

Ballet Beat



A Newsletter from For Art's Sake

June, 2011
Vol. 14 No. 1

Welcome to Saratoga Springs and the 46th season of the New York City Ballet at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center.

NYCB Brings a Jewel of a Season

The New York City Ballet will bring George Balanchine's *Jewels* back to the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, and SPAC's stage should sparkle during a two-week season crammed with this and other great ballets. As always, the Balanchine works form the heart of the repertoire, but dancegoers can also see Jerome Robbins, Christopher Wheeldon, and Peter Martins at their best, as well as a Gala studded with Saratoga premieres by Martins, Benjamin Millepied, and Broadway's Susan Stroman, who teamed with Mel Brooks for the musical version of *The Producers*.

Jewels (performed July 13, 14 Matinee, and 16), from 1967, consists of three large ballets in different moods, tied together by the "jewel" theme. *Emeralds*, to Fauré, updates French Romanticism with intimacy and introspection; *Rubies*, to Stravinsky, draws on American jazz and show dance; and *Diamonds*, to Tchaikovsky, harkens back to the grandeur of Russian classicism. When new *Jewels* was billed as the first full-length story-less ballet. True? Or is it three separate ballets on one bill? Regardless, it is sublime.

Other Balanchine works—the season brings eight in all (ten if *Jewels* counts as three)—include two brilliant collaborations with Stravinsky, made three decades apart. *Apollo* (July 14, 16M), from 1928, the earliest surviving Balanchine, presents three muses auditioning for the young sun god; since this is ballet, he chooses as his favorite Terpsichore, muse of dance. It marks Balanchine's first statement in the neoclassical style he made famous. *Apollo's* movement is clear and utterly unorthodox, a revolutionary dance that remains fresh today. *Agon* (July 14, 15), made with Stravinsky in 1957, combines homage to Renaissance courtly dances with space-age steps the like of which no one had ever seen. On July 14 you can catch

both of these modern masterpieces alongside Balanchine's 1964 *Tarantella* (July 8, 14), a nine-minute whirlwind pas de deux to Gottschalk, and Wheeldon's 2001 *Polyphonia* (July 6, 7, 14), an intricate modern ballet to Ligeti, whose attractively spiky music inspired Wheeldon's early works as Stravinsky did Balanchine.

NYCB will display Balanchine in Americana mode as well—who else could make a ballet to John Philip Sousa and have it become a classic? The 1958 *Stars and Stripes* (July 5, 7M, 8) is a classic showstopper, complete with baton twirling, marching cadets, and a comically touching pas de deux—not to mention Old Glory waving proudly at the end. In quite another key, his 1957 *Square Dance* (July 7M, 8, 9M) threads American dance motifs through the baroque music of Arcangelo Corelli. Originally using a square dance caller ("Promenade that pretty little miss, swing your partner just like this"), Balanchine soon decided the dancing should stand on its own.

And in a sumptuous romantic mode, Balanchine's 1934 *Serenade* (July 6, 8, 16M), to Tchaikovsky's lush *Serenade for Strings*, makes the ensemble the star—for his first American work, he made the first democratic ballet. The rarely seen 1967 *Valse Fantaisie* (July 6, 9M, 15), to Glinka, rounds out the summer's Balanchine.

NYCB also brings back what may be Jerome Robbins's greatest ballet, the 1969 *Dances at a Gathering* (July 12, 15), over an hour of splendid invention for ten dancers, to piano music by Chopin. As they perform in a great variety of moods, we get to know their personalities and delight in the community they create together through dance. We will also see Robbins's homage to Fred Astaire, the 1983 *I'm Old Fashioned* (July 5, 7), to Morton Gould's variations on Jerome Kern's great song—danced on screen by Fred with Rita Hayworth, and

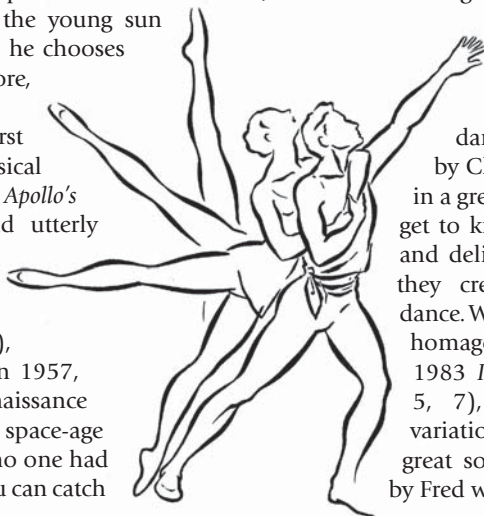
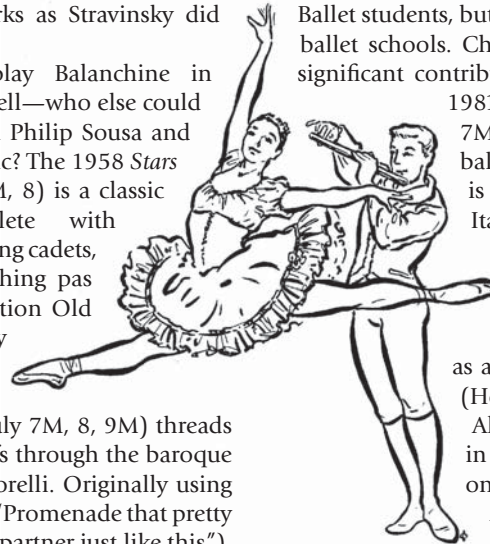
live on stage by NYCB.

Robbins's charming 1972 *Circus Polka* (July 12, 15, 16M) presents a stageful of ballet students, with a ringmaster whipping them into shape. Many of the young girls scurrying in circles and lines are School of American Ballet students, but several come from local ballet schools. Children will also make a significant contribution to Peter Martins's 1981 *The Magic Flute* (July 6, 7M, 9M, 16M), the second ballet he ever made. This is not Mozart's *Flute*, but Italian composer Riccardo Grigo's, a bucolic comedy about young lovers that Balanchine gave the young Martins as a homework assignment. (He got an A.)

Almost a decade later, in 1990, Martins made one of his best ballets, *Fearful Symmetries* (July 5, 7, 9M), an intricate, continually satisfying work to the music of John Adams, whose opera *Nixon in China* enjoyed a Metropolitan Opera production this season.

The July 9 Gala this year will pay tribute to Broadway and show-biz, featuring *For the Love of Duke*, a two-part dance by Broadway's own Susan Stroman to music by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. The first section, *Frankie and Johnny . . . and Rose*, premiered this past January and involves a jazzy love triangle. Act two, *Blossom Got Kissed*, dates from 1998, a comic tale of the awkward Blossom, transformed into a jazz baby by a musician's kiss. The Gala will also feature the Saratoga premiere of Martins's 2003 *Thou Swell* (also danced July 12), a big tribute to early Richard Rodgers (in his sparkling Rodgers and Hart period), set in a glamorous café society world of white ties and elegant gowns. Finally, Benjamin Millepied's budding choreographic career will unfold further at the Gala, with his 2010 *Plainspoken*, an exploration of partnering and pas de deux for four couples to commissioned chamber music by David Lang.

NYCB will also introduce its innovative "See the Music" program at SPAC. On July 6 and 14, music director Fayçal Karoui and the



NYCB Orchestra will give an inside view of the music behind these great ballets.

The season offers loads of family-friendly viewing. Children love watching other children dance on stage, and you won't go wrong by bringing them to *Circus Polka* and *The Magic Flute*. But the magnificent *Stars and Stripes* and the high-speed *Tarantella* will also delight all ages, and young dance fans will also be intrigued by the intricacies of *Square Dance*, enthralled by the beauty of *Apollo* and the mystery of *Serenade*, and fascinated by the stunning angularity of *Agon*. *I'm Old Fashioned's* mix of movie and live dance makes it engaging, and youngsters may identify with the simple elegance of *Dances at a Gathering* and think, "Yes, that's me up there—this dance says something to me."

Jay Rogoff

The audience

for the New York City Ballet at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center is always offered the opportunity to have the first look at the new company apprentices, recent graduates of the School of American Ballet, the official school of the NYCB. These young dancers are offered apprenticeships after the annual workshop performance in early June.

We also have the chance to see dancers make debuts in new roles.

And we often have to bid farewell to beloved dancers who have become part of our extended family. This year principal dancer Charles Askegard will be in Saratoga for his final appearances prior to a farewell performance in New York City on Sunday October 9. Mr. Askegard has been a member of NYCB since he joined as a soloist in 1997. He was swiftly promoted to principal rank in 1998. Prior to dancing with NYCB he was a member of American Ballet Theatre for ten years, the last five of which were spent as a soloist.

Charles Askegard is widely recognized as a gallant partner and local audiences will have another opportunity to see him in that role. On December 10 and 11 he will appear as the Cavalier in Northeast Ballet's production of *The Nutcracker* partnering Wendy Whelan as the Sugar Plum Fairy. Do not miss this!

Rhona Koretzky

The Making of Saratoga Dances

The seed was planted at a Dance Alliance board meeting – "Have we ever considered applying for a grant to commission a dance about Saratoga Springs?" Little did NYCB dancer and promising choreographer Justin Peck know I would be waiting for him at the dock behind SPAC only two days after NYCB began their summer residency! Eleven months later *Saratoga Dances* premiered

at the Skidmore Dance Theater as part of ArtsFest 2011. The program, curated by Peck, included the world premiere of his new ballet *The Enormous Room*, an abstract work that represents the contrasting feeling of openness of Saratoga Springs as compared to the claustrophobic feeling of New York City. Returning to its summer home at SPAC each summer is like a room welcoming the Company home. The Mendelssohn score was a nod to Balanchine's choice of the same composer at the opening of SPAC in 1966.

Area critics praised this tribute choreographed about Saratoga Springs, dedicated to Saratoga Springs and danced in Saratoga Springs. NYCB dancer Andrew Scordato was commissioned to design and create the costumes for the new work. The hour-long program also included the Saratoga Springs premiere of *Mopey* danced by NYCB soloist Sean Suozzi, insight into the Balanchine/Stravinsky artistic partnership by the esteemed Dr. Chuck Joseph, three excerpts from Balanchine's *Apollo* danced by NYCB principal dancer Teresa Reichlen and NYCB soloist Ask la Cour, and a musical interlude of Stravinsky's *Three Pieces for String Quartet, Movements 1 and 3* under the direction of Brooke Vincent.

After nine months of grant writing, donor solicitation, an afternoon of master classes, a silent auction and a community forum, the \$9000 needed to fund this endeavor was raised. Little did I know that Peck's and Scordato's first words to me two days after the performance would be, "Let's do this again next year!" And so it begins again.....

If you would like to be part of the creation of *Saratoga Dances II* please contact me at totbtri@aol.com. Monetary donations, in-kind donations and silent auction donations are welcome and are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. *Saratoga Dances* celebrated the uniqueness of Saratoga Springs, its rich history and its longtime commitment to the arts but there is so much more left to celebrate.

Mary Anne Fantauzzi

I Know That Song: The Music of New York City Ballet

When people think of the term "ballet", surely the term "classical music" is not far

behind. And yet, lots of ballets are set to music that might not be considered strictly classical. This summer at SPAC, there are several ballets fitting into this mold, by four choreographers: George Balanchine, Jerome Robbins, Peter Martins, and Susan Stroman.

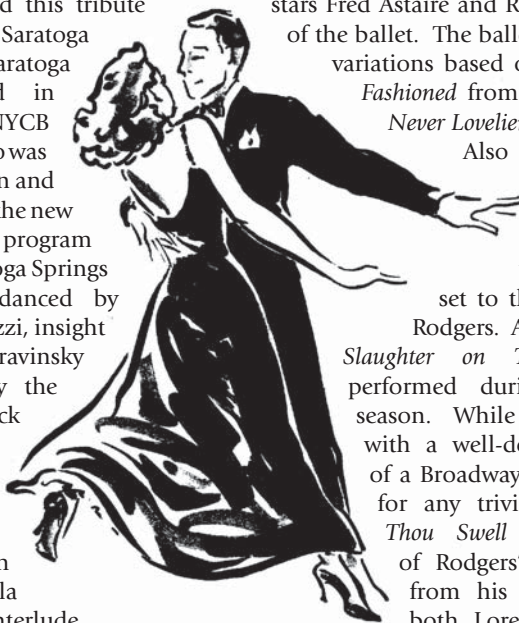
Jerome Robbins' beloved *I'm Old Fashioned* returns this season. This ballet features music by Morton Gould, based on a song by Jerome Kern. If you remember Jerome Kern's songs from lots of older movies, perhaps you won't be surprised to see movie stars Fred Astaire and Rita Hayworth as part of the ballet. The ballet's music consists of variations based on the song *I'm Old Fashioned* from the movie *You were Never Lovelier*.

Also on the schedule is Peter Martins' *Thou Swell*, one of several ballets in the NYCB repertory set to the music of Richard Rodgers. Another, Balanchine's *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue*, was performed during NYCB's spring season. While *Slaughter* is a ballet with a well-developed story, part of a Broadway show (*On Your Toes* for any trivia buffs out there), *Thou Swell* includes a variety of Rodgers' music with songs from his collaborations with both Lorenz Hart and Oscar Hammerstein. Most songs featured are from early in Rodgers' career when he worked with Hart. Set in a cafe, couples dance to fun versions of classic songs like *The Lady is A Tramp* and *Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered*.

Susan Stroman's *For the Love of Duke* is set mostly to the music of Duke Ellington including his famous piece *It Don't Mean a Thing if it Ain't Got That Swing*. This work is an extension of an earlier Stroman work, *Blossom Got Kissed* set to a song by Ellington's frequent collaborator Billy Strayhorn. Ellington is of course known for his contributions to big band and jazz and Stroman's work, often featured on Broadway, is well-suited to Ellington's jazzy rhythms and melodies.

Balanchine didn't shy away from non-classical music either. He choreographed numerous musicals, both for Broadway and Hollywood. Balanchine also set ballets to music that isn't strictly classical on his own company, works like the previously mentioned *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue* to music by Rodgers and *Who Cares?* set to Gershwin.

While you're not likely to hear the music of *Stars and Stripes* on Broadway, you also probably won't hear it in the concert hall. This ballet is set to popular pieces by



“March King” John Philip Sousa. Sousa was a major figure in American band music; in addition to his work as a composer, Sousa spent twelve years as the leader of the United States Marine Band. His rousing marches combined with Balanchine’s choreography provide a fun and patriotic ballet experience. While much of the music is familiar, you’ll certainly recognize the final featured piece which also happens to be the country’s National March: *The Stars and Stripes Forever*, of course.

One other note about music, especially for those of you who like seeing choreography set to music you know, here’s a quick word of caution: Peter Martins’ ballet *The Magic Flute* is not set to the music of Mozart’s famous opera, nor does it share the opera’s story. The ballet is a charming piece with a fun story accompanied by the music of composer Riccardo Drigo.

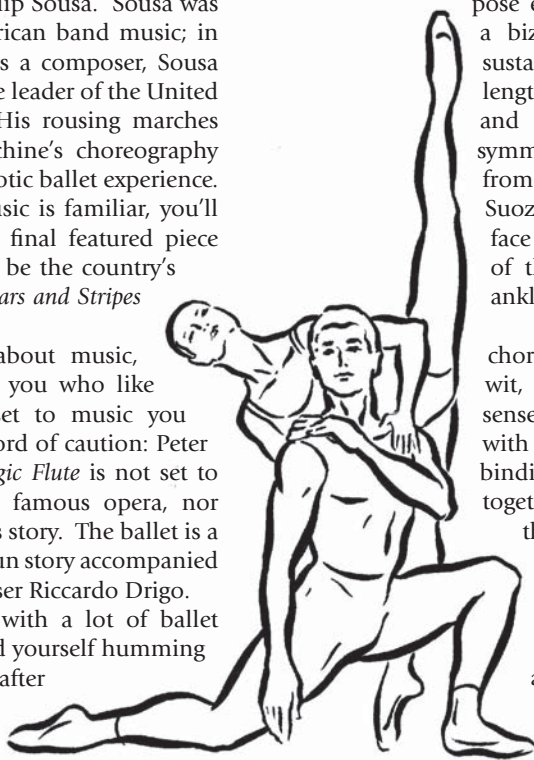
If you’re familiar with a lot of ballet music, perhaps you find yourself humming recently heard themes after a performance. This year, you just might find yourself singing.

Alisa Forman

Justin Peck Ballet Enjoys World Premiere in Saratoga

Three New York City Ballet dancers—principal Teresa Reichlen and soloists Ask la Cour and Sean Suozzi—performed the world premiere of NYCB colleague Justin Peck’s *The Enormous Room* June 10 at the Skidmore College Dance Theater in Saratoga Springs. Part of *Saratoga Dances*, an hour-long program assembled for ArtsFest 2011, Peck’s ballet, commissioned by Dance Alliance, adds to his dancing credentials his skill as a choreographer in the making. The performance also included Suozzi dancing *Mopey*, a violent, busy solo choreographed by Marco Goecke, and Reichlen and la Cour in passages from Balanchine’s *Apollo*, part of this summer’s NYCB repertory at SPAC.

Set to two movements from Mendelssohn piano quartets, *Room* abstractly presents a peculiar romantic triangle, each of whose members seems to pursue a partner who tries to escape. Peck uses many striking recurring poses. In one, Reichlen reaches out to grab Suozzi around the waist as he pulls away from her, while la Cour, his body extended along the ground, clutches Reichlen’s long leg, trailing elegantly behind her. Moments like these stay in the mind and make us think of the inexplicability of passion and the elusiveness of the romantic chase. In this way, Peck’s choreography has already begun to suggest large human themes. In another



pose early in the ballet, a bizarrely funny one sustained for a giggly length of time, Reichlen and la Cour stretch symmetrically away from each other while Suozzi lies prone, his face nestling on top of the others’ crossed ankles.

Peck’s choreography shows wit, variety, and a sense of structure, with repeating motifs binding the dance together. In one of these, the dancers solo independently at three points of a triangle, then move together and suddenly snap into unison, their arms extended before them in courtly fashion.

In another, Reichlen suddenly falls radically away from Suozzi’s embrace into la Cour’s waiting arms.

Although some of these motifs repeat from the first movement into the second, each section has its own character, with the opening quicker and more energetic than the lyrical, meditative conclusion. *The Enormous Room* needs a third movement to wrap things up aesthetically and resolve the tensions it establishes; for now this unfinished feeling is a good thing, since it makes us eager to see more of Peck’s imagination at work.

From *Apollo*, Reichlen and la Cour performed Terpsichore and Apollo’s solos, followed by their pas de deux. After a brief introduction by Skidmore professor emeritus and Stravinsky/Balanchine expert Charles M. Joseph, these excerpts offered a rare intimate view of Balanchine’s spare 1928 masterpiece, which looks dynamic from afar and dazzling up close.

As she has matured, Reichlen has relaxed her habitual severity, permitting a moving, warm performance. The choreography calls for her footing to slip girlishly near the start of her variation, a move she made look so natural that only her repetition of it revealed it as deliberate. The pas began with her and the rangy, majestic la Cour eyeing each other warily, then developing great tenderness in their dancing, occasionally smiling shyly at each other. When Apollo supported Terpsichore on his hip, her legs divided in a split and her arms alternately flicking in the

air, Reichlen’s grin seemed not the studied smile of the ballerina, but a signal that she was enjoying this magnificent dance as much as her lucky audience.

Jay Rogoff

Dance With the Dancers

Total Body Trifecta Studio, 61 Lawrence Street, Saratoga Springs, will host NYCB principal dancers Jonathan Stafford and Jenifer Ringer for two very special ballet master classes featuring works “inspired” by ballets in NYCB’s rep this summer at SPAC. Mr. Stafford will teach choreography inspired by *Fearful Symmetries* on Saturday, July 9th from 10-11am. The cost is \$20 or \$18 for seniors and students. Ms. Ringer will teach choreography inspired by *Thou Swell* on July 21st from 6:30-7:45pm. The cost is \$25 or \$23 for seniors or students. The classes are designed for beginner/intermediate level participants who want to physically experience the beauty of ballet and as a result, have a deeper understanding of the art form. To register, email Totbttri@aol.com or call 518-581-8025.

Story, Dance and Play: Ballet

Children ages 5-8 can hear the story of *The Magic Flute* and *Ballet of the Elephants* on Wednesday, July 6th from 10:30-11:30 as Mary Anne Fantauzzi leads a movement class that prepares participants to watch the NYCB children’s ballets coming to SPAC this July: *The Magic Flute* and *Circus Polka*. Space is limited to 10 children. The cost is \$10 per child. Call 518-581-8025 to register.

Local Children Chosen to Dance with NYCB

Garielle Whittle, New York City Ballet children’s ballet mistress, and Dena Abergel, assistant children’s ballet mistress, conducted an extensive audition process at the National Museum of Dance’s School of the Arts on Sunday, March 27th. The auditions were to fill children’s roles in Peter Martin’s *The Magic Flute* and Jerome Robbins’ *Circus Polka*. Local children chosen as dancers or understudies were Alanna Trees, Anna Konieczny, Amelia Bacon, Tuli Marshall, Noa raskin, Gianna DeMassio, Kelly Morrew, Elizabeth Pullman, James Kilberman, Case Prime, Chunling Minucci, Cassandra Wagemann, Elizabeth Houk, Nathan Pan-Doh, Emily Heym, Hanna Valiquette, Mahogany Akita, Grace Goodell, Elizabeth Claire Usack, William Halm, Gwenda Law, Hannah Hanson, Samantha Whitman, Giana Papa, Emily Lewis, Lilah, DuBoff, Halie Maple, Alison Genevich, Molly Genevich, Adele Mah, Alexa Niziak, Lauren Barbieri, Hayley Place and Samantha Percy,

National Museum of Dance Celebrates 25 Years

On July 7, 1986, the National Museum of Dance opened its doors to the public for the first time. Located in the building formerly known as the Washington Bath House, it existed as a carbonic gas plant used to extract carbon dioxide from mineral water. When the need for the baths diminished, the building lay empty from 1978 until the dream to dedicate a museum dedicated to professional dance became a reality.

This season the Museum is proud to display *Postage Paid: Dance Around the World, The National Museum of Dance's 25th Anniversary Celebration Exhibit, The Washington Bath House, American Ballet Theatre: Then and Now, Eleo Pomare: The Man, The Artist, The Maker of Artistis, MJ: A Michael Jackson Tribute, Art in the Foyer: Photography by Rose Eichenbaum, Dancing With the Stars, The Alfred Z. Solomon Children's Wing and The C.V. Whitney Hall of Fame.*

The Museum of Dance is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10am to 4:30pm. Admission is \$6.50 for adults, \$5 for seniors and students, \$3 for children under 12 and free for children under 3. The Museum is also the home of the New York State Summer School of the Arts for Ballet under the direction of NYCB principal dancer Jenifer Ringer. Visitors may view classes during museum hours in the Swyer Studios located behind the museum's main building. For more information, call 518-584-2225.

Mary Anne Fantauzzi

2011 Marks the Passing of Three Dance Greats

The area mourns the loss of three dance pioneers this year: R. Michael Steele who passed away in January at the age of 69 was a former soloist with NYCB and the co-founder of the Ballet Regent School in Saratoga Springs; Patricia Peterson who passed away in March at the age of 85 was the co-founder of the Dance Alliance and established the dance program at Emma Willard School; and Edward Bigelow who passed away in April at the age of 93 was a former NYCB dancer who became the company manager working closely with George Balanchine. He also curated several exhibits at the National Museum of Dance including 40 Years of New York City Ballet and Firebird.

Mary Anne Fantauzzi

A feast of dance

For dance lovers who reside in or visit Saratoga Springs during the summer season there is a wealth of activities from which

to choose: diverse and yet unified by the opportunity to observe or participate in the joy of movement.

May 30-June 18 brought the annual dance residency to Skidmore College. This year the chosen company was the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, founded in 1968 by Mr. Lubovitch who has been called "one of the ten best choreographers in the world," (New York Times).

In a style that is gentle and rhapsodic, Lubovitch has choreographed for such diverse groups as ballet companies, Olympic ice skaters and the Broadway theater (Tony nomination for his work on *Into the Woods*) in addition to his own company.

June 10, the audience at the Skidmore Dance Theater was treated to a world premiere, with choreography by NYCB corps de ballet member Justin Peck. This was a unique opportunity: the chance to see the work of a young and extremely promising choreographer and the premiere of a work dedicated to Saratoga Springs as the summer home of the NYCB.

Of course the jewel in the crown of the Saratoga summer is the annual residency of the New York City Ballet. This season is now in its 46th continuous year. The first week of July sees Saratoga Springs welcome "our" company back to its summer home where they perform the masterpieces of Balanchine and Robbins, as well as exciting new works by today's choreographers.

No sooner will the ballet depart and the Philadelphia Orchestra conclude a three week SPAC season, yet another treat is in store for dance fans. On August 19 the Trisha Brown Dance Company takes the SPAC stage for an exploration into cutting-edge choreography. Ms. Brown, called the "innovative high priestess of dance" in The New York Times, has also worked in opera and the visual arts. Trisha Brown is recognized as the most widely acclaimed choreographer of the post-modern era.

Where Lubovitch work is dominated by the curved line, Brown's choreography is a showcase for the angled line. The NYCB repertoire is vast and we will be treated to a wide variety of choreographic styles.

So there we have it: from lyrical and traditional yet with a unique style all its own, to a brand new work by an emerging choreographer, to the sweeping repertoire of the premier ballet company in the United States, and then to the work of a maverick always pushing the limits to change the course of modern dance.

It is a feast of dance.

Rhona Koretzky

Ballet Beat

is written and published by the members of **For Art's Sake**

Founded in 1998 to raise public awareness of New York City Ballet. To learn more about our events and activities, call Rhona Koretzky-Forman at 587-7023.

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Thank You everyone.

In Memoriam - Mae G. Banner