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Ballet Review



From the Winter 2013 issue of *Ballet Review*

Robert Barnett

On the cover: Wendy Whelan in *Restless Creature*

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- 4 Balanchine's Revolution – Jay Rogoff
- 6 Hamburg – Gary Smith
- 8 Copenhagen – Ilona Landgraf
- 9 New York – Gary Smith
- 11 Cooperstown, NY – Jay Rogoff
- 12 Stuttgart – Gary Smith
- 13 Letter to the Editor – Barbara Palfy

Frank O'Hara

- 14 *Roma*

Kevin Ng

- 20 A Conversation with Daniil Simkin

Francis Mason

- 26 Linda Hodes on Graham

Leigh Witchel

- 31 Traveling Man

Joel Lobenthal

- 36 A Conversation with Robert Barnett

Harris Green

- 54 One, Two, Three

Michael Langlois

- 60 A Conversation with Sally Radell

William James Lawson

- 66 Robert Irving: A Personal Memoir

Ian Spencer Bell

- 80 Living

Don Daniels

- 84 Low Anxiety

- 96 London Reporter – Clement Crisp

- 97 Music on Disc – George Dorris

- 100 Check It Out

**Cover Photograph by Em Watson, Jacob's Pillow Dance:
Wendy Whelan in *Restless Creature*.**



Robert Barnett in Jerome Robbins' *Ballade*, 1952. (Photo: Melton-Pippin, New York City Ballet. All photographs from the collection of Robert and Virginia Barnett.)

A Conversation with Robert Barnett

Joel Lobenthal

Robert Barnett: As a kid, I didn't take any ballet. I took tap dancing, because I grew up with the dancing of Fred Astaire and Eleanor Powell. My mother used to drive me twenty miles back and forth every Saturday to study tap. I had two sisters. I was the baby, spoiled rotten.

My dad was a rancher. We raised quarter horses and cattle. Had about four thousand acres of land in Washington state, right on the Columbia River. It was sold to Alcoa; it's all broken up now.

In high school I was studying to be a fashion designer. It's probably the way I would have gone, if I hadn't been a dancer. I saw Ballet Theatre when I was in the service in California. I was living in San Pedro in a barracks, and I'd just been in Los Angeles on liberty for that day. I walked by the theater and decided I was going to go in. It was a revelation.

I was stationed in Japan right after the war. They were putting together a liaison unit to do Broadway shows. A friend from Lubbock, Texas, who was an actor, encouraged me to go to an audition. We appeared in Tokyo at the old Takarazuka Theater, home of the famous all-girl revues.

Michio Ito had been visiting Japan when he was arrested as an American sympathizer and put in a prison camp. When the war was over the American forces released him. They found out who he was, so they invited him to come and choreograph these shows. He did them and he did some sort of pseudo-ballet things. He encouraged me to come back to the States and study when I was mustered out of the navy.

My mother had an uncle who lived in Pasadena. I went home for about six weeks, and told my parents, "I'm going back to Los Angeles and see if I can find a place to study."

I questioned my mother's aunt, because she taught at Pasadena Community College. I knew they had a theater department at the school. I wondered if they might know a teacher. She said, "Why don't you ask at the theater department and maybe they can advise you?"

Well, I couldn't find the department. But they had a little theater with a box office, and there was a girl there who said, "You know what, I have a friend who studies in a school in West Los Angeles, and she's very smitten with the teachers and what's going on there. You might try them."

I got on a bus, transferred and went down La Brea Avenue, and finally found the school. It was over a movie theater. There was a blond lady at the desk. She said they had classes for older students. In fact they had a program under the GI Bill. The teacher turned out to be Bronislava Nijinska.

They signed me up, got all the papers. I took twelve classes a week: tap, ballet, and character class. We had music theory. We had French classes. It was like a little academy. Our classes started from ten to twelve noon. Then we'd have a break and we'd go from 2:00 to 3:30. After another break we'd start at 6:00 and go to 8:00.

Nijinska taught you musicality as well as steps. You had certain things you did on certain days, like Cecchetti. But you always did, say, four petit allegro things that were linked musically. She would take one piece of music and you would do something front and back and on a diagonal, you would do it crossways, and then you'd do something turning. All on the same piece of music. Then, at the end of class, you would put that all together like a variation. And the boys would always do a manège, jumps diagonally, grand pirouette, and double tours.

A lot of the combinations were the same: if you did them one week, you did them the next week, so you built on them. But pirouette combinations would change daily. In Nijinska's class, when you did an attitude it was absolutely square. But the arabesque was something different. An arabesque was open-hipped, not

squared off. It was completely Cecchetti, flat to the front.

Later, she came to guest teach in New York at a studio right down from the City Center stage door. I was in New York City Ballet, and I couldn't wait to get into her class. I'd been away from her for three or four years. I went into her class, and my whole placement had changed. I had gone from what she had taught me to squared off and a turned-out standing leg.

It was so frustrating for me, because I knew what she expected from me, but I couldn't do



In 1943, just out of high school.

it, because it was just against everything that I was then doing. On the third day after the class I went to her and said, "You know, Madame, my rehearsal schedule is such I just can't make class. I'm sorry." I didn't want to disappoint her but I also didn't want to foul up the way I was working.

BR: Did Balanchine ever say anything to you about Nijinska?

Barnett: They were not friends. No.

I was there with her in Los Angeles for a year and eight months. When I left, my technique was so secure that I could do almost anything. I could do sixteen pirouettes and stop in half pointe. No problem. À la seconde turns, doubles, triples. And there were boys in class who could do even more.

There was a kid named Jack Clause, who danced with Roland Petit for a while. He used to be able to do thirty-some fouettés on pointe with no pointe shoes. He was just that strong; his feet were that strong. But practically everybody in the class was that strong technically. It's the way she built the class. And she was on the floor with everybody all the time.

She used to line people up in the morning: she would have Slavenska, Danilova, Krassovska, Denisova in half-hour coaching classes every morning before our class.

Marjorie Tallchief was already a ballerina with de Cuevas, and married to Skibine. One day, Marjorie started leaning on the barre. All of a sudden you heard this scream, "Marjorie!" in her Russian accent. Nijinska made her walk from the barre to take her place at least ten times. She really let her have it, because Marjorie was slouching there: not pulled up, not standing, but hanging on the barre, which you just didn't do in her class. It didn't matter who you were.

Nijinska frowned on your going anywhere else, but I used to go around and study at other places. A woman by the name of Frye ran a school in Hollywood, and David Lichine and Tatiana Riabouchinska used to teach for her. So I went to take class with David, just to see what it was like. He asked me and some other dancers to go to Europe to join the Original Ballet Russe.

Riabouchinska was dancing; so was David. They had a lot of the old dancers and a lot from Eastern Europe, from Yugoslavia, from Poland. There were some dancers from Scan-



Nijinska arabesque, Los Angeles, 1947.

dinavia: Elsa Marianne von Rosen was in the company. There was another girl by the name of Iao Oxvig, who was Norwegian. Vladimir Dokoudovsky was one of the main dancers.

BR: Who did the classical ballerina roles?

Barnett: Nina Stroganova, and Geneviève Moulin. There was another French dancer by the name of Gladys Loubert. Olga Morosova was in the company, and her sister, Nina Verchinina was there too. She danced as well as choreographed. They did a lot of the old roles that were created on them. Grigorieff; he was there.

BR: With Tchernicheva, his wife?

Barnett: Yes. She did *Three-Cornered Hat*; she did Zobeide. Grigorieff used to call me, "Good boy." I did Rumor in *Symphonie Fantastique*. We did *Les Présages*; we did all of those old ballets. We did *Coq d'Or*; we did *Graduation Ball*, *Swan*

Lake – holding up the girls. That was a very good first experience, doing all those things.

We went back to Paris because they were going to do a film of *Graduation Ball*. I decided I didn't want to do it. It was sort of a hokey thing, and they weren't paying anything. I thought, Gee, I'd just rather study and get myself back home. So I studied with Egorova and with Preobrajenska. I lived in a room about the size of this table.

Finally, I got on a train and went to Belgium and caught a ship to come home, and arrived in New York, not knowing what I was going to do. Went the next day for an audition for the Municipal Theater in St. Louis and was there for the summer, doing all kinds of shows, and saving my money so I could come back to New York and study and audition.

I had an entrée to American Ballet Theatre,

and I went and auditioned for them, but they weren't taking anybody at that time. The company was small and they didn't have much money. It was one of the very low points of Ballet Theatre.

But the next thing that came up, in December 1949, was an audition for New York City Ballet. Mr. B and Jerry Robbins and Lincoln Kirsten were at the audition. They were looking for one boy, and I think every boy in creation was there. About two hundred guys. I didn't know anything about NYCB. I did not know the repertory, or anything. I think Robbins saw something in me he thought he could use. I think he was the reason I got in.

I went up and changed clothes: right after the audition they were doing a rehearsal of Robbins' *The Guests*. The ballet was going to premiere two days later. I had as my partner a girl by the name of Barbara Walczak. Wonderful. I was floundering, trying to pick up steps. After Robbins had dismissed the rehearsal, she stayed for three hours and taught me the ballet. The next day we had a rehearsal and I knew it. The following day I was onstage dancing it.

One of the first ballets I learned was *Symphony in C*, demi-soloist second movement. I danced with a wonderful girl by the name of Barbara Bocher. She was gorgeous. A beautiful performer. And *strong*. She could stand in arabesque and promenade herself. She didn't need any help from me.

BR: In the spring of 1950, you were the Dandy and the Drummer Boy in the premiere of Ashton's *Illuminations*.

Barnett: Freddie Ashton was different from any choreographer I've ever seen. He'd look at you and decide what you were going to do, but then he'd take you individually into a room and audition you. He wouldn't give you steps;



Schéhérezade, backstage at the Original Ballet Russe, 1948.

he would give you an idea of the story. He'd give you a situation and say, "How would you react?" So you worked with him to do the choreography, at least in the audition. When you got into rehearsals, he knew exactly what he wanted you to do. But he wanted you to be a part of it.

I was there for maybe two minutes, and he said, "You're not a product of the School of American Ballet." And I said, "No, but how do you know?" He said, "I know exactly who you studied with." He sat down, he kept me there for about two hours, and we talked about Nijinska. He said that in rehearsals, when he wasn't involved, he used to sit in



Jerome Robbins' *The Pied Piper*: Tanaquil Le Clercq with Barnett at right in white shirt.



Bourrée Fantasque with Patricia Wilde.

the corner and watch her work, watch her choreograph. She was so prepared. She knew exactly what she wanted, and she was able to impart it. He said, "For me, she was a university of the dance."

Lew Christensen actually gave me my first chance to do a principal role. That summer, we were doing the first tour in Great Britain. We went into, I think it was Manchester, and Harold Lang injured himself and couldn't do the first movement of *Bourrée Fantasque*. So they called me about 4:00 in the afternoon for that night. I was dancing third-movement corps. I hadn't even looked at the first movement. But they called Tanny Le Clercq in for rehearsal and I learned it and performed that night. That was Lew's doing.

Tanny was incredible to dance with, such a joy in every way. But back in New York, there was one performance where she almost knocked me out. There was one



Interplay with Allegra Kent, Barbara Fallis, Herbert Bliss.

place where she was supposed to kick me, and I was much shorter than she. She was wearing new pointe shoes, and she didn't realize how hard she was kicking. She got me in the forehead and you could have heard it a block away. I was supposed to do a take, but I wasn't faking. She turned around: "Oh, Bobby, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry!"

Tanny was special. Even today I see roles that she danced and nobody can touch her. She was a fantastic actress; she stole the ballet when she did the other woman in *Lilac Garden*.

BR: Tudor loved her in that.

Barnett: She was intelligent about her body and the way she moved. She knew what to do with herself. She just was very knowing, and

so bright. *The Cage*, everybody wore these wigs, Nora Kaye and Melissa Hayden. When Tanny did *The Cage*, she took her hair and braided it and used egg whites to stiffen it like tentacles on her head. It was completely her idea.

Swan Lake was probably her least favorite role of anything she'd ever done. But Mr. B just wanted her to do it, and again she did everything her way: white face, white tights. She was white from one end to the other.

BR: You were a Goon during her two performances of the *Prodigal Son Siren* in 1950. How was she?

Barnett: Wonderful. Maria did it first. Diana did it. The best was Yvonne Mounsey. I remember standing behind her in the wings, and she was watching, I think, Diana do it. Yvonne had this very sexy figure. She had bazooms that wouldn't quit. She turned around to me,

put her hands on her hips and said, "It takes a real woman to do that part!"

BR: Did Balanchine give you a lot of attention?

Barnett: No. In the beginning I just started inheriting things. I got third movement *Symphony in C* because Herbie Bliss hurt his back. Mr. B came in and said, "Who knows it?" And of course I stood in the wings and learned every part that I wanted to dance eventually. So when he said, "Who knows it?" I knew it, so I got it.

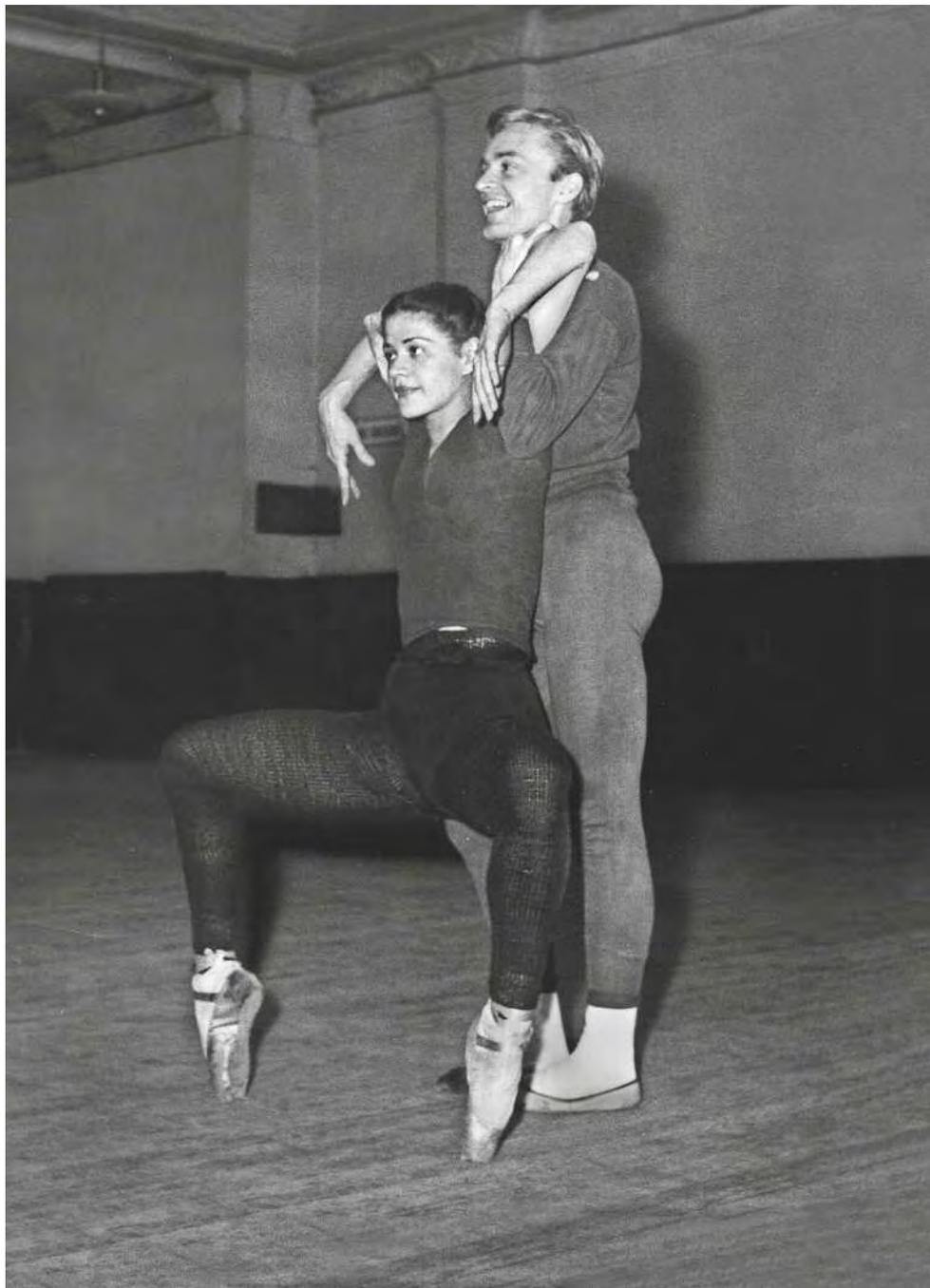
I didn't want to do any of those prince roles. They didn't interest me at all. I wanted to dance. I wanted to get out there and do it. And I loved character building. I loved to take a role and work on it.

BR: When you created Merlin in Ashton's *Picnic at Tintagel*, what type of movement was it?

Barnett: It was more interpretive than any-

thing else. It was ballet based, and it was acrobatic.

There was one section where I had a big solo. I opened the ballet. I was over with my



With Melissa Hayden.

back to the audience. I had a hand movement and then it was a move sort of in a circle and a backward rollover. That sort of thing, just to set up a mood for the space.

BR: Balletic grotesque?

Barnett: Yes. The whole premise was that my character made everything happen. The characters came to the picnic with chauffeurs and servants. They relived the King Marke story. It went from Edwardian dress into period Renaissance, psuedo-Renaissance.



Jeux d'Enfants.

At the premiere, I was so nervous. At that time the company was small enough that it didn't make a difference if you were in a premiere, you had to go on and do something else. I went back up, exhausted, after the premiere, trying to get the last face off and get a new one on. Jerry Robbins comes running in: "Bobby, I never knew that you could dance like that." He was very complimentary, which Jerry usually wasn't. It just wasn't his thing.

BR: But after *The Guests* you went into one Robbins ballet after another.

Barnett: I loved working with him because you were so prepared. You knew what your little finger was going to do. I worked on almost every ballet he did when I was in the

company. He used to work things out on me. If I was available, he'd call me and say, "Bobby, could you come with me and work on this section?"

Ballade was wonderful. In the studio everybody fell in love with it. The ballet had Tanny, Nora, Janet Reed, all of them special characters. It had a wonderful feeling when you did it, but it just didn't go out toward the audience. It was too intimate. My wife Ginger's mother saw the premiere; it was her favorite ballet. But it just didn't work as far as the audience was concerned.

When *The Concert* was first done, I knew several parts. I had my own part, but I learned Todd Bolender's and other things that Jerry had worked out on me when someone wasn't available. Opening night, Todd calls in sick. At half hour Jerry comes running up to my dressing room. I was putting on my makeup for the first ballet of the program. He said, "Bobby, do you remember what we did in *The Concert* for Todd's role?" I said, "Yes, I remember what you did for me, but you changed it completely for Todd, so I haven't a clue." He said, "Well Todd can't dance tonight, and I need somebody." We stood there in the hallway for twenty minutes, and he taught me what Todd did, using some of the

things that I already knew. It was a composite. I went on and did both parts on opening night. Talk about bad dreams.

My big disappointment: for years, Lucia Chase had an exclusive right to *Fancy Free*. Just as I was about to leave the company in 1958, she lost the exclusivity. Jerry came to me one day and said, "Bobby, I'm thinking about doing *Fancy Free* for you, Jacques, and Eddie." I wanted to do Jerry's role, the rumba. Then something happened. Financially he couldn't mount it that season.

BR: When you created Candy Cane in the first *Nutcracker*, did Balanchine tell you he was giving you the same choreography that he had danced at the Maryinsky?



Western Symphony.

WINTER 2013-14

45

Barnett: Mmm, hmm. . . . Yes, that's what he told me.

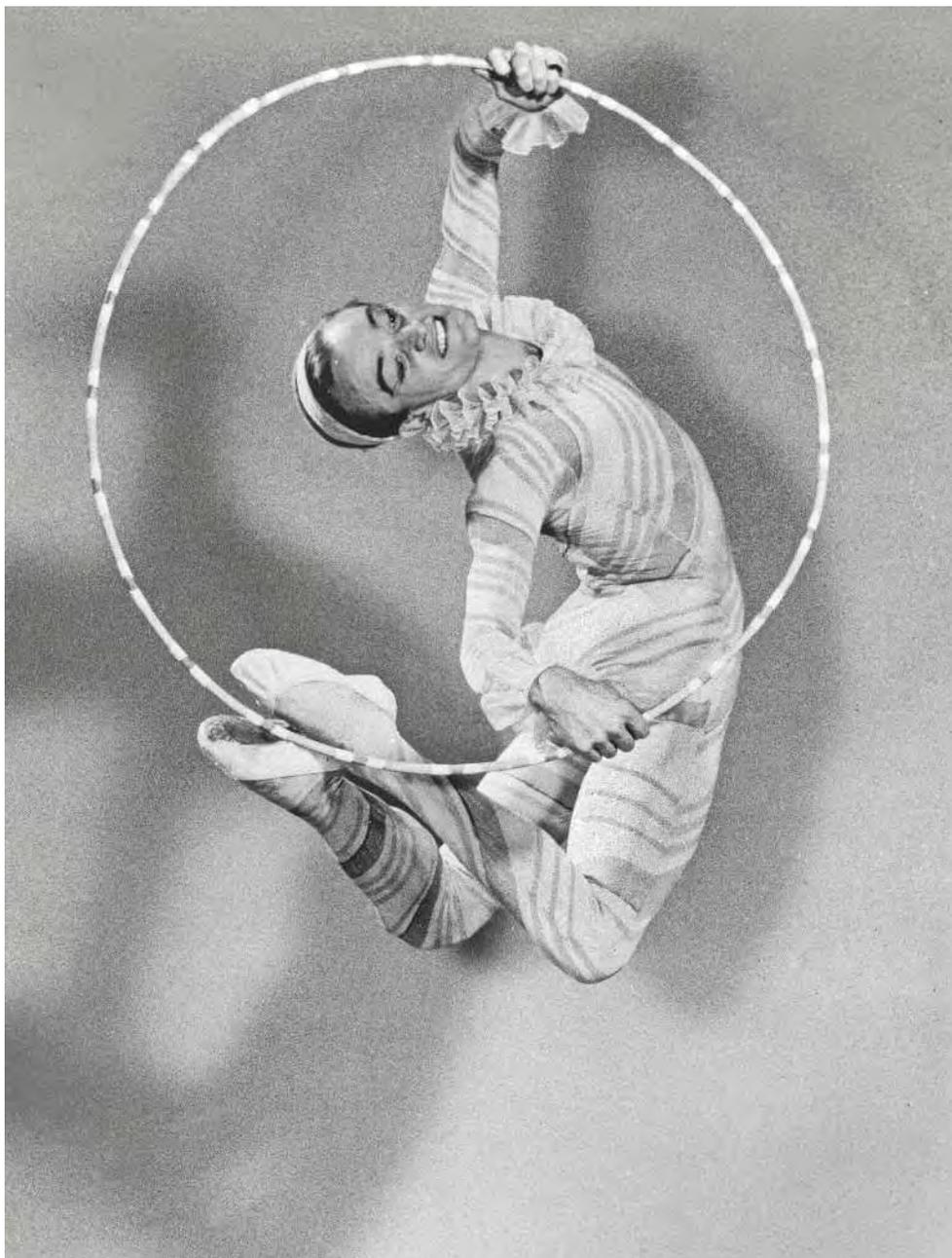
BR: Did he have any other memories of the production or ever say anything about the old days in Russia?

Barnett: No.

BR: Were you curious, or was it too remote from you?

Barnett: No, we were all curious, but he just never talked about it.

I rehearsed with him standing in front of me, and at breakneck speed. He was very help-



Candy Cane.



Opening night of *The Nutcracker*, February 2, 1954. (Photo: Fred Fehl)

ful, because there were some awkward movements in that. There's one step across the stage where you do an *échappé* but it's almost like a *chassé*. Then you have to *plié* and turn the leg out and open it to second.

I was having a lot of trouble, because I was trying to do it academically. You can't do it that way. It's just got to work. He said, "Bobby you just have to attack it, make it happen." Which I did, and it worked.

I remember being so excited – we all were – because it was the first full-length ballet we were doing. It was a big success. The audience went nuts. It was great. Just before I went on, I was back doing *tendus* and jumping up and down, trying to get my legs to loosen up. Jumping through that damn hoop at that breakneck speed – it was not that easy.

Once in 1962 Ginger and I spent two-and-a-half hours with Tanny and Mr. B at the Apthorp. He was reminiscing about the days when we were in the company, and talking about roles that I had danced. He said about Candy Cane, "Nobody's ever danced it like you did," which was a big boost to the ego.

BR: Why do you think you were good in it?

Barnett: It was just me. It was the way I moved. I was agile, and turned easily, jumped easily, changed directions easily, which he liked.

I was doing eight shows a week. I told Balanchine I needed an understudy, but he just wouldn't let anybody do it. Finally, in the second or third season, Richard Thomas did it. But he didn't do that many performances. Sometimes he would do the matinees and I would do the evenings. We were on tour with it. We did it at Griffith Park in Los Angeles and then to San Francisco. We didn't do it in Seattle, but then we went to Chicago.

I was getting ready to do a performance, and I got into a *plié* and I couldn't get up. Thank God, Dickie could do it that time. Mr. B put me on a plane back to New York, and I went to Dr. Jordan at Lenox Hill Hospital. He was the chief of staff, an orthopedic surgeon. He operated on my knee and six weeks later I was back on-stage dancing.

Then it happened again, and I went back to him. He said, "Well, I thought you'd be back



Bluebird pas de deux with Anne Burton, Atlanta Ballet.

sooner. I didn't want to do everything that needed to be done the first time because you would have lost too much muscle." So he did the second part of the operation, and I was back again in six weeks. The company had gone again out West, and they were in Seattle. I arrived on the plane and the next night I was onstage doing *Interplay*, and I didn't look back until I got to Atlanta and tore my meniscus. Same knee. So I had to have that taken care of.

In Atlanta I had a wonderful little partner, absolutely incredible. Anne Burton. Mr. B had adored her at NYCB and would cast her in many things; then Johnny Taras would take her out. He just took a dislike to her. She didn't like the politics, so she left NYCB and went to school. Anne was in Utah and worked with Willam Christensen. She was old school:

very lyric, a real believer. If she did a role she lived it. It wasn't just a bunch of steps. She thought about it. One of the most beautiful Giselles I ever saw.

BR: What did your parents think of your being a dancer?

Barnett: Absolutely thrilled to death. They accepted it completely. It was what I wanted to do. I maintain that most people who have any reservations about their sons being dancers are too educated. My dad home-studied in Washington State, and didn't have all that baggage. He came once and stayed in New York for a month, went to the ballet every single night. Absolutely adored Patty Wilde, thought she was the end. He loved Maria Tallchief; he used to call her "the little Indian girl."

I loved Maria, too, especially in the repertory that was done for her. The role that I was

surprised at was *Scotch Symphony*, because it was very lyric, and I just didn't think of Maria that way. But I liked her very much in it. It was one of her best roles and one she got the least credit for. I didn't like her so much when she was doing the Bournonville stuff. She was too much Maria in it.

BR: You mean the Bournonville on TV, with Nureyev?

Barnett: Yes. I didn't like that. I wished she hadn't done it.

Maria was a stellar musician. She never counted anything; she just felt the music. You'd watch her standing there in the wings; she was fixing her shoes or whatever she was doing – she was meticulous about herself. All of a sudden, Boom! – she was onstage, and musical from then on out. When Maria left the theater you knew you were looking at somebody. She never left until she was done to the nines. She learned that from Danilova.

I used to be a shopper for Maria. She'd go



The Nutcracker pas de deux with Anne Burton, Atlanta Ballet.

on tour, and she'd get all this money for the per diem that she never used, because everybody was always taking her out to dinner. When we were in Rome once, she said, "Bobby, I have a pile of lira and I don't know what to do with it. Why don't you go out shopping for me?" So I went down to where all the nice shops were and bought her a brooch. I saw her several years ago and she still had it.

BR: Even then, of course, NYCB's philosophy was dictated by Balanchine, despite the many other choreographers who made things for you, for the company.

Barnett: Working with him was such a pleasure, because he had very specific ideas about what he wanted, and he was prepared when he came to you with it. That's why he worked so fast. He could do a ballet in three



Virginia Barnett in Carl Ratcliff's solo *Georgia O'Keeffe*, 1984.



Barnett and his wife Virginia with Balanchine at Atlanta Ballet in 1968.

days, and it would take somebody else three months.

We were disciplined. He taught one group, on one side of the stage. If they were doing it to the right you had to do it left, and you had to reverse it to the back. The patterns were beautiful on stage. It just worked. But, of course he had a lot of ladies there who'd worked with him a long time, knew exactly what he wanted. Especially corps de ballet girls and soloist girls: Barbara Millberg, Barbara Walczak, Una Kai. Those girls who were in it from the beginning, they danced everything.

Millberg was so talented, so bright, and she would challenge him. She would challenge him mentally. They used to get into long conversations. She was also a very good pianist, and that impressed him.

Balanchine used to stand in the wings. I don't think he watched anybody dance. He was listening to the orchestra, whether the tempo was right, whether it was what he wanted.

He adored my wife. She had a humungous long neck, and she had the most gorgeous port de bras. He placed her in a lot of things because of her port de bras, her use of the upper body. She was very elegant, and that appealed to him.

He hated any kind of confrontation. He never liked to talk to anybody about anything, because he didn't like being put on the spot. He had his little clique that he was friendly with. I didn't have any part of that group. I just admired him so, and respected him, and used to pick his brain. I knew that I wasn't going to be dancing all that many years, and I wanted to learn just as much as I could.

Mr B loved science fiction. We used to talk about science fiction. He loved the West, horses and Western attire. He used to dress that way, and he knew that was my background. That interested him. He asked about my Dad, things like that.

I wouldn't ask him anything about the dance. I would just watch him, pick his brain

by watching what he did and how he did it. I used to volunteer to go in for lighting rehearsals, because we had Jeannie Rosenthal, who was one of the greatest lighting designers. I used to go just to hold a costume to watch them light, to see how they lit the backdrop, how they lit underneath those tutus. I knew that was knowledge I was going to have to have one day if I directed a company.

In 1958 I was thirty-three and we were expecting a child. I thought I should have a little bit more stability. Dorothy Alexander was ill and was about to retire as director of the Atlanta Ballet. She extended an invitation to us. Also, Lew Christensen in San Francisco knew I was leaving the company. So, it was a matter of making a choice. Ginger had just lost her mother and her father was alone, so we decided to go to Atlanta.

BR: How did you tell Mr. B that you were leaving?

Barnett: Actually he wasn't around. I was with the company in Melbourne, Australia. He was in New York. I went in and told Betty Cage and she said, "Don't you think you should discuss this with Mr. B?" And I said, "Why?" Dancers come and go all the time.

When I left I taught Eddie Villella everything I danced. He was sort of my size. That's how he started out in his career, dancing all my roles. But he was right for them. And now I have fun teaching things that were made for him, like *Tarantella*, things that I probably would have danced.

Dorothy Alexander was an amazing lady. She had a flourishing school in Atlanta. Ginger came from that school. Not only that, Dorothy taught in the public schools. She traveled all over. In the summers she would go away. She studied with Kschessinska, she

studied at the Royal Ballet school; she would go and educate herself. She was one of those teachers who wanted to teach the whole thing. She studied kinesthesiology. She knew what every muscle did in the body.

I never knew anybody who taught port de bras any better. It's one of the reasons why Ginger had such a gorgeous port de bras. So many kids just use their arms, but they don't know where the port de bras comes from and what muscles you use and what you have to develop.

At Atlanta I was an associate director and a principal dancer, and so was Ginger. But the school worked nine months out of the year, with three months off. I had to have a job. Rich's department store was building a new location and so I went and got a job for the summer. I was coordinator of all the merchandise in the store. I was there for three years, first part-time, then full-time.

I trained in the fashion department, where



At the Harid Conservatory in the mid-1990s with Marcelo Gomes.

there were a lot of snobbish salespeople. They had their special customers, and if anybody walked into the department that they thought didn't look just right, well. . . .

We had this one lady come in one afternoon; she was in sort of a ratty old tweed skirt and a sweater. She had a little bit of red clay on her shoes. The sales people all just fled, so I walked

up to her and asked if I could help. She said, "Yes, you certainly can. I'm just going to be in town for a few hours. I've been with my husband on a trip up north to look at some property. I was wondering if you could help me find some things and maybe send them to me. . . ." We were there for almost three-and-a-half hours. She walked out having spent almost \$15,000.

I wasn't a salesperson, so I didn't get any commission, but I made damn sure the staff didn't either because of their attitude. I put it on the house book. There was one woman who came up later and apologized for her attitude. She helped me write it all up and box it. When I left Rich's I gave her the lady as a customer. But even after I left the store, people used to call me up and ask me to do shopping for them. It was just fun; I enjoyed it.

Then in 1962 I took over the company as artistic director. I was able to stay in shape and dance, so I wasn't galumphing onstage. Mr. B came down in support when I first started, and came back two or three times for fundraisers. He was very generous. I danced until I was forty-nine. For my last performance I did the pas de deux in *Nutcracker*.

BR: With the variation?

Barnett: Yes. Then I left the stage. I knew

that I was going to quit because it was the time when the company was really getting busy. It was too difficult trying to stay in shape and run the company as well, and so that was the obvious choice.

BR: When did your wife stop dancing?

Barnett: When she was sixty. She wasn't doing ballet; she was doing modern.

She had worked with John Butler and Anna Sokolow before she got into NYCB. In fact, Anna used to tell her, "I don't know why you want to be a bunhead. You would be the most spectacular modern dancer." She also worked with Mary Anthony. Before Graham died her manager asked Ginger to come and join the company. At the time Graham was not really working with the dancers. That's one reason Ginger didn't do it.

She helped Carl Ratcliff establish his company. He and Bella Lewitsky left Lester Horton at the same time and opened up a school. Then he came to Atlanta, in 1962. Ginger was pregnant with our second son. She saw Carl and said, "I want to do that." So after she had the baby she got into shape and started working in modern dance. She did one last Lilac Fairy in *The Sleeping Beauty*, took off her pointe shoes, put them in a metal trashcan, and burnt them: "Never again!"