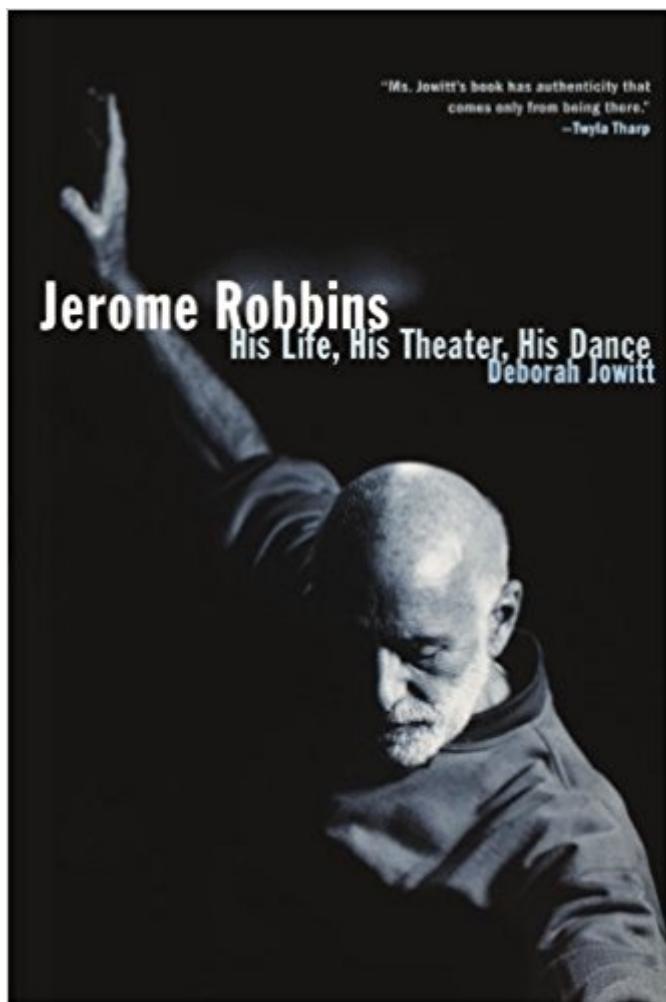


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Jerome Robbins: His Life, His Theater, His Dance



Synopsis

In this authoritative biography, Deborah Jowitt explores the life, works, and creative processes of the complex genius Jerome Robbins (1918-1998), who redefined the role of dance in musical theater and is also considered America's greatest native-born ballet choreographer. This meticulously researched and elegantly written story of a life's work is illuminated by photographs, enlivened by anecdotes, and grounded in insights into ballets and musical comedies that have been seen and loved all over the world.

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Customer Reviews

Jerome Robbins's story is as distinctively American as his choreography. Born Jerome Wilson Rabinowitz in New York City to Russian-Jewish immigrant parents, Robbins (1918–1998) became a Broadway chorus boy in 1938 before joining Ballet Theatre and New York City Ballet, ultimately dancing lead roles. Robbins also became one of the 20th century's most highly regarded choreographers, including for the 1957 Broadway hit *West Side Story*. Other Broadway successes include *On the Town*, *The King and I* and *Peter Pan*, and significant ballets such as *Fancy Free*, *The Cage* and *Dances at a Gathering*. With precision, lucidity and insight, *Village Voice* dance critic Jowitt (*Time and the Dancing Image*) chronicles Robbins's extensive career, as well as his struggles with bisexuality, ambivalence about his Jewish heritage, and his decision to name names before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in the 1950s. Given unrestricted access to Robbins's personal and professional papers, Jowitt adds a new vulnerability and humanity to the legend:

Robbins was infamous for his perfectionism, insecurity and temper. "I... still have terrible pangs of terror when I feel my career, work, veneer of accomplishments would be taken away," wrote the man who worked alongside Bernstein and Balanchine, "that I panicked & crumbled & returned to that primitive state of terror—â the facade of Jerry Robbins would be cracked open, and everyone would finally see Jerome Wilson Rabinowitz." Both critically sophisticated and compulsively readable, this is a must for theater and dance devotees. Copyright Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review Director and choreographer Robbins was a complicated man--social and solitary, inspired and neurotic, brilliant and cruel. A giant in the worlds of theater and dance, he worked on many of the most successful Broadway shows of the 1950s and '60s, including *The Pajama Game*, *The King and I*, *gypsy*, and *West Side Story*, the last of which he conceived, nurtured, directed, and choreographed. While he won himself a place at the top of the American theater, he regularly created dances for American Ballet Theatre and the New York City Ballet. The emotional cost to him was enormous. Stories abound of his terrifying tantrums and monstrous tongue-lashings. In recounting his life and work, longtime *Village Voice* dance critic Jowitt neither praises Robbins nor buries him. Instead, in a well-researched, well-written biography, she spreads Robbins' life before us: his relatively late start as a dancer, his rapid rise, his follies and foibles and moments of triumph. She doesn't sugarcoat her subject. Robbins named names to the House Un-American Activities Committee, after all, thereby helping to destroy the careers of people who had helped him earlier. Yet she doesn't demonize him. Jack HelbigCopyright Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Any valid bio of Robbins would have to result in a narrative of the development of dance and musical theatre in America, since the 1940s. While Jowitt gives us the, often sad, milestones in this man's life, her major thrust throughout this long and always exciting book is on his work. She delves into virtually every creation of his, including his generally poorly received occasional forays into non-musical theatre. Detailed attention is given to both concept, creation and execution of his prolific endeavors. Her in depth analysis of each of his works, often quite technical, VIVIDLY recall many great performances of these masterpieces. While not necessarily for those with a casual interest in dance, the facts of his life, as well as the cavalcade of his shows and ballets, makes for a read that is always more than just factual. Interestingly, Jowitt seems never to editorialize on

Robbins' work. But then again, why attempt to laud a universally acclaimed genius ?

Great book and in really good condition.

Fabulously detailed, scholarly and exhaustive biography. In addition, it is a masterly survey of 20th century modern dance in the US.

Excellent biography of Jerry Rabinowitz, who as Jerome Robbins, shone brilliantly as dancer and then creator of dance, both for Broadway and Dance stages until his death at age 80. Given the difference in audience size, he is most likely best to be remembered for his theater work and its reproduction in Hollywood films than for his ballet work centered in the Old City Center and New Lincoln Center buildings in New York City. (As the author points out, his perfectionist approach to filming dance lost him his chance to direct his own work in Hollywood...put more precisely, he was fired while working on his first assignment there.) I cannot compare this with other of the several biographies available since I have not read them. I can say that this will tell you all that the average reader wants to know about the choreographer, his career and personal life. She has had access to his voluminous personal records as well as many others relevant to his life and work. Many co-workers, friends (and enemies) have been interviewed and the published material scoured as well. One of the reviewers found her writing quite repellent, I did not. The author writes clearly and balances his virtues with his uncanny ability to behave so as to alienate even a Saint. He was an anxious perfectionist, as she portrays him, and also had an ungovernable temper, easily touched off by almost anything done by those whose work he supervised as well as by collaborators in his various endeavors. Extensive but intermittent psychoanalysis presumably led to some of the self-understanding manifest in his diary and letters, but understanding, unfortunately, never insures self control. On specific issues, such as his naming names in his testimony as a former communist, she is fair in conveying both his motivations (as best they can be captured) and his sense of guilt over his actions. At any rate, the book has about 500 pages of text, details of his life, and his creative process in action to give us a fair idea of the person. No book can replace personal association in intimate circumstances but there is enough here to convey a general understanding of the man and his work....allowing the limitations of any biography. In sum, despite its length, my interest never flagged. I commend the book to any general reader seeking to know the man behind some of the best dance that Broadway, the Ballet stage and Hollywood, had to offer us during his working lifetime.

I'm amazed at the other reviews for this book that I have read (above) and their unstinting praise for a long, incredibly boring and ultimately disappointing slog through Mr Robbins life. Perhaps Miss Jowitt has managed to bewitch or possibly hypnotize the other readers. Personally I found this drawn out rambling book to be nothing more than a catalogue of dates, dance moves and occasional affairs. And please know that I am a huge Jerome Robbins fan and consider him to have been quite simply a genius in his field. I could seriously have done with less talk and more action. I wonder how much free access Miss Jowitt had to Robbins personal letters or what her subject's estate actually allowed her to write about. She delivers a bland, un-emotional and hand tied account of someone her readers should have found a page-turning study. How does one compose a book about the man who created at least three of the worlds most acclaimed, enduring and legendary Broadway musicals and gloss over them in a matter of pages? If you suffer the 600 pages of this book you'll discover how. Unlike Mr Robbins own work, I couldn't wait for Miss Jowitt's to end.

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