

# Balancing act

**To** celebrate New York City Ballet's 50 years, the New-York Historical Society organized a 10,000-sq.-ft. (900 sq. m) exhibition of photographs, correspondence, and film/video footage chronicling the dance company's impact on the American cultural landscape. Included are original scenic design sketches and models for many ballets, plus several actual costumes by quintessential ballet designer Karinska. *Dance for a City: Fifty Years of the New York City Ballet* was curated by dance scholar Lynn Garafola and historian Eric Foner; the exhibit was designed by Stephen Saitas with lighting by Anita Jorgensen, IALD, IESNA.

Galleries are organized chronologically, with kiosks dedicated to certain famous ballets such as *The Nutcracker* and *Sleeping Beauty* containing costumes and props. "Stephen's idea for the project was to keep a very clean, spare look, which is not unlike City Ballet's work itself," Jorgensen explains. "His vision was to give the audience member an impression of what backstage is like." Kiosks and dividers are made up of large plywood panels painted white, in front of long vertical panels of white voile. The plywood panels are not connected and are unfinished on the back, like theatre scenery flats, and cabling and strip-lights under the voile scrims can be seen, giving visitors the feeling of standing in the wings awaiting their cues.

"The idea was to start with a kind of reference to a 'Balanchine Blue' cyc," says Jorgensen, reminiscent of *Serenade*, one of the choreographer's trademark works. "Then it goes into the Lincoln Center era, with creamy white tones for a very clean, sparse look, like Travertine marble." Some scrim panels are just grazed with white or pale blue. The exhibit ends with Peter Martins taking the reins after Balanchine's death, so the designers wanted to make a strong statement. Since one of Martins' ballets is *Ecstatic Orange*, "we thought that would be a great way to turn the very white, clean show into color at the end." In this gallery the colored light skims up the wall behind a large grid of plywood strips from which hang photos, creating interesting shadows.

Jorgensen kept her design as clean and spare as the exhibit by specifying very few types of fixtures. "The basic workhorse of the show, which did all the wall-washing," she says, was Lighting Services Inc. (LSI) closed-back PAR-38s with snoots to avoid light leaks and glare. She added spread lenses and GE 60W HIR lamps. "I didn't use a PAR-38 wall-washer fixture because it was a very high ceiling, close to 20' [6m]. We didn't want too much light way up on top, we wanted to keep it

down at eye level, so I used a wall-wash lens with a fixture that took a cone." For highlights she used LSI closed-back PAR-36s with spread lenses and 50W 25° AR-111 lamps. "It's a very pretty, clean combination, and the color temperature doesn't really change over time."

The colored scrims were lit with Altman Micro-Strips with Osram Sylvania 20W MR-11 flood lamps. Color was added with GAM Color T12 fluorescent tube sleeves, just slid in under the top lid of the fixture. Balanchine blue was achieved with a single layer of GAM 845 Cobalt, by slicing the sleeve in half lengthwise. Martins orange was GAM 388 Gold Rush. It required double saturation, so the LD simply flattened out the sleeve. Costumes were highlighted with LSI gel in various colors.

The major technical challenge was keeping light levels low. "The entire show was 5-7fc, which is what fabric and works on paper require conservation-wise," explains Jorgensen. "We could blast the scrims, but we had to go very subtle on the costumes. This is the first time I had to light a tutu in a conservation setting. The bodice can take more [light] because it's vertical, and the tutu itself has to take less because it sticks out horizontally. It was a little tricky."

Her solution? "We used ordinary aluminum window screen, cut to size, as a mechanical dimmer. You can buy it ready-made, but there were budget limitations. I do it all the time in museums. It cuts the light and the color temperature stays the same. We placed it behind the lens of the fixture and that cut the level down. It required between two and four screens depending on what we were lighting. The accent lights required more screens—the AR lamp is punchier than the HIR, because it has a narrower beam spread."

A dance enthusiast, Jorgensen got into lighting design after seeing Jennifer Tipton's name in programs and admiring her work. Jorgensen has since made museum work her specialty, so designing this exhibit sort of brought her full circle. "I had a fabulous time working on it," she concludes. "I am a huge City Ballet fan, so for me it was a dream come true."



PHOTOS THIS PAGE: GLENN CASTELLANO



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