

IN SEARCH OF BALANCHINE



by Holly Brubach

On May 28 and June 4, WNET/*Dance in America* presents Balanchine, a two-part documentary that has been nearly a year in the making, produced by Judy Kinberg, directed by Merrill Brockway and written by Holly Brubach. Following are excerpts from a journal Brubach kept while she worked on the program.

Nov. 15: Merrill, Judy and I meet for the first time and draw up a plan of action. The amount of material is staggering: seventy-some hours of footage, on film and videotape, including Balanchine's ballets, interviews with people who worked with him and Balanchine himself on camera. For the past seven months, Nancy Reynolds has been hunting down these materials from all over the world, and her findings have been compiled in an enormous three-ring notebook, with a page for every ballet—178 pages in all. We agree to meet for three hours every after-

noon to screen and evaluate this material, starting tomorrow, until we've seen everything. I take the notebook home and leaf through it, excited at the prospect of seeing *Liebeslieder Walzer* with its original cast; Diana Adams and Arthur Mitchell in the *Agon* pas de deux; glimpses of Tanaquil LeClerc in *La Valse* and *Bourrée Fantasque* (these, very brief and silent).

Nov. 16: We begin by screening documentaries on Stravinsky and Diaghilev. Stravinsky's charm is infectious. "I love the music of Mozart," he says. "In fact, I love this music so much that I find I am all the time stealing it. And I feel I have a right to steal this music, because I love it so much." We also look at home movies of Lew Christensen in *Apollo*, circa 1937, and of the American Ballet Caravan's tour of South America, in 1941, including scenes of Balanchine and his friends clowning around—these people appear to have had more fun in a few weeks than

most people have in a whole lifetime.

Nov. 22: Merrill and I screen *Apollo*, filmed in Canada in 1969, with a young Suzanne Farrell and Peter Martins as Terpsichore and Apollo, then compare it to a later version, taped in 1982 for "Live from Lincoln Center." Martins' performances are astonishingly different—much rougher around the edges in 1969, with an ingenuousness missing later. The Canadian *Apollo* is the old version, recorded before Balanchine cut the birth and revised the coda. The coda is stately and moving. We watch *Apollo* and the muses climb the stairs, and, as the last chord dies, we turn to each other and say, "Well, there's the end of our show."

Nov. 28: We meet in Judy's office to view *Serenade*, filmed for German television in 1972 by a fidgety director. The camera careens around the studio and closes in on one dancer just when you want to see the whole stage; by the end, the jump cuts are

The New York City Ballet in Serenade, whose fiftieth anniversary is observed this month

coming so fast you feel carsick. This ballet is notoriously difficult to photograph because it opens out. The only other attempt is a Canadian film, from 1957, but it has two disadvantages: it's black-and-white and almost never wide enough to convey the ballet's scale. But *Serenade* is crucial to the story of Balanchine's career, so we're determined to salvage something of it. Judy has tracked down fifty cans of the original footage shot for this German version in London; she will send for them and hire a film editor to construct a new version—a costly and tedious procedure.

Dec. 1: We meet at the Museum of Broadcasting to screen various programs, saving for last a kinescope of *The Nutcracker*, broadcast on Christmas night, 1958, with Balanchine as Drosselmeier. When the time comes for us to view it, we're informed that, though CBS promised to furnish a copy months ago, the museum hasn't received it. We ask, are they sure a copy still exists? "Frankly, no."

Dec. 5: We stagger out of the Dance Collection, grateful to Canadian television for having had the foresight to film *Agon*, *Orpheus*, *Serenade* and *Pas de Dix* in the 1950s. The dancers are of a generation I've never seen, and we all remark on how different these ballets seem now. *Agon*, in this 1960 film, seems higher-strung, with an almost neurotic intensity; *Orpheus*, also from 1960, has a greater urgency. In *Pas de Dix*, Maria Tallchief and André Eglevsky turn in wonderful performances, but the ballet, even in the solo variations, was shot with a wide-angle lens that hideously distorts the dancing.

Dec. 6: At a dinner party, discussing the Balanchine shows, I lament the lost CBS *Nutcracker*, and a friend, a dancer in NYCB, says that he knows of someone who has a copy. We call for it and screen it. As television, this show is quite a period piece, with June Lockhart reading voice-over narration throughout, but the performances are good. Balanchine is tender and eccentric as Drosselmeier; Mitchell, lascivious as Coffee. Allegra Kent is an exuberant Dewdrop, and Adams, as the Sugar Plum Fairy, is, for some mysterious reason, partnered by four cavaliers.

Dec. 7: A friend who writes about theater calls to talk about his current project, a piece about Broadway in the 1930s, and mentions film clips of *I Married An Angel*, one of the shows Balanchine choreographed. What film clips, I ask, and where? They are new to us and the only existing record of Balanchine's choreography for Broadway. We go to the The-

atre Collection of the New York Public Library to have a look. The film flies by in less than four minutes; as shot by a musical comedy fan who surreptitiously made movies of musicals, it's hopelessly fragmented because his camera made so much noise that he could only film numbers when the music was loud.

Jan. 13: We call Eglevsky's wife and ask if it's true that she owns a kinescope of *The Nutcracker*—a different broadcast from the one we've already got, with a different cast. She says that her husband destroyed all his performances that he didn't like, and this particular kinescope was one of them. She does, however, offer us some other films—among them *A la Française*, which is amusing but probably won't find its way into the final shows, and *Concertino*, a trio for Adams, LeClerc and Eglevsky, which we love. We promise ourselves to find a place for it.

Jan. 18: Judy gets a call from Deni Lammont at NYCB. In cleaning out a file cabinet, he found, in the back of the bottom drawer, an 8-mm reel marked "1935—Balanchine, Marie-Jeanne." He has no idea what's on it, but would we like to see it? The entire reel is no more than five minutes and fragmented. Parts of it are familiar—scenes of Balanchine, looking dapper, demonstrating finger turns—but here, they're longer and in color.

Jan. 25: The time has come to organize all this material into an outline. Judy, Merrill and I go through our notebooks page by page, making cards for everything we intend to use. The cards are color-coded: pink for important ballets; blue for ballets less important or poorly shot, many of them silent; white for documentary footage (the Russian revolution, Hollywood in the thirties); orange for people who worked with Balanchine; yellow for Balanchine himself. We have 179 cards in all, and for the time being we pin them on three bulletin boards, repositioning them every few minutes as we change our minds.

Jan. 26: The bulletin boards are overloaded, and there are still more cards to go. We are working with far more material than we can possibly use—and not yet willing to be realistic. Each of us insists on our favorite parts of our favorite ballets. The drawing board becomes a bargaining table; I trade Merrill the Gigue in *Mozartiana* for *Duo Concertant*—and we eliminate them both.

Jan. 28: At last, we arrive at a plan for the structure. The first show will be narrative—starting with *Apollo*, covering Balanchine's childhood in Russia in flash-

back and then recounting how he came to America and acquired the resources he needed to do his work. This show will close with the opening night of the New York State Theater—*Stars and Stripes* is the finale. The second program will be about Balanchine's collaboration with Stravinsky, his use of music, his devotion to his dancers and other topics. This format, if it works, will be along the lines of a two-act ballet, like *Harlequinade* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—the first act will tell the story and set up the second, a series of divertissements.

Jan. 29: LeClerc tells me about a *Concerto Barocco* she danced with Adams that was filmed in Canada in 1956; NYCB's Eddie Bigelow showed her the film some twenty years ago. I call him; he doesn't remember, but says he turned over all copies of the Canadian shows to the Dance Collection and suggests we try there. We've already been there. Dead end.

Jan. 31: Most of the silent footage is choppy and of poor quality, but there's no question that it belongs in these shows—it's all we have of *Cotillon*, *Jeu de Cartes*, *Balustrade*, *Concertino* and even of later works like *Ballet Imperial*. It's hard to get anything more than a vague impression of these ballets without their music, yet it's practically impossible to synchronize a recording to these films. Our plan is to convey the sense of the music by having it played on the piano, even though we can't set it to the steps. Today, we watch Violette Verdy dance her variation in *Emeralds*—even in silence, it looks musical.

Feb. 1: Our desperate request for a third program, one hour long, is denied.

Feb. 8: Of the 178 pages in our notebooks, we've discarded more than thirty, because the tapes can't be located. Today one of the "lost" shows was resurrected—*Let's Take a Trip*, a Sunday program in which an emcee took two children, Pud and Ginger, on some vaguely educational guided tour. In February 1956 they toured the School of American Ballet. CBS told us weeks ago that this episode, like many others, had been destroyed, but it turns out the director saved a kinescope. This afternoon Merrill and I go to his apartment to see it. It contains some wonderful moments: Ginger, who changes into her leotard for the tour, is told by Balanchine that she should cut out second helpings. Balanchine makes variations on "Yankee Doodle Dandy," which Pud whistles through the space between his teeth.

Feb. 17-19: Judy and I hole up in her office at WNET to evaluate the Balanchine audio material. She has already edited

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CALENDAR

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Jan Van Dyke & Dancers; June 1, 2, 8, 9; Footwork Studio (415-824-5044)
New Perf. Gallery (415-863-9830)
Douglas Dunn & Dancers; June 6-9. Deborah Slater; 20-23
Dance Action; June 9; Vorpall Gallery (415-397-9200)

SAN MATEO, CA

Peninsula Ballet Th.; June 1-3m;
Perf. Arts Ctr. (415-343-8485)

SAN RAFAEL, CA

Carol Friedman; June 8, 9; Dance Palace/Point Reyes (415-663-8024)

SHAKER HEIGHTS, OH

Association of Ohio Dance Companies; June 1, 2; Otterbein Coll. (216-491-9169)

SPENCER, NY

Music in Motion; June 4; Van Etten School (607-273-7906) *Coppélia*

TALLAHASSEE, FL

Momentum Dance Co.; June 16; State Dance Fest. (305-235-3047)

TORONTO, ONT

TORONTO INT. FESTIVAL (416-766-3271) Premiere Dance Theatre: Kathakali; June 5-10m
The Dice Game and the Killing of

Duhsasana. Ryerson Th.: Hamburg Ballet; 6, 9m/e *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; 7, 8 *Mahler's Third Symphony*; 10m *St. Matthew Passion*. Sankai-juku; 12-14 *Kinkin Shonen*; 16, 17m/e *Jomon Sho*. Dance Theatre of Harlem; 19, 21, 23 *Pas de Dix*, *Wingborne*, *Banda*, *Firebird*; 20, 22, 23m *The Four Temperaments*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Adagio No. 5*, *Troy Game*. Pina Bausch Wuppertaler Tanztheater; 26-28 *Café Müller*, *The Rite of Spring*; 29, 30 1980. Outside: Sankaijuku; 11m, 15m. O'Keefe Centre: National Ballet of Canada; 14-17m/e *Olegin*. Mac Millan Th.: National Ballet School;

20-22 *Giselle*, Act II, *Concerto Barocco*, *A Dancer's Circus*

Dance in Canada Conference perfs.; June 27-30; Harbourfront Th. (416-978-8668) and Premiere Dance Theatre (416-869-8444)

WASHINGTON, DC

Dance Place (202-462-1321)
Perlo/Bloom & Co.; June 2, 3.
Mary Williford & Donna Brandenburg; 9, 10. Ruth Barnes w/ Susan Alexander & David Robinson; 16, 17. Dance Place Summer Touring Co.; 21
Improvisations Unlimited; June 5, 6m; Penney Aud. (301-454-4847)

This Month on TV

Times cited are Eastern Time, and all programs are subject to change, so check local listings. Abbreviations are as follows: A&E—Arts and Entertainment Network; BRV—Bravo; PBS—Public Broadcasting Service.

Balanchine. A two-part "Dance in America" special tracing the choreographer's career. (For a related feature, see page 26.) PBS, May 28, 9 PM, June 4, 9 PM.

Bat-Dor Dances Ellington and Ailey. *Night Creature*, followed by the Batsheva Dance Company in Donald McKayle's *Album Leaves*, to the music of Jelly Roll Morton. BRV, June 4, 10 PM;

June 12, 10 PM; June 13, 3 AM; June 22, 10 PM; June 23, 3 AM; July 5, 10 PM; July 6, 3:30 AM.

Classically Cuban. One-hour documentary on Alicia Alonso's Cuban National Ballet. A&E, June 7, 8 PM; June 8: 12, 8 and 11 AM.

Swan Lake, Minnesota. A country-western version of Tchaikovsky's ballet. PBS, June 13, 9 PM.

New World Ballet. Documentary of 1982 Miami festival featuring Cynthia Gregory and Fernando Bujones. A&E, June 15, 8 and 11 AM.

An Evening with the Royal Ballet. 1960s film

of Fonteyn and Nureyev in *Les Sylphides* and *Le Corsaire*, Ashton's *La Valse*, Fonteyn and David Blair in Act III *The Sleeping Beauty*. BRV, June 15, 9:30 PM; June 16, 2:30 AM, June 30, 10:30 PM.

To Dance for Gold. Documentary of the 1982 International Ballet Competition in Jackson, Mississippi. A&E, June 21, 9 PM; June 22, 1 AM and 2 PM.

American Dance Machine. A celebration of Broadway dance starring Wayne Cilento, Janet Eilber and others, introduced by Gwen Verdon. BRV, June 29, 10 PM; June 30, 3 AM.

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thirty-four hours down to five. These are interviews with Balanchine on tapes the writers have generously turned over to us, and we listen, choosing statements to be used in voice-over. Our hope is that we'll be able to let Balanchine tell much of his own story, and that there will be enough of his voice to give the viewer a sense of his personality. There are technical problems with many of the statements, and we listen to them again and again to determine if the quality is good enough. Some are funny, and even on the fourth or fifth hearing, Judy and I are still laughing. "The music is the aquarium," Balanchine says, "and the dancers are the fish." Or, in a more serious vein: "I believe in what I see. Ballet belongs to a dancer that is now, at this moment, in front of your eyes. The choreographer doesn't exist."

Feb. 22: Today we add up all the material to be transferred from film and videotape to cassettes, for use in editing. Total time: eight hours.

Feb. 28: Judy gets a call—the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has just come across a program they didn't know existed—*Concerto Barocco* with Adams and Le Clercq. They will send it tomorrow.

March 6: Every few days, we hit some new snag. The catalog of our disappointments to date includes:

- A BBC film of the pas de deux from *La Sonnambula*, with Verdy and Pierre Lacotte, our only hope of including this

ballet in the show. At the climax of the music, when the poet arches back, sinks to the floor with his arms around the sleepwalker's legs, and she steps out of the circle of his arms—the camera closes in on Verdy's face and misses the point.

- Farrell's home movies of her and Balanchine in *Don Quixote* looked great on screen but prove too dark when transferred to videotape.

- The loss of all the "Live from Lincoln Center" footage—*Apollo* (1982), *Mozartiana*, *Coppélia*, *Vienna Waltzes*, others. Lincoln Center is negotiating a new contract with the stagehands' union, and it won't be settled by the time we air.

I have also been keeping a list of the surprises, which are some compensation:

- *Western Symphony*, which has always seemed slight to me in the theater, makes perfect sense danced by its original cast in a 1955 film.

- *The Figure in the Carpet*—Adams' Scottish variation is a prophecy of Farrell's variation in *Union Jack*, with the same music.

- *The Four Temperaments*—the original 1946 version, with a coda that, if this film is any indication, was not effective: the whole cast hunkers down in a circle and turns, center stage.

- *Elegie*, circa 1946, on film at the Museum of Modern Art. Two girls in bare feet, bare legs and tunics dance around each other in a duet that stays pretty much in the same spot. Except for an occasional penchée arabesque, this looks

like 1940s-style modern dance.

March 12-16: Our third week of editing, a grueling sequence of disputes over *Agon*, *Davidshündertänze*, *Symphony in C*, *Concerto Barocco*. Merrill wants certain sections, I want others, and neither of us is about to give in. He and I reiterate our points of view, getting louder and more adamant, until at the end of the day we both leave in a huff. We have all been subsisting on black coffee, Lifesavers, chicken salad sandwiches and not enough sleep. There are seven more weeks of editing to go.

April 2: Today we complete the rough assemblies—three hours and forty-seven minutes for two one-hour programs. The cutting begins. It's clear that Balanchine's own statements are far stronger, and the dancing more eloquent, than any narration. "I occupy myself with how not to interfere with the music," Balanchine says, and we are occupying ourselves with how not to interfere with his work.

April 13: The biggest find of all, and not a moment too soon—the news reaches us that a farmer in Ireland has a print of *Dark Red Roses*, a feature film given up for lost years ago. Balanchine choreographed it in 1929 in London and dances in it himself along with Lydia Lopokova and Anton Dolin. We dispatch a friend who lives in Dublin to the farmer's house in County Galway, where she gets the film for us. We are leaving one minute blank in the first show to be filled in when the film arrives next week. □