

# ENCUENTROS

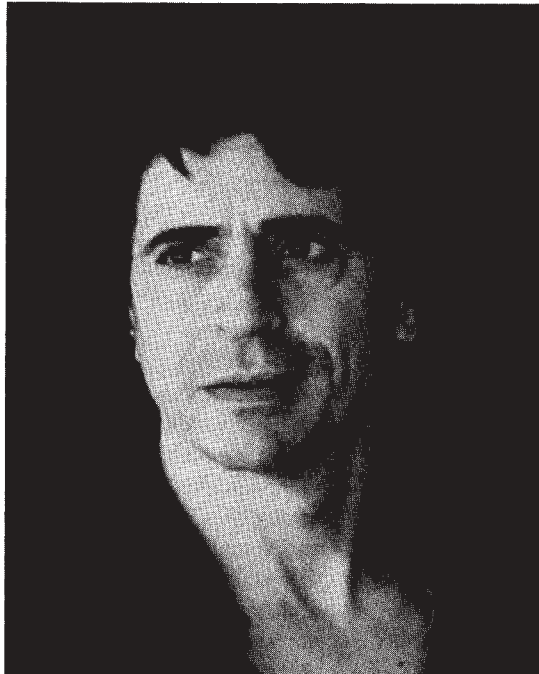


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*Dance:  
from folk  
to classical*

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Lecture by

**Edward Vilella**

## **CULTURAL CENTER**

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The Cultural Center of the IDB was created in May 1992 at the Bank's headquarters in Washington, D.C., as a gallery for exhibitions and a permanent forum from which to showcase outstanding expressions of the artistic and intellectual life of member countries. Through the Center, the Bank contributes to the understanding of cultural expressions as an integral element of the economic and social development of its member countries. In addition to exhibitions, other Center activities such as conferences, lectures, and concerts stimulate dialogue and a greater knowledge of the culture of the Americas.

# DANCE: FROM FOLK TO CLASSICAL<sup>1</sup>

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*By Edward Villella*

It gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon, especially in this wonderful environment. I'd simply like to start off by posing a question. What is ballet? I'm sure for most of us it conjures up sylphs and *Swan Lakes* and *Sleeping Beauties* and *Giselles*. It does for me. But more particularly, it's all about movement. It's human. It's simply the ability to take human movement and move it into a structured circumstance. By adding structure and technique to this normal human expression, we are able to form gesture, so that eventually we arrive at something that I am fond of calling a physical vocabulary.

We dancers speak a physical language and are able to converse with you physically. We achieve this through line and form—we are placed from the tops of our heads to the tips of our toes, and we do not move in an arbitrary fashion. Today when people dance to music, it's all individual in terms of their interpretation of gesture. But in ballet, we formalize it with the placement of our bodies. We attempt to speak a language without accent. If you train in a certain area of the coun-

try or the world, you possibly come with a dialect, and it is incumbent upon those of us who have a specific sense of purpose to alleviate this dialect or accent and achieve a kind of harmony.

Everything is organized and placed, and the basis is line and form. For instance, hands, what are we going to do with them? If we make a fist, that's tension, and tension stops movement. We relieve tension and allow the hands simply to open in a natural manner. If you look closely, there is a circular sense in the palm of my hands, and the fingers continue this circular form. But we can't dance like that, so we take that circular form, and we extend it. And as we extend, we attempt to speak with our hands, just as we attempt to speak with our entire bodies. Arms, like the hands, have circles, and parts of circles. Again, we don't dance like that; we pass through these positions.

So we have guidelines from which to depart, and certainly return to. It gets organized, there is logic. The same thing with our legs. We don't just dangle them out there, we extend the line of legs, we stretch our knees,

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<sup>1</sup> The lecture "Dance: from folk to classical" was presented at the Inter-American Development Bank on August 25, 1994, as part of the IDB Cultural Center's Lecture Series.

and down there at the end, we point our feet to finish the line. What separates us from other kinds of physicality is the position of the feet. When we walk, we proceed by turning our feet out, to have a line.

We have five positions of these various lines of the feet. Heels together, toes going out in opposite directions, that's the first position. We then extend to have a space between the heels, that's the second position. Then we slightly cross our heels—we have the third position. We extend and open in front, then we have the fourth position. And then we totally cross our feet in the fifth position. As with the arms, we have places of departure and areas to return to. Logic and simplicity. The most complicated thing to achieve is to be simple, and that's what we seek to attain.

In order to arrive at the essence of gesture, we have to get rid of what is unnecessary, so we have unencumbered, unadorned gesture. It gets down to the absolute essence. At that point we can take our basic vocabulary and begin to be poets. We create poetry by abstracting down to only what is necessary—the essence of gesture. We then become poets of gesture.

Not only do we have a very basic vocabulary, but we have to relate our physicality to musicality, to rhythm in time. We have to provide you with the inherent complexities and comments within the music, as an extension of the orchestra, if you will. You should almost see music pass through our bodies. We should be able to physicalize music for you, so that you are able to see what you hear—and hear what you see—a perfect marriage therein.

Of course, we are on stage, which immediately suggests theater and drama. We have

to be somebody up there, so we have to understand not only human relationships but behavior in the various periods of history and style. We want to be able to interpret the themes of life that are common to all people.

So we use a number of elements beyond simply the physical to show you, our audience, the aesthetics that reside within the human body and how we can, with this international language, communicate. It's a lovely sense, a lovely idea.

Now, we don't just throw steps at music and call it ballet. We need a point of departure choreographically; we have to have a reason to dance. This brings us to the purpose of my talk this afternoon, and that is folk, and how we relate folk dancing to this very formalized, almost imperial kind of gesture. If you look at the 19th century spectacles, you will find aspects of these works based upon tarantellas, Spanish dances, mazurkas, polonaise, all of the folk dances. We can take a wonderful thought, a previous statement, out of the village square and theatricalize it, formalize it beyond its very basic origins of dances that allow men to show off their physical strength and women to display their grace and femininity.

Through folk origins, we have the ability to relate directly to nationalities and to specific periods in style. For example, at the turn of our own century, the tango, which originated in the taverns and less-refined areas of Argentina, was incorporated into modern ballet. This is a good example of how the stories and styles of ballet can be influenced by every level of society, and it is not just an imperial idea for the entertainment of a royal court.

At the Miami City Ballet, we have a work based on tango called *Trans-tangos*, all based

on folk ideas and idioms. Eight years ago, the Hispanic Heritage Society in Miami commissioned a work from us. I said to our resident choreographer, Jimmy Gamonet De Los Heros, a Peruvian that I met in Oklahoma City, that it might be interesting if we found some Hispanic music. Jimmy found the work of Astor Piazzolla, who is unfortunately no longer with us, but who was fascinated with the tango. He took the tango beyond its origins and extended it, just as we in classical ballet no longer dance the way we danced in the 19th century—we have extended. So now we have a contemporary sense of the tango still based on its tradition, a tango for now with great regard and respect for whence it came. All choreographers throughout history have been fascinated with this idea, so why not we?

In Miami we sometimes think we are the gateway to Latin America, and located where it is, the Miami City Ballet is naturally influenced by the environment. We do Hispanic work, based on Hispanic themes. We have many Hispanics in our company—dancers, administrators, choreographers, costume designers, and so on. We are surrounded by talented people, and we seek talent.

Because of our positioning, we have toured Latin America four separate times. The first time we were invited to Ecuador, and we went to Guayaquil and on to Quito. I was fascinated with the multi-faceted culture. I was basically overwhelmed, especially in the mountains. As we were traveling and seeing the traditional Latin, Indian and then Colonial mix, it became so extraordinarily stimulating, I said, “Wow! Here is a moment for us where we can find another point of departure, we can make a work.”

There was a wonderfully enlightened American ambassador there at that time, Ambassador Rondon, who came to see our first performance as an ambassador might with a company visiting from his country. He watched the first ballet and enjoyed it. I invited him and his wife to come back and watch from the wing. It’s a very different experience to watch what goes on from the wing. He became that much more fascinated and began to introduce us to the various members of the cultural community in Quito. As this was going on, I asked Jimmy Gamonet De Los Heros, our costume designer Haydée Morales, and our scenic designer Carlos Arditti to gather as much material as possible on the folk arts. I contacted a friend in New York and sent him all the musical materials and instructions. He began to put an orchestration together because folk, as charming and wonderful as it is, in order to theatricalize it, again you need to further formalize.

We took all this information back to Miami and put together a work called *Danzalta*, which we had the pleasure of presenting at George Mason University last spring. George Mason is a very enlightened university. They decided they would also appoint me Heritage Chair and asked if I would put together a course based on Latin influence in terms of classical dance. It became an extraordinary experience for us and a wonderful area to gain new friends and have further insight, which leads to understanding. We brought *Danzalta* to Ecuador, and it was wonderfully received and critically acclaimed by the various artists who had helped us. This idea of being able to speak and communicate internationally is wonderful. And unlike politicians and businesspeople, we are able to represent culture from our side and to meet culture

from other communities. In this way we come to enjoy basic human values directly related to the wonder of art and culture. Art and culture I believe provide us with this thing called hope. It's a lovely thought. We understand what it is the world has unfortunately become. There are dark elements within the human mind and spirit, but there are also these sublime circumstances that are available to all of us.

I'll relate another small story that has a certain significance. I was a member of the New York City Ballet from 1957 for some 22 to 25 years, and in 1962 the New York City Ballet was invited to perform for the first time in the Soviet Union. We arrived and were well received. For the second performance at the Bolshoi Theater, I was dancing a role that George Balanchine, my mentor and boss at the NYCB in those days, had designed for me. I finished my variation and happened to have this really, for me, very best possible performance, and suddenly, bam!, I finish, there was silence, and then the house fell down. I had approximately 26 curtain calls. At the NYCB, we never had a tradition of encores, but the Russians were demanding an encore from me. I was pouring sweat and had goose bumps, going on and off stage, and the house would not let the performance go on until I went back and repeated my performance.

I am not telling you this story because I want to aggrandize myself; the point is this was October of 1962, the month of the Cuban missile crisis. And there we were, the NYCB at the Bolshoi Theater, dancing encores with the Russian audience yelling and screaming while each nation was poised to thermo-nuclear annihilate the other. We were thinking, "Wouldn't it be annoying to be

killed? But how much more annoying to be killed by an American missile." It just made no sense. But what did make sense was this ability for us to converse with other communities, another culture, and to walk away happy. We were happy, they were happy.

I have been, I think, one of the most fortunate people in the world because I was in a profession that I loved that also allowed me to participate tangentially in so many other aspects of life. Some of my colleagues say to me, "Golly, you get buried in the theater, and you miss life." My response is "look what you've missed." I had the great privilege of working with a man called George Balanchine and, at the same time, a man called Jerome Robbins. In the very first year that I was at the NYCB, I had in front of me Igor Stravinsky, Rieti, the genius of Lincoln Kirstein. Now I try to explain to the dancers of the Miami City Ballet the importance of those individuals who are the giants of this century, the communicators of this century, who changed the faces of their art forms. As I begin to pass these works along to them, I suggest that they are in the presence of genius. When a Balanchine ballet is done correctly, we are in the presence of the mind of George Balanchine. And if it's a Balanchine work to the music of Igor Stravinsky, we are then in the presence of both of those minds, and one complements the other. I was saying to you earlier that we attempt to physicalize music, and the marriage of the genius of a Balanchine and a Stravinsky is extraordinary.

I said that they changed the faces of their art forms. How did they do that? How did they go from the 19th century story ballets like *Swan Lake* to the next level? I suggested it earlier when I mentioned simplicity and

unadorned abstraction. People today are a little concerned about watching abstract ballet. “Oh, gee, I’m not too sure because I don’t know the story. If there is no story to this ballet, how can I understand it?” Well, possibly not, possibly not. Unless you say, “Gee, if it is an abstract ballet, maybe it has been abstracted from something I am familiar with, like a folk tale or a mythological story.”

There are many folk references throughout the Balanchine repertoire. An early example, *Square Dance*, is based on themes of the American West he loved and is set to the music of Vivaldi and Corelli. In *Bugaku*, the *pas de deux* is a highly stylized marriage ceremony in a Japanese setting. *Tarantella* is set in an Italian village where the dancers perform a national dance. *Harlequinade* is a wonderful *commedia dell’arte* ballet whose style originated in 16th century Italy, and even though the harlequin character has a comical role, he presents himself with a classical bearing of nobility and dignity. Another example—in the *Prodigal Son* ballet, there is a phrase where one of the sirens frames her fingers around the prodigal son’s head like a halo. Here he’s referring to the haloes around the heads of the saints in the Russian icons. And finally, the modern worlds of jazz and tango are seen and heard in “Rubies” from Balanchine’s *Jewels*. Many of the stories and ceremonies in ballet are drawn from recurring themes in our own lives, and so we express them in our art. They mark the passage of time and the changing stages of our lives.

In a way, my own life went through an evolution from folk to classical, from a street kid in Queens to *premier danseur* of the New York City Ballet. As you may know, I have the oddest of backgrounds. It didn’t happen

in a flash one day. I didn’t wake up and say what a great idea, I’m going to be a classical ballet dancer, certainly not in my neighborhood. My mother was a frustrated dancer, so she took my older sister to a local dance school in Queens, where I grew up. I used to hang out on the streets and got into physical, feisty trouble until one day I was knocked unconscious by a baseball. My mother said, “I can’t trust you on the streets anymore, you are coming with us.” I protested but got dragged off to my sister’s school where they were doing all these painfully poetic gestures, and it was so boring. Then when you’re warmed up, you get to do these things called jumps, the brutal stuff. I tried one or two, and I said [Vilella whispering], “Hey, this stuff is not so hard.” The next day, I was in tights at the barre.

My mother had heard about this guy called George Balanchine who had a school, the School of American Ballet in Manhattan. She wanted the wave of the future for my sister and her career, and George Balanchine was predicted to be such, so she took my sister off to Manhattan, where she was accepted as a student. As they were leaving, my mother offhandedly said, “Oh, incidentally, I have a son at home who dances, but he’s not really very interested.” Mr. Balanchine said, “A son? A boy? Can he walk? Bring him in.” I was brought into the School of American Ballet and could see right away it was a very different atmosphere with beautiful instruction studios and gorgeous mirrors, pianos in tune and people who could play them, and in addition, there was this incredible array of the great international dancers of the day. Not that I knew any of them—I was just a kid from Queens—but there was something about them that really

impressed me. They were physically confident; they had style. I said to myself, "Maybe I'm going to be like that."

I was offered a job by the NYCB when I left high school, but my mother said absolutely not. Of course, my father was not thrilled either. He ran a trucking business in the garment center, and he didn't have the same sort of aesthetic pursuits that I was now hoping would be before me. He said, "Enough of this, you're going to college. I said, "No, I'm going to be a dancer." He said, "College!" Dancer, college, dancer. I went to college. I went to the New York State Maritime College, from which I have a Bachelor of Science degree in marine transportation. They did not have ballet as an elective at the Maritime College, but they did have baseball and boxing, and I went out for boxing and won letters in baseball.

Time passed, I was in my last year, and I really wanted to dance. So I started sneaking off base into Manhattan and presented myself once again to George Balanchine, who remembered me, and offered me a job. I graduated, gave my degree to my dad and said, "That's for you." My parents didn't talk to me for a year.

The company went off for a tour of Japan, Australia and the Philippines. Upon our return, I sent my parents two tickets in the second balcony of the old City Center where the NYCB originated. I called my Dad and said, "If you like what you see, I'll leave word with the stage doorman, and you can come backstage." He said, "From where we'll be sitting and from where you'll be standing in the back line, we may not even be able to find you."

Of the four ballets that opening night, I had three principal roles. Curtains up, bam!

We were flying and doing all these things; the audience was going, "Wow!" I finished the last ballet and was huffing and puffing and pouring sweat, makeup was dripping down, and George Balanchine came on stage after the curtain went down to tell me what I had done right and what I had done wrong. The curtain went back up, dark house, stage hand turned on the night light and left, we finally finished our conversation, shook hands, bowed. Mr. B went off stage right, and I started going off upstage left when I suddenly heard something. There in the wing were my mother and father in tears, and the three of us stood on that stage laughing, hugging and crying. From that time on my father became a balletomane and handed out my reviews and pictures in the garment center. It was a nice way to resolve a kind of thorny situation.

That then proceeded to provide me with 22 to 25 years of extraordinary existence being the raw material for the genius of George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins. An awesome challenge, I will say to you. Because I was a guy who could jump and beat and turn, I got an awful lot of things coming at me very quickly. I was the happiest man alive.

We have three levels upon which we dance: the flat foot, the half toe and the full point. The toe shoe created the third aspect of choreographic possibility with the third level. So with this, another art form within ballet called partnering was devised, *adagio*, where a gentleman will offer a hand in support of woman up on balance and lift her. I had never partnered because I had stopped dancing when I was 16. But I figured, "What's the big deal here? Grab 'em, pick 'em up, put 'em down."



Being terrifically naive, I didn't know my way around a ballerina,, I couldn't find her balance, I'd be leaning out like this, they'd be falling, I'd grab whatever I could. When you're a bad partner in a ballet company, your social life is also very bad. So for three years I had a terrible social life at the NYCB until I began to be able to partner. Then they started to ask for me to dance with them. What a wonderful sensation! To dance with someone else was really the culmination of what I was learning, to speak the same language, to be responsible for them. To look after a woman on stage is a wonderful masculine feeling, and it is instantly recognized by the audience as chivalry.

I had a number of wonderful roles, but there is a prime role in the Balanchine repertoire called *Apollo*, and Balanchine said to me one day, "Oh, go learn this ballet and show it to me. I think you have potential in it, and if you do a good job I'll allow you to dance it." Well, I learned the steps and the counts and showed it to him, and he said, "No, that's not Apollo." I said, "But Mr. B, those are the steps and the counts." And he said, "Ah, yes, but there's no poetry in your gesture; you are not a poet of gesture. Let me show you."

He was a man at that time of about 60, and he had a double-breasted grey suit on and was wearing loafers. He had a cowboy shirt and a cowboy tie—he was fascinated with American culture. This man then danced Apollo for me. I was stunned. Here was a man who wore style. Here was a man who was the essence of a god-like figure. Here was a man who you could see was an extension, an instrument of the orchestra, as the music passed through his body. It was an extraordinary experience, and a perfect ex-

ample for a very young male dancer seeking to be an actor, a dancer, a performer, and then, finally, an artist, which, of course, is the ultimate idea.

Balanchine rarely ever spoke about his work, and he left it a mystery. But for some strange reason, he started to talk about Apollo and gave me not only the sense of Apollo, but also a sense of the new classicism. How do you portray a Greek god? Well, you could look at a painting or imitate a statue, but that's not what genius is about. It's about inner content, an inner mind that creates this abstract circumstance of a Greek god.

I told you we have the arm positions, and overhead like this is indeed sometimes called fifth position. Well, Balanchine took this fifth position and extended it. The very first position Apollo achieves in his variation is this [Vilella holds arms up and out with palms up]. So now fifth position is extended and Apollo is looking up at Zeus or Olympus or whatever. Next is a sweeping gesture of the arms, again it's fifth position, except this time it's shortened like this. He said, "You know, it's like an eagle on a crag looking down." A point of departure, an eagle. Then there was a further sweeping of the arms in the wing-like fashion of a circling eagle. Then Apollo does a Spanish motif, and Balanchine said, "You know, dear, it's like a matador watching the bull go by." Now I have an eagle and a matador. Then there's a chariot-like gesture, and I have a chariot driver and a military guy. All of a sudden I said, "Wow, this is incredible." Written in the score from 1928, it says "soccer step." The soccer step is when the guy jumps in second position like this and then swings a leg across, so he's kicking away like this. Now I have an athlete, and a matador, and an eagle and a chariot. So you see,

he often used familiar themes and gestures as starting points, and as he set them to modern music, he created a neoclassical ballet.

I love to relate these kinds of stories because it gives you a little insight into a guy like George Balanchine, where his mind departed from and how he made these incredible works. I loved that man, he was such an incredible human being as well as an artist. Naturally, all of us wanted to get closer and closer and closer to him.

To perform Balanchine, you have to understand and move to 20th century music. More and more, as I travel around these days, I find that dance is less frequently taught in relation to music; too much attention is paid to the basic positions, rather than to how they are connected. When I teach, I start every class by insisting on “turnout,” where dancers lift themselves upward, forward and outward in a smooth movement from head to toe. From there, they can “release” gesture. That is part of the tradition I learned from my teacher, and what I am now passing on to my students. With the creation of the Miami City Ballet, I wanted to help position a company that would carry on the Balanchine aesthetics that were founded in the 19th century and then infused with 20th century energy. I also hoped the company would take part in the next evolution in this art form called ballet.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I have carried on for a bit. I was asked that if I did indeed reach this point, which I seem to have, that I might open for questions. I’d love to be able to do that right now. I’d be happy to entertain any curiosities.

*What will the repertory be that we will bring to the Kennedy Center in April 1995?* The repertory that we will bring is a George Balanchine

full-length work called *Jewels*, a work based on emeralds, rubies and diamonds to the music of Fauré, Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky. Then we will do a premiere by our resident choreographer, Jimmy Gamonet De Los Heros. What is fascinating about this work is that it is a marriage of very contemporary technology to the music of the lesser Bach. So we have this almost 300-year span between the technology and the music. Jimmy has a computer program called *Lifeforms*, and has literally choreographed off the computer. He has created his own language and is now a leader in the field of computer technology in choreography. And it’s an extraordinary marriage. Jimmy calls his piece we’ll be doing *D Symphonies*. We’ll also have a world premiere, which the Kennedy Center is providing as commission. Lynne Taylor-Corbett will be the choreographer, and the music will be by Donald York, an original score. We will probably do the *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux*. These are two separate programs obviously. Then we will present a wonderful symphonic Balanchine work called *Western Symphony*, which is a series of 19th century American Western cowboy folk songs like “Golden Slippers”—you know all of these songs. A fabulous orchestrator named Hershy Kay took all of these, rearranged, orchestrated and made a symphony. There is an *allegro* to begin, an *adagio*, a *scherzo*, and a grand finale. That’s what we will present at the Kennedy Center.

*What position did I play in baseball?* I played some infield. I love the infield because I love to move real quick, but it was discovered I had a pretty good arm, so I played some left field. It was then discovered I could throw a curve ball, and I did some pitching, so I covered a couple of bases.

*The question is about modern dance, and some modern dancers who do not directly relate to music, and does that bother me?* It doesn't bother me if I don't have to do it. I think it's just fine for people to engage and involve in art and culture how they wish. Can I enjoy it aesthetically? If it's artful, sure I can. I think there's a great deal of fabulous work around. I think Paul Taylor is a genius, I think Mark Morris is another genius, Martha Graham, and so on. These were people who had fabulous comments to make. I think, however, there are an awful lot of people who are getting away with it. There's a lot of so-called New Wave and Next Wave. It's kind of disposable art, and it's influenced more by MTV and the social headlines of the day. It has its place—so long as it has substance and comment, there's nothing wrong with it. By getting away with it, I mean there aren't the networkings I'm more comfortable with in great art. I'm much more interested in work that is aiming to become a master work, that has timelessness about it, that has a universal way to engage.

*The question is about the five classical positions of the feet and the comment that modern dance has created a sixth position.* My understanding of sixth position is just basic, where we have our feet standing straight and pointing forward. We do that a lot, and so you may say we do use that. The real formality is within the five positions, but because of neoclassicism and the extension thereof, we can have almost an elastic sense of flexibility about these as long as we continue to regard and respect the tradition. Our purpose is not to distort the tradition but, again, to seek what else is available in terms of relating to previous comment because that's what's classic. We look at what has been previously stated and see where we

can then extend from. So the sixth position has now become very much part of our vocabulary, but we obviously don't teach it, there's nothing to teach, you just stand there.

*The question is, I stopped dancing for four years, between 16 and 20, and on my 21st birthday I joined the NYCB. Then, within three years I had become a principal dancer. Did I train overtime, or how did I achieve that?* As I suggested earlier when I discussed partnering, when I arrived at the NYCB, I was without knowledge. I didn't know what I was doing. I was just relying on basic instinct and what you might call talent. I was just flying around, there was no refinement in what I was doing. If I had had any sense, I would have realized that slower is faster, that you don't rush, and I would have rearticulated and gone back to first position and started all over and had the patience. But as a 21-year-old kid who had lost four years, there was no way I would have patience. I was driven by frustration, so I nearly killed myself, and almost ruined my career. It was very difficult, and very stupid. I had a natural ability to jump, the thing I couldn't do was land. There's a technique to landing, so I was crashing down. I started immediately to do television. I was on "The Ed Sullivan Show," "The Bell Telephone Hour," "The Carol Burnett Show," "Kraft Music Hall," "Firestone Hour"—just a crazy hot kid who could jump and beat and turn. In those days, however, they didn't have any soft floors in television studios because the cameras were this big, you had to jump and beat and turn on cement floors. So I am the proud possessor of nine broken toes and stress fractures in both legs. I have a once-operated, now-inoperable left knee, I have two herniated disks, and an artificial hip. Other than that, man, I could go five rounds right now.

So, yes, it was complicated and difficult, and I don't recommend a four-year layoff.

*Who was the most extraordinary female dancer that I have ever danced with, or who was the most extraordinary dancer I have ever known?* Well, I had a unique situation, as did all of us at the NYCB who partnered ballerinas, and that was we partnered ballerinas chosen by George Balanchine. They were phenomenal, just extraordinary. I danced with a dozen different partners. I once did *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux* five times in one week with five different ballerinas. So what's my patent answer to who's my favorite dancer? The one I'm dancing with tonight. Aside from that, the people who stand out, of course, are people like Violette Verdy, Suzanne Farrell, Melissa Hayden, and so on. Probably the easiest and most wonderful lady to dance with was Patricia McBride. Patty and I danced together for our entire careers, and in 20-odd years we never had a cross word. It was such a pleasure to present her; just easy, wonderful, lovely. She could dance anything, no matter what. So I have a very great and fond feeling for Patty because she covered the horizon, she could do anything. Of course, Suzanne Farrell was very specific and beautiful and incredible, and Violette Verdy was wonderfully French and musical. This is a long-winded way of saying I was very fortunate to dance with some of the most extraordinary people who had such incredible and specific talent, all chosen by George Balanchine.

*The question is, how does American ballet compare with European ballet and is there a dialect?* American ballet is very different from European ballet in that Europe is much closer to the origins and traditions. It's much more a European art than an American art. It started

of course in Italy and France and moved on through Denmark, Sweden and on to Russia. George Balanchine left Russia because artistic comment and invention basically were not available, so like any great artist, you've got to move on. If you look at the early works of Picasso, they are traditional, and then they move through blue periods and further abstractions. It is the same with choreography. You cannot stay with *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty* all of your life if you have genius and motivation. Balanchine basically changed the face of the art form, but just as we in Miami are Hispanically influenced, Balanchine was influenced by the energy of America and by a folk dance called American jazz—Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. He said he came to America because he loved Ginger Rogers and wanted to be in the country that produced Ginger Rogers. He was a guy who really loved women—five wives, all of them ballerinas. Balanchine took American energy, attack, line, form, and basically created a new classicism. In 1962 when we were in the Soviet Union, his old colleagues he grew up with said to him, "Welcome to the home of classicism," and his response was "classicism doesn't live here anymore." So there is a very specific and definite difference between American neoclassicism and traditional European 19th century classicism.

*The question is how we achieve a Balanchine repertoire.* When George Balanchine was in his later years, he prepared himself very carefully for everything, including his death. He left his entire repertoire to individuals who now have the rights to the works. They formed an organization called the Balanchine Trust, an umbrella organization. We need to apply to the Balanchine Trust to perform the works, and they then consider

*DANCE: FROM FOLK TO CLASSICAL*

whether we are able to articulate these works. Fortunately I have a very good relationship with the Balanchine Trust, in addition to which they are convinced that my purpose is to present these works the way they were originally intended, and the way I and my colleagues remember them. We at the Miami City Ballet are very fortunate, as, for instance, with *Jewels*. Along with the NYCB,

we are the only two companies in the world that have the rights to do full-length *Jewels*, so that is a suggestion that the Balanchine Trust trusts us.

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to tell you I have had the best time. I hope that I have allowed you inside our world, and I hope you also had a giggle or two. I know I did. Thanks very much.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert J. M. Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'R' and 'J'.

**Edward Villella** was born in Bayside, New York, in 1936. He entered the School of American Ballet at age 10 but interrupted his dance training to complete academic studies. A graduate of the New York Maritime Academy, he obtained a B.S. in marine transportation, lettered in baseball, and was a championship boxer. He returned to SAB in 1955, and in 1957 was invited to join the New York City Ballet.

Mr. Villella was promoted to Soloist in 1958 and then to Principal Dancer in 1960. He originated many roles in the New York City Ballet repertoire, among them *Tarantella*, the “Rubies” section of *Jewels*, and the role of Oberon in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Perhaps his most famous role was in the 1960 revival of Balanchine’s 1929 masterpiece, *Prodigal Son*.

Mr. Villella was the first American dancer to perform with the Royal Danish Ballet, and the only American ever to be asked to dance an encore at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow. He danced for President Kennedy’s inaugural and for Presidents Johnson, Nixon and Ford. In 1975 he won an Emmy Award for his CBS television production of *Harlequin* and was producer-director for the PBS series “Dance in America” for one-and-a-half years.

Among the distinguished honors awarded to him are the 38th annual Capezio Dance Award; the Frances Holleman Breathitt Award for Excellence, for his outstanding contribution to the arts and to the education of young people; the National Society of Arts & Letters Award for Lifetime Achievement, becoming only the fourth dance personality to receive the Gold Medal; and the *Dance Magazine* Award, in 1964. He has been awarded honorary degrees by Union College, Siena College, Fordham University, Skidmore College and Nazareth College.

In 1981 Mr. Villella served as Ida Beam Visiting Professor at the University of Iowa and was Visiting Artist at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point from 1981-82. In 1985 he was Regents Lecturer at the Irvine campus of the University of California. He held the George Mason University Heritage Chair in Arts and Cultural Criticism in 1992-93.

He currently serves on the Board of Trustees’ Executive Committee of the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts.

From 1983 through 1986 Mr. Villella served as Artistic Director of Ballet Oklahoma and was the Artistic Director of the Madison Festival of the Lakes. He remains Artistic Advisor to the New Jersey Ballet. In 1986 Mr. Villella became founding Artistic Director of Miami City Ballet, which has achieved worldwide acclaim under his direction.

Mr. Villella has a son, Roddy, and two daughters, Lauren and Crista Francesca. He and his wife, Linda, a former Olympic figure skater, reside in Miami Beach. Mr. Villella’s autobiography, *Prodigal Son: Dancing for Balanchine in a World of Pain and Magic*, written with Larry Kaplan, was recently published by Simon & Schuster in 1992.



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