

Winter 2017-2018

Ballet Review



**From the Winter 2017-18
issue of *Ballet Review***

**A Conversation with
Heather Watts
by Michael Langlois**

Ballet Review 45.4
Winter 2017-2018

Editor and Designer:
Marvin Hoshino

Managing Editor:
Roberta Hellman

Senior Editor:
Don Daniels

Associate Editors:
Joel Lobenthal
Larry Kaplan
Alice Helpern

Webmaster:
David S. Weiss

Copy Editor:
Naomi Mindlin

Photographers:
Tom Brazil
Costas

Associates:
Peter Anastos
Robert Greskovic
George Jackson
Elizabeth Kendall
Paul Parish
Nancy Reynolds
James Sutton
David Vaughan
Edward Willinger
Sarah C. Woodcock



- 4 New York – Elizabeth McPherson
- 6 Washington, D.C. – Jay Rogoff
- 7 Miami – Michael Langlois
- 8 Toronto – Gary Smith
- 9 New York – Karen Greenspan
- 11 Paris – Vincent Le Baron
- 12 New York – Susanna Sloat
- 13 San Francisco – Rachel Howard
- 15 Hong Kong – Kevin Ng
- 17 New York – Karen Greenspan
- 19 Havana – Susanna Sloat
- 20 Paris – Vincent Le Baron
- 22 Jacob's Pillow – Jay Rogoff
- 24 Letter to the Editor

Lauren Grant

- 25 Mark Morris: Student
and Teacher

Joel Lobenthal

- 28 Baranovsky's Opus

Karen Greenspan

- 34 Two English Operas

Claudia Roth Pierpont

- 39 *Agon* at Sixty

Joseph Houseal

- 41 Hong Kong Identity Crisis

Michael Langlois

- 46 **A Conversation with
Heather Watts**

Joseph Houseal

- 58 Merce Cunningham:
Common Time

Daniel Jacobson

- 70 At New York City Ballet

Francis Mason

- 86 Jane Dudley on Graham

- 89 London Reporter – Clement Crisp

- 94 Music on Disc – George Dorris

Cover photograph by Tom Brazil: Merce Cunningham in *Grand Central Dances*,
Dancing in the Streets, Grand Central Terminal, NYC, October 9-10, 1987.



Heather Watts in "The Waltz of the Flowers" during NYCB's Tchaikovsky Festival in 1981. (Photo: Costas)

A Conversation with Heather Watts

Michael Langlois

Heather Watts: I've been doing some work recently with Robbie LaFosse at DEL, Dance Education Laboratory. We teach teachers and facilitators, public school teachers, Lincoln Center teaching artists. People come to the seminar over a weekend. I usually teach a barre. Sometimes I'll do Balanchine and sometimes I'll do Jerry Robbins.

Then I start teaching repertory. How the ballet relates to the time of its creation. What year it was done. What was going on in the choreographer's life. The music. What was going on in the composer's life. With Jerry's *Faun*, I like to show the famous photo of Nijinsky in his version so they can see the Art Deco sideways movements that Jerry obviously looked at, show similarities and differences.

With Balanchine I mostly just do context. What was going on in Balanchine's life and what was going on culturally. With *Agon* I talk about civil rights. It was 1957. Arthur Mitchell is dancing the lead. That season Balanchine choreographed *Stars and Stripes* and *Agon* and *Gounod Symphony* and *Square Dance*. It was also during the Cold War and toward the end of McCarthyism. Balanchine is a Russian working with another Russian, Stravinsky, and he's doing *Stars and Stripes* on Sousa, and he puts Arthur out there and doesn't say anything. It's right after Tanny had polio, and you're seeing all the manipulation of the female body by the man. You see black and white.

It's Stravinsky's first twelve-tone score, so you're seeing black and white like piano keys, like ballet clothes, like skin tones. You're seeing all the modernist aesthetic in *Agon*, the stripping away of everything – of costumes, of scenery, of everything – which people think of now as very common but at that time, for Balanchine, he hadn't done a lot of these kinds of ballets.

The Four Temperaments was originally costumed and then they were taken away. *Barocco* was also costumed and then they were taken away. But *Agon* was intended to be in practice clothes. It fit what was going on in design and architecture at the time: mid-century modern, stripped down, clean lines. It's the same month that Jerry and Lenny did *West Side Story*. You have snapping and other allusions to things, beatniks and slouching. You don't need to know any of this to love *Agon* but it's how I break down ballets so people can be caught up in the thinness of it.

BR: What were Balanchine's views on race and the intent behind casting Arthur in that role?

Watts: Well, if you look back to Lincoln Kirstein's 1933 letter to Chick Austin describing the new School of American Ballet as he and Balanchine envisioned it, it clearly states eight young, white girls and boys, and eight young, Black girls and boys. It was going to be Balanchine's idea of a utopian America as he saw it. How do we know what Balanchine felt about race? We know that when parents complained about Arthur's being at the school Mr. B told them to go ahead and leave.

BR: What was the reaction to seeing Arthur in *Agon*?

Watts: It was nothing, and everything. No discussion. This is New York. We're not in the South. Everybody who was anybody was there. I think it's been said that Duchamp was there. And it was an overnight sensation. But the racial aspects of the ballet weren't spoken about. [John Martin's review of *Agon* in 1957 from the New York Times merely states that the ballet is certain to be "controversial." Nothing was mentioned about the racial aspects of the work.] Yet it's so politically charged. It's a very erotic pas de deux. It's got gender equality. It's got a lot of moments where the man and woman are the same. And yet, "It's just a ballet." Balanchine, as an artist, was of that generation and of that mind that nothing meant anything – supposedly.

I've met painters who are like this: nothing means anything. They don't want to be pinned

down into being defined – that they meant a certain work to be interpreted in a specific way. It’s more of an alchemy. It just comes out of them. It’s delicate.

Balanchine had that attitude that nothing meant anything, but then when you would be rehearsing with him, say *Agon*, he said to me, “No, dear. It’s *Sleeping Beauty*.” He was teaching the role to Victor Castelli, in Saratoga. Everybody was out. I’d already been doing *Agon* for a couple of years and he said, “No, dear” You know the part where you take your leg, he said, “No, no, it’s *Sleeping Beauty*.” And I went, “What?”

It was a Saturday morning before the matinee and he said, “It’s the Rose Adagio.” And, you know, the man holds me, then he flips me and lies down on the ground. What he meant was it’s that tension, the circus, and everyone is still. Now it’s different. Maria Kowroski is past a split, it’s crazy. But, it has as big an effect now as it did then. People still hold their breath at that moment.

The Rose Adagio – its virtuoso, right? So, what’s the intention with Balanchine? I never speak for him, but I remember saying to him once about *Agon*, “How did you make this ballet?” He looked at me and I could see he was a little put off, and then he said, “Well, I had the music. And where did Stravinsky get the music? From the air.”

So in his rehearsals that’s the extent of the clues we might get as to what things were about, what they were references to. He never would tell you that that section of *Agon* was meant to indicate a beatnik, but if you weren’t doing it like this [she jumps up and demonstrates] he would say, “No, dear, aren’t you hep? Can’t you do it like this?” He would pretend to hold a beret on his head, smoke a cigarette, and do a couple of slouches in B-minus down to the ground.

You had to listen very closely because if you asked him after rehearsal, “Am I supposed to be a beatnik?” He’d probably say, no. He did not like to be pinned down to one idea, but to get to the right place he would leave clues. He used animals a lot. He used imagery to help us

reestablish whatever it was he’d done. Those images are something that never leaves you. Because it tells you better than right or wrong, good or bad, or just: no.

But in the image, it’s sort of unattainable so you can give that to your kids today. You can share that image and they can interpret it. And now it’s even more exaggerated, but it can’t look easy. Because it’s like *The Sleeping Beauty*. If you know what the tension of the Rose Adagio is, then you are able to tell your students how to do it within the abilities of today. It’s not, “Oh, it’s right,” or, “It’s wrong.” It’s that it’s supposed to be [she imitates a drum roll] a high-wire act.

BR: What are your feelings about what has happened with Misty Copeland and do you believe she has subtly or not so subtly made the assertion that the ballet world is racist?

Watts: Well, I’m a fan and a friend of Misty’s and I don’t think that’s what she’s saying, exactly. I think without Misty, ballet would be dead, in a sense, because she has been able to identify the problem that’s in classical music, in ballet. There’s a grossly understated problem that has been unimaginatively dealt with. It’s an almost all-white world.

There’s no pipeline. There’s no gracious pipeline for a Black community to relate to ballet. Why would you go watch a hundred white people do something if you were Black? If you went to Broadway during the time of *In the Heights*, the first Lin-Manuel Miranda musical, you just walked in and you were, “Oh, My God! This is New York.”

This is my New York. I live on the Upper West Side. Yes, there are a lot of white soccer moms but there is also a lot of diversity. You mostly don’t see that in Broadway shows. You see white people. You go to the opera and you see an audience that’s often reflecting what’s onstage. *In the Heights* was filled with a diverse audience. You can’t relate to something you can’t relate to.

If you see the Vienna Philharmonic on the January 1 telecast, and they’re all white and you’re Hispanic, do you want to go? So modeling is a big problem if there’s nothing to as-

pire to; the teaching, if you have no teachers of color. We can't just have Black jazz players and Black Alvin Ailey dancers. It's preposterous. Our country is not like that.

I teach a lot. Universities have found ways to bring in a more diverse population and we as an industry have failed at that. The distance between Debra Austin's career, who was in the company with me, and Misty's career is far too great. Yes, there were a few NYCB women in between, but very few. I can name them. Myrna Kamara, Cynthia Lochar, Aesha Ash, Andrea Long. Beautiful dancers. Beautiful women, all of them. So that's, what, five Black women in New York City Ballet.

It's the same in other major companies, so I think it's a tremendous issue. It's also an issue of not having voices to look back to. Without those voices among us, we are singing one song with one note.

I loved all the years of going to see Miami City Ballet and seeing the Delgado sisters and other Hispanic dancers there. And then when they come to New York, I loved that they were representing their community, and that when you go there, you're a part of it. Miami is not like Palm Beach. And Eddie's company had many voices. It was a strong mix, like America.

BR: How do you think a school like SAB is trying to address this?

Watts: Well, it's getting better. They have a diversity program and a woman who's been funded by the Ford Foundation so, once again (I'm a Ford scholar), the Ford Foundation to the rescue. Darren Walker [president of the Ford Foundation] is on the board of New York City Ballet and I know he's very concerned about all of these issues in every area – not just in ballet but in the whole world. We all need to be. We have to create pipelines for children to be exposed: to grow up and be teachers; to grow up and be dancers; to grow up and be critics; to grow up and be ballet masters.

SAB is doing better. It's not great. It's not anywhere near where we want it to be, but they have focused on it. They've hired a di-

versity person who works exclusively on this. That is a step in the right direction. We all have to work on this. I mean, America: it's reflective of sky boxing. You don't just want to be with people like you.

BR: Well, some people do.

Watts: Yes, and they're on the wrong side of history. Put that in your article. That's how we got here, how we got to today.

BR: It's a backlash against diversity and inclusion.

Watts: It's not a backlash. It's a reprehensible pile of steaming grossness. It's not a backlash.

BR: Touché [laughing]. So why didn't you like "Linda"? [Linda Heather Watts is her full name]

Watts: I was never called Linda. My mom was kinda crazy and therefore, when I was in school, from first grade on, you know, when they say your name? I didn't react to Linda Watts, so they were thinking, whoa! We have a challenged kid here. I didn't react to it. But after 9/11 . . . it's my legal name. It gets used a lot. It's on my passport. But I'm not going to change it legally now. I remember Balanchine wanted me to change my last name.

BR: Why?

Watts: I don't know. He just said, "You know, dear, we should talk about your name." And I said, "I can't do that to my father. I'm not going to change it."

BR: Were you a bit of a rebel as a kid?

Watts: You don't know that you are. Everybody seemed to think so. I was just me. My mom was a very interesting woman and very vibrant. She was a war bride from England. She married my dad and came to California and had four children. She was young. She was eighteen when she came. My dad was a glider pilot and when he came home from World War II he started going to college.

My mom worked as a secretary until she had my brother. And then after we were all nearly grown up she did a variety of things. She wrote for the local newspaper and then ran a flower shop and worked for the historical society. She was very civic minded, was

on the PTA and all that. She was very outspoken so I guess it just didn't feel that weird to me to be outspoken.

And also, I come from California. I'm sixty-three now, but at the time we were involved with Vietnam. California was on fire and liberal, hippies and free, and New York was still conservative in many ways. People weren't walking around barefoot with flowers in their hair. I had come from that.

Balanchine used to say to me, "Oh, you're a flower child. You have to be more disciplined." But he liked everything we were. He liked us. He liked how we landed. He liked our differences. You look back at the pictures and you see we were all kind of the same height and the same hair color, but Balanchine loved where we all came from.

Balanchine knew about all of us. My dad was a rocket scientist and Mr. B loved that. He would say, "How can your dad land a man on the moon and you can't land from a grand jeté?" He'd say that every day. Do you know, Wilhelmina Frankfurt? One of her grandparents was from Mexico. I was British and he thought Brits were too polite, so it was good that I came from California. Balanchine loved that Jock Soto was part Navajo and he called Afshin Mofid "Persian boy." He loved our backgrounds and how that made us different. How we danced. How we rolled, really.

BR: You came to New York when you were really young. You were fifteen when you moved here, but you came to the SAB summer courses when you were only thirteen.

Watts: Yes. I was enrolled in the Professional Children's School and I hated it because I came from a really great public school in California, and PCS was not what it is now. At the time it was very old-fashioned and I'd already done all the work because I was in AP classes in California so it was sort of, "Ugh!" I was away from home and, in hindsight, I was too young to come. As my parents suspected. I wasn't wild and into sex and drugs, but it was on that edge. We were in the Juilliard building then and those are college kids. We would go to their parties and here I was this fifteen-

year-old girl from California and those acting boys were really hounds. They really were.

And they were fun. They were smart and funny. They were people like Robin Williams, Treat Williams, Kevin Kline, and Patti LuPone. They were these eighteen- and nineteen-year-old, hip kids. Robin and I would just scream with laughter.

BR: Did you start skipping school?

Watts: I just stopped going, and it was expensive for my parents. But then I got into the company so all was forgiven. I was seventeen then.

BR: What were your living arrangements? Did you live with an older woman and a bunch of other SAB girls in one of those big Upper West Side apartments?

Watts: No, the school had a kind of dorm then. It was a brownstone they owned, and a mother of a dancer in the company at the time ran it. It didn't work for me. But it was good in the beginning, for the first four or five months. There were several other young women – dancers – who lived there. Mariana Tcherkassky, Bonnie Bourne, Willy Frankfurt, and myself. I just ended up getting into fracasés with the house mom. So I got moved to Marymount on Seventy-Second Street. I lived with the nuns. It was for students over eighteen, but they took me. That had a lot more freedom and it was better for me. I just came and went as I wanted.

I loved Stanley Williams' classes, and I kind of liked Eglevsky's and Danilova's and Tumey's so I stayed up on my dancing. But I had a long way to go. I was quite weak. I wasn't a strong dancer. I was kind of new to it. My training was lovely in California. I had a good teacher, Sheila Rozann, but I wasn't there for that long and it wasn't like that old Russian training.

Michael, where did you come from?

BR: The North Carolina School of the Arts and then SAB. Prior to that I just had local teachers in small schools.

Watts: The little local school I went to was not the same kind of training you would get with, say, Irina Kosmovska in Los Angeles. Those were really strong dancers. Jock Soto

went there. Darci Kistler went there. Damian [Woetzel, her husband] went there. Kids that came from Kosmovska's studio were like prodigies. They could already really dance. I wasn't like that. So it took me longer in the company to get my legs.

Balanchine was totally cool with that, learning to dance through the repertory, through rehearsals. He would say to me, "You know, dear, I have to protect you from the audience. You don't look like anybody else. You don't dance like anybody else. So just dance. Get strong. Get ready."

BR: I read in an interview you did with *Dance Magazine* that you did not perform at City Ballet when you joined the company. For two years? Can that be true?

Watts: Balanchine told me I wasn't going to dance and I wasn't put into much, but then people would be out, and I'd end up doing things. Balanchine said, "Just come and learn, dear." But then Debbie Koolish was out and I did the Blue Girl in Spanish corps. And then Delia Peters – I don't know if she was injured or she'd just had it – but I got to do *Stars and Stripes*, and I couldn't do it. Balanchine was right. I wasn't ready to dance. You know tall girls in *Stars*? [She sings the music and demonstrates a few steps.] That was about as much as I could do, and there is a whole lot more. I really learned to dance there. Chops. Strength. Those other kids . . . Damian could already dance when he got to the school.

BR: But isn't it terribly challenging to get stronger given that most company classes aren't really enough and that you didn't have enough rep to make you stronger?

Watts: Yes, but you're leaving out the Balanchine rep for girls. I mean that's just it. Learning *Diamonds* was tough. And Balanchine had me go back to SAB when I joined the company and do Suki Schorer's public school lecture-demonstration performances. Steve Caras and I did them. With Suki we did shows every Monday. And Balanchine assigned Suki to teach a class, a different class.

When I got into the company I didn't know how to do my makeup. The girls all had these

gorgeous earrings. Christine Redpath gave me a pair. Susan Hendl taught me how to do my hair. It seemed like everybody else knew how to do everything. I felt that I was by myself. I got into the company by myself. I never had a plan.

Look back at some of the women who helped me early on and later on – and I don't mean the stars, like Allegra, who was a "she-ro" to me that I modeled myself on. She was kind to me, but Susie Hendl was really a mentor. She would say to me, "You should take Stanley's class on Mondays," which was our day off. You like his class and you shouldn't take any time off. She took me on Eddie Villella's gigs. They had a group that would perform. I was in the corps of *Allegro Brillante*, that was my big break. Because of Susie, I understood things.

Later on, when my career was going wonderfully for me, I was so lucky. Soloists in the company who weren't getting to dance as much as me were still nice to me: Colleen Neary, Suzy Pilarre, Susie Hendl, Chrissy Redpath. They all helped me. I didn't have that relationship with people in the company much until I was older. Now, that's how I spend my life. I try to help people. Because a dancer can feel lost in a role, even if they're a very good dancer. Sometimes they just don't get it. I've always been pretty good at coaching, even when I was young. I sort of get it. I've developed deep relationships with some dancers over the years. It started with Monique Meunier, and it has continued. I work a lot now with Tiler Peck.

BR: I sometimes reflect on the two different lives we led as young dancers at SAB. There is the life we led at the school and there were our lives outside the school, learning how to negotiate the difficulties of living in New York at age fifteen or sixteen with no one around to really guide us.

Watts: It's different now with the student dormitories in the Rose Building. I think it gives SAB a culture. The kids that grew up together relate easily to one another. Robbie Fairchild and Justin Peck were roommates in the dorm. And it doesn't matter where I go in the world now, I run into musicians and per-

formers from Juilliard who also lived in the dorm. They all know Tiler Peck. We didn't have that in the same way.

BR: We lived out on the street in those days. In apartments with who knows who, doing whatever, whenever.

Watts: And we never had any money. Or if we did, we spent it on the wrong things. I'd buy clothes. I'd do modeling jobs and get some money and I'd immediately go out and buy red clogs. Still no money, right? We were less organized, emotionally and mentally. New York was different. It was a wild scene. We were all going to clubs. I don't even know if there are nightclubs anymore. I don't think the kids are going to them now, but maybe they are.

BR: Your trajectory at City Ballet seems odd when you look at it on paper. Eight years in the corps and then in two years you become a soloist and then principal. Bam. Bam.

Watts: Well, it took me a long time, maybe five years in the corps de ballet and then for the next three years even though I was still officially in the corps I did every role in the repertory. I didn't think about it and neither did Balanchine. When I talk to dancers today, I find that promotion is a big deal. Merrill Ashley was also in the corps for a very long time, but she was dancing everything. She was doing *Chaconne* and *Flower Festival*. While in the corps de ballet I did Second Movement Bizet and Third Movement and First Movement leads. I was still in the corps; that wasn't uncommon then. Both happened – meteoric rises and long stretches when you would just be dancing. The delight was the rep.

BR: What roles were you called to learn that surprised you?

Watts: Being called for *Rubies*. Being called for *Barocco*. Second Movement Bizet was one of my first big parts. *Symphony in C*. I probably was not ready for it. It wasn't a natural fit for me. It was never a role I really believed myself in. But, wow, how flattering was that for a corps girl? You're doing *Afternoon of a Faun* and Second Movement Bizet on the same program and it's just your life. That's where I took my satisfaction . . . from the repertory. I

didn't care about promotions or raises or dressing rooms.

My last promotion, when Kyra Nichols and I were promoted, along with Bart Cook and Danny Duell, we found out rather oddly. The press department called me and said, what do you want to use as a headshot? And I said, oh, I don't have headshots because I'm not a principal. And the woman said, well, you are now. That's how I found out, which was a little disappointing.

We didn't believe it, Kyra and I. One of us said, "Didn't you think that to be a principal you wouldn't pancake on an adagio?" I think Kyra said it to me, and I said, "Yes, that and a lot more." I thought to be a Balanchine ballerina you had to be a goddess. And I was no goddess. Kyra and I were, "What?" Look who we were joining: Suzanne and Patty and Kay Mazzo and Violette Verdy and Melissa Hayden and Diana Adams. And we were just – well – humbled is too strong a word . . .

BR: But isn't that the dream?

Watts: Yes, but you don't just have it happen overnight. To me it wasn't achievable. I remember once that I thanked Balanchine for a raise and he said, "What's the matter, dear? You don't think you earned it?"

BR: On the other hand, Balanchine was very prickly about the union and the dancers' demands. He threatened to fire everyone and start a new company at one point.

Watts: Yes, he said, "I'll take Heather and Peter and Kyra and Darci and go to Salzburg." I guess we were going to be doing *Apollo*, because that was just three girls and a boy. But why wouldn't he be prickly? He built NYCB. He paid us better than anybody else. If what you wanted to do was dance, that was heaven. You had all the toe shoes you could ever wear. You had the greatest rep in the world. You were paid better than in any company in America. Okay, what were the problems? There were no pensions. People wanted more money for overtime. We needed more security. We had to fight for that.

It's a real difference between then and now, when people get college degrees while they're

dancing. That's a wonderful thing. Yesterday, Megan Fairchild got her diploma in mathematics and economics from Fordham University, after fifteen years of going to school. She posted it on Facebook and I almost started crying. I thought, you must not have even had a goal? Just going to classes, all those years.

I had the great honor of getting an honorary degree from Hunter College and at the ceremony they start telling us about the graduates. It's a commuter college. Nobody goes to Hunter for only four years. The stories. There are people there who've been there for thirty-two years, who were building custodians. Guys who've been in prison and come out and have nothing and go to Hunter. I think it's incredible that the dancers today go to school, but it marks a difference in thinking about your future.

Damian went to school when he was, perhaps, thirty-eight. He was still dancing. He got a Masters from Harvard. He worked hard. Squeezing classes into breaks from City Ballet, still doing *Nutcrackers* and doing his side gigs because we needed the money. It was crazy. But he did it. It's not all dance all day like it was when we were young.

Damian did that at the end of his career for his security. He was going to take care of his old lady and his dogs [laughing]. Many say things like, "I wish I could play an instrument." If I'd started studying when I started saying that, by now I would be playing an instrument. But Damian didn't just say he wanted to get a degree. He did it. His family was very educated. His dad was a professor. His mom worked at UNICEF. There was a lot of Joseph Polisi [past president of Juilliard and the author of *The Artist as Citizen*] on his mind, and education and the road not traveled, and Damian decided to change his fortune at a certain point.

BR: Did Damian think he would leave the dance world entirely?

Watts: He had no idea what he was going to do. Did you?

BR: Not really. I did think I would do something unrelated to ballet.

Watts: So did I. I was never going to be

teacher. But look at where we're both sitting right now [at the Center for Ballet and the Arts at NYU]. You write about ballet and do some teaching and I'm teaching and lecturing. No, Damian wasn't planning to leave the ballet world. He wanted to expand his world. He went to the Kennedy School at Harvard and studied public policy. Lincoln Kirstein was in his brain. He was thinking about Lincoln Center and how the arts fit into society and what the arts can do for society – not just what we can get but what we can give back.

BR: And now he's the incoming president of Juilliard.

Watts: Yes. That came out of left field. It was crazy, joyful, insane. . . . It started some months ago. He's been sought after and he's looked at lots of opportunities that he hadn't wanted. He has interesting jobs. The Aspen Institute of Arts; he's built that up into a really interesting program; and the Vail International Dance Festival, obviously. He's never lacked for getting offers, and most of them he hardly considered, but this was, "Wow, that's a big platform." How can the arts serve this country? How do we raise young musicians, actors, and dancers to think like citizens?

It's already a big aesthetic at Juilliard. Dr. Polisi's been magnificent there as their president. The Juilliard family is incredibly excited about Damian's arrival. It seems that there is a general sense of belief in him already – that aside from protecting the excellence and legacy of Juilliard, he is also the right person to move the school and students forward.

BR: It's the Harvard of performing arts schools, essentially.

Watts: It is. The dancers are college aged, not SAB aged, but you see them everywhere. On Broadway, in many dance companies. I teach a lot of college dance and I've been fortunate that Jeffrey Edwards [former NYCB dancer, now teacher at Juilliard] has invited me in to teach. We did some work on *Afternoon of a Faun* and the first theme from *Four Ts*. It was so funny. Juilliard is so different from the time we were there at SAB. They've renovated the whole building.

BR: Are the old SAB studios still there?

Watts: It's different, there are even more dance studios. Even a glass studio you can see from the street.

I went to the third floor and I didn't recognize anything. I said, "Jeff, where am I?" Then I went into a studio and the clock was still there. The same clock that was in our old studio. The pole was gone, but it's the same clock. I took a picture of it. I put it right on Facebook and when I was done an hour later about a hundred people had responded. "Oh, my God! The clock!" There's no mistaking it. The hallways are gigantic and there's marble everywhere. It's gorgeous, glass, and glittering, but there's that same damn clock we used to stare at in a class we wanted out of [laughing].

While we are talking about SAB, you know what crosses my mind? Janet Collins. She was teaching modern dance at SAB when I was there, and we didn't want to take modern. We also had jazz. Peter Martins put ballroom in the curriculum. He loved Pierre Dulaine and Yvonne Marceau. [Dulaine created methods for teaching ballroom and travels the world implementing these techniques.] That went on for years. Then Olga Kostriusky started teaching character classes in addition to her ballet classes. But we had modern, we had jazz. So here are two stories.

Janet Collins, a Black woman, barefoot, bon-go drums, on the floor, right? She was the first Black person to dance at the Metropolitan Opera – in 1951. She was a great dancer! Did anyone tell us this? No. I found this out years later. Buzz Miller was our jazz teacher. [Buzz Miller was a Jack Cole dancer, worked with Jerome Robbins and Bob Fosse, appeared on Broadway in *Two's Company*, *The Pajama Game*, and *Funny Girl*.]

We had these amazing people teaching us, but nobody told us who they were. To us they just seemed old, because they were forty. I am very sensitive to that. I remember thinking, Stanley is so old. He was forty when I came to the school. I remind Damian, who thinks he's a kid, "Do you remember how old you thought Stanley was? Well, he was fifty. You're fifty."

I am older than Danilova was when I thought she was ancient. Balanchine used to say to me, "You know, I can't show today, dear, because of my back." And I would think, can't show, today? It's not like he ever showed full out in my time. You know what I mean? Show meant *show*, to me. Now I do the same thing. I say to my kids, "I can't show today." Well, no shit. When you get to be my age you never show. I show with my hands. My hands hurt; I can't show today.

BR: Nobody explained anything. When I arrived at SAB I thought Krammy [Andrei Kramarevsky] had been there for forty years. But he'd only just defected from the Soviet Union a couple of years earlier. I thought he was like the other Russians, so why couldn't he speak English? Danilova could speak English. But he'd only just arrived.

Watts: Well now you can Google. We didn't have Google. I don't know if the students now bother. But we didn't know anything. In those days, if you went to the Performing Arts Library it was so intimidating. You'd sign your life away to see one movie of Tanny.

BR: What strikes me as odd is that the people running those schools and companies – I'm referring to City Ballet and Ballet Theatre – didn't seem to understand that we were terribly uneducated and might benefit from learning about the people standing right in front of us in the studio that we actually knew very little about.

Watts: Balanchine was very reverent. If a dancer came back . . . I was dancing *Agon* and Diana Adams was there and he invited her to come onstage, "Will you show Heather? We don't know this part." And she gave me a wonderful correction. So he was very nice. With Sally Leland and *Symphony in Three Movements*, which was done on her. She was a ballet mistress, she wasn't just teaching me, but he would say, "Sara, dear, you did this so well. Can you show Heather? You did this so beautifully." He was more like what you're saying. He knew that we didn't know things.

I remember Balanchine said to me about *Monumentum pro Gesualdo*, "You know, dear,

it's a little more . . . it's a *monumentum*." I just looked at him. And he said, "You know what that means? It's a salute. It's an homage. It's a funeral, if you will, for Gesualdo." And I was still looking at him, so he said, "Do you know who Gesualdo was?" And I said, no. And he said, "He wrote madrigals. He was a wonderful composer." He said, I think, in the sixteenth century. And so, right then, already, I know why we're doing this [she stands and places both hands on one hip, as if she's holding the hilt of a sword]. It's a court dance, but it's very modern, the way we do it. Stravinsky wrote the music based on those themes, so it's all built on the times of the court.

That's why Balanchine would say nothing means nothing. That's why I teach context. It's not enough to say to people, take *Barocco*, "It's jazzy." Balanchine said to Judy Fugate and me in 1975 or 1976 "You know, dears, it's jazzy." Now, in 1976 we still knew what "jazzy" was. Try saying that to, you know, Unity Phelan? Jazzy? What does that mean to her? Are we using the right word?

In the opening of the third movement of *Barocco*, the girls do the Charleston, really. That's what it is. It's the Charleston. But it's a jazzy Charleston. What does that mean to an eighteen-year-old today? They're doing arabesque arabesque arabesque [she demonstrates a very stiff version of what the step should be].

You have to find new words or explain to them what the Charleston was if you want to go that far back and talk about jazz as slightly dangerous. Prohibition. Bathtub Gin. Flappers. It's got more to it than "jazzy." It's not cute at all. There's a bit of danger. People thought that if you went to a jazz club you were a naughty girl. So we have to find new ways to describe that spirit today.

Another thing I like to teach to the professionals I work with is how the ballets relate to one another. Especially Balanchine. His ballets are sisters and brothers of each other. The Tchaikovsky repertory, you go from *Serenade* to *Theme*, but they're sisters. The sweep of *Serenade* is so different. Get in the middle of that

pas de deux from *Theme* and you've got some real sweep going there. The wildness of *Allegro* and the wildness of *Dewdrop*, they're related. Those ballets are interrelated.

If you meet a dancer who hasn't been in the corps de ballet very much, they're not sure what's going on around them. They don't know. I don't think you can dance Balanchine if you don't know what else is going on around you, within the context of the ballet. I don't think you can be a good *Dewdrop* if you don't understand the kaleidoscope. If you don't understand where you're pushing. How they're settling as you start. It gives you that waltzing kind of repose, almost.

The corps stands and kneels right as you come on and start calling. That fourth entrance is like a call to arms, but if you don't know that they've just settled, like flowers? But you're not a flower. You're the *Dewdrop*. You need to know what those Flowers are doing. You need to know when you run and push those girls what they're going to do. They're going to scatter all the way around the stage and you're going to leave. But you can't just leave. You have to know how it resolves – to be able to really leave with conviction. To know that the stage is not empty. It's full. And those girls don't leave the stage so it's really important. The corps women in *Flowers* don't leave. You leave. So what are you rushing into?

It's not just a bunch of steps. It's like some great old Goldwyn Follies type of film where the Goddess is coming and going, all of that. That's what I like to teach.

BR: What are you proudest of and most disappointed in when you look back at your time in City Ballet?

Watts: I don't really feel pride. When I was first teaching about Balanchine, Damian was at school and he said, "You know, when you talk about your career, you refer to it in two parts." I said, "I don't know what you mean." He said, "Well, when you talk about the time period when Mr. Balanchine was still alive you call it 'My Real Career,' and when you talk about the time after he died, you say, 'My Career.'"

And I said, "Shit, because that's how it was, really." I'm pretty disappointed in myself with the second part of my career. I really probably should have quit when Balanchine died. I didn't have the stability of mind to deal with all that swirled around me without him. And when he died I didn't take the time to mourn and recover and rebuild. I never did.

BR: Did you have enough of a relationship with Jerry for that to give you some sense of purpose?

Watts: It's funny. After Balanchine died we were in Europe. I was a mess and Jerry came up to me and said, "Why don't you leave the tour?" I never told anybody this except maybe Peter or Damian. Jerry said, "Why don't you leave, come with me? I'm going to visit some friends in Italy." And I said, "I can't do that." I couldn't stop. I couldn't take the time.

And ultimately I rejected Jerry. He needed so much of your time to rehearse his ballets, which I thought, right or wrong, were more accessible physically to me. I felt like I needed to concentrate more on the classical rep than the dance drama of Jerry's ballets. I made a lot of mistakes.

I think I was a little egotistical when Balanchine was alive. But he was so superior to everything that it wasn't in my way. I had problems with music. I had certain problems. I had a bad arabesque. I was very nervous and high strung. Those problems: they dog you. You never solve them. You learn to work with them. You learn to use your strengths. I got a lot of help with music from Peter, Bart, Sean Lavery, Jock, Judy Fugate, Gordon Boelzner. I had a hard time staying clear on the music and not getting indulgent. A lot my problems in life have stemmed from overindulgence.

Emotional indulgence: I ended up with an alcohol problem. That's an indulgence or, for me, it was. I was partying quite a bit and I did not know how seriously involved I was with liquor for many years after I retired – probably four or five years. It wasn't a good scene for me and I'm really lucky that that isn't an issue in my life and hasn't been for a while. I worked at that, and in working at that I found

my better self again. In a certain way you can obscure your real problems with alcohol.

BR: It is extremely difficult to find yourself once you leave the ballet profession. Your entire identity is as a dancer. Who are you? What are you, once you walk away? That can be a very dark place.

Watts: Because I was involved with Damian when I retired, I kept going to the ballet. I didn't feel like I was in a dark place because I kept going. I went to see him dance along with the rest of the company. Jock was still dancing and our relationship kind of diverged. But dancers I still cared about were still there so it wasn't so much that.

It was complicated for me in the beginning when Balanchine died because of Peter. Peter had been my boyfriend, and now he was the company director and had to do things. Other people would think I did things that were really spoiled, but if Balanchine puts you into *Barocco* and Peter comes along and chooses somebody else to do it – makes you share it – that feels terrible. We were all hanging on to what we had from Balanchine. Not just parts. Words. Steps in a ballet. The little differences were really important to us.

It must have been really terrible for Wendy Whelan and Damian to join the company then, right after Balanchine died, because we were all really traumatized. All of us, and doing the best we could. It was a dicey time. I had a few years when I danced okay. And then, it was a self-fulfilling prophecy: a lot of bad press about Peter and me. Some of it was sour grapes; some of it bitter nastiness; some of it maybe true. But it was overwhelming. It pretty much became my story. I lost myself in some of that sadness. So that's a regret.

But proud? I'm proud of the kind of woman I am today. I like helping others. I like sharing what everybody knew to be a magical time, with humor and warmth. I like supporting dancers the way I was by Balanchine. I like pushing them because it's hard to push yourself. Balanchine would let you dance and then suddenly after a performance he would come onstage and rehearse you for fifteen minutes.

No matter how incredible Tiler Peck dances, afterward I will always remember something that could have been better. I like giving her that, so she has goals. Because what they think went badly is never what matters. Dancers say, "Oh, I missed that." And I'm thinking, I didn't even see that.

But, why are you going ahead of the music right there? Wait. Wait forever. You think you are saying something new. Afterwards, you hear yourself while you're walking down the street and you realize it is just Balanchine. It's just Balanchine speaking.

BR: Did you know him socially?

Watts: A bit. Peter and I went out with him a few times. To his apartment once. He made us lunch. We went out to dinner with Balanchine and Misha a few times. But I was scared of Balanchine. I was scared of him. I didn't want him to know I smoked because he hated smoking. I had a lot of secrets. I didn't reek of it, my hair didn't smell. Balanchine would walk in the room and Misha would be smoking and give Peter the cigarette and Peter would walk over and give it to me in a towel. We were a mess. It was funny.

Those were heady days, the days with Misha. We'd fly on the Concorde. I did guestings with him. Balanchine revived *Apollo* for him and we danced a fair amount together, maybe five or six ballets?

BR: Why didn't Balanchine make any new work on Misha? Balanchine was sick at various moments during that time but he was healthy enough to choreograph *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* on Nureyev for City Opera while Misha was still dancing at City Ballet. *Bourgeois* premiered in April 1979 and Misha's last performance with City Ballet was in October.

Watts: He would have. Had Misha stayed longer I believe Balanchine would have made something on Misha. But the time was so short, and then the ABT job came along.

Misha did a lot during the fifteen months that he danced with us. It was tremendous

pressure. I remember watching him do Melancholic and thinking, how good could you feasibly be? But Bart Cook was incredible! Yes, Misha was beautiful, but there were years and years in an interpretation like the one Bart did. Misha was just so good in everything he did, all right out of the box. I just showed the video of Misha in *Prodigal* to a group of dancers and you can't believe how good it is.

BR: Yes, we did it at ABT when I was in the company.

Watts: Balanchine kept tinkering with *Apollo* when Misha was doing it and then he put some things back in when Peter did it. He would have done something for Misha eventually, I'm sure.

We were dancing in Paris – Misha and Peter and I – and the company was in Washington, and when we got to Washington Misha said he was taking over Ballet Theatre. Then he finished out those performances and left. *Apollo* had run for one season and then Balanchine kept working on it.

Was it fun to work with Misha at ABT?

BR: I wouldn't characterize it as fun. But to work with him was to understand how things should be done, with an incredibly high standard, with integrity. He had and, I think, still has tremendous integrity in all that he does. Even if he does *Sex and the City*, it has integrity because he has integrity.

Watts: You know, I work at *Vanity Fair* and over the years I've done a few things on Misha. He was doing this Robert Wilson piece and I thought, maybe it's time for Misha to do the "Proust Questionnaire" – it's the magazine's back page. So I asked him. I wasn't sure he would say yes, but he did. So he sent me his answers and I read them and when I spoke with Damian about it that was the exact word I used. I said, you know, even in this *Vanity Fair* quiz, there's so much integrity. It was done on such a high level. No bullshit. He's a smart man. Well, there is that guitar moment in *The Turning Point* [laughing].