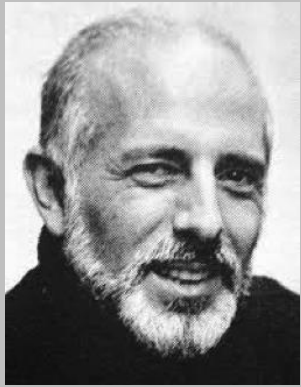


Choreographer on the Town: Jerome Robbins



Jerome Robbins
1918-1998

“Why can't we dance about American subjects? Why can't we talk about the way we dance today and how we are now?”

-Jerome Robbins

Jerome Robbins is considered the first quintessential American choreographer, known for his work as a theater producer, director, dance choreographer, and renowned for creating ballets for American Ballet Theatre and New York City Ballet. Born in New York City, he spent much of his adolescent life in New Jersey. Robbins was always fascinated by ballet and puppetry as a child. The source of his inspiration for dance came after he saw his older sister dance in a ballet production. Robbins began to study dance full time in 1938. He studied a variety of dance styles including ballet, modern and Spanish. Robbins worked in various Broadway productions and in the 1940s joined Ballet Theatre (ABT) where he danced small roles in classical ballets. He emerged as a choreographer and eventually collaborated with Leonard Bernstein to create a contemporary ballet called *Fancy Free*. Due to the ballet's enormous success, it was later turned into a Broadway musical called *On the Town* in 1944 and a motion picture in 1949. This success marked the start of a new career for Robbins as a stage choreographer, becoming the most sought after choreographer on Broadway! Over the next 20 years he directed and choreographed 15 other musicals and also became known as the “show doctor” since he had a way of turning troubled productions into a success. Robbins also worked with New York City Ballet where he was the Artistic Associate Director through 1989, and choreographed 61 ballets. Robbins had a remarkable career as a director and choreographer, and holds five Tony Awards, an Emmy award and was a Kennedy Center Honoree in 1981.



Did you know...?

➤ Many Americans were doubtful that ballet could turn into an American art form. Robbins challenged and changed this concept. His work incorporated street styles, urban cool, and comedy. He became the first American-born ballet choreographer who adapted European technique and tradition to American rhythms and themes.

➤ Jerome Robbins attended New York University for one year and planned to major in chemistry. He quit after one year due to economic hardship and began to study dance.

➤ Many of Robbins' Broadway hits were turned into films including *The King and I*, *The Pajama Game*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *West Side Story*.

➤ Jerome Robbins is of Jewish decent and was born as 'Jerome Rabinowitz,' but it was only later that he adopted the stage name 'Jerome Robbins.' He was born to parents who owned a Harlem delicatessen, and later opened a corset company. As a first-generation American, Robbins faced opposition from his family for pursuing dance and not going into the family business.



Photo by Maurice Seymour

Jerome Robbins and the original cast of *Fancy Free*



Quiz:

What influenced Jerome Robbins?

What made him famous?

What is he known for?