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THIRTEEN'S *Great Performances: Dance In America*  
Presents Cinematic Reimagining of Jerome Robbins' *NY Export: Opus Jazz*

The "Ballet in Sneakers" Was Shot On-Location  
All Over New York City

(New York, NY – January 22, 2010) In 1958, Jerome Robbins' "ballet in sneakers," *NY Export: Opus Jazz*, became a smash hit when it was broadcast on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and toured around the world. Set to an evocative jazz score by Robert Prince and abstract urban backdrops by Ben Shahn, the dance told the story of disaffected urban youth through movement that blended ballet, jazz and ballroom dancing with Latin, African and American rhythms to create a powerfully expressive, sexy and contemporary style. Now, the work comes full circle in a vibrant new film adaptation, conceived by New York City Ballet soloists **Ellen Bar** and **Sean Suozzi**, that is shot on visually dynamic locations around New York City, premiering Wednesday, March 24 at 8 p.m. on *Great Performances: Dance in America* ([check local PBS listings](#)).

*Great Performances* is a production of THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG – one of America's most prolific and respected public media providers.

Despite all the success and visibility of its debut, the intervening decades have found *Opus Jazz* infrequently performed. The concept of taking this little-

seen ballet and adapting it for the screen in a modern, real-world context was the brainchild of two New York City Ballet soloists, who, while dancing the ballet, found that it had urban themes and a contemporary relevance that spoke to them. "Sean and I danced *Opus Jazz* at the New York City Ballet revival in 2005," explains Bar. "We thought the ballet seemed a bit dated in its 1950's trappings, but the themes that came out in the dancing -- the energy and raw emotion of urban youth -- were just as relevant today as they were then." Mr. Suozzi adds that because the ballet is danced in sneakers, instead of toe shoes, it seemed especially fitting to be filmed on location. "We decided to put our dancers in regular clothes, instead of costumes," says Suozzi. "It makes the dance even more accessible. Ballet doesn't have to be a mysterious art form -- it's our most natural, visceral expression."

Enlisting filmmakers Henry Joost (*Catfish*) and Jody Lee Lipes (*Brock Enright: Good Times Will Never Be The Same, Afterschool*), Bar and Suozzi set out to make the most ambitious dance film in recent memory -- the first to return Jerome Robbins' choreography to the streets of New York since the movie version of *West Side Story*. Shot in widescreen 35mm film format, this on-location adaptation utilizes New York City locations like the pre-renovation High Line, McCarren Pool, Coney Island, Red Hook, and Carroll Gardens as backdrops for the five very different movements of the ballet. Scripted interludes between the dance scenes draw the audience further into the lives of the young, restless characters, all played by dancers from the New York City Ballet. "Acting out rage and delight through Robbins' carefully cultivated steps, the cast demonstrated the pent-up emotions of a new generation," raves *The New York Times* of this film. The stylized cinematography captures the majestic landscape of New York City as well the subtle beauty, energy and sensuality of the dance piece. The resulting film is a unique and compelling 43-minute abstract narrative that highlights the form, structure and energy of the dance, while embodying the raw emotional experience of urban youth.

Following the dance film is a 10-minute documentary by director Matt Wolf (*Wild Combination: A Portrait of Arthur Russell*) and Anna Farrell (*Twelve*

*Ways to Sunday*) that recounts the history and summarizes the enduring significance and appeal of *Opus Jazz*. Choreographer (and original *West Side Story* dancer) Eliot Feld, Sondra Lee (one of Robbins' original "Opus" dancers), along with other Robbins' friends and colleagues join the current cast of dancers to contextualize the cultural and historical importance of Mr. Robbins' career and ***NY Export: Opus Jazz***.

"***Great Performances*** has been bringing the best in American dance to public television viewers via the ***Dance in America*** series since 1976," says Executive Producer David Horn. "WNET was very fortunate to be able to collaborate with Robbins during his lifetime on several landmark productions for television. So we are proud to serve as the broadcast partner for this film, and we are confident the adaptation will make an impact on today's generation, as it has on generations before."

Written for the screen by Jody Lee Lipes and edited by Zac Stuart-Pontier, ***NY Export: Opus Jazz*** was produced by Kyle Martin and Melody Roscher. ***Great Performances*** is funded by the Irene Diamond Fund, the National Endowment for the Arts, Vivian Milstein, the LuEsther T. Mertz Charitable Trust, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, public television viewers and PBS.

Major funding for ***NY Export: Opus Jazz*** was also provided by the Jerome Robbins Foundation, Emily Blavatnik, Chandra Jessee, Gillian Attfield, Arlene C. Cooper, Judy Bernstein Bunzl and Nick Bunzl, Marty and Perry Granoff and Nancy Norman Lassalle.

For ***Great Performances***, Bill O'Donnell is series producer and David Horn is executive producer. Visit **Great Performances Online** at [www.pbs.org/gperf](http://www.pbs.org/gperf) for additional information about this and other programs.

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