to me why I chose to do it. The language and style of the piece give the opportunity for a male dancer to act through dance in a fun and playful manner. It also has an element of jazz to it which I love."

— Toby Seddon (former student at The Royal Ballet School, London)



“Learning *N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz* has been incredibly rewarding. It gave me the opportunity to learn the language of rhythm, acting, and style that Jerome Robbins created. Going into the process, I can honestly say that I had never experienced anything like the movement of *Opus Jazz*. The aspects that immediately struck me were the lively and pedestrian natures of the choreography—the ‘coolness’ factor quickly became essential to understanding the motivation

for each phrase. I learned fast that acting is needed to provide context for each duet or formation, as well as to create an air of ‘humanness’ and interpersonal connection that I feel all of Robbins’ pieces aim to establish. Along with the style, musicality is also necessary to properly convey the feeling of the piece. I feel that Robbins’ choreography perfectly fits the saying of being able to ‘hear the movement.’ For the dancer, the phrase work is liberating, It is freeing to be able to describe the music with form and interact genuinely with the other dancers in the piece. For the audience member, I can only imagine the satisfaction and accompanying emotional response that is provoked by the choreography. The vocabulary of *Opus Jazz* has not only been immensely fun to dive into, but has also sparked, for me, a new kind of perspective on the playful nature of dance that can coexist perfectly beside the technicality of phrase work.”

—Willa Regan (age 17, student at Kanyok Arts Initiative, New York City)

“As someone who’s grown up as both a dancer and an instrumentalist, the experience of learning choreography from Jerome Robbins’ *N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz* was fascinating. I realized that in order to portray his movement authentically, I had to allow my dancer brain to take a break and let my musicality guide me. Instead of feeling the need to have control over the steps, I learned to sink into the music and let the rest happen. That is what I love about Robbins’ choreography: it is completely informed by the music. I have found that the specificity of the instrumentation allows me to play with dynamics and character choices within the movement. I can feel each rhythmic syncopation reflected in the choreography, and it makes dancing that much more conversational and meaningful.”

—Lucas Pignotti (age 17, student at Kanyok Arts Initiative, New York City)

Los Gatos Ballet, in California, performed Jerome Robbins’ *Circus Polka* (alongside *Sleeping Beauty’s Wedding*) at Santa Clara University’s Mayer Theater in March 2026. The production was a highlight of the spring season for the school, emphasizing mentorship and community. Peter Doll, School Director at Los Gatos Ballet, said “It was an honor and privilege to perform *Circus Polka*. Working with Zippora [Karz] and hearing her stories about working with Mr. Robbins was invaluable for both myself, and the students. We hope to have the chance to perform it again someday.”

“*Circus Polka* was kind of challenging but fun. It felt amazing to dance with the higher levels. Being in *Circus Polka* made me want to go and do the performances again and again. My favorite part was the big circle because I love the polka step. The challenging part was the cannons, because of the timing. I had fun dancing, even if it was only a few minutes. It was great to dance with my best friends. I loved being in *Circus Polka* and hope I can do it again.”

—Noemy (age 9, student at Los Gatos Ballet)

“*Circus Polka* has been an amazing experience. My favorite part was the choreography. The energy in the dance brought it to life. I could tell my friends really enjoyed it too. And dancing with the older girls made it even better. I think dancing with people that are different ages helps people work together more easily. I really liked how Jerome Robbins put together this dance. It was very energetic and it took a lot of practice. I am really proud I got to do this dance. It took a lot of work, and I wish I could do it again.”

—Penelope (age 9, student at Los Gatos Ballet)

“It was such an honor to be a green girl in *Circus Polka*! Performing this led me to learn more about its history, including how it began as a circus act and evolved into this cheerful dance. My family and I enjoyed taking the time to learn more about Igor Stravinsky and his music, as well as Jerome Robbins. Learning the dance from Ms. Zippora Karz was amazing, and practicing the complex formations and steps as a team every week was challenging but rewarding. I had so much fun that the time flew by during the rehearsals and shows. Every time I learn a new dance, it always feels like a new adventure, leading me off into an unforgettable experience, and for that I am very appreciative.”

—Molly (age 11, student at Los Gatos Ballet)



Students at Los Gatos Ballet in their *Circus Polka* costumes, 2026.
Photo: Annarose Monroe Photography.



Jerome Robbins and Patricia Zipprodt Archives as Insight by Arnold Wengrow

In 1992, when the Broadway costume designer Patricia Zipprodt (1929–1999) was considering where her archive of drawings should go, she asked the advice of her friend Jerome Robbins, one of her most important collaborators. “Dear Jerry,” she wrote, “I would appreciate your thoughts on where my dance and theatre sketches might be housed... The Harvard Theatre Collection has expressed interest... I hope you are fine. All's well with me. Love, Pat.”

Robbins replied, “Dear Patricia: Ballet sketches are in New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, Dance Division — but check yourself on how they store and show them. Just ask to see some and ask questions. I think they're good, but you would know better and should check it out. I'm mostly concerned with video tapes and movies. All love...”

Both Robbins and Zipprodt ultimately entrusted their professional and personal papers to the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, where this exchange is found. These two collections chronicle their friendship. Just as importantly, they offer clues to how they worked together.

I was Patricia Zipprodt's posthumous co-author for her memoir, *If the Song Doesn't Work, Change the Dress* (Bloomsbury/Methuen, February 2025). Her archive was indispensable in reconstructing her recollections of working on Broadway and off Broadway with Robbins, Hal Prince, Bob Fosse, and Mike Nichols. She did not include her work for dance, however, and Gregory Victor, this Newsletter's editor, has asked me to see what the Robbins and Zipprodt papers might tell dance historians about their ballets.

Meeting Jerry

Robbins first met Zipprodt in 1962 when he was searching for someone to design Arthur Kopit's Absurdist comedy *Oh, Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feeling So Sad*. Robbins, the eminence of the Broadway musical stage and the ballet world, was trying his first non-musical in the safety of the Off-Broadway Phoenix Theatre. After a few unhappy Broadway assignments, Zipprodt was just finding her career footing in the fledgling Off-Broadway movement with Jean Genet's *The Balcony* (1960) and *The Blacks* (1962) at Circle in the Square.

This first Robbins-Zipprodt collaboration had its fraught moments — as many Robbins collaborations did — but the two artists went on quickly to the dazzling success of *Fiddler on the Roof* in 1964. She did not design many of his ballets, but there were four significant pieces: *Les Noces*, music by Igor Stravinsky, in 1965; two in 1972, *Watermill*, an evocation of seasonal rituals, influenced by traditional Japanese music, set to a score by Teiji Ito, and *Dumbarton Oaks*, by Stravinsky again; and *Dybbuk Variations*, music by Leonard Bernstein, in 1974.

Zipprodt had a distinguished career on Broadway. In addition to *Fiddler*, she helped shape the visual world of some of the American musical theatre's most memorable shows, including *Cabaret* (1966), *Pippin* (1972), and *Chicago* (1975). She also designed for the Metropolitan Opera, the New York City Ballet,



above: Patricia Zipprodt's costume design for the character of Madame Rosepettle in *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feeling So Sad*, 1963. From the Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts © Estate of Patricia Zipprodt.

top of page: Patricia Zipprodt at the drawing table in her studio. Photo by Lucia Moffett, courtesy of Anstice Carroll.

New York City Opera, and American Ballet Theatre. One of her few forays into film was Mike Nichols's classic *The Graduate* (1967).

As Zipprodt recounts her first encounter with Robbins, she was summoned to the Phoenix on East 74th Street, where she was handed a script by the producer Norris Houghton. She had one hour, he said, to read it before seeing "Mr. Robbins."

"And that's when I discovered," she wrote, "I would be meeting the famously difficult Jerome Robbins."

She was ushered into a large rehearsal room where Robbins was sitting at the far end, "just as gloomy and formidable as I had heard." He told her to go home, do some sketches, and come back on Sunday.

It was already late on a Friday afternoon. Rehearsals began on Monday morning. Zipprodt later learned that Robbins had been through the portfolios of every designer in New York. When she returned on Sunday with photos of costumes she had designed for Judy Holliday, Robbins studied them in silence. Then he murmured under his breath, "Well, I suppose you'll do."

That April, while *Oh, Dad* was enjoying its highly successful 454-performance run, Zipprodt wrote to him, "Dear Jerry, This bright sunny morning inspired me to straighten up my work closet—and what was in it? The O DAD sketches. And I remembered that you had asked for one. And I would love you to have one. But WHICH ONE ??? Call up & tell me when you return from wherever you are. Again—working with you was marvelous—one of those most rare occasions where a new window opens up. Pat."

Unlike some designers who freely bestow their sketches as gifts to their collaborators, Zipprodt kept her archive close. So the offer suggests the beginning of a real friendship.

For his *Oh, Dad* memento, Robbins chose one whose significance Zipprodt would have recognized: an elegant drawing of Madame Rosepettle in a crimson ball gown. It had a wide opening in the back which revealed roses when the actress whirled around.

The actress was Jo Van Fleet, and she was as strong-willed as Robbins. They battled frequently in rehearsal. When Miss Van Fleet came for her fitting, she did not approve. "I don't like the shade of red on the roses," she announced. "It is not becoming to me." "But it is exactly the shade Mr. Robbins approved," Zipprodt protested. "I don't care. I want a different shade of red."

Determined that the expensive, handmade roses would stay, Zipprodt asked Robbins and the producers to back her up. After the dress rehearsal, when Van Fleet again objected, the producers and Robbins caved, and the actress got her way.

As Robbins was leaving by a fire door, Zipprodt chased after him into the back alley. "I grabbed him and shook him so hard his hat flew off," she said. "And then he started to laugh. He knew he'd been bad." Looking back, Zipprodt said, "I was young and untried in those days. I took what I saw as a betrayal to heart and just steamed. Today I'd give a philosophical shrug and say, "So, red, what's red?"

Friends and collaborators

During the rehearsal period for *Fiddler*, Robbins gave Zipprodt a set of notes which are a clue to how she ultimately developed the costumes' distinctive look. "Don't romanticize the characters," he wrote; "they are tough, working, resilient, tenacious; they fiercely live and hang on to their existence...we are not to see them thru misty nostalgia of a time past, but thru the every day hard struggle to keep alive and keep their beliefs...They are not 'Characters' but laborers, workmen artisans, and the effect of their work on their clothes and bodies must be apparent."

To get the effects of work, time and their bodies on their clothes, Zipprodt invented a new distressing technique. She and her assistants scraped, sanded, bleached, dyed, and glued the fabric. She then had the makers stitch a bright motley of patches on the worn spots. The clothes looked lived in. Under stage lights, the mostly dark colored garments looked vibrant.

In 1989, when she was teaching at Brandeis University, Zipprodt sent Robbins a copy of his page-long *Fiddler* notes. "Dear Jerry— Thought you'd enjoy passing your eyes over this. I remember the day I waited while you pounded it out. All my design students at Brandeis have a copy of it. I tell them—that's the kind of focus a good director gives to the designer. I think it has shaken up the in-house directors/faculty a bit.... Love + cheers P."

Epiphany at the ballet

It is surprising that Zipprodt did not include her work for dance in her memoir, since it was an epiphany at the New York City Ballet that inspired her to be a costume designer in the first place.

After graduating from Wellesley College, Zipprodt moved to New York in 1947 intending to become a painter. A friend, the *Life* magazine photographer Gjon Mili, took her to see rehearsals he was shooting of the New York City Ballet



top: Patricia Zipprodt's costume design for the characters of Tzeitel and Motel, the bride and the groom in *Fiddler on the Roof*, 1964. From the Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts © Estate of Patricia Zipprodt.

bottom: Patricia Zipprodt's costume design for the characters of The Bride and The Groom in the Jerome Robbins ballet *Les Noces*, 1965. From the Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts © Estate of Patricia Zipprodt.

at City Center. "One evening in February 1951," she recalled, "they premiered Balanchine's *La Valse*, set to Ravel's music. Out came Tanaquil Le Clercq, Balanchine's muse and later his wife, in the most ravishing costume I have ever seen. It had a tight fitted bodice and a huge Romantic tutu skirt in layers and layers of silk net in different tones of pink and white. The skirt floated and fell and caught the light as she moved. The ensemble also wore different tones of silk net, layers after layers after layers, floating and falling. A little light bulb went off. There it was, I thought, it is actually possible to paint with fabric. Everything I was trying to put together, the painting, the paper dolls [I had created as a child], clicked into place. I knew for the very first time that I wanted to be a costume designer more than anything else in the world."

Zipprodt's archive is a treasure trove for scholars looking to document *Les Noces*, *Watermill*, *Dumbarton Oaks*, and *Dybbuk Variations*. There is a folder of correspondence with Robbins from 1964 to 1989. There are slides and photographs of *Dybbuk Variations*, *Les Noces*, and *Watermill*. Costume bibles for *Les Noces* and *Watermill* document the nitty-gritty of the organization, planning, construction, and running of the costumes and how continuity is ensured from performance to performance.

A photograph of the *Watermill* curtain call with Zipprodt, Leonard Bernstein, and Jerome Robbins would have been particularly gratifying to the costume designer. In her memoir, she notes with asperity occasions when designers sat out in the house while directors, choreographers, authors, conductors, and producers took bows.

The heart and soul of the archive of course are the thick folders of Zipprodt's designs. Many designers produce individual drawings of each character. Zipprodt drew many characters in a variety of different groupings. This allowed her to see all the color values and silhouettes as they would appear together on the stage.

In *Watermill*, for example, besides single characters, she shows one woman and two men, two women and one man, two men and one woman, and three women. Robbins was known for obsessively wanting different options. Were Zipprodt's variations for him to choose from? Suggestions for different moments in the choreography?

For the monumental production of *Les Noces*, with four pianists, six percussionists, four solo voices, and a full chorus sharing the stage with the dancers, Zipprodt produced one grouping of nineteen characters and another with twelve men and twelve women.

Rich resource

The archive of the Jerome Robbins Personal Papers [(S)*MGZMD 182] in the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts will be the rich resource for a scholar studying Robbins's work with Zipprodt. In a section titled Ballet Notes, there are a series of Robbins's own costume sketches for *Dybbuk Variations*, from 1973–74. There's a notebook as well, dated 1971–74, which contains costume sketches and set designs. For *Les Noces*, there is a folder of costumes. For *Watermill*, there is a folder of Robbins costume sketches dated 1971.

A letter to Zipprodt from February 1973 captures their working partnership. "Dear Pat, There you are in God's Pocket [Zipprodt's cottage on Martha's Vineyard] sending me notes. What indeed is it that you saw that I was after? I'd like to have your impressions. Just for a change we restored scenery and costumes for the very next performance and when the curtain went up the audience applauded with what seemed to a welcoming back warmth. Me? I'm not sure but as you know I was never totally satisfied with what I felt to be an over-produced version. I take it you think the scenery is too much while I feel the costumes are a little too much. Well we'll figure it out. It goes on again beginning of May and we can get together in April. All love,..."

Robbins was known as a visual artist himself. From the 1930s onward, he made figure drawings, portrait sketches, landscapes, still lifes, abstract works, and costume and set designs. His costume designs for *Les Noces* and *Watermill* are rough, Giacometti-like pen-and-ink sketches on notebook or graph paper. The tantalizing question: What were they for? Where in his creative process did they fit? Did he show them to Zipprodt? What will comparing them to her designs tell us?

I hope this survey of the Robbins-Zipprodt partnership in dance will inspire a dance/costume historian to take up the challenge. And looking at Zipprodt's work with the choreographers Lynne Taylor-Corbett, Peter Martins, Antony Tudor, and Talley Beatty would add to further appreciation of her work. ■

Arnold Wengrow is the author of *The Designs of Santo Loquasto* (USITT, 2017) and numerous articles about contemporary designers for Theatre Design and Technology, Theatre Crafts International, and Entertainment Design.



Buddy Bradley rehearsing Jack Buchanan. © Illustrated London News Ltd. / Mary Evans Collection.

Feel the Floor Maureen Footer Restores the Legacy of Choreographer Buddy Bradley

Exiting the IRT at Times Square, the walk from the subway to the dance studio on Forty-Sixth Street confirmed what Bradley already knew: he didn't really belong here, a brown face in a sea of white. Broadway, a canyon of theaters and commerce, congestion and commotion, was a foreign country after the leafy expanses, awninged windows, and familiar argot of uptown. The laughably small cubby-hole that masqueraded as a dance school emphasized the absurdity of the situation.

It was also laughably intimidating. He, Buddy Bradley, who had only mastered a time step a few years ago, was now to teach others from a position of authority. He was nineteen, had never been an expert in anything, had only followed orders from maître d's and dance directors until now, had really become a dancer by accident, and now found himself in this unfamiliar realm. In entering this makeshift room, Bradley would step into his destiny.

Feel the Floor: Restoring the Life and Legacy of Jazz Choreographer Buddy Bradley (Beacon Press), a biography of Buddy Bradley by Maureen Footer, resurrects the visionary choreographer whose contributions to rhythm tap and jazz dance reshaped dance on international stages. *Feel the Floor* shows how Bradley's revolutionary moves electrified Broadway in the 1920s and conquered London's West End in the 1930s. His experiments in rhythm would anticipate bebop, and his influence even permeated classical dance, cross-pollinating with ballet choreographers like Frederick Ashton and George Balanchine.

Buddy Bradley's story isn't just one of influence. He created the movement language we still speak today. The white performers Bradley taught to move became legends: Eleanor Powell, Ruby Keeler, Adele Astaire, Jessie Matthews. Bradley was among the first to fuse movement, character, and narrative in the theater, setting the stage for the integrated book musical and the careers of Agnes de Mille, Bob Fosse, and Jerome Robbins. In legitimizing street dance on the performance stage, he trailblazed the path for tennis shoe ballets and hip hop at the opera.

Maureen Footer is the author of *George Stacey and the Creation of American Chic* and *Dior and His Decorators: Victor Grandpierre, Georges Geffroy, and the New Look*. Her books have been reviewed in the *Financial Times*, *Forbes*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Vogue*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *Vanity Fair*, among others. Footer sits on the boards of the New York City Ballet and the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of the New York Public Library, the preeminent dance research institution in the world.

Maureen Footer spent five years in prodigious research, crossing two continents, tracking ancestral history in the Deep South, and enlisting private investigators to uncover Bradley's buried legacy. *Feel the Floor* corrects the false narratives that have erased Bradley's influence, revealing how one man's genius transformed musical theater, shaped modern ballet, and rewired the very DNA of American dance.

Jerome Robbins newsletter editor Gregory Victor had an opportunity to ask Maureen Footer a few questions about this fascinating new biography:

What inspired you to choose Buddy Bradley as a subject?

Bradley, a dancer from the Harlem Renaissance, was the African American choreographer who revitalized dance on Broadway in the 1920s. He also brought jazz and tap to stages on the West End. He planted early seeds of linking movement, music, lyrics, and character into a whole, trailblazing the integrated book musical. He changed the face of 20th-century ballet via his collaborations with George Balanchine and Frederick Ashton.

Bradley's impact on dance is enormous. It endures to this day. His collaborators and dancers from Adele Astaire, Noel Coward, Rodgers and Hart, Ruby Keeler, Cole Porter, and George Balanchine are known and revered. Yet, Bradley's name receded into obscurity. How did this happen?

It became my mission to lift Bradley and his contributions to the light. This story needs to be part of our dance conversation so we can truly understand what we see on our dance stage—and the full scope of our history.

Can you tell me about your research process?

It was a fascinating and arduous as there were no archives and little documentation. There are two reasons for the lack of resources: Dance on the theater stage was long neglected and African American stories are, historically, sparsely recorded.

Regarding the neglect of theatre, jazz, and tap dance: We realize today that popular culture revitalizes "high art" and makes it relevant but, until quite recently, this was not the case. Dance historians and critics focused on concert dance—dance performed in a formal setting, say an opera stage or concert hall—while dynamic movement, including folkloric, street, and vernacular dance remained outside the critic's field of vision. Dance in musical theaters, cabarets, and revues was dismissed as mere "entertainment," not art, so Bradley as well as his white colleagues, such as Larry Ceballos, Sammy Lee, and Albertina Rasch, didn't get the critical attention bestowed on a George Balanchine or a Martha Graham. It didn't occur to anyone to save and document this history. This partially explains the lack of documentation on Bradley but, what is more, jazz dance—and tap, Bradley's subspecialty—with roots in African American culture was even farther outside the critics' gaze. Happily, this is no longer the case.

Hip hop, house, club, and break dancing now are in the lens of history. If we open our aperture even further, to Bradley's time, we can trace how he used Black dance to shake up dance convention and fundamentally reshape our dances. Now Camille Brown stages stepping on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera and the Guggenheim Works and Process showcases hip hop. Buddy Bradley opened the doors for this.

Regarding the process of finding Bradley's story: Digging through theater playbills, *Variety*, *Billboard*, the *Stage*, the African American press, and British press archives helped me piece together an outline. Traveling to the Black Belt in Alabama, Birmingham, and the Blue Ridge mountain town where he was born shaped context. But to find out who Bradley the man was, I had to go to England, where he worked as an expatriate for 35 years, given the racial barriers on Broadway in the '20s. At the Westminster archives, I dug out every playbill of every show, found the name of every dancer, then traced them, often having to hire a private investigator, since 90-year-olds don't have much presence on social media. Most are no longer with us, but the few remaining—as likely to live in Dover, Brighton, or the theatre artist's retirement home, as Central London—shared stories, of Bradley's girlfriends, of how he moved like silk, of his softspoken but poised presence, that made Bradley literally come alive.

What was Buddy Bradley's style as a dancer and as a choreographer, and how did it reflect his personality?



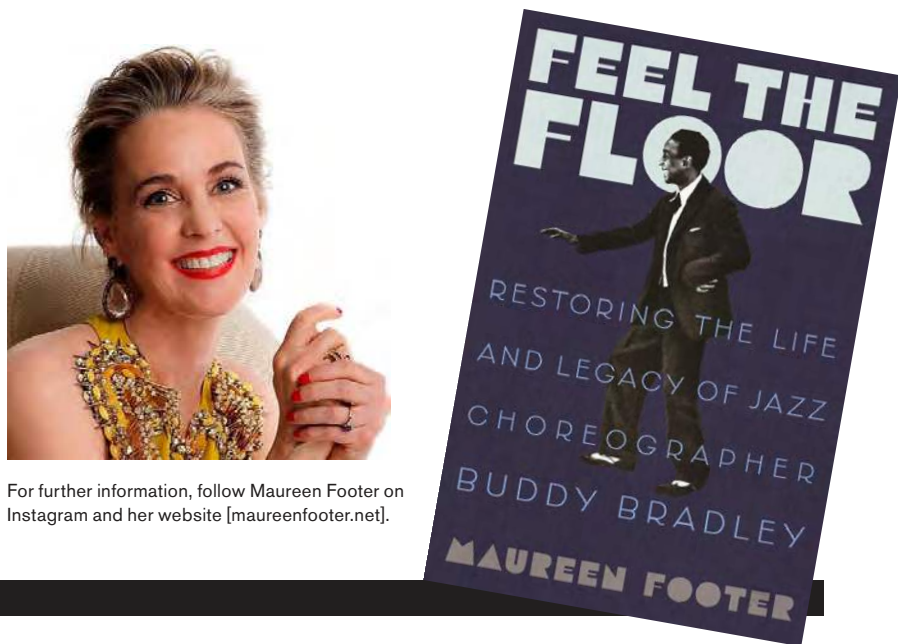
Maureen Footer. Photo by Zev Starr-Tambor.

Bradley as a dancer in the 1920s admired the clarity and showmanship of Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, but above all he adored someone named Eddie Rector, who linked steps musically, carved space three dimensionally, innovated ways to showcase tap technique, and emphasized the visual as much as the percussive aspects of tap.

Bradley as both a man and as a choreographer was insatiably curious—as a teenage orphan, he took a train to start his own life in Harlem. He was unwilling to stay in the confines that society place on an African American man or work within what was expected of a "Black choreographer" or "Black dance." Working with Eddie Rector as a model, he continually expanded it. When he moved to London, he worked with other dance forms from flamenco to ballet, aspects of which he adapted for jazz choreography. For example, while working with Frederick Ashton, he became enamored of epaulement, the balletic use of torso, head, and shoulders and it permeates dramatically into his own choreography.

While writing *Feel the Floor*, did you learn anything about Buddy Bradley that surprised you?

The complexity of his character; he had crossed boundaries, took risks, stood alone, experimented, was lionized in London as the go-to choreographer for British stage and film, yet remained so gentle, so kind, when he could have become tough and even bitter. The man who emerged from the interviews I obtained from friends and dancers who knew Bradley, was that of a complex, elegant, intellectually curious, and unassuming man. I adore him and I hope the readers do, too. ■



For further information, follow Maureen Footer on Instagram and her website [maureenfooter.net].



Stewarding the Legacy of Broadway Theater Dance in Paris by Lori Ann Ferreri

In the summer of 2000, at 18 years old, I was hired by choreographer Joey McKneely to travel to Europe to perform in *West Side Story* at La Scala Opera House. It was the first musical ever presented at the historic Italian institution. Despite already working professionally—I had just finished the first national tour of the Broadway musical *Footloose*—this was my first time in Europe, and my first experience with work that asked so much of me, specifically as an actor.

Joey McKneely had worked directly with Jerome Robbins and approached directing *West Side Story* from that firsthand experience. Robbins was known for pushing dancers beyond what they thought they were capable of. Joey did the same. I remember rehearsing the “Scherzo,” the ballet sequence full of relentless jetés and jumps, in a hot, European rehearsal room, in the middle of summer, getting eaten alive by mosquitos, while Joey yelled at us to jump higher! I thought my legs might fall off, but I finished that rehearsal jumping higher than I ever had in my life. Joey pushed us to turn inward, into our own interiority and emotions, to create fully realized characters, no matter how big or small our roles were. The emotions I felt dancing the choreography of *West Side Story* were unlike anything I had experienced onstage before.

A decade later, I returned to *West Side Story* as Consuela and the understudy for Anita in the first national tour of the 2009 Broadway revival, reuniting with Joey McKneely, under the direction of David Saint, and the guidance of Arthur Laurents. It was the last production Arthur worked on before he died.

In March of 2020, a fortuitous leap of faith brought me to Paris. And then the world stopped. Like many, that time was completely disorienting. Once lockdowns ended, with no friends and unable to speak French, I turned to my first language: dance. I went to class. Approaching 40, and out of the hustle of New York City, I had the space to meet the dancer I was becoming. In France, disciplines are often more categorized—ballet, contemporary, and modern dance—with fewer spaces where these worlds meet. I noticed a growing interest in *comédie*

musicale and *danse théâtre*, but limited access to training and repertoire. Most dancers were learning Jerome Robbins and Bob Fosse® from YouTube.

I reached out to the Jerome Robbins Foundation for permission to teach a *West Side Story* workshop, choreography that had bookended formative years of my life. It had been 13 years since I had danced that choreography, yet it was still living inside of me. Out of deep gratitude for what this work had given me, I passed on what I had learned with care. I pushed the dancers beyond where they thought they could go—“Jump higher!”—and the dancers loved it. This became my purpose: to steward the legacy of Broadway theater dance with a new generation of dancers in Europe. From there, *ON OFF* was born. My vision for *ON OFF* is to create a home for the transmission and development of theater dance in Europe. Recently, in partnership with The Verdon Fosse® Legacy, we welcomed over 100 dancers from across Europe to Paris for a three-day workshop in Fosse® technique and repertoire, led by Broadway dancers and répétiteurs Lloyd Culbreath and Dylis Croman.

In Paris, art and culture hold a central place in French life. There is a deep reverence for history, craft, and artistic practice, where new ideas can be supported and put in motion. I want *ON OFF* to be a space where French and international choreographers and artists can come together to study, workshop ideas, and develop new work, with community and care at the center. I am a dancer. I love dancers. In many ways, I am building the world I always wanted to dance in.

And to Joey McKneely, I am jumping higher! ■

Lori Ann Ferreri is a multifaceted artist, educator, and the founder of *ON OFF*. As a performer, Lori Ann appeared on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and in national touring productions including *Wicked*, *West Side Story*, *On the Town*, *Sweet Charity*, *Footloose*, *Aida*, and more. She was mentored by Donna McKechnie to perform “Music and the Mirror” for *American Dance Machine for the 21st Century*, as highlighted by *The New York Times*. Based in Paris, she aims to steward the legacy of Broadway theater dance with a new generation of dancers in Europe. Discover more at weareonoff.com



facing page: Dancers in Paris learning “Sing, Sing, Sing!” from *Dancin’* [Choreography Bob Fosse®] in The Verdon Fosse® Legacy Workshop, in partnership with ON OFF. Photo: The Verdon Fosse® Legacy, 2026. Photo by Joanna Aloysia.

left: Eliza Ohman, Dylis Croman, Lori Ann Ferreri, Jean-Luc Choplin (Théâtre du Lido), Joanna Goodwin, Lloyd Culbreath. Photo by Joanna Aloysia.

above: Lori Ann Ferreri. Photo by Adam Hills.

below: Photos by Joanna Aloysia.



Dancers from St. Louis Ballet perform "Free Play" from Jerome Robbins' *Interplay* as part of *American Dance Odyssey* in Miami, Florida, 2026. Photo by Alex Markow, courtesy of New World Symphony.





New World Symphony and Miami City Ballet Present a Tribute to Jerome Robbins



Dancers of Saint Louis Ballet perform a section of Jerome Robbins' *Interplay* as part of *American Dance Odyssey* in Miami, Florida, 2026. Photo by Alex Markow, courtesy of New World Symphony.

In April 2026, two of Miami's premier cultural institutions, New World Symphony (Stéphane Denève, Artistic Director) and Miami City Ballet (Gonzalo Garcia, Artistic Director) joined forces for *American Dance Odyssey*, led by NWS Artistic Director Stéphane Denève, at the New World Center. This celebration of American music and dance opened with the world premiere of a Choreographic Concerto, the brainchild of 10 acclaimed composers and choreographers: Kevin Puts and Brian Brooks; Carlos Simon and Jamar Roberts; Sarah Kirkland Snider and Claudia Schreier; Jennifer Higdon and Tiler Peck; and Michael Abels and Pam Tanowitz. Each composer and choreographer pair created one of five movements that made up the choreographic concerto.

Composer Kevin Puts teamed up with Brian Brooks for *Rosalie*, a movement inspired by the musical sequence known as a "rosalia," in which a melodic phrase is repeated several times, each iteration rising a step or half-step higher than the last. Composer Carlos Simon joined forces with Jamar Roberts for *Lamentations*, inspired by both the biblical Book of Lamentations and the artists' personal experiences of grief. Composer Sarah Kirkland Snider partnered with choreographer Claudia Schreier for *Iris*, which traces the journey of an underdog through turbulence, transformation, and joy. Composer Jennifer Higdon collaborated with New York City Ballet Principal Dancer Tiler Peck on *Dance Measures*, which is an expanded version of Higdon's earlier work, *Jumble Dance*, from *Dance Card*. Composer Michael Abels united with choreographer Pam Tanowitz for *Polymnia*. *American Dance Odyssey* featured costumes by Andrea Spiridonakos and lighting designed by Luke Kritzeck.

The performance culminated in a tribute to choreographer Jerome Robbins, featuring dancers from Miami City Ballet, New York City Ballet, Houston Ballet and Saint Louis Ballet. The program featured selections from *Interplay*, *West Side Story*, *Gypsy*, *Fancy Free*, *NY Export: Opus Jazz*, *Billion Dollar Baby* and the Finale from *I'm Old Fashioned (The Astaire Variations)*. Collaborating with New World Symphony and dancers for this tribute were vocalist Brian Letendre, New York City Ballet soloist Harrison Coll, lighting designer John Hall, and répétiteur Robert La Fosse.

Stéphane Denève, New World Symphony Artistic Director, said, "Uniting different art forms in multidisciplinary collaboration is at the heart of New World Symphony. Our ambitious *American Dance Odyssey* brings together the New World Symphony Fellows with nearly 40 dancers from today's major ballet companies in a kaleidoscope of influences, genres, technique and inspiration. This is about collaboration: artists coming together — dancers, choreographers and musicians — each bringing their own voice, perspective and creative energy. These aren't just performances. They're dialogues across disciplines, across generations, across traditions."

"The most exciting moments in the arts happen through collaboration," said Gonzalo Garcia, Artistic Director, Miami City Ballet. "Bringing *American Dance Odyssey* to life with New World Symphony bridges past and present, presenting a thrilling new work while honoring a legend. That is the beauty of the arts — they endure across generations, continually evolving through the vision of today's brightest musicians and dancers."

American Dance Odyssey was supported in part by Senior Producers: Peter and Christina Gold; Jerome Robbins Foundation; NWS Fund for New Ventures, Robert Moss; Edward M. Shumsky and Susan D. Kronick; Producers: Estate of Douglas S. Cramer; Ann Drake; Andrea Virgin; Lynn & Louis Wolfson II Family Foundation; with additional support by Deborah and Charles Adelman; Anne Donovan Bodnar and James Bodnar; Peter and June Felix; Jeanne Donovan Fisher; NWS Collaborations Fund Endowment, William H. and Patricia M. Kleh; Frayda B. Lindemann; Jeffrey W. Davis and Michael T. Miller; Andrew and Denise Saul; and Stella Volosin. ■

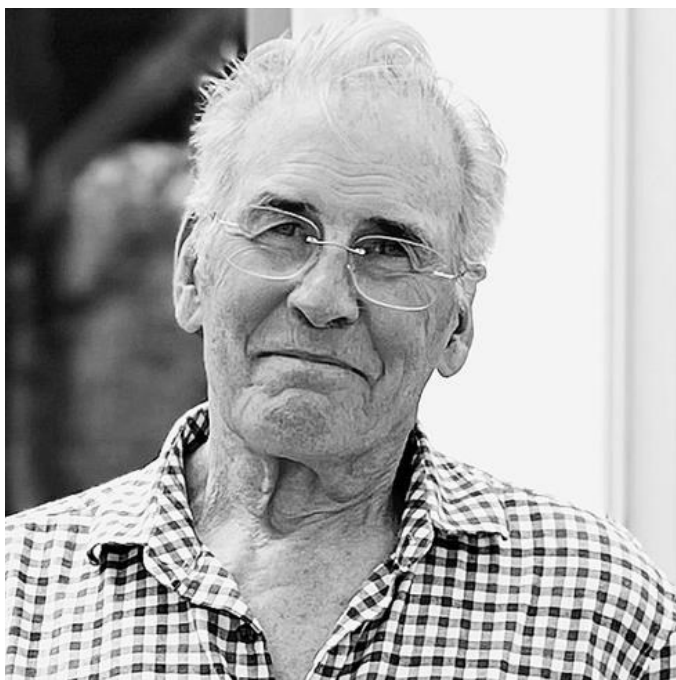
below: Jacquelyn Long and Connor Walsh of Houston Ballet perform a section of Jerome Robbins' *Fancy Free* as part of *American Dance Odyssey* in Miami, Florida, 2026. Photo by Alex Markow, courtesy of New World Symphony.

right: Dancers of Miami City Ballet perform a section of Jerome Robbins' *I'm Old Fashioned* as part of *American Dance Odyssey* in Miami, Florida, 2026. Photo by Alex Markow, courtesy of New World Symphony.



left: Dancers of Saint Louis Ballet perform a section of Jerome Robbins' "Charleston" (from *Billion Dollar Baby*) as part of *American Dance Odyssey* in Miami, Florida, 2026. Photo by Alex Markow, courtesy of New World Symphony.

above: Dancers of Miami City Ballet perform a section of Jerome Robbins' *West Side Story Suite* as part of *American Dance Odyssey* in Miami, Florida, 2026. Photo by Alex Markow, courtesy of New World Symphony.



Richard Dow (1941–2025)

Jerry met Richard Dow in 1968 through their friend, the playwright and actor Bill Gunn, who lived in Nyack, New York, not far from Sneden's Landing, where Jerry spent so much time throughout the '60s and '70s. Richard was a Bostonian, a gentleman and a scholar who began his career as an English teacher, transitioned into acting, and ultimately became a psychotherapist, a vocation that so well suited his empathy, kindness, and compassion. No doubt his knowledge of Sophocles and Shakespeare, as well as his time spent studying personae through drama, also were fundamental to Richard's skill as a psychologist.

Their shared love of the written word and the theater connected the men deeply, and the early friendship between Richard and Jerry was played out at Sneden's in those heady days. He is most surely one of those characters in *Dances at a Gathering* that was inspired by Jerry's most intimate friendships of that time and place. Richard grew to love that little corner of Rockland County, and he and his wife Maggie, who survives him, would eventually live for many years just up the river in Grandview-on-Hudson in a rambling nineteenth century house much like Jerry's.

Jerry first introduced me to Richard in 1982, in another bucolic place—the house on the beach in Bridgehampton. I was, of course, immediately struck by Richard's astonishing beauty; though I soon learned, as did anyone who knew him, that Richard possessed a beauty of the spirit that was more permanent than any physical grace. He makes me think of the words of Tennessee Williams from *Streetcar*: "Physical beauty is passing. A transitory possession. But beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit and tenderness of the heart aren't taken away, but grow, increase with the years." And, indeed, Jerry and Richard's friendship deepened and endured with the passing of time and its accompanying joys and sorrows.

I was with both men upon the occasion of their last meeting, again at the house on the beach, on a beautiful July afternoon not long before Jerry's passing. They were friends who communicated as much in speech as in silence, and I recall their quiet contentment together as they listened to the waves and the wind and the birds that had nested in the chimney. For two men whose friendship had been forged against the private and public tumult of the late '60s, it seemed so right that their parting should occur in such a place of peace. ■

—Brian Meehan

Brian Meehan taught high school English and writing for thirty-five years at Prep For Prep, a scholarship program for students of color in New York City. He currently works in restoration at Sage Street Antiques in Sag Harbor, Long Island.



from left: Jean-Pierre Frohlich, William Earle, Randall Bourscheidt, Aidan Mooney, Ellen Sorrin, Allen Greenberg, Floria V. Lasky, Susan Hendl (partly obscured), Christopher Pennington, and Christine Redpath attend the ceremony on June 20, 2005, at West 62nd Street and Columbus Avenue in Manhattan, when the intersection was officially co-named Jerome Robbins Place.

Randall Bourscheidt (1944–2026)

Randall Bourscheidt, a constant figure in the New York cultural scene, was born and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He lived in New York City beginning in 1962.

Following his graduation from Columbia College in 1969 with a major in history, Mr. Bourscheidt, known to friends as Randy, was the editor of the newspaper of the Episcopal Diocese of New York and Press Secretary to the Chairman of the New York Democratic State Committee. After working in the Office of Management and Budget, he became Executive Assistant to Cultural Affairs Commissioner Henry Geldzahler in 1978 before being appointed Deputy Commissioner by Mayor Edward I. Koch.

He was Deputy Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for New York City from 1981 to 1987, including a period as Acting Commissioner in 1982–83. As the chief operating officer of the Department of Cultural Affairs, he played an active role in the nearly three-fold increase in New York City's arts budget in the 1980s. From 1995 to 1998, he was the Chairman of the New York City Advisory Commission for Cultural Affairs.

Randy's commitment to the arts was immense and extended to many disciplines. In 1989, after a period as a private arts management consultant, he became President of the Alliance for the Arts, the highly regarded cultural advocacy group. At the Alliance, Randy established the Estate Project for Artists with AIDS, the first national effort to preserve the work of artists with HIV/AIDS or other life-threatening diseases. Also in the early 1990s, he began a lecture series for world cultural leaders, now the Arts Forum at The New York Times. Randy was also a devoted advocate for independent filmmakers at a critical time, several of whom thrived because of his support.

An avid lover of music and ballet, he served on the boards of the David H. Koch Theater at Lincoln Center, the American Friends of the Paris Opera and Ballet, Moving Theater, the Center for Performance Research, and the George Balanchine Foundation. He was also Chairman of the Brendan Gill Prize Jury of the Municipal Art Society and a director of Artspace Projects.

Randy was a longtime friend of Jerome Robbins. Besides attending ballet and art museums together, the two shared many travel adventures, including trips with ballerina Tanaquil Le Clercq to places like Spoleto, Italy, for the annual summer festival, where Robbins had been a pivotal figure in its inaugural seasons. Not only was Randy a good friend of Jerry, he was also an advocate; he helped the Jerome Robbins Foundation secure a street named for Robbins. There were several alternative sites to consider, but Randy knew the perfect place—on 62nd Street and Columbus Avenue, near the stage door to the State Theatre, being as close to the dancers, musicians and crew as one could be. Randy had many friends, the most important of whom was Josef Asteinz. Whether it was at a ballet, an art exhibition, or an opera, Randy and Joe were always there—inseparable, both with sparkles in their eyes. ■



Sondra Lee (1928–2026)

On February 23, 2026, Sondra Lee passed away at the age of 97. Over her nine-decade career, Lee excelled as a dancer, actor, teacher, author, stage director, playwright, theatre and film consultant, and painter. She was recognized for her continual reinvention and versatility throughout her professional life.

Lee's major breakthrough occurred in 1954 when she collaborated with Jerome Robbins to originate the role of Tiger Lily in *Peter Pan*. In her 2009 memoir, *I've Slept With Everybody*, Lee recounted her first meeting with Robbins at the Shubert Theatre, following a missed audition for *High Button Shoes*. Unaware of Robbins' identity at the time, Lee explained, "Oh, I just auditioned for *Allegro* and they found I was too short, so they let me go. So I'm going home to commit suicide." Robbins replied, "Don't go home and commit suicide, come over here and dance for me." She accepted.

Peter Pan became the first full-length Broadway show filmed in color for television, with Lee's portrayal of Tiger Lily reaching an audience of 65 million viewers—a record at the time. In 1964, Lee returned to Broadway to originate the role of Minnie Fay in *Hello, Dolly!* Lee made her final public appearance in 2025 in the Transport Group's concert staging of *Hello, Dolly!* at Carnegie Hall, where she participated as the last surviving principal from the show's original cast. The evening concluded with an extended standing ovation, as the audience honored her remarkable career.

Sondra Lee's love for Jerry Robbins stayed true through the end of her life, as her estate made a generous bequest to the Jerome Robbins Foundation. ■

above: Sondra Lee and Jerome Robbins at New York International Airport (Idlewild), as they depart for a tour with Robbins' dance company Ballets: U.S.A. in 1958. Photo by Aviation News Pictures.

right: Joshua Ellis and Sondra Lee

far right: A compact that Mary Martin gave to Sondra Lee, who bequeathed it to Joshua Ellis

Peter & Jerry & Sondra & Mary

by Joshua Ellis

By all accounts, Sondra Lee adored Jerome Robbins, and he adored her back.

She was his 4-foot-10 (and a half) comic spark plug—young, very impressionable, a bit naive, but an instinctively wise dancer. Their first collaboration was *High Button Shoes*, a big hit.

A few years later, Robbins wanted Sondra to play two roles in his *Peter Pan*: Tiger Lily, the Indian princess in the Never-Never Land scenes, and Liza, the Darling family's twinkly little nursery maid back in London.

However, they both faced a creative force in the evolution of this new musical adaptation of *Peter Pan* that would thwart many of their efforts. That was Peter herself, Broadway legend Mary Martin, and her very protective husband Richard Halliday, the sole producer of *Peter Pan*.

The Hallidays wanted their young daughter Heller to play Liza. End of discussion. Heller was cast as Liza. Sondra kept the role of Tiger Lily.

Collaborating with the Hallidays was no holiday, according to Sondra. Matters were not helped when a pre-Broadway West Coast theatre critic wrote that the highlights of the musical were—in this order—Cyril Ritchard as Captain Hook, Sondra Lee as Tiger Lily, "followed closely" by Mary Martin as Peter Pan.

Jerome Robbins knew the balancing act he had to accomplish—doing what was best for *Peter Pan* and honoring Mary Martin's star power, to put it gently.

After that review appeared, many of Tiger Lily's songs and dances were removed, which did not surprise Sondra. However, one specific song, about to be axed was a particular favorite of hers. It was called "When I Went Home," a gentle and heartbreaking ballad that reveals Peter Pan's loneliness behind his bravado. It was a Mary Martin solo. It didn't even involve Sondra Lee, the actress, or Tiger Lily, the character.

Sondra didn't understand why it was being cut. It was so beautiful. With a braveness born of naiveté, Sondra directly confronted the star. Mary Martin explained to Sondra that the song was just too sad. "The audience barely applauds."

"Mary," Sondra tried to reason, "they were taken off guard, they were so moved." Mary looked at Sondra blankly. Flummoxed, Sondra added, "They didn't applaud for the Gettysburg Address either."

Jerome Robbins and Sondra wanted the song to stay in. Robbins chose his battles. Sondra learned about Broadway star power. The song was cut. ■

Joshua Ellis began the development of his solo show "Call My Publicist: The Starry Education of a Broadway Press Agent," under Sondra Lee's mentorship. She also encouraged him to write it in book form with a lot more of his inside stories. He's currently working on that project. Josh began his career as a Broadway press agent over 50 years ago. He is also an ordained Interspiritual minister who specializes in life ceremonies and disaster chaplaincy.

*"When I Went Home" was written by Moose Charlap, with lyrics by Carolyn Leigh. It was restored in the 2014 televised version, *Peter Pan Live!*



Preserving the Fire Kathak, Consciousness, and the Art of Transmission

by Rachna Nivas



“Do you know why I’m yelling at you right now?”

The dance room freezes when I ask that question. Students stare at me blankly or look at the floor. A few nod apologetically. I follow it up with, “No, really. This is not a rhetorical question. Does anyone know why I’m taking time out of *your* dancing to give you this lecture?” Many glance nervously at each other. Eventually, someone speaks. And almost always, they already know. I just have to dig it out. After some prodding, they eventually arrive at the root of what caused the interruption. Then I’ll ease the tension with a story of my own Guruji and tell them what would have happened to *me* if I did what they just did, helping them understand the seriousness of the moment without reproducing the same old-school harshness I inherited. Then I’ll wrap it up with a deeper life philosophy followed by, “This will help you with everything else in your life.”

I do this frequently. Not because I enjoy lecturing, but because I am not teaching people to execute dance steps without purpose. I am using the rigor, precision, beauty, and depth of kathak as a vehicle for cultivating attention, awareness, and a deeper way of moving through the world.

None of my teachers, for any craft that I have trained in my lifetime, taught exactly the way I teach now. Pedagogy *must* evolve because people and social paradigms evolve, and every generation requires different pathways toward trust, accountability, focus, and transformation. But the teachers who transformed me most all shared one thing in common: they paired uncompromising standards with a deep conviction in what I was capable of becoming. They demanded precision, commitment, and discomfort, but always in service of awakening something larger within me. Long before I encountered kathak dance, these were the values that were already shaping me.

Learning to Withstand Discomfort

Most people are surprised to hear that I did not start my kathak dance studies until I was in college. We more often hear of dancers beginning formal training in early childhood. But in my own arc, I was unknowingly being prepared for the rigor of my guru, who would become the central inspiration for my life’s work.

Although my parents were Indian immigrants raising me in a culture that often prioritized academic and professional achievement, they never cultivated me narrowly. Athletics, public speaking, arts, and civic engagement were all treated as equally essential. Reflecting back, what stayed with me most was that they never immediately sided with my ego when I came home upset about a teacher or coach. They taught me to sit with discomfort and investigate the truth inside it. If I felt humiliated or criticized, they encouraged me to think more deeply about what standard the teacher was trying to uphold, what they could see in me that I could not yet see in myself.

I began training as a figure skater at the age of 6 and eventually advanced to an early morning regimen where I skated for two hours before school at 5:30 am. Most of it was spent alone in silence inside one quadrant of the ice rink, tracing intricate figure-eight blade footwork. It required intense concentration and self-discipline for an 11-year-old, but I would go to school feeling alive, accomplished, unstoppable. Later, as a competitive tennis player, I trained under a coach who was stern and exacting. Once, after secretly watching me emotionally unravel and throw tantrums during a match, he publicly called me out the next day for defeating myself mentally before my opponent ever had the chance. I was mortified. But he forced me to confront my emotional reactivity, and I worked hard to earn his respect. His praise was rare, but when he gave it, it felt earned and hard-won.

Do or Die

By the time I arrived at UC Berkeley, the same intensity I once poured into athletics and academics had evolved into a restless search for meaning, purpose, and social impact. Berkeley was a socially charged environment of activism, irreverence, political debate, and challenging authority. I knew with absolute clarity that I wanted to become someone who cultivated hope and joy, fought for social justice, organized community, and lived with emotional honesty and spiritual depth. I wanted my life to *matter*. It was also the first time I unapologetically stepped into my identity as a South Asian American, discovering the richness and complexity of my cultural heritage through campus life and student organizing. But what I didn’t yet understand was that identifying with a culture and being *transformed* by its deeper philosophies were two very different things.

Little did I know that I would find the purpose and truth I was seeking in a place I never imagined—in Pandit Chitresh Das’s classroom of kathak dance. It was there that I would be tested and confronted in ways I could never have imagined.

One day I went to “take a dance class” with a master teacher I had heard about in San Francisco. As I entered, I could hear the sounds of *ghungroo* (ankle bells) vibrating through the entire building. The energy already felt electric. When I walked in, there were several women dripping in sweat, their gaze unwavering and fixated on the front of the room. The atmosphere was charged with seriousness, intensity, and total concentration. And they were doing things with their feet and bodies that I had never seen in my life. I had never seen such fierce women. At the front of the room was this fiery man yelling, “Do or Die!”

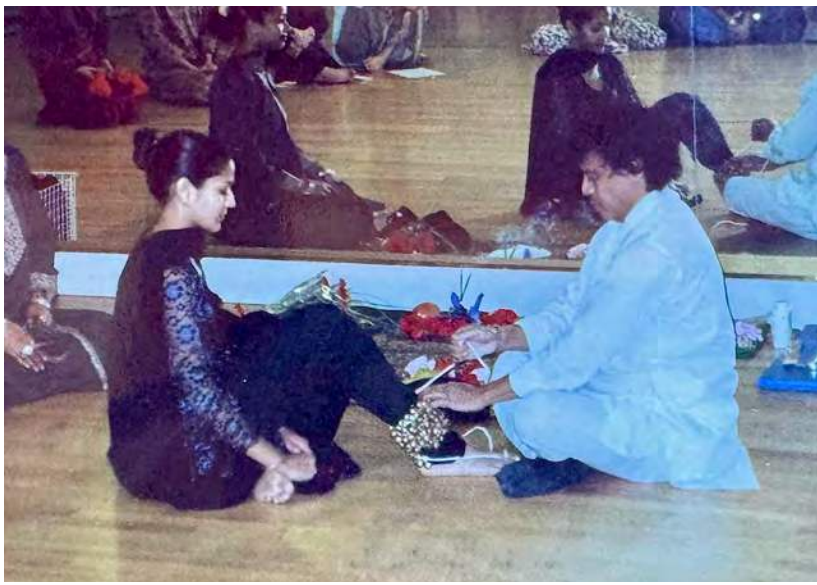
I sat and watched him teach the entire class. At times he would stop the dancing entirely and challenge students psychologically, holding mirrors up to their habits, excuses, ego, fears, and conditioned ways of thinking. As I sat there, every part of my body was shaking. I had no idea dance could demand this level of physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual intensity all at once. I had never seen a teacher pour himself into students with that level of urgency and conviction.

At some point, Pandit Das finally looked directly at me and smirked, “Who are you?” His question was existential. “Who *are* you? Why were you born? Do you even know?” Suddenly I realized that I didn’t know. In fact, I had no idea. But I was determined to find out.

Truffles and Kit Kat

Guruji’s training methods were merciless and confrontational, but always with a purpose. I traveled with him regularly to India, training in the humid summer heat with the air conditioning deliberately shut off so we would be dancing in a pool of our own sweat, barely able to breathe or see straight by the end of class. This was *tapasya*—the burning of ego and impurities through disciplined practice. Guruji was content with his methods weeding out students. He was looking for people who could withstand the heat without collapsing inwards.

A few years into my training, all I wanted was to dance the choreography Guruji was creating for his company. At that stage, I measured my progress by where I stood on stage and who I stood beside. So when he abruptly pulled



Rachna Nivas being initiated into formal kathak training by Pandit Chitresh Das through a ghungroo (bells) ceremony, in which the guru ties the bells onto the student for the first time (Berkeley, California, 1999).



Over twenty years later, Rachna Nivas initiates a student through the same ghungroo (bells) ceremony, symbolizing the continuity of lineage. Photographs of the late Chitresh Das and previous lineage gurus sit in the background (New York City, 2021).

me away from performing and immersed me instead in playing an instrument (harmonium) while doing footwork, I was devastated. It did not look “pretty” like the choreography the other women were doing. My ego spiraled. I interpreted it as rejection, humiliation, and proof that I was somehow failing at dance. That I would never look beautiful.

One day, Guruji walked over to me while I was playing the harmonium and crying and he pierced me with his gaze, “Why are you being so stupid? I’m trying to give you truffles (points to the harmonium) and you want Kit Kat (points to the dancers doing choreography). Just trust me.” I didn’t fully understand what he meant. But I trusted he could see something in me that I could not yet see in myself. So, I surrendered, not to him the person, but to the lesson he was instilling in me.

Slowly, my interest shifted away from performance and toward solitary practice that channeled focus, rhythm, and mind-body integration. The more deeply I trained, the more expansive the dance became. I had discovered an entirely different doorway into the art, rooted not in choreography, but in knowledge and self-awareness. It demanded such complete concentration that everything else disappeared. And when Guruji eventually brought me back onto the stage, I understood something I hadn’t before: performance was not for vanity. It was a *responsibility*.

Guruji had intervened not only in my dancing, but in my relationship to validation. He was dismantling my attachment to the outwardly beautiful and externally consumable aspects of the dance, redirecting me instead toward embodiment, presence, and substance. Choreography was the icing. The deeper I now go into my own practice as a teacher, the more I understand the extraordinary intelligence behind what Guruji was doing. He was never simply training dancers, he was cultivating conscious human beings.

Transmitting Values in Modernity

My own evolution as an educator and mentor has led me to realize that preserving rigor in today’s world requires a different kind of pedagogy than the one I inherited. We are living in a culture increasingly disconnected from the body and instead organized around comfort, distraction, and emotional avoidance. Nuanced concepts have flattened: reverence mistaken for blind obedience, discomfort interpreted as harm, discipline reduced to oppression, and sustained focus eroded by endless stimulation and fractured attention. Social media and influencer culture have further denigrated excellence by replacing mastery with visibility, substance with performance, and the slow cultivation of knowledge through discipline, devotion, and time with self-proclamation and personal branding.

Yet despite all this, I see young people today craving depth more than ever. They are longing for authenticity and purpose. They just do not know where to find it, and when they do find it, they are often unprepared for the rigor it demands. This is the tension I am constantly navigating in my teaching. How do I preserve the kind of transformative discipline that shaped me while adapting pedagogy for a profoundly different world? I was forced to confront my ego, my habits, my distractions, my emotional reactivity, and my dependency on validation. But rather than making me smaller or more compliant, the process made me more awake, more discerning, and ultimately more resistant to the status quo. Perhaps this is why teaching itself has become so important to my life as an artist.

My Guruji never believed performance and teaching should exist in isolation from one another, and I have come to understand the profound wisdom behind

that philosophy. Performance is exhilarating, transporting, and necessary. But it is also deeply entangled with ego - insecurities about audience reaction, desire for critical validation, fixation on production value. Teaching becomes a necessary counterbalance. It demands patience, empathy, long-term commitment, and the ability to see beyond yourself. It forces you into relationship with humanity. Transmission itself is what keeps the art living and breathing. And the more knowledge I attain, the greater the responsibility I feel to pass it forward as part of a 2000-year continuum. Teaching is not separate from my artistry. It refines it. Purifies it.

Teaching Indian classical art in America, including to young South Asians growing up inside a deeply westernized and post-colonial world, has become one of the most meaningful tensions of my life as an artist and educator. Modern western culture values constant innovation, disruption, individuality, and irreverence, while Eastern philosophies are rooted in consistency, reverence, intention, discipline, interconnectedness, and the understanding that wisdom and creative evolution emerge through depth of knowledge passed across generations. I often feel uniquely positioned between these clashing value systems because I have been *deeply* immersed in both. My embodied knowledge has taught me how to evolve the art for contemporary life while protecting its deeper purpose and integrity from being flattened into content, aesthetics, or entertainment.

So when I ask students, “Do you know why I’m yelling at you right now?” I am not asking because I want obedience or fear. I am asking because I want them to become conscious participants in their own transformation. Transformation still requires discomfort and accountability, but teaching today also requires greater psychological awareness, transparency, and relational sensitivity than the pedagogy I inherited. There is a difference between obedience that diminishes a person and discipline that expands them. I have learned that rigor alone is not enough. Students must feel seen in order to remain open while their perceived boundaries are being pushed. Students *can* withstand enormous rigor if they deeply trust the intention behind it.

I still teach the same foundational values I inherited—entering the room with intention, bowing to the space, respecting knowledge-bearers, sweating, working hard, never taking shortcuts, and being discerning of excellence. But rather than relying primarily on humiliation or rigid hierarchy, I strive to generate an atmosphere whose energy itself inspires students to embody these values through their own desire.

Will I cultivate the same kind of dancers as my guru did? Probably not. But my guru produced very different kinds of dancers than *his* guru did. As long as I remain faithful to the underlying values no matter how the world changes around us, I trust that some students will carry this fire forward in ways I cannot yet foresee. This is the enduring power of classical arts: they survive because each generation finds new bodies, new minds, and new lives through which to remain alive. ■

Rachna Nivas is a kathak choreographer, performer, educator, and curator based in New York City. She was an NYPL Dance Research Fellow (2023) and has held artist residencies at 92NY Harkness Dance Center, Works & Process, and Yaddo. For over two decades, she has shaped kathak education in the U.S. She directed Pandit Chitresh Das’s institution in California, helping build one of the most influential Indian classical dance centers outside India. She later co-founded Leela Academy to steward her guru’s teachings after his passing. Today she is founder of The Kathak Legacy Project, a lineage-based training ecosystem rooted in deep training, artistic excellence, and community.



Reflections on *Dances at a Gathering*

Recently, on *Hear the Dance from City Ballet The Podcast*, host Silas Farley led a conversation about Jerome Robbins' masterwork *Dances at a Gathering*. For the discussion, he was joined by Kay Mazzo (former Chairman of Faculty at the School of American Ballet), and Robbins Rights Trust advisors Christine Redpath and Jean-Pierre Frohlich. In the following edited conversation, they recall the ballet's momentous 1969 premiere as well as memories of time spent with Robbins in the rehearsal studio.

top: Indiana Woodward and Anthony Huxley in Jerome Robbins' *Dances at a Gathering*.
bottom: Adrian Danchig-Waring and Mira Nadon in Jerome Robbins' *Dances at a Gathering*.
Photos by Erin Baiano, courtesy of New York City Ballet.

Silas Farley *Dances at a Gathering*, one of the masterpieces in New York City Ballet's repertory, was created in 1969 by choreographer Jerome Robbins. Robbins, affectionately known as Jerry, made this ballet to a selection of works for solo piano by Frédéric Chopin, with costumes by Joe Eula and lighting by Jennifer Tipton.

A bit about this ballet's background. City Ballet co-founder Lincoln Kirstein invited Jerry to return to make a new work for a company benefit performance. It was a return, as Jerry had been away from the company for about a decade, creating iconic works of American musical theater, including *West Side Story* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. Before that, Jerry had been a City Ballet dancer, choreographer and associate artistic director, working closely with City Ballet co-founder George Balanchine. Balanchine, affectionately known as Mr. B, and Jerry were the complementary choreographic voices who made New York City Ballet. For this 1969 return ballet, Jerry originally planned to make a pas de deux for two of the company's stars, Patricia "Patty" McBride and Edward "Eddie" Villella.

With Balanchine's encouragement, Jerry continued to add on to this original duet, constructing what would become an hour-long sequence of dances for ten dancers. Each of the dancers is identified by the color of their costume. The ten original dancers were Patricia McBride (Pink), Edward Villella (Brown), Allegra Kent (Mauve), Sara Leland (Apricot), Kay Mazzo (Blue), Violette Verdy (Green), Anthony Blum (Plum), John Clifford (Mustard), Robert Maiorano (Blue-green), and John Prinz (Olive).

Dances has been heralded as a masterpiece for its poetic, choreographic construction and its illumination of Chopin's music. Reflecting on the ballet after its premiere, critic Clive Barnes wrote, "It is as honest as breathing, and in some special way, more a thing to be experienced than merely just another ballet to be seen. It is also one of the most significant evenings in the American theater since O'Neill. Chopin is all daggers and velvet, all poet and peasant. This Robbins has accepted. And then Chopin's feel for place, his need for belonging, for that peasant assurance of the earth beneath him and the sky above, this Robbins has captured."

I am joined by three people who have unique insight into this ballet—Kay Mazzo, Christine Redpath and Jean-Pierre Frohlich. Kay Mazzo is a member of the ballet's original cast. She began her close work with Jerry while she was still a teenager, dancing in his company, *Ballets: U.S.A.* She went on to become a City Ballet Principal dancer, originating roles in ballets by Jerry and Balanchine. Kay then served for many years as chairman of faculty at City Ballet's affiliated academy, the School of American Ballet—SAB—where she still teaches. Jean-Pierre Frohlich, affectionately known as JP, and Christine Redpath are former City Ballet Soloists who worked closely with Jerry as dancers and rehearsal assistants. They are now City Ballet Repertory Directors responsible for Jerry's works.

Kay, Christine, Jean-Pierre—welcome. I probably couldn't be with people who know more about *Dances at a Gathering* than the three of you. Kay, I would love to begin with you, because you were part of the original cast. Where were you in your career when Jerry began making *Dances*?

Kay Mazzo I got into the company in '61, '62, just during *Nutcracker*. This was '69 and I was a Principal by then and had been dancing a lot and was very happy. And then Jerry came—and I knew Jerry from his company before—so it was great.

SF What was the mood around the theater when Jerry came back, and what was the buzz about him making a new ballet after some years of mostly working on Broadway?

KM I think everybody thought it was a pas de deux. Patty and Eddie were rehearsing and nobody saw it. And then I think Mr. Balanchine saw it and said, "Okay. Do more, do more. It would be very nice. Do more." And Mr. Robbins did more.

SF He did a lot more. How did you find out you'd be part of it? Did your name just go up on the call sheet?

KM Yes, but you didn't ever know if you were really going to be a part of it because we were all learning so many different roles. And nobody knew how long it was. We kept rehearsing and rehearsing and rehearsing.

Christine Redpath Kay, is this true—the rumor that right up until the day of the performance, you guys were not sure which of all the variations that you learned—

KM It kept changing. And we'd have a different posting every day of who was doing what, and what was going first, and what was going second.

CR And the orders too. He juggled the orders.

KM Yes, and it's an hour long, so it took him a long time to figure out what he wanted. But once he did it, it didn't change.

Jean-Pierre Frohlich I'm a product of SAB, starting in 1964. So all the dancers that were in *Dances*, I was watching in class—in late class. All the dancers used to come uptown, when the school was on 82nd Street and Broadway. They would come and take Stanley's [Stanley Williams] late class before the performance. I would watch just in awe of all these dancers. I was a student at SAB, and it was the gala, and they gave tickets out that night because we weren't selling for some reason. And I was at the premiere of *Dances at a Gathering*. And I was mesmerized by the whole thing. I saw people crying in intermission afterwards, because it was so emotional watching it for them. But to hear the audience go wild when Jerry took his bow, I hadn't experienced that kind of reaction watching City Ballet before.

KM And Jean-Pierre, wasn't it—it was very quiet during the whole ballet. People applauded a little bit, but when we were dancing on stage for that hour, we didn't really know if people liked it or not.

CR That reverence.

KM They were holding their breath, I think, but we didn't know that.

JPF Also I think it was the first time there was an hour-long ballet that was just piano. And it was very different, so a lot of people didn't know—"Are we watching a recital, or what are we watching," you know? I think that might be why, I don't know. But it's the first time I think there was a ballet just with piano. No singers. I mean, *Liebeslieder* [*Liebeslieder Waltzer*] had singers.

SF So it brought a different kind of attentiveness. Kay, how did the rehearsal process unfold? Like what was Jerry's mood or maybe some of the energy in the studio as he was starting to add more sections from that original Patty, Eddie pas de deux?

KM It just kept going and going and going. When I was in Jerry's company in 1961, we would have about eight hours of rehearsal, and he had all of us dancers waiting outside the door. You had to stay there—you had an hour break for lunch—so that he could use anybody at any time. When he came to City Ballet, Mr. Balanchine gave him those hours again. He gave him Gordon Boelzner, the pianist, so he had everything, and we would just keep doing it over and over and over. One cast, and then another cast. And that's how he worked.

SF I'd love to go through different sections of the ballet—and we may not get to every one because there are 18 movements—but it would be fun to hear your different thoughts. Reflections you have on it, or some of the coaching you heard Jerry give. Starting from the beginning with that solo for Eddie Villella that uses the same mazurka from a solo that he made for Tanaquil Le Clercq, that he then later cut from *The Concert*. It's that same music that starts *Dances at a Gathering*. It's poignant. What would you want the listeners to know about the Brown boy?

JPF I think the Brown boy is self-explanatory. He's coming into a space that he was in a long time ago, and all the memories are coming back. It could be a studio. It could be just a stage. He starts to mark—Jerry would say, "Easy, baby"—and do the variation for himself, very slowly.

CR Remembering it.

JPF He does the step slowly, and then it builds to a certain crescendo. And then, right before he goes off stage, he does this arm movement to his forehead, like, "Oh, I remember that." And he walks off stage. You're not *performing* this variation for the audience. The audience is not there at all. It's hard for dancers who don't know Jerry, when they learn it at first, because they feel they're not *doing* anything. Less is more. But they're not performing, and they need to show the steps, and to not walk like a dancer. A lot of dancers like to go through their feet. Jerry would always want you to walk just normally what you would do when you walked into a place. And I think *that* is one of the hardest things for dancers to do.

SF And it sets the tone for the whole ballet.

JPF It sets the tone, and the audience can relate to that dancer as one of them.

SF Then next is the "Wind" waltz. Kay, you have a lot to say, I'm sure, about the "Wind" waltz.

KM It was hard. It was windy. It was puffy. And then that last lift at the end, you had to make sure that your partner could get you up—you know, the twirl around and onto his shoulder and run off with him. But it was fun. I loved it. I remember, though, there was an attitude turn. You had your foot *en pointe*, and then you had to go into an attitude. And falling off of it—he didn't care if you fell off of it—was fine.

JPF I think everyone falls off of that step. You're in a lunge with your foot *en pointe*, and you're doing that turn.

CR You have to do an *arabesque relevé* on to the right leg and do an *arabesque* turn, and put the left foot back down, keeping the right foot still without moving it, keeping it *en pointe*, and do it again, adding a *passé développé* as you turn again.

KM But it was also something that involved your partner. You're looking at each other the whole time, and one goes forward, one goes back, then the next one goes forward. It was fun. I did it with a couple of different dancers and enjoyed it, but it was absolutely puffy.

SF And then there's the *adage*—the first part of it for the pink girl. What are some of your thoughts about that? That one is so stunning.

JPF Well, it kind of introduces her, which is fascinating to me. It's just very quiet, calm, sensitive—

CR Gentle. It's interesting how each piece is now introducing the character, the flavor of each person, the atmosphere of each person.

JPF Yes, it's fascinating because Jerry is really introducing each person. They're not characters. He's introducing the dancers.

KM When I watched Allegra do the "Wind" waltz, it was *her*. I mean, that flowing was Allegra.

JPF Jerry must have been so fascinated with Allegra. If you look at the original performance, and how much she did in it. I mean, between the "Wind" waltz—

KM Different sides of her.

JPF—"Giggle," the "Walk" waltz. So many different sides.

SF And then it goes into this sequence of mazurkas, which are brilliant.

JPF What I love about a section of the mazurkas is when they do those poses for the pictures. Jerry's sense of humor came out, and it worked with the music. I love the three guys and the two ladies. And they turn and they start to dance again.

SF That is so fun—running to those family portraits right on the music. And then it goes to the "Giggle." Can you talk about that? You know that from inside out.

CR So fun to do—like kids playing. It's this back and forth, and then just having to take a breath and have fun and dance together and then tease each other again.

JPF I always think of them having a young relationship, and they're on a farm, in a wheat field.

CR On a summer afternoon.

KM And you do giggle when you're watching it. I was trying to remember if it was Jerry who gave the names to the different parts. It could have been Gordon also, but it probably was Jerry saying, "Okay, this is the 'Wind,' and this is the 'Giggle.'"

JPF I would not be surprised if it was Gordon, because of his sense of humor.

SF And then it goes to the "Three Sisters." I don't know if it was called "Three Sisters" from the beginning, but Kay, you were part of that. Could you talk about that women's trio?

KM I remember it was three of us—Patty, Sally and I. And again, like Jean-Pierre said, "Don't walk like a dancer." You're walking around and you're just sort of walking and looking. The two would go off, and the other girl would be in her dreamy world, and all of that. And then—all of a sudden—a fellow comes in and makes it very different. And then he leaves. And the other two were in the back sort of gossiping, I always thought. And then the girl and the guy were in the front and dancing a little bit and—you know, Jerry never talked about it. It was like Mr. Balanchine. He didn't talk about how you're supposed to feel. But you certainly got that feeling that we were all friends. And then we went off friends. We all went off and it was a community, a very tight-knit community. A fellow comes in, but then he leaves, and the girls are together again. It was fun.

CR I always loved doing that. But to me, my interpretation was that the guy may have been a dream of that girl. That the three sisters are in their own afternoon and talking with each other but remembering someone—maybe that guy that they danced with at a party, and she kind of had a crush on him. But, you know, he just drifts away and she kind of goes, "Hmm, I wonder." You know, it's a possibility. It was such a nice atmosphere—the three of us walking in this beautiful lighting of Jennifer Tipton's. Oh my God, the lighting is so beautifully important. It set such an atmosphere—like in any of Jerry's pieces. And at the end, the other two waiting for the third one, and the third one kind of swishes her skirt. And there's a little *ronde de jambe*, and the other two were waiting for her, and she comes into the arms of her sisters, their arms around each other's waist, and they go off quickly together into the wings as the music drifts off.

JPF What's amazing is how Jerry created these relationships without really explaining about any relationship. He always used to say, "Who are you dancing with, baby? Look at them." People forget that.

SF And then comes that wonderful two boys dance — when they throw their heads back. I read something that he'd seen like two boys playing in Central Park. And they were throwing their heads back, like doing some kind of game like that. And that was inspiration for that section. And the next is Violette's solo. Can we talk about that? That's a solo that's in its own place in all of time — Violette's Green girl solo — for the ages.

JPF That variation is telling a story about the past, and how she did these variations. But what's interesting about Green girl is that Victor [Castelli] later on — to get the dancer to get the right feeling — would make them rehearse in high heels instead of pointe shoes, because you are really not on pointe at all in that dance. You are wearing pointe shoes, but you are always on *demi-pointe*, or you are jumping. But he would want them to get the feeling of being in a long skirt. You are moving and showing the costume that you used to wear.

CR And the perfume.

JPF Yes. The perfume. It lingers.

KM And Violette, of course, when she did that little thing with her foot, the tapping.

JPF I have to tell you, we haven't yet — and neither had Jerry, when he was alive — found someone to do it close to the way Violette did it. It's just impossible.

KM It's like how she spoke. She could find the perfect words for everything, and she found the perfect way to dance that variation. Couldn't have been more perfect.

CR The flirtation, the French, beautiful gestures of conversation. Classy, elegant, and playful. And so musical. But what's great is that each woman brings their own flavor to it when they really get it.

SF And then there's the "Grand" waltz, which is like a ballet within a ballet.

CR Sheer fun dancing. And fun to do that throw.

SF Could you describe that? That's a moment when the audience often gasps.

CR You have to just trust the guy. It's the third of the three girls — you slide down on the floor, slide with the first guy who tosses you to the second guy, who tosses you to the third guy, and each of those lifts from the second guy to the third gets bigger, and the last one slides down, goes to the second guy, and he tosses her and she spins twice, way up in the air, with her feet together, and then the third guy grabs her out of the air and dips her head down, with her feet up, so the audience gasps on a good day.



A page from Jerome Robbins' notes, written during the time he choreographed *Dances at a Gathering* at New York City Ballet, 1969. From the Jerome Robbins Papers, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

SF And then it goes to the Etude pas de deux for the Pink girl and the Brown boy. And is that the original material, when it was just going to be Patty and Eddie?

KM I would think probably, because it's such an extraordinary pas de deux, but I really don't know.

JPF It's interesting because if it were going to be a pas de deux, there's no female variation. There are two Brown boy variations. So I think he started, and I think Jerry went up to Mr. B and said, "I have more music." And Mr. B said, "Dear, yes, it's like popcorn. Just keep on going. Make more. Make more."

SF Then comes the Scherzo. I had read at one point he thought that maybe he would finish with the Scherzo. But then he said to himself, "No, that's not how I think about those people. They don't just go whoosh and then they're gone." And then he made the beautiful Nocturne finale. But what about that Scherzo?

CR I love it. It's like the weather in the summertime — like these intense, dark clouds come over. And it affects everybody. There's agitation and everyone's a little bit on edge. The Mauve girl comes firing out and stops on the chord. Then she's spinning all over the place, and then it settles down a little bit. Then she looks around and she starts up again. It's agitated. And at the end, they all drag the three couples, they kiss and run and split off in different directions. And then the sun comes out for the finale, in this serenity. I can't imagine it in a different order because it makes so much sense. The angst and then the semi-circle in the Scherzo, where everyone walks in to look at each other, and one after another, they explode again. It's beautiful.

JPF What we're forgetting to mention is this incredible pas de deux in the middle of the Scherzo. The clouds are coming, and then right before the storm starts, there's a calmness to everything. The water is kind of still and there's your pas de deux. Then the lightning starts, and it gets back into that crescendo. In the last movement — when the music is stunning — the dancers are not dancing. It's the first time you play music, and they're just walking. And suddenly they look up and see something across the sky. We don't know what it is. And then they go forward and look up. And then, to me, the beautiful moment is when the *port de bras* starts, and the palm comes out.

KM And then Eddie touches the floor. That's all he does. And it's a big, huge deal. It tugs at your heart.

JPF And Jerry was very particular. He would tell dancers, "You're not touching it like Eddie Villella used to touch it." Because he was adamant how that would be. He was so particular about the look he wanted for that.

CR And Jerry showed it so beautifully too. He always showed things very beautifully. You could see just what he was getting at. But that touch of the floor is so specific. It needs to be real from that person — the reverence of the floor, the space. He would say, "This is your sacred space."

JPF I've been in tears, to be honest with you. I've been in tears after Jerry's passing, when that part comes, because I think of him all the time, when that music is played in the *port de bras*. Even though he could be difficult, we cared about him.

CR He was a son of a gun to work with often. And he was pitching fits, and screaming, when he was in a bad space. But ultimately, look what he gave us as a gift — this loving community of simplicity.

SF Well, you three have been people that Jerry obviously trusted tremendously, and you've been so faithful to keep his ballets not only alive, but thriving. We close with an extended quotation from Jerry. It's his reflection on making *Dances at a Gathering* — especially what it was like for him to come back to choreographing in the language of ballet after being away from City Ballet and working on Broadway. Here are Jerry's words: "I didn't know how my hand would be. It's almost like an artist who has not been drawing for a long time. I was so surprised that the dances began to come out and began to come out so gushing in a way. And I worked in a way I hadn't worked before. Whether I knew the details or not, I pushed through to the end of the dance. I sort of knew where it was going, and then I'd go back and clean it up and fill it up. Quite often, the dancers weren't even sure how they got through the steps to the next step, but they went with me. I was pleased to be choreographing again, and to have it coming out. I want to go on and see if I can work a little bit more the way I've worked this time."

From City Ballet The Podcast (Episode 155)
Hear the Dance: Dances at a Gathering, February 9, 2026

Martha Graham: The Mother of Psychological Dance at The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts



Portrait of Martha Graham, ca. 1940s. Photo © George Platt Lynes. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, located at Lincoln Center, is currently featuring a large-scale exhibition exploring Martha Graham and her Dance Company through the Jerome Robbins Dance Division's Martha Graham archive. Part of the Martha Graham Dance Company's centennial celebration, the exhibition, *Martha Graham: The Mother of Psychological Dance*, curated by choreographer, writer, and educator Jack Ferver, opened May 20, 2026. The Jerome Robbins Dance Division at the Library for the Performing Arts acquired the Martha Graham Dance Company archive in 2020. The show displays rarely seen archival materials from the Jerome Robbins Dance Division's Martha Graham archive and offers insight into the genius and legacy of Graham and the dance company. Several programs at the Library for the Performing Arts accompany the exhibition, which runs through November 7, 2026.

"Martha Graham's transformative approach to making the inner life of the psyche visible through the body continues to shape culture today. It is a tremendous societal gift that the Jerome Robbins Dance Division holds the Martha Graham Dance Company archive. When audiences come to this exhibition at the Library for the Performing Arts, they will encounter a uniquely intimate view of Martha Graham's genius. I hope visitors — whether deeply familiar with her legacy or discovering it for the first time — are drawn into a meaningful relationship with her work, not only in its historical significance, but also in its enduring artistic and emotional resonance."

— Jack Ferver, curator, *Martha Graham: The Mother of Psychological Dance*

"It is an honor to partner with the Library for the Performing Arts as we celebrate the Martha Graham Dance Company's centennial — we couldn't think of any better way to highlight our work this year than through this exciting exhibition. We are grateful to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division for their dedicated stewardship of Martha's archives. Their work ensures that Martha's revolutionary contributions to American culture are not just preserved in history but remain a dynamic influence for generations to come."

— Janet Eilber, Artistic Director of the Martha Graham Dance Company

The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts is grateful to dance educator and advocate Jody Gottfried Arnhold for her visionary commitment to making dance and dance education accessible to all. *Martha Graham: The Mother of Psychological Dance* would not be possible without the generous support of Jody and John Arnhold and the Arnhold Foundation. Additional support is provided by The Jerome Robbins Foundation, the Anne H. Bass Foundation, Leslie Tonner Curtis, Allen Greenberg, and Edward A. Brill. ■

Errata

In the previous newsletter (Vol. 12, No. 1), an image of the ballet *The Four Seasons* mistakenly attributed the costume design to Santo Loquasto, who had designed the scenery and costumes for the original production at New York City Ballet in 1979. The Perm Opera production in 2017, staged by Maria Calegari and Bart Cook, featured costumes designed by Elena Solovyova. Mr. Loquasto's scenic and costume designs for *The Four Seasons* may be seen in New York City Ballet's Spring season in May 2027.



Emilie Gerrity and members of New York City Ballet in Jerome Robbins' *The Four Seasons*. Photo by Erin Baiano, courtesy of New York City Ballet.



Erica Pereira, David Gabriel, and members of New York City Ballet in Jerome Robbins' *The Four Seasons*. Photo by Erin Baiano, courtesy of New York City Ballet.



The stage at New York City Ballet being set for a performance of Jerome Robbins' *The Four Seasons*, featuring scenery and costumes by Santo Loquasto. Photo by Martha Swope © Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.



Christina Clark and members of New York City Ballet in Jerome Robbins' *The Four Seasons*. Photo by Paul Kolnik, courtesy of New York City Ballet.



Tiler Peck and members of New York City Ballet in Jerome Robbins' *The Four Seasons*. Photo by Erin Baiano, courtesy of New York City Ballet.



News from The Jerome Robbins Foundation
Volume 13, No. 1 (2026)

Jerome Robbins is a publication of The Jerome Robbins Foundation. © 2026 by The Jerome Robbins Foundation.

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Disclaimer The views and opinions expressed in the articles in this newsletter are strictly those of their authors, and do not necessarily reflect the position of The Jerome Robbins Foundation, nor The Robbins Rights Trust.

cover: New World Symphony Artistic Director Stéphane Denève conducts, while Jacquelyn Long and Connor Walsh (of Houston Ballet) perform Jerome Robbins' *Fancy Free* as part of *American Dance Odyssey* in Miami, Florida, 2026. Photo by Alex Markow, courtesy of New World Symphony.

above: Dancers perform Jerome Robbins' "Cool" (from *West Side Story*) in the Off-Broadway dance revue *GOTTA DANCE!* in New York City, 2026. Photo by Christopher Duggan.

Select Upcoming Performances of Jerome Robbins Works

WEST SIDE STORY
Paper Mill Playhouse, Millburn, NJ
May 28 – June 28, 2026

A SUITE OF DANCES
New York City Ballet,
Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, Los Angeles
June 24, 25, 26, 2026

WEST SIDE STORY
(film with live orchestra)
San Francisco Symphony,
Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco
July 9, 10, 2026

OPUS 19 / THE DREAMER
New York City Ballet,
Saratoga Performing Arts Center
Amphitheater, Saratoga Springs
July 10(m), 11, 2026

OTHER DANCES
Étoile Classic Co., Ltd.
(w/Tiler Peck and Roman Mejia),
Seoul Arts Center, Seoul
July 29, 30, 2026

A SUITE OF DANCES
Étoile Classic Co., Ltd. (w/Roman Mejia),
Seoul Arts Center, Seoul
August 1, 2, 2026

**THE CONCERT (OR,
THE PERILS OF EVERYBODY)**
New York City Ballet,
David H. Koch Theatre,
New York City
September 29, 30,
October 3(m/e), 9, 10, 2026

FANCY FREE
Philadelphia Ballet, Philadelphia
Ballet Center for Dance
October 8, 9, 10(m/e), 11(m), 2026

N.Y. EXPORT: OPUS JAZZ
Miami City Ballet
Adrienne Arsht Center, Miami:
October 16, 17, 18(m), 2026
Broward Center, Fort Lauderdale:
October 24, 25(m), 25(e), 2026

AFTERNOON OF A FAUN
Teatro Dell'Opera Di Roma,
Teatro Costanzi, Roma
October 27, 28,
November 5, 6, 7, 8(m), 2026

DANCES AT A GATHERING
Royal Ballet,
Royal Opera House, London
November 9, 12, 17,
20, 23, 24, 28(m/e), 2026

Please note: Cancellations or postponements are always possible.