

## Lessons from the Field

### American Ballet Theatre

New York, NY

Michael M. Kaiser, 2005

*In 1995 American Ballet Theatre's accumulated deficit of \$5 million put the organization in a major financial crisis. By 1998 the organization was able to retire its deficit by focusing on creating new repertoire and educational programs, increasing its presence in New York City, and aggressively marketing its artistic product.*

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In June 1995, I received a call from Peter Joseph, Chairman of American Ballet Theatre (ABT), asking if I would agree to become the new Executive Director of the company. I had been doing consulting for the organization and had a clear idea of the huge problems it faced. There were similarities to Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Foundation: cash flow was a major problem and revenue had to be increased. There were substantial differences as well: while fundraising could be improved, it was relatively strong. But ticket sales were not adequate for the New York season and touring activity was extremely weak.

This was not surprising. The collapse of dance touring had hit large ballet companies particularly hard. While many presenters could afford modern dance companies, with limited personnel and taped music, it was harder to pay large ballet companies and orchestras. When Ailey toured, we brought about 45 people on the road—ABT traveled with 125. The local presenter also had to find and pay an orchestra. It could be prohibitive. Yet ABT was founded in 1940 as a touring company; it could not survive on only eight weeks at the Metropolitan Opera House each spring.

The contract with the ABT dancers required the company to pay for 36 weeks of work, of which one was a vacation week. This meant that the company, in addition to eight weeks at the Met and twenty weeks of rehearsal, had to find seven other performing weeks each year. This was proving very difficult. The company was forced to cut deals that had it losing substantial sums on each tour week.

I felt, as I always do, that the central problem had to do with the nature of the art and the marketing of the product. ABT had always been the company of stars. The list of ABT principal dancers is a roster of the stars of ballet of the latter half of the twentieth century. From Alonso to Bruhn, Makarova to Baryshnikov, Gregory to Bujones, ABT was laden with celebrity dancers of the highest caliber. When Mikhail Baryshnikov became artistic director in 1980, he had a different vision. He wanted to improve the general level of dancing and aimed to build a corps of unparalleled excellence. He wanted to establish an ensemble and move away from star-driven casting. While he remained with the Company, this policy worked because he was a star of such great magnitude. Donors and ticket buyers were anxious to see Baryshnikov's company at work.

When he left, in a dispute with the Board in 1990, the company lost its greatest star. While there were other dancers of renown and great ability, the company no longer had the long list of famous principal dancers that audiences were happy to pay to see and that donors wished to support.

As a result of the lack of “star power,” ticket sales and contributions fell and the loss of tour income further damaged the company. By 1994, the organization was in dire need of cash.

I started my consulting work by interviewing staff and Board members. I had a particularly interesting discussion with Kevin McKenzie, the Artistic Director of ABT. I asked him my standard question: What would make you happy? What would you like to do?

Kevin gave me a long list of his ambitions: creating more new works, extending the New York season, securing more touring, engaging more guest choreographers, commissioning new music, hiring a music director, etc.

As the centerpiece of my consulting work, I wrote a plan that would help Kevin achieve these goals. The plan involved a huge increase in marketing and a focus on diversifying the repertoire. ABT had produced the same ballets over and over and audiences were getting tired of them. As a result, subscriptions to the Metropolitan Opera House season were falling.

Kevin had recently identified several young male dancers who he felt could have an immediate and immense impact on the organization. These dancers—Angel Corella, José Manual Carreno, Vladimir Malakhov, and Maxim Belotserkovsky—were all distinctive and immensely talented. I believed we needed to focus our marketing on them.

Although I was working on developing these plans, I did not feel I was having any real impact on the organization. The staff leadership would get caught up, quite naturally, in the immediate cash problems of the company. They were so busy trying to find the cash to make each weekly payroll that little time or energy remained to develop new sources of revenue. I am convinced that managers of troubled organizations must devote a portion of their time to implementing plans that will make the next year easier. Instead, too many spend so much time finding resources (and using up resources) for the short-term that even if they survive the week, things get even more difficult. In other words, one must spend some time searching for new oil fields, not simply draining those one has already identified. This takes discipline and nerve; it is scary to spend any time working on plans for even the medium-term when the wolf is at the door.

So when Peter Joseph asked if I would take a “hands on” role implementing my plan, I was excited, and daunted. Peter had just been diagnosed with cancer and it was clear a rocky road lay ahead.

The last set of financial forecasts for the fiscal year (that was set to end the following month) suggested a small operating deficit of less than \$100,000. Peter Joseph was determined to eliminate that deficit so that the Company could claim that it had turned the corner and was operating with a balanced budget. After several years of deficits, this seemed extremely advantageous to fundraising and Board solicitation strategies. He asked Claudette Donlon, the Chief Financial Officer (and my great friend from the Kansas City Ballet) and me to study the books to determine how we could eliminate the deficit. He also suggested he would convert some loans he had made to contributions if we needed a bit extra to accomplish this goal.

Claudette and I sat down together with the accounts and it immediately became evident to us that the deficit for the year was more likely to be over \$500,000! My predecessor had made some very optimistic assumptions about the contributions we would receive in August, usually a quiet month for contributions. More problematic were the cash flow implications of this new forecast. With the dancers due back for rehearsal and a short tour in September, we were facing an immediate cash shortfall of \$700,000 for that month alone, in addition to the millions of dollars we owed to vendors. There was no way we would ever be able to survive this additional cash drain. And there was no point calling the dancers back from break and then having them leave when we could not pay them. Either we closed now or we found extra cash, and quickly.

I immediately called Peter and told him the bad news. I suggested that we consider closing the company for three to six months to evaluate how we could move forward and address this cash shortfall. It was the first and only time I recommended this drastic step but I knew that we were in truly dire shape. Peter said that he would personally guarantee the extra \$700,000. I explained that this was in addition to the contributions we “expected” from him, about \$1,000,000 for the year. He said simply and emphatically, “There is no way I am going to close the company; I will get you the money.”

I gave Claudette the good news and she carried on managing the daily stream of calls asking for payment on past due invoices. One vendor, a small shoe manufacturer, camped out in my office and said he would not leave until I paid him. He told me his wife and children were hungry. It made our debts appear so much more immediate and dangerous than I had ever experienced before. I wrote him a personal check. A “friend” from a ballet-clothing supplier wrote me a fax to welcome me to ABT, and attached her unpaid invoices. We had run out of toe shoes and no manufacturer would give us more on credit. We had no Xerox paper. We took out every second light bulb to save on electricity. Welcome to the glamorous world of the arts!!

As we worked to welcome the dancers back from vacation and prepared for the tour, I gradually began to win the confidence of the staff. Once again, I was in turnaround mode.

I moved into my office and got to work. As always, I started by working on a plan and attempting to gain the confidence of the inner circle of donors, those who could really make a difference. But the mountain was just too high to climb. And cash was running short. Claudette, Larry Sterner (our General Manager and Claudette’s boss) and I spent hours each day reviewing our cash situation and deciding who would get paid and who would not.

I had agreed to forego my salary for one year; we simply did not have the money. Several members of the senior staff agreed to hold their paychecks and did not cash them for weeks on end. But this was a mere drop in the bucket. We owed over \$5 million to vendors, including a substantial amount in back taxes.

Eventually we ran out of cash for even the most crucial payments and I had to call Peter for the first installment of the extra \$700,000 he had pledged. Unfortunately, by this time, Peter had begun his chemotherapy and was not available to us. The dancers were back, the tour was going ahead, but we had no way to get the cash we needed. I had two alternatives: I could either personally lend the money to the organization or we could close down. I chose the former and

made the first in a series of loans to ABT. (I had lent some money to Ailey during my time there but these amounts were small. The loans to ABT represented everything I owned.) I trusted that Peter would pay me back when he was healthier, but I was scared. I was running a bankrupt dance company with a very sick chairman, a pile of bills, and no personal safety net.

When Peter left the hospital he was anxious to get back to work. He promised that he would repay me any money that I had loaned ABT if the company could not. He was moved by my loan and realized he had a partner who was as determined as he was to see the company regain its health.

I realized through my initial fundraising solicitations with Board members and other major donors that we would need to jump-start our fundraising effort if we were to raise the money needed to erase our deficit. We already had to raise over \$7 million a year just to break even. But breaking even was not good enough; we needed to raise substantially more to pay off the \$5.5 million dollar deficit.

I realized that there was one major stumbling block to our raising more money: donors had lost confidence in our ability to manage ourselves. They feared that their gifts would go down a big black hole and would have no real impact. Even the several donors who gave us very large gifts, of \$100,000 or more each year, knew that their donations were sucked up immediately by past debts and made no direct contribution to our future programming. While most donors remained loyal, some were dropping out or reducing their gifts and virtually none were willing to solicit their friends—the best way to build a fundraising effort. We needed to inspire more confidence in our donors, and we had to do it quickly.

The quickest way to instill confidence is to find one or several people who will make major commitments even when things look bleak. Peter was the logical choice. He was donating approximately one million dollars a year to ABT and was lending additional funds as needed. He also paid for numerous dinners, events and other expenses. His generosity was extraordinary. In fact, he was giving so much, so visibly, that some donors felt that their support was not needed. If I were to get a major gift from Peter, it had to be structured to encourage others to give.

Hence was born the *Peter T. Joseph Challenge*. I asked Peter to give us four million dollars over the next four years, no more than he would normally give, but a huge gift nonetheless. The gift would be made up of both contributions and forgiveness of the loans he had made. (Of course I asked for cash first. Loan forgiveness would come as we developed other sources of revenue.) The “catch” was that this would be a matching gift. Peter would only be obligated to give this money if we could raise an equal amount from new contributors or from increased gifts from existing donors. In other words, Peter’s gift would be matched by new money, over and above the normal giving of our donor base.

I wrote an extensive proposal and faxed it to Marcia Penn a consultant who knew Peter far better than I did. I asked her whether I should send him the proposal. She asked, “What have you got to lose?” I replied, “My job.” She suggested the job wasn’t worth much anyway. We laughed together.

I called Peter, told him I was sending over something for him to read and that he should think about it before firing me. I imagine he was suspecting another close-down plan. An hour later the phone rang and Peter simply said, “Let’s make it five million. Five million sounds better than four.” I was startled and thrilled and am convinced to this day that Peter’s immediate willingness to consider this plan rescued the company from certain closure.

Peter and I worked for several days on the details of the gift, including the recognition he would receive. We agreed that our offices and studios would be named the Peter T. Joseph Studios in perpetuity. I believe that Peter deserves no less.

This challenge grant gave me an immediate tool with which to approach every donor. It appeared to every donor, when the grant was announced, that this money would save ABT and that their gifts, therefore, would not go down a bottomless hole. What they did not realize was that most of Peter’s gift was part of our base annual fundraising budget; their contributions paid off the deficit.

Peter had unrealistic expectations about the way his challenge would be met. He truly believed that the entire five million dollars would be matched by extra gifts from our Board members. I was a bit more skeptical. Many of them had given large gifts for years and did not appear to be willing to *increase* their gifts. In many cases just holding on to the historical level of giving was a serious challenge.

But several of our donors did respond. I met with Bill Rollnick, a former Board member, and his wife Nancy Ellison. They were disgusted with the organization and were not convinced that they wanted to remain involved. They believed they had contributed in many ways with little thanks for their efforts. Nancy, for example, had taken a series of wonderful photographs of the company for a souvenir book that had been created before I arrived at ABT. Bill had made substantial financial contributions including supporting the annual appearances of Nina Ananiashvili—a remarkable Bolshoi ballerina—during ABT’s Metropolitan Opera Season.

Bill and Nancy were typical in their concern for the company and in their level of disgust. They were not typical in their response to my pleas for help. After I laid out my plans for the organization, they brightened noticeably, offered me a substantial contribution and promised to help me in any way possible. They have been true to that word to this day. Bill and Nancy have become great friends of mine and hugely loyal patrons of ABT.

Many other ABT board members were supportive as well. Cindy Sites and her husband John had been extremely generous to ABT and continued to be so. Audre Mendel, a former ABT dancer, and her husband Herbert gave generously. So did David Zalaznick, one of the newer Board members brought on by Peter. David Koch, the largest giver besides Peter, was also warm and inviting and generous. He truly cared for the company and asked me detailed and insightful questions about the decisions I was taking. He then made a huge gift. These amounts might not have equaled Peter’s expectations, but they were substantial and generous. I actually did not want to meet the entire goal with board contributions. I wanted to use the challenge to generate grants from new donors. And we did in large numbers.

The most important of these was a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Ann Tatlock, a member of the ABT Board, was also a member of the Board of the Mellon Foundation. She had suggested that Kevin and I accompany her to a meeting with the Foundation staff to discuss mutual areas of interest.

When we arrived, the Mellon Foundation staff announced that the Foundation was interested in supporting us and had the impression from Ann that an endowment grant would be most helpful. I hope I did not let my disappointment show but an endowment was *not* what we needed. We did not need cash to put in the bank. We needed cash for operations, for new productions, for rehearsals, for touring. We were not ready for an endowment gift where one can only spend the interest on the grant, not the principal.

I asked what level of gift they had in mind and one million dollars was mentioned. I knew what one million dollars would do for our cash situation and for the Peter T. Joseph Challenge. I suggested that maybe we could have a dual-purpose grant: part for new works and the remainder for endowment. The Foundation staff was receptive. I took the plunge and asked for \$1 million for new works (over a three year period) and \$500,000 for an endowment grant. I asked for the new works gift up front and suggested that we should be required to match the endowment grant 'three for one' so that we would be left with an endowment of \$2 million. Not a great deal but something to build upon.

We were asked to write a proposal to that effect and we left in jubilant spirits. In time the grant was approved and in March, 1996, we received a check for one million dollars from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of that grant to ABT.

It meant that we now had the cash to pay off most of our crucial bills. It meant that we could afford to mount new ballets with some security. It meant that we could start to look towards the future rather than the past. I only regret I was not there to receive the check. I was with the company in Washington, D.C. preparing for our Kennedy Center opening. But my staff faxed a copy of the check to the Center so we could celebrate there. I felt from that moment that we had turned a corner and were on our way.

These donors, who gave early (time was of the essence) and so generously, had an historic impact on the company. While cash was still tight, we started to believe that, with time and a new strategy, we just might make it after all.

The new strategy was crucial. One of the mistakes made by organizations in trouble is to focus exclusively on paying off the debt. This is obviously the first step in getting healthy. But the world is littered with companies who were sick and raised extraordinary funds to pay off the debt, but did not solve the problems that created the debt and fell back into the hole. I was determined that this would not happen at ABT.

The staff and I developed a comprehensive plan to ensure that we continued to build a healthy foundation. There were six key areas of focus in our plan:

1. Touring
2. New York City Presence
3. New Repertory
4. Education and Training
5. Marketing
6. Fundraising

## **Touring**

The dancers of American Ballet Theatre did not have enough performing opportunities. The year before I joined, between Metropolitan Opera Seasons, there had been fewer than four other performing weeks. It was impossible to maintain the quality and morale of the company, let alone any semblance of fiscal stability, when the company would go for months without performing.

The central problem was that to stage a one week engagement, a presenter would have to be willing to spend about one million dollars in fees to ABT, local stage crews, an orchestra and marketing. Ticket sales could never cover this huge expenditure since most dance companies simply do not sell very well. If a presenting organization invests the large sums required for a full ballet company and orchestra, it needs to sell a great many tickets at high prices. Yet few ballet companies or dancers guarantee a sell-out on tour these days.

When the number of presenters willing to take the risk of producing ballet began to decline in the early 1980s, American Ballet Theatre started to “self-produce” on the road. This meant the company would act without a local presenter and would bear all the costs and all the risks. While this put all touring activity in the control of management, and would allow for extensive touring and performing opportunities, the losses were immense.

My analysis suggests that the central reasons for ABT’s huge financial problems throughout the late 1980’s and early 1990’s were self-produced seasons in Los Angeles, Chicago and several other cities. In London alone, ABT lost over \$500,000 on one tour and was forced to borrow enough to cover that loss from a very loyal patron, Howard Gilman. This debt mushroomed as the interest was left unpaid until after my arrival at ABT. By the time we completed payment on the principal and the interest, this tour cost ABT over \$750,000.

Clearly self-presentation was not affordable and we could not take the risks associated with this form of touring. But finding presenters willing to take the risk was most difficult. The Kennedy Center, which had once presented many weeks of ABT performances each year, had whittled us down to one week, at a fee that did not even cover our direct costs.

Unfortunately, covering our costs was not the standard by which we would evaluate a tour. We had guaranteed a number of weeks of work to our dancers in our union agreement. Every week of the guarantee we did not tour had to be a rehearsal week. A rehearsal week would cost approximately \$300,000. If a tour lost less than that per week, it was a better financial deal than rehearsing. It was a depressing way of evaluating touring but it was a reality. (Of course there was a minimum number of weeks of rehearsal needed to produce our performances, but achieving that minimum was never a problem.)

While I believed that touring should increase once our marketing efforts improved, I knew we could not wait for months and years to get it moving. Tours typically took one to two years to plan and negotiate, so inactivity would have had an impact for years to come. Our union contract gave us the right to hire a portion of the company for a tour as long as the remainder of the company had its minimum weeks of work covered. I discussed with Kevin the notion of “half company” tours. We would bring smaller ballets to cities that wanted ABT but could not afford the full fee. If the presenter could not afford an orchestra, we would perform to tape.

This was a very difficult concept for Kevin and the remainder of the artistic staff to consider. They knew we needed work. They were even willing to consider bringing smaller groups of dancers as long as appropriate repertory was developed. But performing to tape was a sacrilege. Ballet dancers need to have a conductor who supports them, particularly when they are doing “technical” moves, like turning or leaping. If one must end a *pirouette* or a *grand jeté* when a tape moves on, it hampers the quality of performance dramatically.

In the end, Kevin decided to try the tours and we booked a few weeks. We divided the Company into two: Company A and Company 1 (there being no place for comparison with these names). We performed to live music in some cities and to tape in others. Kansas City, Berkeley, Nashville, and even Benton Harbor, Michigan got to see the wonderful ABT dancers. The dancers complained about the small towns and the taped music, but at least they were dancing. Over time we found that the number of dancers on these tours kept increasing and that the losses on these tours equaled the losses on full company tours; at that point, the concept was all but dropped.

As with Ailey, touring was exciting but hard on the dancers and the company. The dancers typically flew in to a city a day before opening, got acclimated to a new environment and frequently a new time zone, and got prepared to dance to a world-class standard the next day. Hotels were not typically luxurious; we simply could not afford to stay in fancy places, particularly in larger cities. A visit was always made to a tour city before a tour was confirmed to find hotels that met the standards of the company; a union representative was always present on these advance trips, as were members of the technical staff who needed to evaluate the theaters.

The most memorable ABT tours during my tenure were those to Korea and Japan. Unfortunately these tours were not consecutive, so we found ourselves going back and forth over the Pacific Ocean twice in short order.

The trip to Japan was preceded by performances of *Don Quixote* in Los Angeles, at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. The audience was so excited by Angel Corella and Paloma Herrera that they

gave a standing ovation at the end of the Act III *pas de deux*. It was electrifying and we anticipated many return trips. I felt that this was one city in which we could establish a beachhead, since Los Angeles had no substantial ballet company of its own. All of my efforts to build some permanent relationship in Los Angeles came to naught. The leadership of the Los Angeles Music Center, home of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, simply could not decide what kind of dance program it wanted.

Many tour dates, like the L.A. visit, were wonderful and hold great memories. Others are less pleasant to recall. On the subsequent tour to Japan, many of our dancers became ill and it was questionable whether we would have enough swans for *Swan Lake*. Our Korean visit was marred by a truly awful hotel that reeked of kim chi (garlicky pickles) that did not seem to leave us during our entire stay.

The worst tour for me, however, was our visit to a dance festival in Vienna. Vienna has always been one of my favorite cities and I was delighted to bring my dancers there. Our hotel was exceptionally modest, but clean and bright. In an effort to make a bit of money, the company had organized a “patron tour.” This is not unusual in the arts. One organizes a tour for company patrons and sells tickets at a premium. The patrons have an opportunity to see the company on tour, to enjoy activities not available to normal tourists and to support the organization. One hopes that the touring patrons will be so impressed that they will increase their support of the organization.

Unfortunately, the trip to Vienna did not enhance our reputation. The first night we had dinner in an Austrian castle with faded royalty who rented out their home to royalty-loving tourists. It was most depressing. The day trips were worse and included an interminable recital at a local dance school. The school, it turned out, wanted this group of “rich Americans” to come to its aid and contribute to improve its shabby surroundings. Nothing we saw that day encouraged anyone to be generous.

Worst of all was our “theatre.” While the great Vienna Staatsoper springs to mind when one mentions performances in Vienna, our programs were given in the Royal barn. Literally. This was a modern dance festival that was not accustomed to hosting a major ballet company. The tiny stage barely held our dancers. There was no orchestra. We were performing in a barn. Our patrons, used to the glamour of the Metropolitan Opera House, were not impressed. Nor were we. The patrons were lovely about the whole affair but I was depressed; this was not the impression I wanted to make.

To make matters worse, Peter Joseph was feeling terribly ill while enduring another battery of chemotherapy and had to leave a day after he arrived. This cast a pall over the entire trip. As did a typical dance injury to Angel Corella, one of our young stars, who had to return home without performing. The entire trip was a disaster.

One factor that makes tours so difficult to book is the presenter’s difficulty selling tickets. Except in the rare instance when a company has achieved huge international prominence (e.g., Bolshoi or Kirov) or when individual dancers have created fame (e.g., Baryshnikov) dance is the hardest art form to sell.

The reason why most companies sell more at home than on tour is that the home audience knows the dancers and the repertory; many company fans will want to see all of the repertory and even see several dancers do the same role. I have argued to presenters, therefore, that they need to build more intensive relationships with the dance companies they present. This can take the form of longer seasons, or mounting auxiliary events like master classes and lecture-demonstrations that allow an audience to get to know a company better. Ideally, a presenter would bring the same company annually. This would give local audiences a chance to get to know and appreciate the dancers.

I tried to introduce the concept of an annual residence while I was at ABT. ABT had visited both the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. and the Performing Arts Center in Orange County, California virtually every year for many years. I added a long-term relationship with the Michigan Opera Theatre in Detroit. We hoped to introduce activities that would build bridges to the local community. We were most successful in Detroit where we added a summer camp and a series of master classes and other educational events. This program of events allowed me to help the local presenter raise funds to support for annual residence.

ABT also established a brief relationship with the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC). While I was at Ailey, I was asked by Len Vignola, the head of National Arts Stabilization Fund, to meet with a man named Larry Goldman, President of a new arts center that was under construction in Newark, New Jersey. Len thought that Ailey would be a good company to perform in Newark. I met with Larry in Newark and he showed me around the development and described the plans for the center.

Over lunch, Larry and I learned that we had an unusual connection. When I was 4 years old, Larry had been my counselor in the day camp run by our community in New Rochelle! We discussed many ways in which Ailey could be involved. I was particularly interested in the educational elements of his plans; Ailey seemed a natural for participation there. I got Denise Jefferson, director of the Ailey school, involved as well.

When I left Ailey, I maintained my connection to Larry and when I arrived at ABT I called him to discuss the possibility of involving ABT at his new venue, the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. Larry was enthusiastic and set up meetings with his new artistic director, Stephanie Hughley.

We all agreed that ABT should be a permanent resident company at NJPAC and set up the first season, a run of *Cinderella* during the Center's forthcoming inaugural season. The opening night of NJPAC was a gala performance including many groups that would participate, including Ailey and ABT. It was wonderful to see two of "my" organizations present, though the Ailey performance far outshone the *Swan Lake pas de deux* that our poor ABT dancers had to dance in front of an orchestra on a stage the size of a postage stamp.

It saddened me, but did not surprise me, when the relationship between ABT and NJPAC ended a few months after I left ABT. The difficulty of marketing dance cannot be overstated. While I am convinced that ABT and NJPAC should have a long-term relationship—much of ABT's. Met season audience comes from northern New Jersey—the marketing effort has to be focused, and

intense. And, as has been patently clear everywhere that presenting dance is attempted, one has to find a dedicated corps of donors who care specifically about dance. I remain convinced that this will be the answer to dance touring; it will be the only way that enough funding can be generated to support visiting dance companies.

## New York Presence

While touring was a great concern, our presence in our home city had a far greater impact on our financial health.

The fund-raisers and marketers of American Ballet Theatre faced a very difficult challenge. The company was only visible in New York for eight weeks each year during its annual Metropolitan Opera Season in May and June. Selling tickets to the Met season was a challenge since the public heard nothing from the company for months following the preceding season. Fund-raisers were also challenged to raise a great deal of money during these “empty” months. If one accepts the premise that it is easier to raise funds for a visible organization, then one can appreciate the problems at ABT.

I knew we had to do more to make ABT seem “at home” in New York City. It was amazing how many people, even those in New York, thought ABT was housed in Washington, D.C. This notion came from the many years that ABT had long seasons at the Kennedy Center. But it signaled a problem with the image of the company.

We needed to act quickly; shortly after I arrived we initiated two short-term projects. The first was a master class series at the Danny Kaye Playhouse. I knew that we could create an exciting program of celebrity master class teachers working with young company dancers. This would have the dual benefits of showcasing some of the glamorous dancers of the past and educating audiences about the technical, emotional and theatrical elements of dancing.

Our first master class took place in December, 1995. Cynthia Gregory taught three dancers from our junior company a solo from *Les Sylphides*. The audience, composed of members of our Friends group, arrived in high spirits. They were so happy to have ABT doing something between Met seasons.

It was a magical and successful evening. Cynthia was wonderful. She revealed the images she used as she was dancing and imparted many important stylistic and technical pointers to the young dancers. Many of the audience members came away feeling that they had a new understanding for ballet and the challenges facing dancers. Most important, they all believed that a new day was dawning for ABT. The Peter T. Joseph Challenge and the master class were the two most important public signs that things were changing at ABT.

But no single program has a lasting impact on an organization. The “half life” of the impact of any event is quite short in our culturally dense world, particularly in New York City. I knew we had to do more. I contacted my old friend, Barbara Stratynier, at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center. Creating the Ailey exhibition with Barbara had been such

a good experience; would she do it again for American Ballet Theatre? The answer was yes—and no.

The Library had done a big ABT exhibition for the fiftieth anniversary of the company in 1990. We had to find a topic that was more specific than simply the history of ABT. As I was mulling over this challenge from Barbara, I was also working on plans to establish a fall season in New York. Since touring was proving so hard to organize we had to fill our guaranteed weeks of work to the dancers in some fashion. But where? A consistent concern raised about ABT was the lack of a home theater. The New York City Ballet had the State Theatre, the Paris Opera Ballet had the Palais Garnier, the Royal Ballet had the Royal Opera House, etc. We were one of the few major international companies without our own theater.

I appreciated all the reasons for wanting a home theater, especially controlling one's own seasons and costs. But I also felt that there was a downside to owning a theater: one had no flexibility. The Metropolitan Opera House is a fantastic theater for full-length, large-scale ballets. But it is not the ideal setting to see the more intimate works of Antony Tudor or Agnes de Mille. This smaller-scale repertory was central to the artistic mission of the company and to its history. But these works did not sell out the Met's 4,000 seats as predictably as did the popular full-length story ballets. Since there was no possibility of obtaining our own theater in the short or medium-term, why not turn lemons into lemonade? Let's use two theaters.

I met with Judith Dakin at City Center and asked if she would be receptive to housing a fall season by ABT. She was delighted; City Center had suffered as much as anyone from the decline in dance touring and was anxious to have more companies use its facilities. ABT had been born at City Center; this would be a homecoming.

Kevin, of course, was delighted with the concept of a two-week season (hopefully growing over time) in New York each autumn and was especially grateful for the opportunity to do the repertory that did not work as well, artistically or financially, at the Met.

There were obstacles to overcome. In particular, our contract with the Metropolitan Opera, which was about to expire, included a restriction on ABT's appearances in New York. Simply put, we were not allowed to perform in any other venue in New York City. Period. In a lengthy renegotiation with the Met, we obtained the right to do a fall season at City Center on a series of conditions regarding repertory and ticket pricing. The Met wanted to make sure that the prices of the two seasons bore some relationship to each other and that the repertory at the Met did not suffer because of investment in the fall season.

These were logical and reasonable requests. ABT rented the Met for eight weeks each year, paying not only a rental fee but also all the costs of stagehands, box office personnel, and front-of-house personnel for these two months each year. This income was extremely helpful to the Met. The management of the Met had seen ABT suffer in recent years and was concerned that we not overextend ourselves and jeopardize our ability to mount a successful season in their theater. I managed to convince the General Manager of the Met, Joe Volpe, that City Center would help the Met season by keeping ABT in the public eye and would not cannibalize our seasons at the Met.

Joe appreciated that City Center would give us a more intimate space and a more economic one in which to showcase the smaller works of our repertory; he was just as happy to have ABT focus on the full-length ballets at the Met. Kevin and I discussed themes for the first City Center season. Since he hoped that the City Center season would house many new repertory works, and since so many important works in our history had been created for City Center, (before ABT moved to the Met), I suggested we focus the first City Center season on works that had been created for ABT. This would highlight the creativity that had been encouraged by the organization and suggest the crucial role ABT had played in American dance history.

As we discussed this possibility, it occurred that we now had a theme for our exhibition at the Public Library as well. Why not mount an exhibition about works created by ABT over its history? Barbara thought it was a great idea and liked the tie-in to the City Center season.

## New Repertory

The initial City Center season and the exhibition at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts would reveal the rich vein of ballets that had been created for American Ballet Theatre, from Balanchine's *Theme and Variations* to Robbins' *Fancy Free* to De Mille's *Fall River Legend* to Tudor to Taylor to Tharp. Many great choreographers had created many great works for ABT. But the company's weakened financial condition matched by a huge increase in the cost of mounting a new work had reduced substantially its ability to commission new works.

Yet dance audiences want, and expect, to see new works. Much more so than audiences in the concert hall or the opera house, dance audiences like to see new works and to see the art form develop. Perhaps this relates to the relatively short history of concert dance. But whatever the reason, it is interesting to note that many important 20th century musical compositions were created for ballet; the hunger for new dance works inspired many great composers to create their greatest works.

Like virtually all artistic directors, Kevin wanted to commission new works for his dancers. I knew I had a responsibility to find him the resources to do so. One of the best works created for ABT during my tenure was *Without Words* by Nacho Duato. Nacho had already created *Remanso*, a powerful trio for men, for the company. *Without Words*, for my last City Center Season, to music by Schubert, had four lovely *pas de deux* and was an instant audience hit. (It did not fair so well with Clement Crisp, the dean of British critics. Clement, a good friend, dislikes Jiri Kylian and anyone associated with him, including Nacho. When ABT performed *Without Words* on a Paris tour recently, he said the title should be 'Unspeakable!') Twyla Tharp created *The Elements*, a dynamic work to French music for my first Met season and *Known by Heart*, a powerful work for my second City Center season. In the process, I became one of Twyla's greatest admirers.

These works were all one-act ballets included in repertory evenings featuring three or more works. One of the factors working against the commissioning of new ballets is that the audience for "triple bills" is substantially smaller than for full-length story ballets. American Ballet Theatre,

like most major ballet companies, struggles to sell tickets to triple bills. *Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, etc. all are far easier to sell. While dance enthusiasts will happily come to repertory evenings, the casual ballet-goer is more comfortable purchasing tickets for a ballet that seems familiar.

This is especially true for *Nutcracker*. It is safe to say that many regional ballet companies can only produce triple bills because of the money they make each Christmas time through multiple performances of *Nutcracker*. ABT's main "rival," the New York City Ballet, is no exception. Were it not for several weeks of *Nutcracker* performances, the company could not afford the remainder of its season. This Christmas classic is so lucrative, not only because tickets sell in large numbers, but also because the advertising expenditures required to sell tickets is so minimal. I have always differentiated between what I term "informational marketing" and "missionary marketing." The former is the kind of marketing one does for *Nutcracker*. All one has to do is tell people that it is time to buy their *Nutcracker* tickets, mention where to call and list the performance dates. There is little other information needed to sell these performances.

Missionary marketing is far more complicated. In a missionary marketing effort one must convince people that they will enjoy a ballet even if they have never heard of it. It requires communicating much more information through words and images. It is much harder, more expensive and less productive per unit of expenditure.

*Nutcracker* is so important because one can sell so many performances and need simply to pursue a widespread informational marketing program, simple direct mail augmented with print and radio advertising and posters are all that are required.

Unfortunately, ABT has no *Nutcracker* season in New York; the Metropolitan Opera is at the height of its season in December and would not cede the hall to ABT at holiday time. Therefore ABT cannot benefit from the relatively easy sell of *Nutcracker*. ABT must compensate for the lack of a *Nutcracker* season by producing many full-length ballets during its Metropolitan Opera season. Many critics would chastise ABT for performing so many full-length ballets but these same critics never found fault with other ballet companies for mounting *Nutcracker* performances for weeks on end.

While ABT wanted to produce the major story ballets, therefore, there was a constant need to find new ones. *Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake*, and *Giselle* would routinely sell out easily. *La Bayadere* and *Romeo and Juliet* would also fare well. Less successful was *Coppelia* and *Manon* was always a disaster in New York. The list of existing full-length productions was a short one and Kevin and I kept looking for new ideas. Before I arrived at ABT, Lar Lubovitch had suggested that he create a full-length ballet based on the play *Othello*. He had an idea for the work that would make it relatively low cost for a full-length production but would tell the story faithfully. The key to a good story ballet is to select a story that can be told in pictures. One can easily draw a "story board" for the great full-length ballets: *Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, etc. However, it is difficult to convey the nuance of conversation in dance. *Hamlet*, for instance, would be a dreadful ballet to stage. *Othello*, however, has far more plot.

Lar's idea seemed a strong one and I believed that mounting a new full-length ballet would be a statement. In fact, since Lar wanted to commission a new score, it would mark the first time in the history of ABT that we would commission a full-length ballet to a new score. We announced the project well before its premiere. This allowed us to benefit from the anticipation and the impression this large project made while having the time to find the funding.

The creation of *Othello* was one of the most interesting and exciting group efforts with which I have ever been involved. Lar clearly led the effort; it was his project. But there needed to be a dedicated team to help. Lar knew of a young composer, Eliot Goldenthal, whose music he enjoyed. Eliot was excited by Lar's vision for *Othello* and agreed to compose the score. Claudette and I eventually came to an agreement on contract terms. We did not have the means to pay a normal fee and Eliot was extremely generous with us.

Lar's original idea had been for very minimal sets. He had anticipated a window, a door, etc., simple pieces to convey each location. His search for a set designer led him to George Tsypin, a Russian designer living in the United States. George brought in his portfolio, primarily of opera designs. They were original, modern, fantastic. It was not clear immediately how they would translate to ballet since the floor has to be clear for dancing, nor how we could afford to build his sets. He was so excited by the project he promised he would find inexpensive ways to meet the needs of the work.

Lar also wanted to use Ann Hould Ward as costume designer. Ann was a top theater designer who had recently won a Tony Award for *Beauty and the Beast*. She is a delightful person and colleague and we were all thrilled to have her join the project.

What was clear to everyone was that we had assembled, thanks to Lar, a stellar team that was going to create a very interesting work. But it was also clear that this work was going to cost far more than we had anticipated and that the team deserved to be given a budget that would allow it to do its best work. I believed we could raise a substantial sum for *Othello*, but I was frightened of carrying the budget alone.

I asked Kevin if he minded if we shared *Othello* with another ballet company. We would only do the work a few times a year, at best, and it was a shame to create such a large work and keep it in the warehouse. Like opera companies, we had the opportunity to find a co-producer. Kevin was completely open to the idea. So was Lar. Finding another company to co-produce the work would mean his work would be more widely seen; he could also have a larger initial budget to play with.

Kevin called many of his fellow artistic directors. Several expressed interest, but only one, Helgi Thomasson at San Francisco Ballet, had money to spend and the desire to participate. Arthur Jacobus and Glen McCoy, Executive Director and General Manager in San Francisco, were wonderful to deal with. They worked with Claudette and me to develop our co-production agreement. All at once, we could increase the project budget while reducing the amount invested by ABT, a "win-win" scenario.

By the time all of the creative artists were contracted and work had begun, we did not have a great deal of time to create the ballet: less than nine months. For a new full-length ballet, with a new score, this was no time at all.

Lar had already created his “libretto,” the story he planned to tell, so it was up to Eliot to write the score, George to create the sets and Ann to create the costumes. As Eliot was writing, we would hear snippets brought to us by Lar. In this day of the synthesizer, it is so much easier to write and demonstrate new music and, especially, to provide a tape for rehearsals while the actual scoring is completed and each orchestral part is written.

Eliot’s music was exciting and vibrant. Lar was particularly pleased with it and felt that he had the material to create his dance. George came forward with his proposed design: a series of glasslike panels that would move across the stage as large pictures were projected at the rear of the stage. The “glass” panels had embedded patterns that made them look like the *kuba* clothes that were sold at all of the South-African flea markets. They recalled Othello’s African roots and were quite beautiful. We were all very pleased with the designs although a bit scared about the weight and mobility of the panels.

Ann came forward with a host of costume designs. They were meant to show the movement of the legs of the dancers through diaphanous cloth that created period costumes. We loved them on sight.

Everything was coming along well and we all felt we were creating something important. Now Lar had to choreograph. When we discussed casting, both Lar and I had suggested engaging the same dancer to play Othello: Desmond Richardson. Desmond, who had been such an important part of the Ailey company when I was there, had recently left the Frankfurt Ballet where he danced for William Forsythe. Desmond is a strong, muscular, beautiful dancer who would be perfect for Lar’s choreography. Kevin agreed and Desmond was engaged.

His Desdemona was Sandy Brown, an ABT soloist who had performed in Kenneth Macmillan’s last work, the climactic *pas de deux* in *Carousel*, at the Vivian Beaumont Theatre. Lar always enjoyed working with her and she was lovely.

Before Desmond was available to start rehearsing, Lar worked with Keith Roberts, an ABT dancer who was every choreographer’s dream. Keith is smart and remembers every step as soon as it is created. Othello was created on him, as was Cassio, the role Keith danced in the world premiere. He also danced Othello in some performances in that first run, with a wonderful Julie Kent as Desdemona.

The role of Iago, obviously pivotal, was given to Robert Hill, a senior ABT dancer. He was remarkable in the role. Susan Jaffe danced his wife Emilia. It was a dream cast.

As we moved towards opening night, things got tense. Our Met schedule did not allow for enough stage rehearsal, especially with orchestra. Remember that *Othello* was only one of seven full-length ballets performed in an eight-week season at the Met. I approved an extra expenditure so our orchestra could learn the challenging music, but we simply had too few stage calls. The set

was large and dramatic but scary to operate with panels moving during the scenes. The rear projections, designed by Wendell Harrington, seemed foolproof until one performance when the machine broke down and the slides ran out of sequence leading to some unusual images.

To pay for all of this we had embarked on a major fundraising drive that involved many donors. The lead contribution was the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant from the year earlier. Other funders included a group of corporations and individuals who each gave \$50,000 to sponsor the project.

The opening night of *Othello* was incredibly exciting. We had a dinner before the performance for all of the funders. While we were nervous about the stage technology, we were so pleased with the work that we were all very jovial. Opening nights can be dismal when you know the work is awful but you have to put a brave face on it for the critics, donors and the public. No such effort was required for *Othello*. We knew we had created a major work; whether the critics and audience would like it was another matter.

The opening performance was beautiful, the dancers were superb, the sets worked and the audience was responsive. There were quibbles. The first act did not have much dancing, but most story ballets have first acts that are primarily exposition. Desdemona's dress was not becoming and was changed for future productions. But in general the response was strong. We had done so much talking about the production that we sold a remarkable 90% of the tickets at the Met, equating to over 3,500 seats per performance, a huge number for a new work.

The critics were divided. No one called it a masterpiece. Anna Kisselgoff writing in *The New York Times* was very supportive; Clive Barnes in *The New York Post* was not: "Moor or Less a Disaster" read the headline. But the audiences kept coming and we were exceptionally proud.

While *Othello* was by the far the largest artistic venture during my three years at ABT, it was certainly not the only one. In collaboration with the Houston Ballet, we co-produced another new full-length ballet, *The Snow Maiden*, to music by Tchaikovsky and choreography by Ben Stevenson, the artistic director of the Houston Ballet. *The Snow Maiden* is a classic Russian fairy-tale. Ben created a lovely, if over-long, production with elaborate sets and costumes by Desmond Heeley. This was Desmond's last ballet production in his career and was remarkable for its lavishness and detail. He was a joy to work with and an important figure in the history of American Ballet Theatre.

Commissioning *Othello* and *Snow Maiden* were attempts to add to the company's repertory of full-length story ballets, as were company premieres of *The Merry Widow* and *Cinderella*.

Our biggest success with staging the company premiere of a full-length ballet was the addition of *Le Corsaire*, a relative rarity that was known primarily for its *pas de deux*, especially as danced by Rudolph Nureyev. The Boston Ballet had staged a full-length *Corsaire*, produced by its artistic director Anne Marie Holmes. Kevin had seen the production and thought it would be good for us.

The ballet has four major male leads and two central female roles. It would be perfect for the current group of ABT principal dancers. When Anne Marie came to set the ballet it was clear that changes had to be made, however. The storyline was confusing and needed cleaning up. Kevin worked tirelessly to make the changes required. In his typical modest way, he claimed no credit whatsoever.

But when the ballet debuted in 1998, it was a mammoth hit. The male roles, particularly, gave Ethan Stiefel, Angel Corella, Jose Carreno and Vladimir Malakhov a chance to shine. The production, originally from the Kirov, was a bit creaky but the dancing was sublime and the story was fun. It was not high art but it was a delightful and useful addition to the repertoire.

As pleased as I am to have been part of the production of these wonderful ballets, I know that the future of dance depends upon finding ways to create ballets without the high budgets implied by performances on large stages. When the great 20th century choreographers were creating their masterpieces, they had the luxury to create five or more new works each year. Rehearsal costs were minimal, unions were non-existent and costume and set costs were also low. A work could be created and discarded without a thought.

Now new works are incredibly expensive. Rehearsal costs can be many hundreds of thousands of dollars for a major work with many dancers. Sets can be huge and one can easily spend up to \$3,000 per costume! When one spends hundreds of thousands of dollars on a work, it had better be good. This puts pressure on choreographers, inhibits risk taking and vastly reduces the number of works any one choreographer can create in a year or a career. No wonder we don't have Balanchines or Grahams emerging these days.

## **Education and Training**

One way to reduce the cost of creating new works is to use younger, less experienced dancers to develop the work. It can then be transferred to more experienced dancers at a substantially lower cost. It is the creation process that is so slow and expensive in dance making. Hours can be spent on a few minutes of movement. One comes to regard highly those choreographers, like Lar or Twyla, who come truly prepared into the studio.

This was one of the compelling reasons to re-establish a second company at ABT. Gage Bush Englund, a former ABT dancer, had created with her late husband, Robert, a junior ABT company in the 1970's. At one point, they took the company to the Joffrey where it flourished for a time. After the problems of the Joffrey forced a move to Chicago, the junior company was without a home.

Gage suggested it should come back to ABT. She generously agreed to provide most of the funding since we were not in position to bear this expense. After much negotiation, we agreed upon the name ABT Studio Company and, in 1996, the company was re-formed.

The Studio Company had several goals. It provided a training ground for young ballet dancers not ready to join the first company, giving them training and stage experience. Many graduates of the program have already joined the main company.

It also provided a place where young choreographers could work. John Selya and Robert Hill, ABT dancers with an interest in choreography, both created works for the Studio Company. So did a host of other choreographers.

The Studio Company also played a pivotal role in our educational work. It was far simpler and less expensive to send these young dancers into the public schools. And it worked better, too, since these dancers were far closer in age to the students they were addressing than the dancers in the main company.

A highlight during my tenure was a series of family performances at the New Victory Theatre on 42nd Street in New York City. It was wonderful to see so many young children, and their parents, enjoying ballet together. I believe that arts organizations make an error when they work solely with children as part of their education programs. It is clear to me that involving parents heightens the chances that a child will follow through and participate again in the arts. Before I left ABT, I conceptualized a family program to bring young families into dance. It included attendance at performances and rehearsals, ballet classes, lectures and demonstrations. It is a program that I still hope to see implemented.

Before I joined ABT, the organization had created an unusual and interesting scholarship program. Since ABT does not have a school attached, there was no natural “feeding mechanism” that brought strong, trained dancers to the company. This, of course, is one of the important strengths of the New York City Ballet; its School of American Ballet is a central asset. ABT addressed this shortfall by giving scholarships to promising young dancers who studied with teachers throughout the US who were respected by ABT artistic staff. The hope was that these young dancers would graduate to ABT when they were ready.

The Studio Company was an ideal place for some of these scholarship students to begin their professional careers, although it was not enough. We wanted an opportunity to work with these scholarship students while they were still quite young without taking them from their families for full-time study.

We also wanted an opportunity to meet and work with a larger number of talented, young dancers. From this desire sprang the ABT Summer Intensive Program. This was, initially, a six-week training program held in our studios in New York. An audition tour identified those young dancers throughout the United States who would benefit from our coaching. The program paid for itself since tuition was not inexpensive. Scholarships were offered to the most promising dancers. The program was initiated in the summer of 1996 and grew to include camps in Alabama and Detroit. We had an Eastern, Southern and Midwestern camp; all that was missing was a Western camp.

The summer programs were challenging to administer and placed new burdens on ABT but they also introduced us to many young dancers, gave us a chance to work with our scholarship

students, and became a feeder for the Studio Company. They also gave us a chance to work with ABT graduates, from Christine Spizzo to Bonnie Mathis to Cynthia Gregory to Kirk Petersen. It was a pleasure to have these artists back at ABT and to have our studios filled with young people.

In addition to training young dancers, I wanted to use the resources of ABT to introduce more children to dance. I have long believed that arts organizations must seriously address the lack of arts education in the public schools. For a time, we were encouraged to measure the success of these programs by the number of children reached. A program that exposed 5,000 children was deemed better than one that reached 1,000. I have long disputed this view. For me, exposing children to the arts is not enough. A one-off student lecture demonstration has minimal impact (although it is true that a student performance by the Ballets Russe first inspired Alvin Ailey to begin dancing). We must create a habit of going to the arts. We must develop programs that allow children to interact with the arts over time and that ideally involve parents as well.

It was this philosophy that led me to develop *Make a Ballet*, one of the most important programs I have developed in my entire career. *Make a Ballet* is simple to describe: one takes a group of children and teaches them to create a ballet performance, from developing the choreography to doing the fundraising to devising the marketing strategy.

The idea behind the program was also simple. Too often we expose children to an art form by asking them to participate in creating that kind of art. If they cannot, we simply assume that art form is not for that child and we move on. For instance, we teach a group of children to dance. Those that cannot dance are told explicitly or implicitly that “dance is not for them” and are encouraged to play an instrument or draw or sing. I find this a huge waste of opportunity.

I, for one, cannot dance a step. While I took ballet classes in Kansas City (with Claudette at my side at the *barre*), I could not dance. And yet, I have had a remarkable career in dance. If my involvement with ballet had been dependent simply upon my performing talent, I would have been so much the poorer. I believe the same applies to children. We must allow children to “enter” the arts through whichever related discipline is interesting to them.

*Make a Ballet* teaches some children to dance. But it teaches others to design sets or costumes, others to do budgets and marketing plans. Each child has an in-depth experience with the art form and is more likely to care about the art form than if they simply visited one student performance.

With this general concept in mind, I approached the Department of Education of New York City to discuss where we might develop this idea further. The response was unanimous: go to the Frederick Douglass Academy in Harlem, an innovative public school developed by Dr. Lorraine Monroe. Dr. Monroe encouraged corporations and other organizations to help create programs for the students. There was a sophisticated computer lab, annual trips to Japan, visits to Europe, etc. The ninth grade students ran the cafeteria.

There was a *quid pro quo*. The students were required to do well in school. Those falling behind had mandatory tutoring. There was a school uniform. Sneakers were not allowed. When one student turned up for a trip to ABT in sneakers, she was sent home. No questions asked. This

strict discipline was foreign to me, and not comfortable, but it worked. A huge percentage of these students went on to college, most on scholarship. Dr. Munroe had turned one of New York's worst schools into one of its best.

I was delighted to meet with her and her assistant principal Dorothy Haime. While we had feared that they might be hesitant to participate in a large-scale dance program, Dr. Monroe and Ms. Haime were so excited about the project that they decided to make it part of the base 9<sup>th</sup>-grade curriculum. Students would spend two periods each week in the *Make a Ballet* program. After a semester during which all the ninth-graders would take dance, each student would decide to join one of four teams addressing an element of producing a dance performance: dance/choreography, costume and set design and construction, stage management/crewing, administration.

Dr. Monroe was especially interested in training her own teachers and we devised a team-teaching approach to allow her teachers to participate fully in the program. For example, I would teach the administration team to do budgets, marketing and fundraising. I was paired with a computer teacher who taught relevant computer skills: word processing, computer design and spreadsheets.

One early concern, of course, was money. Who would pay for the teachers, the materials, etc.? Fortunately, the New York State Council on the Arts started a program in 1996 that supported partnerships between schools and arts groups. *Make a Ballet* was one of the first recipients of an Empire State Partnership Grant. Dorothy Haime and I went to Albany together to receive the grant and celebrate with other recipients.

The implementation of *Make a Ballet* started with an afternoon session that brought parents and teachers to ABT to discuss the project. Everyone was enthusiastic. It demonstrated how important vision and leadership are to an organization. Dr. Munroe's vision had been so ably communicated to her staff that they were all as receptive as she was.

We also brought a group of students from Frederick Douglass to ABT to meet with the staff and to discuss how a ballet is developed. These were the students who would start in the program the following school year. I think their enthusiasm was infectious and ABT staff got excited about *Make a Ballet*.

The actual implementation was even more gratifying. We each went weekly to Harlem to teach. I taught the administration classes; these sessions were challenging but fun. I would go back to work thoroughly exhausted.

In the end, the 75 students involved had a remarkable experience. They did budgets, raised money, designed and built costumes and sets, crewed the show and danced. I particularly enjoyed taking groups of students to visit corporations and soliciting funding for their program. During the course of the school year, the participants were all invited to ABT performances with their parents. This parental involvement was crucial to the program.

*Make a Ballet* continues to this day. Several of the participants have gone on to internships and mentoring programs. I am convinced that the participants have a far more likely chance of enjoying dance in their lives than they would have without *Make a Ballet*.

## Marketing

Taken together, the Studio Company, the summer camps, the new repertory, the exhibition, the new tours, *Make a Ballet* and the City Center season gave a completely different impression of ABT by 1998 than existed in 1995. While previously, ABT simply danced at the Met and did some touring, now it was a much fuller and richer organization. The new financial health, with its roots in the Peter T. Joseph Challenge and the Mellon grant, completed the picture of a healthier, more vibrant organization.

If we were to sustain this new image, however, we needed to re-think the marketing of the organization as well. Bob Pontarelli had been Marketing Director at ABT since 1980. He had lived through the heady days of the Baryshnikov era and had suffered through the lean years. Bob and I thought alike about what was needed: a full-scale ramp up of our national marketing efforts with a focus on the new programs at ABT and, especially, a focus on the new crop of principal dancers, especially the new male dancers at ABT.

I have long believed that, despite Balanchine's statement that "dance is woman," male dancers sell a great many ballet tickets. And ABT had men. Julio Bocca, our "senior" male star was a virtuosic dancer who had matured. He did not spend enough time at ABT and was not a great fan of rehearsal. But he electrified the audience, particularly in his performances with Alexandra Ferri and Nina Ananiashvili. While Julio was somewhat disaffected when I arrived at ABT, we developed a nice friendship and I was especially pleased when he learned the role of Iago for our revival of *Othello*. It was a mark of his commitment to the company.

Jose Carreno was a huge addition to the company. In addition to his clean and exciting dancing, he re-invigorated Susan Jaffe before her recent retirement. She found a partner that brought out the best in her. Vladimir Malakhov is a unique dancer; his leaps and line are beautiful to watch. In the right role, he is magical. Angel Corella is a virtuosic dancer who can fire up an audience. He opened my first Met season in *Don Quixote* with Paloma Herrera. We were nervous about his ability to carry off his first full-length ballet but it was a triumph. Angel is a joyful, talented, lovely dancer, and a true friend.

These dancers all were at ABT before I joined. As was Maxim Belotserkovsky, a beautiful clean dancer whose wife, Irina Dvorovenko joined ABT after I arrived. They make a wonderful couple.

One of the most exciting newcomers to ABT during my tenure was Ethan Stiefel. Ethan was a principal dancer at New York City Ballet and one of the most beautiful American male dancers. He had performed in Europe as well and was looking for a new artistic home. Through a friend of Ethan's, a member of ABT's corps, we arranged a meeting in California. I expressed Kevin's interest in Ethan's participation and we agreed he would join us for a Met season. If things worked well, he would become a full company member.

Ethan proved a hugely important addition. He is a wonderful dancer and a great company person. It was a joy to see Kevin teach him *Swan Lake*, *Giselle* and other standards from the repertory

that he had not had a chance to dance before. I remember watching his debut in *Swan Lake* from the lighting booth at the back of the Met. Peter Boal, a superb New York City Ballet dancer, came in late from a performance across the Lincoln Center Plaza and sat with me. He commented on how happy Ethan seemed at ABT and how wonderful he looked as Siegfried. I wholeheartedly concurred.

Of course the men needed women to partner. If our women were less remarked upon at ABT it is simply that many had been with the company for years. They were not news. Susan Jaffe, a dear friend, was ABT's senior ballerina. She had undergone a transformation in recent years, adding depth of characterization to her prodigious technique. Nina Ananiashvili and Alex Ferri were both world-class ballerinas who spent too little time with the company. Julie Kent developed into a first-rate dancing actress; I would place her Juliet against any other. There were so many other wonderful dancers at ABT. It was an honor to support them in their work.

The talent and diversity of our principal dancers gave Bob Pontarelli the ammunition he needed to develop a new and dynamic marketing program for ABT. The central feature was to focus on the new stars of ABT. One example: the radio advertisements we used for our Metropolitan Opera Seasons had a background voice reading the names of the principal dancers. It was a not-so-subtle reminder of the renewed star power at ABT. This was controversial. Whenever one focuses on some people, you exclude others. There were hurt feelings but it was essential to get the public talking about ABT's dancers once again.

We also changed the images we used. We focused on dynamic and dramatic photographs, frequently of men in the air. For my first Met season we used a remarkable picture of Vladimir Malakhov in *Le Corsaire*. I believe these pictures are much more inviting than those of women in *arabesque en pointe*, pictures used over and over in ballet marketing.

Much of our marketing effort was aimed at our closest competitor for ticket sales and funding, the New York City Ballet. American Ballet Theatre and the New York City Ballet have always had an armed truce. We lend costumes and sets to each other on occasion but there is little formal contact. We perform at the same time, each spring, a few hundred feet from each other.

I was frequently asked why we performed at the same time. ABT had little choice when it could perform at the Met. The only time available is May through July and the earlier weeks are easier to sell during than the later weeks. New York City Ballet's schedule is developed in conjunction with its co-tenant at the New York State Theater, the New York City Opera. They would have more flexibility, it seems, to change their performing dates but I am sure there are good reasons why this is not feasible or attractive to them.

The competition between the two companies does rear its head every now and then. The most viciously fought battle between the companies was what became known as "banner wars." There are several large poles outside of Lincoln Center on which banners can be suspended. Some of the poles allow for a great deal more "banner visibility" than others.

ABT, as a tenant of the Met, was traditionally given one of the central positions. When ABT started selling much better, the New York City Ballet argued that we were not a resident of

Lincoln Center (which was true) and that they deserved the center pole, not us. We were relegated to the pole position furthest down Broadway and invisible to just about everyone.

We went into action and threatened to withhold our rent from the Met if they did not argue on our behalf. They did, and arranged a meeting between the leadership of Lincoln Center and us. Eventually a rotational system was put in place and we were promised that our banner would always fly in one of three prime locations. To my knowledge, this solution has stayed in effect to this day.

This battle seems silly in retrospect but it was a deeply emotional point at the time and illustrates the fear with which we lived. Selling tickets was a constant struggle. Bob and I would evaluate ticket sales reports daily and agonize over a day that was inferior to the same day the year before. We would evaluate our advertising strategy constantly and make revisions as necessary. We would change the content of our ads, the size of the ads and their placement. It was a painstaking process but I remain convinced that the tremendous growth in ticket sales during our Met seasons resulted, in part, from this constant evaluation and change in tactics.

We also became much more aggressive about feature stories that focused on the new programs at ABT. With so many new ventures, it was easier to make the organization sound dynamic and thriving.

As each of our new programs was developed and implemented, ABT became known increasingly as a vital and successful institution. Some of this reputation rubbed off on me and the press began to talk about me more frequently. Sid Smith, a Chicago journalist, called me the 'Turnaround King.' While this *sobriquet* was not applied any more in the USA, it was to follow me across the ocean to my days in London. A funnier piece appeared in *The Village Voice*. It was a thoughtful piece that compared running a ballet company to running a sports franchise. It began with the unfortunate sentence, "Michael Kaiser is the Dennis Rodman of dance." Dennis Rodman was a superb basketball player known for his unusual antics and hairstyles. To most readers, including all of my staff and dancers, that was the comparison they thought the author intended. His real intention was subtler. Mr. Rodman was known for rebounding in basketball; the author meant that I was known for helping arts organizations to rebound. *The Washington Post* did a very nice story on Kevin and myself and the rebirth of ABT and I was a guest on National Public Radio to discuss turnarounds in the arts.

Of all the coverage we received, however, the most important, was a piece by Anna Kisselgoff in *The New York Times* prior to the 1996 Met season. As the dean of American dance critics, Ms. Kisselgoff's opinions carry a great deal of weight. She wrote very favorably about the progress at ABT, our new artistic and educational ventures and our renewed fiscal health. It had a tremendous impact on the way we were perceived by our donors and audience. I was immensely proud to have my work recognized in this way.

Peter Joseph was not as impressed. He felt he had been slighted in the story and was not being given enough credit. It is a problem I have faced several times with turnarounds. The press tends to give too much credit to one individual when an organization becomes more successful. In this

case, they focused on me; rarely is a Board Chairman given credit in the press. I tried to get journalists to recognize Peter's role in our turnaround but it proved a difficult challenge.

A second manifestation of the changing perception of ABT was the willingness of PBS to film dance programs about ABT again. It had been a decade since ABT had been on television, a filming of *Romeo and Juliet* with Natalia Makarova and Kevin. This was the famous filming where Kevin forgot to remove his sweat pants for the last act and did the entire act in them. The sweat pants were later auctioned to support the company.

Judy Kinberg and Jac Venza, of PBS' dance staff, discussed with Claudette and me the possibility of filming a gala type performance that would showcase the remarkable depth of our principal dancers. Filming at the Met is prohibitively expensive but City Center would be much more reasonable a venue. Kevin devised a program that was entertaining, diverse, and showed our dancers to best advantage. Planning took ten months and we helped Judy raise the funds for the program. Peter Joseph and Gerry Grinberg, head of Movado Watch and a tremendously supportive member of the ABT Board, helped to defray the program costs.

We invited donors and friends to the two filming sessions. Makarova agreed to be the host; she told the story of her U.S. debut, at City Center, and showed the place where she collapsed after her initial solo in *Giselle*. As charming as she is, her speech had to be cut in so many places that one can get dizzy watching her on the tape.

The dancers were fantastic. Susie and Jose did *Sleeping Beauty*, Angel and Paloma the *Don Quixote pas de deux*. Julie Kent and Robert Hill did the *pas de deux* from James Kudelka's *Cruel World*, Amanda McKerrow and her husband, John Gardner, danced Tudor's *Leaves are Fading* and Keith Roberts, Parrish Maynard and Vladimir Malakhov did Nacho Duato's *Remanso*. A highlight for me was the Balcony Scene from *Romeo and Juliet* with Julio and Alex. The program opened with the *corps* entry in the last act of *Sleeping Beauty* and closed with the last movement of Clark Tippet's *Bruch's Violin Concerto* with Ethan Stiefel and Ashley Tuttle.

It was a brilliant program and the dancer interviews that were interspersed throughout brought out the youth and vitality of these charming, talented people.

The success of our new production of *Le Corsaire* gave PBS a second opportunity to film the company. All of the arrangements were made during my tenure, although the filming and broadcast only happened after I left. I was so pleased and honored when I was given a special credit at the end of the *Corsaire* film. Watching from home, one has no idea how much time is devoted to planning these broadcasts. While I did my share, the true lion's share of the work was performed by Claudette. She, as much as anyone, was responsible for the tremendous productivity of the organization in the late 1990's.

## Fundraising

While the new repertoire and new marketing and new dancers were having a marked impact on ticket sales on tour and at the Met (our box office revenue increased over half a million dollars in one year alone), the biggest impact was on fundraising.

I had hired Lynn Thommen to become Director of Development at ABT in 1997. Lynn had been so successful at the Jewish Museum that the entire Museum staff and Board was angry with me for poaching her. But she was ready for a new challenge and I was thrilled to get her. (More recently, Lynn left ABT to rejoin the Jewish Museum; turnabout is fair play.) Lynn brought a remarkable professionalism and strategic sense to ABT. Under her direction, the organization began to raise more serious sums, building on all forms of fundraising from corporations to foundations to individuals.

Amazingly, even our government grants increased. We received one of a handful of Millennium Grants from the NEA. These were grants meant to celebrate the wealth of American culture. We applied for a grant that would allow ABT to mount and record a series of the great American ballet masterworks, from Robbins' *Fancy Free* to De Mille's *Fall River Legend*. Over a period of years we restaged and captured for posterity an invaluable archive of works.

The New York State Council on the Arts was also very supportive. With the great help of the director of its dance program, Beverly d'Anne, ABT was able to apply in a wide range of categories and NYSCA supported new works, our New York season and our *Make a Ballet* program.

We even were able to get some funding from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. Schuyler Chapin had become the Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for the City of New York. He was always extremely gracious and supportive, both personally and professionally.

While City funding was difficult to attract, one of the easiest ways to raise funds for an arts organization is to stage a gala performance. While there is a great deal of work involved in producing a gala, Board members typically find it easier to sell tickets to a well organized gala than to raise money from other sources. There is a lesson to be learned here; if other kinds of fundraising programs were as clear, they would be far more successful. The ABT galas raised over one million dollars each year, a substantial portion of contributed funds.

As important as galas are, they also are difficult to bring off. My first ABT gala was an event called Dances at Dinner, a fall gala for ABT at a time before the City Center seasons had been inaugurated. The event, conceived by Peter Joseph, was held at the famous Four Seasons restaurant. After drinks in the Grill Room, we went to dinner in the Pool Room. A small stage was built on top of the pool to house a short performance by ABT dancers. This was the highlight of the glamorous evening.

Peter loved the event. He had had his wedding at the Four Seasons and felt at home there. Unfortunately, only a few tables had an unimpeded view of the stage, the costs were very high as a proportion of revenue and the dancers simply hated dancing on the small stage. Eventually no principal dancer would agree to perform on top of the pool. By that time, however, the opening

of the City Center season replaced Dances at Dinner and we happily put away forever that rickety stage over the Four Seasons pool.

The big gala of the year was, of course, the opening of the Metropolitan Opera season. These galas were large, glamorous and hugely profitable. My first Met gala was incredibly problematic, however. In trying to ensure that the performance was a sell-out, Kevin invited Liza Minelli to perform a tango with Julio Bocca. We also had Natalia Makarova, Cynthia Gregory and Ann Reinking as hosts. On the day of the event, first Liza and then Ann cancelled due to ill health. Bob and I were convinced that many ticket purchasers would be furious, demand their money back and cause a stir.

At the event, no one seemed to care! We had a wonderful performance following a day of hell: reprinting programs, placing posters in the lobby, etc. Both Natasha and Cynthia spoke charmingly and thoughtfully, the dancers were superb and the dinner in the tent was quite festive.

The 1997 Gala was special for the appearance of Alicia Alonso who spoke so movingly about her experience with George Balanchine when he created *Theme and Variations* for her fifty years before. It was always a pleasure to introduce the glamorous dancers from ABT's illustrious past to our audience. It was exciting for the current dancers as well to meet and talk with these legends. It is one of the most important elements of the dance world that three, four or even five generations of dancers are typically alive at any one moment since the career is so short.

The 1998 Gala was particularly exciting since it featured a visit by Hillary Clinton. Mrs. Clinton was a big fan of ABT's and graciously agreed to be Honorary Chair of our Gala. She came early and posed for pictures with various Board members, Gala Chairs and dancers. She was extraordinarily gracious and kind. Apart from the inevitable competition for the right to sit with the First Lady, the evening was a huge success.

Galas are typically only profitable if a large number of tickets can be sold easily to those who support the company. American Ballet Theatre had several support groups of generous donors. These different groups gave many people an opportunity to play a role. Those supporters not asked to become members of the Board of the organization are able to participate in another volunteer effort. Each effort also gives some volunteers the opportunity to play leadership roles.

At American Ballet Theatre, the most active of our support groups was the Golden Circle Council, composed of those donors who contributed over \$5,000 to the organization and wanted to help raise additional funds. The central activity of the Golden Circle Council was staging its own fundraising event, the Culinary Pas de Deux. This was one of my favorite events. More than 20 of the best chefs in New York were asked to provide one dish to a large cocktail party. The chefs were arranged throughout the party space and patrons would walk from table to table tasting the various dishes. A wine tasting was held coincidentally. To increase the amount of money raised, a silent auction was held concurrently.

I love silent auctions. Items are arranged on tables and bid sheets are placed in front of each item. Patrons walk around and write their bids on the bid sheet. Each bid must be more than the prior

one by a specified amount. At the end of the auction, the highest bidder ‘wins’ the item. Silent auctions make a cocktail-type party more interesting if the auction items are interesting.

Many of the objects were beautiful, others were interesting one-of-a-kind experiences. We auctioned off walk-on roles in ballets, opportunities to watch a performance from the wings, costumes worn by great stars of the past, dinners with famous dancers, trips, jewelry, etc. All of these items were donated to the auction, collected by the gala committee. One favorite item was a scrapbook compiled by Rosalie O’Connor, a member of the ABT *corps*. Rosalie was becoming an excellent dance photographer and her scrapbooks of photos and personal captions were auctioned for many thousands of dollars each year.

In the first few Culinary Pas de Deux evenings, we included the dancers in excerpts from a few ballets. But the tiny stage created the same problems as the Pool Room stage at the Four Seasons and the idea was dropped. Many of the dancers, relieved to avoid dancing on an uncomfortable surface, helped with the auction.

While these events all raised substantial sums, there were other meaningful events that were intended to create friends rather than raise funds. The most exciting of these was certainly the visit by Kofi Anan, Secretary General of the United Nations, and Mrs. Anan on closing night of the Met Season in 1998, my last Met performance with the company.

A pre-performance dinner for Board members and dancers gave us a chance to meet this inspiring couple. Before the opening of the performance, the Anans walked backstage and greeted the dancers who were performing *Le Corsaire*. As the lights dimmed, I went before the Met curtain, my first and only time speaking from that great stage, and introduced Mr. Anan.

The Secretary General then proceeded to make an impassioned speech for arts support and joked that *Corsaire*, with its tale of harems and slaves, was hardly a politically correct ballet. It was a wonderful speech and a great way to end the season. No one who attended that night will forget Mr. Anan’s humor, generosity of spirit and inspirational tone.

Mr. Anan was only one of the world-famous people with whom we worked. Peter Joseph had a strong relationship with Princeton University and was intrigued by a program developed by Toni Morrison, the Nobel Prize winning novelist. Ms. Morrison had developed a fascinating program, the Princeton Atelier, which brought important artists to the campus. These artists, like Yo Yo Ma, would work with a group of selected students and help them create a work of art. The structure of the program was left to the individual artist and no press was allowed.

Peter asked me if there was any way to involve ABT with the Atelier as he was considering a major grant and wanted us to participate. I suggested we send the Studio Company to Princeton for a few weeks and have a choreographer create a work for our dancers and the Princeton students. A series of seminars would be offered as well. In the first year, we staged a series of symposia on dance topics from choreography to design to administration. These discussions were attended by members of the Atelier program and others on the Princeton campus. In our second year we focused on arts administration. By this time I was living in England but returned for a weekend with Princeton students. The Atelier was a wonderful way for practicing artists to

inform, influence and inspire students; it was a joy to participate and to benefit from the guidance and wisdom of Ms. Morrison.

Programs like the Atelier brought ABT to the attention of even more people and helped us to create new supporters and patrons. But we had to develop ways to turn these new friends into donors. Lynn and I developed ABT Partners, not unlike the Ailey Partners, except that the annual “fee” was \$10,000. For this amount one received many benefits. If one were willing to commit to giving for three years running, we would dedicate one performance at the Met to the patron.

These were lovely occasions. The donors and their guests were seated in a center box. The evening’s program featured a dedication to the patron. After the show, the patron and guests would come backstage, meet the dancers and drink champagne. The *pointe* shoes of the ballerina were signed by the star performers, as was the program. These made great souvenirs. It was fun to see these patrons meeting their favorite dancers and enjoying the backstage atmosphere.

Only once did we have a major problem with this event. I had arranged an evening for my father, on his birthday. The ballet that night was *Romeo and Juliet*. The program was dedicated to him. It all worked well with my family in the box. And then disaster struck. A piece of stage machinery broke and the set began to crumple. We had to stop the show, and figure out how to work without the broken stage pieces. It was all embarrassing and scary, and hardly the way to celebrate my father’s birthday!

The ABT Partners scheme became a substantial money-maker. But the search for funding never ends. Our first Mellon grant had been so successful that we asked if we could apply for another from the Foundation’s new head of culture, Catherine Wichterman. With a background in symphony orchestra management, Catherine is one of the most enlightened givers.

She and I discussed the needs of the company and of the wider dance world. She expressed an interest in finding ways to expand the ballet support by the Foundation. She was particularly interested in new works and we had several long discussions about the problems of creating and then disseminating new ballets. Too many works get an initial showing and then fade away. I came up with a new idea: the Foundation could support the creation of new works that would then be shared by other companies.

We proposed that the Foundation give a three-year grant to ABT that would be used to create one new ballet each season. Three regional ballets companies, Boston Ballet, Houston Ballet and San Francisco Ballet, would be given smaller grants that would allow them to “purchase” the work from the choreographer. But the sets and costumes and lighting plots would be given free of charge by ABT. The three regional companies had only to commit to doing one of the three works. ABT was obligated to ensure that each choreographer selected agreed to working with these three companies should they elect to take the work.

It was a new approach to extending the lives of new ballets beyond their conceptions. It was a pleasure to work with Catherine on the grant and especially fun to inform my three colleagues from the three ballet companies that they would be receiving grants from the Mellon Foundation. The program made me rather popular. The grant also helped create some important new works.

The first, *Without Words*, by Nacho Duato was my favorite of all the repertory works created during my time at ABT.

I believe this grant from the Mellon Foundation is an example of the best of philanthropy. Rather than develop their own program into which ABT had to fit, the Mellon Foundation gave us a chance to recommend a program that would truly benefit the dance community. It was also refreshing to receive a grant that was meant to support the creation of art. I am, obviously, a great proponent of arts education and developing new audiences. Unfortunately, the grants from many foundations and corporations in recent years have been focused so exclusively on funding educational initiatives that it is increasingly difficult for arts organizations to find funding for art creation. One hopes a better balance can be established in the future.

While fundraising initiatives were at the heart of our fiscal turn-around at ABT, Claudette and I worked to clean up our balance sheet in other ways, as well. It was clear that many of our debts were so old that the debtors probably had forgotten, or had written off, the debts. One large group of creditors were choreographers and designers who were owed money, usually royalties, often for performances from years before. Rhoda Oster, my assistant, began a project to ask these individuals to forgive all or part of the past royalties in an effort to shore up our finances. In many instances these amounts were trivial, in others they were substantial. In the end, Rhoda received forgiveness from enough artists to allow us to reduce our debts by \$100,000; a huge sum and a big help.

A second source of financial relief was the building we co-owned and occupied. ABT resided at 890 Broadway, a venerable building named the Lawrence Wien Center after the philanthropist who purchased the building and made it possible for ABT and the Eliot Feld Company to reside there. Originally, the Ailey company was meant to reside at 890 as well but the costs of purchasing the building were simply too great for that company to bear. The space in the building not used by ABT and Feld was occupied by a few permanent tenants (notably Barbara Matera, the great costume creator) and by transient renters, principally Broadway producers who used the large studios for rehearsals.

As a result, one never knew who one would meet in the small elevators. I remember entering the elevator one day and hearing one of the most famous voices right behind me. There was Julie Andrews! The major source of revenue for 890 Broadway was a Sony multiplex cinema that was located in the ground floor.

The Wien Center was, initially, a joint venture between ABT and the Feld Company. The Feld Company leadership believed there was a more efficient way to run the building and spearheaded a restructuring of the building ownership and management. The building was extremely profitable and had built up large reserves. I could not understand why ABT, during its darkest days, had not asked for a portion of these reserves. I still have no idea. The condominiumization took endless hours of work. But with the restructuring we were able to receive many hundreds of thousands of dollars of reserves and reduce substantially the running costs of the building. We were able to replace the Wien Center staff with our own staff and ended up with a more efficient business. The Wien Center continues to be a central asset of both organizations.

While the organization was getting healthier and healthier, artistically and financially, we did suffer two very important losses. In early 1998, Howard Gilman suddenly passed away at his plantation in White Oak, Florida. Howard had been a vital supporter of the company and had been extremely generous to a number of our dancers.

More serious to the organization was the loss of Peter Joseph. In December, 1997, Peter was diagnosed with a recurrence of his cancer. Peter called me immediately and we met that night at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center during our opening night of *Cinderella*. Peter was, understandably, incredibly depressed and left at intermission. I think he dreaded the treatment more than the disease. He had been so devastated by the chemotherapy he had endured during his first bout.

Over the next five months, we watched as Peter got sicker and sicker. He never lost his devotion to the company; in fact, he seemed to enjoy my visits to his home and to his hospital bed. They were a diversion from his pain and discomfort. Fortunately Peter was able to convince his doctors to allow him to come to the opening night of the 1998 season and to greet the First Lady. This meant a great deal to him and to me. While others were concerned that Mrs. Clinton was happy and comfortable, I was far more concerned for Peter. He stayed for the entire performance and loved every moment. A few weeks later he passed away. ABT had lost its most important supporter. I am convinced that without Peter's involvement, ABT would have ceased to exist.

Kevin spoke at his funeral but we wanted to mark Peter's passing more personally and arranged a memorial service at City Center in November. Many of Peter's friends spoke. The artists he supported spoke of his generosity. Toni Morrison told of Peter's involvement in the Atelier. Both Kevin and I spoke of Peter's historic role at American Ballet Theatre. But most important, dancers from the company performed excerpts from a series of works associated with Peter and the company during his tenure. It was a wonderful chance to celebrate Peter and his life. We all left the event feeling better.

With Peter's passing we had to address his successor as Chairman. Peter himself asked two strong Board members, Tony James and Anne Tatlock, to serve as Chairman and President of the Board. The remainder of the Board agreed and ABT had strong new leadership.

When I asked Claudette to replace Larry Sterner as General Manager she made me make her a promise. She said she would only take the job if I promised to stay at ABT until the deficit was eliminated. I agreed. By 1998, the entire deficit had been eliminated and a small surplus had been established. The company was thriving, had new Board leadership and my job seemed done. I started to look for a new challenge.

When I received the offer to go to the Royal Opera House, I had to inform the Board and staff and dancers. This was very difficult for me. I had grown extremely close to everyone at ABT and hated the thought of leaving them.

But the Company sent me off in style with a wonderful goodbye party on the last day of our City Center season. Bob and Rhoda and Claudette and Kevin all made speeches. I felt very proud to

have been associated with this wonderful group of dancers and staff and to have played a role in the resuscitation of the company.