



A FILM BY CHANA GAZIT AND MARTIE BARYLICK

Ballerina Boys

Ballerina Boys

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TRT: 53:02 minutes

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TAGLINE

Changing the world one pirouette at a time

SYNOPSIS

This is the story of little boys who wanted to grow up to be ballerinas. And did. “Ballerina Boys” celebrates Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo—for 45 years home to some of the world’s most beautiful dancers, male ballerinas who have taken great risks to practice their dazzling version of ballet parody. A film full of beauty and fun, it seduces viewers into facing issues of gender, inclusion, and social justice. It interweaves a tour of the Carolinas (epicenter of efforts to walk back LGBTQ rights) with portraits of the dancers and the survival saga of the Company itself—a story that begins at the Stonewall Riots of 1969 and culminates in “Stars and Stripes Forever” at the Stonewall 50th Anniversary Celebration where fifteen drag queens in red, white, and blue tutus exult in a moment of unabashed patriotism.



ABOUT THE FILM

“Every time the curtain opens we represent progress for equality. We just do it dancing.”

–Kevin Garcia, Trockadero ballerina

“Ballerina Boys” is a portrait of an artistic institution that has brought to the world some of its most beautiful ballerinas. They are the men of Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, a company of dancers who challenge the traditions of ballet art. This is a beautiful and funny film, yet it asks viewers to face issues of gender, inclusion, and social justice.

For forty-five years “The Trocks” have, in their fanatic adoration of classical ballet, overturned many of its strictures: that ballerinas are women, that ballet is highly serious, that it’s an endeavor for white people, and that it is meant only for high-brow audiences. And while the Trocks have messed with the rules, the one rule they have preserved is that ballet must be difficult. What they do just as well as female ballerinas is dance on pointe – an astonishing feat for their male bodies. These dancers – who mix mastery of many ballet styles with physical comedy and acute satire – are changing the world one pirouette at a time.

“Ballerina Boys” travels with the Trocks on a bus tour to the Carolinas, the epicenter of efforts to walk back LGBTQ rights. On that trip, the dancers reveal how, by way of wrenching personal histories, they found their serendipitous pathways to the Company. The film interweaves this tour, the backstories of three main characters, and the survival story of the Company itself.

Inspired by the spontaneous kicklines that materialized during the Stonewall Riots in 1969, the Company was fueled by a spirit of defiance and creative exuberance unleashed by the blossoming gay rights movement. They named themselves Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, an homage to Les Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo, a company that toured the country in the '50's, introducing Americans in the heartland to classical Russian ballet. (As a matter of fact, an intrinsic aspect of the Trocks' comedy is giving each dancer a preposterous fake-Russian stage name.) Their first performances took place in a run-down meeting hall on a plywood stage. Not content to be consigned to the fringe of the dance world, within a year they set out to tour the country. At a time when a man wearing women's clothes violated the law in many states, the Trocks were forced to ask the question: where can we be safe?

Much to their amazement, their blend of expert technique and joyful "homage" caught on. By 1980, they were touring not only the country but the world. Then, like a tsunami, came AIDS. The 90's were full of unimaginable heartbreak – as more than half the dancers died. But the company pushed forward, energized by grief and the conviction that male ballerinas had something important to offer the world. This was the moment when the Company should not have survived. But survive it did.

While many dance companies folded over the next 25 years, the Trocks continued touring and growing as an institution. Dancers mastered dozens of ballets, performing 150 shows a year. The days of grungy lofts are long gone; the Trocks now grace grand opera houses around the world.

The film's half-century historical arc culminates with the Trocks' gala performance at Central Park's Stonewall 50th Anniversary Concert, where they danced "Stars and Stripes Forever." Their version of George Balanchine's 1958 military ballet features John Philip Sousa marches and—of course—a kickline. New York City cheered as fifteen drag queens in red, white, and blue tutus flaunted their stunning technique and exulted in a moment of unabashed patriotism. The world will love these heroes who do actually wear tights.





THE TROCKS

Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo (fondly referred to as the “Tocks”) is a company of professional male dancers performing the full range of the ballet and modern dance repertoire. The comedy is achieved by incorporating and exaggerating the foibles, accidents, and underlying incongruities of serious dance. The fact that men dance all the parts—heavy bodies delicately balancing on toes as swans, sylphs, water sprites, romantic princesses, angst-ridden Victorian ladies—enhances rather than mocks the spirit of dance as an art form, delighting and amusing the most knowledgeable, as well as novices, in the audiences.

The company was co-founded in New York City in 1974 by a group of ballet enthusiasts for the purpose of presenting a playful, entertaining view of classical ballet in parody form. The founders included Peter Anastos, Natch Taylor, and Anthony Bassae. Their very first show took place on September 9, 1974 in a second-story loft on 14th Street in the Meatpacking District.

By the mid-1975, the Tocks began touring the world and garnered notoriety

outside of New York. Articles and notices appear in publications such as *Variety*, *Oui*, and *The London Daily Telegraph*. Richard Avedon published a photo essay of the Tocks in *Vogue* in May of 1975. All of which helped in making the company nationally and internationally known. To date, they have performed in over 600 cities in more than 40 countries worldwide.

Awards that the Tocks have won over the years include the prestigious Critic’s Circle National Dance Awards (2007) (UK) for best classical repertoire, the Theatrical Managers Award (2006) (UK) and the 2007 Positano Award (Italy) for excellence in dance. In December 2008, the Tocks appeared at the 80th anniversary Royal Variety Performance, in London, attended by members of the British royal family.



DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

"Ballerina Boys" delivers serious social justice themes wrapped in irresistible comedy and gorgeous dancing. This soulful portrait is full of entertainment that combines lowbrow fun with highbrow art. At the same time, all who search for hope and inspiration in the fight for equal treatment will be uplifted by these unlikely heroes. This theme is embodied in our choice to feature The Trocks' version of Balanchine's "Stars and Stripes." As they perform "Stars and Stripes Forever," the Trocks will be drag queens you come to love and respect, and who will incidentally sell you on a more inclusive vision of America.

FILM INFO

Title: Ballerina Boys
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CREDITS

Co-directors/Co-producers
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Martie Barylick

Director of Photography
Claudia Raschke

Editor
E. Donna Shepherd

Music by
Nathan Halpern
Chris Ruggiero

Associate Producer
Sarah Keeling

THE CREATIVE TEAM



Chana Gazit - Co-director/Co-producer

Chana Gazit is an award-winning documentary producer/director/writer. Her films have been honored with multiple EMMY nominations and three EMMY Awards. Her work has also been recognized by the Alfred duPont- Columbia Journalism Awards, Peabody Awards, Writers Guild Awards, and Sundance Film Festival. Some of her career highlights include two Public Television series: a biography of Franklin Roosevelt and a biography of Lyndon Johnson; and seven films for the history series, American Experience: Chicago '68, Surviving the Dust Bowl, Meltdown at Three Mile Island, Fatal Flood, The Pill, Test Tube Babies, and The Forgotten Plague. Her work has also been featured in major stand-alone series including: Healing and the Mind with Bill Moyers, Slavery & the Making of America, Destination America, and This Emotional Life. In 2019, she produced an exposé on the impact of captivity on the killer whales at SeaWorld. She completed two films in 2020: her eighth film for American Experience, The Codebreaker, which was broadcast on January 11th 2021, and the independent film Ballerina Boys.



Martie Barylick - Co-director/Co-producer

Martie Barylick is on the faculty of NYU's Graduate Program in Dance Education. She has taught dance since 1974, when she founded the PACE Program, an integrated performing arts elective program at Mamaroneck High School in Mamaroneck, NY. That program was named by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund as one of the ten best public school arts programs in the nation. At Mamaroneck, she produced 900 student-choreographed dances and was the subject of the Getty documentary "Teaching In and Through the Arts." A graduate of Brown University and a Certified Movement Analyst, Martie has published articles in Daedalus, Movement Studies, and the Journal of Dance Education. The focus of her scholarship has been the intersection of adolescent development and dance education.



Claudia Raschke - Director of Photography

Most recently the DP of Academy-Award-nominated RBG (Magnolia/Partisan/CNN), award-winning cinematographer Claudia Raschke is best known for her ability to bring the rich tones of the motion picture medium to a diverse spectrum of films, from highly stylized commercial endeavors to feature documentaries to lower-budget works of art. Among her many notable award-winning films are: Particle Fever (Bond), Oscar-nominated God is the Bigger Elvis (HBO), Peabody Award-winning Black Magic (ESPN), Oscar short-listed Mad Hot Ballroom (Paramount), Atomic Homefront (HBO), The Freedom to Marry (Argot Pictures), A Sea Change (Discovery), Oscar-nominated My Architect (add'l DP), Oscar-nominated Small Wonder (add'l DP), Oscar-nominated Sister Rose's Passion (add'l DP) as well as indie features like Kiss Me Guido (Paramount), The Last Good Time (Samuel Goldwyn), No Way Home. She is currently completing a portrait of Anthony Fauci.



E. Donna Shepherd - Editor

Donna is an award-winning editor whose work has been featured in some of the most prestigious series on the documentary landscape. These include for PBS: Soundbreaking (8 hour special); A Path Appears with Nicholas Kristof (3 hours); Carrier (10 hours); Circus (4 hours); Half the Sky (4 hours); Lincoln @ Gettysburg. For HBO: The Emmy-award winning Marina Abramovic: The Artist is Present; Missing and Murdered, Atlanta's Lost Children (5 hours). For Discovery: Why We Hate (6 hours Executive Producers: Steven Spielberg & Alex Gibney); All the President's Men Revisited. For CNN: Soundtracks: Songs that Defined History (8 hours.) Additionally, her credits include numerous programs for A & E, MSNBC, Bravo, and VH1.



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