

Theatre essays – jerome robbins and agnes de mille essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

An analysis of the life and plants of the choreographers Jerome Robbins and Agnes de Mille and their role of dance in musical theater

Agnes de Mille and Jerome Robbins worked in musical theater in what is widely regarded to be the industry's Golden Era. Many would state that it was their innovative attack to choreography in musical theater that brought an energy and a dynamism to the musical, accounting for its rush in popularity. It is certainly true that they did much to promote the function of dance in musical theatre, which was antecedently mostly simply as an accoutrement to the main dramatic event; pretty adult females with a natural flesh exhibiting around the stage. Robbins and De Mille regarded dance as a serious art signifier and endeavor to portray it as such on the phase.

Musical theatre as we know it today did not come into being until the twentieth century, but song and dance have been a portion of theater for 1000s of years. From every bit early as the 5th century BC the Ancient Greeks employed music and dance in many of their comedies and calamities to entertain the public. The Romans carried on this tradition from the 3rd century BC, with many dramas by Plautus including vocal and dance. They invented the first theatres by attaching metal home bases to their places so that the entire audience, who would sit in a prodigious alfresco theater, could hear the dance steps (1). In the Middle Ages going folk singers and companies of histrions, terpsichoreans and vocalists performed popular vocals and slapstick comedy. The religious play of the 12th and 13th

centuries also included liturgical vocals, although no dance. In the <https://assignbuster.com/theatre-essays-jerome-robbins-and-agnes-de-mille-essay/>

Gallic tribunal of the Renaissance Louis XIV insisted that vocal and dance be incorporated into his entertainments.

In America, some of the first dramatic functions to be performed by terpsichoreans were in melodrama, which is unsurprising since the extremely conventionalized motion of melodramatic histrions lends itself more to dance than to anything else. Mlle Celeste, who was subsequently to go on to become one of the most celebrated terpsichoreans of the nineteenth century, was foremost billed in America as the famed melodramatic actress (2) . Across the 19th century, circuses, showboats and pantomimes all included dance in some significant way. Stars such as Mlle Celeste and Fanny Essler helped make a popular demand for dance and companies began to include more luxuriant dances in their eventide ' s measure. Melodrama and pantomimes would frequently integrate complex concert dances into their entertainments. In England the most popular signifier of amusement for the working- and middle-classes was the music hall, which staged vaudeville amusement in the way of vocalists, terpsichoreans and forte Acts of the Apostles. Vaudeville was besides extremely popular in America in the 19th century, and by the 1890s dance Acts of the Apostles were ever more in demand. Dances were still, nevertheless, mostly performed in between the Acts of the Apostles of the chief production or before the end-piece to make full the spreads. The role of dance in the theater at that time was limited chiefly to entr'actes.

They existed strictly to pacify the audience, to showpiece a star, or to titillate predominantly male audiences with the spectacle of female limbs in leotards (3) . Jack Cole referred to the dances and the terpsichoreans in theater at this time as wallpaper (4) .

It was not truly until the thirties that dance began to be an important portion of the musical. George Balanchine, who trained at the Russian Imperial Ballet School before working with Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, regarded dance as a legitimate and important constituent in musical theater. He believed dance to be the greatest expressive medium and foremost introduced concert dance onto the popular musical stage with *Ziegfeld Follies*. Dancers in the theater began to be taken seriously, instead than regarded simply as pretty misses baring a batch of leg; into a choreographic universe that was a mélange of cosmetic motion, legs and lights-outs, Balanchine opened the door and concert dance leapt on to the popular musical phase, directed by a supreme creative person (5). Whereas antecedently merely *modus operandis* had been performed on the theatrical phase, Balanchine choreographed *dances*. He refused for his dances to be simply bite-size pieces of entertainments sandwiched between the chief attractive force and insisted that they be portion of the plot, integrated seamlessly into the action. For the first time in a musical the dances in Balanchine's *On Your Toes* really helped to progress the plot. When, in 1982, *On Your Toes* returned to Broadway, Carol Lawson of the *New York Times* wrote ;

On Your Toes was a turning point in the history of musical comedy, for Mr. Balanchine's dances were more than mere interludes. Alternatively they served as essential facets of the secret plan, and were exhaustively incorporate parts of the production. (6)

Balanchine paved the manner for Agnes De Mille and Jerome Robbins to

wholly alter the kinetics of dance in musical theatre, and thereby in musicals
<https://assignbuster.com/theatre-essays-jerome-robbins-and-agnes-de-mille-essay/>

has a whole. De Mille introduced the concept of utilizing dance as a vehicle for story-telling and Robbins transformed the role of choreographer in a musical to being manager of the full show, making dance the drive force.

Agnes De Mille

As a kid, although she came from a theatrical household, De Mille was not permitted formal dance preparation, but would improvise pieces to execute to invitees and nightly improvised to the accompaniment of her female parent on the Orchestre (7). She would pattern her melodramatic playing accomplishments every day before performing flexibility exercises to limber up her organic structure in preparedness for the phase. When in Hollywood with her household her true terpsichorean 's inherent aptitude became apparent as she fell in love with the broad unfastened infinities of the state environing the town ; this would be a repeating subject in her ulterior stage dancing. In her autobiography, *Dance to the Piper*, she exclaimed ;

The descending grassy inclines filled me with a passion to run, to turn over in craze, to bust up

my body on the Earth. Space means this to a terpsichorean – or to a kid! The descent through

the air, the determination of earth-footage, the embrace and battle with the fundamental

ground. These are to a terpsichorean what strong aromas are to an animate being. (8)

The day De Mille foremost watched Anna Pavlova perform merely increased her desire to become a terpsichorean. She was enthralled, awed, and dumbstruck, and describes that moment with passion and relish (9) . It was this that encouraged de Mille to organise her first dance show with a group of other misses but she was still not allowed dance lessons and became frustrated with the limited dance she could do. It was not until her sister was advised by an orthopedist to get down ballet dancing that she excessively was permitted to go to the Theodore Kosloff School of Imperial Russian Ballet. Whilst there she learnt technique and poise and trained her organic structure into that of a terpsichorean ' s. She worked feverishly difficult, perhaps even more so because her parents would not let her to hold lessons more than twice a week, going forthing her lagging behind the remainder of the category. She resorted to practising in her female parent ' s bathroom, where she had installed a barre for her.

By the time De Mille had finished high school nevertheless, she had grown to loath the rigours of day-to-day pattern and decided to abandon her categories and her solitary practices and travel to college. During her time at UCLA De Mille occasionally staged dances for pupil mass meetings and towards the terminal of her college life she started exerting with the head to acquiring back up on her points. She decided to dance professionally after running into Douglass Montgomery, who convinced her that she could. Things were never traveling to be easy for her though. She moved to New York at a time when terpsichoreans [were] hired on the shininess of the stock and the blink of an eye of their agent, and when the few dance companies that existed on Broadway were little and dedicated to the personal development

of some star (10) . I have mentioned earlier the limited chances a terpsichorean had in thistime, where no ‘ pure ‘ concert dance was being performed in either music shows ormoving image shows and there was no such word as ‘ choreography ‘ . Whenrehearsing for a concert of her ain stage dancing Montgomery taught De Mille howto act through her dance ; he taught me that every gesture must hold someexplicit significance (11) . She decided to execute character surveies whereby thedancing revealed personality and was natural in the class of the narrative. Rightfrom the start she wanted to use dance as more than light amusement, asa critical story-telling vehicle. These first efforts, being lone charactersketches, were rather light by nature, and the manner was folk instead thanballet, but it was different to what anybody else had done on the phase before. When she performed some of these at a concert she was received good but whenshe auditioned for Charles Cochran and Noel Coward they told her that she wasmore suited to the concert hall, and that she would ne’er do it in thetheatre.

Aftertouring with Adolph Bolm, she was commissioned as a dancer-choreographer on ChristopherMorley ‘ s resurgence of *The Black Crook* but the drunken, noisy audience madeher manus her notice in. It was in the mid-thirtiess that the dance scene in NewYork began to stir. Every Sunday a twosome of dance concerts were given, withsoloists experimenting with every dance signifier conceivable. De Mille remembers, we were out remodel our full trade there were no regulations we struck sparksfrom one another (12) . For five old ages De Mille taught herself to choreograph, but she was seeking to larn to compose dances, non dumb shows, nor dramaticstories,

nor character surveys, but planned sequences of sustained movement which would be original and compelling (13) . She viewed dance as a serious art signifier and wanted to choreograph dances that would show it as such, but with hardly any formal preparation behind her she found this really difficult. After disastrously choreographing *Flying Colours* De Mille and her mother moved to London where, as in New York, she choreographed and danced in her own recitals to critical acclamation but with no fiscal addition. At one narration though, Marie Rambert and Arnold Haskell were amongst the audience and were impressed enough to inquire her to remain in London to go on her narrations and be taught at The Ballet Club.

It was at The Ballet Club that De Mille met Anthony Tudor and Fredrick Ashton, both of whom would travel on to go of import choreographers and who, with her, would revolutionize the dance universe. In 1933 she choreographed the dances for Charles B. Cochran ' s *Nymph Errant* in London but during the mid-thirties DeMille returned to America several times, dancing in her uncle ' s production of *Cleopatra* in 1934 and choreographing Irving Thalburg ' s film-version of *Romeo and Juliet* . On the latter undertaking she had to digest her dances being cut to pieces as the camera cut out most of the group work and showed merely snippets of the remainder. The usage at the clip was non to demo a whole dance but to provide light amusement with film editings of dances.

On *Hurrah for What* De Mille came up against the type of work forces that insisted dancers were hired for their sex entreaty and that dances were performed to sell sex. These were the kind of work forces that were

maintaining dance from going a serious, of import art signifier and that issued <https://assignbuster.com/theatre-essays-jerome-robbins-and-agnes-de-mille-essay/>

it with merely a cosmetic function in theater and movies. The direction wanted the miss exposed as much as possible, face foremost ever, bosom bared, legs merely visible to the waist, DeMille recalls (14) . As she refused to conform precisely, desiring her own creative input, she was fired with one word, before her stage dancing was ripped to shreds. Without the security of Equity many of the terpsichoreans and histrions were fired without warning as the Business Manager exacted his vision of abosoms-and-legs chorus-line extravaganza. At this clip on Broadway dances, at their best, were slick and grammatical, but with no great minutes of dramatic revelation (15) . When De Mille returned to Broadway some old ages subsequently she was to dramatically alter this impression.

In 1940 Ballet Theatre was formed and De Mille was invited to go one of the choreographers, on the apprehension that she was not to dance herself. It was an extremely original clip for De Mille and she was able to work with some of the finest terpsichoreans and choreographers of the clip. It was at Ballet Theatre that De Mille created her first concert dance, *Black Ritual* , a controversial piece with black terpsichoreans ; the first clip this had of all time been attempted by a serious ballet company. Having had long brief and manic bustles with commercial troupes of assorted cocottes and chorus terpsichoreans she had not had the experience of putting a agenda of choreographing and rehearsing and was extremely nervous. Her terpsichoreans did not assist affairs by being systematically tardily and by arriving unprepared. The concert dance was not received good but shortly after she was hired by a successful engagement director for a national circuit. De Mille and her terpsichoreans prepared for the circuit through blood,

perspiration and cryings but it was a total success, and De Mille discovered something critical: although the managers may not, the populace liked and appreciated her work.

Not long after returning to New York, De Mille was asked by Ballet Theatre to create *Three Virgins and a Devil*, which was an immense hit and distributed the young Jerome Robbins. In 1942 she was commissioned to make a concert dance for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. She extended a piece she had partially choreographed years earlier, and *Rodeo* was the consequence. The concert dance formed the basis for a uniquely American dance manner, utilizing common people subjects, pat dance and energetic, fast-paced motions, capturing the kernel of a cowpuncher's manner. Teaching male terpsichoreans who were used to the preciseness and elegance of ballet proved to be hard so De Mille resorted to moving lessons to assist her dancers happen their characters. She wanted them to *be* cowpunchers; she wanted them to pass on dramatic significance. Come opening dark they were prepared and the audience adored them. De Mille had created an wholly new and exciting dance manner; it was the first of its sort, and the minute was quick with birth (16). De Mille successfully turned concert dance into musical comedy, and gave the signifier existent energy and relish, with motions never before seen in this really precise of dance signifiers.

We had breached the ramparts De Mille exclaims in *Dance to the Piper* (17). She, with a few choreographers before her, had created a new tradition, one with a different root urge to traditional concert dance. She asserts that to create a manner that truly differs from concert dance one must establish <https://assignbuster.com/theatre-essays-jerome-robbins-and-agnes-de-mille-essay/>

that manner on another technique. De Mille integrated folk dances into her work, without lowering the public presentations to comedy imitations. Her work, like that of fellow choreographer Anthony Tudor, conveyed theatrical significance through dance stairs ; the line between histrion and terpsichorean was blurred. Rather than terpsichoreans using traditional technique and executing well-known stairs, where the human bodies are used simply as units of design, grouped, lumped, and directed into predetermined multitudes, De Mille endeavor for originality and dramatic communication in her stage dancing. She writes of Tudor ' s work ;

Tudor developed the story-telling quality of his stage dancing to such a degree that each gesture, formed out of the emotional constituents of the minute, is almost as explicit as though the terpsichoreans spoke. The new stage dancing does not arrange old stairs into new forms ; the emotion evolves stairs, gestures, and beat. (18)

Reading De Mille's explanation of her method for making dance in *Dance to the Piper* , one is reminded of a manager getting down to present a drama. She spends much time on characterisation ; happening the right gestures and stance for each character acts as a stimulation for the choreographic procedure (19) . De Mille did not create impersonal terpsichoreans but characters moving out, through dance, a narrative.

From the success of *Rodeo* , every bit good as for its all-American manner and subject, De Mille was asked by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein to choreograph dances for their new production, *Sooner state!* De Mille knew the project was traveling to be hard as, unlike concert dance where the

choreographer is the master and swayer of the show, many elements other than dance contribute to form musical theater. The performing artists must take away from the manager, the composer, the writer of the book, and the manufacturer. The dance manager got little say in the agreement. Singing and moving were the chief constituents in musical theater at the clip; dance was simply for ornament. When projecting the dancers, De Mille insisted on endowment and personality, Rodgers wanted faces, although his thought of a face had often to make with the character in it, but Mamoulian, the manager, wanted slender legs above all (20). It was assumed that the populace, besides, were far more interested in the vocalizing and the drama than the dance. The numbers of dances were hence limited. De Mille insisted, nevertheless, that every terpsichorean was hired for merely one ground – that he or she was the best available performing artist for the function (21). She did not cave in to the caprice of the manager; she wanted her terpsichoreans to be serious professionals, and Rodgers agreed. Once, during dry runs, a note was played out of melody and one of the chorus ' faces winced with hurting, but it was not annoyance or amusement, it was agonized concern. When Rodgers saw her expression – 1 he had ne'er seen cross a chorus miss ' s face – he realized that responsible creative persons had entered the ranks (22). The chorus terpsichoreans were no longer pretty faces, good legs but nil between the ears; every performer, including the terpsichoreans, knew their trade. Another trouble De Mille would hold was that the dances would hold to be created from the impetus of the book, they would hold to construct the writer ' s line and develop his action (23), instead than being created from a braid from characters developed by her.

De Mille was besides faced with the job of fleetly going from dialogue, to <https://assignbuster.com/theatre-essays-jerome-robbins-and-agnes-de-mille-essay/>

song, to dance, and back to duologue once more without it looking ludicrous. As the choreographer she was traveling to hold to learn surgery, to graft and splice (23) .

DeMille achieved all this and more. She succeeded in promoting her function as a choreographer to that of equal importance with the dramatist, the composer and the lyricist, and she did what no choreographer had successfully done before - she integrated the concert dances into the narrative. Her terpsichoreans were not merely decoration but *characters*, and she worked with them to accomplish deepness of character, motive and emotion. Dancers could no longer project their personal response to a piece of music. They needed to travel as the characters they were portraying. Their reactions, their facial looks, all needed to further the audience's apprehension of their character. This required in-depth book readings and analysis of character motives, merely as a director would take a firm stand on for his or her histrions. De Mille realised that this can really help the terpsichorean. Whereas in concert dance the terpsichorean has to trust on what they feel to give the dance energy and dynamism, they now had the vocalizing and acting to give them background and motive to assist give their dance, as these characters, expressive motion (24) . If the function of dance in *Sooner state!* was to pass on dramatic significance to the audience, and to foster the secret plan, the terpsichorean had to *become* the character, and cognize it wrong-side-out.

As De Mille herself notes, it was Anthony Tudor who foremost shocked audiences into viewing a concert dance terpsichorean as an single capable of dramatic communication through her organic structure, by dressing them in

<https://assignbuster.com/theatre-essays-jerome-robbins-and-agnes-de-mille-essay/>

long Edwardian frocks (25) . No longer was the concert dance dancer the conventionalized, typical image that made it acceptable for women to bare their legs and waists and wrap their limbs around a adult male. She was now familiar ; like their female parents and aunts. They could now pass on human truths and take part in the relation of a narrative. Dressed as the characters of a South-western town, instead than leotards and a Tutu, the audience was able to see terpsichoreans as worlds with a narrative to state.

The crowning glorification of De Mille ' s stage dancing on *Sooner state!* was without doubt the dream-ballet which occurs at the terminal of Act 1. With this De Mille experimented with something wholly new in musical theater, and for many years to come hardly a musical was made without it incorporating a dream concert dance. In this extended concert dance Laurie acts out her quandary through dance ; a highly imaginative method of traveling the narrative forward. Dance was inextricably bound to the secret plan of the musical. Whereas in old musicals dance was simply a side amusement and could be cut without the narrative losing any of its meaning, one could not take the dream concert dance out of *Sooner state!* without ruining the secret plan. By utilizing dance the ideas and feelings in the head and the heart of Laurie could be conveyed and explored far more efficaciously than through consecutive dialogue. The dances were intended to beef up the audience ' s apprehension of the characters and further the secret plan, every bit good as complement the words and the dialogue, and it worked. Now, every bit good as singing and playing, dancing added to the dramatic impact of the musical on the audience.

AsKislan notes, dance besides adds to the of import subject of unfastened infinite in *Sooner state*. It is the steering metaphor for the promise of the American Dream and the limitless chances for the 'brand new province' the lovers are destined to live in (26). The audience is ever cognizant of the physical infinite on phase as the terpsichoreans ne'er seem crowded, no affair how many occupy the infinite. In the dream concert dance Curly lifts Laurie up in the air, making for the sky, and the balletic manner danced in invariably opens the organic structure up, widening weaponries and legsto give the feeling of illimitable infinite. In *Dance to the Piper* DeMille writes of the sense of infinite concert dance terpsichoreans work with ; Every articulation and sinew is pulled long, the weaponries are broad and free the stretching up and out, the emancipating leap, the racing over and off from the Earth (27). The feeling of infinite conveyed on phase through dance complements the vocals, with lyrics such as plentifulness of room to swing a rope/plenty of bosom and plentifulness of hope (28).

At last dance as more than an accoutrement, but as a serious art signifier, had arrived onto the popular phase, and the audience were howling. They were howling. People had n't seen miss and boys dance like this in so long. Of class, they had been dancing like this, but non merely where this audience could see them (29). Possibly the most of import achievement for dance in *Sooner state!* was that De Mille was a choreographer on the show, non a dance manager. The difference being that dance managers worked for audience blessing ; choreographers work for audience enlightenment (30). Her dances were integral to the narrative - they added and enlightened instead than decorated. This was a new function for dance in musical theater.

DeMille went on to choreograph the dances for many more Broadway musicals in the 1940s and 1950s, including *One Touch of Venus* in 1943, *Carousel* in 1945, *Brigadoon* in 1947, *Gentlemen Prefer Blonds* in 1949, and *Paint Your Wagon* in 1951. *Tally-Ho* (1944) and *Fall River Legend* (1948) provided her with the chance to further her revolutionary manner. She continued to project terpsichoreans that were skilled at projecting character every bit good as executing the right stairs. Kislán records that dancers that worked with De Mille have testified to her antic ability to feel even the smallest dramatic quality in their dance, and, together, manage to put it free and incorporate it into the stage dancing so that the dance is always expressive of the play (31) .

De Mille was still responsible to the manager, the lyricist and the writer of the book though. Her stage dancing had to suit the other elements of the musical, and dance was frequently of secondary importance to those elements. Choreographers such as Jerome Robbins were to alter the function of the choreographer, and therefore the function of dance in musical theater, everlastingly. Banished was the mindless aesthetics that enslaved dance to the colossal, opulent, and lavish demands of the manufacturer, the star, or the forte act (32) . Dance was to be given the highest position of the production. The choreographer was to rule the show. Indeed, the choreographer would no longer be simply the dance creator, but the director-choreographer ; the dance-director follows, the choreographer adapts, but the director-choreographer leads (32) . Jerome Robbins was an innovator of this alteration in position for the function of dance in musical theatre.

Jerome Robbins

<https://assignbuster.com/theatre-essays-jerome-robbins-and-agnes-de-mille-essay/>

Robbins was born into a piously Judaic household in 1918, but resented being Judaic, with its conservatism and old ways. His big household, nevertheless, provided him with many theatrical contacts and influences. His uncle, Jack Silverman, started out as a dance hall terpsichorean with the two work forces he was populating with, Bing Crosby and George Raft. Edward G. Robinson was besides related, and another of Robbins' uncles, Daniel Davenport, owned a concatenation of music hall and burlesque theatres. Davenport's male parent and his brother performed on the music hall circuit under the name of the Davenport Brothers, presenting athletic Acts of the Apostles. It is to this part of the household that Robbins owes his gusto for vaudeville-comedy.

Robbins' parents ensured that both their kids were educated in the humanistic disciplines, and this is where Jerome shone. He saw it as an flight path, a manner by which he could have access to the possibilities which lay beyond his community ; When I was a child it seemed like a tunnel to me. At the terminal of that tunnel, I could see light where the universe opened up, waiting for me (33) . Both he and his sister, Sonia, were strongly encouraged by their female parent to draw a bead on to the phase. Sonia took dance lessons and Jerome music lessons, and by the age of three and a half he was composing pieces and giving narrations on the piano. Indeed, he excelled in anything originaive that he tried, but admitted that this was because, the lone universe that was truly exciting for me was the universe in which I could do believe that things were non the manner they were (33) . The world of musical theater was hence the perfect universe for him, subsequently, to populate in.

Robbins had to maintain his love of dance a secret from his parents, particularly his male parent, and his school friends, who were all into athletics. As his sister danced her way into the limelight Jerome was left practicing in private, frequently with the help of Sonia. At the Weehawken schools he attended Robbins performed in many school dramas, but it was at his summer camps that he fell in love with Gilbert and Sullivan musicals, and played the amusing leads in *HMS Pinafore*, *The Mikado*, and *Plagiarists of Penzance*. Jerome's bent for comedy was made evident through his public presentations in these functions. A fellow camper later commented, Jerry had an enormous sense of temper in everything he did (34). He still kept his dancing a secret though. At one parent's twenty-four hours at the camp however, Robbins performed a dance on the table-tennis tabular array and, as another camper remembers, had the grownups in cryings. Furthermore, This was a big audience and he was wholly uninhibited (34).

Robbins eventually took dance lessons with Sonia's dance instructor in modern dance, the form that was the emerging tendency in the Depression old ages of the 1930s, when people wanted a dance signifier that could more readily show the societal realism of the clip than could ballet. Jerome witnessed many opening greats of the dance phase, such as Martha Graham, Charles Weidman, and Doris Humphrey, but in 1932 he was to run into the adult male he would subsequently name his 'guru', Gluck Sandor (35). Sandor directed, choreographed and danced in many of the productions staged at the Dance Centre, at which Sonia danced. He worked in music hall and on Broadway in the 1920s and was an enormously expressive

terpsichorean, manipulating every gesture for dramatic consequence, which was to have profound influence on Robbins' future work. As Robbins himself has cited, We terpsichoreans were taught to perform with the concentration of an histrion (36) . Anzia Kubicek, a terpsichorean, remembers that Sandor, preferred to make things with a narrative line his imagination would merely travel a stat mi a minute, and he worked with the organic structures he had to work with, which were sometimes really limited (37) . Robbins would work with both rules in his stage dancing, getting downing with a narrative from which his dancers could develop their characters, and hence their motions.

After graduating from Woodrow Wilson High School in 1935 Robbins entered New York University to analyze Chemistry, but in his 2nd twelvemonth his male parent's corset business was in danger of traveling insolvent and he could no longer fully financially back up Jerome's instruction. Jerome was by this point desperate to drop out and follow his dream of going a professional terpsichorean and, through his sister, he managed to successfully try out for an apprenticeship with Sandor's company. With the aid of Sandor, Jerome convinced his parents to let him seek to do it as terpsichorean, and he left the university. Sandor persuaded an unconvinced Robbins to concentrate on concert dance instead than modern dance but it was n't until he saw Alexandra Danilova perform with the Ballet Russes that Robbins agreed that concert dance held many chances for him. Jerome progressed quickly and Sandor recognised him as a natural terpsichorean, remembering old ages subsequently ;

Once he saw something, he could make it backward. Before I would make a thing he had it. He could expect what was to come. He was sensitive and he was musical. (38)

In 1937 Robbins secured his first position in *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, which intensified his passion for the theater. Throughout its tally he would practice on the barre, much to the obfuscation of the Yiddish dramatic personae of the drama. His fellow performing artists recall him invariably dancing (39) . After two old ages training at the Dance Centre, and holding procured functions in assorted dramas, Robbins left the company in hunt of more commercial work. He found work in the chorus of a figure of musicals which, in the mid-thirties, were mostly amusing. Although Robbins went on to choreograph and dance in such musicals, he besides wanted to take the medium farther, and utilize musical theater as a vehicle for exploration into the human mind. He would subsequently state, Musicals tend to be bantering. No one has of all time used them as a medium to picture deep personal battle, and I think this can be done (40) . He would travel on to make merely that.

As well as his brief brushes with Broadway, in the summer of 1937 Robbins started working as a portion of the amusement staff at Camp Tamiment, a summer occupation he would have for five old ages. The resort played host to many up-and-coming talents, such as Danny Kaye, Imogene Coca, and Carol Channing. It was a virtual genteelness land for instrumentalists, comics, vocalists and terpsichoreans. Robbins choreographed and danced in many of the public presentations held in the societal hall. It was a really originaive ambiance, with new productions performed every week. Max Lieberman, <https://assignbuster.com/theatre-essays-jerome-robbins-and-agnes-de-mille-essay/>

manager of the amusement plan at Tamiment, endeavor for Broadway-quality pieces, and with merely a hebdomad to make and practise each one, thoughts had to flux. Robbins' work was of two extremes; burlesque sketches on the one hand and socially serious dramatic dances such as *Strange Fruit* and *Death of a Loyalist* on the other. Some of his pieces were performed at the 92nd Street YMHA, under the protection of the Theatre Arts Committee, every bit good as in the *Straw Hat Revue*, which Tamiment opened on Broadway in 1939. The review was a merger of many of the sketches performed at that summer's cantonment but, due to the sensitive atmosphere following the eruption of war in Europe, they were merely allowed to include the comedy sketches. Robbins suffered an immense blow to his self-importance when Jerome Andrews, who had been brought in by the angels to oversee the dances, was given exclusive credit on the charge for the stage dancing. It did nevertheless give him a determination to be entirely in charge of any stage dancing in future productions, and led to his later devising of the function of the all-controlling director-choreographer.

In the summer of 1940 Robbins joined Ballet Theatre and was taught by some of the great choreographers of the twenty-four hours, including Tudor and De Mille. They trained Robbins and his fellow pupils to move every bit good as dance, and taught that dancers must not merely be able to execute stairs accurately but must besides be able to show the dramatic content of dance. He danced in the corps in many ballets at this time, among them Anthony Tudor's *Goya Pastoral*. Robbins learnt much from Tudor, whose ability as a story-teller through dance was his forte. This was the sort of dance Robbins wanted to see in musicals, for while other choreographers were interested in <https://assignbuster.com/theatre-essays-jerome-robbins-and-agnes-de-mille-essay/>

stairss and cosmetic motion, Tudorwas devoted to analyzing human passions and relationships (41) . Robbins wouldtake much of what he learnt whilst working with Tudor and utilize it as astarting-block for his ain expressive stage dancing.

Robbinswas shortly promoted to solo functions, his first as the Youth in De Mille ' s *ThreeVirgins and a Devil* . He was lauded for his expressive motions andgestures, which made his an improbably amusing character to watch. De Mille'sinfluence led Robbins further into the field of moving, by presenting him to a good friend of hers, Mary Hunter, who had late established a theater groupcalled the American Actors Company. She showed him the procedure ofimprovisation which greatly influenced and improved the staginess of hisdancing and stage dancing. He realised that, holding started dancing relativelylate in life, he did n't hold the proficient accomplishments, but his playing experienceprovided him with a dramatic genius.

Thegreatest solo public presentation of his early calling was as the marionette in *Petrouchka* , and his readying for the function was intense. He studied images of thepuppet in minute item, seeking urgently to capture the kernel ofPetrouchka in order to acquire every individual gesture merely right. He prepared as anactor would fix for a function, seeking to happen the character ' s motive, hisemotions, ideas and feelings, so that he could feed that into hismovements. In this manner every gesture conveyed dramatic significance. The criticsand the audience raved about him and he became one of the taking terpsichoreans ofthe company.

Robbins desperately wanted to choreograph his own concert dances for Ballet Theatre and eventually was given the opportunity to do so after he pitched to them, of a ballet about three immature crewmen on leave in Manhattan, was given the go-ahead and *Fancy Free* was born. He gave each of the terpsichoreans exact detail of the characters they were playing, and he expected an exact performance in return (42) . Like De Mille on *Sooner state!* , Robbins picked dancers that were the most appropriate for the functions, and the consequence was an incredibly tight, character-driven concert dance which became a smash-hit. John Martin reported in the *Times* , He has managed to acquire into this light-hearted small piece of American genre the same quality of temper which has ever characterised his personal dance, the same histrion ' s sense of the theatre (43) . Each character had a personality, which was portrayed brilliantly in the dance, particularly in the person dances where each tries to court the miss. He integrated classical concert dance with modern dance forms and images of modern-day American civilization in a manner that no-one had seen on the stage before.

Perhaps inevitably, *Fancy Free* was turned into a Broadway musical entitled *On the Town* , and contained the highest figure of dances of any Broadway show yet. In *Sooner state!* the dances moved the narrative forward but in *On the Town* the dances really hold the production together. The kernel of the whole production, commented Leonard Bernstein, is contained in these dances (44) . Importantly, there is no effort to do the dances realistically ; the characters in *On the Town* dance every bit of course as they sing and speak, and the audiences accepted this. Robbins successfully farther

grounded dance in musical theater as an indispensable story-telling component.

Following *On the Town* every musical Robbins worked on contained essential story-telling elements – a secret plan, characters, and a point. *Billion Dollar Baby*, *High Button Shoes*, and *Look, Ma, I ' m Dancin '* were all conceived around a solid narrative with strong characters, and with the secret plan and audience apprehension of the characters both furthered by the dances. In *Look, Ma, I ' m Dancin '*, a partly-autobiographical show about an incredibly ambitious, hard-working dancer-choreographer and the rich inheritress that backs his company, the two concert dances Robbins creates illustrate the alterations the protagonist ' s character makes. In the first he is cock-sure, loud and energetic and the concert dance mirrors this, being fast-paced, complex, and full of youthful exuberance. The 2nd concert dance is unagitated, brooding and altogether more heartfelt, bespeaking his changed temper and the fact that he has come to reflect on his life and what he values most. The concert dances have a more profound effect on the musical than any of his others as, they grow out of the hero ' s personality and in that manner they develop the narrative (45) .

Throughout the 1940s Robbins had continued dancing at Ballet Theatre but in 1949 he left to join Balanchine ' s fledgling New York City Ballet, where he was almost instantly appointed Associate Artistic Director. He danced with the company until the mid-1950s but his stage dancing was his most of import part to the company. His plants contained his hallmark staginess and were infused with modern dance signifiers and music. His work in musical theater continued alongside his residence at City Ballet, with his most of

<https://assignbuster.com/theatre-essays-jerome-robbins-and-agnes-de-mille-essay/>

import piece in the early 1950s being *The King and I*. This proved to be one of his toughest challenges yet, as his mostly Western set of terpsichoreans had to learn and perform an assortment of Eastern dance signifiers. His most of import piece in *The King and I* is doubtless the concert dance, 'The Small House of Uncle Thomas', into which was poured historical information, researched oriental dance signifiers, and personal creativity.

Conventionalized gesture and motion, masks and mummer, all characteristic but do not overwhelm the other facets of the dance, such as the comedy of the ballet. The concert dance besides helped convey one of the cardinal subjects of the musical; that love and ground can get the better of cultural differences and racism.

In 1957 Robbins embarked on what was to go his greatest accomplishment in musical theatre yet; *West Side Story*. The challenge for the confederates of *West Side Story* was, harmonizing to Robbins, to see if all of us - Lenny [Bernstein] who wrote 'long-hair' music, Arthur [Laurents] who wrote serious plays, myself who did serious concert dances, Oliver Smith who was a serious painter - could convey our Acts of the Apostles together and make a work on the popular phase. The thought was to make the poesy of the piece come out of our best efforts as serious artists (46). Robbins' actuating force was to wholly incorporate the book, mark, stage dancing, and design of highbrow creative persons and convey it to the commercial stage. Although there were other major subscribers to *West Side Story* the musical was conceived, directed and choreographed by one adult male, Robbins, and as such was the first of its sort. *West Side Story* furthers the idea that *Sooner state!* foremost suggested, that musicals can be wholly integrated so that

every component works together to back up the implicit in subjects, its plot and its characters.

For the first clip in a musical, instead than project a chorus and chief terpsichoreans, an ensemble of 40 performing artists was cast who could all sing, act and dance, to enable *West Side Story* to be a genuinely incorporate show. The dramatic communication inherent in all the dances was really of import to Robbins. He undertook extended research into gang civilization, including in-depth observation of, and conversations with, teenage pack members on the west side. Once he knew what he wanted to portray he instilled it in his performing artists utilizing Method Acting techniques. The rival packs (the Sharks and the Jets) were not allowed to socialise with each other even wing and in between dry runs. He wanted to construct a bitterness and a misgiving between the packs that would come out in their public presentations. He besides wanted each performing artist to cognize their characters inside-out. Chita Rivera, who played the lead female function, recalls Robbins talking to her about her character ;

We used to sit and merely speak about the character. I ' d ne'er speak about something I did not cognize about earlier, a individual, and he talked in colors and textures, that kind of thing. It was merely a absorbing manner to dissect a person and why they existed. (47)

For each component to come together in public presentation, everything had to be tight, and Robbins took on the job of seeing that every facet of the show was watertight.

For the first clip in musical theater, dance was an perfectly equal spouse to the words and the music. If anything, words and vocal served the dance (48) . The extremely stylised motions and gestures of the terpsichoreans effectively communicated the tensions between the packs and the personalities of the characters. Furthermore, dance is employed to travel the secret plan forward in the least sum of time possible. For illustration, dance novices and introduces the audience to the conflict between the Jets and Sharks in the ' Prologue ' , it advances the conflict during the ' Dance at the Gym ' and it concludes the action in ' The Rumble ' (49) . The ' Dance at the Gym ' besides provides an emotional aspect without stalling the action of the play. Much happens between Tony and Maria in a short sum of phase clip. Through dance they meet and fall in love in only forty steps of music. If the scene was dialogue-led it would hold taken triple the sum of clip. Further, moving out this stamp foremost love scene without words makes it far more emotional and sensitive.

Robbins continued to choreograph and direct Broadway musicals, each wholly integrated to create a tight, seamless production. His background in both musical theater and concert dance, combined with his many accomplishments, gave him the ability to near a show with the over-all position with which to intermix all the elements into a homogenous, seamless, whole. He became a director-choreographer, with full control over the production, promoting dance to the highest position.

Agnes De Mille and Jerome Robbins both contributed greatly to the altering function of dance in musical theater. De Mille started the tendency for

incorporate musicals, guaranteeing that dance furthered the secret plan, and <https://assignbuster.com/theatre-essays-jerome-robbins-and-agnes-de-mille-essay/>

provided her terpsichoreans with dramatic gestures and characteristics, analyzing character motive and emotions with them. Robbins further advanced the importance of the function of choreographer to director-choreographer, doing dance the indispensable component of the show. Dance became not simply the support for the chief theatrical show, but the show itself. Not merely did this alteration in function for dance benefit terpsichoreans by creating more chances and raising the importance of the medium they worked in, but musical theater itself evolved into a far more originaive art. With a single director-choreographer supervising the full production, the histrions, singers and dances could far more easily work together.

Hubert Saal, composing in *Newsweek* ten old ages after Robbins foremost started on Broadway, asserted ;

dancer remains the kernel of the Broadway musical. Body English is an eloquent language all its ain. It may merely be heightened or stylised motion, or a means of altering gait, or a stageful of ebullient organic structures exposing raw energy, but the exhilaration of Broadway beat is every bit strong as of all time. The new breed of choreographers, following such ground-breakers as Jerome Robbins, Agnes De Mille and Bob Fosse, has gone to great strivings in their attempts to integrate dance into the secret plan.

(50)

Thanks to the innovativeness of choreographers such as De Mille and Robbins, and their defeat with the limited function danced played in musical theater, dance is now an of import and fully incorporate component of any

musical. The pinnacle of their success was probably the juncture, for *West Side Story*, that the first box in a programme was posted with the words, Entire production, way, and choreography by Jerome Robbins (51). From that minute on, dance would be forever built-in to musical theater.

Bibliography

Bell, Marty. (1994) . *Backstage on Broadway: Musicals and their Makers* . London, Nick Hern

Citron, Stephen. (1991) . *The Musical from the Inside Out* . London, Hodder & A ; Stoughton.

De Mille, Agnes. (1982) . *Dance to the Piper ; And Promenade Home: A Bipartite*

Autobiography . New York, Da Capo Press.

Kislan, Richard. (1987) . *Hoofing on Broadway: A History of Show Dancing* . London, Simon & A ;

Schuster.

Lawrence, Greg. (2001) *Dance with Devils* . New York, G. P. Putnam ' s Sons.

Lerner, Alan J. (1986) . *The Musical Theatre: A Celebration* . London, Collins.

Couples, Julian. (1985) . *America ' s Musical Phase: Two Hundred Old ages of Musical Theatre* .

Westport & A ; London, Greenwood Press.

<https://assignbuster.com/theatre-essays-jerome-robbins-and-agnes-de-mille-essay/>

Steyn, Mark. (1997) . *Broadway Babies Say Goodnight: Musicals so and now*
. London,

Faber and Faber.

www.musicals101.com