

Reidy first saw Baryshnikov in Leningrad in the Soviet ballet *Creation of the World*, a performance captured by the young photographer Nina Alover. Irina Kolpakova and Mikhail Baryshnikov, *Creation of the World* (Petrov/Kasatkina, Vasilyov), Kirov Ballet, Leningrad, 1971 (photo by Nina Alover).



# BARYSHNIKOV /BALANCHINE

# A PROFILE OF STEPHEN K. REIDY

BY RONALD MEYER

**S**tephen Kroll Reidy has spent the last twenty-five years as a venture capital investor, serving since 1987 as a general partner at Euclid Partners in New York City. Prior to Columbia Business School (M.B.A. '78), Reidy earned his master's degree in international affairs ('74), also at Columbia, taking courses at the Russian Institute from luminaries Zbigniew Brzezinski, Seweryn Bialer, and Marshall Shulman. When not studying Soviet politics and history, the young graduate student, who now sits on the board of the New York City Ballet, took in ballet performances by the Joffrey Ballet, the resident ballet company at City Center during what is now considered the company's golden era.

Reidy's ballet education had its beginnings during his spring semester as a CIEE (Council on International Educational Exchange) student in Leningrad, living in a student dormitory near the Winter Palace. It was the first trip to the Soviet Union for Reidy, a Russian studies major at Middlebury College, who had chosen the school because of its famed Russian-language program. Reidy viewed learning the language as a crucial step to studying the country's history, politics, and culture; the fact that the Russian Department boasted the most flamboyant faculty and held the best parties was merely a bonus. In Leningrad, near the Winter Palace, he became acquainted with an elderly woman selling theater tickets on the street, mostly for the ballet and opera, both of which were novel for the young student from working-class Boston. His ticket seller counseled him to try various performances and would save tickets for him. He fell in love with the ballet and very quickly focused on that. The first time he saw Mikhail Baryshnikov perform was in the full-length Soviet ballet *The Creation of the World*. His girlfriend at the time, Carolyn, who is now his wife, followed Reidy to Leningrad that summer and bought tickets from the same woman.



After graduating from Middlebury, Reidy moved to New York in the fall of 1972 for his graduate studies in international affairs. While still a first-year student he happened upon a job announcement posted at the Russian Institute for USIA (United States Information Agency) exhibit guides in the Soviet Union. He landed the job after a telephone interview in Russian and a follow-up meeting in D.C. The USIA had chosen the theme Outdoor Recreation for the 1973–74 American Exhibit to the USSR, and Reidy, a skier, was assigned to the section on winter sports. The assignment took him to Moscow, Ufa, and Irkutsk, with two months in each city,

followed by a week for independent travel. The guides were responsible for setup and striking the installation for shipment to the next city—a process that brought them into close contact with the locals and showed them a different side of Soviet life. The USIA American Exhibits, which had begun in 1959, were enormously popular. Reidy remembers that Outdoor Recreation logged 900,000 visitors in Irkutsk, a city with a population of one million. Nevertheless, it was a chance to speak to Americans and about America that packed the halls, rather than information about sports in the United States.

Living conditions outside of Moscow were “atrocious.” Food was hard to come by outside of the capitals—only cucumbers and potatoes in the stores in Irkutsk—

and it was getting cold. Medical services seemed backward. So much so that when a fellow guide fell seriously ill in Irkutsk, he was evacuated to an army hospital in Germany aboard Henry Kissinger's plane, which flew from Moscow to fetch him. Foodstuffs received through the diplomatic pouch, which the guides pooled for festive potlucks, provided some relief from the deficits. The other source of relief came from the Russian people. Reidy recalls spending evenings in Irkutsk with a mathematician and his mother, also a mathematician, talking about the United States, the Soviet Union,

Russia, and how those evenings made “cold, snowy, muddy, awful” Irkutsk almost bearable. Likewise, in Ufa, a fellow guide introduced Reidy to the mother of Rudolf Nureyev, the ballet dancer who had defected to the West a decade earlier.

The final adventure of this tour of duty ended with an unauthorized plane trip to Khabarovsk. Five of the guides wanted to leave the USSR through the Soviet Far East for Japan, rather than the approved route of returning to Moscow and flying home from there. Clutching airplane tickets purchased for them illegally by a Soviet guide, the group of Americans left their hotel after dark and boarded the evening flight to Khabarovsk. Even though they arrived at the only hotel in Khabarovsk without travel documents or reservations in the middle of the night, the frightened attendant let them in. They managed to catch the first plane to Japan.

Back in New York in January '74, Reidy was named an International Fellow at Columbia and completed his degree that May. Once again the bulletin boards at the Russian Institute served as his employment bureau, and he found an announcement of openings for Russian speakers to work in the Munich bureau of Radio Liberty. He worked in the Political Department as a kind of censor, whose

job it was to ensure that broadcast scripts tallied with U.S. foreign policy. But all those courses on politics had not prepared him for the infighting among the three groups of Russian émigrés at the bureau: the Old Guard from the postrevolutionary days, the World War II refugees, and the current third wave of Jewish émigrés. The upside of the Munich assignment was that the city was awash in ballet and opera. Reidy soon realized, however, that the radio job was a temporary assignment for him—and indeed, he was downsized out of a job the following year. Meetings with an economist whose interest was economic development under various economic regimes served to interest him more and more in that field.

Returning to Columbia for Business School seemed the next logical step. He moved back to New York in 1976, now married to Carolyn, who was starting out in publishing—she’s currently CEO and president of Simon & Schuster. A literary agent who was representing Russian authors introduced the Reidys to two older gentlemen, connoisseurs of the ballet and opera, whose collection of memorabilia included a signed photo of Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn’s ballet shoes. Their new friends, who lived close to Lincoln Center, introduced them to both art forms in New York



City, which for them meant the Met and George Balanchine's New York City Ballet (NYCB). They also knew Russia and had been following Balanchine since his arrival in New York, so they had great stories and were in a position to help Reidy and his wife understand what they were seeing and how to see it. The two couples became friends and went to the theater together.

"In 1976, when I met these gentlemen, NYCB became my lodestar. There was a Russian underpinning to it all, from which I started to explore," Reidy said. Having become a devotee of Balanchine, he started to look back to Diaghilev, the Ballets Russes, and all the Russian performers and ballets in the interwar years that became the source of what Balanchine would eventually bring to New York and his creation of NYCB.

The transformational figure for Reidy is Balanchine, who wanted to make something distinctly American or that took advantage of distinctly American talents and sensibilities about movement, perhaps seeing the fusion of his Russian roots and this American potential as the future of ballet. Now thirty years after Balanchine's death, there is a body of work that builds on that source and with dancers associated with developing it—all of which prompted

Reidy to become a member of New York City Ballet's New Combinations Fund, which has supported the making of 140 new ballets in the last twenty years, 120 of which are in the NYCB repertory. The Twenty-First Century Choreographers program in the current 2014 spring season at New York City Ballet is largely comprised of work, both old and new, supported by the New Combinations Fund. Reidy firmly believes that new choreography is essential to the continuation of ballet as a growing art form. NYCB will always be "Mr. B's" company but new dances build on this Russian-rooted foundation. The idea is not to replicate but to create. □

Opposite page: Principal dancer Sara Mearns and Company in George Balanchine's *Serenade* (photo by Paul Kolnik, courtesy of New York City Ballet); below: New York City Ballet in Justin Peck's *Year of the Rabbit*, a production made possible in part by generous contributions from members of the New Combinations Fund (photo by Paul Kolnik, courtesy of New York City Ballet)

