NEW YORK STORY: JEROME ROBBINS AND HIS WORLD

Donald and Mary Oenslager Gallery

The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Exhibition Curated by Lynn Garafola

March 25 – June 28, 2008

The labels, wall exits, and reflections that follow are an effort to revisit an exhibition that did not, alas, have a published catalogue or a robust website. Exhibitions are like performances. When they close, they are dismantled, and the objects, their magic gone, sent back to their boxes. In revisiting this material, I wanted to evoke the experience of walking through the Donald and Mary Oenslager Gallery of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, with the reader enjoying by suggestion and as an act of imagination the numerous objects on display tracing the remarkable career of Jerome Robbins as an artist of the ballet, Broadway, and concert stage in mid-twentieth-century New York. This is the second of three exhibitions I have curated about ballet in New York City from the 1930s to the late twentieth century. As such it complements Dance for a City: Fifty Years of the New York City Ballet (New-York Historical Society, 1999) and Arthur Mitchell: Harlem’s Ballet Trailblazer (Wallach Art Gallery, 2018). To revisit these exhibitions digitally, see “Dance for a City” Revisited (https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/catalog/ac:qrfj6q5763) and the Mitchell exhibition website (https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/mitchell).

In preparing this material for publication on the Columbia University Commons, I have modified some of the labels, adding explanatory text when it seemed necessary as well as excerpts from letters and telegrams that exhibition visitors could read for themselves. The contents of the six video compilations appear at the end. Unless otherwise indicated, all objects are from the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

I thank once again the many colleagues and friends at the New York Public Library’s Jerome Robbins Dance Division who made this exhibition and the research that accompanied it not only possible but also a memorable experience.

INTRODUCTORY TEXT

No choreographer was so consummate a New Yorker as Jerome Robbins. Manhattan-born, New Jersey-raised, he set out to conquer the city as a teenager, and by 1948 he had become, in the words of Esquire magazine, the "hottest thing in show business." He choreographed for Broadway and the ballet stage, and in both he made the city’s landscape and kinetic pulse a living presence. A good democrat, he celebrated the ordinary. He commemorated city landmarks, while also memorializing less appetizing sights. He relished the city's promise of unexpected romance and the exhilarating energy of its streets, its movement vernaculars and native gestures, its jazz and Latin rhythms, its corporeal accents of New Yorkean.

New York Story: Jerome Robbins and His World is the first exhibition to tell the choreographer's
story from the multitude of papers, graphic works, photographs, and videotapes that he bequeathed to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Robbins seldom threw anything away, and from his earliest years as a choreographer he documented his work. Multi-talented, he painted, sketched, and was a serious amateur photographer; he played the piano, made collages, and wrote extensively. He found the stimulus of collaboration both exciting and productive. The artworks dedicated to him, like the many objects by Robbins himself in *New York Story*, testify to his passionate commitment to the making of art.

**EARLY LIFE**

Born in New York City in 1918, Robbins spent his childhood in New Jersey. He began formal dance classes in the mid-1930s, training in a variety of techniques, including ballet. After performing as a modern dancer in WPA-sponsored events and other concerts, he appeared in several Broadway shows and created his first documented choreography at Camp Tamiment, a left-wing resort in the Poconos.

Jerome Robbins, with members of his family in Poland, including his bearded grandfather, Nathan Mayer Rabinowitz, 1924. Jerome Robbins Photographs.

When Robbins was five, his mother took him and his sister Sonia to visit their grandfather in Rozhanka, a mostly Jewish village of wooden houses and dirt roads. Robbins would draw on memories of that idyllic summer in the shtetl forty years later, when he staged *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964).


Although he did not always get along with his father, Robbins clearly inherited his looks.


Robbins' father settled in New York City in 1905 and nine years later became a United States citizen.

Harry Rabinowitz in front of the J. Rabinowitz delicatessen at 1403 Madison Avenue. Harry lived with his family in the same building as the delicatessen on 97th Street. Jerome Robbins Photographs.

Robbins' parents, Harry and Lena Rabinowitz, around the time of their marriage. Photograph by Mandelkern. Jerome Robbins Photographs.

The Mandelkern studio was located on Madison Avenue at 111th Street.

Sonia Rabinowitz (Robbins) dancing with a Duncan teacher, late 1910s? Jerome Robbins Photographs.

Robbins' sister Sonia studied Duncan-style dancing with Alys Bentley and briefly performed with Irma Duncan's Russian company, which toured the United States in 1928. Bentley's classes, which Robbins sometimes observed, introduced him to concert dance.

Harry, Lena, Sonia, and Jerome Rabinowitz, early 1920s. Jerome Robbins Photographs.

Jerome Robbins and members of a student orchestra at a recital, 1920s. Jerome Robbins Photographs.

Robbins is seated center holding his violin and bow. As a child, he studied both the piano and
the violin.

Jerome Robbins (waving), with friends on an excursion to the New Jersey Palisades, 1930s. Jerome Robbins Photographs.


Jerome Robbins (à la Peter Pan) leaping over his shadow on the sand, late 1930s. Jerome Robbins Photographs.


In the early 1920s Harry and his siblings sold the family delicatessen. Harry moved his family to New Jersey and opened a foundation-garment business in Union City.

DEBUT OF A DANCER
Federal Music Project of New York City, announcement of five programs on the relationship of music and dance, [February-April 1937]. Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

With lectures by critic John Martin and composer Louis Horst and performances by the Martha Graham Concert Group, the English Folk Dance Society, Chief White Feather, and members of the cast of Bassa Moona, this series of fortnightly programs curated by Felicia Sorel emphasized inclusiveness. Here, on February 21st, as Gerald Robbins, the future choreographer appears to have made his professional debut in an commedia-flavored ballet.

Felicia Sorel and Gluck-Sandor in a "geometric" Charleston number, 1930s. Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

In 1936 Robbins began to study with Gluck-Sandor and Felicia Sorel at their pocket-sized Dance Center at 101 West 58th Street. Both left a deep impression on him. Like the young Robbins, they were modern dancers, with an eclectic training that embraced ballet, "ethnic," and modern techniques, experience in the commercial theater, and a commitment to exploring the creative aspects of choreography. Both, moreover, were active members of the left-wing dance world. They taught movement for actors at the Group Theatre, choreographed union revues and shows for the Federal Dance Project, and staged original works and versions of modern ballet classics at the Dance Center that attracted performers of the stature of José Limón. In the 1940s Sorel served as codirector, with Wilson Williams, of the Negro Dance Company, and choreographed the dances for a revival of Run, Little Chillun! and Lysistrata, performed by an all-black cast. In 1947 Robbins hired Sandor as his assistant on High Button Shoes, and in 1964 cast him as the Rabbi in Fiddler on the Roof.


Playbill of the program that reopened the Dance Center after an interval of four years in March 1937. Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

The opening program featured a revival of Gluck-Sandor's El Amor Brujo, with José Limón in the role of Carmelo, and a new piece, Isabella Andreini, also with Limón. Robbins, as Robin Gerald, had small roles in both works.

Students' Dance Recitals playbill of an evening of Sandor-Sorel Ballets presented by the Dance Center, 2 April 1938. Jerome Robbins Dance Division.
The program balanced revivals (Petrouchka and El Amor Brujo) with newer dances (such as Felicia Sorel's Negro Blues Poems and Spanish Dances of War). In addition to Gluck-Sandor and Sorel, the cast included Demetrios Vilan, a Turkish-born dancer who had gone from Denishawn to Broadway and often partnered Sorel; Randolph Sawyer, an African-American dancer who frequently performed with Edith Segal's Red Dancers and was the first black man to appear as the Moor in Petrouchka; and in yet another experiment with his name, "Gerald Robins."

Lisa Parnova was a Russian-born American ballet dancer who had studied with Michel Fokine and worked at the Cologne Opera in the 1920s. In the 1930s she performed with Gluck-Sandor and Felicia Sorel at the Dance Center in addition to giving concert programs. Gerald Robbins was one of several stage names that Robbins used at the start of his career.

Still very slight, the nineteen-year-old Robbins was cast as a child in the production, which opened on 20 September 1937 and had choreography by Gluck-Sandor.

Members of the cast of the Yiddish Art Theater production are joined by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia and Albert Einstein. Robbins is in the third row, fourth from the right. The show was choreographed by Gluck-Sandor.

Jerome Robbins
The Story, late 1930s. Titled by the artist. Watercolor, pen and ink, and pencil on heavy brown cardboard. Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works.
A label on a separate sheet reads: "Storyteller: from sketch on Weehawken ferry, 38-39?"
According to an attached note, “The Story” grew out of a sketch that Robbins made on the Weehawken ferry in the late 1930s. Until the 1940s Robbins lived in Weehawken with his parents and came to New York City by ferry. "I used to come to New York and audition for shows," he once said, "and not get them, and go back to Jersey and look back from the Palisades and say, 'Well, I'll be back tomorrow'."

Jerome Robbins

Felicia Sorel

Jerome Robbins

Jerome Robbins
Study of a dancer, [194-?]. Pencil, gouache, and pen and ink on yellow paper. Signed by the artist. Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

THE TAMIMENT PLAYERS
In 1938 Robbins spent his first summer at Camp Tamiment, a left-wing Pocono resort where he
took part in the weekly musical revues under the inspired direction of Max Liebman, later known as the producer of the television variety program *Your Show of Shows*. For Robbins those summers at Tamiment in the late 1930s and early 1940s were an invaluable preparation for a career in musical theater. The company included Danny Kaye, Sylvia Fine, and Imogene Coca, as well as a chorus of modern and ballet dancers. The material was light and topical, often with a political bent, and poked fun at movies, theater personalities, ballets, and current events. Robbins typically appeared in several numbers each week.


Robbins created his first original dances in Tamiment's freewheeling cabaret atmosphere. *Death of a Loyalist* alluded to the Spanish Civil War and had a cast of both modern and ballet dancers. *Strange Fruit*. Alvarez-Robbins, [1939]. Drawing by Jerome Robbins. Charcoal and pencil on paper. Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works. This was the climactic image of the duet *Strange Fruit*, which Robbins choreographed for himself and Anita Alvarez at Camp Tamiment in August 1939. Inspired by the anti-lynching song made famous by Billie Holliday, the number was reprised only weeks after its premiere for the TAC Dance Cabaret. Alvarez danced with Martha Graham until 1939 and later worked on Broadway, appearing in *One Touch of Venus* (1943) and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1949), both choreographed by Agnes de Mille, and *Finnian's Rainbow* (1947), choreographed by Michael Kidd. She served as Robbins' assistant on his second Broadway show, *Billion Dollar Baby* (1945).


Robbins (as Jerry Robyns) and Anita Alvarez performed a reprise of their duet *Strange Fruit* on a shared program with Agnes de Mille, Ruthanna Boris, Sybil Shearer, Lotte Goslar, and the Lindy Hoppers. TAC Dance Cabaret was sponsored by the Theatre Arts Committee (TAC), which organized some of the era's liveliest left-of-center cultural events, in addition to publishing *TAC Magazine*, a high-spirited monthly edited by Edna Ocko. With its alliance of theater and concert work, ballet and modern dance styles, and artistic and political concerns, the TAC Dance Cabaret exemplified the Popular Front of the mid-1930s and the left-wing "cultural front" (to borrow a term from historian Michael Denning) that survived in New York until the 1960s.


Robbins not only choreographed *Harlem Episode* but also played one of the Negroes. He later described the piece: "a party of white slummers invade a Harlem dive,...[and] almost create a riot". Robbins also appeared in a duet, *Whirling Persians*, with Anita Alvarez, a favorite partner, and in a trio, *Three Alike*, with comedian Imogene Coca and her husband Robert Burton.


In addition to appearing in several numbers, Robbins choreographed *Oscar Wilde's The Happy Prince*. Featuring Max Liebman and Imogene Coca, this seems to have been an early experience for Robbins in directing performers who were not dancers.

Jerome Robbins in his *Lazy Boy* number, Camp Tamiment, 1941. Photograph by Seymour E.


**BALLET THEATRE**

In 1940 Robbins joined Ballet Theatre. Here he worked with Russian masters such as Michel Fokine, the maverick English choreographer Antony Tudor, and American choreographers such as Agnes de Mille who were transforming the look of American ballet and theater dance. Here, too, he cemented relationships with future collaborators and the dancers who would realize his vision of a contemporary American art. It was at Ballet Theatre in 1944 that he staged *Fancy Free*, his first ballet, now an American classic.


Although Robbins' early career was closely identified with Ballet Theatre, he was not a charter member of the company. His work on Broadway, however, had introduced him to several Ballet Theatre dancers, including Annabelle Lyon, Alicia Alonso, and Maria Karnilova. Eugene Loring had danced with Lincoln Kirstein's Ballet Caravan and Karen Konrad with Catherine Littlefield's Philadelphia Ballet before joining Ballet Theatre.


Although the United States had not yet entered World War II, all men over the age of eighteen had to register with their local draft board in the event of a military call-up.


Alicia Markova (née Marks) was one of the great classical ballerinas of the 1930s and 1940s who danced with Ballet Theatre during Robbins' early years with company.

Tamara Toumanova in *Stars in Your Eyes*, 1939. Inscribed "To dear and very nice / Jerry / With my best wishes & best luck / Tamara / Toumanova / Work hard and you / shall see." Jerome Robbins Photographs.

With her dark beauty and charismatic presence, Tamara Toumanova epitomized the Russian émigré ballerinas of the 1930s and 1940s. In 1939 she made her Broadway debut in the Arthur Schwartz-Dorothy Fields musical *Stars in Your Eyes*. Choreographed by Carl Randall, the show had a dance chorus packed with future stars, including Alicia Alonso, Nora Kaye, and Jerome Robbins.


A charter member of Ballet Theatre, Noble also danced with Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and Valerie Bettis' modern group in addition to appearing on Broadway and Max Liebman's *Your Show of Shows* on television. In 1965 he joined the faculty of the newly founded North Carolina School of the Arts.
Playbill, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, 9 September 1942. Jerome Robbins Programs. Robbins made his debut in the title role of Michel Fokine's Petrouchka only a few weeks after the choreographer's death. Fokine had sensed Robbins' undeveloped gifts and worked closely with him in this last restaging of his greatest ballet. "It means so much to me," Robbins wrote in his diary. "I want to be the best Petrushka there is. I am & want to be humble & workmanlike before the part. It has to be good – it is me in so many ways."

Donald Saddler, 1940s. Inscribed “Jerry / With...friendship / Always / Don.” Jerome Robbins Photographs.
A charter member of Ballet Theatre, Saddler followed Robbins to Broadway, first as a dancer, then as an outstanding choreographer, director, and producer. Among his award-winning shows were Wonderful Town (1953) and No, No, Nanette (1971).

Eugene Loring as Billy the Kid, Ballet Theatre, 1940. Inscribed "Three rousing bronx cheers / Eugene Loring." Jerome Robbins Photographs.
With Billy the Kid (1938), for Lincoln Kirstein's Ballet Caravan, and The Great American Goof (1940), for Ballet Theatre, Loring established himself as a leading exponent of Americana ballet. Soon after, he left the ballet world to choreograph for the popular stage, screen, and television. In 1965 he founded the Department of Dance at the University of California, Irvine.

Agnes de Mille, 1940s. Photograph by Louis Melancon. Jerome Robbins Dance Division.
More than any other Ballet Theatre choreographer, de Mille marked out the path that Robbins followed. They had much in common: eclectic training, an exposure to modern dance, a feeling for the popular pulse, a sense of humor, a commitment to American material, and an ability to move easily between ballet and Broadway. De Mille created theater dances that stood on their own, used ballet forms like the pas de deux, and were fully integrated into the plot. In Oklahoma! (1943), Robbins later told playwright John Guare, she brought "real people" on stage. "Every time they danced, there were people you could identify with....No longer did you have eight boys and girls coming out tap dancing or hoofing or kicking."

Choreographed by Michel Fokine to Prokofiev's "Lieutenant Kijé" suite and with costumes and scenery by Mstislav Dobujinsky, this all-Russian production about a dying soldier of the Napoleonic period was dedicated to the soldiers dying at that very moment on Russia's Eastern front. During World War II the United States and the Soviet Union were allies against Nazi Germany.


Nora Kaye, 1940s. Jerome Robbins Photographs.


**Jerome Robbins**
[Christ Figure?], ca. 1941. Charcoal on paper. Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works. This was probably executed when Robbins was on tour in Mexico with Ballet Theatre.


Nora Kaye in a ballet portrait, ca. 1945. Photograph by Constantine. Inscribed "For Jerry / With
my love / Nora." Jerome Robbins Photographs.
Of all the dancers that Robbins met in his early years as a dancer, none was as close to him as Nora Kaye. Like Robbins, she came from a Russian-Jewish background, read voraciously, spoke her mind, and was professionally and intellectually ambitious. They were sometime lovers and even briefly engaged, and the roles he created for her in *Facsimile* (1946) and *The Cage* (1951) suggested both the depth and complexity of his feelings for her.


Antony Tudor rehearsing *Romeo and Juliet* in Los Angeles, [1943?]. Jerome Robbins Photographs.
"Tudor has been a great influence on me," Robbins wrote in 1944, "but now that I'm about to do my own work" – a reference to *Fancy Free*, which he was then choreographing – "I can't play 'son' to him any longer, nor the adoring disciple. I couldn't do my own work then. I'd be always wondering how he would do it, or what he would think. Well, I'm still interested in what he will think of my piece, but I'm not inhibited about it any longer. One has to have complete confidence in oneself, and finally there will be no one to rely on but me."

**Jerome Robbins**
Francis Steuben was the pen name used by Edna Ocko in her reviews for *New Masses* in the 1940s. In her article of 7 December 1943, she had written: "Antony Tudor, more than any other individual, has made the ballet of today a modern, living, expressive art." During the early 1940s, Robbins regarded Tudor as his "artistic father."

**Jerome Robbins**
This letter captures Robbins' mood on the eve of his first major success with *Fancy Free*. It also documents his idea for an unrealized ballet exploring the psychosexual terrain of *Facsimile* (1946) and *The Cage* (1951), and records his growing artistic independence from Antony Tudor.

**J. Alden Talbot**
The shortest contract Robbins ever signed with Ballet Theatre, it assigned him a royalty of only ten dollars per performance for the most successful of his early ballets. Talbot was the President of Ballet Theatre, Inc.

**Oliver Smith**

**Oliver Smith**
With scenic design by Oliver Smith, *Fancy Free* marked the beginning of a collaboration with Robbins that endured for more than twenty years. Smith, who became co-director of Ballet Theatre in 1945, designed the scenery for all of Robbins' works for the company – *Fancy Free*
(1944), *Interplay* (1945), *Facsimile* (1946), and *Les Noces* (1965) – as well as *Age of Anxiety* (1950) for the New York City Ballet. He also designed many of Robbins' finest musicals, including *On the Town* (1944), *High Button Shoes* (1947), *Look, Ma, I'm Dancin'*! (1948), and *West Side Story* (1957). "In my work," he wrote in 1953, "I have tried to produce in ballet an American style that is neither easel painting nor stage design in the architectural, dramatic sense [but]...a combination of these two elements.... I have tried to reduce the set to its simplest elements...to achieve a simplicity of design which allows the dancer to remain the most important object on stage."

**Kermit Love**


Muriel Bentley in *Fancy Free*. Inscribed "For Jerry-balls, 'It's been a long time / and I hope it will be / longer. Love you, nevertheless. / From your girl, / Muriel / 6/24/45." Jerome Robbins Photographs.

Although Robbins began choreographing in the late 1930s, *Fancy Free* (1944) was his first ballet. Inspired by the sailors crowding the streets of midtown before sailing off to war, it was fresh and funny, and made him a star. *Fancy Free* displayed key elements of the Robbins style: a melding of classical and vernacular movement, a keen sense of timing, detailed characterization, and a feeling for the here-and-now. With a bright, new score by Leonard Bernstein and scenery by Oliver Smith, the ballet brought together the members of Robbins' first collaborative team. *Fancy Free* marked the high tide of Americana ballet. Even more it established Robbins as a poet of New York.


The success of *Fancy Free* (1944) led to the collaborators' first Broadway show, *On the Town* (1944).


Although *Fancy Free* had premiered the year before, Robbins and the other members of the cast were still performing their original roles. On this program Robbins also danced the role of Hermes in David Lichine's *Helen of Troy*.


Robbins' choreographed his second ballet, *Interplay*, for a variety program that featured comedian Imogene Coca (with whom he had worked at the Tamiment Playhouse), Zero Mostel (the future star of *Fiddler on the Roof*), and Katherine Dunham and her company. Newly costumed by Irene Sharaff, *Interplay* soon entered the Ballet Theatre repertory.

Interplay premiered on a program of "Concert Varieties" at the Ziegfeld Theatre in 1945. The program was eclectic, including comedians Zero Mostel and Imogene Coca, the Spanish dance duo Antonio and Rosario, and the Katherine Dunham company. "Interplay is a ballet based on dance games," read the program note. "There is the interplay of the dancers among themselves. There is the interplay of classic ballet steps and the contemporary spirit with which they are danced. There is the interplay of the dancers and the orchestra, and finally there is...the interplay of the piano and the other instruments." The music was Morton Gould's "American Concertette," which had premiered a short time before on NBC radio. Interplay entered the Ballet Theatre repertory in 1945.

The Ballet Theatre, Inc. Letter-contract for the production of Facsimile rejected by Jerome Robbins, 27 June 1946. American Ballet Theatre Records, Jerome Robbins Dance Division. After Fancy Free, Robbins drove a hard bargain in contract negotiations with Ballet Theatre, demanding long rehearsal periods and higher fees and royalties than either Antony Tudor or Agnes de Mille. This is one of several contracts rejected by Robbins in the months before Facsimile went into rehearsal.

Playbill, Ballet Theatre, Broadway Theatre, New York, 24 October 1946. Jerome Robbins Programs. This was the premiere of Facsimile, "a choreographic observation by Jerome Robbins" that was his second work for Ballet Theatre. The evening opened with Michel Fokine's Les Sylphides and closed with Antony Tudor's Lilac Garden.

Oliver Smith
Facsimile, set design, 1946. Watercolor, gouache, and pen and ink on paper. Lent by Dr. Robert Bunting (former collection of Jerome Robbins).
"He has a brilliant visual sense," Smith said of Robbins in 1961. "I think he has the most highly developed visual sense of any choreographer. He has a sense of rightness. When I first knew him he didn't know the time of day. He's educated himself."

Upper and lower right: Nora Kaye and Jerome Robbins.
Upper left: John Kriza (left), Nora Kaye, and Jerome Robbins.
Lower left: John Kriza (left) and Jerome Robbins.
Facsimile (1946), Robbins told an interviewer, "is about people who are insecure and lonely, who don't know how to cope with real relationships with the rest of the world....In fright, they take on false manners and politeness. You have seen people doing this at cocktail parties. You put three people together acting roles like this and it results in disaster. Finally they realize that they must go off alone." The ballet's commissioned score was by Leonard Bernstein.

Set to music by Prokofiev, Summer Day premiered at City Center on a program of the American-Soviet Music Society.


Lucia Chase was the driving force behind Ballet Theatre for thirty-five years. In 1945 she became co-director of the company, contributing generously from her private fortune to its maintenance and survival.

The accompanying caption read: "Jerome Robbins, stretched out on the floor smoking, is surrounded by ten dancers from six of his ballets, all of which have been danced this season in New York. At twenty-nine, he is not only one of the best but one of the most prolific American choreographers....For this Mili photograph, Vogue asked Robbins to design a composite scene holding together these wildly dissonant elements. In the background, he placed those absurd and delicious crooks from his comic hit, the Mack Sennett Ballet in High Button Shoes (Vincent Carbone, Jacqueline Dodge, and Sondra Lee); he flanked the left edge with Giselle Svetlik, as a French maid from Look, Ma, I'm Dancing. In the centre, he put Ruth Ann Koesun of the ballet Summer's Day; Hugh Laing and Nora Kaye of the ballet Facsimile; and Zachary Zolov [sic] and Melissa Hayden of the ballet Interplay. High in the right corner is John Kriza, one of the three sailor stars of Fancy Free."

**NEW YORK CITY BALLET**
In 1948 Robbins left Ballet Theatre to join the fledgling New York City Ballet. Here he came under the influence of George Balanchine and his vision of a spare, energy-infused American neoclassicism. Balanchine staged a number of ballets for Robbins, while actively supporting his choreographic efforts and allowing him the flexibility to continue working on Broadway. By 1957, Robbins had choreographed three of his most celebrated works – *The Cage* (1951), *Afternoon of a Faun* (1953), and *The Concert* (1956).


After a lapse of twenty-one years Balanchine revived *Prodigal Son* (1929) for Robbins. Since 1950 the ballet has seldom been out of repertory.


This was the first ballet that Robbins and Balanchine choreographed together. The swimsuits were by Jantzen.


*The Guests*, which had a commissioned score by Marc Blitzstein, was the first work that Robbins choreographed for the New York City Ballet.
Age of Anxiety, 1950. Photograph by George Platt Lyes. Above (from left): Todd Bolender, Jerome Robbins, Roy Tobias, Tanaquil Le Clercq; below (from left): Herbert Bliss, Richard Beard, Shaun O'Brien, and Melissa Hayden. Jerome Robbins Dance Division. With music by Leonard Bernstein, scenery by Oliver Smith, and costumes by Irene Sharaff, Age of Anxiety reunited Robbins with his Ballet Theatre and Broadway collaborators. Loosely inspired by W. H. Auden's poem, the ballet was set in New York City and dominated by a view of the Flatiron Building. Robbins considered it a major work, and in 1958 tried to coax Lucia Chase into reviving it for Ballet Theatre. "I think 'Age of Anxiety' is one of Oliver's best sets, one of Leonard's best scores, and some of my best choreography," he told her.

Jerome Robbins


This Friday evening program celebrated Robbins both as a choreographer and as a dancer. He appeared in all three ballets, his own Age of Anxiety (1950) and The Guests (1949), and Balanchine's Prodigal Son (1929). The critic John Martin was deeply moved by Robbins' interpretation of Prodigal's title role: "[H]ere is a performance to wring your heart. Only Nora Kaye in the field of the ballet has done anything that approaches it. It is dramatically true and it touches deep; there is not a movement that is not informed by feeling and colored by the dynamism of emotion....[H]ere is the first dramatic dancer of our ballet."

Robbins joined the New York City Ballet in 1949 and from the start danced as well as choreographed for the company. Bourrée Fantasque was one of the ballets in which Balanchine teamed him with Tanaquil Le Clercq, matching the stylish verve of his future wife with the impish humor of his new Associate Artistic Director.

Robbins admired ballerina Tanaquil Le Clercq enormously and cast her in many of his ballets. In Afternoon of a Faun, he later said, no one ever surpassed her.

In the 1950s Sneden's Landing, a village on the banks of the Hudson River just north of New York City, had a vibrant weekend arts community. Aaron Copland and the duo pianists Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale had homes there, and friends such as Robbins and Tanaquil Le Clercq, who married Balanchine in 1952, often visited. Robbins rented a house there in the 1960s.

Jerome Robbins
Letter to Tanaquil Le Clercq, early fall 1952? Tanaquil Le Clercq Collection, New York City Ballet Archive.
In this letter, one of many that Robbins wrote to Le Clercq during the 1950s, he expresses his admiration for Balanchine ("He is my ideal...my God as an artist") and complicated feelings about Lincoln Kirstein, the New York City Ballet's General Director. In addition Robbins speaks
frankly about the appeal of working on Broadway: "I don't want to do only ballets and work with ballet companies. I like doing shows when I get one to do and it always gives me a much better perspective on ballets when I can do them. I think that one can get terribly warped doing only one thing, and I never want to feel (or exist) as I did when I was in Ballet Theatre."


Jean Rosenthal was the New York City Ballet's technical director and the set designer of several Robbins works, including The Cage (1951) and Afternoon of a Faun (1953). "Because she is able to use light so dexterously," wrote critic John Martin in 1951, "to create walls where none exist, to isolate areas for action, to obliterate unsightly structural elements and to compensate by color and contrast for the gaunt vacuities of an empty stage, she has succeeded miraculously in making the ballets look smart and well-groomed without exception. And this in spite of the fact that the City Ballet is notoriously poor in terms of money."


A serious amateur photographer, Robbins not only took pictures but also had a dark room in his home to develop them.


Set to Aaron Copland's Concerto for Clarinet and String Orchestra, The Pied Piper was performed on a stage bare except for a ladder and flats, and with the clarinet soloist seated on the far right. "I am deep in work on Aaron's clarinette concerto," Robbins wrote to the composer Ned Rorem, "and its turning out to be lots of fun and somewhat of a camp. The humor is coming out in this work, and I'm sure that all of N.Y. will find it a relief after Cage." The eccentricities of spelling are Robbins'.

Boris Aronson

Ballade, [1952]. Above: preliminary scene design ("first idea-sketch"); below left: costume design for a Harlequin, with the stamp of United Scenic Artists, Local 829; right: costume design for a woman commedia figure. Watercolor and pen and ink on board. Boris Aronson Papers and Designs, 1923-2000, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

Although Robbins choreographed Ballade to the same Debussy music that he later used in Antique Epigraphs (1984), he initially conceived some of the ballet's movement material for a project with the composer Ned Rorem that never came to fruition. "I was terribly disappointed that it did not work out for both of us," he wrote to Rorem after Ballade's premiere. "Instead I converted some of the material to a ballet to a Debussy score which was panned to hell in the Times and praised galore in the Tribune. I personally felt it worked wonderfully well at rehearsal with piano and practice clothes, and unsatisfactory as a stage work with orchestra (which watered the whole thing down) and costumes and scenery which threw the spectator into a false visual approach to the ballet."

Ruth Sobotka

The Cage, costume design for a Woman by Ruth Sobotka, 1951. Signed and dated by the artist, with the stamp of United Scenic Artists, Local 829. Watercolor and ink on paper. Jerome Robbins Dance Division.
Ruth Sobotka, an Austrian-born member of the New York City Ballet, made her debut as a costume designer with Robbins' now classic ballet *The Cage* (1951). "It is an angry, sparse, unsparing piece," wrote John Martin in his opening night review, "decadent in its concern with mysogyny and its contempt for procreation." Otherwise, he loved everything about the ballet: Jean Rosenthal's "simple web structure of ropes," Sobotka's "brief, spiny costumes," Robbins' "tautness of...phrase," and Nora Kaye's "beautiful and terrifying" performance as the Novice. Despite the cultural resonance of the theme in an era of Freud and Momism, the ballet was considered highly controversial and even banned in parts of Europe when the company toured.

**Ruth Sobotka**


Although Robbins created the role of the Novice for Nora Kaye, Melissa Hayden quickly took it over and danced it to acclaim throughout the 1950s and 1960s.


Nora Kaye danced with the New York City Ballet from 1951 to 1954, originating roles in several ballets, such as *The Cage* (1951) and *Ballade* (1952), both by Robbins, and *La Gloire* (1952), by Antony Tudor. She also danced the role of Caroline in the company's revival of Tudor's *Lilac Garden* (1951) and appeared as Profane Love in Frederick Ashton's *Illuminations* (1951).

"This is my finish." Postcard from Jerome Robbins to Tanaquil Le Clercq, mid-1950s. Tanaquil Le Clercq Collection, New York City Ballet Archive.

The added legend, in Robbins' hand, alludes to his ballet *The Cage* (1951), in which two male "intruders" are killed by a tribe of Amazons.


Like Robbins, Le Clercq was an amateur photographer.


Balanchine created *Tyl Ulenspiegel* for Robbins in 1951 to the Richard Strauss tone poem. With spectacular scenery and costumes by Estebán Francés, the ballet capitalized on Robbins' dramatic gifts. "Tyl is a very strange ballet," he wrote to composer Ned Rorem during rehearsals, "really a montage nightmare impressionistic affair...like a Bosch....For me it is nothing but a seventeen minute obstacle [sic] race, changing clothes, handling props, climbing scenery etc. I figured out that over the whole length of it there is only 30 seconds where I am prop free and can dance."

"Balanchine has designed [Tyl Ulenspiegel] for Jerome Robbins," wrote critic John Martin after the ballet's premiere, "and this is sheer inspiration, for Robbins is a superb performer, with a wit and a cutting edge to his buffoonery. He moves with remarkable ease and command, and shifts from phase to phase of his malevolent masquerading with a speed of mind that flashes like light. He is at once warm and diabolical, genial and merciless, a subtle actor and a unique mime."

Playbill, New York City Ballet, City Center of Music and Drama, 9 March 1952 (matinee). Jerome Robbins Programs.

Playbill, New York City Ballet, City Center of Music and Drama, 9 March 1952 (evening). Jerome Robbins Programs.
This all-Robbins program included Ballade (which had premiered less than a month earlier), Age of Anxiety (1950), The Cage (1951), with Nora Kaye in her original role as the Novice, and The Pied Piper (1951).

**Irene Sharaff**

*Fanfare*, costume designs for Harp, First Violins, and Second Violins, [1953]. Watercolor, pen and ink on paper, with annotations in pencil. Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works. These designs were created by Sharaff for the original New York City Ballet production in 1953, then used for the Royal Danish Ballet staging three years later. The penciled names were members of the Danish company. Choreographed in 1953 to Benjamin Britten's "The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra," *Fanfare* was choreographed for a special Coronation Night program, celebrating the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The all-British evening included Frederick Ashton's *Picnic at Tintagel* and *Illuminations*, with music by Sir Arnold Bax and Britten respectively and scenery and costumes by Cecil Beaton, who also designed the remaining ballet on the program, *Swan Lake*. With an address by Major General William Alfred Dimoline of the British Army and the first New York performance of the "Orb and Sceptre" march by Sir William Walton, the Coronation Night program exemplified the Anglophilia of its producer, Lincoln Kirstein.

**Irene Sharaff**

Costume for the Viola in Jerome Robbins’ *Fanfare*, New York City Ballet, [1986?]. Executed by the New York City Ballet costume shop. Short tutu with a lightly boned peach silk bodice with gray appliqué, peach balls and cord for strings, and a skirt with multiple layers of peach netting and attached briefs. Courtesy of New York City Ballet Archive. This costume was worn by Lisa Jackson, who began performing the Viola role in January 1987. In 1975 the *Fanfare* costumes were remade, with the new costumes differing in some details from their 1953 predecessors.

**James Gillray**

*A Broad Hint of Not Meaning to Dance*, 1804. Hand-colored etching. Published by Hannah Humphrey. Inscribed on original mat: "For Jerry from Lincoln. Another 'Concert' ca. 1780. Merci!" Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works. Although Robbins and Lincoln Kirstein had many differences, this gift from Kirstein testifies to his admiration for one of Robbins' most popular and enduring works, *The Concert* (1956).

*Pas de trois*. Black-and-white print detached from *Le Royaume des Marionettes*, 1880s. Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works. This is one of many prints collected by Robbins revealing his sense of humor.

Tanaquil Le Clercq, New York, April 1957. Photograph by Jerome Robbins. Jerome Robbins Photographs. This photo, which Robbins took after Le Clercq had contracted polio, was found in his home at the time of his death.


**BROADWAY**

In 1944 Robbins choreographed his first Broadway show, *On the Town*. It was fresh, lively, and like nearly all the shows that he would choreograph and direct during the next twenty years, it treated the dancers as individuals, borrowed freely from the concert stage, and integrated the
dances into the story. Although Robbins was one of many choreographers working along these lines, his greatest shows – *On the Town*, *High Button Shoes* (1947), *Peter Pan* (1954), *West Side Story* (1957), *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964) – epitomized the golden era that opened with Agnes de Mille's *Oklahoma!* (1943).

**Al Hirschfeld**  

**Alfred Frueh**  
*On the Town*, final proof of a drawing of leading members of the cast, [1944]. Signed by the artist and stamped on reverse "The New Yorker / Editorial Dept." Pen and ink on board. Billy Rose Theatre Collection.  
*From left:* Nancy Walker (Hildy Esterhazy), Sono Osato ("exotic Ivy Smith"), Betty Comden (Claire DeLoone), Adolph Green (Ozzie), Cris Alexander (Chip), and John Battles (Gabey), 1944.

*On the Town* (1944) grew directly out of *Fancy Free* (1944). It involved the same trio of collaborators – Robbins, Leonard Bernstein, and Oliver Smith – along with Betty Comden and Adolph Green, who wrote the book and lyrics, and George Abbott, who directed the show. This core group of people would collaborate with Robbins for the next twenty years – in Bernstein's case, even longer.


*Billion Dollar Baby* (1945) was Robbins' second Broadway show, and with music by Morton Gould (whose *American Concertette* Robbins had just used in his ballet *Interplay*), book and lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, scenery by Oliver Smith, and stage direction by George Abbott, it was almost a replay of *On the Town*, except that it was set during the Roaring Twenties in a New York of speakeasies, gangsters, beauty pageants, and Charleston-dancing flappers.

**Jerome Robbins**  

**Jerome Robbins**  
Robbins was a perfectionist, who left detailed notes of his thinking about characters and their behavior.

**Jerome Robbins**  
During this period Robbins was fascinated by the idea of film. "He would like to do a ballet, a musical comedy and a movie every year until his ideal form of theater – an amalgamation of all the forms of theatrical art – comes into existence," PM reported in 1946. "The only place where he has found ballet really integrated into another art form is in murder movies and they don’t call it ballet there."


**Alfred Frueh**  
*High Button Shoes*, final proof of a drawing depicting Phil Silvers (left), Nanette Fabray, and
The chase scene, when mayhem broke out on the beach at Atlantic City, was a high point of *High Button Shoes*. Not only did the show seal Robbins' reputation as a successful and innovative Broadway dancemaker, but it also won him his first Tony Award for choreography.


Robbins was celebrated for the extensive research he did to prepare for his shows. Although *On the Town* (1944) was set in the present, both *Billion Dollar Baby* (1945) and *High Button Shoes* (1947) had period settings that Robbins thoroughly investigated above all with regard to their movement and gestural vernaculars.

Stephen Longstreet


Jerome Robbins cutting up backstage with Nancy Walker, the star of *Look, Ma, I'm Dancin'!*, 1948. Photograph by Eileen Darby-Graphic House. Jerome Robbins Photographs.
A backstage musical, *Look, Ma, I'm Dancin'*! grew out of Robbins' own experience of touring with Ballet Theatre and had roles for ballet "pals" like Janet Reed and Harold Lang. The famous sleepwalking scene, set in a Pullman car, anticipated choreography in *The Concert* (1956), a example of the "seepage" between Robbins' ballet and show dances.


This is one of several stills that Robbins acquired from the Museum of Modern Art Film Library as part of his research on *High Button Shoes*.

*Clockwise from upper left*: Nancy Walker (143), Harold Lang and Janet Reed (142), Janet Reed, Nancy Walker, and Katharine Sergava in costumes for *Swan Lake* (140), and Harold Lang and Janet Reed (141).

Trude Rittman
"If You'll Be Mine." Original music for the "Sleep-Walking Ballet" in *Look, Ma, I'm Dancin'!*!, [1948]. Pencil on staff paper. Trude Rittman Scores, Music Division.
After serving as musical director for Ballet Caravan and American Ballet Caravan, Trude Rittman worked closely with Robbins during his first decade on Broadway, providing "dance arrangements" for *Billion Dollar Baby* (1945), *Look, Ma, I'm Dancin'*! (1948), *Miss Liberty* (1949), *The King and I* (1951), and *Peter Pan* (1954). She also worked on shows with Agnes de Mille (*Carousel*, *Brigadoon*, *Allegro*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blonds*) Hanya Holm (*Out of This*
"Look, Ma, I'm Dancin'!, Theatre Arts, February 1948. Billy Rose Theatre Collection. John Pratt designed the costumes for Look, Ma, I'm Dancin'! (1948) as well as for the ballet Pas de Trois (1947), which Robbins choreographed for the Original Ballet Russe. Pratt was married to the dancer-choreographer Katherine Dunham.


Lee Rogow, "Hottest Thing in Show Business," Esquire, November 1948. Private collection. This was one of many feature articles about Robbins after the enormous success of High Button Shoes (1947), which won him his first Tony Award for choreography, and Look, Ma, I'm Dancin' (1948).


Oliver Smith
Miss Liberty, set design, 1949. Signed. Watercolor and pen and ink on paper. Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works. Miss Liberty had music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, costumes by Motley, and stage direction by Moss Hart. Smith's splendid scene designs evoked the bygone charm of New York in the 1880s when the Statue of Liberty took its place in the city's harbor and became a symbol of American promise to millions of immigrants.

Motley
Miss Liberty, costume designs for Maisie Dell (left) in the "Policeman's Ball" scene and a Lady in the "Old Fashioned Walk," [1949]. Signed by the artist, with the stamp of United Scenic Artists, Local 829. Watercolor and pen and ink on paper, with annotations in pencil and fabric swatches. Billy Rose Theatre Collection. Miss Liberty had music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, scenery by Oliver Smith, stage direction by Moss Hart, and costumes by Motley. Motley was the professional name of the design group consisting of Margaret Harris, her sister Sophia Harris, and Elizabeth Montgomery.

Raoul Pène du Bois
Call Me Madam, set design, [1950]. Initialed and titled by artist. Watercolor and pen and ink on paper. Billy Rose Theatre Collection. Call Me Madam, which starred Ethel Merman, had music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, and stage direction by George Abbott. An acclaimed designer whose credits spanned more than half a century and included dozens of Broadway shows as well as films, ballets, and ice shows, Pène du Bois designed scenery and/or costumes for three Robbins' shows of the 1950s — Call Me Madam, Bells Are Ringing (1956), and Gypsy (1959).


Raymond Cogniat
Danses d'Indochine. Paris: Editions des Chroniques du Jour, [1932]. Jerome Robbins Dance Division. This is one of many sources consulted by Irene Sharaff when she designed the costumes for "The
Small House of Uncle Thomas" in The King and I. Like Robbins, Sharaff was an indefatigable researcher, committed to authenticity.

**Martin Hürlimann**  
This is another volume consulted by Irene Sharaff when designing The King and I. The photographs of Cambodian and Siamese dancers were clearly an inspiration for her costumes.

**Trude Rittman**  
"Uncle Tom's Cabin." Original music for "The Small House of Uncle Thomas" in The King and I, 1951. Dated, with lyrics and notes regarding orchestration and stage action. Pencil on staff paper. Trude Rittman Scores, Music Division.


**Lemuel Ayers**  
The notes read: "Dark violet blue sky / silver and white clouds / (perhaps some cherubs sleeping on them) / Twinkling / silver stars (with little lights / in them) spell sleeptite / Tab curtain. Same dark blue as sky / with silver stars appliqué." Based on Richard Bissell's novel 7-1/2 Cents, The Pajama Game had music and lyrics by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, sets and costumes by Lemuel Ayers, and choreography by Bob Fosse. Robbins directed with George Abbott.


Mary Martin, publicity photo, late 1980s. Inscribed "Darlin' Jerry - Look at me singin' / at '75' - 'My Heart Belongs to Daddy'! / A Merry Christmas & Love, / Mary." Jerome Robbins Photographs.


*Peter Pan* (1954), starring Mary Martin as Peter, Cyril Ritchard as Captain Hook, and Sondra Lee as Tiger Lily, was the first successful show that Robbins directed. Thanks to repeated broadcasts on national television, the show became a favorite of children all over the country.

**The Academy of Television Arts & Sciences 1955 Awards**  
*Peter Pan* won an "Emmy"® as the "best single program" of 1955. Staged, choreographed, and adapted for television by Jerome Robbins, the Producers' Showcase program was telecast on 7 March 1955.

*Bells Are Ringing*, which starred Judy Holliday, had a book and lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, music by Jule Styne, and scenery and costumes by Raoul Pène du Bois. Robbins directed the show and shared choreographic credit with Bob Fosse.

**Jack Murray**  
"He was a kind of a slave driver," recalled Hollywood director Robert Wise, who worked with Robbins on the movie version of West Side Story and shared an Oscar with him. "He worked those kids out. Some of them would say, 'I'll never work with that SOB again.' But they'd come back."

**Jule Styne**  
"Dear Boy, I just signed to do Gypsy. I hope you're happy. I am, happy cause we are working together again. It's going to be a smash." Jule Styne wrote the music for several Robbins shows: High Button Shoes (1947), Peter Pan (with Mark Charlap), Bells Are Ringing (1954), and Gypsy (1959). Robbins was in Brussels with Ballets: U.S.A.

**Jerome Robbins**  
Leland Hayward was one of the producers of Gypsy. As this letter (written while Robbins was on tour with Ballets: U.S.A.) makes clear, the collaboration had its bumpy moments.

**Jo Mielziner**  

Based on the memoirs of Gypsy Rose Lee, Gypsy (1959) reunited longtime Robbins' collaborators: Arthur Laurents, who wrote the book; Raoul Pène du Bois, who designed the costumes; Jule Styne, who wrote the music; and Stephen Sondheim, a relative newcomer to the Robbins circle, who wrote the lyrics. Gypsy was Jo Mielziner's second show with Robbins; the first was The King and I (1951).

**Jo Mielziner**  
Clippings of photographs of strippers, including Gypsy Rose Lee, mounted on board [1959]. Stamped on reverse: Jo Mielziner, 1 West 72nd Street, New York 23, N.Y. Jo Mielziner Collection of Designs and Technical Drawings. Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

**Jo Mielziner**  
*Gypsy*, design for the poster in the strippers' dressing room, 1959. Date stamped by the artist, with the stamp of United Scenic Artists, Local 829. Watercolor, and pen and ink, and crayon mounted on board, with paste-up and annotations in pencil. Jo Mielziner Collection of Designs and Technical Drawings, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.  
Maria Karnilova, a charter member of Ballet Theatre, originated the role of Tessie Tura, "the Texas Twirler," as Mielziner calls her. Karnilova performed featured parts in several Robbins shows, including Miss Liberty (1949), Two's Company (1952), and Fiddler on the Roof (1964). She also appeared with Ballets: U.S.A.

**Tony Walton**

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum (1962) was one of many shows that Robbins "doctored" without credit. A musical comedy based on the plays of Plautus, Forum had music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, a book by Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart, scenery and costumes by Tony Walton, stage direction by George Abbott, and choreography by Jack Cole.

Floria V. Lasky
In a letter to theatrical lawyer Edward Colton, Floria V. Laskey, Robbins’ longtime attorney, lays out his staging and choreographic contributions to A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum (1962). Among his contributions was the “whole opening number,” the staging of several songs and restaging of others, and the choreography and stage business for the “3 Virgins section of the Chase.” Robbins admired the choreographer Jack Cole tremendously. “He was a man of enormous talent,” he wrote in 1984. "Packed into his body were fierce discipline, controlled furies, exuberant sexiness, immaculate clarity, athletic ardor, and a surprising cutting humor.... Sophisticated, dynamic, elegant, and subtle, his dancing and choreography of the forties and fifties were a knockout experience to see.

Stephen Sondheim
“Thanks for the flowers,” wrote Sondheim a few days after A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum opened on Broadway. “And more than these, thanks for giving the show moments of style, invention and wit.”

Betty [Comden], Steve[n] [Kyle], Phyllis [Newman], and Adolph [Green]
Opening night telegrams from Robbins' old friends and collaborators, Betty Comden and Adolph Green, and their respective spouses, Steven Kyle and Phyllis Newman.

Sean Kenny
Mother Courage and Her Children, sketch for the setting, [1963]. Watercolor, pen and ink, and newprint on paper. Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works.
This was one of several sketches for the Bertolt Brecht play by the Irish-born, London-based artist Sean Kenny, whose spectacular sets for Oliver! won him a Tony award in 1963. In a letter sending these "first ideas" to Robbins, who directed the production, Kenny explains that he has withdrawn from the project because "as usual I have taken on far too much work and live it seems only to churn the stuff out. Sorry to miss this chance of working with you. The idea was that these shapes could be forest, trees, etc., etc. and could swivel into various arrangements – the wagon would pull round or inside." When Mother Courage opened at the Martin Beck Theatre in 1963, the scenery was by Ming Cho Lee.


Patricia Zipprodt
Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad, costume design, 1963. Watercolor, pen and ink, and pencil on paper. Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works.
In 1962 Robbins directed Arthur Kopit's *Oh Dad, Poor Dad* at the Phoenix Theatre off-Broadway. With costume designs by Patricia Zipprodt, the play marked the beginning of another long and fruitful collaboration. Zipprodt designed costumes for some of the most important productions of Robbins' middle years – *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), *Les Noces* (1965), *Watermill* (1972), and *Dybbuk* (1974). The 1963 date suggests that this design was made when *Oh Dad, Poor Dad* moved to the Morosco Theatre on Broadway.


**HUAC**

In May 1953 Robbins testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). He was what was called a "friendly" witness, meaning that in addition to admitting that he had been a member of the Communist Party, he also named other members. Robbins knew many Communists and Communist sympathizers. He had lent his name to many left-wing causes and taken part in performances sponsored by organizations denounced in the late 1940s as Communist "fronts." But even if Broadway producers ignored *Red Channels* and *Counterattack* ("The Newsletter of Facts to Combat Communism") and refused to enforce the blacklist, television sponsors took a dim view of "Reds," and Robbins was banned from Ed Sullivan’s popular variety show, *Toast of the Town*. Less than six weeks after testifying, Robbins made his television debut with the *Ford Fiftieth Anniversary Show*, a two-hour special aired live on both NBC and CBS.


This paid advertisement was placed by Citizens United to Abolish the Wood-Rankin Committee during the early investigations of Communists after World War II. Robbins was one of the "outstanding Americans...supporting the fight." Others included Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, Lillian Hellman, Arthur Miller, Sono Osato, Paul Robeson, and Edward J. Robinson. In the mid-1940s Robbins signed numerous appeals by groups subsequently identified by the United States Attorney General as Communist "fronts."


The sponsors of U.S. participation in this Communist-dominated festival included many notable figures from both the ballet and modern dance fields: Bill Bales, Dorothy Bird, Ruthanna Boris, Jane Dudley, Doris Humphrey, Nora Kaye, Michael Kidd, José Limón, Sophie Maslow, John Martin, Pearl Primus, Muriel Stuart, Walter Terry, and Charles Weidman.

Flyer for "Dances and Mimes," two benefit performances for the Henry George School of Social Science, 92nd Street YMHA, 16-17 April 1949. Jerome Robbins Programs.

Organized by Agnes de Mille, the granddaughter of the social reformer Henry George, the program included excerpts from works by Robbins, de Mille, Charles Weidman, Janet Collins, José Limón, Sophie Maslow, Jane Dudley, Bill Bales, and Hanya Holm. In the late 1940s modern dance – a category that embraced ballet mavericks like Robbins and de Mille – and liberal politics continued to overlap.


Supervised by Marc Blitzstein, the program was sponsored by the American-Soviet Music Society, cited in 1948 as a "Communist or Communist Front" organization and subsequently
listed in *Red Channels*. Robbins' contributed the duet *Summer Day*, which he danced with Annabelle Lyon. The other dance offerings were *Yerma* by Valerie Bettis, and *A Mirror For the Sky*, a theater piece with choreography by Charles Weidman.

**American Business Consultants, Inc.**


*Red Channels*, along with the weekly newsletter *Counterattack*, was probably the leading instrument for blacklisting in the performing arts. Scores of actors, composers, playwrights, stage and radio directors, musicians, and dancers were listed in the volume along with the left-wing organizations they had supported. With the crystallization of the system of private sponsorship in the new medium of television, *Red Channels* became the bible of sponsors anxious to avoid political controversy. Although Robbins himself was not listed in *Red Channels*, many of his collaborators were, including the composers Leonard Bernstein, Marc Blitzstein, Aaron Copland, and Morton Gould, the playwrights Arthur Laurents and Edward and Jerome Chodorov, and the actors Judy Holliday and Zero Mostel.


Robbins encountered the blacklist in 1950, when Ed Sullivan, host of the television variety show *Toast of the Town*, bowed to sponsor pressure not to hire known or suspected Communists. The following year Sullivan published this scurrilous front-page attack on Robbins in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.


This weekly newsletter systematically "outed" leftists in all walks of life, causing numerous people to lose their jobs. In this issue, which singled out Robbins and several of his Broadway collaborators because of their "long Communist front records," the editors also attacked the modern dancers Anna Sokolow and Muriel Manings because of their connections with the Jefferson School, New Dance Group, and Theatre Arts Committee.

Jerome Robbins, testifying before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in New York City, 5 May 1953. AP Photo/Jacob Harris.

In 1953, in perhaps the most controversial moment of his career, Robbins appeared as a friendly witness before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). In the course of his testimony he named Lloyd Gough, Lionel Berman, Madeline Lee, Elliott Sullivan, Edna Ocko, Jerome Chodorov, and his brother Edward Chodorov as members of the Communist Party who belonged to his "theatrical transient group." Lloyd Gough, Madeline Lee, and Elliott Sullivan were actors; Lionel Berman a filmmaker; the Chodorovs playwrights, and Ocko a writer, editor, and activist who had left the dance field by the late 1940s. Gough, Lee, Sullivan, and the Chodorovs were all listed in *Red Channels*.


This is the original transcript of Robbins' testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). It was later republished in Eric Bentley's *Thirty Years of Treason* (1971).
Although uncredited on the program, Robbins staged the vaudeville sequence performed in the play by the USO unit.

Directed by George Abbott and choreographed by Donald Saddler. Wonderful Town was one of many shows that Robbins "doctored" without credit. The artistic team included Leonard Bernstein (music), Jerome Chodorov (book), and Betty Comden and Adolph Green (lyrics), and Lehman Engel (musical direction), friends and professional associates who were also leftists.

"My eyes are peeling the skin of the city and looking everywhere," he wrote to Robbins in 1956. "Nothing is more beautiful to me than a row of doors, nailed up to hide a vacant lot, a solitary 'El' column, rusted and deep red and blotched with turquoise black, dark red fire escapes, and brick buildings the color of dried blood...black and green doorways with multi-colored walls beyond, like a Van Eyck in color only hideous modern detail. I know I can do this show better than anyone and Jerry believe me, I will not disappoint you. It shall be a work of love on all our parts."


Cheryl Crawford
Letter to Jerome Robbins, 3 January 1957. Jerome Robbins Papers. A founding member of the Group Theatre and the Actors Studio, Crawford was a highly regarded producer and director. "I am worried about the time needed to get the show in top shape," she wrote. "I re-read it very carefully and it's too good not to be great. I think most of the segues from speech to music are inexpertly handled, much too primitive for this kind of a show. The songs just don't come out of the dialogue in that inevitable way that we are used to in our best musicals." She also felt that the show didn't capture "enough of the humor of these boys and girls,... their original sense of fun and wit," and suggested that Robbins "spend a week observing these kids at work and play."

Jerome Robbins
Excerpt from a letter to Tanaquil Le Clercq, 25 February 1957. Tanaquil Le Clercq Collection, New York City Ballet Archive. 
"[At] night I went up to the Puerto Rican Harlem section to watch a dance given at a school. It was absolutely like going into a foreign country. I got into a long conversation with a 19 year old Puerto Rican boy who used to be a member of one of the most notorious gangs in the section. Great background material for my show. The dancers themselves were from age 13 to 19. They do dances that I've never seen before anywhere, evolving their own style and approach. In one dance, after starting with your partner for about 2 bars, you leave and separate and never touch
or make any contact again for the whole rest of the dance. When you look at the floor each
person seems to be having a ball of their own but I'm told that the partners knew damn well who
they're dancing with. All the boys wore their overcoats and this is because if a fight breaks out
they're well padded. There's a huge sign which says NO GRINDING. This refers to slow pelvic
movements pushed against each other. The whole section is really wonderful and some day I'll
take you up there if you'd like to see it."

Irene Sharaff

West Side Story, costume designs for Jets, including Grover Dale (Snowboy), Hank Brunjes
(Diesel), Tony Mordente (A-Rab), and Tommy Abbott (Gee-Tar), and Brian Davis, [1957].
Signed by the artist, with the stamp of United Scenic Artists, Local 829. Watercolor and pen and

Jerome Robbins conferring with costume designer Irene Sharaff, 1957. Photograph by Martha
Irene Sharaff's close working relationship with Robbins began in the 1940s and embraced ballet
as well as Broadway. Among the works she "dressed" for him were Interplay (1945), Billion
Dollar Baby (1945), Facsimile (1946), Age of Anxiety (1950), The King and I (1951), Afternoon
of a Faun (1953), Fanfare (1953), The Concert (1956), and West Side Story (1957).

Sondheim wrote the lyrics for West Side Story and Gypsy (1959).

This is the House that Jerry Built. Sheet music cover, early 1900s? Inscribed on accompanying
mat "From Steve Sondheim, on building my house." Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic
Works.

Jerome Robbins and Chita Rivera, who played the role of Anita, during rehearsals of West Side

Jerome Robbins rehearsing West Side Story, 1957. Photograph by Friedman-Abeles. Billy Rose
Theatre Collection.

Jerome Robbins, Larry Kert, Chita Rivera, and Grover Dale, photographed for Life Magazine,
According to a note on the reverse, this was photographed in Washington, D.C. on 3 September
1957 for an article about West Side Story.

Key to Washington, D.C.
Leonard Bernstein, Jerome Robbins, and Arthur Laurents were awarded the key to the country's
capital on 30 August 1957, during previews for West Side Story.

Lee Becker (Theodore) created the tomboy role of Anybodys in West Side Story. In 1975 she
founded the American Dance Machine to document, preserve, and perform "classic" Broadway
choreography.

Lee Becker (second from left) and Mickey Calin (far right) lead the Jets in "Cool," 1957.
Photograph by Fred Fehl. Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

Chita Rivera and Kenneth LeRoy in the gym scene in West Side Story, 1957. Photograph by Fred
Fehl. Billy Rose Theatre Collection.
Jets in the schoolyard, with Oliver Smith's Renaissance-inspired scenery behind, 1957. Photograph by Fred Fehl. Billy Rose Theatre Collection.


Carol Lawrence (Maria) and Larry Kert (Tony) running down a real West Side street in a publicity shoot, 1957. Photograph by Friedman-Abeles. Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

Carol Lawrence (Maria) and Larry Kert (Tony) "wed" in the bridal shop where she works, 1957. Photograph by Fred Fehl. Billy Rose Theatre Collection.


**Antoinette Perry Award**
Robbins won a "Tony" Award® for his choreography of *West Side Story* (1957).

**Harold S. Prince**
Writing to the principal members of the musical's creative team, coproducer Harold Prince urges them to consider “slacken[ing] our tight control of material insofar as television is concerned. Business, as you know, is godawful all over town and while we're certainly not alarmed, we do feel that by being selective, we can permit occasional appearances of the principals on the major television shows and pick up plenty of free publicity.”

**Paul J. Sherman**
*West Side Story* opened to great acclaim in London in December 1958.


Pre-production location shooting, with stand-ins, for the film version of *West Side Story*, 1960. Three contact sheets by Muky. Jerome Robbins Photographs.
For twenty-five years, beginning in the 1950s, the Hungarian-born Muky took pictures of movies in the making in New York City.

Jerome Robbins leading the dancers in a barre on location during the shooting of the film version of *West Side Story*, 1960. Jerome Robbins Photographs.
The West Side neighborhood where the film was shot would soon be demolished to make way for Lincoln Center.

**The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences**
Robbins won two "Oscars"® for *West Side Story* (1961) – one for Best Director (shared with Robert Wise), the other, an Honorary Award "for brilliant achievements in the art of choreography on film."

**BALLETS: U.S.A.**
Ballets: U.S.A. was a chamber-sized company conceived to showcase contemporary American
dance abroad. The company made its debut at Gian-Carlo Menotti's Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto in 1958 and went on to perform at the U.S. Pavilion of the Brussels World's Fair. The following year, under the auspices of the State Department's International Cultural Program, the company embarked on a four-month tour that took the dancers all over Europe and to the Middle East. A third European tour followed in 1961. Dancing nearly always to packed houses and critical accolades, the company transformed how Europeans looked at ballet. In 1981 Robbins mused to an interviewer, "I was happiest when I had my own company."


Robbins began his long relationship with the Umbrian hill town of Spoleto in 1958, when his company Ballets: U.S.A. made its debut at Gian-Carlo Menotti's Festival of Two Worlds.

Ballets: U.S.A. made its debut at the Festival of Two Worlds on 8 June 1958. Three of the ballets were by Robbins – N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz (a world premiere), Afternoon of a Faun (1953) and The Concert (1956). Todd Bolender's Games was the program's second world premiere.

Cercle International de la jeune critique pour la recherche artistique et les échanges culturels (International circle of young critics for artistic research and cultural exchange) award to Jerome Robbins for "the best choreography of the 1959 season." Signed by members of the group, identified by country. Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works.

Ben Shahn


Ben Shahn


Davidson took these pictures on 9 September 1958, a few days after the opening of Ballets: U.S.A.'s first New York season, for a Life feature published in both the magazine's American and international editions. The backdrop was by the painter Ben Shahn. Robbins auditioned hundreds of dancers for Ballets: U.S.A. He wanted a company of soloists, equally accomplished in ballet and jazz technique, that mirrored the country's diversity. "There's a sort of democracy among the members," he told an English interviewer. "Racially we're American – every sort of heritage is represented." Wilma Curley joined Ballets: U.S.A. after dancing with the New York City Ballet and originating the role of Graziella in West Side Story. A native of Philadelphia, John Jones danced with the Katherine Dunham company before joining Ballets: U.S.A. He later danced with the Joffrey Ballet and the Dance Theatre of Harlem.

Rutherford and Craig Hall, then members of the New York City Ballet.


Patricia Dunn in a boat, probably in Italy, late 1950s. Jerome Robbins Photographs. This photograph was probably taken by Robbins when Ballets: U.S.A. was performing in Italy. Patricia Dunn was a Korean-American dancer, who joined Ballets: U.S.A. after dancing on Broadway and performing with the Jack Cole Dance Group. She was a "very, very special dancer," Robbins said after her death in 1990, adding that she had been outstanding in choreography by Cole. Dunn subsequently took part in the experimental group organized by Robbins for performances in Spoleto.

Jerome Robbins and Sondra Lee on tour, late 1950s? Jerome Robbins Photographs. Robbins was especially close to Sondra Lee, the diminutive dancer who originated the role of Tiger Lily in *Peter Pan* (1954). She appeared with Ballets: U.S.A. during its first season and, like Patricia Dunn, took part in the Spoleto experimental group. With music by Charles Mingus, Dave Brubeck, and Teiji Ito, the Spoleto dances, she recalled, were "very experimental, as if he were trying to break old ballet modes."

Jerome Robbins in his bedroom listening to a record, possibly of Brahms' "New Love Song Waltzes," [1959]. Photograph by Philippe Halsman. Jerome Robbins Photographs. "I rebel violently," Robbins told an interviewer in 1961, "against being classified and being specific about what my ballets are about....I work for months, days and hours and keep changing until many, many moments come from a deep unconscious stream. Then I work through layers until I get to the level I call the key or spine of that work. Once I hit that, the work pours forth."


Composer Aaron Copland gesturing to Jerome Robbins, whose back is to the camera, as pianists Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale look on, [1959]. Photograph by Philippe Halsman. Jerome Robbins Photographs. This photo commemorates Copland's unrealized collaboration with Robbins that led to the choreographer's ballet *Moves*, performed in silence, and the composer's *Dance Panels* (1959).


**John P. Shanley**
"Ballet on Television: Jerome Robbins Discusses Specialized Demands of the Small Screen," *New York Times*, 10 January 1960, X13. Digital copy from ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Although Robbins described most dancing seen on television as "second rate and shot poorly," he
also believed that the medium had "fantastic" possibilities for "imaginative choreography." In the late 1950s and early 1960s he was involved in a number of television projects, most involving Ballets: U.S.A.

Robert Prince
"This is to certify that Jerome Robbins is a mensch, February 26, 1962." Collage of sundry objects, including an opening night ticket stub, on paper. Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works.

Robert Prince composed the jazz-inflected scores of Robbins' N. Y. Export: Opus Jazz (1958) and Events (1961), works premiered by Ballets: U.S.A. in Spoleto. Prince also composed incidental music for two plays directed by Robbins in the 1960s – Maria Irene Fornes' The Office (1962) and Arthur Kopit's Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad (1962), which opened at the Phoenix Theatre on the night commemorated by the ticket stub and inscription.


For this star-studded salute to President John F. Kennedy at New York's Madison Square Garden, Robbins and his dancers shared the limelight with Maria Callas, Judy Garland, Bobby Darin, Danny Kaye, Marilyn Monroe, and other celebrities. This was the last appearance of Ballets: U.S.A.

Jaco

H. Sučeska

In Belgrade, the first-night audience, which included Yugoslav government officials and members of the diplomatic corps, gave the company fourteen curtain calls at the end of the performance.


After making its debut at the Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Ballets: U.S.A. performed at the Maggio Musicale in Florence and at the Brussels World's Fair.


This was the company's first American season.

Programs.


The company performed at the Festival on August 31 and September 1-2.

Jerome Robbins
The demise of Ballets: U.S.A. found Robbins at a crossroads. Despite overtures from the New York City Ballet and his "high regard for Balanchine and his artistic principles," he continued to harbor the idea of a company steeped in modern, jazz, and classical styles. His suggestion for a "new" Ballet Theatre included dancers from Ballets: U.S.A., the Martha Graham Dance Company, and Ballet Theatre. "I'm very interested," he told Chase, in a company that "carries forward the traditions and lineage as first created by Ballet Theatre when it was organized."

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF
Both these images were given by the photographer to Kate Mostel, who in turn gave them to The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts as a gift.

Jerome Robbins
Addressing the actor as "Zee," Robbins writes: "I want you so very much for the show that I would willingly postpone till fall but I'm stuck with a signed commitment.... Please don't make me do this without you." Robbins and Mostel first crossed paths at least as early as 1945 when both appeared in Billy Rose's Concert Varieties. Mostel, who had been blacklisted during the McCarthy period, was sharply critical of Robbins' decision to testify before the House Un-American Activities as a "friendly witness," and once, during a rehearsal for A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum (1962), famously called him "Loose-lips." Mostel accepted the role of Tevye.


Jerome Robbins
Cable (draft) to Marc Chagall, 4 September 1963, with response from the artist, Vence, 7 September 1963. Jerome Robbins Papers.
Chagall was Robbins' first choice to design the scenery for Fiddler on the Roof. Although Ballets: U.S.A. had danced its last performance in 1962, Robbins apparently did not consider the organization defunct at this point.
Jerome Robbins
“Dear Ruthie, he wrote. “I’m going to do a musical on Sholem Aleichem stories with Harnick and Bock. Stop. I’m in love with it. It’s our people and I want more than anything to have you as stage production manager.” Mitchell, who accepted the invitation, had previously worked with Robbins on Bells Are Ringing (1956), West Side Story (1957), and Gypsy (1959).

Boris Aronson
Portrait of a Man. Limited edition print. Signed by the artist and inscribed "With thanks to Jerome Robbins for your generous assistance." Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works. Boris Aronson, who designed the scenery for Fiddler on the Roof, grew up in Kiev, where he trained with Alexandra Exter. In New York he designed for the Yiddish theater as well as ballet and Broadway.

Boris and Lisa Aronson
Letter to Jerome Robbins, 23 September 1964. Jerome Robbins Papers. “Working with you on ‘Fiddler’ was most rewarding – even if the going was rough at times. We are very much impressed with the way you search and perform your special ‘magic’. Thank you for the ‘bottle dance’ and the beautiful white chrysanthemums!”

Patricia Zipprodt
Fiddler on the Roof, costume collage depicting the menfolk of Anatevka, [1964]. Initialed by the artist. Watercolor, pen and ink, and pencil on paper, with attached fabric swatches. Patricia Zipprodt Papers and Designs, Billy Rose Theatre Collection. Zipprodt's costumes for Fiddler on the Roof won her the first of three Tony awards for costume design.

Patricia Zipprodt
Fiddler on the Roof, departure of Anatevka's Jewish community from the village, [1964]. Titled and initialed by the artist. Pen and ink on paper. Patricia Zipprodt Papers and Designs, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

Patricia Zipprodt
Fiddler on the Roof, costume sketches for the principal characters, [1964]. Watercolor and pen and ink on paper. Patricia Zipprodt Papers and Designs, Billy Rose Theatre Collection. The costumes are for Golde, Tevye, and their five daughters – Shprintze, Bielke, Tzeitel, Hodel, and Chava.

Fiddler on the Roof, several dozen fabric swatches assembled for display, [1964]. Patricia Zipprodt Papers and Designs, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

Jerome Robbins
"Jerry Robbins' Note – 1963 / written during the pre-rehearsal period." Typed notes by Robbins about Fiddler on the Roof, 1963. Patricia Zipprodt Papers and Designs, Billy Rose Theatre Collection. Robbins' observations concerning the social, economic, and geographic background of the Anatevka community were sent to Patricia Zipprodt at a very early stage of the design process and reveal how deeply he was involved in every aspect of the production.

"A Behind the Scenes Look at Costume Designing For Fiddler on the Roof." Unidentified article about Patricia Zipprodt's challenges in designing the costumes for Fiddler on the Roof, n.d. Patricia Zipprodt Papers and Designs, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.
Of particular interest is the "field research" she describes conducting in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where she visited factories and Orthodox synagogues, and on Manhattan's Upper West Side, where she and Jerome Robbins observed Orthodox weddings from the "top balcony of...huge halls" several nights a week. Zipprodt won a Tony Award for Best Costumes.

Betty Walberg  
A graduate of Bennington College, Walberg served as a pianist for the first American Dance Festival at Connecticut College in 1948 and for such modern dance choreographers as Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, and Anna Sokolow. She created dance arrangements for several Robbins shows, including West Side Story (1957), Gypsy (1959), and Fiddler on the Roof (1964), and performed the onstage role of the pianist in The Concert with Ballets: U.S.A.


Dvora Lapson  
Dvora Lapson, the author of several books about Jewish dance, arranged for Robbins to attend numerous Jewish weddings in preparation for Fiddler on the Roof (1964).

Dvora Lapson  
The first part of this sixty-page "Index" is a bibliography of source works that Robbins compiled in preparation for the staging of Fiddler on the Roof. The list includes works by and about Sholom Aleichem, reminiscences of shtetl life, studies of Jewish folklore, festivals, religion, art, and history, and Dvora Lapson's various books about Jewish dances.

Jerome Robbins  
"Notes on Score" (Fiddler on the Roof), 4 April 1964. Jerome Robbins Papers.  
These notes reveal the scrupulous attention that Robbins gave to every aspect of his shows.

Oliver Smith  
“Dear Jerry,” he wrote, “I have missed deeply not only fighting with you but your superb and supreme talents. All my love for tonight, Oliver.”

Jean and Peter Gennaro  
Peter Gennaro choreographed the Latin dances in West Side Story.

Mrs. David Grabe[?]  
The letter writer, living in Tenafly, New Jersey, had survived the Russian Revolution and Civil War, and like many older Jewish members of the audience was profoundly moved by Fiddler on
"My tears haven't stopped flowing. Memories of my childhood began coming out of my mind I had them hidden since 1920 locked up in my mind. I haven't slept yet through a night without them."

Joseph Stein

Jerome Robbins
Letter to Gluck-Sandor concerning his interpretation of the role of the Rabbi in Fiddler on the Roof, 9 December 1966. “Dear Sandor,” the letter to his first dance mentor began. “Here's another note about you know what – that rabbi problem again. I've tried to make you understand that very strong pressure is continually brought upon me because of your interpretation of the rabbi, and you must help me by not cutting up and making him a source of ridicule... I know you are totally capable of giving the rabbi dignity and wiseness. Please don't jeopardize my belief in you or your own position in the show. It's valuable to both of us to have you there.”

Antoinette Perry Awards
Robbins won two "Tony" Awards® for Fiddler on the Roof (1964), one for choreography, the other for direction of a "musical play." Both are displayed here.

LES NOCES
In 1965 Robbins created his first ballet for American Ballet Theatre since 1946. Les Noces was set to a score commissioned by Serge Diaghilev and choreographed by Bronislava Nijinska in 1923 for the Ballets Russes. Like Fiddler on the Roof the Robbins ballet had costumes by Patricia Zipprodt and a prerevolutionary Russian setting.

Oliver Smith
Les Noces, set design, 1965. Signed, titled, and dated. Watercolor and pen and ink on paper. Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works. Inscribed on reverse: "Dear Jerry, / It looked something / like this; thank you /for such a wonderful / Ballet. / All my love, / Oliver." Smith made numerous preliminary designs for the setting, as he sought to balance the spatial needs of the dancers with the presence on stage of four grand pianos, singers (including chorus), and conductor. With Leonard Bernstein conducting the premiere, the ballet reunited the creators of Fancy Free.

Patricia Zipprodt
Les Noces, costume sketches for men and women of the ensemble, 1969. Signed and dated by the artist. Gouache, pen and ink, and pencil on paper. Patricia Zipprodt Papers and Designs, Billy Rose Theatre Collection. Since the ballet premiered in 1965, this sketch was probably used in the 1969 staging for the Royal Swedish Ballet.

Les Noces, fabric color chart, with swatches, for the costumes and headwear worn by the various characters, [1965?]. Ballpoint pen, pencil, fabric, and safety pins on brown bag paper. Patricia Zipprodt Papers and Designs, Billy Rose Theatre Collection. Zipprodt's designs for Les Noces presaged the simplification of form and palette of Robbins' costumes after returning to the New York City Ballet in 1969.

Patricia Zipprodt

Patricia Zipprodt

Patricia Zipprodt

Les Noces, 5 April 1965. Four photographs by Gjon Mili/Life. Jerome Robbins Photographs. According to a note on the reverse, Mili's photos were for a story about the ballet boom and the New York State Theatre, which had recently opened. "The music is a masterpiece," Robbins wrote on the eve of the premiere. "The score is monolithic and elegant – barbaric, beautiful and frightening....Deep within th[is] whole passionate work there rests the poignant incongruity of an intensely personal moment being subject to the public offenses of a ritualistic social ceremony. The bride and groom have been prepared and offered up in some holy and barbaric rite which must run its course." The Bride was Erin Martin, who had danced in Ballets: U.S.A.; the Groom was William Glassman. Sallie Wilson and Bruce Marks played the roles of the Groom's parents.

Arnold Newman
Igor Stravinsky at the piano. Inscribed "To you dear Robins [sic] with / my full enthusiasm after / seeing your NOCES. Thank / you, thank you, and thank you. / Your Stravinsky / April 1965 / Chicago." Jerome Robbins Photographs.


Leonard Bernstein
Framed page of a handwritten musical score inscribed, "For Jerry on his 50th / Souvenir of a Prologue / with love Lenny B., 10 October '68." Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works. The page is in the original frame chosen by Bernstein.


AMERICAN THEATRE LAB
Robert Wilson
The Exception and the Rule, 1968(?). Strips of images representing dramatic action. Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works. Brecht's play The Exception and the Rule was one of many projects of the American Theatre Lab, an experimental group of dancers, actors, and writers founded by Robbins in 1965. The play, which never came to fruition, underwent numerous transformations as Robbins and his collaborators – Robert Wilson (design), Stephen Sondheim (lyrics), Leonard Bernstein (music),
and John Guare (book) – shifted the setting from China to a television studio where limousine liberals are conducting a telethon to combat racism. Robbins was involved in all aspects of the project, including the designs, as the folder label for these images indicate: "B[ob] Wilson: plans for E&R after my meeting and showing him my sketches."

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
In 1969 after a hiatus of more than ten years, Robbins returned to New York City Ballet. Renewed contact with the company elicited a cycle of powerful new works from him. Most were plotless, with only the simplest of costumes, and music by master composers of the past. He also discovered a new generation of dancers, and enshrined their gifts in his choreography. After Balanchine's death in 1983, Robbins became artistic director of the company with Peter Martins.

Joe Eula


Joe Eula


The 1970 revival of *Firebird* was jointly choreographed by Robbins and Balanchine.

Jerome Robbins

These are two of several sketches that Robbins made while recovering from a ruptured Achilles tendon. The note on the left hand sketch reads: "This isn't a floor pattern, but a rhythmic pattern made for myself after accident to try to parse out music. Some of it can be seen in choreography. / Jerome Robbins / 10/69." *The Goldberg Variations*, which premiered in 1971, was Robbins' first encounter with the music of Bach.


**Jerome Robbins**


The numerous notes reveal the care that Robbins devoted to the details of cut and subtleties of color in even the plainest of costumes. The dancers (*from left*) are Jay Jolley, Daniel Duell, Laurence Matthews, Bart Cook, and Victor Castelli. *Sailing* was the original title of *Une Barque sur l'Océan*, which premiered during the New York City Ballet's 1975 Ravel Festival. The costumes were credited to Parmelee Welles (Tolkan).

**Jerome Robbins**


The notes and attached watercolor of the setting make clear Robbins' goal of harmonizing the colors of the costumes with those of the set. The tunic, a favorite Robbins costume beginning with *Goldberg Variations* (1971), recalls Irene Sharaff's costume for Tanaquil Le Clercq in *Afternoon of a Faun* (1953). The costumes for *Dumbarton Oaks* were credited to Patricia Zipprodt.


*Watermill*, named after the Long Island town where Robbins summered for many years, built upon his American Theatre Lab experiments of the late 1960s. Working with ideas of stillness, arrested time, and stylized ritual movement that his friend Robert Wilson was also exploring, Robbins created a Noh-influenced theater piece with strong autobiographical resonance. The music was by Teiji Ito, but Robbins himself designed the scenery, inspired by Japanese scroll painting. He described the work to Balanchine as "a search into another place." "George said that it's a ballet about there being no time. And that was when he made a remark to me about choreographers – that we have to get our fingertips into the land where there are no names for anything."


**Patricia Zipprodt**

*Dybbuk*, costume designs for an Angelic Messenger (*left*) and a Man, [1974]. Watercolor, pen and ink, and pencil on tracing paper. Patricia Zipprodt Papers and Designs, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

Robbins and the ballet's composer, Leonard Bernstein, had conceived a ballet on this Central
European Jewish theme nearly thirty years earlier. “I'm going to do a light ballet next and then "The Dybbuk with a score by Leonard Bernstein," Robbins told a PM interviewer in 1946. "That will be my first long work and it will be a real production." In 1958 he returned to the subject, discussing with Aaron Copland the possibility of his writing the music, an idea that the composer rejected. After the ballet's premiere in 1974, Robbins continued tinkering with the choreography, eliminating sections, and changing the title to "The Dybbuk Variations." In 1980 he restaged the male variations in "Suite of Dances." In 2007 the New York City Ballet revived the work in its original form.

Rouben Ter-Arutunian
Ter-Arutunian's design was also used for the scenery.

*Dybbuk*, sample swatch for a prayer shawl, 1974. Layered white and black gauze with fringes at the end, mounted on white board and covered with plastic. Rouben Ter-Arutunian Design Portfolios.


Laura Dean

Capezio Dance Award, 1976
Presented to Jerome Robbins "for bringing a new classicism and daring innovation, profundity, and hilarity to the world of ballet and for giving the world of theater...a new and eloquent classicism through his mastery of the art of dancing." Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works.
The members of the Awards Committee were Martha Hill, Anna Kisselgoff, P. W. Manchester, and Walter Terry.

Handel Medallion
In 1976 Robbins was given the Handel Medallion, New York City's highest cultural award. The presentation took place at the Metropolitan Opera House during "The Star-Spangled Gala," a fundraising benefit for The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Accepting the award, Robbins said: "The city has nourished me creatively."


In 1970 Robbins staged *Dances at a Gathering* for Britain's Royal Ballet.


These four photographs were taken during "Celebration – The Art of the Pas de Deux," a special program of pas de deux arranged by Robbins at Spoleto for five celebrity couples – Malika Sabirova and Muzofar Bourkhanov, Antoinette Sibley and Anthony Dowell, Violette Verdy and Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux, Carla Fracci and Paolo Bortoluzzi, in addition to McBride and Tomasson. These photos capture the glowing sensuality that Robbins discovered in McBride and explored in many roles.

**Santo Loquasto**

Costume for an ensemble woman in the Summer section of Jerome Robbins' *The Four Seasons*, New York City Ballet, 1979. Silk chiffon Empire style dress with braided gold and red cord trim under the bust. Courtesy of New York City Ballet Archive.

**Santo Loquasto**

Costume for Suzanne Farrell in the Fall section of Jerome Robbins' *The Four Seasons*, New York City Ballet, 1979. Scarlet silk chiffon tunic with a gold-edged ruffle at the neckline and a gold-trimmed, silk berry corsage at the waist. Courtesy of New York City Ballet Archive. This costume was subsequently worn by Lourdes López.


Lourdes López, Hélène Alexopoulos, and Carole Divet are among the dancers.

Robbins partnering Merrill Ashley during a rehearsal of *Firebird* as Joseph Duell looks on, 1985. Photograph by Martha Swope. Private collection.


Members of the cast of *Fancy Free* in costume, with Jerome Robbins at a post-performance party. Photograph by Sara Leland. Inscribed "To Jerry – with appreciation and thanks" and signed by Jerry Zimmerman, Flo[rence] Fitzgerald, Lourdes Lopez ("Love / Lourdes"), Jean-Pierre Frohlich, Robert LaFosse, Kipling Houston, and Stephanie Saland ("Sincerely Stef"). Michael Byars is also in the picture. Jerome Robbins Photographs.


Inspired by ancient Greek sculpture, *Antique Epigraphs* was set to the same Debussy music that Robbins had used in his 1952 ballet *Ballade*. The eight dancers of the cast were all women.


**Morton Gould**
I'm Old Fashioned, musical sketches based on a theme by Jerome Kern, 1983. Holograph sketches signed in pencil. Music Division. These sketches were for the ballet I'm Old Fashioned (The Astaire Variations), which Robbins choreographed for the New York City Ballet in 1983. The ballet opened and closed with film sequences from You Were Never Lovelier, starring Fred Astaire and Rita Hayworth. Morton Gould composed the music for Robbins' second Broadway show, Billion Dollar Baby (1945). Robbins choreographed his second ballet, Interplay (1945), to the music of Gould's American Concertette.

National Medal of Arts
Robbins received the National Medal of Arts "for his outstanding and enduring contribution to the art of Dance" on 9 August 1988.

LAST YEARS
In 1989 Robbins returned to Broadway after an absence of twenty-five years. Jerome Robbins' Broadway was a retrospective of his theater dances from On the Town (1944) to Fiddler on the Roof (1964). "I just hated the idea that they were just disappearing," he said. The following year the New York City Ballet staged its own Robbins festival. Robbins choreographed his last ballet, Brandenburg, in 1997. He died the following year at the age of seventy-nine.

Jerome Robbins
Poppa Piece, collage of photographs of Robbins, his family, and Jewish-related objects and iconography. Jerome Robbins Collection of Graphic Works. Robbins worked on the autobiographical Poppa Piece intermittently from the 1970s until the early 1990s, but in the end abandoned it.

Antoinette Perry Award
For his last show, Jerome Robbins' Broadway (1989), Robbins won a "Tony" Award® for "best direction of a musical."

Jerome Robbins

Grover Dale


Robbins solicited help from numerous people to resurrect dances from *On the Town*, *Billion Dollar Baby*, *High Button Shoes*, *Look, Ma, I'm Dancin'!*, *The King and I*, *Peter Pan*, *West Side Story*, *Gypsy*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, and *Fiddler on the Roof*, carefully documenting the reconstruction process in photography and on videotape. "The...show is not just my dances," he told John Guare in an interview. "It's about Leonard Bernstein and Jule Styne and Betty Comden and Adolph Green and Stephen Sondheim and Richard Rodgers and Irving Berlin and Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick....It's about those book writers and set designers and all the costume designers and dance arrangers. It's showing off what the theater and its artists were like in those days."


**Legion of Honor**  
In 1993 Robbins was awarded the French Legion of Honor with the rank of Chevalier.

Robbins was a great dog lover and often brought his canine friends to the studio.


**Robin Heidi Kennedy**  
Among the ballets memorialized are *Fancy Free*, *West Side Story*, and *Dybbuk*.
VIDEO COMPILATIONS
The exhibition featured six video compilations played continuously on monitors in a viewing area at the end of the exhibition.

1) Broadway


2) Ballets: U.S.A.


3) Jerome Robbins' Broadway


4) Ballet


5) Robbins at Work


6) Ballet


Image, Jerome Robbins Dance Division.


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