Principles of Choreography as Exemplified in the Works of George Balanchine

Virginia E. Bird

Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses

Part of the Dance Commons, and the Fine Arts Commons

Recommended Citation

http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses/1851
PRINCIPLES OF CHOREOGRAPHY
AS EXEMPLIFIED IN
THE WORKS OF GEORGE BALANCHINE

by

Virginia E. Bird

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment
of the
Degree of Master of Arts
Department of Dance

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
August 1980
This thesis presents an examination of George Balanchine's choreography. The examination is directed to three principles which are discussed in relation to his choreographic works.

The thesis is composed of six chapters and a summary including an introductory chapter. The second and third chapters discuss the historical background of George Balanchine as it relates to his choreographic development. The subject of the fourth chapter is Balanchine's musicality: how it was developed and how it is exemplified in his ballets. The fifth chapter is devoted to a discussion about Balanchine's neo-classical style. The last chapter examines Balanchine's ability to elucidate the talents of his individual dancers.

The three choreographic principles discussed in the thesis will elucidate Balanchine's remarkable, creative abilities and the development of a style of choreography unique to the New York City Ballet Company as seen in the ballets he has created for it.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This was produced from a copy of a document sent to us for microfilming. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting through an image and duplicating adjacent pages to assure you of complete continuity.

2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a round black mark it is an indication that the film inspector noticed either blurred copy because of movement during exposure, or duplicate copy. Unless we meant to delete copyrighted materials that should not have been filmed, you will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame.

3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., is part of the material being photographed the photographer has followed a definite method in "sectioning" the material. It is customary to begin filming at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. If necessary, sectioning is continued again—beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.

4. For any illustrations that cannot be reproduced satisfactorily by xerography, photographic prints can be purchased at additional cost and tipped into your xerographic copy. Requests can be made to our Dissertations Customer Services Department.

5. Some pages in any document may have indistinct print. In all cases we have filmed the best available copy.
BIRD, VIRGINIA ELIZABETH
PRINCIPLES OF CHOREOGRAPHY AS EXEMPLIFIED IN
THE WORKS OF GEORGE BALANCHINE.

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY, M.A., 1980
TO JOHN
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTERS</th>
<th>PAGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION. ........................................... 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significance and Background of Study........... 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose of the Study. .............................. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need for the Study. ................................. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limitations of the Study. ....................... 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>BALANCHINE: 1904 TO 1933 ............................. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>BALANCHINE: 1933 TO 1950 ............................. 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS IV, V AND VI ........... 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>MUSICALITY. ............................................. 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Musicality as Exemplified in Choreographic Works. 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>NEO-CLASSICISM. ......................................... 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neo-classicism as Exemplified in Choreographic Works .................. 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>EDUCATION OF ABILITY ................................. 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SUMMARY ............................................... 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY. .......................................... 49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

SIGNIFICANCE AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

George Balanchine, born Georgi Melitonovitch Balanchivadze in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1904, started his ballet training in the Imperial Ballet School of the Maryinsky Theater. It was quite by accident that he entered the school. While he and his mother were waiting for Balanchine's sister to audition for the academy, one of the Governors proposed that Balanchine also audition. In August of 1914, he was admitted with seven or eight other males and his career as a dancer began.

Toward the end of his schooling Balanchine began to choreograph ballets. The dances he made were radically different from the traditional Russian ballets. He experimented with the ballet tradition by inventing new ways of utilizing the old concepts. As ballet master for Serge Diaghilev's Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo, his experimentation with choreography was greatly encouraged. At this time Lincoln Kirstein saw some of Balanchine's ballets and invited him to come to the United States to assist him

---


in creating an American ballet school and company.  

The significance of Balanchine's arrival in the United States cannot be overstated. "Under Balanchine, the New York City Ballet has developed an enormous and brilliant repertoire; its dancers perform superbly and its productions are handsomely mounted."  

Balanchine was able not only to create an audience for ballet and direct and choreograph for an outstanding company, he was also able to develop a style unlike any other choreographer in the world. In his book about the New York City Ballet, Joseph Mazo wrote of Balanchine, "He certainly knows more than anyone in the world about American Ballet— he invented it."

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the principles which George Balanchine has used in his choreography. The study will begin with two chapters of historical background about Balanchine's life in Russia and Western Europe and then his move to the United States and the ensuing years spent developing and directing the New York City Ballet. Chapters four through six will examine the development of the principles of choreography that Balanchine uses in light of his background influences. Each of the above three

---

4 Ibid., p. 185.
chapters will also demonstrate those principles as exemplified in his choreographic works.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

"American classical ballet, as we know it, got its start in 1933: Lincoln Kirstein . . . invited George Balanchine . . . to visit America." The intent of the invitation was to assist Kirstein in establishing a school, a company and an audience for ballet in the United States. Balanchine accepted the offer.

George Balanchine is a private man. As a result, very little has been written about his style and methods of choreography. The present study will be devoted to an examination of the emergence of Balanchine's unique and highly successful style of choreography. As yet, no such study has been done. There is a paucity of literature about Balanchine's choreographic style. The compilation of the three choreographic principles which will be discussed will elucidate Balanchine's remarkable, creative abilities and the development of a style based on his background and innate talents.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study will not attempt to analyze Balanchine's choreography nor will it criticize his ballets. It is not intended to be a complete study of all of the ballets that Balanchine has choreographed.

---

6 Mazo, Dance Is A Contact Sport, p. 24.
7 Taper, Balanchine, p. 161.
8 Kirstein, Dance A Short History, p. 321.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
GEORGI MELITONOVITCH BALANCHIVADZE was born in 1904 in St. Petersburg. His father, Meliton Balanchivadze, was a composer of a variety of religious compositions, including a mass and numerous choral works. He also composed an opera entitled, "Tamara The Wily."\(^1\) Balanchine's mother, Maria Nikolayevna Vassilyeva, was twenty years younger than his father and had a limited education. Despite this, she was aware of the importance of the arts and had learned to play the piano. She was Balanchine's first piano teacher when he began taking lessons at five years of age.\(^2\)

At the age of ten, Balanchine's mother and father planned to enroll him in the Imperial Naval Academy, but at that time he was turned down because the Academy was full. At the same time, his older sister, Tamara, was auditioning for the Imperial School of Theater and Ballet. When a child was accepted to a Russian Academy, whether it was a military school or a school of the arts, his education and livelihood were handled by the government. While Balanchine and his mother were waiting for Tamara to finish her audition, one of the governors of the school approached Balanchine's mother and suggested that Balanchine also audition for the ballet.

---


\(^2\) Ibid., p. 35.
academy. A dancing career in Russia was a respected one for either a male or a female. Balanchine's audition was successful, and in August of 1914, he entered the Imperial School of Theater and Ballet quite unaware that the consequences of his haphazard audition and acceptance would change the world of ballet.

During Balanchine's first year at the school, he was miserable. Not until his second year did he feel any enthusiasm for the rigors of practice and classes. The change in his attitude came after his first performance in the Maryinsky Theater. It was the custom of the Imperial School to start using the second year students in the elaborate ballet productions. This practice gave the students an excellent opportunity to take part in the productions and exposed them to the professional aspects of performance. Watching the dancers and the spectacle that was unfolding, Balanchine "was stirred by the realization that every one of them had gone through the very same schooling as he, in the same building and with many of the same teachers." After this revelation, Balanchine worked to emulate those ballet dancers. His work was rewarded with many opportunities to perform with the Imperial Ballet Company at the Maryinsky.

Music was a required subject at the Academy, and all the students were expected to learn to play the piano. The task was an easy and enjoyable one for Balanchine because of his background

---

3 Taper, Balanchine, p. 39.
4 Ibid., p. 43.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
and innate ability. He was often asked to accompany the senior students in their required final performance before graduation. It was an honor to be asked and a good opportunity for him to be recognized by the faculty. A recollection of Balanchine describing his musical aptitude during his senior years in the Academy was written by V. Kostrovitskaya, a senior instructor of classical ballet.

Among the students he was noted for his extraordinary understanding of music. He could never pass with indifference by any musical instrument. The minute he came down to our floor of the school the sounds of a piano would be heard from one of the big rehearsal halls—that would be Balanchivadze improvising or playing the most difficult compositions while waiting for the rehearsal to begin.\(^5\)

November of 1917 brought disaster to the school. With the overthrow of the Czar came the termination of all participation and support of the arts. They were seen as decadent and as a burden upon the masses.\(^6\) The Imperial School of Theater and Ballet was closed. Balanchine went to live with his aunt who lived in St. Petersburg in order to be close if the school reopened. It was very difficult to find work, and Balanchine took whatever jobs he could find.

Performances resumed eventually, but the conditions were not favorable. There was a scarcity of all staples—no fuel to

\(^5\) Taper, Balanchine, pp. 55, 56
\(^6\) Ibid., p. 51.
heat the theater and very little food. The hardships were great under the Bolshevik regime; but nevertheless, Balanchine graduated in 1921, seven years after he had been admitted. He danced in the Imperial Ballet Company for the next three years and studied music at the Petrograd Conservatory of Music. He had not as yet made a decisive choice for a career between music and choreography. He was proficient in both, and his knowledge and experience with music was to become invaluable in his choreographic career once the decision was made.

During the three years at the conservatory he continued to choreograph at every opportunity. He experimented on a group of fifteen dancers who were young students of the Academy. In his biography of Balanchine, Bernard Taper describes how these young students felt about the experience of working with him.

They met in their spare time, whenever they were free from performances or rehearsals at the state theatre, and worked enthusiastically till late into the night on the new dances Balanchivadze was choreographing. "We had confidence in Balanchivadze," one of them later said. "Gentle and shy as he was, he yet had authority among us." They felt they were creating something such as had never been seen before.7

Initially the experimentation was encouraged by the Maryinsky authorities and the dance critics of the town. As his work progressed, however, the directors of the theater began to see the new choreography as a threat to the classical traditions already

7 Taper, Balanchine, p. 60.
established. They openly ostracized him and threatened to expel any Academy students who danced with Balanchine.

The opportunity to leave Russia came the next summer when Vladimir Dimitriev, a baritone opera singer in the Maryinsky Theater, arranged a trip to Europe for himself and nine other artists. Having arrived in Berlin with very little money and no prearranged engagements, they managed to perform in some resorts during the summer and London in September. Before leaving Berlin, however, the ten artists received a telegram from Russia demanding their immediate return. Four returned, while the remaining six, five of them dancers including Balanchine, chose to defect. The group, calling themselves The Soviet State Dancers Company, received an invitation from Serge Diaghilev to audition for his Ballets Russes in Paris. The audition went smoothly. Shortly after the arrival of the Russian dancers, Bronislava Nijinska, the choreographer for the Ballets Russes, left the company. Diaghilev selected Balanchine to succeed her. He became the ballet master of the world-famous, trend-setting ballet company under the direction of the unique and capable Serge Diaghilev.

The ballet company was more than a dance company. Diaghilev was a precursor of the attempt to synthesize various art forms in his productions. He used painters of the day—Picasso, Miro, Rouault—to design costumes and scenery, and he commissioned accomplished composers—Stravinsky, Rieti, Dukelsky—to write the music. "From the moment of its [Ballets Russes] first Paris appearance in 1909, it made itself felt as a major influence on European
The process of bringing together major contemporary artists effected changes in the arts. "The company [Ballets Russes] was the darling of the smart set . . . but it also spoke to the intellectuals of the day, who treasured it for being in the forefront of the avant-garde, winning spectacular victories for important new movements in other arts besides the dance." 

During the four and a half years that Balanchine was ballet master for Diaghilev's company, he was continually exposed to a variety of art forms; as a result he became quite knowledgeable about them. It was Diaghilev's firm belief that a choreographer must have a diverse education in all of the arts. Balanchine benefited from the extraordinary talents that Diaghilev had to offer. In return, Diaghilev received ballets that matched musically and visually with the score, scenery, and costumes. Balanchine had an extraordinary ability to listen to music and translate it into movement. He was able to augment the music with movement so that the feelings conveyed by the sounds of the score were made visible to the viewer through the choreography. A prime example was Le Chant du Rossignol where "Balanchine's choreography matched well the enchantment of the fairy-tale libretto and the mysterious lyricism of Stravinsky's score . . . ." 

A turning point in Balanchine's career came when he collaborated

---

8 Taper, Balanchine, p. 80.
9 Ibid., p. 60.
10 Ibid., p. 85.
with Stravinsky on Apollon Musagète, now abbreviated Apollo. With Apollo, Balanchine evolved a new style of choreography, a neoclassical style, that became his trademark. Apollo "marked the point when he entirely rejected the artificial conventions of classical dance and instead, began to simplify its principles and vocabulary in order to match it to the classical formulas in the score provided by Stravinsky."\footnote{Joan Lawson, \textit{A History Of Ballet And Its Makers} (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd., 1964), p. 130.} Balanchine used the classical style of choreography and matched it with the music. He simplified the movements and gave them a continuity which enhanced the dramatic action. The ballet brought together two artists, a musician and a choreographer, who shared similar ideas:

\ldots firstly, that their own art was complete in itself, but could when necessary complement the other; and secondly, that the classical arts of dance and music presuppose certain generalizations upon form and technique to the exclusion of the romantic idea that the individual with his moods, emotions and actions is the more important part of any work of art.\footnote{Ibid.}  

The last ballet that Balanchine was to do before Diaghilev's death was The Prodigal Son, another huge success. The theme of The Prodigal Son was Biblical and involved basic emotions. Balanchine created choreography which used the principles of classical technique but which was free of a strict classical style. As a result, the dramatic action of the story was heightened by the choreography. In The Prodigal Son he utilized what he had learned
from his collaboration with Stravinsky and that contributed to the success of Apollo. "...Balanchine created such rapport between the dance and Prokofiev's score that all its emotional surge, melody and rhythms were seen, heard and felt, ..."\(^{13}\)

Diaghilev had abused his health throughout his career and in August of 1929 he died of diabetes. The Ballets Russes collapsed. The next four years were unsettled for Balanchine. He suffered a major illness, tuberculosis, which involved several months of recuperation. When his health returned, he choreographed for Sir Charles B. Cochran in the "Cochran Revue" of England. He spent six months in Copenhagen as the guest ballet master of the Royal Danish Ballet. He returned to London and worked with Sir Oswald Stoll on variety shows. In the Autumn of 1931, Balanchine was asked by René Blum to become ballet master to a new company which Blum was attempting to organize in Monte Carlo. Balanchine remained with that new company, the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo as it was eventually to be named, for a year.\(^{14}\) With the patronage of Edward James, a British socialite, Balanchine was able to create his own company called Les Ballets; but the company lasted only a year. With the company's demise in 1933, he was without any interesting prospects for the immediate future. One important result, however, of the engagements of Les Ballets was the attendance by

\(^{13}\) Lawson, A History of Ballet And Its Makers, p. 131.

\(^{14}\) Taper, Balanchine, p. 143.
Lincoln Kirstein at one of its performances. Kirstein invited Balanchine to join him in the creation of an American ballet. Balanchine arrived in the United States on October 18, 1933.
Since childhood Lincoln Kirstein had shown a particular interest in ballet. As a renowned patron of the arts, he was able to act upon a lifetime dream by inviting Balanchine to bring ballet to the United States. After seeing Balanchine's La Chatte and Apollon Musagète in a London production, he knew that Balanchine was the choreographer to assist him in establishing a ballet school, a company, and a ballet audience. In Kirstein's mind Balanchine was the best. "I knew that what Balanchine made meant ballet to me, because ballet was about dancing to music, not about painting to pantomime." In 1933 very few people in the United States had even seen ballet performed or had any conception of ballet as an artistic expression.

The time was not auspicious to bring the young choreographer to the United States, but Kirstein was determined. With the financial assistance of his friend, Edward Warburg, he proposed a plan which would provide Balanchine with young dancers, studio space, and a small faculty. Balanchine was to be chairman of the three member faculty, and the school was to be known as the School of

1 Taper, Balanchine, p. 161.

2 Lincoln Kirstein, "To Do Again," Theatre Arts, September, 1976, p. 70.
American Ballet. "The official opening date . . . was January 1, 1934, and classes began the next day, with some twenty-five students in attendance." The first choreography Balanchine created for the new school was the ballet Serenade. It was a choreographic attempt to teach the young novices of ballet about the necessity of discipline and order in daily class instruction.

Balanchine devised it [Serenade] as a lesson for the students in his school's advanced class. He wanted to show them how the fundamental steps they were painfully trying to master can become transformed, when shaped by a choreographer, into something more than routine exercises. . . .

Kirstein and Balanchine were perhaps overly anxious to promote the school and scheduled a two week engagement in New York City beginning March 1, 1935. The performance by the company, now called the American Ballet, were not highly successful, although neither Kirstein nor Balanchine interpreted the lack of enthusiasm as an indication of the company's immaturity. They scheduled a fourteen week tour of the United States which collapsed soon after its beginning. Both the arrival of Balanchine in America and Kirstein's enthusiasm for an American ballet audience were premature. In his book Modern Ballet, John Martin, a New York Times dance critic, states that "The bringing of Balanchine to America in 1933 was an event of considerably greater moment than anybody

---

3 Taper, Balanchine, p. 164.

4 Ibid., p. 168.
Before embarking on the ill-fated and short-lived tour, the American Ballet was invited by the Metropolitan Opera to be their resident ballet company. The invitation was received with enthusiasm, but it waned as the relationship between the Metropolitan Opera and the ballet company grew strained.

There was ... an almost immediate clash of artistic policy. Balanchine has always believed in the purity of dance and that nothing--story, costumes, scenery--should distract the attention from it. ... Also, Balanchine is a phenomenally musical choreographer ... Consequently, his works are renowned for their musical abstraction and their subtle emotional approach.

The Met wanted a ballet company which would supplement the opera company's performances, not dominate them. The fresh and innovative Balanchine choreography was a threat to the established tradition of opera ballets. "Rather, it [the Metropolitan Opera] required the more traditional and spectacular works with which everyone ... was familiar." Balanchine also expected to be able to use the opera house for exclusive evenings of ballet. The opportunity for the ballet evenings came only twice during the three year contract. Balanchine stayed with the opera company from the fall of 1935 to the beginning of 1938. "Early in 1938, the

---

5 Taper, Balanchine, p. 173.


7 Ibid., p. 15.
Metropolitan Opera and the American Ballet separated on bad terms amidst considerable publicity." The experience was a bitter one for Balanchine.

He could adjust himself amicably to the quirks and demands of commercial entrepreneurs, since he knew in advance how little their business had to do with making art as compared with making money. From the Met he had expected something very different. Indeed, he had been sure when he first signed his contract with the Met that this was the beginning of a lasting association and a magnificent, creative era in opera and ballet.

When the American Ballet left the Met, they could not survive financially on their own. They disbanded the ballet company altogether.

Without a ballet company or school Balanchine could have been totally forgotten, but the demise of the association with the Met,

... forced Balanchine much against his inclinations into the Broadway theatre from time to time. But whatever his personal objections may have been he ushered in a new era in musical comedy dancing...  

His success in Hollywood and on Broadway was immediate. "He quickly established himself as the best in the business, and had more offers of shows than he could handle." Whenever an opportunity to

---

8 Doeser, *Ballet And Dance*, p. 15.
choreograph a ballet arose, Balanchine was quick to fulfill the invitation. In 1941, Nelson Rockefeller proposed a goodwill tour of Latin America. The ballet company was called the American Ballet Caravan and the intention of the tour was "... to reveal to the people of South America, through a medium that transcended the language barrier, that the North American colossus had a soul and was not just a grasping imperialist." 

The Latin American tour ended after four months and Balanchine returned to Hollywood. In 1944 the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo extended an invitation to Balanchine to restore its prominence. For two years Balanchine concentrated his efforts on ballet and brought the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo back to its zenith. Balanchine knew, however, that his stay would not be permanent. His conceptions about ballet differed immensely with Serge Denham, the company's general director. When Lincoln Kirstein proposed that Balanchine return to the United States and join him in a rejuvenation of their original balletic effort, Balanchine consented and began work immediately. With the new and different name of Ballet Society, their first performance was November 20, 1946. The place and setting for the performance was quite unsatisfactory.

---

12 Taper, Balanchine, p. 214.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., p. 219.
The chairs were hard; the stage was merely a raised surface with a curtain; there was no orchestra pit. The fifty members of the orchestra were seated in full sight at floor level, partially obstructing the spectators' view of the stage, and the conductor, on a small raised platform, presented a further obstruction to vision.\(^{15}\)

In addition, the atmosphere created in the bleak hall was almost offensive.

The audience was kept waiting for half an hour for the first curtain, during which time the sound of hammering and other construction work could be heard going on behind the curtain and the orchestra tuned up and practiced difficult passages over and over.\(^{16}\)

The result, however, of the evening's ballet was artistically rewarding. After the curtain went up, Chujoy writes in his history about the New York City Ballet that "The long wait, the uncomfortable seats, all the impediments of the auditorium and stage were immediately forgotten, for there was magic on the stage."\(^{17}\)

A few months later Balanchine accepted an invitation to be the guest ballet master with the Paris Opera for a season. His style, however, was not what the Parisian audience desired. They thrived on "... a spider web of intrigue, bussing with rumors, machinations, plots and counterplots."\(^{18}\) Balanchine walked away from all of the intrigue, indifferent to it, and refused to be a part of it.

\(^{15}\) Taper, Balanchine, p. 224.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

His treatment of the Parisian dancers was different from that to which they were accustomed. "In general, the members of the Paris company respected Balanchine but were somewhat disconcerted by his reserve." Balanchine was not the type of choreographer to fuss over his dancers, and "They were used to Lifar, [the previous ballet master] making a great fuss over them, and some of them missed that kind of excitement." Balanchine had considered working both the Paris Opera and Ballet Society, dividing his time between Paris and New York, but his differences of style occasioned his departure. During the fall of 1948 he resumed responsibilities for his New York based company.

The second season provided Balanchine with another opportunity for a collaboration with Stravinsky. In Orpheus the two men were able to unite their talents in such a way that another extraordinary ballet was created. Their efforts were doubly rewarded because at the premiere of Orpheus, the chairman of the City Center's finance committee, Morton Baum, was in attendance. He was so enamoured with the ballet that he arranged for the Ballet Society to become the performing group for the City Center. Their name was changed to the New York City Ballet. Balanchine became the artistic director and Lincoln Kirstein acted as general director. For the next three years the New York City Ballet expanded its repertoire and strengthened its forces. They had a permanent home, a place to perform and a guaranteed income, and they were the first ballet company in the

---

19 Taper, Balanchine, p. 233.
20 Ibid.
United States to become a public institution. Their reputation was spreading as one of the finest ballet companies in the world. With an invitation from the Royal Ballet in Britain to perform a seven week engagement at Covent Garden, the reputation was solidified. Balanchine was in his element, and his company was thriving. The New York City Ballet had a style quite unlike any other ballet company in the world, and George Balanchine was responsible for the invention of its style and for the company's triumphs.
The three objectives that Lincoln Kirstein had set out to achieve for the United States in 1933—the creation of a ballet school, the formation of a ballet company, and the development of a ballet audience—became reality after nearly two decades of struggle. The 1950's brought attention to the New York City Ballet, which in turn brought enthusiasm for ballet and notoriety to the School of American Ballet along with widespread acclaim for the company's dancing style. The success of the school, the company, and the development of this particular style has been attributed solely to George Balanchine.

He [Balanchine] had founded a school, a company, a style, a repertory—a range of achievements, as could be seen now, matched by few, if any, individuals in the history of ballet. He had become, without question, the dominant figure in ballet for the present era.¹

Balanchine's unique position with the New York City Ballet as teacher, choreographer, and artistic director has given him the opportunity to create a distinctive style of ballet. His background and the working principles he has established through the years have contributed to the success of his ballets. In order to describe his style, it is expedient to examine it in terms of three principles—

musicality, neo-classicism, and eduction of ability. The remaining three chapters will be devoted to an examination of these principles.
CHAPTER IV

MUSICALITY

George Balanchine spent the first ten years of his life in a home in which music was an important cultural value.¹ His mother gave him piano lessons at the age of five; and although he was not enthusiastic about practicing, she insisted that he learn to play. On a normal day of practice while Balanchine was playing a Beethoven sonata, he was suddenly struck with "... the potential beauty and grandeur of the music..."² That meaningful moment helped the young Balanchine to begin to understand and appreciate music. The cultural atmosphere of his home fostered an aptitude with the piano which was to aid Balanchine throughout his choreographic career.

Balanchine's proclivity for the piano was constantly evident while he was studying ballet at the Imperial School of Theatre and Ballet. He was never able to pass by an empty practice room or available piano without stopping to play or improvise on the instrument.³ Because of his abilities he was frequently asked to accompany senior students in their final recitals.⁴ After graduating from the ballet academy, Balanchine entered the Petrograd Conservatory of Music

¹ Taper, Balanchine, p. 36.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid., p. 56.
⁴ Ibid., p. 47.
where he studied for three years while dancing with the Imperial Ballet company. "All this intensive training, such as no other choreographer has ever had, was to prove invaluable to him."\(^5\)

Among the many influences of his youth, one in particular was to affect him greatly. It was an experience which inspired him to eliminate the tradition of the storyline ballet in his choreography. Fokine was a traditionalist whose choreography was devoted to Russian ballets which had a definite storyline. *Les Sylphides* was a ballet that "... evoked a mood just by dancing, without any story..."\(^6\) It was one of the few storyless ballets that Fokine choreographed for the Imperial company, but it was the one that affected Balanchine the most. Because of his Imperial training Balanchine attempted to find a literal interpretation to the Fokine ballet where there was none. It intrigued him that a ballet could portray beauty through movement alone, without the help of a plot. Taper wrote of this puzzlement over the ballet,

> At that time, as a boy, he took it for granted that all ballets were required to tell a story; later in life he was to make the storyless ballet his most characteristic medium.\(^7\)

Fokine's influence and Balanchine's strong musical background combined to develop the style which was to eliminate a dependence on the storyline ballet and to produce movement choreographed solely


\(^6\) Ibid., p. 64.

\(^7\) Ibid.
to music. A further influence on Balanchine's development of this style was Serge Diaghilev.

Working with Diaghilev from 1924 to 1929 was an excellent apprenticeship for Balanchine. Diaghilev introduced him to some of the finest musicians, painters, and artists of the day. By far the most important introduction was to Stravinsky. Their first collaboration produced Apollo, and for Balanchine it was "... pivotal in his own development." He has considered it a turning point in his life. The ballet was plotless and exquisitely combined movement with the score. He has said about it that,

Apollo is sometimes criticized for not being "of the theater" [because] it has no plot. But the technique is that of classical ballet, which is in every way theatrical, and it is here used to project sound directly into visible movement.

Balanchine's remarkable background in music, his dance training in the classical vocabulary, and his basic experimental nature merged in the creation of Apollo. Balanchine choreographed ten ballets for Diaghilev. It was an invaluable experience to work for such a giant, the "... greatest magician in the world of art." Claudia Cassidy has written about those productive years in a review of Balanchine ballets.

---

9 Ibid.
10 Claudia Cassidy, "Mr. B of Ballet," *Chicago*, April 1979, p. 158.
Four crucial years in the life of George Balanchine. From the cradle of ballet tradition, this already rebellious experimenter now worked with iconoclasts--Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Picasso, Cocteau, Matisse, the brilliant, far-out Pavel Tchelitchev. He had renowned dancers. He rehearsed the company, danced with it, and choreographed ten new ballets.11

The development of Balanchine's choreography was beginning to exhibit his remarkable sense of musicality. The thirteen years between Balanchine's arrival in the United States and the establishment of the New York City Ballet were turbulent years for American ballet. The American audience was not educated in appreciation of ballet; their exposure to dance came from travelling vaudeville shows. With his work in Hollywood Balanchine was able to arrange the dance episodes in the musical comedies as "... miniature ballets. They were distinguished from other diversions by their musical originality, self-sufficiency, and style."12 He was paving the way for the acceptance by the American public of an American ballet company. Lincoln Kirstein has written of this period of Balanchine's choreographic efforts,

His choreography drew attention to dance design, to the fact that it had its own integrity as part of the entertainment, and that the pattern was not an improvisation for star performers but a carefully formulated, predesigned map of movement.13

11 Cassidy, Chicago, p. 158.
12 Reynolds, Repertory in Review, p. 7.
13 Ibid.
With the American public ready for a ballet company, Balanchine began choreographing for the New York City Ballet company. His Russian background in classical technique, his strong musical foundation, his varied experiences in Europe and the United States produced a style strong in musicality and inventiveness. At the very basis of this unique choreographic style was a purely musical approach. Jamake Highwater has written about Balanchine's choreography as having "... a very special grasp of music and his most inventive choreography seems to be the result of the imagination demanded of him by music."^14 Joseph Mazo spent a year with the New York City Ballet, participating in its daily routines and performances. He has written that,

Ballet, especially Balanchine ballet, is built on music. The structure of the piece frequently orders the structure of the dance; the mood and rhythms of the music dictate the choreography. The style and spirit of the music's period are transmitted to everything that appears on stage—the steps, the costumes, the lighting, even the size of the cast.^15

MUSICALITY AS EXEMPLIFIED IN CHOREOGRAPHIC WORKS

Balanchine's musical approach to choreography and his accomplished style can be seen in his many choreographic works. Duo Concertant was choreographed for the Stravinsky Festival in June of

---


1972. The music by Stravinsky was written for violin and piano. The two musicians performed on stage with the dancers. The ballet was an excellent example of Balanchine's ability to augment the music with movement, sacrificing neither the accompaniment nor the choreography. Of this integration, Nancy Reynolds has written,

An instance of this extraordinary musicality is Stravinsky's Duo Concertant, which is actually a double duet for two instruments and two dancers. There is here as much duration of sonority without steps or movement as that accompanying the dancing itself. Piano and violin spin their aural choreography in air the dancers seem to inhale; it overtakes them, or rather they take over the music in a complex weaving of mobile and sonorous complexity visibly activated, presenting a fusion of ear, eye, and mind. Although miniature in scale, the ballet fills a large stage with the concentration of this magical interchange.16

Another Stravinsky-Balanchine collaboration produced Agon acclaimed as "... plainly a masterpiece of our time."17 Balanchine was able to use his remarkable musicality in combination with a complicated score. The score itself was designed by Stravinsky to dictate the choreography, to leave only the steps to the choreographer and nothing else. This could have been an enormous obstacle for Balanchine but instead resulted in "... perhaps Balanchine's most inventive composition."18 Jamake Highwater goes on to comment,

16 Reynolds, Repertory in Review, p. 11.
17 Ibid., p. 182.
There has never been a ballet score which attempted to do the choreographer's job to such an extent. It would seem that George Balanchine's only requirement in bringing *Agon* to the stage was providing fill for Stravinsky's thorough choreographic plan. The miracle, however, is that *Agon* turned out to be the superb dance it is.\(^{19}\)

In her chronicle of the repertory of the New York City Ballet, Nancy Reynolds has written of *Agon*.

It does, of course, mirror the rhythms, the dynamics, and the witticisms of the music, but it does have a character of its own, for the movements are not only extensions of sound into physical substance but they also comment upon the score, occasionally tease it, race with it, rest with it, play with it.\(^{20}\)

Balanchine has choreographed ballets to works of many other composers. One of these was *Concerto Barocco*, a work for violins by Bach. In this ballet he was able to choreograph the movement "... in simple but absolute alliance with the body of strings ... the essence of the music propelled its echo in motion. ..."\(^{21}\)

The four works previously discussed are representative of Balanchine's use of musicality in his choreography. This musicality pervades his works to the extent that he has been considered a genius by many of his fellow artists.\(^{22}\) Igor Stravinsky was "... impressed by Balanchine's remarkable musicality and his

\(^{19}\)Highwater, *Dance, Rituals of Experience*, p. 179.


\(^{21}\)Ibid., p. 6.

ability to translate the rhythm, melody, harmony and the intangible qualities of a musical score into the visual patterns of dance."\textsuperscript{23}

In answer to a question posed to him by an interviewer from \textit{Newsweek Magazine} about his ballets without a plot, Balanchine responded,

For me, movement is visual logic—a story in itself. Ballet is visual and aural. So we have to hear and we have to see... I want to show public what great music is. Not to express it but to dance with it... So I do it. I try to make cafe au lait. Coffee is one thing, Milk another. But together cafe au lait--inseparable. If you don't like the ballet, close your eyes and just listen to the music.\textsuperscript{24}


\textsuperscript{24}_______, "Celebrating Mr. B," \textit{Newsweek}, February 12, 1979, p. 59.
CHAPTER V

NEO-CLASSICISM

For the purposes of clarification in the present chapter, the definitions which follow will elucidate the discussion of neo-classicism. Classical and neo-classical are defined in Webster's Third New International Dictionary as follows:

Classical . . . of or relating to a form or system felt to be of first significance before modern times; as (5): of, relating to or felt to suggest traditional ballets (as in formality or grace of movement).1

Neoclassical . . . of, relating to, or having the characteristics of a style of artistic expression that is based on or felt to be based on the classical style.2

Style and technique have been defined by the writer as follows: Style is the artistic vision of an idea form which becomes characteristic in the manner of presentation of an individual choreographer; technique is the transference of the artistic vision (style) into a visual form.

The training that Balanchine received as a student in the Imperial Academy was in the classical tradition of the Russian Imperial schools. Most of the repertory danced at the Maryinsky Theater by the Imperial Company was choreographed in this tradition

1Webster's Third New International Dictionary, s.v., "Classical."
2Ibid., s.v., "Neoclassical."
by Marius Petipa. It was during Balanchine's second year, at the age of eleven, that he began performing the Maryinsky repertory. As a member of the Imperial company for thirteen years, Balanchine became very familiar with the Petipa ballets. "He had stored Petipa up in his very muscles, having danced in nearly all the Petipa ballets, since they constituted virtually the entire Maryinsky repertory."\(^3\)

Toward the end of his schooling, Balanchine began choreographing whenever he had the opportunity. The first showing of his choreography was a program called "Evenings of the Young Ballet."\(^4\) The established, conservative patrons of the ballet who were in attendance that evening found the choreography shocking. The younger people of the audience were very enthusiastic. The performance,

\[\ldots\] created a sensation such as nobody had anticipated. "The whole town started talking of Balanchivadze," writes Kostrovitskaya in her memoir of him.\(^5\)

Balanchine's choreography was a radical departure from the traditional forms of ballet familiar to the Russian audience. It was his experiment with a different style. He was attempting to use the vocabulary of the classic dance in a contemporary manner.

Balanchine continued to experiment on his own, driven by a


\(^4\) Ibid., p. 61.

\(^5\) Ibid., p. 67.
desire to use the classic dance as a vehicle for giving pleasure to his audience and creating ballets for the beauty of the movement. The four years he spent as ballet master to Serge Diaghilev's Ballet Russes in Paris were crucial in the maturation of his balletic style. Diaghilev encouraged all of the artists with whom he worked to experiment in their artistic endeavors. In fact, the Ballets Russes was known for its major influences on European culture. During these years, Balanchine thrived on the exposure to the major talents of Europe and the freedom to experiment accorded him in his choreographic field.

The gradual development of Balanchine's style of choreography occurred in two stages.

The first took place in Russia, where, at the ballet school and at the Maryinsky Theatre, he learned to love ballet, developed a profound respect for its history, tradition and fundamental principles and, most significant of all, acquired a mastery of all aspects of ballet technique. The second stage began when he had the good fortune to be taken into Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes as the company's choreographer. It was during his four and a half years with Diaghilev that Balanchine's aesthetic outlook was shaped, his canons of judgment were established, his taste was refined—that, in short, he became an artist as well as a technician.

Balanchine's arrival in the United States furthered the development of his distinct style of dance. In her chapter on "Neoclassicism I," the noted dance critic Marcia Siegel has written,

6 Taper, Balanchine, p. 63.
7 Ibid., p. 79.
. . . the first American dancers were not imitators, they were explorers. Even those who worked within the classical ballet vocabulary seemed to want to reshape its syntax. . . . Certainly Balanchine and Anthony Tudor, our most influential transplanted choreographers, must have felt they had entered a climate more receptive to experimentation.\(^8\)

She conjectured that perhaps the literal separation from their homeland by the ocean may have contributed to the spirit of experimentation. The United States fostered this spirit of openness to new ideas so that artists were "much more capable of reinventing the modes of art."\(^9\)

Balanchine's association with Lincoln Kirstein provided him with the freedom he had always needed to experiment with inventive dance in the classical tradition. "He has been able to forge ahead into new dimensions precisely because he could build upon the requisite vocabulary he has always carried with him."\(^10\) In his book about the New York City Ballet, Anatole Chujoy has written about Balanchine's style,

>If any choreographer can be credited with creating a new style in classic ballet, it is, of course, Balanchine. And if we must have a label for Balanchine's style, it could with excellent justification be called neo-classic.\(^11\)


\(^9\) Ibid., p. 69.


In her dance review of the New York City Ballet, Anne Kisselgoff wrote a tribute to the company and its director-choreographer. She captured the basic tenet of Balanchine's neo-classicism—the reconciliation of tradition and innovation,

Stated directly, this creed holds that tradition is the base for innovation. To break the rules, one has to learn them first. The hallmark of the Balanchine style is, in fact, his conscious use of tradition as a springboard for renewal. If Balanchine is called Petipa's heir, it is not simply because he has chosen to work in Petipa's idiom. It is also because he has used the training of the Petipa heritage and developed its classicism into something new, a 20th century neo-classicism. Tradition to Balanchine, has not been a constriction but a liberation.12

Balanchine utilizes the vocabulary of classical ballet but augments it with innovative invention. Specifically he takes the plié (bending of the knees) and adds it to a balance or movement on point or, similarly, he takes a pirouette (turn) on point and adds a plié to it. The classical smooth line has been changed to become angular.

Over the years his dancers came to look more angular than softly rounded; he exaggerated the transfer of weight from one leg to the other by bringing the hips and pelvis into play; he gave more articulation to the foot; his dancers' line became subtly distorted to make us more aware of the connections between different parts of the body rather than of the body as one smooth, harmoniously working whole.13

13 Siegel, The Shapes Of Change, p. 70.
NEO-CLASSICISM AS EXEMPLIFIED IN
CHOREOGRAPHIC WORKS

Balanchine has kept the classic tradition of ballet alive
through experimentation and innovation in his works. This neo­
classical style can be seen in Agon, a ballet choreographed to the
music of Igor Stravinsky for twelve dancers.

Every movement of Agon relates to balletic tradition,
yet the movements are strangely new. Like the music
of Stravinsky, the dance is eminently ordered and ex­
ceedingly clear in exposition, resting in a balanced,
neoclassical framework. . . .

Another excellent example of neo-classicism, Symphony in C, was
first performed in 1948 and has been retained in the repertory with
great success. The critic Anatole Chujoy wrote enthusiastically of
the ballet,

If there ever was any doubt that Balanchine was the
greatest choreographer of our time, this doubt was dis­
pelled when the curtain came down on his Symphony in C.
Here is a classic ballet that will go down in history
as the finest example of this thrilling art form.

There are several concepts of classical ballet which are
recognized as traditional elements of choreography. For example,
the corps are treated as anonymous dancers and given movements to
be performed in unison. This results in emphasizing the soloists


and de-emphasizing the corps dancers. "Classical ballet's concept of the corps is extremely dehumanized." The corps' function is to complement the main characters of the ballet and to fill in the area of the stage. A ballet which utilizes this traditional concept was choreographed by Balanchine in 1941 to Bach's Double Violin Concerto. Marcia Siegel has discussed Concerto Barocco in some detail in her latest book. She examined Balanchine's use of the corps "... as a choreographic element interesting in itself ..." without jeopardizing the role of the soloists.

Balanchine immediately makes the corps more personal by reducing its size. Instead of seeing it as an unobtrusive sort of second layer to the main action, like the lower parts of a string section in an orchestra, he imagines the corps as an instrumental colleague of the principals, with a complex texture of its own, like a piano.

Two works which Balanchine has choreographed for his company are considered to be traditional works, The Nutcracker and the second act of Swan Lake. They have been "... freely staged by him to suit his company's personnel and his own preferences." Balanchine's contemporary classicism has explored new possibilities in ballet. His innovations have proven that out of tradition it is possible to be innovative and at the same time pleasing. Edwin

---

16 Siegel, The Shapes Of Change, p. 104.
17 Ibid., p. 105.
18 Ibid., pp. 104-105.
19 Taper, Balanchine, p. 261.
Denby has written about Balanchine's unique classicism and its relationship to society,

The secrets of emotion Balanchine reveals are like those of Mozart, tender, joyous and true. He leaves the audience with a civilized happiness. His art is peaceful and exciting, as classic art has always been.\(^{20}\)

\(^{20}\) *Taper, Balanchine*, p. 261.
CHAPTER VI

EDUCTION OF ABILITY

The third principle evident in the choreographic process of George Balanchine involves his expertise at working with individual dancers. The execution of a sequence of movements is one of the crucial elements of a dance. As a choreographer, Balanchine has developed a process which utilizes to their best advantage those abilities peculiar to individual dancers. The process involves the recognition of individual proficiencies as well as the eduction of those proficiencies.

After Serge Diaghilev's death in 1929, Europe was without a major ballet company and although there had been rumors of new companies being formed, none had materialized. In 1931 Rene Blum began organizing a company which was to become the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. As ballet master for Blum's new company, Balanchine set out to recruit new talent.

While in Paris on this occasion Balanchine had discovered three prodigies, children of Russian emigres, whom he had engaged. These were the trio upon whom American publicity agents were before long to pin the label of "the baby ballerinas"--Irina Baronova, who was twelve; Tamara Toumanova, who was thirteen; and Tatiana Riabouchinska, who was all of fifteen. . . .Balanchine intended to feature them prominently in the new works he planned to create for the company.1

Having to work with intense concentration was a challenge to the three young dancers. At times they would appear extremely mature in their dedication and at other times childish in their behaviors. Balanchine was able to reconcile the differences between their innocence and extraordinary abilities in the choreography he devised. "In the ballets he created for them Balanchine succeeded in making a remarkable synthesis—a new artistic essence—out of these incongruities."\(^2\)

In Cotillon, a ballet he made for Toumanova, Balanchine created choreography which combined the excitement of a young girl's first ball with the insecurity of its unknowns. "Here dazzling choreography, which showed off the technical precocity of Toumanova and the others in the ballet, was combined with a wistful, bittersweet atmosphere, shy yet sophisticated, and somehow terribly poignant even in the midst of exuberance."\(^3\) La Concurrence was another ballet which Balanchine choreographed for one of the young dancers. In it he was able to capitalize on the youth and the excellent technical expertise of Baronova.

When Balanchine moved to the United States at Lincoln Kirstein's request, he was intrigued and delighted with the prospect of working with American dancers. The young girls he began to work with were innocent and eager, bringing a freshness to their work. The American dancers,

---

\(^2\) Taper, Balanchine, p. 146.

\(^3\) Ibid.
were basketball champions and queens of the tennis court, whose proper domain was athletics. They were long-legged, long-necked, slim-hipped, and capable of endless acrobatic virtuosity. The drum majorette, the cheerleader of the high-school football team of the thirties filled his eye.  

Balanchine worked with his American dancers, challenging them to perform progressively more difficult technical feats and to achieve greater command of ballet. The first dance he created for them was Serenade, a ballet which was intended to teach the students the results of rigorous daily practice. He wanted them to understand the process of perfecting the fundamental steps and turning the routines into a ballet. Balanchine created a fresh and uncomplicated ballet which reflected both the spirit of his dancers and the spirit of simplicity. His choreographic process demonstrated his remarkable ability to use dancers and circumstances to create a masterpiece.

So, with a string serenade by Tchaikovsky for his music, he improvised choreography around his students. The first evening he worked on it, seventeen girls were present, so he choreographed the opening scene for seventeen, demonstrating how that awkward number of dancers could be arranged on the stage in an interesting manner. The next evening, only nine girls were present, and the third evening six; at each session he simply choreographed to the music with whatever students he had. Male students began attending the classes, and he worked them in. At one point, where the girls were supposed to rush out, one fell down and began to cry. He choreographed the incident right into the ballet. Another

---


5 Taper, Balanchine, p. 168.
evening, a girl showed up late. That went in, too. It must have been not only an illuminating but a delightful series of lessons.\(^6\)

Between the years 1938 and 1946, Balanchine choreographed for Broadway musicals and for Hollywood. The dancers with whom he worked were vaudeville performers whose pasts had demanded perfection of one single act. "Balanchine found new ways to make them surprisingly different while retaining their individual characters."\(^7\) The musical "Cabin in the Sky" demonstrated Balanchine's remarkable proficiency at creating roles for dancers whose backgrounds limited their versatility.

In the musical "Cabin in the Sky" (1940), he was among the first to use black dancers, American, Cuban, and Puerto Rican, in a way that enhanced their own ethnic style without vulgarization or recourse to the prototypes of ordinary tap dancing, inherited from minstrel shows, ragtime, and early jazz.\(^8\)

In 1946 Balanchine and Kirstein rejoined forces and established the School of American Ballet. They developed the school to provide training for young dancers who would eventually enter the company. "At the School of American Ballet, Balanchine wisely trained his future ballerinas from childhood."\(^9\) This unique position of teacher-director-choreographer has given Balanchine the leverage to

\(^6\)Taper, Balanchine, p. 168.

\(^7\)Reynolds, Repertory in Review, p. 7.

\(^8\)Ibid.

familiarize the dancers with his technical demands and with his choreographic style. Equally as important, it has also provided Balanchine the opportunity to observe the dancers' innate abilities. An excellent example of such a student rising to success in the company has been Suzanne Farrell who became a member of the New York City Ballet as soon as she graduated from the School of American Ballet. Balanchine choreographed Meditation expressly for her.¹⁰ She has been called the "perfect Balanchine dancer"--the image of the slim, long-legged American athlete that Balanchine first admired in the United States. The two of them have worked together with respect and understanding. Farrell's understanding has been an almost uncanny knowledge of what Balanchine has wanted out of her and what he has desired in the choreography he has designed for her.

Violette Verdy was another performer who was also trained in the school and joined the company. Balanchine created roles specifically for Verdy, a process which he has developed where he "...tailor[s] the steps to the dancer with whom [he is] working. When another performer takes over the part, the role changes."¹¹ Verdy has left the company and the roles have changed when other performers danced them. Kay Mazzo and Peter Martins have performed


Duo Concertant and in it Balanchine has displayed each of their attributes to their best advantage.

Balanchine provided the elegant, small-boned, wistful Mazzo with her most fitting role. As for Martins, Gellen wrote: "Balanchine has understood that there is another part of [him] that is not Apollo, not that large, glamorboy, space-filling dancer. He has given him steps and movements that are very small, and he has made Martins articulate in a way we have never seen before. Balanchine has made a role that lets him be fast and delicate, and he is brilliant."\(^\text{12}\)

Raymonda was first choreographed in 1946, and Balanchine has used the Alexander Glazunov's "Raymonda" score for two ballets since then. When Melissa Hayden announced her retirement from the company, after twenty years of performing Balanchine's ballets, Balanchine choreographed a new version of Raymonda specifically for her.

For this ballet, Mr. B. chose the music to suit a dancer. . . .he choreographed a ballet using material with which Milly [Melissa Hayden] already had achieved not only success, but identity, "I made it for Melissa," he said. . . .\(^\text{13}\)

Balanchine has developed a creative process of choreography which demonstrates the dancer's best abilities. "His imagination is challenged and guided by the human material, by the dancer's personality."\(^\text{14}\) He has organized a school which trains students in

---

\(^{12}\) Reynolds, *Repertory in Review*, p. 298.

\(^{13}\) Mazo, *Dance Is A Contact Sport*, p. 116.

the style he prefers. The result has been a marvelous American company which performs American ballet.

As a workshop for his ideas he formed the New York City Ballet. This month, as he turned 75, Mr. B. was being acclaimed as the founder of an American ballet tradition in classical ballet, and his company as possibly the greatest in the world.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{15}Life Magazine, Volume 2, Number 1, January, 1979, p. 61.
SUMMARY

It has been forty seven years since the arrival of George Balanchine in the United States. During those years Balanchine created the School of American Ballet from which are graduated highly accomplished and professional dancers.

When Lincoln Kirstein and I began to work together and started the School of American Ballet in 1934, we knew that our dancers would one day be admired throughout the world. This happened much more rapidly than we imagined.¹

He directed a ballet company which has grown in stature and has become world renowned. He has instructed the American public in an appreciation for ballet.

New audiences for ballet, of course, are not created by new dances that have just a passing interest. What makes an audience, what makes a newcomer committed is a dance that will cause him to ask, "When can I see that again?" Those are the ballets we are all looking for...Audiences cannot be trained, of course, only advised a little--most of all advised to go to the ballet and to keep on going.²

Balanchine has developed a distinctive style of dance and choreographed numerous ballets most of which have been retained in the repertory of the New York City Ballet. The success of his style


²Ibid., p. ix.
has been the most significant factor which has made the New York City Ballet a highly respected ballet company. This style is a combination of Balanchine's cultural heritage and background, his artistic inventiveness, and his extremely effective manner of dealing with the individual dancers of his school and company.

Balanchine's Russian background in classical technique established a strong foundation in ballet movement. His musical expertise acquired at home and at the music academy was invaluable in the development of the remarkable musicality present in his ballets.

Choreographically, Balanchine has combined his classical vocabulary of traditional ballet with his musicality.

To him, it [the music] is the foundation of ballet. "The music dictates the patterns," he says. "The rhythm gives us the floor on which we can dance..." 3

Balanchine began to choreograph while attending the Imperial Ballet School. He began by inventing new ways of moving utilizing the traditional vocabulary of classical ballet. The venture was popular with his dancers but not with his teachers or with the management of the theatre.

Meanwhile I had become interested in choreography. I do not know how to explain this interest. I had learned to dance, to move, I loved music, and suddenly I wanted to move people to music, to arrange dances. In 1920 I had arranged my first ballet, ... which was danced by my fellow students at the school. The boys and girls who

---

were in my ballet liked it very much, though its quality of movement was new to them. Our teachers did not like it at all.  

The combination of tradition and innovation is the basic tenet of his neo-classical style.

With the creation of the New York City Ballet, Balanchine has developed an astounding ability to detect and display his dancers' expertise. Choreographing dances which present his company members at their peak of perfection has sold out the box office season after season.

Balanchine's musicality, his neo-classical style and his ability to educe the best from his dancers are three principles which combine to create magnificent choreography. The New York City Ballet company is the workshop and the showplace for Balanchine's remarkable genius.

It is not for me to comment on the New York City Ballet: this would be like a father telling you about his own children. I can only invite you to come and see it . . . . Only by seeing ballet repeatedly in the theatre can you understand why it has entertained audiences for three hundred years and how it has given some of us happiness because we have been able to provide some of that pleasure.

---

5 Ibid., p. 805.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCE


SECONDARY SOURCES


__________. "Celebrating Mr. B. (George Balanchine)." *Newsweek,* Vol. 93, February 12, 1979, pp. 56-59.


