

NEWYORKCITYBALLET

Winter 2008
Volume 3, Issue 1

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Volunteer Focus

NEWS, INTERESTS, AND UPDATES FROM THE VOLUNTEERS OF NYC

A few words from Joan

We all spend so much time these days, at the Company, discussing what attracts audiences and how to keep them. So, for this issue, we have asked several volunteers to discuss the ways they came to NYCB and what keeps them here. A few are new to us, some have been fans for years, but all have the devotion we know this Company inspires. Their articles are insightful and reveal the richness to be experienced as part of the NYCB family.

- *JQ*

Becoming a Volunteer By Tobie Meth

Coming to NYCB as a volunteer has been an extraordinary experience for me. When I was looking for an activity which would bring me out of my home where I work, I had no idea that the level of enjoyment would be so high. The reward of volunteering has been compounded for me in this arena by the dedication of every level of professional within the ballet and within the volunteer corps.

I have attended many ballet performances through the years; however, this has added a whole new dimension for me. The energy that one feels at a performance is incredible, but seeing the work from behind the scenes is transforming. The quest for perfection and a no holds barred attitude towards achieving it is sensational.

It has furthered my own appreciation of a performance. In watching the dancers coming out of their daily exercise class, running to and from rehearsals, to costume fittings, more rehearsals, and then in performance, I have the highest respect for the way they meet the demands. A performance often feels like magic but now that I have witnessed how this comes together, I know better than to think it is hocus pocus. It comes from devoted people planning the evening with the highest regard for excellence.

The group of volunteers has been another source of fun. Here we are, all lovers of the arts, specifically the ballet. We are here because we care and we all share that common interest. We are also a diverse group coming from all different walks of life

and each of us has a wealth of experience in the world.

It is so enchanting to hear the stories: Volunteers who were here from the days of George Balanchine. Stories they've heard from dancers attending dinners at Lincoln Kirstein's residence. Stories of the days of Jerome Robbins. Stories of how the children on the Backstage Tours enjoy seeing the dancer's costumes and holding a ballet slipper and then taking a bow on the stage.

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The Joys of Being a Docent By John Lovelady

Probably the primary joy comes from the research one does in order to prepare a talk. I always 'intend' to look up something or check on something but more often than not that 'intention' gives way to simply letting the piece wash over me in all its glory, whatever that ballet might be. (With performance art- it's performed and it vanishes, that particular moment never to occur again, not even in memory. Fortunately, with the aid of tape or film, memory can be jogged and tweaked, but nothing replays the live instant. I just want to see the dances again...and again...and again.)

But then comes the knowledge that only study of a program can bring. The excitement then is of a different color. Or perhaps, same color, more hues. The ballet, even in all its performed glory, achieves a background, an ambience, a place in history that enriches its performance. And the excitement of discovering those hues has to be communicated.

Case in point- Robbins' work. Most of it seemed so personal and close to the chest, I often felt almost embarrassed to try to figure out where he was going or why. I still feel that way about some of the ballets, but now there's the knowledge of the terror and the torture (Jerry was always tortured) that he endured. His efforts give his ballets an environment that enriches the perfection of the movement. I still may not know where we're going but the trip is much more fascinating now. And maybe that's one of the things that Jerry wanted to say.

And it's a joy to share that insight. It's exciting to tell interested patrons what I've learned about the creation of a ballet. The colors and hues I keep to myself. It's much better to give them the facts as I've learned them and let them discover on their own how that knowledge enriches experiencing the piece.

Another case. Peter's *Romeo + Juliet* comes with enormous expectations: the programmatic Prokofiev music, the previous versions, the new designs, and his determination to make it his -- and by extension, our (that is NYCB's) -- own. It viscerally engaged me from the beginning. And as an audience member that could be more than enough, but as a docent, with study and repeated viewings, the piece began to unfold as a wondrous tapestry that not only was imaginatively conceived choreographically, but dramatically gave our dancers space to explore and grow in their dramatic interpretations as well as making the steps their own.

From the first chord of music and the initial blaze of Per Kirkeby's extraordinary designs, there is now not one moment

of the ballet that I don't look forward to with excitement and anticipation. That exceptional engagement has come only from the study of the piece itself, a heightened awareness that more than likely I would not have come to unless I had been a docent.

Thanks, JQ.

There is much else to be enjoyed in being given the opportunity to be a docent. Working with fun, funny, exceptionally bright people. Of course, that's true with all the volunteers, no matter what their persuasion of committee. But I am especially challenged by the erudition and commitment of the docents, since they know they're putting their knowledge and insight on the line.

And there have been times when a patron challenges that insight. I have to be open to their response and their willingness to inform and share. We all see performances in our own unique way, especially ballet with its inherently emotional and intellectual involvement. And since it doesn't speak it leaves itself open to even more variations of interpretation.

And, frankly, one of the great joys of docenting is being in the fourth ring. You don't see our dancers sweat from the fourth ring, but you see the patterns upon patterns, the unfolding of extraordinary choreography weaving bodies through amazing configurations that often leaves one breathless with the intricacy and simplicity of genius.

And then, of course...we don't have to try to sell anything.

Except us. Our enthusiasm, our love, our knowledge, our joy...at being a docent.



John Lovelady, Docent,
Information and
Administrative
Assistance Committees

Off to Saratoga! By Julia McGinnity

A beautiful tree-lined path leads the way to Aurora's castle on the opening scrim for Peter Martin's *The Sleeping Beauty*. Those familiar with the summer home of New York City Ballet may recognize this scene as The Avenue of the Pines entrance to the Saratoga Performing Arts Center (SPAC).

Saratoga Springs, NY has been a fairy-tale escape for the Company and its patrons for many years since George Balanchine established a summer residence in this town known for its role in the American Revolution and thoroughbred racing.

Each summer new opportunities arise to explore Saratoga and its Adirondack surroundings. For me, the number one attraction is seeing NYCB perform in an open air setting at the SPAC amphitheater. The Company brings a variety of repertory from the Lincoln Center Spring season. This summer three Saratoga premieres also arrived to critical acclaim and captivated audiences: Christopher Wheeldon's *Carousel (A Dance)*, Peter Martin's *Romeo + Juliet*, and Alexei Ratmansky's *Middle Duet*.

One of the joys of Saratoga is seeing dancers assume new roles. Over the years I enjoyed debut performances in *Swan Lake*, *Apollo*, *Stars and Stripes*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Every July there is a Gala performance by NYCB to benefit SPAC, followed by fireworks and dancing. This year since the Company performed on the Fourth of July, I reveled in *Raymonda Variations*, *Apollo*, and *Stars and Stripes* followed by a great fireworks display.

SPAC also hosts opera and theatrical performances at the Spa Little Theatre. There are numerous musical performances, both classical and rock concerts, at SPAC throughout the year.

During the NYCB summer residence, pre-performance events occur in The Hall of Springs. Last summer focused on Peter Martin's new production of

Romeo + Juliet. NYCB Wardrobe Supervisor Dorothy Cummings displayed and discussed the new costumes and on another occasion Joan Quatrano interviewed Peter Martins. One weekday evening Paul Kolnik showed many of his fabulous photos, captured during NYCB performances. There were also delightful pre-performance concerts by the NYCB orchestra. Other venues in town offer chamber music performances with NYCB musicians often participating.

Saratoga is a great walking town. Art galleries, shops, restaurants, and a few hotels line the main street, Broadway. Stroll through Congress Park and take a sip from the natural spring water fountains, visit the Saratoga Springs History Museum, or ride the children's Carousel.

Gallery 100 hosts a reception and exhibits the work of NYCB photographer Paul Kolnik each summer. The Lyrical Ballad Bookstore on Phila Street has been an antiquarian bookseller since 1971. Wander in and check out the numerous art and dance collections. You may find that rare elusive book.

Head for the Shoe Depot, Saratoga Trunk, or browse through smaller shops for vintage clothing, antique jewelry, or that lovely summer chapeau for opening Day at the Races. There are many real estate dealers as well, so you can find that perfect country home.

Horse racing fans dash every summer to the world famous Saratoga Racetrack. In July there are trotters and late July/August the thoroughbreds race. A local fair and great parade inaugurate the racing season each summer. One year there were quarter horse exhibition races. For more on the ponies cantor over to The National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame located on Union Avenue.

Dance enthusiasts flock to The National Museum of Dance on South Broadway. New exhibitions every summer celebrate great events in dance history.

The Hall of Fame includes George Balanchine, Fred Astaire, and Martha Graham. Wander through the museum and learn about all forms of dance. Some exhibits have excerpts from movies or film recordings – opportunities to see early Balanchine or Robbins' ballets with original casts, Broadway musicals, tap extravaganzas, and modern dance. One summer you could try on tap shoes to work on your time step or "shuffle off to Buffalo". A dedicated gallery area is filled with costumes, props, and a small stage encouraging children to express their creativity.

One of the best kept secrets is the three dance studios housed behind the National Museum of Dance. Every summer local students and some children from the School of American Ballet participate in the Museum's ballet, modern, and jazz dance programs. NYCB dancers frequently teach the ballet classes. Over the years I have had the pleasure of observing Sean Lavery, Heather Watts, Damien Woetzel, Kyra Nichols, Peter Boal, Jock Soto, Jenifer Ringer, Amar Ramasar, Andrew Veyette, and Daniel Ulbricht teach. Last July Mr. Veyette put the boys through the paces of the *El Capitán* solo variation from *Stars and Stripes*. It is a rare privilege to watch the wonderful NYCB dancers guide their students with such enthusiasm, demonstrating variations, and offering encouragement and praise, and to see the improvement in the technique and presence of their charges.

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Off to Saratoga! By Julia McGinnity *continued from previous page*

The National Museum of Dance also offers dance classes during autumn at its School of the Arts with ballet instruction by former NYCB dancer Robert Maiorano.

For respite, book a spa treatment. Saratoga visitors have been taking in the mineral water cures for two centuries. Within the Saratoga State Park, take a long walk, relax at the huge Victoria pool, or play tennis or golf. For a plein air experience, take in the gardens at Yaddo. Yaddo is a 400 acre estate founded in 1900 by Spencer and Katrina Trask, that nurtures the creative process and provides an opportunity for artists to work without interruption in a supportive environment. Professional artists are selected by a panel for a two week to two month residence to foster their work in choreography, film, literature, musical composition, painting, performance art, printmaking or photography. The Yaddo Gardens, open to the public free of charge, provide a great escape to relax and enjoy nature. Guided tours of the gardens are offered for a small fee.

If your feet hurt from all that walking, explore town riding the Saratoga Trolley which runs from the Skidmore College campus, past beautiful old mansions, down Broadway to SPAC. It stops on every corner including Congress Park and The National Museum of Dance. Last summer the trolley drivers explained local history and recommended nearby sightseeing while en route.

As you stroll about town you may come upon NYCB patrons, dancers, musicians or Company members who are just shopping, dining, and enjoying their rare leisure time. Many of the streets off Broadway offer specialty shops and restaurants. My favorite breakfast spot is Beverly's, a tiny restaurant with a backyard patio on Phila Street. Dancers and orchestra members often stop by for breakfast or lunch, and one July morning I had the pleasure of chatting with pianist Cameron Grant

and his wife. For year round enjoyment of this fare, get Beverly Reedy's cookbook, *Beverly's Best*.

This summer I enjoyed great Italian cuisine at Limoncello Ristorante on Broadway. One afternoon while shopping I met up with Joan Quatrano and a friend. We shared a light dinner at Cantina, a recently opened Mexican restaurant with excellent choices served exactly as you desire. Afterwards we enjoyed delicious desserts at the Adelphi.

A Saratoga landmark, the late nineteenth century Adelphi Hotel, has uniquely decorated Victorian period guest rooms, a lovely patio, and a private pool in classic Grecian setting. Guests may breakfast on the piazza overlooking Broadway or enjoy a continental breakfast off the lobby. The Adelphi was managed by balletomanes for many years. When NYCB is in town, there is a ballet newsletter and daily listing of performance programs for hotel guests. Dinner is served most evenings. After the performance you can relax at the Adelphi bar or enjoy luscious desserts. And, there is a Starbucks next door on Broadway if you can't live without your special latte. If you like gelato, try one of the 24 flavors at Eugenio's Café Gelato several blocks north.

The Gideon Putnam Resort and Spa, a National Historical Landmark with Georgian Revival architecture, is just a brief walk from SPAC. Splendor in the Roosevelt baths and Spa, lunch at the Café in the Park, or have dinner in the main dining room surrounded by Adirondack murals. Just a few steps closer to SPAC, The Hall of Springs offers pre-performance dinners or Sunday brunch.

Saratoga is a wonderful escape from bustling New York City. If you don't drive, take Amtrak or Greyhound. Getting around Saratoga is easy with new bus routes, the Trolley, several taxi

companies, or bicycle rentals. If you want to further explore Upstate New York head north to Lake George or Lake Placid. If you've never experienced this lovely town or haven't been back in a while it's well worth a visit. Several hotels and Bed and Breakfasts offer special NYCB packages. Next summer I hope to see you in Saratoga.



Julia McGinnity,
Docent Committee Chair,
Information and Green Room
Committees

One Date Leads to Many By Kiran Rijhsinghani

The swirling music of *Glass Pieces*. Lithe bodies moving effortlessly across the stage. This was my introduction to New York City Ballet. It was early 2005, and I was sitting in the last row of the orchestra on a date. Surprisingly, it was my date – not I – who suggested a trip to the ballet. In doing so, he opened up a new world to me.

Growing up in Iowa, I was involved in gymnastics so I had an appreciation for the athleticism of ballet dancers, but I knew little about ballet. I would sometimes watch performances that aired late at night on A&E and marvel at the way ballet dancers could move their bodies. Prior to my date in 2005 at NYCB, I had only been to one live ballet performance: *Swan Lake* performed by American Ballet Theatre in Chicago. I was a couple of years out of college and that performance was everything I imagined a ballet performance to be: theatrical, romantic, with familiar music and a tragic ending. But sitting in the last row of the State Theater that night I realized the dances before my eyes were different than what I saw in Chicago. Intrigued, I visited the NYCB website when I got home that evening. I stumbled upon the Volunteer page and discovered the Business & Professional Committee, which is dedicated to introducing new people to the ballet. It sounded interesting, so I contacted the volunteer office and joined the committee. I have now been on the B&P Committee for over 2 years, and recently took over the responsibilities of Chairperson. During that time, I also took Joan's Dance History classes and became a member of the Docent Committee.

I have a full-time job on Wall Street, so why spend my few free moments doing more work? Because I remember what it was like to be introduced to New York City Ballet by someone I knew. It was low pressure, and I could ask as many questions as I wanted without feeling silly. Sure, I could have gone to the ballet on my own. But to be honest, I found the prospect of planning a visit to the ballet intimidating. I was unfamiliar with the repertory, I didn't know when the ballet

was in season, and I had no idea what to wear! So making my way to the ballet seemed like a lot of work, and with an uncertain payoff.

But I have learned the payoff is big. Since becoming a volunteer, my knowledge and appreciation for ballet and NYCB's unique repertory has grown tremendously. As I've watched performances and read books to prepare for Docent talks, I've discovered ballet showcases more than just athletic prowess. It's an art. It's also a business. I think there are a lot of people who can appreciate one or both of these aspects of ballet. I recognize that ballet may not be for everyone, but shouldn't everyone have the opportunity to experience it to find out?

This is what the B&P Committee aims to do: to introduce the ballet to people who have never attended a performance. Committee members work hard to plan a pre-performance reception and sell tickets to the event. Most members have full-time jobs, but give their free time to solicit donations for the food, wine, and raffle prizes enjoyed at the reception. And of course, they publicize the event, sell tickets, and provide information to guests. Their hard work gives guests a personal introduction to an experience that may have otherwise been prohibitively daunting.

I thoroughly enjoy watching guests come to the realization that I did: that ballet is accessible, it is relevant, and it is enjoyable. I am gratified when a guest thanks me for introducing them to the ballet. I look forward to sharing in more moments of discovery.



Kiran Rijhsinghani,
Business and Professional
Committee Chair, Docent
Committee

Portrait of the Artist... as a Ballet Fan By Jack Freiman

I don't remember when I first became a volunteer at the ballet. I do remember seeing an ad or a notice of some kind in the newspaper that NYCB was having a meeting of people interested in volunteering. Since I recently retired and had moved back to New York after being away for 30 years, it seemed like something worth investigating: so I came to the theater, not really knowing if I qualified for anything. I had been acquainted with the ballet for many years. While I was a student at NYU, the head of the Drama Department had encouraged us to go see the new NYCB at the City Center. I was really taken with the company, Hugh Laing, Diane Adams, Maria Tallchief, Tanaquil Le Clercq, Janet Reed, the list of talented dancers goes on and on. It was an amazing company. One of my favorite ballets of that period was *Picnic at Tintigal* by Anthony Tudor. It didn't stay in the repertory very long, but I was really taken with the story, the music, the design, and the dancers, of course (Adams and Laing). One dancer in the production really intrigued me, Robert Barnett. He was a young man, but always danced character roles and often played old men. As an audience member and someone interested in acting, this phase of the dance interested me. He woke me up to the fact that dance was more than just steps.

I really don't know why or how I became interested in ballet. I certainly had no interest in becoming a dancer. I grew up in a tiny town, Tieton, population 450, in the state of Washington. The nearest city, Yakima, if one could call it that, was 20 miles away and going to Yakima was an occasion. We had no movie theater in Tieton and entertainment was mostly home grown. The HS Jr. and Sr. plays were special occasions for the whole town. I suppose my introduction to dance came, like so many other

males, when my sister took dance lessons. I remember being so impressed with the recitals and my mother working so hard sewing my sister's costumes. This all stopped when WWII came along and gas rationing put an end to the 20 mile trips to dance class in Yakima. I saw my first real ballet when I was about 15 and attended a HS Summer Drama program in Seattle. I saw the Ballet de Monte Carlo at the old Moore Theater. The program was *Coppelia*, *The Black Swan*, and *Rodeo*. The leading dancers were Danilova and Fredric Franklin. Danilova was in *Coppelia* and *The Black Swan*. I guess they worked harder in those days. *Rodeo* was the eye-opener for me and has always remained a favorite. I remember being disappointed with *The Black Swan* because Danilova's black tutu didn't look much like a swan of any kind. I never saw another ballet till I saw NYCB. If Prof. Somerville at NYU hadn't encouraged us, I might never have learned to enjoy this amazing art form.

Later, while getting a Masters at Fordham, I took a class on the Romantic Ballet taught by Lincoln Kirstein. Mr. Kirstein allowed me to attend rehearsals at City Center, which I did for a semester. I sat at the back of the orchestra and watched, and, hopefully, learned a thing or two. Of particular interest to me was watching Jean Rosenthal light the ballets. My dream at the time was to be the fellow who came out and handed the flowers to the ballerina during a curtain call. Sadly, a dream yet unfulfilled.

My 30 years away from New York were spent in Walla Walla, Washington where, for 25 of those years I was head of the Drama Department at Whitman College. Although Walla Walla was only 75 miles from Yakima, I had never been there. The only thing that I knew about it was that the State

Penitentiary was there and that an old high school friend was in it. Walla Walla is a rather isolated city and I felt that the students suffered from this. To make them more aware of the theatre as a profession, an art form, and a business, I started collecting, framing and decorating the theater with theater posters. I started with American posters, but soon moved on to posters from around the world. Two of the first posters I got, and that are still on display in the theater, were from NYCB. I wrote to NYCB and they sent me two 3 sheets. One was for NYCB and the other for Jewels. Today that collection extends all over campus and is probably the largest theater poster collection on permanent display in the United States. There are over 800 posters in the theater, and another 250 or so in other buildings and classrooms on campus, plus several hundred that are in storage waiting to be framed when a new wall becomes available. There are many dance posters in the dance studios; Alvin Ailey, Ballet Theatre, Pina Bausch, Merce Cunningham, etc. I still collect and send them to the college. If you see some strange guy taking down a poster off a wall or swiping one out of a store window, it's probably me. I was stopped by the police in Moscow for doing that very thing. I found a very large and handsome poster for *Godspell* on a street in Brussels. It was in a mud puddle. In perfect condition; but covered in mud. I took it back to the hotel, soaked it in the tub and carefully wiped away the grime. It is also hanging in the theater today. Needless to say their monetary value has increased through the years. One that I bought for about \$15.00 is now worth \$2,000.00. I'm not telling which. Don't want to give people ideas.

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Portrait of the Artist... as a Ballet Fan By Jack Freiman

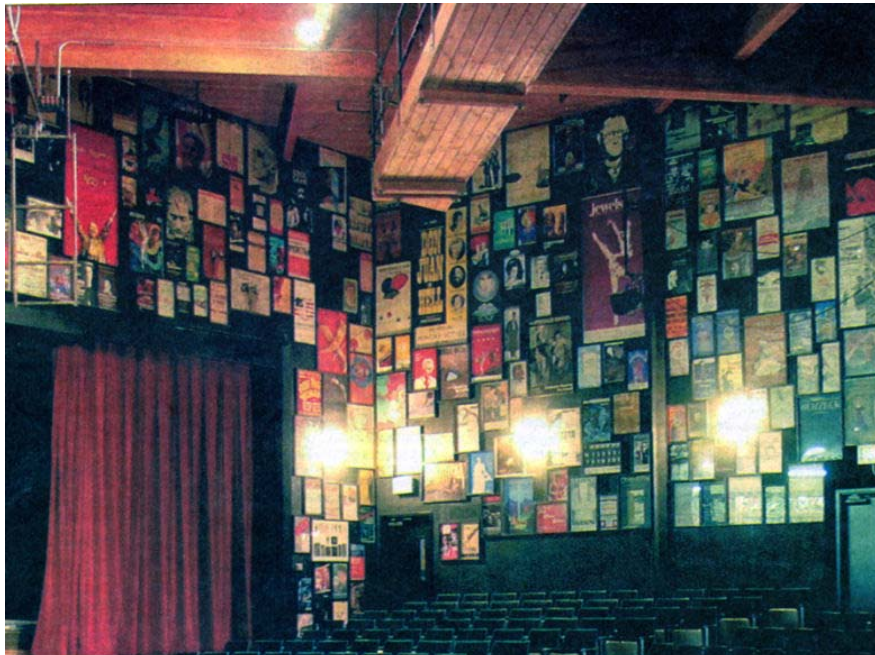
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During the past 10 years, during the summer, I've been fortunate enough to have worked at The Muny in St. Louis. While there I came upon a line of postcards, some of them very funny and many about dance. I've tried to send one each year to the volunteer office as if coming from the choreographer of a down and out touring (but fictional) ballet company. One summer they lost their costumes and had to perform nude. (the card was of nude dancers performing on a beach somewhere) The choreographer was very pleased with the audience reaction; knowing that all the applause was for his choreography. Oh well, maybe you had to be there.



*Jack Freiman,
Administrative
Assistance
Committee
(left)*

*The collection
(below)*



Becoming a Volunteer By Tobie Meth *continued from page 1*

Stories of how much fun they've had with the children who come to the workshops dressed in tutus and ballet slippers. My own stories of how joyous the days are when the children are brought up onstage with NYCB's Choreographer Christopher Wheeldon and a NYCB Dancer, Dena Abergel dressed for their stints in *The Sleeping Beauty* or *The Nutcracker* or *Swan Lake*. Stories about how the volunteers respond to the outpouring of excitement as children dance onstage at NY State Theatre as their parents watch and applaud and give standing ovations. The laughter and joy is palpable for anybody lucky enough to be there. Because the volunteers are so committed, working together with the NYCB staff, we can bring activities like these as well as smaller workshops to the

community many times during the year. I feel extremely privileged to be able to participate in the New York City Ballet Volunteer Program. Although the spirit of volunteering is to give the gift of oneself, my experience is that volunteering at NYCB is NYCB's gift to me.



*Tobie Meth
Rose Building and
Special Presentations
Committees*