

Paul Boos: Teaching Balanchine Abroad

by Larry Kaplan

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Paul Boos was a member of the New York City Ballet for thirteen years, from 1977 until 1990. Born and raised in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Boos was a scholarship student at the Ballet Theatre School, transferring later to Balanchine's School of American Ballet. At City Ballet Boos danced a broad-based Balanchine/Robbins repertory, appearing in principal roles in *Symphony in C*, *The Goldberg Variations*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Four Seasons*. He spoke to *Ballet Review* in New York, having returned from Europe, where he has been living and working for the past four years.

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Ballet Review: Can you tell us about your career since you left New York City Ballet?

Paul Boos: In 1990, when I stopped dancing, I went to Copenhagen and began teaching. Occasionally, I gave classes at the Royal Danish Ballet, quite infrequently at first, just a few months out of the year here and there. They had Balanchine ballets in the repertory that needed tightening, and they wanted the dancers to familiarize themselves again with the technique involved in performing them. Since I was living in Copenhagen at the time, Frank Andersen thought it was a good idea for me to take care of that.

BR: Was this in preparation for their 1992 Balanchine Celebration?

Boos: Partly. The Royal Danish Ballet has always performed a lot of Balanchine. When I arrived in Denmark, Pat Neary was working on *Theme and Variations* and staging *Allegro Brillante*, both of which I'd danced often. At the time, *Serenade*, *Tschaikovsky Pas de Deux*, and *Theme and Variations* were active in the repertory. They were being performed as part of a Tschaikovsky evening. *Apollo* was also done with some frequency. With the approach of the Celebration, however, the company started staging works they'd never done before. *Agon* was brought in as well as *Tschaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2*, *Tzigane*, and

*Diverti-mento No. 15. La Sonnambula*, which they had danced a lot in the past, was also revived; John Taras came in and restaged it.

Then in 1992, Colleen Neary joined the Royal Danish Ballet as a teacher/dancer/ballet mistress. One of her responsibilities was to raise the level of the dancers' technique so that they could better cope with Balanchine, and she really pulled it all together. She cleaned up the women's pointe work to the extent that the dancers could tackle the ballets. But because the Balanchine repertory was expanding so rapidly, the administration thought it was a good idea to have another Balanchine teacher there and so they brought me in to teach company class.

BR: When you taught, what did you look out for?

Boos: Overall, the Danes get a good strong classical training. The Bournonville they do is very tricky and requires a certain amount of speed and coordination. But it's different from Balanchine. For one thing, the technique is not as finely tuned to dancing on pointe. Therefore, I had to give the dancers, especially the women, steps and exercises that would strengthen their feet and legs and build up their stamina so that they'd actually be able to get through a Balanchine ballet on stage. I also increased the speed they worked at, developed the precision and clear articulation of steps, and generally concentrated on pointe work.

It meant, really, that I had to start at the very beginning, with absolute basics, how you do plié, how you do tendu, all the simple elementary exercises most people take for granted.

What I saw was that at the Royal Theater dancers were used to doing plié in a different way, in a much heavier way than we use it in New York City Ballet. They did it in a sitting fashion, and I had to get them out of the habit and teach them to use plié with more attack, with pliancy.

I understood that it was difficult for them. I was telling people used to doing plié and tendu a certain way – who have been trained from day one to do it that way – that they must suddenly change just because a couple of ballets have been added to the repertory. It's really a lot to ask for, and not everyone was

receptive. Some dancers insisted on doing things the way they felt most comfortable, the way they thought showed them in the best light. But I must say that even though exercises I gave were uncomfortable in the beginning, once they got an idea of what I was after, most of them were able to work with it.

BR: What about the tendu? How did your tendu differ from what they usually do?

Boos: The attack of the tendu is generally more legato in the Royal Danish Ballet than in New York City Ballet. The word tendu means to stretch, and that's how the Danes do it, as a sort of stretchy, good-feeling, massagey kind of movement. Whereas with the Balanchine technique – well, you can't call it Balanchine technique –

BR: The Balanchine style?

Boos: No, it's not even style, it's the principle of tendu –

BR: That he developed –

Boos: That he employed. I think it's incorrect to call what Balanchine wanted a technique. Strictly speaking, it's not a style, either. I suppose you could call it the White Russian training that he learned in the Imperial School in Petersburg and brought to the West, as opposed to, say, the Soviet training that was developed later in Russia.

Not long ago when I was working in Monte Carlo, I went to the Besobrasova School there and watched Madame Besobrasova's classes. It was intriguing because she is a White Russian, brought up and trained in the Imperial style, and in her classes I was seeing exactly what Balanchine had always asked for in New York. So much for the myth that Balanchine's idea of classical dancing was not real classical ballet! Balanchine asked for absolute classical ballet.

Yet occasionally he himself, if he didn't like somebody's dancing, would say, "It's too classical, dear." You know, on the one hand, he was demanding pure classical ballet, but on the other, he was putting classical ballet down: "I don't want you to look like that, it's too classical." So classical could be a put down and it could also mean purity.

But, yes, there certainly is something called the Balanchine style, though I think it has nothing to do with plié and tendu, with pure academic classicism. It's something else. Balanchine style is something that could be called American. You could call it jazzy, fast, sharp. Sexy. You could call it twentieth century classical dance, something current, because Balanchine's attitude toward plié and tendu was absolutely traditional, absolutely classical.

He believed that tendu was not something to make you feel good but rather an exercise to build strength. It was even more. He was convinced, and said so many times, that if you did this one step correctly, tendu, then everything else would fall into place.

He meant it. In his class we did tendu differently every single day. It was never the same. One week he might want the accent on "out." Then he'd come in and he'd say, "Who told you to do that?" and all of a sudden the accent was "in." The main thing was that we had to be responsive to every nuance, every variation in the timing of the step. But he wasn't being arbitrary, he was simply telling us to be limitless in our approach, that we should be unrestricted, that tendus could be done a hundred different ways. You see, he wasn't giving tendu by rote. He wanted us to use our minds and bodies all the time, to be aware of every little aspect of the step and every single part of our body and how it reacted to doing the step.

Outside New York City Ballet, outside of the companies profoundly influenced by Balanchine, tendu is really sort of overlooked. Or it's structured differently. In Russia and Europe, dancers go into tendu and then bounce right out of it into the next position. But Balanchine wanted us to give equal value to stretching the foot and to bringing it back in.

In Europe, ballet masters seem to be interested in the big picture and tend to jump past the basics. But in our classes, Balanchine spent the whole time working on these two steps, plié and tendu. Whatever we were doing, a huge jump or petite batterie, it was all related to the plié, all related to the tendu.

BR: Even the pointe work?

Boos: Especially the pointe work. And that was another thing about his class. Balanchine insisted on the girls always being on pointe. But in Europe the girls almost always put pointe shoes on at the last minute when they feel their feet are warmed up. Balanchine wanted them on immediately so that the shoe was no longer a shoe but almost a part of the full extension of the leg.

Of course when you do battement tendu with a pointe shoe, it's entirely different from doing it in a ballet slipper, and in Europe, for the most part women won't wear the pointe shoes until they come to the center. Very often they don't even put them on there. A lot of classes in Europe are designed so that the boys leave during the final ten minutes and then the girls get into their pointe shoes and do about four or five pointe combinations. But this completely defeats the purpose of building up strength on pointe for the stage.

As I say, before teaching my first women's class in Copenhagen, I was told to concentrate on pointe work. But at the barre I saw only one woman wearing pointe shoes. So after the barre, I said, "Okay, girls, put your pointe shoes on." Half of the room picked up their bags and walked out. I really didn't understand it. I thought, this is a classical ballet company. Pointe shoes are just taken for granted. If you're a woman, why take class at all unless you are taking it on pointe? Unless, of course, you're a modern dancer.

And pointe shoes should be worn in company class above all. In company class, you not only develop artistry as a female ballet dancer, you also get your shoes ready for the rest of the day there. So when you come to center you really ought to have your pointe shoes on. I suppose it's acceptable to take them off for the big jumps but I would advise keeping them on the whole time.

Afterwards I related the incident to Anne-Marie Vessel, the woman in charge, and she just laughed and said, "Oh, yes, that sounds like our girls."

BR: How did you learn about pointe work?

Boos: Both the School of American Ballet and New York City Ballet are so focused on pointe work that even if you were never in the women's class, you were still immersed in the principles of it. When Balanchine taught, very often there would be about a fifteen or twenty minute period within the class in

which he ignored the men and concentrated on the women. But the men were still in the room, we were still listening and watching, and it was remarkable, the incredible feats Mr. B had the women doing on pointe. You just couldn't *not* be part of it.

Sure, some boys may have felt, Oh, this isn't doing me any good, and just stand on the side. Yet a lot of us, including me, recognized the benefit of understanding the mechanics of these exercises. It wasn't so much with the idea that we were going to use them as ballet masters. I wasn't thinking long term. I was thinking right now, and felt that watching the women would contribute to my own technique.

Then, of course, there was always that thing about pleasing Balanchine. If he gave a step you wanted at the very least to look like you were interested. But there was more. You really did want to please him. If he said stand in the corner with your back to the room, you'd run to the corner and do what he said. That was the atmosphere of the class. Still, I wouldn't say I was happy to do everything he asked, because often he asked for the impossible. Many of the steps he gave were brutal, the body pushed past its limit.

BR: Was this in terms of the step or the intensity?

Boos: The intensity. Completely. Often he would ask for a very simple step, but it was in the extreme. Sometimes when you were jumping you felt as if your head was in danger of hitting the ceiling, and when you pliéed you wondered if you were going to descend into the floor below.

BR: Aside from intricate pointe work, characteristics always associated with Balanchine dancing are speed and musicality. How do you develop the speed in dancers, such as the Danes, who lack the Balanchine training?

Boos: It's a problem. Basically, the Danes have two speeds, slow and fast, but speed in Balanchine is more complicated, a matter of modulation and flexibility. It's true, over and above everything, Balanchine dancers dance faster than others, but the speed required to do so must be incorporated into a dancer's daily regimen and built up slowly. Essentially, it starts with the plié because if you're used to dancing things at one tempo, that means that your plié is finite,

that there's no stretch to it. And tempo in jumping is controlled by the pli . If the tempo gets slower that means that you have to use a deeper pli . If the tempo is faster, you're going to do the same pli  but exert even more control over it so that you can use less of it to make your effect.

But the bodies of most dancers are on automatic. They know what's coming, they've already worked it out in rehearsal. The only glitch is if the conductor decides to slow down (or speed up) the tempo. Then the impulse has to change, and this is where the control of pli  comes in for most non-Balanchine dancers. But in Balanchine choreography the tempo is shifting *all the time*, and if in class you always have the same tempos, then you don't develop real control of the pli , which is essential for moving quickly, for turning and for jumping in Balanchine ballets.

BR: Does this tie into Balanchine's theory about not landing on the heel from a jump?

Boos: The heel controversy is something even Balanchine laughed at. We were in Berlin once and were doing grand pli  in second position, and he started yelling at us, "Leave your heels on the ground! Leave your heels on the ground!" And then he sort of chuckled and said under his breath, "But don't tell anybody I told you that."

In truth, what he was looking for was lightness of movement. If you lose control of the heel, then you lose control of the step, and if you drop the heel to the floor, movement takes on a heavy quality. Balanchine wanted jumping to be buoyant. He wanted everything to be controlled. And he wanted the weight forward onto the balls of the feet, so that you had more control. I mean, he used to tell us, "Did you ever see cats put their heels down?" Well, their heels are halfway up their legs so there's no way that they could put their heels down.

But what he was saying was he wanted the weight forward on the balls of the foot because you have much more control that way, especially women on pointe, because if you land firmly on your heels, you must rock off them to get onto pointe. Whereas if your weight is already forward you're already in the position and there's no adjusting.

The controversy comes from people saying that the method causes tendonitis, and it may in some people because it hasn't been explained to them correctly. Also everybody's different. Some people's bodies react very badly to it. Because I wasn't trained from the beginning in Balanchine, I learned to jump with the weight more toward the heel and when I first came to the School of American Ballet, Stanley Williams worked on getting me to put my weight over onto the ball of my foot. Well, I developed horrible shin splints from that and it took a long time for me to get over them.

BR: What about musicality? How does the musicality required for Balanchine differ from the musical training the Danes are used to?

Boos: Musicality was something Balanchine drilled into us. From the beginning of class he would throw complicated exercises at us in which our bodies had to work one way while our minds had to cope with a whole other set of rhythmical impulses. Recently, I was reading about a doctor who trained U. S. Army and Air Force pilots. During flight simulation, he'd monitor what the flyers were doing on take-off and as they navigated the aircraft during the course of the flight. But, as soon as he saw they were confident and in control, he'd start throwing questions at them about altitude, the radar chart, the weather report, the wind velocity, the flight path, and so on, just to see if they could pilot the plane and still manage to do four or five other things simultaneously. He wanted to push them to the point at which they were overwhelmed but see if they were still able to maintain control. He was harassing them. Balanchine did that to us. Every day.

The pianist would be playing something simple like "Tea For Two," and he'd have us do the step in five, and an arm in an eight, and so on, so that we were forced not to listen to the melody but to let the rhythm take over and concentrate on all these different things at the same time. This is what we were used to. Musicality became something of a game to us, fun . . .

BR: Were there people who couldn't cope with this?

Boos: Certainly, people had problems. When I first came into the company, I thought, What the hell is this? It was overwhelming. But eventually I began



to understand. At the school we didn't have exposure to such demands. It wasn't until we got in the company that we had those challenges. On the other hand, veterans, people who'd been in NYCB for a while – I doubt that they could second-guess Balanchine – but once he gave a combination they would grasp it. Nevertheless, it took time.

BR: Presumably, appearing in the repertory helps.

Boos: Oh, absolutely. After class his repertory became easy. Almost. Because what we did in class was so complicated and so developed that when we finally got into a rehearsal and were listening to Stravinsky, it wasn't beyond us. It was something we could get, if we concentrated on it. But a company like the Royal Danish Ballet isn't used to that kind of complicated structure in music. They do have Stravinsky ballets and a smattering of twentieth-century music to dance to, but mostly it's scores from the nineteenth century that make up their repertory, music that's unsophisticated compared to the works in the New York City Ballet repertory.

On top of that, the Danes have an odd quirk, a habit of following the music, of being a little behind. They hear the music, then they go. You see the conductor start his "and," but you wait to hear the "one." So they're always slightly off, slightly late. And it's consistent, let's say, half a beat behind.

I asked one of the pianists at the Royal Theater if this was something that is taught. And he said, no, it's not taught, it's simply a habit that evolved. Even the musicians will do it. When the conductor gives the "and," the musicians come in a count late. Now this is at the Royal Danish Ballet. In the other companies with which I've worked, if you see the "and," the "one" follows immediately. It's right there. But in the Royal Danish Ballet there's always this hesitation, and the dancers are exactly the same. When you see them do a Balanchine ballet, even those that aren't so intricate, there always seems to be a hesitancy in their reaction to the music. And that is something that's very hard to get them to change.

When I taught, I often gave complicated steps at the barre that didn't go with the timing of the music but went with the rhythm instead, and in that way

I was trying to get the Danish dancers to move to the rhythm and free them from being dependent on the melody. When I danced I used to enjoy those exercises, but for people who aren't used to it, it's work. First thing in the morning, many dancers want a class in which they don't have to think. They want a class that warms them up and maintains them so that they're feeling good the rest of the day.

The purpose of Balanchine's class was also to get us ready for the day mentally and physically, but in a very shot-out-the-cannon way. After class, everything was easy. In Europe, it's almost as if the Lamaze method of ballet is being practiced: you go into a room and by the end of an hour and a half you're beginning to feel good and you're awake. Well, it was not like that at all with Balanchine.

BR: So how did people react in Denmark when you taught?

Boos: There was some resistance, but I had to live with it. I understood that as a guest teacher I couldn't make demands. You have to tread carefully. You have no clout in casting ballets, you have no clout in anything. From the dancer's point of view you're there to entertain them. And that has to be taken into consideration. You have to win them over because, above all, you want the class to have a beneficial effect and if you alienate everybody by making demands that seem outrageous, no one will take your class and you'll end up with two or three people in the studio. What's the point of that?

Yet as a guest you're expected to whip them into shape magically so they can handle the choreography.

BR: What did you do?

Boos: In the beginning it was difficult because what seemed like a reasonable class to me was out of the question for them. You know, when I showed them something that required speed, they'd laugh. Indeed, some of them were good humored about it. But when they tried it, they'd realize, Oh, we actually can dance this fast. It is possible.

The irony is that in Bournonville ballets, speed is also an important factor. But the footwork is set in rigid, predictable sequences that the dancers have

been doing since childhood. The steps form part of their technique, they're part of their education. Whereas, in our classes at City Ballet, everything was always changing. Balanchine was always adding a new twist. There was always some special surprise, something that you'd never done before.

In the Bournonville classes, nothing is ever new. There may be a different approach by individual teachers, but the sequence of steps is always the same. So when you're a Dane and come in for a Balanchine-style class and are given steps like a grand royale or a temps de cuisse, steps you've never even seen or heard of before, or when the tempo shifts and changes within one simple combination, it's all so new that you start having trouble.

Naturally, you can reverse the situation. The first time I took a Bournonville class years ago when I was in Denmark I thought I was taking a tap class. It was so far from anything that I'd done in ballet that I was rattled and I couldn't master the sequence of steps at all. It boggled my mind. So, I think the most important thing a dancer can do when learning to work in a new style is to decide which elements of technique are right for him or her and work towards them in a logical and determined way.

For example, in developing speed, I see that some dancers can't handle the placement of weight over the ball of the foot. But if they work hard it will come. The danger is in compensating. Some people will cheat to make an effect. For instance, in order to make, say, one leg look good in arabesque, they'll twist the supporting leg. But this is not what Balanchine wanted.

What Balanchine wanted was that people dance to the principles of classicism according to their individuality. Balanchine sometimes respected people's individuality to a fault. In class he might suddenly say, "That arabesque looks awful. I'm going to fix it." So he'd take your leg and place it in a position that in classical ballet has nothing to do with arabesque but on you as an individual produces the line you need.

Okay. So Balanchine has done this to you. Can you do it to anybody else? No way. Because you were the only one whose body would respond that way. The metaphor of a garden he often used, that everyone's a flower and you're all

different is really apt. Everybody is different. One bush needs pruning in one way and a second bush needs it in another. You know, everyone's an individual, and he really worked that way with people.

BR: So could you do it in Denmark?

Boos: I tried. But when you're working with the people for such short periods of time, even seven to eight weeks is a short period of time, what you do is concentrate on those you sense really want to learn. Those are the ones I would work with individually, and those are the ones I could see develop. By the end of a session, I saw a real change and that was very exciting.

BR: Would it be reflected in the ballet?

Boos: Yes. It would be reflected in how they looked on the stage.

BR: You've recently staged Balanchine ballets in Monte Carlo, St. Petersburg, and Amsterdam. Can you tell us about your experiences there? Did you teach in those cities?

Boos: Yes. When I negotiate my terms of employment I always stipulate that I must teach company class, at least for a while, for the reasons I just discussed. You just can't ask dancers to dance a Balanchine ballet if they have no idea of what the basic principles of the plié and tendu are, or if they're unsympathetic or unreceptive to his approach. Teaching the steps of the ballet is not enough, so I would always insist on giving company class, preferably a women's class. In most of the ballets that I staged, the emphasis was on women and of course they needed the most work, although I just staged *Kammermusik No. 2* for the Dutch National Ballet – the corps part – which, ironically, is for an all-male ensemble. Karin von Aroldingen and Sean Lavery took care of the principals.

Working on *Kammermusik* is a good illustration of what I was saying about Balanchine musicality. Hindemith scored the piece for piano and chamber orchestra, and the music is densely textured. But the dancer can't follow the melody alone because the melody reflects only one element of Balanchine's choreography.

You have to be conscious of all the shifting dynamics that Balanchine is responding to – tempo fluctuations, rhythm, silences, etc., so often you're listening to one part of the orchestra and not to the other. The Dutch National men needed work on this badly because it wasn't part of their education. It was very difficult for some and took longer than I had hoped to get it through to them.

Men in most classical ballet companies don't have the same demands made on them in terms of music and technique as women do, so whenever you teach a corps de ballet of women they are more likely to get it right away, whereas you have to explain a few times with the men. I don't like making a generalization, but in my experience it's worked out this way.

Staging *Theme and Variations* and *Serenade* in St. Petersburg for the Moussorgsky Theater Ballet was interesting from another point of view. For me, it was a very emotional experience because there I was working in Balanchine's birthplace, teaching a Russian company. Most of the dancers had been trained at the same school that Balanchine attended. Teaching them his ballets was a thrill, and I was surprised that their technique and their ability to dance Balanchine in some ways surpassed that of other dancers in the West, and in America!

It's odd because pointe work in Russia is different from the technique used in Europe and America. The Russian pointe shoe is built differently from ours. The shank isn't flexible and because of that Russian women don't roll through demipointe to get on their toes, and they don't roll through demipointe to bring the heel down. They go straight up and down in a kind of popping motion, which isn't what Balanchine encouraged.

But Russians, when they want to, catch on quick. Beyond that, their upper bodies are glorious and that adds a whole other dimension to the choreography. Russians have an amplitude and an expressive quality in their movement that reads all the way to the back of the house, whereas in our theater I don't think that quality was strongly developed. What's interesting is that Balanchine was always pulling and stretching our upper bodies in class, putting us into positions that were huge and expressive and were exactly what the Maryinsky

and the Vaganova School developed. But it wasn't an organic part of our dancing.

BR: Why? Why didn't Balanchine work on that more?

Boos: In his class he did. He worked on hands and on the positions of the torso, shoulders, arms and head. But he focused on so many different things that the upper body was only one of them. In the overall picture there were other things that were equally important to him.

But working with the Russians was enlightening for very many reasons. At the Moussorgsky, I was expecting to have an easy time with *Serenade* because the steps are straightforward classical. The technique involved in *Serenade* is not as stretched or on as high a level as *Theme*. And yet *Theme* was what they excelled at. They grasped it immediately and felt comfortable. But it made sense. After all, Balanchine choreographed *Theme and Variations* in a strict Petipa tradition.

But *Serenade* is his first American ballet and he's already incorporating movements into it that aren't exactly jazzy but are natural, even freeflowing, the use of the pelvis in the opening sequences, for instance, and the movement involving rolling-through-pointe with the pelvis as the center weight. It's very Ginger Rogers, lush and sexy. Russian girls were just not used to it. And they giggled. They were embarrassed by it because they'd never been asked to do anything like it.

I demonstrated it for them over and over, and it really took a lot of doing to get them to feel comfortable doing that one step. But of course, they'd been doing the ballet illegally for so long that their bodies were used to doing it their way. They'd hear the music and go into automatic. So I had to break all of the bad habits they had acquired. I had to change everything, the tempos, the steps, the accents, and show them how they were really meant to be danced.

Who knows what the ballet looks like now? I mean, you rehearse it and then as soon as you leave you don't know if they're going to change it back to the way they feel comfortable. That's one of the biggest drawbacks about staging these ballets. After the premiere they have the idea and the ballet looks

right. But when you leave you have no idea what's going to happen in a couple of months. There's only so much you can control. While you're there you do your best to instill a sense of responsibility and love for what they're doing into the dancers so that they'll respect the choreography and dance with integrity. But there are many variables you have to deal with.

As I've learned, each company has its own politics, its rules. In New York City Ballet, each ballet is given a rehearsal period sufficient for its needs and everyone respects it. Dancers are available throughout. In Russia, rehearsal time is limited, not because of unions but because of tradition and policy. In the typical European opera house system, the opera and ballet share the theater. You have to contend with overlapping seasons and that eats up time.

Aside from that, in Russia on a night when the ballet company is performing, the corps de ballet is only allowed to rehearse from 12:00 to 2:00. The principal dancers are not required to rehearse at all on a day that they perform. And they have the option of not rehearsing the day before or the day after. So with all these restrictions, some days you can only work as much as two hours. Now I was expected to stage *Theme and Variations* and *Serenade* during a three-week period, only to discover that that three weeks was really about a week and a half when it came down to the actual number of hours that I would be able to rehearse.

BR: And you were doing principals and corps.

Boos: Yes. I did the best I could. Many of the older dancers didn't take class, but many of the younger ones showed up, even if they were only pressured into it by management. Still, I saw that there were several ballerinas who really were interested in learning, and they would always attend. But, of course, my class was completely different from what they were used to. Even the pianist had trouble. I'd say "tendu" and he'd immediately start playing something that had nothing to do with what I'd just demonstrated. To them there's one tendu music. Their system's ingrained in them the way the Bour-nonville system is ingrained in the Danes. There's a technique, a system, and you follow it

every day with minor alterations. It took a while for me to get the pianists to think about what they were doing.

Then of course casting can be a problem. You come into a theater and find that the company is quite clear about who it wants in leading roles. Now it's true that theater directors know their dancers better than somebody who's coming in from the outside, but not many foreign directors are qualified to judge what is best for a Balanchine ballet. And the responsibility of a Balanchine répétiteur is to do what's best for the ballet, to put the dancer on stage who will make the ballet look the best it can. Therefore, a state of confrontation often exists between management of the company and a répétiteur. You have to be careful not to step on too many toes and choose the battles to win the war.

It's especially difficult when you find that management isn't interested in a dancer you adore, so it's up to you to prove that it's in the company's best interest to have, say, little Mariana in the back, who they seem to ignore but who can dance circles around the prima, dance a lead. Often there are beautiful dancers who just need that chance, and it's exciting to give someone young and gifted an opportunity. It's something I love. It's not that you're creating stars, it's that you're watching people fulfill their potential.

BR: Did it happen in Petersburg?

Boos: In a way. There was a girl who was third cast as the *Elegie* girl in *Serenade*, the Dark Angel. At first I had few expectations of her. She was so shy, tender, and reserved, but ultimately she was the one who came through. It was such a pleasure to see that kind of development. She ended up doing first cast. And there was another young girl, Ella, who was third cast Waltz girl in *Serenade*. This girl really was very young, very inexperienced, doing the role was a stretch for her. But I could see given time she was going to get it, and I understand that after I left she went on in it.

BR: What about *Theme*?

Boos: *Theme* was difficult because I was only given two women and one of them just did not have the technique. She was a legato dancer, an adagio performer, and lacked the necessary strength. I took her aside and I gave her



Therabands and precise exercises to strengthen her feet. These are the kinds of things that as a guest you do. You try to help the dancers in any way you can. You know, you'd make chicken soup, chant mantras, do voodoo, if you thought it would do any good.

The other ballerina, however, was really quite impressive, not I suppose if you compare her to dancers at the New York City Ballet. But she was lovely. At the Moussorsky, the aura of the ballet was enhanced in a way that we don't see in the West. There was a connection to the Imperial style.

But *Serenade* was kind of flat because the corps just couldn't move with the proper sense of freedom. They're used to standing in lines, making sure that they're exactly behind the person in front of them and doing the same thing so that, hard as I tried, I couldn't get them to understand. "You are each individuals. You are each women on your own, dancing together," I'd explain. But they couldn't get it. Their eyes were always bouncing around, making sure that they were in line, making sure that everything was exactly the way it was supposed to be, and that limitation defeated the whole feeling of the free movement.

In Amsterdam, on the other hand, it was different. I was amazed to find that the Dutch National Ballet has the largest Balanchine rep-ertory outside of New York City Ballet. They are very open to Balanchine's aesthetic. Their dancers are tall, they've got beautiful legs and feet, and a Balanchine look to them. Rudy van Dantzig, Hans van Manen, and the ballet master Reuven Voremborg have enormous respect for and interest in Balanchine's repertory, and they've incorporated his principles into their own Dutch style. For this reason Balanchine ballets look very good on them.

In Monte Carlo, it's similar. The women are tall and beautiful. It's a very glamorous company. Princess Caroline supports it, Helmut Newton takes the photos, and the costumes are very au courant, very chic. The company has a caché – and a Balanchine look.

BR: What did you stage there?

Boos: I didn't stage anything. I rehearsed five ballets: *Raymonda Variations*, *Rubies*, *Theme and Variations*, *Stravinsky Violin Concerto*, and *Tschaikovsky*

*Pas de Deux*. Most of them had been staged by Pat Neary. My job was to clean them up. I'd like to say, because I think it's important to bring up, that when one person stages a ballet they have a very clear idea of what they want the ballet to look like based pretty much on how they learned it and performed it. But, as I said before in relation to the arabesque, Balanchine might tell one dancer to do it one way and another to do it differently. He changed things all the time for different dancers. If one step didn't suit you or was giving you trouble, he'd change it. He told different people different things and naturally this affects the result. One person may set a ballet one way, and when someone else comes in to redo it, he or she may tell another story.

This doesn't mean, however, that there are different versions of the ballets, but rather that there can be different interpretations. For instance, Pat Neary may stage a ballet one way, but the same work staged by John Clifford, or Suzanne Farrell, or Vicky Simon, or me, will have a slightly different emphasis or look to it. Productions will of course be consistent with what Balanchine wanted and with his standards. You can rely on the Balanchine Trust to insure that.

Nevertheless, each production is an interpretation by the répétiteur. If you see a *La Sonnambula* staging by John Taras and a *La Sonnambula* staged by Ib Andersen you're going to see some slight differences. Each has a slightly different feel to it. It's not that one is right and one is wrong. It's just that if, say, ten people see an accident, you'll have ten versions of the accident, and it can be like that when staging a ballet, you know, "Balanchine showed me this way so it looked like that."

So if I rehearse a ballet that's been staged by somebody else, the dancers are in effect, hearing a second opinion, and that can be confusing for them.

BR: How do you deal with that?

Boos: The Balanchine Trust insists that the model to follow when staging a work is the last version of the ballet that Balanchine created. There are one or two exceptions. Companies are given the option of staging *Apollo* in the 1978

truncated version or they can do it complete, with the original prologue and ending. But with everything else there's no option. It must be the last version.

Still, when Pat Neary, to choose one person, who danced in New York City Ballet in the '60s and early '70s, stages something she may not necessarily be up to date on the final version of a work so she'll probably stage it the way it was done when she danced it. So when I rehearse something she staged, I take that into consideration. If somebody can definitively tell me, "Well, this is what Pat said about this step or this moment," then I say, "Do what she said, because this is her staging." But if it's unclear, then I can only say, "We have to do the most recent staging, or what the New York City Ballet does today."

What I'm talking about is quite subtle; it may not be visible to the untrained eye. So it's good that the Balanchine Trust issues guidelines. These ballets are precious works of art, more valuable than ever I would say now that Mr. B is not around to give the – I can't say "final" so let's use "authoritative" – word. It's up to us to protect them.