

Nothing is as exciting and fulfilling for a dancer working out a new role in the studio as the moment when he/she hits upon his/her personal interpretation for the part. After years of physical training comes the moment of touching that mystical, magical, intuitive something that is larger than life - artistic expression.

The article highlights certain aspects to do with artistic interpretation which are most pertinent to me as a creator and performer. I have always found that interdisciplinary encounters inspire and encourage me in my quest for artistic expression, and so have cited here artists from fields other than dance. They shed light on the subject at hand from their own perspective, and yet all touch upon similar points.

In preparing a role a dancer must work out both the technical and the artistic aspects of the performance. The first is a systematic, logical and cognitive grappling with the challenges that the steps pose. The second an individual artistic interpretation of the part, stemming from the private world of imagination, emotion, energy and associations of the individual artist. Like ying and yang these are two poles that art, as a metaphor of life, contains and which the dancer must bring into equilibrium. A fine balance between the two marks a good performance.

From lesson one a dancer strives to make his/her body into an instrument and intensive training is his/her daily bread until retirement from the stage. Today the physical demands made on dancers are greater than ever; they are expected to master more than one dance style and show artistic talent in other fields too. The name of the game today is energetic fast-moving dance, and so, instead of extending, the span of a dancer's career has shortened over the years. This means that dancers are often forced to quit before attaining full artistic maturity.

Already in their student days dancers are led to devote a much greater portion of their energy to physical proficiency than to a quest for personal artistic expression. Moreover, after they reach technical proficiency, dancers are left virtually to their own devices as regards the artistic aspect of the profession.

In classical repertoire companies a veteran ballerina used to coach the new soloists, but today the rate at which dance companies are expected to produce new programmes does not allow them to perfect both aspects of their performance and far too often it is the artistic that is neglected.

THE ART OF PERFORMING

BY RUTH ESHEL

Nothing is as exciting and fulfilling for a dancer working out a new role in the studio as the moment when he/she hits upon his/her personal interpretation for the part. After years of physical training comes the moment of touching that mystical, magical, intuitive something that is larger than life - artistic expression

There are dancers who are more charismatic than others by nature, some have had the good fortune to be coached by teachers who are artists in their own right, but even among these you will often find artistic naivety, and by the time they will have reached artistic maturity their bodies will no longer be able to cope with the physical aspect of a contemporary performance.

Observing advanced classes, I have often felt deeply frustrated by the kind of instructions and admonitions voiced there. Teachers place great stress on the precise position of an arm, the thrust of a leg, the angle of inclination of the head or a slight shift to left or to right. It may be extremely important to place each finger just right and to display the body contours to perfection but it contributes little to the artistic development of the young dancer. The physical shape in itself never made a movement more interesting nor a dancer into a more radiant stage personality.

It is very seldom I encountered a teacher who managed to guide a student how to transform his "artistic frenzy" into dance form, or how to endow a movement with all the hues of this passion without going into excesses that Gertrud Kraus in her picturesque language called "A facial emotional bath".

Whenever I watched advanced students rehearsing a new performance it was always blatantly obvious what painstaking efforts had been made over the years to perfect the technical aspect of their dancing, and that the artistic aspect had been mercilessly neglected. Admonitions such as "you are not dancing, move, be more interesting, project yourself, dare, be yourself", only go to illustrate the incompetence of most teachers to cope with this issue, and they serve no good purpose. They hurt the students, diminish their self-esteem and self-assurance and inhibit them still more.

Jane Dudley, a former dancer with Martha Graham, is an exception to this norm. Once, in a master class of hers which I observed at the Rubin Academy of Music and Dance in Jerusalem, she was not happy with the execution of a series of exercises. She stopped the lesson and told the students to stand up, close their eyes and imagine a third eye in the centre of their forehead and a fire burning in their body. "Open and shut your eyes several times and feel how the internal combustion affects your facial expression and how it sends forth waves through your eyes", she instructed them.

They concentrated and started introspecting. All of a sudden something about the carriage of their bodies and the

general atmosphere changed entirely. Softly, so as not to break the spell, Dudley told them to sit down again and resume their exercises but to keep alive the burning within.

Advanced students must be coached by an artist. Only someone with personal experience of grappling with the artistic side of performing - the challenges, solutions, confusion, revelations, progress and regress, can inspire a young dancer to translate his/her internal world into movement quality, can lead him/her gently but firmly to the point where body and soul merge.

Imagination is the medium through which the inner life of man - memories, disappointments, covert and overt aspirations - is revealed. It is a wonderful asset and enables man to breath life into all his creations, be they dramatic or abstract. This does not mean that artists become the persona they represent or the object they create, but imagination puts at their disposal all of life's experience - visual, emotional and sensual memories, which can be transformed into energy to animate their creations. Spectators need not, of course, interest themselves with the processes and associations that contribute to the significance and potency of the final product.

Two great artists on two separate television programmes devoted to master classes, the pianist Arthur Rubinstein and the ballerina Natalia Makrova, dealt with artistic interpretation using metaphors and similes. Makrova, working with a young soloist (who had already left a mark in the world of dance) on a variation from "The Nutcracker", corrected neither line nor pose. Instead, she encouraged the dancer to let her imagination soar free and with her sought ways to make each dance phrase significant, energetic, colourful and rhythmic. "Try to proceed as though you are treading on ice", she kept urging the dancer, and persisted until the image, through a personal memory of the performer's, shaped the quality of her steps.

When Chopin preludes were played in Rubinstein's master class he compared them to a gust of wind and caused his young students to persist in trying to animate the first few bars of music and imbue them with the correct hue, touch and dynamics that his words conjured up in their imagination. Some people feel that such straightforward imagery is ridiculous, a thing for children to indulge in. Others are too inhibited to open up and expose their inner self. True artists never fear simplicity nor try to conceal themselves in sophistry. Great

artists are willing to listen and to absorb. Their whole body - inner space and outer casket - is in a constant state of preparedness, sending out sensitive invisible feelers eager to absorb every scent, sensation and image. They take you back to your starting point in early childhood - that creative core from which emanated the dream of dancing, but do so with the wisdom of the mature man and artist.

Suzanne Farrell and Edward Villella, former stars of the New York City Ballet, tell in their respective autobiographies about work with choreographer George Balanchine. He too used similes to illustrate the quality he was after. Balanchine used to give soloists a free hand in interpreting his creations and asked them not to say but to do. He believed that a movement should be allowed to sink into the body and that the imagination should shape it and dictate its quality. He rejected cognitive interpretations. Farrell says that whenever he created a part for her she used to shut herself alone in the studio and try to discover the drama, the rhythms, the ebb and flow, the starts and the stops, the stormy and the mellow moments of the piece, "because that is the stuff dance is made of". When she refers to precision in dance Farrell qualifies that the number of pirouettes executed is not the point but rather the focus of energy in each movement and the balance one strikes between them. The movement must radiate without becoming elaborate.

Another dancer and choreographer, the American Murray Lewis, also spoke of energy: "I treat dance as an abstract dictionary of motion. The drama is my passion to exhaust the movement's motion, and the narrative is the way in which I organize the energy in a phrase".

Dancing Oberon in Balanchine's choreography to "A Midsummer's Night Dream" Villella said that: "From the choreography there emerged a character marked by swift and light movement like a spear piercing the air". William Stanley, a famous Danish teacher at the New York City Ballet, coached him: "if it is an athletic show of strength you are after, you will perform a brises ouvert and land-stop dead on your heels. But if the jump is to become an art form you must integrate it in the next dance phrase, tie it to the music and find your own personal style for it". Villella described how he found his own style by saying that he jumped imagining he was flying over the treetops of tall trees in a wood hidden under heavy fog. His legs, he said, did all the work, carrying up the inert torso.

Dance literature is very short on the subject of artistic interpretation. Recourse to literature in other art fields yielded more. Stage director and teacher Michail Chechov underlines the supremacy of imagination over the intellect. The latter recognizes only facts and so confines interpretation to the known world and places the realm of the unknown out of bounds. He counsels actors and stage directors to get acquainted with the whole play (the dramatic equivalent of the choreographical text) first through a superficial reading of it and to focus in that stage upon creating an atmosphere. Then he suggests to move about on stage, without as yet looking at the stage directions, and to let the imagination expand the atmosphere until it envelops the actor, and only then to begin articulating the text. The text should be articulated naturally and the message the play carries become an organic part of the atmosphere. He reiterates that the performer must at first be "neutral and receptive", physically and mentally, to the suggestions of his imagination, and only later allow his intellect to classify, choose and organize.

Since the physical demands made on a dancer are more strenuous by far than those made on an actor, Chechov's instructions may seem inapplicable to dance. None the less, as regards the first phase of grappling with the technique, it is most suggestive. Maybe a dancer should also guard his neutrality when first approaching a new dance, and like a clean slate avoid at that early stage the interference of memories, associations and recollections of movements from previous dances that are inappropriate to the new.

In the East, where the artificial western distinction between theatre and dance is unknown, one commonly comes across references to the energy that transforms a performer into an artist. How does one "learn" this energy? A famous Noh artist tells how his father taught it to him. He directed his son to walk and then proceeded to hold his waist and pull him back. In order to overcome the pull and make progress the actor had to exert much more energy than he would have done walking unhindered.

Energy, then, is the result of a struggle between two contending forces each pulling in an opposite direction. In similar manner vertical energy is created when a large iron ring pulls kyogen theatre artists upwards, forcing them to exert energy in order to keep their feet on the ground.

Western classical ballet strives towards a gliding, feather-weight motion as the height of aesthetic achievement, but there too, before it can be attained one must reach

genuine awareness of the feel of the foot on the ground. Only through pushing the foot down towards the ground can upward growth be achieved. Imagining the sole taking root in the ground during a releve one evokes greater amounts of counter energy. This energy crawls up the spine, lengthening it, and like steam finds an outlet at the top of the skull. The deeper the basis the higher will be the peaks attained.

Internal and external energy must be clearly distinguished. The external energy of an energetic person is the outcome of physical training and it brings to the art precision and technical prowess. A physically well trained artist will move swiftly, use his muscles well and tire himself out. But that is not the energy that lends art its magic.

Artistic energy is born out of strife of contending forces within the body. It is larger than life and when present charges the body and turns it into a radiating presence. Every cell and blood vessel throbs with life and sends forth its full spiritual and creative potential. In the performance of a great artist the internal battle-dance nourishes the external motion of the limbs. The energy that has first been accumulated within the body is channelled into the body parts performing the dance.

The art of Zen is full of subtle wisdom and may offer the western dancer new challenges. "lofty dryness" is one of the characteristics Zen performers strive to achieve. It is an artistic performance free of childish frivolity, an essence of wisdom born of experience. To become dry means to become all bone - a concise, matter-of-fact movement - having relinquished sensualism of skin and flesh.

This quality is tied to another important feature - simplicity, a reductionism aimed to enrich and to deepen, the antonym of overburden. Another quality is naturalism - not as a synonym for naivety, intuitiveness or infantile motion, but a pure and concentrated naturalism, rich in creative orientation, but one born while taking steps to distance oneself from aiming in order to prevent strain, compulsion or artificiality. The artist is supposed to approach artistic interpretation free of constraint. So long as he/she conforms to some specific physical or mental norm he/she cannot be said to be free to innovate, to interpret so as to reveal the novel in a traditional role.

Every artistic performance should leave the spectator with the feeling that despite the tremendous exertion on the part of the artist, the source of his internal energy has remained intact. Motokiyo Zeami, the

greatest Noh performer, came up with one of the most wonderful images: "even on a dry branch there is a flower". In other words, any interpretation - sad or happy, fast or slow, extended or minimalistic - has to contain a modicum of its opposite, like a flower on a dry branch.

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Talia Paz (dancer)

Only once you have solved the technical difficulties are you free to dare with the other aspects of your work. At the Cullberg Ballet, where we perform, much deep work is done on interpretation. When I was given the role of the servant in Matz Ek's "Bernarda Alba" I first read Lorca's play. Matz Ek spoke with me about all the details of the character: who this woman was, what she does, what she represents and what I was supposed to project.

Matz demands very precise movement and he sets narrow boundaries for the moves and the transitions between them. I have to dig deeper into the role and to use my imagination more and more. If there are no limits, everything is amorphous. I need artistic guidance because not all I feel inside me really reaches the audience.

I try to imbue my dancing with inner emotions, but that has to be in measured quantities, so as not to get out of control. Simplicity is such an important quality in dance ...

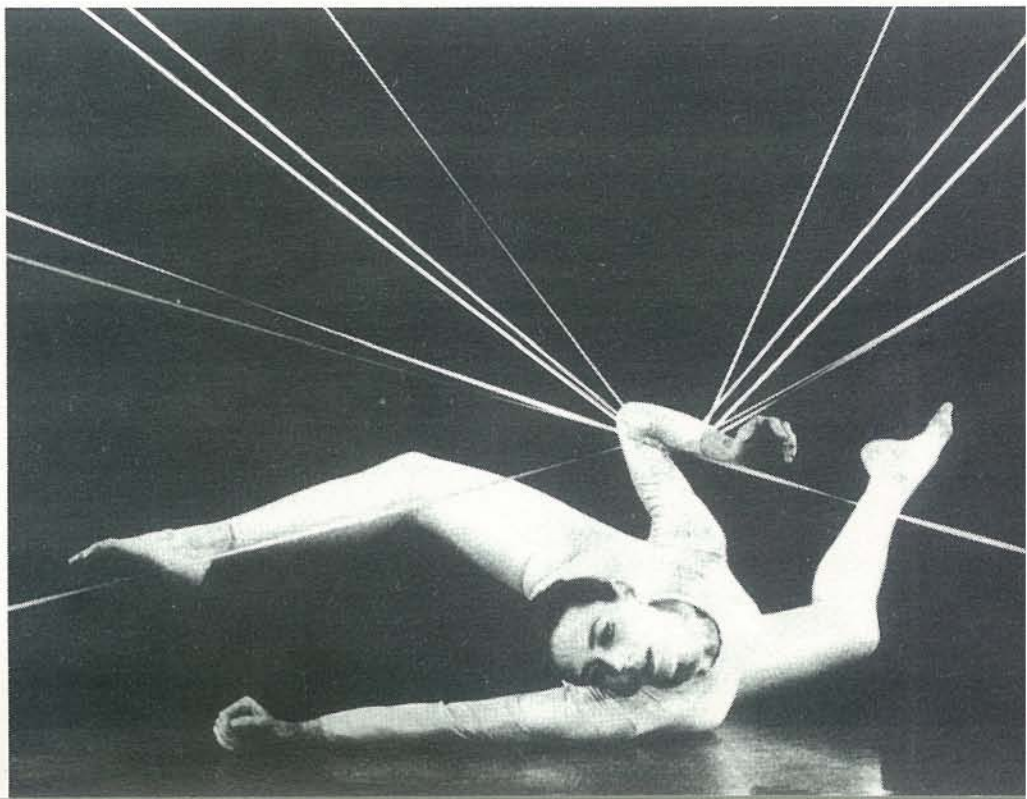
Rina Schenfeld

(dancer and choreographer)

When I am performing works which I created 15 years ago I do not change the steps. However, there are differences in execution, as I myself have changed. When working with my students I demonstrate what I am after. I talk to them about weight and placing and try to explain things in technical terms. I offer them images, but am not sure it works. It is preferable that they find their own inner motivation. There is a difference between a teacher and an artist-teacher. Each artist projects his/her personality. As a dancer I had many teachers and I had to choose what to accept from them and what to reject.

I recall how I learned the female role in Martha Graham's "Medea". I was influenced by the personalities and the way the artist of Graham's company, who showed us the movements, performed the role. One of them had a very wide pelvis, an unusual feature in a dancer, and I endeavoured to absorb the special something in her movement. After all, the steps were the same, but I tried to capture her heaviness and how she was drawn toward the earth.

RINA SCHENFELD



Like a honeybee, I tried to suck all I could from the performances of great artists and then to decide what I am to do with the part. In this particular dance I watched the videotapes, read all the literature about Medea and immersed myself in all the material. I am not quite sure it helped, but certainly there was no harm in this approach. After learning the steps and watching several dancers performing the role, I made up my mind what line to take. I investigated what I wished to emphasize and how to finish each move. I wished to do it my way.

Ruth Eshel

Imagery has always been very important to me as a dancer and choreographer, but for years I did not dare share my images with anybody. In the early 1970s I created one of my first dances and a television director, before filming it, asked me where in my mind's eye I see the dance performed. It was the first time anyone evinced an interest in my imagery. Excitedly I told him that I had envisaged two girls standing in an open field, a white moon rising and illuminating them and they begin to dance. The director listened carefully, he wanted to know exactly how to place the lighting so as to create the atmosphere I sought.

My dancers, on the other hand, heard and giggled: "accentric Ruti with her images". They believed it was unbecoming for a choreographer working with professional dancers to be speaking so. I was young and a beginner, and their reaction hurt. For a long time after the incident I kept my images to myself.

The images were always there, however, a part of those secret aspirations that one may not want to speak of but that nevertheless seek an outlet. Like music (and unlike the theatre, where every word has a referent) dance is an art of atmosphere and of mystery and its message is both overt and covert. With no active effort on my part my imagery found its way into the dances I had created for myself and into those created for me by others.

Rehearsing dances of my own creation I used to note the images that attended my movements, sifting them gradually until only the "right" ones remained. Whenever I returned to an old dance that I had not performed for years I was again open to images and wondered which would surface this time around. Sometimes, those of the old images that had withstood the passage of time resurfaced and new ones emerged by their side.



In the dance "Healing Candle" (86'), to music by Zippi Fleischer, I wear a black robe created for me by the sculptor Avraham Ofek. The folds of the robe conceal shuttered windows which I open in the course of the dance to reveal sore areas in the body, to dress them in herbs and to warm them by the candle light. The dance begins with slow oscillating movements, as of an inert object slightly out of balance.

The image I had in mind was of rags tied to a stick that the wind moves about, like some kind of scarecrow, but the motion it bred was too fast and sometimes too abrupt and broken. It failed to produce the quality of motion I was after and broke the spell I was trying to create, and I could come up with nothing better at the time. Only years later, returning to the same dance, a new image replaced the first. I visualised the body as a horizontal sand-glass, half of it full of sand trickling into the other half. The relative

RUTH ESHEL

weight of the two halves of the body changed gradually and I went along with the internal demand to stand on one foot and incline to one side in an off balance. The result was much better and flowed beautifully, but something about the position of the body still did not satisfy me, and I missed the feeling of dizziness and sea-sickness that I wanted in the motion.

Several more years went by and, as though it had been waiting for the moment I don the black robe again, a new image emerged of itself; the sand-glass gave way to an empty pest-infested ship bobbing on the back of long waves in a calm sea, abandoning itself to their motion. The body became limp and heavy, the knees freely moving with the motion of the waves. Suddenly, all the technical problems

sorted themselves out and the quality of the movement came very close to that which I had been seeking all along. It had taken years for the right image to be born.

Mira Zakai

Vocalists grapple with musical compositions on different levels at different stages of their lives. An older artist would tackle several levels of the material he is about to perform, each serving a different function, whereas the beginner is often too busy overcoming technical difficulties. Most vocal music accompanies a text, an element that can enrich the imagination. A singer is expected to approach the text like someone well versed in poetry, and to relate to the song according to its type and on all its verbal levels.

A performer receives a text after a composer has already responded to it, and the singer's mental reaction to the text set to music is expected to lead him to the junctions where the dialogue between composer and text had taken shape. All these junctions make the performance.

Unlike the human body, a musical score does not change over time, though the way it is executed might. Since I started out as concert singer eighteen years ago, I have performed Mahler's symphony no. 2 on average once a year and each rendition was different, because each occurred at a different stage of my life. Events do affect artists, though it is commonly held that an artist lives insulated in his/her creative expressive bubble. The world about us changes - discoveries are made, wars are waged and peace treaties signed - and the way we function changes with it.

When I return to a piece I had once performed I first run through the technical-physical aspect of it, and I have discovered that my technical difficulties at 35, for example, were not the same as those I encounter today. I even find that over the years I have integrated into my rendition of the piece some of the solutions to earlier technical problems. In other words, I have blazed a path that sounds like an artistic decision but was in fact born out of my struggle with a technical shortcoming. But today when I sing the same piece, I must review these solutions to make sure that they coincide with my present artistic credo.

There is a marked difference between an interpretation of a part that is the outcome of personal experience and one that is based upon experiences the performer has never



HANNA MARON

shared. A wonder child exemplifies the artist who instinctively plays as one who has accumulated life experience, though in fact he can only sense, in a kind of *deja vu*, the events and emotions his playing evokes. Daniel Barenboim was a wonder child by any standard, but when he plays today parts which he had played 30 years ago, what I hear is the "wonder of accumulated experience" which to me is much more exciting.

Singing resembles dancing much more than it does playing the violin, because like the dancer the singer's instrument is the body. A lucky violinist can purchase a Stradivarius and have an instrument bordering on perfection ready-made, and the encounter between artist and instrument may yield superb results. Singers and dancers, on the other hand, must build their instrument - the body, while learning how to play it.

When I begin work on a new part I never sing out loud straight away, so as not to imprint upon the muscles an error of intonation or diction. I peruse the map

carefully before setting out, because a wrong turn once taken is later difficult to undo. Errors may be erased by conscious effort, but why fix the muscles that govern the system in the wrong mold if you can avoid it.

The vocal cords can be seen as one more wind instrument, the sound of which is shaped by the creative imagination of the blower. I can sing like an oboe - the instrument sends out acoustic energy and information and my body and imagination respond and try to meet it half way. Artistic maturity is a prerequisite to the ability to do so, however, and that stage is hardly ever reached before the age of 35. Then one discovers that all that is true for one art form is true for another.

When I teach I separate the technical training from work on the spiritual aspect of singing. I spend much longer on the latter, touching, in the process, upon the philosophical, emotional and ethical encounter of the artist with the composition. The artist seeks the seed that will enable him to grow his plant in the given container.

I believe artists are born not bred and that the function of their mentor ("teacher" is inappropriate in this context) is to help them find the key to the chambers of their castle.

Hanna Maron

Some believe that only in the case of dancers the instrument is the body, and that for actors their voice and their stage presence are the most important factors. The truth is that for the actor, just as for the dancer, the body is the most important single factor. When I speak of knowing one's body as one would an instrument I refer to the whole - the blood and respiratory systems, the rhythm of the heart and of the mind.

This may come as a surprise but I am really a frustrated dancer and personally I have always laid great stress upon physical fitness. Before my accident [Maron lost a leg in a terrorist attack. R.E.] I had ballet shoes and I used to dance at home and even pirouette.

As a young actress I interpreted most of my parts by intuition alone. As Nora in Ibsen's play by that name I entered into the part absolutely. When one critic wrote that in the second half of the play my acting was too emotional I could not accept. I felt it was so real that it was virtually pouring out of me, and thought the critic did not know what he was talking about. Thanks partly to the great directors I have worked with over the years I have grown out of it since, I hope.

I have learnt to distinguish between art and life. I realized that the first need not be an exaggeration of the second but rather a correct choice of "where to place the red spot on the canvas". The canvas need not be filled with red spots; one dot precisely placed, one correct movement, may suffice. Reductionism relates to this correct choice, though it is not infallible. The mature artist does not rely solely on intuition (tantamount to talent, perhaps) but understands how true it is that less is more.

Cultural heritage is the basis. In order to activate the imagination one needs stimuli. If the cultural basis is narrow so, proportionately, will be the store of stimuli. One cannot create something novel and exciting without a source of nourishment.

The key word is to take an interest - to be curious about other art forms, be involved in the general doing, find out what goes on

in the world of dance, painting, sculpture, classical and pop music, to widen the horizons, to pick and choose from among everything that is taking place. This animates the imagination, provides new ideas and new tools - "oh, here is something I could use".

There are so many ways of nurturing the imagination - to walk along the street, watch people, visit exhibitions, take part in the political scene, be involved in and aware of current events, even to read the paper every morning. The daily paper is full of life and can stimulate the flow of associations. One should take interest in what goes on in the world without relinquishing one's own cultural heritage. The concepts should be contemporary but they should flow forth from a source within.

Wendy Lucking

My common objective is always to try, to the best of my physical and mental abilities, to express the intentions of the choreographer. To serve his choreography while at the same time injecting something of "me" into the performance. The most important thing is for me to believe in myself in the role, otherwise there is little chance that the audience will. How to achieve this differs from ballet to ballet. It comes most naturally when I am working personally with the choreographer on a new work.

Strangely enough the real classics give me most freedom of interpretation. Within the strict confines of the steps in a ballet such as "Giselle" I am able to express the character in any way I feel.

For ballets like this I also draw inspiration from other dancers' performances. Video is a wonderful tool. I can study in infinite detail the work of the greatest ballerinas performing with the best companies in the world. Then it's harder not to just copy the nuances of interpretation of a dancer such as Makarova. If I do see something that seems

just perfect I somehow have to make it a part of my own expression.

Sometimes I can't seem to find myself at all in a part, whether for physical, technical or other reasons. That makes it very difficult. Then I have to resort to playing a part rather than being it. I have to think more carefully about how to project the image I am after.

Someone once wrote about me in a Balanchine ballet that I "looked like a princess who got lost on her way to the ball". Since then, I have really concentrated, in ballets like "Four



ROMEO AND JULIET

CHOR.: BERTA YAMPOLSKY, MUSIC: S. PROKOFIEV,

DANCERS: WENDY LUCKING-SHAPIRA, KEVIN CUNNINGHAM

ISRAEL BALLETT

Temperaments", on trying to appear stronger, longer and more assertive. It's more a state of mind than anything else and I feel sometimes I succeed and sometimes not.

