Dance, Costumes, and Barbara Matera

Lynn Garafola

Lynn Garafola: Holly Hynes has designed for theater, ballet, opera, and films since completing her degree in theater arts in 1978. She has costumed more than seventy ballets, including thirty-five at New York City Ballet. In addition to her design work, Holly is the costume consultant for the George Balanchine Trust and the Jerome Robbins Estate. She is currently New York City Ballet's director of costume, a position she has held since 1985.

Carole Divet, Holly's assistant, danced with the New York City Ballet from 1976 to 1990, when she joined its costume shop. Now the assistant director of costume, she is launching her own career as a designer.

This evening's program was planned originally for Barbara Matera. Then two days after the terrible events of September 11, she died after falling outside her famed costume shop at 890 Broadway. In desperation I phoned Holly, who had helped me tremendously in 1999 when I organized an exhibition about the City Ballet. She told me that Barbara Matera had been her mentor and that she had been working with her at her shop the very day that she had fallen.

The obituary, published in the New York Times on September 16, 2001, said:


"Here, she became the archetypal costumer in the worlds of opera, ballet, theater, and film, collaborating with the designers Irene Sharaff, her mentor; Theoni V. Aldredge, Patricia Zipprodt, Tony Walton, Julie Taymor, William Ivey Long, Freddy Wittop, and Desmond Healy.

"Armed with bolts of fabric, she would enter her workroom and begin her magic, draping and fitting her clients in a way that accentuated their assets and diminished their flaws. Always, her work had something secret and special: beneath a crinoline or a tutu, for instance, she would tuck a tiny silk rosebud.

"As the costumer for the American Ballet Theatre, Ms. Matera outfitted the soloists and corps of Swan Lake, Othello, Snow Maiden, Theme and Variations, and Gaité Parisienne. For the New York City Ballet, she not only constructed and refurbished costumes, but designed them for productions including Sinfonia Mystica, Tanzspiel, Five, and Baroque Variations.

"She also dressed the dance companies of Paul Taylor, David Parsons, Lar Lubovitch, and Eliot Feld, and the San Francisco and Houston Ballets."

Garafola: Holly, tell us how you met Barbara Matera.

Hynes: In 1980 I was working at Brooks-Van Horn, a large costume shop in New York that has since closed. I then tried the freelance route for several months. One day a designer named Ann Roth, who was a film designer mostly, called me up and said, "Barbara Matera needs an assistant to be in charge of all the dance projects. I think you should take the job." I said, "I don't do dance. I do theater. Are you serious?" She said yes.

So I called up, made an appointment, and went to Barbara's shop. I was nervous because it was Barbara Matera! I had only been in New York for two years, but I definitely knew about her: her skill; the size of her shop; how many people worked there. I took a big gulp and hoped she wouldn't ask me a lot of questions about how to make ballet costumes.

Barbara was at a dress rehearsal and was going to be a little late. I sat and waited and waited and waited. I decided at the end of an hour-and-a-half that if I could wait that long..."
Kate Capshaw in the red-and-gold beaded dress designed by Anthony Powell and made by Barbara Matera for the Steven Spielberg film *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*.
for a job interview, I probably would get the job. And I did.

I learned all about dance through Barbara. I cut my teeth on Eliot Feld, American Ballet Theatre, Paul Taylor, and Twyla Tharp. In the 1980s all of these companies had tremendous designers working for them, so not only did I get to see fabulous costume-making, I got to see fabulous costume-designing as well. And I got to know Barbara Matera, the person and the artist.

Then, in the winter of 1985, we went to New York City Ballet together as a team. Peter Martins wanted Barbara to run his shop, but she couldn't really do that with her own shop to run at the same time. So she agreed to come if I would do the day-to-day running of the City Ballet workshop, which was a fabulous opportunity. I never thought I'd be there as long as I have.

My only hesitation at the time was that I was about seven months pregnant, and I kept thinking, All these skinny, skinny dancers are going to be there, and I'm going to walk in, a tub. I got past it and had a great baby, and everything worked out all right.

Garafola: Tell us about the Matera shop. What is it like?

Hynes: It blows you away when you walk in the door. There are on average sixty people working there. The shop that we run at New York City Ballet has twenty when it's operating at full steam; otherwise there's maybe sixteen. So imagine three times that many at Matera's. Each person tries to have her own sewing machine, so that means you've got sixty different sewing machines going. You've got steam irons hissing and telephones ringing and people running and shoppers coming in and out with bags. You just can't believe there are that many personalities all in one shop making fabulous, fabulous stuff. One thing that makes Barbara's so special is that she has six different drapers. At the New York City Ballet we have one tailor and one draper.

Garafola: What is a draper?

Hynes: A draper is sort of a team captain, the person who has to look at a sketch and figure out how to drape the fabric — hence the name "draper" — how to create a pattern and make a three-dimensional version of what you see on the paper. It's very hard to find fantastic drapers. A lot of it comes with time, experience, and practice. You don't graduate from school and become a fantastic draper, although we've known a few.

The other thing that is so amazing about Barbara's shop, compared to other shops, is that she has a beading facility. I may be wrong, but I don't think there's anybody else who has an area set up just to do beadwork. It takes space, and you have to have people who have the eye for detail and the very fine motor skills to do that kind of close work. You know, your fingers rarely get a break during the day.

There's not a lot of talking that goes on in a beading area because if you're chatting about what you saw on TV last night you're not counting the beads. Maybe you're doing a navy-blue bodice. You get the whole thing done; you look it over and you think, What's this purple one over here? So it takes a specific kind of skilled person. Barbara loved bead­ing, probably almost as much as she loved the world of ballet. It was one of her passions.

Garafola: Now we'll take a look at a few minutes from a Japanese documentary about Barbara Matera and her shop. In this section you will see one of the beaders. It also shows Holly working on one of her own projects.

Hynes: It was for Pennsylvania Ballet. Even though I have, so to speak, my own shop, we only construct costumes for New York City Ballet, so as designers if we design something for another company, we have to take it outside. In this case Barbara's shop executed the costumes.

Garafola: What you see in the video is something that every designer goes through. You've stayed up all night; you've got your drawings done, you feel comfortable showing them to a living human being. The choreographer has seen it. Everything's a go, and now you take it to Barbara. Barbara looks at it and makes suggestions or gives you ideas about the fabric or maybe color suggestions.
The morning of the taping I slipped in the snow and hurt my ankle. I crawled back to the house, called Carole, and said, "I've done something to my ankle. Maybe I should stay home." And she, being a former dancer, said, "Oh, put a little ice on it. Get up, get into the city, and you'll be fine." So I slogged through the snow to Barbara's for this design consultation. I walked in, ankle throbbing, and she said, "Oh, there's a TV crew here. You won't mind if they taped us talking, would you?"

Garafola: Since the narration is in Japanese, I've asked Holly to be our voice-over.

Hynes: This is the workroom. You see that all of them have their own table, their own spot, ideally their own sewing machine, although everybody would share the same irons.

That's Barbara. The man with Barbara is a draper, the person who would be in charge of a team. This took place about two years after Barbara said she wasn't going to be a draper anymore; she was going to retire. She never did. She never stopped.

Garafola: That's me, and those are my sketches. You know, often you'll choose a fabric, but you can't get the right color, so then you have to have a dyer correct it. A lot of the details on costumes are still made totally by hand because it's just impossible to get a sewing machine to do the stitching. The drapers know each mannequin in the shop, what size it is;
Stephen Baynes's *Twilight Courant*, designs by Holly Hynes with bead work by Barbara Matera Ltd.

if there’s a repeat performer, they’ll tag the mannequin as Glenn Close or Angela Lansbury.

[Voice of woman doing beading]: “The key to this is having years of experience and the sensory perception in your fingers so you can feel each and every tiny little bead, even to the point where if a bead is broken, you can feel it and crack it out. Everything has to be perfect. No matter how tiny the beads are, you make the stitch accordingly, tiny, one after another, perfect. I mean it’s an art that just takes years and years to do. I learned it when I was a very young girl, eleven years old.”

Hynes: This is a *Beauty and the Beast* costume; it’s the Beast’s jacket. *Beauty and the Beast* is one of those projects that you love and hate at the same time.

[Voice of Barbara Matera, showing details of beading on cuff and sleeve of the Beast’s jacket]: “This kind of embroidery you won’t see anywhere. We go all out when it comes to embroidery. Appliqué and beading and all sorts of little, tiny details on it. I don’t think many people do it. They either don’t have the people to do it, or they don’t have the time to do it. But we make sure we have plenty of time to do this sort of thing because to me, at any rate, it makes a difference. It looks really beautiful. It’s something I have loved all my life to do, this kind of work, so I still continue to do it.”

Hynes: Watching Barbara with the beadwork reminds me of the very first time she forced me to do a beading pattern. She believed that you couldn’t just be a designer in an ivory tower; you had to know how to do everything. You should be able to drape, be a cutter, make millinery, do beadwork, dye fabric, shop. You should be able to do all of it. And you should be able to deal with people.

The first beadwork that I did was a small bit of trim, a little mandarin collar and cuffs, for *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. That’s the second Indiana Jones movie, the one that starts in a nightclub with Kate Capshaw in a striking red-and-gold Chinese-style dress. Anthony Powell was the designer, and he had
done a beautiful sketch, but the detail of the beadwork you had to design for him. I decided that since the dress had a mandarin look, it would be great if there was a little dragon. The pattern was a little dragon chasing another little dragon chasing another little dragon.

I did this little drawing and took it to Barbara. She said, “That’s great. Now you’ve got to mark the beading pattern.” I said, “What do you mean?” She said, “Well, the drawing’s nice, but you can’t hand that to the beading ladies. You have to tell them what’s a seed pearl, what’s a bugle bead, what’s a number one, what’s a number two, what color they are.” It’s like Morse Code. There are Xs and dashes and circles and dots and squares. So I marked the pattern.

At first there was just one dress. Then the order came in for two more, because they were filming on location. So I marked out the beading pattern on the fabric not once but two more times, and off it went to the beaders. The dress was fabulous. We loved it. At Barbara’s memorial they talked about it.

At one point in the movie, Kate gets to ride an elephant, while the dress is draped on the trunk. We got a panic call from the production crew saying, “We don’t know why, but the elephant took a big bite out of one of the dresses.” So we had to make another dress and work out the beading pattern yet again.

You feel so fulfilled when you work on a costume like that because it’s such a fabulous piece. Still, by the fifth or sixth one the poor draper isn’t enjoying it as much. A jacket like the one we saw in the video from Beauty and the Beast is the bread-and-butter of a big shop. When it gets a call from Tokyo or London or Cincinnati to recreate a costume that already has a pattern, it’s a savings, time-wise, and makes the shop money.

Garafola: The costumes for Peter Martins’ The Sleeping Beauty (New York City Ballet, 1991) were made both in-house and by Barbara Matera’s shop. Why were some of the costumes sent out?

Hynes: The City Ballet’s Sleeping Beauty has more than two hundred costumes, and our shop, as I said, has only eighteen people. So there’s no way we could have made all those costumes.

This court dress is from the Prologue, and if you were to lift it, I would guess it weighs around sixty-five pounds. When you create something heavy, you have to counterbalance it by using things that don’t weigh very much. This gown, for instance, has a lot of plastic in it. It’s made with a natural form mold and then painted to give it shadows, to make it look like heavy metal. So each little part of this really doesn’t weigh very much at all. The other fun thing about this dress is that in an attempt to save money, Patricia Zipprodt, who designed the costumes, made the sleeves come off –

Carole Divet: You just pull them, yank them!

Hynes: The cape comes off, and the over-
the dress up, you can see that the whole thing is embroidered within an inch of its life. To make the little tile shapes sticking off the top of it, Barbara took little cup sequins and sewed them all together, down and all the way around, so they stand up on the top. There’s five hundred of them on this one gown. Ten years ago it was the most expensive costume ever made for the company – $10,000. Now it would be more.

Garafola: Can you talk about the collaboration that goes on between the designer and the person who actually builds the costumes? Also, what is the relationship between the designer and the choreographer? Which do you want to start with?

Hynes: With the choreographer.

Garafola: Don’t you have one of those upside-down tutus here?

Divet: It doesn’t look so upside-down on the hanger, just kind of perky. Once it’s on, it’s a little more perky. All the girls are different colors. We weren’t quite sure how to make it stiff to stick up the way he wanted, instead of flopping as the dancers moved. Then, Holly had

Divet: It depends on the choreographer, but it’s always give-and-take. Kevin O’Day and I just did a ballet together for the Royal Danish Ballet. I didn’t even know the title of the ballet until the end. Kevin had certain ideas; we exchanged thoughts and then came to some sort of conclusion. He liked my drawings, and off they went. Most of the time, choreographers will come to you with an idea for something. With Kevin it’s more of a collaboration. Last season I did a ballet with Dick [Richard] Tanner called Soirée (2001). He said to me, “I want an upside-down tutu. That’s what I want the women to wear.”

Garafola: How much does one of those costumes weigh? Did you say sixty-five pounds?

Hynes: It’s sixty-five pounds, easily.

Garafola: How much does a costume like this cost?

Hynes: When the ballet premiered, this gown with its petticoat probably cost $5,000. To reproduce it now would be more like $7,000. Carabosse’s costume cost even more; it’s kept locked up in a vault.

Divet: There’s only one.

Hynes: Even though Patricia Zipprodt was the originator of the Carabosse sketch, Barbara took it and went to town. When you hold
the idea of using nylon horsehair, which is indestructible.

Garafola: Holly, where did you get the idea for this fabric?

Hynes: I had spent two years working for the Ringling Brothers. When you work for the circus, maintenance is a big issue. So you go for fabrics that are ironclad, that are going to last a really long time, like nylon horsehair. You can’t make a chiffon dress using it, but if you want something to stay in a particularly stiff position, it’s one of those wonder fabrics.

When I did Brandenburg (1997) with Jerome Robbins, he actually made a little drawing of what he thought the girls could look like. Then I did drawings. Then he corrected my drawings. Then I changed my drawings. Then we chose the colors. Then he corrected the colors. Then we tried the colors again. Like Carole said, it’s a give-and-take.

There are some choreographers who don’t have a clue at all about what they need, and then you go and watch the ballet. I often tell people that I’ll listen to the music and watch the dancers and imagine what kind of fabric they’re wearing. I’ll imagine a skirt that’s moving or a sleek line. If people are being dragged across the floor, the fabric had better be something that stays close to the body and won’t be shredded or ripped on the floor. So you watch for different clues.

Sometimes they might say a color. I’ve had choreographers tell me a smell or a spice or a flavor. It’s a lot like cooking. You’re adding different things, and you hope that in the end it’s something that everybody wants to eat. Once I had a choreographer tell me that he imagined going out, picking up a bunch of autumn leaves, and crunching them together — that was the color he wanted on the stage, that mixture of all those autumn colors. They try to find ways to speak your language, and you try to find ways to speak their language, and hopefully there’s a happy marriage in-between.

Garafola: What about fabric? Do many choreographers talk about fabric?
Hynes: Sometimes they'll guide you. "Stretch," they might say, or "tulle," or they might say "chiffon." But that's probably a choreographer's weakest area because they really don't know very much about fabrics, which is why they need a costume shop to guide them.

Divet: Also, they don't always understand about shapes, how something is going to move. Sometimes we've had to make a mock-up skirt just so the choreographer could see how it moved; they can't envision that.

Hynes: We just helped a designer with a look last year, for a Peter Martins ballet called Morgen (2001). Peter was worried because the designer, Alain Vaës, imagined soft chiffon 1920s-style dresses cut on the bias, and the three women in the ballet were going to get thrown all over the place. He worried that the chiffon would tear, and the costumes would not hold up. It's taken twenty years of guidance for him to reach that point, which is great. Sure enough, we made a skirt and took it to rehearsal; they worked with it, and we understood where we could put some reinforcement and where we couldn't because the leg had to be free.

Garafola: Holly, you've designed costumes for theater, opera, and musical theater as well as dance. What are some of the special considerations in designing costumes for dance?

Hynes: I think Carole hit on it when she said shape is very important. The costume can never get in the way of the dancing. Most importantly, you need to be able to see the choreography. You want to see the dancer's body; a dancer has worked so hard to have this fantastic body, so you don't want the costume to hide it. Also, partnering in dance is very, very hard on costumes, I think harder than any other art form. Musical theater comes close, but it doesn't change casts every night.

In ballet casts change. Cast A goes on; Cast B goes on. Someone's out,
and a substitute's going in. So costumes have to be let out and taken in, expanded, made longer. They have to be washed or cleaned more often. I think all those things make dance different from theater or opera. In opera you can make a big, beautiful dress, and nobody ever touches the diva. She walks across the stage; she sings her aria; she comes back. That's it.

Divet: Also, there is a difference in construction. For instance, the sleeves are made differently for dance costumes. There are extra gussets built into the pattern so that the dancers can move. Little tricks.

Hynes: Yes, little tricks.

Garafola: Can you describe some of those "tricks"?

Divet: Sometimes we'll put stretch in the side seam of men's jackets, so that when they lift a girl and their ribs expand, they're not trapped in the coat; the coat moves.

And the sleeves are made in such a way that they can move up and down, but the jacket stays down; it doesn't move up and around the dancer's head. These are some of the little tricks.

Hynes: A gusset is an insert that adds more fabric to the sleeve. If you add a diamond-shaped gusset below the cap of the sleeve, instead of a pattern only fitting the arm's eye, you can raise your arm much, much higher—all the way up.

Garafola: What about weight? I know that the Carabosse costume weighed sixty-five pounds. But the people who were wearing that costume did not really dance.

Hynes: The person from whom we learned a lot about costume-making even before Barbara Matera was Barbara Karinska, who worked with Mr. Balanchine and ran the New York City Ballet costume shop for many years. She was famous for making elaborate tutus that weighed nothing because on the top plate of the tutu she would put bits of horsehair and bits of net and trim that were originally used for millinery; it would look wonderful but wouldn't weigh the dancer down. You know, dancers spend their whole life trying to get up off the ground, so you don't want to pull them back down to earth with something that's too heavy.

The salmon-colored dress that's hanging there, for example, has little flowers over the shoulder and down the bodice. All the flowers are handmade from ribbons and bits of trim and little-bitty pearls. Again, this was an attempt to make something lighter than the silk flowers you just buy and nail on. The handmade flowers survive longer, too, in dry cleaning. The beautiful little flowers you buy on 38th Street fall apart eventually, which is not good. Then they come back to the shop. We don't like it when things come back to the shop.

Divet: We don't like to fix. We just like to make.

Garafola: What about the bodice of a tutu? What are the things you do in order to make it possible for people to breathe?

Hynes: This is the last bodice that Barbara Matera made. It was for the production of Scotch Symphony that I designed for the Suzanne Farrell Ballet in 2001. It looks like such a simple little bodice. When Barbara looked at the sketch, she said, "You've got stripes on her bodice." If you think about a seventeenth-century bodice with a stomacher, the stripes are horizontal. But I wanted the stripes to go up and down.

Barbara decided that if you made a hard bodice with the chevron lines inside and then covered the outside with stretch fabric that had stripes on it, you could get the stripes going up and down. The inside is made with cotton-backed satin. If you look at the seams on the satin side, you can see all these little bone casings with bones inside. The bones are flexible enough for the dancer to wiggle in but restraining like a corset, which makes for a beautiful shape. This bodice is also an example of a pattern that Barbara used for The Sleeping Beauty and that Carole used on one of her dresses. It looked beautiful on the dancer because it really nipped in the waist.

Divet: I wanted to make it look more like a ball gown.
Hynes: If you look closely, you can see that it's a waist seam and hooks right into the side seam to make a little square at the waist. What happens in partnering is that the little square gets strained. You have to trim the seams very closely in order to turn the corners, which makes a fragile seam. Now if you're Barbara Matera and you've got a costume shop that makes its money making substitute dresses, this is okay. But at our costume shop we don't want a costume to come back; once it's finished, we want it to last a very long time.

Barbara and I fought for years over this pattern. Every time she tried to make something gorgeous, she wanted to use this pattern and I would say, please don't. So when she made this Scotch Symphony bodice, it never occurred to me that she'd use that square shape. But if you look on the inside, you can see it there at the waist.

The only reason I discovered it was that after we created this costume, Suzanne decided it was too earthbound for the character. She wanted her to be more like a sylph and more otherworldly. I don't know where she's from—the forest, the wood, or another planet. I had thought she was a younger sister of the guys in all the kilts. That shows you I didn't know what was going on. So we made another bodice, and she ended up being a very otherworldly sort of ballerina. But when I looked at the final bodice—this, unfortunately, was after Barbara had passed away—I saw that it was this very pattern that we had argued about for ten years. The draper said, "Why are you making such a big deal of it? It was on the other

Kyra Nichols and Damian Woetzel in Karinska's costumes for Balanchine's The Nutcracker. (Photo: Paul Kolnik, NYCB)

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bodice. We didn’t do anything different. We just copied the first one.”

Garafola: Barbara Matera once said, “I really love tutus. They’re ballet to me. When we’re working on a large piece, seeing all the tutus suspended on pipes from the ceiling is very exciting.” What was the signature of a Matera tutu, do you think?

Hynes: I’ll grab that one since I’m writing a tutu book. There are lots of different types of tutus to people who know about tutus. There is a Karinska tutu from Balanchine’s day, which is more of a bell shape and has a little more room to display all the ornamentation.

At American Ballet Theatre, where Barbara Matera made costumes for years and years and years, they preferred – that is, Misha [Mikhail Baryshnikov] preferred in his years there – the Covent Garden tutu, which was how Barbara was trained and was the kind of tutu she learned to make. This tutu has more of a slope underneath. It’s kind of hard to explain. You’ll have to get the book. There is a pantie, and from the pantie to the bottom layer of the tutu it’s all filled in with ruffles. It goes out in a sort of reversed curve, like a flying buttress.

Garafola: Whereas the Karinska tutu had –

Divet: Many, many, many layers.

Hynes: It was softer on the ruffles. All the space wasn’t filled in with ruffles.

Divet: Right.

Hynes: Which is funny because one of the things that I learned from Barbara [Matera] was that whenever you are designing or en-
crusting something with decoration, you have to leave room for space. Don't just fill it all in because from a distance you can't tell anything; you have to have air to see what it is. I guess that only worked for decoration.

She didn't pay attention to that for tutus because she wanted to cram as many ruffles as possible. So when I went to New York City Ballet and became director of costumes, we adopted a kind of half-Karinska, half-Covent Garden tutu, which is now, I guess, associated with City Ballet. Ironically, most of the people working in our shop are Russian, but our tutus are nothing like Russian tutus.

Garafola: What are Russian tutus like?

Hynes: They're different from Karinska's, and they're different from ABT's and Covent Garden's.

Divet: They're flat, very flat.

Hynes: And huge, just huge. I did a project for the George Balanchine Trust in St. Petersburg, and it involved one tutu. There are many, many, many costumes in Jewels (1967), but only the principal ballerina in "Diamonds" wears a classical tutu. I'll never forget sitting at a table with all the powers-that-be here and saying, "Now, there's going to have to be a tutu here, and you know they're going to want to do it their way, and we're going to let them, right?" They all said, "No, no, we want your kind of tutu." I thought, this is not going to be fun.

Over there with an interpreter, I'm going to teach them how to make a different kind of tutu. Well, immediately the response from the Russians was "dinky"; American tutus were very dinky. Russian ballerinas would stand in position, put their arms up over their heads, then reach their arms out; someone would take a tape measure, and that was the width of the tutu. They're huge, like flying saucers. When a Kirov or Bolshoi dancer jumps and leaps, the whole tutu goes whaaaack.

Divet: It's just unbelievable how they flop.

Hynes: That's because they don't tack anything. The poor boy's trying to spin the girl, and all the time this huge thing is whacking him in the face.

Divet: It's so distracting, just aflump, aflump, aflump.

Hynes: Eventually, we compromised. Instead of a thirteen-inch tutu, we made a fifteen-inch tutu. The Russians were happy, and
our powers-that-be who went to the premiere said it all looked beautiful.

About a year later I was designing a piece at Covent Garden, while the Kirov was visiting. I thought, great, I’m finally going to get to see Jewels. We were working in the design shop, and I could hear the music for “Diamonds.” There was a monitor in the other room, and I said, “Do you mind, this is a ballet I worked on. I’d really like to take a look at it.” They said, “Sure, go ahead.” The corps de ballet was on the screen, and they looked great. Igor Zelensky came out, and he looked handsome. Then out came this gigantic white tutu. It was the biggest thing I’d ever seen. The ballerina wasn’t one of those who had done the role the year before. The staff changes about every three months in Russia, so that the prima, whoever she was, got to have her gigantic tutu.

Garafola: Can you show us what the inside of one of your tutus looks like?

Hynes: We didn’t bring a real classical tutu, but this one is from Mozart Serenade (1989), which is a Peter Martins ballet but not a modern one. The design is Barbara Matera’s, but it was made at our shop. If you flip it upside down, you have a little pantie underneath that is made of net and a little bit of tulle on the side with a few ruffles on it. Then we’ve got nine layers of very soft tulle. Traditionally we’ll do a mixture: some soft tulle and some stiff tulle. When this costume is on, it looks more like a Karinska bell-shaped tutu than a stiff one. If you wanted it to kick out, you would have to put stiff net in it.

Sometimes we put a hoop in as well. Our Divertimento No. 15 (1956) tutus have a hoop. But that’s very difficult to partner. This is my design for Sylvia Pas de Deux (1950). It’s a little tribute to Karinska. It’s all soft net, with little clips of lavender and mustard and a little kick of aqua, so it’s not just an orange tutu. When the ballerina jumps or is lifted, just for a minute you see a little hint of color.

Garafola: The decoration was all done in the shop?

Hynes: That’s right. These are all handmade little flowers. This was the first time we tried off-the-shoulder sleeves, which are always a major problem. We figured out that if we used stretch lace, the whole sleeve would move. If you look closely at it, you notice that there’s a soft bit of net over all the flowers, and that’s because the costume for the ballerina’s partner also has ornamentation, and without the net, they can get caught.

This costume, which has “no-hanger” appeal, as we say, is one of mine for a ballet that doesn’t really go anymore called Twilight (1996), which was by Ulysses Dove. Deanna Berg, our dyer, helped me conceive the idea of hand-painting the pattern. It started out with the painting on the topside – a blue leo-

Divertimento No. 15 costume by Holly Hynes for Suzanne Farrell Ballet, made by Barbara Matera. (Photo: Paul Kolnik)
tard with a painted skirt. The day before the ballet went, the choreographer looked at it and said, “I know you really love this painted stuff, but we should have less.”

Well, it had been a lot of work, and I wasn’t going to let go of it. I wanted the colors just the way they were. So we decided to flip the skirt and put the painting on the inside, so that when the dancers flashed by, you got a flash of the painting. After the premiere, three little ladies came up to me. They were clutching their programs, smiling, and waving at me. I didn’t know who they were, just three patrons of the ballet. They said, “We just want you to know that we had our opera glasses, and we saw that hand-painted skirt.” That’s one of my favorite moments as a costume designer.

Garafola: Holly, you went through a regular theater-arts program?
Hynes: Yes.
Garafola: Is that when you began designing?
Hynes: I started designing when I was about six. I had a toy fox terrier that I used to put my doll clothes on. But my formal training was in college, at a liberal arts college, where you couldn’t get a degree in design per se. I got two degrees, one in theater, the other in the humanities.

The humanities really helped me because I learned about research, which is a big part of being a designer. You like to think that you create ideas and whole new looks and that you’re the first guy ever to do a certain kind of sleeve. It’s not true; it’s all been done before. It’s like ballet. There are only so many steps, and you’ve just got to figure out how to put them all together.

I also developed a love for different cultures and societies. As for studying theater, besides training as an actor and learning about scripts and all that kind of stuff, you had to take lighting, and you had to take set design and costume design. I loved the costume aspect of it. My college offered a semester in New York, which meant you could come here for three months and study with someone. I studied with a costume designer. We had fabulous opportunities and just a great time. I went back and finished college, and then I came back.

Garafola: What about you, Carole? Did you start designing for your pet at the age of six?
Divet: No, no. At the age of eight I started at the School of American Ballet. But during my years at New York City Ballet, Balanchine instilled in us the idea that you really had to be glamorous, so I took that for what it was worth.

When Peter Martins became director, he noticed that I was very interested in clothes and fashion, and that we had similar taste. He offered me the opportunity. At the time I was ballet mistressing, teaching ballets for The George Balanchine Trust and at City Ballet. One day he said, “You know, what you’re doing is all right. But I would really like you to work in our costume department.”

I didn’t know if I was really capable of doing it. I didn’t want to get in over my head. So I said, “I’ll take some courses and think about it.” I went to Parsons School of Design on my days off for two years, and after about six months I told him, “Okay, I think I’ll give it a try.” I was taking sewing, draping, color theory, and drawing, whatever I could do on a Monday, which was my only day off. I was doing my homework and dancing eight performances a week and rehearsing from ten in the morning until eleven o’clock at night.

Finally I said, “Okay, I think I can do this.” I started in the shop in 1990 and have been there ever since. I’ve had, I would say, on-the-job training. Holly started me off shopping. I’ve done millinery. I can’t say that I’ve done too much sewing.

Hynes: She made that headpiece.
Divet: I do hand sewing.
Hynes: The flowers on the Sylvia costume are hers.

Divet: The ladies who work in the shop do such fantastic things that you wouldn’t want to go near a machine and screw it up. But I think I’ve learned enough through the years to know what I’m talking about when I talk to a draper. I can talk a sketch through to a draper, which is another kind of collaboration:
Hynes: Yes. Pretty much. I sewed as a kid. My mother, my aunt, my grandmother all liked to sew. They weren’t professional seamstresses, but home sewing was one of their passions. It’s like working with paint or watercolor: the more you sit and draw, the more you sit and paint, the better you get and the more fun it is. It’s the same way with sewing, the same way with fabrics.

Divet: Also, the more ballets you see, the more you learn about the way fabrics react to light and to movement.

Garafola: You’ve alluded a couple of times to stretch fabrics and the impact they’ve had in the last twenty years. What happens when you have to redo a production? Let’s say that all the costumes for Symphony in C (1948) have fallen apart, and you have to redo them. Do you try to making a sketch three-dimensional. You’re always learning.

Hynes: It’s hard for kids. They get out of school, and maybe they’ve learned to draw. They think they’re the greatest designer on the planet, but they don’t know how to walk into a costume shop and talk a sketch through. If you can’t explain to somebody what your idea is . . . You can do a mushy sketch or a beautiful sketch, but you have to take it farther; you have to be able to talk it through with somebody. That really shows you who’s a designer, a successful designer. And you want to have fun in the process; it shouldn’t just be painful.

Garafola: How did you both learn about fabric? Was it from shopping, from working with more experienced people?

duplicate the older fabrics? Do you use newer fabrics? What approach do you take?

Hynes: All of the above.

Garafola: All of the above?

Hynes: It depends. Symphony in C is kind of simple because the bodices are silk satin, and you can still get silk satin. You try to get the best quality that you can find. Sometimes we’ll incorporate stretch, maybe not in the whole costume, but in certain places, so that you still have the look of what the designer originally wanted, but you’re helping a little bit.

I’m helping recreate Dances at a Gathering for San Francisco Ballet. It’s a Jerry Robbins piece that was originally done in 1969. The women are all in silk chiffon. You can still get silk chiffon,
fon; that's not a problem. However, the men's shirts are polyester crepe de chine, which is a problem. They're polyester rather than silk because, when you sweat, silk looks black on your body.

Divet: It sticks to the body.

Hynes: It's very hard to find polyester crepe de chine nowadays. And if you don't find the right color, you've got to find a way to dye it, which is impossible. So I'm sitting, waiting for the phone call from San Francisco, once they've gotten my instructions. Finally they call. "We can't find this polyester crepe de chine. What do we do?" This is why in Dances at a Gathering at City Ballet the men are still wearing the original shirts. Polyester crepe de chine is like nylon organza, a fabric that will outlive us all. Those shirts are never going to die. As they fade we try to put a little more color in, but every time they're washed, a little bit off that color comes off.

Garafola: Are there any questions?

Question: How much do you work with the scene designer or the stage designer?

Hynes: Well, every production's different. At City Ballet we don't have sets very often, unless we do a big, elaborate production like The Sleeping Beauty. In 2001 I did a Sonnambula and a Scotch Symphony for the Suzanne Farrell Ballet, and the designer of the Sonnambula set was a man I've worked with for twenty years, so we had very good conversations over the telephone. Then we e-mailed — thank you, God, for e-mail! — back and forth our sketches as well as color scans of the shades of paint and of the costumes. We had done a lot of theater together, but this was our first ballet.

Garafola: What about you, Carole? When you did Christopher Wheeldon's ballet Mercurial Manoeuvres (2001), did you work with the set designer?

Divet: No, because there was no real set, just red drops. I worked with our lighting designer. I brought him a couple of reds, and we worked the color out that way. But other than that there wasn't much collaboration.

Question: How about contact with lighting designers?

Divet: We love lighting designers. "Don't turn that black brown."


Divet: It turns brown or purple or blue. It's so hard to get the right black.

Question: Do you ever say anything to the lighting people?

Hynes: Oh yes! In 2001 I did Slaughter on Tenth Avenue—my designs, not Irene Sharaff's—at the Kennedy Center. Les Dickert, who is a lighting designer, was sitting in the audience, watching the lights. I was watching too, but not really paying attention. I was looking at the bows, headdresses, shoes, wondering if everybody was all hooked up, and not noticing that the entire scene was a wash of red and everything had turned the same color.

People were having epileptic seizures in the audience, looking at all this red. Finally Les whispered, "Go tell the lighting guy to use this and this and this gel and act like you didn't talk to me." I went up, and he was such a great guy that all I had to say was, "I don't know if you're using orange or pink or red, but whatever you're using..." He said, "Done deal. I know, and we're changing it." That was great. Sometimes everything works just great, but sometimes you have to be a little sneaky.

Garafola: Can you talk a bit about Irene Sharaff?

Hynes: She was definitely a mentor of Barbara Matera. Irene was amazing with patterns, bold patterns like yellow polka dots on a field of orange for West Side Story. Irene was also a very tough cookie. When she walked into a room, it was like Hollywood was walking in. She'd have a turban on and a cigarette and boots up to her thigh; it just took your breath away.

Barbara always treated everybody with respect, be it a designer, a beader, the guy who swept the floor. There are thousands of people who would say she was their friend, and I think that's a great way to leave the world.
along so well with Barbara Matera, because she was a tough cookie too?” She had her moments - of brilliance and of stubbornness.

But Barbara and I spoke the same language. This is a typical Holly or Barbara conversation, trying to describe what a costume should be: “We could have a foobie with a zigzag down the middle and a tchotchke on either end, with a splat on the side and a little dingle-dangle.” We would both go, “I know what you mean.” People would look at us and say, “What on earth are you talking about?” One of Carole’s first initiations in the shop was learning what a tchotchke and a foobie are.

Garafola: What is a “foobie”? Hynes: It’s a ruched up bit of ribbon with a stone in the middle.

Garafola: What is happening with Barbara Matera’s shop? Is it being continued by her husband or by her assistants? Hynes: A little bit of both, I think. Jared Aswegan, who was her last assistant, is trying to hold the shop together and trying to run it. Arthur Matera, Barbara’s husband, is more of a guardian angel than someone actively involved in the shop’s day-to-day workings. The hope is that everybody will carry on in Barbara’s tradition. There are six wonderful drapers who know exactly how she wanted things to be created.

As a designer, I took a lot of my outside stuff to Barbara - to Barbara, not necessarily to the shop. So the first time that I have to take something, and she’s not there, will be a little tough. But there are fabulous people there, and it will still be a great shop.

Garafola: I’d like to thank all of you very much for coming, but most of all I’d like to thank these wonderful ladies for speaking so eloquently about Barbara Matera and bringing so many beautiful things for us to see.