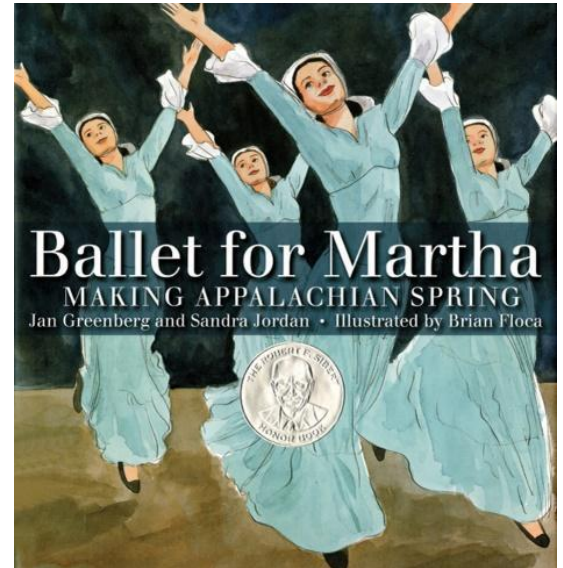


Travels with Brian Floca

Each season Ballet Nebraska collaborates with Joslyn Art Museum as a part of our *Momentum* program. The company performs a piece of choreography that coincides with an exhibition or work of art. This year our Artistic Director created an original work, *Appalachian Song*, in connection with the exhibition *Travels with Brian Floca*, which features the artwork of Caldecott Medal-winning artist Brian Floca. Mr. Floca has illustrated numerous children's books, including *Ballet for Martha*. Several illustrations from the book are on display in the exhibition.

Ballet for Martha takes the reader on a behind the scenes journey through the creation of renowned choreographer Martha Graham's 1944 ballet *Appalachian Spring*. It shows the reader all of the elements that go into creating a new ballet from the first spark of an idea to the finished product the audience sees on stage. Let's take a look at some of those elements together.

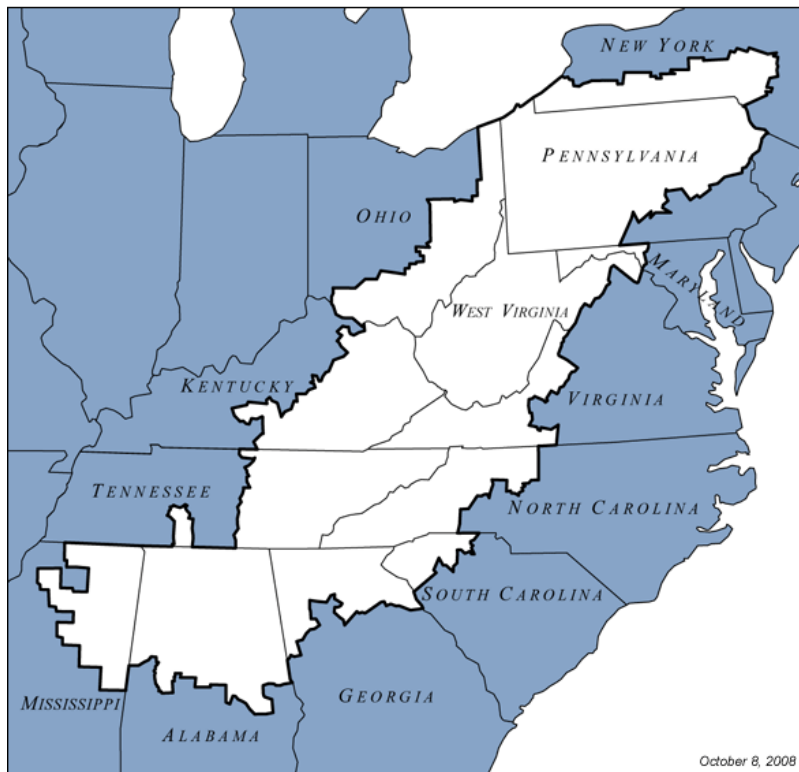


Elements of a Production

- **A Concept:** Every new ballet has to start with an idea. Choreographers can be inspired by a genre of music, novel, piece of artwork or a region of a country, as in the case with our ballet.
- **Music:** Once you have your concept you'll want to decide what music fits your vision best. It should be noted that some choreographers' concepts come from finding a beautiful piece of music. Or sometimes a new piece of music is created especially for a new ballet. A choreographer should also start to decide how long they want their ballet at this stage.
- **Dancers:** Now that you have music and a concept, let's figure out how many dancers you want on stage. Do you want men or women? Do you want a large group, small group, solos or duets? Maybe you want a mixture!
- **Costumes:** Let's dress your dancers. Are they from a specific time period? Do you want their fabric to shine or appear dull? Do you want a specific color family? Do you want movement in their costumes or do you want to see the lines of their bodies? All of these are questions you must ask yourself when designing costumes.
- **Lighting:** Lighting should never be underestimated as it helps set the mood of the piece. Do you want to highlight a certain section of the stage? Do you want lights to shine from the side or from the front? Or both? Does your ballet require bright or dim lights? Do you want your lights to be warm or cool toned?

Now that you know some of the elements that go into a production, let's try creating your own ballet using what you've learned!

Appalachian Song and the Appalachian Region



Source: Appalachian Regional Commission

In connection with Brian Floca’s illustrations in *Ballet for Martha*, our Artistic Director created a new ballet for us called *Appalachian Song*. It is inspired by both the history of the Appalachian region and the people who live there.

Where is the Appalachian Region?

The Appalachian Region, or Apalachia, follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states. It extends more than 1,000 miles and is home to 25 million people.

What are the other 12 states that make up the Appalachian Region?

Mountain Life & Music

A majority of the people who settled in this region were Scots-Irish. They brought an affinity for the fiddle and fiddle tunes with them when they immigrated to the United States. You will hear the fiddle along with other string instruments such as the banjo and mandolin in traditional Appalachian music.

Since the mountains of this region tended to be very isolating, people passed the time with music. It soon formed a sense of community for the Appalachian people and was used for celebrations, as an escape from the realities of life, and most importantly for storytelling. If you listen, elements of the history of the Appalachian people can be found within the music used in *Appalachian Song*.



Let’s explore the music of *Appalachian Song* together...

Black Lung & Coal Mining

Much of the history of Appalachia revolves around the history of coal and coal mining. After the civil war, the country experienced an Industrial Revolution which included both the expansion of railroads and the building of new factories and infrastructure in major cities. This skyrocketed the demand for coal in the U.S. which propelled mining corporations into the region. These larger corporations soon absorbed the smaller independent companies and took over coal mining in Appalachia.

Experiencing a further coal boom during World War I & II, coal companies began to set up “company towns” to accommodate the influx of employees. These towns consisted of simple poorly constructed clapboard homes or shanties with companies issuing their own currency called “script.” This “script” could be used at the company store to purchase food and supplies with any larger purchases taken directly out of the workers’ wages. This set up a system where many of the miners and their families were never able to get out from under the rule of the coal corporations.



In addition to the poor living conditions, the miners had dismal working conditions. Coal mining is still considered one of the most dangerous occupations and it was even more so in the early days. Mines were prone to cave-ins which often injured and killed employees. If the employees were injured the companies provided little benefits to the employees or their families.

In addition, coal miners were exposed to coal dust in tight working quarters for hours every day which led to coal workers’ pneumoconiosis (CWP), or black lung, for which there is no cure. This deadly disease decreases lung function and was responsible for the deaths of many coal miners. Eventually, in 1969 with the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act, US Congress set up standards to reduce dust and created the Black Lung Disability Trust to help protect miners. You will see a solo called *Black Lung* in this ballet about a miner affected by this disease.

Poverty & Religion

Poverty had plagued the region for many years, but it was not until 1963 when John F. Kennedy established the President’s Appalachian Regional Commission that it was brought any national attention. At this time, it was found that many of the people in this region had a standard of living comparable to Third World countries. In these poor living conditions, many people in the region turned to religion as a way to deal with the struggles in their life. Religion provided both a sense of community and purpose for many Appalachian people. Due to new schools, roads and health care facilities the region has seen great progress since the 1960s.



Broadway's Ann Reinking visits Ballet Nebraska to set Fosse medley



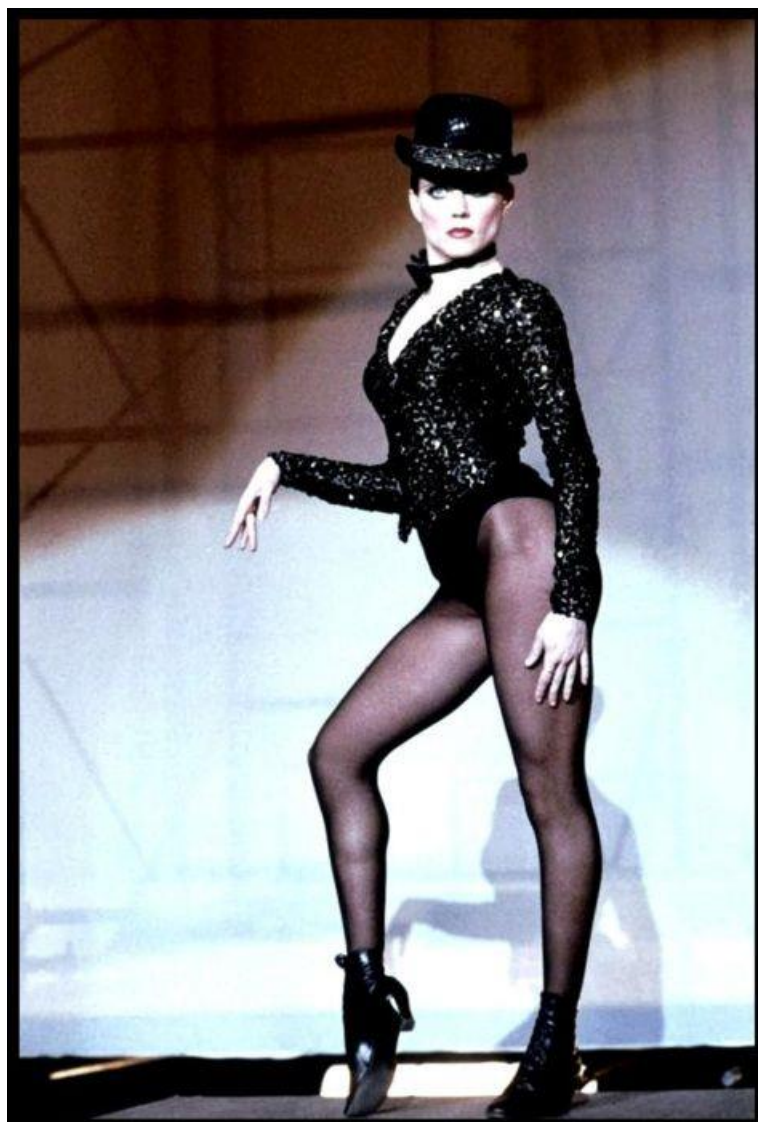
This season Ballet Nebraska was joined by Broadway legend Ann Reinking to stage a Bob Fosse medley just for the company. Who is Bob Fosse? Born Robert Louis Fosse in 1927 he was an American dancer, choreographer and director. Fosse, a nine-time Tony Award® winner, created iconic choreography that set new standards. His style and choreography was known for using turning in knees, sideways shuffling, rolled shoulders and “jazz hands.” In addition, he often used props such as bowler hats, canes, and chairs.



Ann Reinking and Bob Fosse

Fosse's work is broad and widespread throughout both film and musical theater. In 1954 he choreographed his first musical, *The Pajama Game*, which put him on the map in the industry with the popular dance scene “Steam Heat”. Some of his other most notable musicals that he choreographed include *Sweet Charity*, *Chicago*, and *Pippin*. In film, he won an Academy award for his direction of *Cabaret*. Bob Fosse passed away in 1987 and left a lasting legacy in the dance world.

Ann Reinking, also a Tony® winner, is a principal authority on his style and work. She served as Fosse's long-time muse throughout her career starring in many musicals, as well as his autobiographical film *All that Jazz* in 1979. She is well known for her role as Roxie Hart in both the 1977 run and 1996 revival of *Chicago*.



Keep an eye out for these signature Fosse moves!

- **Turned in knees:** different from ballet, where knees are generally turned out.
- **Shoulders and hips:** stylized movements including shoulder rolls and hip isolations.
- **Use of bowler hats:** used as part of the choreography.
- **Jazz hands:** fingers stretched out wide.
- **Small gestures:** small gestures focus your attention.
- **Power of nothing:** stillness on stage can be powerful.