

The Museum of Modern Art



Kirstein and Balanchine's New York City Ballet Four Modern Works

MoMA

**Mar 16–18, 2019,
12:00 and 3:00 p.m.,
The Donald B. and
Catherine C. Marron
Atrium**

Presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern* (March 17–June 15, 2019), this three-day event features eighteen dancers from New York City Ballet performing excerpts from four landmark works created by George Balanchine, the legendary choreographer who cofounded the company with Lincoln Kirstein in 1948. The program, organized by NYCB Artistic Director Jonathan Stafford, will be moderated by NYCB corps de ballet member Silas Farley and accompanied by NYCB solo pianist Elaine Chelton.

In 1933, Kirstein—a writer, curator, editor, impresario, tastemaker, and patron—invited the Russian-born Balanchine to New York from Paris, in the hopes of creating a uniquely American ballet. They established the School of American Ballet (1934), and in the ensuing years, founded—together or separately—the precursor companies American Ballet (1935), Ballet Caravan (1936), American Ballet Caravan (1941), and Ballet Society (1946).

Kirstein, who also played a key role in MoMA's early history, believed in the central place of dance in the museum. He even considered whether MoMA might be the site for his and Balanchine's ballet enterprise, considering "the possibility of opening in New York . . . perhaps under the auspices of the Museum of Modern Art" in his diary in 1933. Instead, Kirstein made a large donation of materials to MoMA, which resulted in a Dance Archives and a short-lived curatorial department of Dance and Theatre Design. The set and costume designs that he gave directly reflected the activities of his and Balanchine's ballet companies.

***The Four
Temperaments* (1946)
[excerpts]**

Music by Paul Hindemith
Choreography by George Balanchine*

Original costume and scenic designs by Kurt Seligmann (performed in practice clothes and without scenery from 1951)

"First Theme" performed by Meaghan Dutton-O'Hara and Andrew Scordato
"Second Theme" performed by Sara Adams and Devin Alberda
"Third Theme" performed by Miriam Miller and Peter Walker

First Variation: *Melancholic*
Performed by Anthony Huxley with Laine Habony and Olivia MacKinnon, and Eliza Blutt, Meaghan Dutton-O'Hara, Mary Thomas MacKinnon, and Miriam Miller

The score for *The Four Temperaments* is based on the ancient medical notion that human personalities are determined by four humors—Melancholic, Sanguine, Phlegmatic, and Choleric—to which the ballet's theme and variations correspond. The ballet was originally performed in Surrealist-tinged costumes designed by Kurt Seligmann, but these were soon stripped away to reflect the clean classicism that Balanchine preferred. A selection of Seligmann's designs, as well as footage of a 1946 Ballet Society rehearsal of *The Four Temperaments*, is featured in *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern*.

Premiere: November 20, 1946, Ballet Society, Central High School of Needle Trades, New York
NYCB Premiere: October 25, 1948, City Center of Music and Drama, New York

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***Agon* (1957)**
[excerpt]

Music by Igor Stravinsky
Choreography by George Balanchine*

“First Pas de Trois” performed by Peter Walker, Sara Adams, and Unity Phelan

The sequences in *Agon* were all modeled after examples published in a French dance manual from the mid-seventeenth century. While it is often considered part of a trilogy with *Apollo* and *Orpheus*, *Agon* (“The Contest”) is not based on a mythical subject. In fact, it has no musical or choreographic subject beyond the new interpretation of the venerable dances that are its pretext. It was even conceived without provision for scenery and was independent, at least in Stravinsky’s mind, of décor, period, and style.

Premiere: December 1, 1957, New York City Ballet, City Center of Music and Drama, New York

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***Orpheus* (1948)**
[excerpt]

Music by Igor Stravinsky
Choreography by George Balanchine*
Costumes by Isamu Noguchi

Performed by Gonzalo Garcia (Orpheus), Andrew Scordato (Dark Angel), and Ashley Laracey (Eurydice)

Orpheus occupies a singular place in the history of New York City Ballet. Stravinsky’s score was commissioned by Ballet Society, and the composer worked closely with Balanchine on the ballet. A contemporary treatment of the story of Orpheus, the musician-poet of Greek myth, it depicts his struggle to rescue his wife, Eurydice, from Hades. A performance of this work led Morton Baum, chairman of the executive committee of the City Center of Music and Drama, to invite Ballet Society to become its permanent ballet company, under the new name New York City Ballet. *Orpheus* was presented with *Concerto Barocco* and *Symphony in C* at New York City Ballet’s first performance, on October 11, 1948.

Premiere: April 28, 1948, Ballet Society, City Center of Music and Drama, New York
NYCB Premiere: October 11, 1948, City Center of Music and Drama, New York

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**Concerto Barocco
(1941)
[excerpt]**

Music by Johann Sebastian Bach
(Double Violin Concerto in D minor)
Choreography by George Balanchine*

Performed by Ashley Laracey and Unity Phelan with Sara Adams, Marika Anderson, Laine Habony, Baily Jones, Olivia MacKinnon, Jenelle Manzi, Miriam Miller, and Mary Elizabeth Sell

Concerto Barocco began as a classroom exercise at School of American Ballet, and it was first performed for the Latin-American tour of American Ballet Caravan in 1941. When it entered the repertory of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo in 1945, the dancers were dressed in practice clothes, probably the first appearance of what has come to be regarded as the modern ballet costume, which Balanchine pioneered. It is considered the quintessential Balanchine ballet of its period, since its manner is entirely pure, its choreography an ideal response to its score, Bach's Double Violin Concerto in D Minor. About the ballet, the critic Clive Barnes wrote, "The three hallmarks of the American classic style are poetry, athleticism, and musicality, and these three graces are exquisitely exploited by *Concerto Barocco*."

Premiere: June 27, 1941, American Ballet Caravan, Teatro Municipal, Rio de Janeiro
NYCB Premiere: October 11, 1948, City Center of Music and Drama, New York

Dancers

Gonzalo Garcia
Born Zaragoza, Spain
Joined NYCB as principal
2007

Anthony Huxley
Born Walnut Creek, CA
Joined NYCB 2007
Principal 2015

Sara Adams
Born Dennis, MA
Joined NYCB 2009
Soloist 2017

Ashley Laracey
Born Sarasota, FL
Joined NYCB 2003
Soloist 2013

Unity Phelan
Born Princeton, NJ
Joined NYCB 2013
Soloist 2017

Peter Walker
Born Fort Meyers, FL
Joined NYCB 2012
Soloist 2018

Devin Alberda
Born Cleveland, OH
Joined NYCB 2005

Marika Anderson
Born Portland, OR
Joined NYCB 2005

Eliza Blutt
Born New York, NY
Joined NYCB 2017

Meaghan Dutton-O'Hara
Born New York, NY
Joined NYCB 2012

Silas Farley
Born Charlotte, NC
Joined NYCB 2013

Laine Habony
Born Dallas, TX
Joined NYCB 2014

Baily Jones
Born Holladay, UT
Joined NYCB 2015

Olivia MacKinnon
Born Mobile, AL
Joined NYCB 2013

Jenelle Manzi
Born Ridgewood, NJ
Joined NYCB 2006

Miriam Miller
Born Iowa City, IA
Joined NYCB 2016

Andrew Scordato
Born Sewell, NJ
Joined NYCB 2006

Mary Elizabeth Sell
Born Wilton, CT
Joined NYCB 2009

Musician

Elaine Chelton
Born Brooklyn, NY
NYCB solo pianist 1995

About New York City Ballet

NYCB was founded in 1948 by the legendary choreographer George Balanchine and arts patron Lincoln Kirstein, quickly becoming world-renowned for its contemporary style and repertory of original ballets that has forever changed the face of classical dance. In 1949, Jerome Robbins joined the Company as Associate Director and, together with Balanchine, created a vast and varied repertory that grew each season. From 1983 until his retirement in 2017, Peter Martins was the Company's Ballet Master in Chief. In 2009, Katherine Brown was named NYCB's first-ever Executive Director, a position created to oversee the administrative management of the Company and its long-time home, the David H. Koch Theater at Lincoln Center. In February 2019, NYCB named Jonathan Stafford Artistic Director and Wendy Whelan Associate Artistic Director.

Performances are produced by Lizzie Gorfaine, Producer, with Kate Scherer, Manager, Performance and Live Programs.

Piano by Steinway & Sons.

Lincoln Kirstein's Modern is organized by Jodi Hauptman, Senior Curator, and Samantha Friedman, Associate Curator, Department of Drawings and Prints.

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Cover: *Lincoln Kirstein and George Balanchine*. Unknown photographer. Courtesy New York City Ballet