

MARTHA
SWOPE
In Rehearsal

SEPTEMBER 27 - JANUARY 26, 2013

VINCENT ASTOR GALLERY THE SHELBY CULLOM DAVIS MUSEUM

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
DOROTHY AND LEWIS B. CULLMAN CENTER



The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts has acquired the archive of Martha Swope, the pre-eminent photographer of theater and dance from 1957 to her retirement in 1994. The collection consists of 1,520,000 images on contact sheets and corresponding negatives, 152,000 slides and 12,000 prints. Additional hundreds of prints are already in The Library's research divisions, as donations from performers, producers, companies, critics, press agents, and periodicals. Many were published in the *New York Times*, for which she was primary performance photographer for many decades. Her images have also been used in books, magazines, calendars, and programs, many of which are on display here. We celebrate her work with this, our second Swope retrospective exhibition here, by focusing on her images of rehearsals. Honoring Swope's dual focus, the exhibition progresses on the east and south walls for photographs of ballet and modern dance or to the north and west walls for rehearsal images of theater productions.

Rehearsals have always had special importance to LPA, which focuses its collections on process and collaboration as vital to the performing arts. Rehearsals hold special meaning in Swope's career – in New York as a School of American Ballet student, her first major shoots were the rehearsals of *West Side Story*, to which she was invited by Jerome Robbins, and of *Agon*, George Balanchine's seminal collaboration with Igor Stravinsky, at the invitation of Lincoln Kirstein. She was self-taught as a photographer but, as a dance student, she had a unique understanding of movement and process. She became the resident photographer of the New York City Ballet until 1983 – decades of productive seasons, in which Balanchine and Robbins created many of their most important works. She was, as Balanchine said, "Family," and brought her own kinesthetic empathy to photographing their sessions of new choreography, as well as revivals and coaching. When she was invited to serve as the photographer for the Martha Graham Company, she prepared by studying its technique and vocabulary. Swope documented Dance Theatre of Harlem from its inception, and spent seasons with American Ballet Theatre, the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, and many other companies.

Take a look at the frozen moments in the gallery.

You may know the picture well from posters, programs or t-shirts. You may find yourself humming the music that she has captured within the image. You may discover, captured in a rehearsal image, a stage picture that you recognize from a performance. Rehearsals are the invisible work behind performance. Martha Swope's lens invites us to witness the invisible.

Martha Swope surrounded by prints of her photographs (1995)
Martha Swope Associates



Right:
Merce Cunningham with
Carol Sumner setting his
Summerspace for the New
York City Ballet (1966)

Upper Left
Erik Bruhn and Mikhail
Baryshnikov rehearsing
Bruhn's *La Sylphide* for
American Ballet Theatre
(1975)

Lower Left
Arthur Mitchell and Diana
Adams rehearsing *Agon*
before its creators, George
Balanchine and Igor
Stravinsky (1957)

“From the fraction of
a second which her
camera catches, you
understand the whole
performance.”

The Baylor Line



“When you chose to click is the sum
total of what you bring to it... I think
that photography is a craft, a tool. The
art is in front of the camera. The art is
the dancer...the actor. As a craftsman,
you take, from what they are giving,
what pleases you and what touches
you and you hope – I hope – that when
people look at one of my pictures they
say: ‘Wonderful! This is what I saw.
This is the way the dancer looked.
This is what happened.’ ”

*Martha Swope interview with Walter Terry for
publication in On Point: American Ballet Theatre,
1979 program.*





Martha Graham setting her section of *Episodes* on the New York City Ballet (1958)

“With ballet, you have an extremely precise form and it is only correct at the peak of the arabesque, only correct at the peak of the jeté, it’s not correct in between, it’s not meant to be seen in between... The modern idiom is a flow, not a pose, a flow and you find the place that pleases you. ”

Martha Swope interview with Walter Terry for publication in On Point: American Ballet Theatre, 1979 program.

“Actually the photos have a life and importance far beyond their first practical use. The sheer beauty and energy of the images aside, Swope has, in (Lincoln) Kirstein’s words, ‘accumulated an enormous file of documentary material almost unique in this country in this century. Hers is a visual record invaluable not only to our company but to the entire range of the performing arts.’ ”

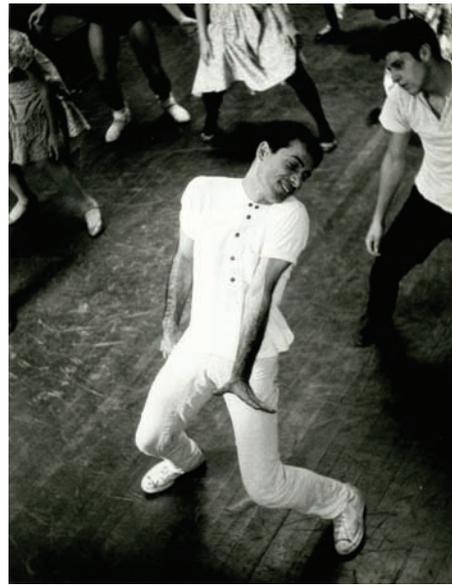
Tobi Tobias, New York State Theater Playbill, November 1978



Right
Jacques d’Amboise
rehearsing his
Prologue with
Mimi Paul (1967)

Left:
George Balanchine
and Igor Stravinsky
at the rehearsal for
Agon (1957)





“Theater is about communication. It’s an attempt to explain, to reach beyond, to share.”

Martha Swope from interview published in Manhattan Plaza Monthly, June 1984

When Jerome Robbins invited his fellow SAB dancer to shoot at his *West Side Story* rehearsal, he facilitated her first publication credit in *LIFE Magazine* and, with it, her career in theater photography. Swope’s work for institutional theaters, such as the New York Shakespeare Festival, serves as annals of their productions and participants. She also worked extensively in the commercial theater. Some images were taken at photo ops, demonstration rehearsals that were open to press photographers. But Swope was also given unique access to production meetings and rehearsals at which she could document the multiple processes of collaborative creation and staging over time. Her ability to sense movement can be seen in rehearsals of plays as well as Broadway musicals.

Upper Left:
Peter Gennaro demonstrating at rehearsals for the Dance at the Gym in *West Side Story* (1957)

Right:
Members of the creative team behind *West Side Story* (l. - r.) Producers Robert Griffiths and Harold Prince, director/choreographer Jerome Robbins, lyricist Stephen Sondheim, composer Leonard Bernstein, (on window sill) librettist Arthur Laurents and his assistant Gerald Freedman, producer Sylvia Drulie, and set designer Oliver Smith.

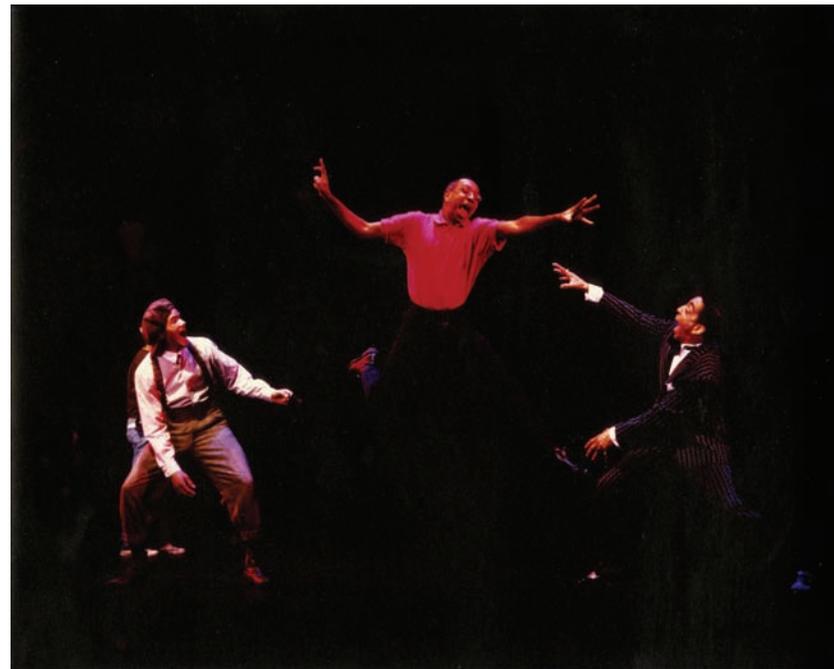


“Martha came along
and changed the face of
theatre photography.
She turned it into an art.”

*Robert Taylor - former curator of the Theater Collection at the
New York Public Library.*

“You know by intuition when it is
exactly the right moment to snap the
shutter. The aim is to capture the
life behind the eyes, the precision of
movement... I do my job best when
no-one knows I’ve been there.”

*From interview published in Manhattan Plaza
Monthly, June 1984*



Right:
Harold Prince with
Patti LuPone at a
rehearsal for *Evita*
(1979)

Left:
Savion Glover,
director George C.
Wolfe and Gregory
Hines in rehearsal
for *Jelly's Last Jam*
(1992)



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The audience applauding at the 4000th Broadway performance of *A Chorus Line* (1985)



All photographs by Martha Swope,
except as noted

The shoes of the cast of *Sophisticated Ladies*
(1980)



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