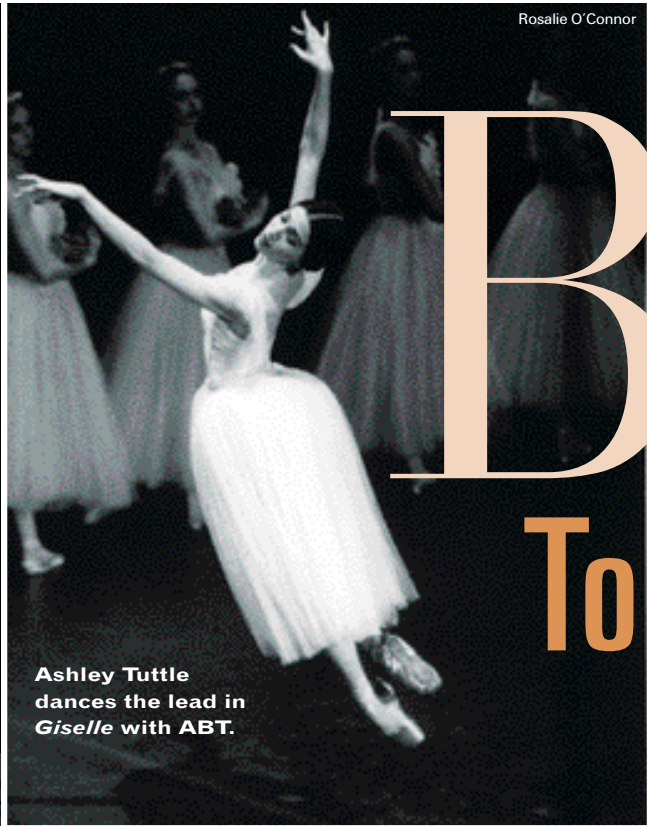


The bright lights of Broadway lure
a new generation of classical dancers.

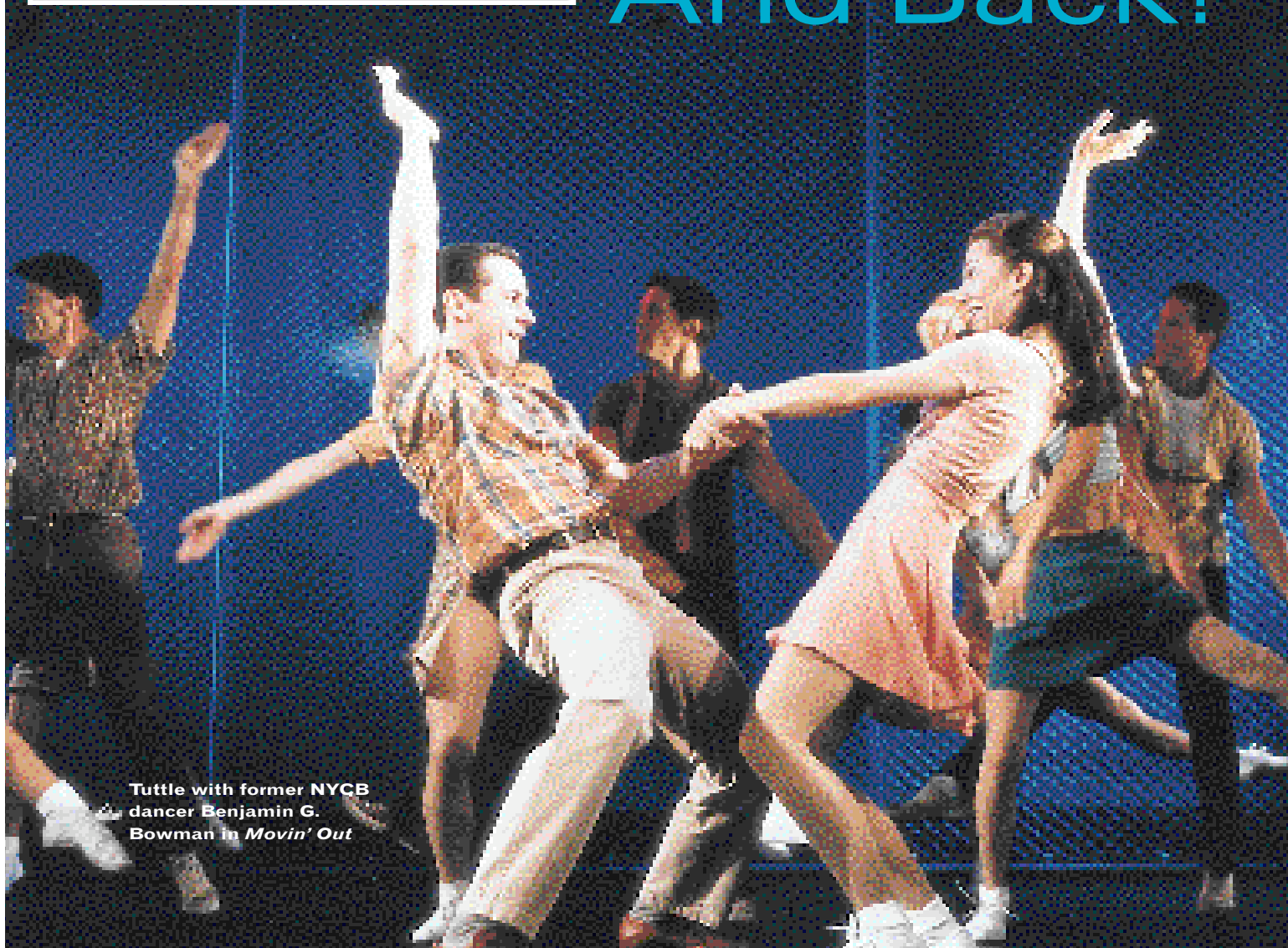
Ballet To Broad

And Back?

Rosalie O'Connor



Ashley Tuttle
dances the lead in
Giselle with ABT.



Tuttle with former NYCB
dancer Benjamin G.
Bowman in *Movin' Out*

WAY

Ashley Tuttle evokes the wiles of *Giselle* onstage. Dealing with death and cloaked in a black veil, she executes a difficult pointe work section. But she isn't onstage with American Ballet Theatre, and she isn't dancing to music by Adolphe Adam. No, she's performing a section of *Movin' Out*, the new show on Broadway, and she's gliding across the stage to a song by Billy Joel.

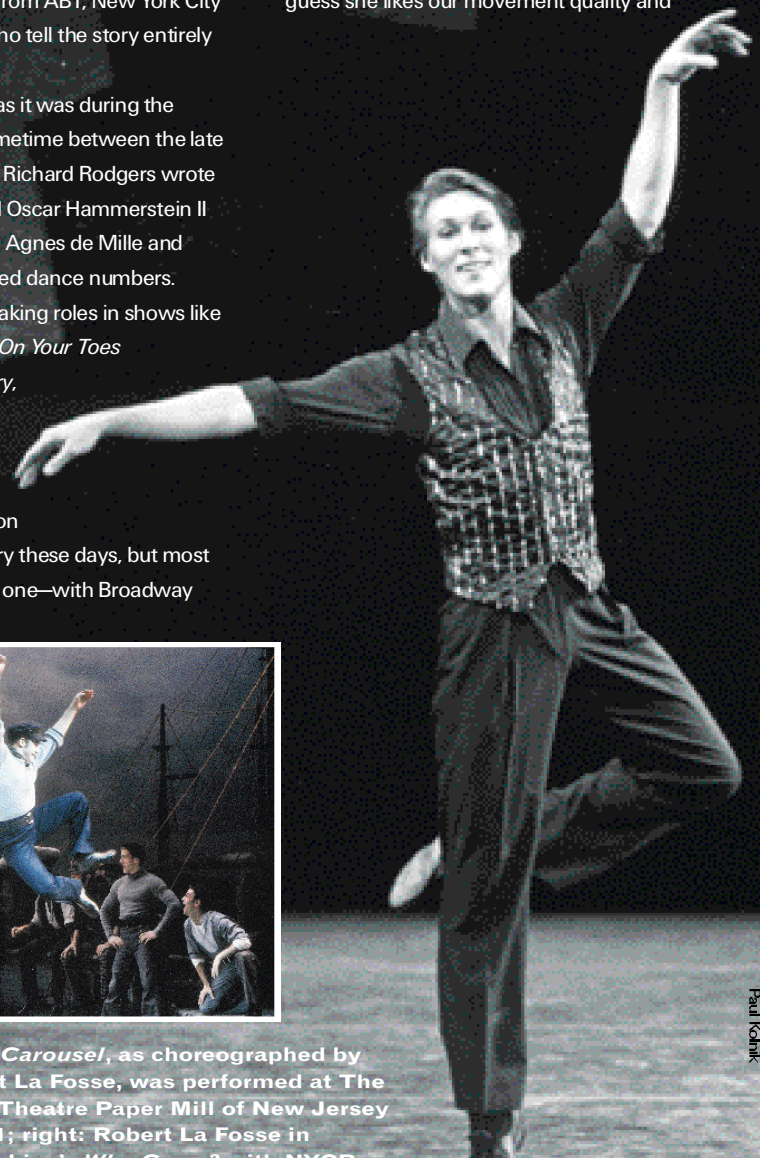
And Tuttle's not the only one. With shows like *The Lion King*, *Oklahoma!* and *Movin' Out* attracting dance fans in New York City's theater district and *Contact*, *Swing!* and *Fosse* still finding success on the national touring circuit, Broadway beckons classically trained dancers. Perhaps the biggest coup for the dance world recently has been the successful October Broadway opening of Twyla Tharp's *Movin' Out*—a show that features high-caliber dancers from ABT, New York City Ballet and the Joffrey Ballet who tell the story entirely through the choreography.

Ballet is back on Broadway, as it was during the "golden age of Broadway," sometime between the late 1930s and early 1960s when Richard Rodgers wrote musicals with Lorenz Hart and Oscar Hammerstein II and when George Balanchine, Agnes de Mille and Jerome Robbins choreographed dance numbers. Accomplished dancers were taking roles in shows like the *Ziegfeld Follies*, *Carousel*, *On Your Toes* and, of course, *West Side Story*, often because there weren't many other places for classical dancers to perform.

Dancers' reasons for taking on the challenge of Broadway vary these days, but most find the experience a valuable one—with Broadway

improving their ballet technique and vice versa. Broadway may take a little getting used to and the crossover can be difficult, but performers and audiences alike benefit from the exchange. "I think it's great that we are exposing people to a lot of different forms of dancing," says Tuttle, "Judy" in *Movin' Out* and a principal dancer currently on leave from ABT. "Some of them have never even seen dance, much less the level of dance we do."

Tuttle has been working on *Movin' Out* for about two years, since Tharp conceived of the project. Tuttle first worked with Tharp at ABT about 15 years ago and has appeared with Twyla Tharp Dance during ABT's off-times since 2000. "She could have created a Broadway show for Broadway dancers," Tuttle says of Tharp, "and she chose these dancers because I guess she likes our movement quality and



Paul Kohrik

Courtesy of The State Theatre Paper Mill of New Jersey



Inset: *Carousel*, as choreographed by Robert La Fosse, was performed at The State Theatre Paper Mill of New Jersey in 2001; **right:** Robert La Fosse in Balanchine's *Who Cares?* with NYCB

Joan Marcus

A scene with gazelles and hyenas from *The Lion King*



Joan Marcus © 2002 Disney

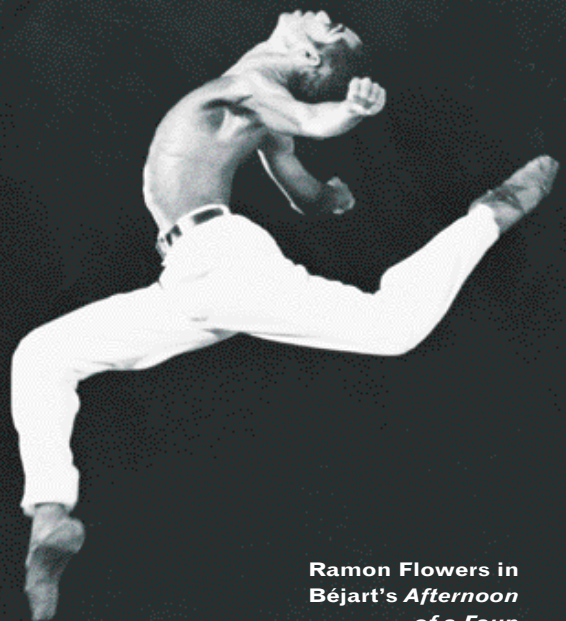
maybe we inspire her as individuals.”

Other opportunities may fall in the laps of successful ballet dancers. Margo Sappington was a dancer with the Joffrey Ballet when a fellow dancer arranged an audition for *Sweet Charity* in the late '60s. That led to more Broadway shows and choreography gigs for Broadway, opera and ballet. In 1979, Robert La Fosse had been a member of ABT for only two years when Broadway legend Gwen Verdon called him out of the blue to ask if he wanted the lead in *Dancin'* for a few weeks. “I was thrilled and curious,” says La Fosse, who is currently a guest artist and choreographer at NYCB and was nominated for a Tony for *Jerome Robbins' Broadway* (1989-90). “How did she know I did shows when I was a kid?...I always connected to [characters] because I enjoyed transforming myself. And that just continued [in ballet].”

That ability may be one reason Broadway producers are drawn toward the classically trained. Another is their proven longevity. “Ballet dancers, with their discipline and training, last longer,” says Ramon Flowers, a *Lion King* dancer formerly of Pennsylvania Ballet, Ballett Frankfurt and Béjart Ballet. “It’s tough; you really have to be disciplined to keep it together.”

Therein lies the main difference between ballet and Broadway:

Francette Leveux



Ramon Flowers in Béjart's *Afternoon of a Faun*

Balanchine's Broadway



Vera Zorina and Charles Lasky appeared in *I Married An Angel* on Broadway in 1938.

Dancers are onstage more often than they ever were in the ballet—usually eight times a week. That means that if shows are dark two days a week, Broadway stars could be performing the matinee *and* the evening show twice a week.

"It can be very grueling," says Dennis Lue, a dancer who made his Broadway debut in *The Lion King* two years ago after previously dancing with Dance Theatre of Harlem, Tulsa Ballet and Alberta Ballet. "*The Lion King* is a very physically demanding show for dancers." Christopher Body, a first soloist at National Ballet of Canada, appeared in *Contact* 210 times in eight months when he went on the tour in 2001. "That's probably about two and a half years worth of shows here," he says of NBC.

Such repetition can also be advantageous. "You might do *Giselle* maybe two or three times a year, as opposed to doing the same character six times a week," Tuttle says. "So it's a great place to explore and try different choices in acting, movement quality and phrasing things."

Still, the crossover is undoubtedly a difficult one to make. When Flowers left ballet, he signed on for a limited engagement of the ballet-heavy show Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake*, so the transition went smoothly. "It was so great because it was still like being in a concert situation, but on Broadway," he recalls. "It was completely fulfilling as far as dance was concerned because it was all dance." From

When most people think of George Balanchine and Broadway, *On Your Toes* usually comes to mind. The 1936 show was a complete and utter hit, with acclaimed revivals staged in the 1950s and 1980s and star turns by Vera Zorina and Natalia Makarova, respectively, in the lead role. But Balanchine did more, *way* more.

The George Balanchine Foundation has just completed a three-year project documenting every Broadway show (and Hollywood film) Balanchine ever had a hand in—about 20—called "Popular Balanchine." The results of the undertaking, which included compiling dossiers on each show, could be available to the public at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts as early as this spring. "What people don't know is that Balanchine was responsible for introducing ballet into Broadway shows," says Claude Conyers, project director. "He was the first major figure. And then other ballet choreographers picked it up."

It's a little-known fact that following the Russian Revolution in 1917, Balanchine worked in cabarets in St. Petersburg, often playing the piano. He had experience with revues in London and Paris before his arrival in New York City in 1933. He soon became involved in musical theater and choreographed his first Broadway number for Josephine Baker in the *Ziegfeld Follies* of 1936.

The results of his work can still be seen on Broadway today. *Babes In Arms* (1937) contained the first Broadway "dream ballet." (The revival of *Oklahoma!* features one now.) "Balanchine was using Broadway to popularize ballet," says Camille Hardy, a principal researcher on the project. "And his dancers in the shows are all well-trained ballet dancers. They are not Broadway hoofers." In fact, Alicia Alonso and Jerome Robbins made their Broadway debuts in *Great Lady* (1938). Robbins, Alicia and Fernando Alonso and Nora Kaye all appeared in *Stars In Your Eyes* (1939), when Tamara Toumanova made her Broadway debut.

Many of the shows were huge hits, including *Babes In Arms*, *I Married An Angel* (1938), *The Boys From Syracuse* (1938), *Louisiana Purchase* (1940), *Cabin In The Sky* (1940), *The Merry Widow* (1943) and *Where's Charley?* (1948). Balanchine choreographed his last Broadway show in the early 1950s, but his legacy lives on. Hardy says, "I think certainly if you talk to anybody in their seventies who would have been going to the theater in the '30s and '40s, they will tell you how wonderful those shows were." For more on "Popular Balanchine," see the George Balanchine Foundation's website at www.balanchine.org.

there, he put his singing skills to use in *Cats* and *The Green Bird*, before he joined *The Lion King*. That switch was a little more difficult. "I've often gotten notes saying that my line was too long because a gazelle wouldn't do that," Flowers says, "or to turn this in more and be more ugly like a hyena. Ballet is the complete opposite of the majority of things they are asking for." If ballet dancers are serious about musical theater, those with experience recommend voice lessons and acting workshops.

And while dancers often leave ballet looking for variety, the same need frequently leads them back. "In ballet you have repertoire—you are always rehearsing to do something new," says La Fosse. "You do four performances and you go on to the next. [On Broadway], you do six weeks of intense rehearsal and repeat and repeat it."

La Fosse and Body each went back to ballet after their stints on Broadway were over. Flowers and Lue have moved on and look forward to working in films and television. Tuttle plans to return to ABT in June, just in time to appear in the last half of the company's Metropolitan Opera House season. "I'm in a place in my career where I'm not ready to give up my ballet," Tuttle says. "I wouldn't want to not go back to [ABT] and just do the Broadway show, even though I'm having a great time."

As for Margo Sappington, most ballet fans know she set her sights on choreography after Broadway. Many have seen her work with ballet companies all over the country, most recently *The Indigo Girls Project* at Atlanta Ballet and *ZuZu Lounge* at Kansas City Ballet. But the prospect of a second "golden age of Broadway" couldn't delight the choreographer more.

"[I hope] it will make people go see ballet," Sappington says. "That's part of the blurring of the lines. I am happy they are there because I think they will make the public not so afraid of ballet. Hopefully, people will say, 'Gee, I like this dancing stuff,' and want to go see some more. That would be wonderful." **P**



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Philadelphia, PA, The Rock School—Feb 8
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Houston, TX, Studio of Dance—Feb 15
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New York, NY, The Alley School—Feb 22
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Washington, DC, The Washington School of Ballet—Mar 8
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