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Ruth Page and Jerome Moross's Frankie and Johnny: Its Reception in 1938 and 1945

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RUTH PAGE AND JEROME MOROSS’ S  

FRANKIE AND JOHNNY:

ITS RECEPTION IN 1938 AND 1945

By:

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ABSTRACT

Ruth Page and Jerome Moross’s *Frankie and Johnny* was first performed under the auspices of the WPA Federal Theatre Project in 1938 Chicago. It was well-received, winning comments such as “a wow with audiences” and “the best thing Mr. Roosevelt has done.” Seven years later, *Frankie and Johnny* was revived in New York by Serge Denham’s Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. The critics of New York did not find it as entertaining as those in 1938 Chicago, however. An analysis of the reception of *Frankie and Johnny* from these two time periods provides insight into two stages in the development of an American style of ballet.
INTRODUCTION

The term “American ballet” has only been around for about seventy-five years, when Lincoln Kirstein and George Balanchine opened the School of American Ballet in New York. The classical ballet tradition had not really even been introduced to America until the beginning of the twentieth century, saturated by the Russian tradition; Anna Pavlova’s frequent tours of America in 1910 through 1925 and Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes extensive American tour from the West Coast to Canada to Texas in 1916-1917 were really the only exposure that America, outside of New York, had to the classical ballet tradition. Russians Michel Fokine and Leonide Massine, choreographers for Ballets Russes, both established schools in New York. Ballet critic George Amberg called ballet in America “Russian…an imported, highly valued commodity, as alien in origin and flavor as caviar and vodka.”¹ In fact, the Russians had such a monopoly over the early classical ballet tradition in America that the term “ballet” became synonymous with “Russian ballet.” Lincoln Kirstein took the terminology one step further, juxtaposing the two words as Russianballet.² Even throughout the 1930s, it was common belief that the two words were inseparable. Kirstein uses the term Russianballet to exploit how inseparable the concept was and to support his argument for the creation of American ballet that was not Russian.

Kirstein was one of the earliest, if not the most vocal, activists in the development of an American style of ballet. His pamphlet, Blast at Ballet, advocates the need for ballet’s disassociation from Russianballet so that a unique American style of ballet could materialize. He states:

American style springs or should spring from our own training and environment, which was not in an Imperial School or a Parisian imitation of it. Ours is a style bred also from basket-ball courts, track and swimming meets and junior-proms. Our style springs from the personal atmosphere of recognizable American types as exemplified by the behavior of movie-stars like Ginger Rogers, Carole Lombard, or the late Jean Harlow. It is frank, open, fresh and friendly. It can be funny without seeming arch, and serious without seeming pained.³

² Lincoln Kirstein, Blast at Ballet (New York: Martin Press, 1938).
³ Ibid., 45.
Kirstein’s first step towards the discovery of an American style of ballet was the creation of the School of American Ballet with Balanchine in 1934. The goal of the American Ballet Company, and inevitably the school, as stated in Kirstein’s manifesto, was to “create a repertory which will not only displace the existent Russian programs, but which can keep abreast of them in ideas and invention.” Although Balanchine was Russian, Kirstein saw his ideas as the realization of his dream. But eventually Balanchine took the American Ballet to Hollywood to perform in *The Goldwyn Follies* and Kirstein was left in New York without a company. In order to continue his mission, Kirstein used students from the School of American Ballet to create smaller troupes that would produce his vision of American ballet. Most notable was the *Ballet Caravan*, a troupe created in 1936, which toured throughout the United States until Kirstein was drafted in 1940. The company, whose initiative was to create ballets that would be familiar to American audiences, organized American choreographers and American composers to accomplish such a goal; choreographers included Eugene Loring, William Dollar, and Lew Christensen and the composers included Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, and Elliott Carter. Kirstein’s *Ballet Caravan* was responsible for well-known American works such as *Yankee Clipper* (1936), *Filling Station* (1937), *Billy the Kid* (1938), and *Pocahontas* (1939). Subjects ranged from a farmboy’s travels to different ports of the world on a merchant ship of the “fifties” in *Yankee Clipper*, to the representation of characters from different facets of American civilization who meet at a gas station in *Filling Station*, to American legends in *Billy the Kid* and *Pocahontas*.

Kirstein was not the only one who recognized the call to develop an American style of ballet. Catherine Littlefield in Philadelphia was not afraid to retain the classical tradition, restaging classical works such as Diaghilev’s *Daphnes and Chloe*, composed by Maurice Ravel. Admittedly, *Daphnes and Chloe* is of modern construction, but falls into the category of “Russian ballet,” especially because it was a work of Diaghilev. Littlefield also created Americana works such as *Barn Dance* (1937), set to a collection

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4 Ibid., 94.
5 Ibid., 41.
6 *Yankee Clipper*, choreographer Eugene Loring, composer Paul Bowles; *Filling Station*, choreographer Lew Christensen, composer Virgil Thomson; *Billy the Kid*, choreographer Eugene Loring, composer Aaron Copland; *Pocahontas*, choreographer Lew Christensen, composer Elliott Carter.
7 Kirstein, 45.
of American folksongs arranged by David Guion, John Powell, and Louis Gottschalk. Ruth Page, whose accomplishments as a dancer included appearances with Pavlova’s company and Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes*, began her career as a choreographer with the Chicago Opera Company. Her early American works include *Hear ye! Hear ye*! (1934), *An American Pattern* (1936), and *Frankie and Johnny. Hear ye! Hear ye!*, Aaron Copland’s first performed ballet score, is a parody of the court system, wherein three different tales of a murder are told, each with a satirical spin. *An American Pattern*, Jerome Moross’s first ballet score commissioned by Page, tells the story of an average American housewife distraught over the mundane routine of her life. In an interview about her early career as a choreographer, Page succinctly stated the universal objective of American choreographers in the 1930s:

> At that time we were looking for ideas that were American. We didn’t want to be Russian ballet, we didn’t want to be European, we were searching for Americana.\(^9\)

The term “Americana” can evoke ideas of America’s heritage, from quilt making to antiques, to folksongs, to baseball. By definition, “Americana” can be applied to anything associated with the culture and history of America, particularly the United States. When the term “Americana” is applied to the ballet, it describes a genre, most commonly found in the early development of American ballet, that portrayed stories associated with the culture and history of America. For example, ballets could be associated with an historical event or person, as in *Billy the Kid*, an American pastime, as in *The Flapper and the Quarterback*, or could have social and political connotations, as in *Hear ye! Hear ye!* But American choreographers took “Americana” a step further than subject matter. “Americana” ballets used American composers, many of whom incorporated folksongs or popular musical styles into their works, and choreographers who used popular dance steps in their choreography. The fusion of these elements was

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seen as a way to move away from the European dominance over ballet in America and
inevitably capture a unique American style.

The movement towards an American style of ballet eventually put pressure on all
ballet companies performing in the U.S. to include Americana works in their repertoire.
René Blum and Colonel W. de Basil’s Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo made the earliest
attempt, with Massine’s *Union Pacific* (1934), about America’s first transcontinental
railroad. Set in Utah in 1869, *Union Pacific* deals with the railroad and has a musical
score comprised of railroad songs, cowboy songs and Irish and Scottish ballads popular
in the 1860s. 10 Serge Denham’s Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo made later attempts at
Americana works, including Marc Platoff’s *Ghost Town* (1939), Massine’s *The New
Yorker* (1940) and *Saratoga* (1941), and probably the most famous, Agnes de Mille’s
*Rodeo* (1942). 11

*Frankie and Johnny* is representative of the Americana movement. The
choreography by Ruth Page is sans pointe, in a character-like style, and while this aspect
is not original in the world of ballet, it holds an important place in the history of
American ballet. 12 The character-like style of Page’s choreography consisted of popular
dance steps and pantomime. Composer Jerome Moross incorporated the American
folksong *Frankie and Johnny* into the musical score, a technique often used in scores
written for early American ballets. The use of popular dance styles in the choreography,
for example, the Charleston, the shimmy, and the “Big Apple,” along with a folksong or
popular music as inspiration for the score characterizes the early stages of America’s
search for a unique voice in the international art of ballet. The familiarity of the subjects
could reach out to and be understood by average, American audiences, unlike the foreign
tales and sometimes abstract performances by visiting European ballet companies.

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11 René Blum and Colonel W. de Basil split in 1935, resulting in two companies, Colonel W. de Basil’s
Ballet Russe and Blum’s Les Ballets de Monte Carlo. Denham’s Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo was a result
of World Art, Inc, buying Blum’s company in 1938. For an extensive study of the Ballet Russe de Monte
Carlo, see: Jack Anderson, *The One and Only: The Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo*, (New York: Dance
12 The most notorious sans pointe ballet is probably *Le Sacre du Printemps* of 1913, performed by Sergei
Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes with choreography by Vaslav Nijinsky and musical score by Igor Stravinsky. A
reconstruction of the original performance can be seen on the video: *Le sacre du printemps: reborn,
When *Frankie and Johnny* premiered in 1938, it was in the middle of an economic crisis, under the auspices of a government-funded project whose purpose was to perform works that promoted an American identity. *Frankie and Johnny* was considered “as native as a ball game or a prize fight,”\(^\text{13}\) winning praise from both audiences and critics in 1938 Chicago. Newspaper headlines included “a wow with audiences” and “feather for Mr. Roosevelt.” In 1945, however, it was towards the end of a world war, and viewed as part of the repertoire of a foreign company, who had only a few years earlier been adopted as an “American” company. *Frankie and Johnny*’s revival did not fair so well. John Martin, critic for *The New York Times*, called it “certainly the best ballet of the season”\(^\text{14}\) while others, like dance critic Edwin Denby, though it felt short to works such as *Rodeo* and *Fancy Free*, who had “raised the standard in dance construction, humor of character and situation, and American savor.”\(^\text{15}\) Other factors also contributed to its demise, including harsh censorships that forced Page to water down the choreography to eliminate sexual references. The ballet that had been accepted and praised as an achievement in 1938 Chicago could not survive the different attitudes of 1945 New York.

*Frankie and Johnny* holds a prominent place in the early development in the American ballet repertoire of the 1930s; but its reception in 1945 is indicative of the new direction in American ballet. The 1940s saw fewer Americana ballets, and those created had changed course from the styles of the 1930s. A study of *Frankie and Johnny*’s reception alone can show how ballet had changed significantly over the course of a few years; it can show how ballet in America became defined as “American ballet.” The primary purpose of this thesis is to examine the reception of *Frankie and Johnny* in 1938 and 1945. A secondary purpose is to explore the differences between the two, using this contrast to illustrate two stages in the development of an American style of ballet.

\(^{13}\) Dempster MacMurphy “*Frankie and Johnny*: Feather for Mr. Roosevelt,” *Chicago Daily Times* (28 June 1938).


The 1930s can be classified as a decade of populism in American art music. Populist composers were those who sought to build a relationship between vernacular music and the concert hall, whether through direct stylistic mimicry or through the emulation of a vernacular character in art music.\textsuperscript{16} For some composers, the use of the American vernacular music was a means to create music that was American in identity. The determination to find an American idiom in musical styles became more and more prominent during the 1920s and 30s, and Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Marc Blitzstein, and George Gershwin, to name a few, began to allow indigenous American musical styles such as folk and jazz to influence their compositions. Copland’s \textit{El Salón Mexico} (1932) employs Mexican folk themes as its foundation; Gershwin utilized jazz in his opera \textit{Porgy and Bess} (1935); Virgil Thomson’s \textit{Symphony on a Hymn Tune} (1928) is based upon the Protestant hymn “How Firm a Foundation.” Current events also influenced composers; for example, Marc Blitzstein’s \textit{The Cradle Will Rock} (1937) is about the organization of a union in Steeltown, U.S.A.

That the music of American ballets in the 1930s followed the populist movement is no coincidence. The idea of finding an American idiom in both ballet and music worked hand-in-hand; composers seeking an American voice benefited Kirstein, while he provided an opportunity for composers to realize it. As a result, ballets of the 1930s commonly used folk or popular music. Most well-known today is Copland’s \textit{Billy the Kid} (1938), about the infamous William Bonney, which contains the folksongs “Great Grand-dad,” “Old Chisolm Trail,” “Good-bye Ol’ Paint,” and “Oh Bury me not on the Lone Prairie.”\textsuperscript{17} His first performed ballet, \textit{Hear ye! Hear ye!} (1935), commissioned by


Ruth Page, was created as a satire of American justice. The plot is set in a Chicago court room, where justices are trying to ascertain the murderer of a night-club dancer, through interviews with three different witnesses: a night club hostess, a honeymooning couple, and an African-American waiter. Copland uses a parody of the Star-Spangled Banner to signify a distortion of American justice, jazz to support the cabaret of the night-club hostess’s testimony, a parody of Mendelssohn’s Wedding March for the honeymooning company, and jazz for the Negro waiter. The ballet concludes with the Star-Spangled Banner and a rap of the judge’s gavel as the curtain falls. Virgil Thomson’s Filling Station (1937) uses a pastiche of hymns, honky-tonk syncopations, a “Big Apple” dance, a holdup episode right out of a gangster movie, and a funeral dirge. Paul Bowles’s Yankee Clipper (1938) has popular sailor dances and “pastiches of the exotica” that portray the different lands that the sailor visits. The use of popular styles of music in American ballet enriched the aim of American choreographers: to create an expression that reflected the American social and aesthetic climate. Audiences were more likely to relate to a ballet if all components were recognizable.

By 1938, the year of Frankie and Johnny’s premiere, the tragedy of Frankie and Johnny could be heard in various forms with a wide variety of characters and styles. Carl Sandburg in The American Songbag wrote that the original story of Frankie and Johnny existed in the song “Frankie and Albert,” which was popular among railroad workers in the Midwest around 1888. “Frankie and Johnny” came later, followed by “Frankie Blues” and many others that included aliases of Frankie, such as Sadie and Josie. These could be found in various places over the United States. All versions follow a similar plot: Frankie (or other female character) buys her man clothes and when he does not return home, she goes to the bar to find him. Discovering he has been with another

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18 Copland’s first ballet, Grohg: A Ballet in one Act, was never performed. For a deeper study, see Roberta Lewis Lindsey, “An Historical and Musical Study of Aaron Copland’s First Orchestral Work: Grohg: A Ballet in one Act.” (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1996).
23 Ibid.
woman, she shoots him out of jealousy. In some stories she marches to the scaffold; in others, she goes without punishment.

According to Charles Turner, the popular song *Frankie and Johnny* was inspired by a real-life event in Kansas City, Missouri in 1899, when Frankie Baker, a prostitute, shot and killed her lover in a fit of jealous rage.24 This story was first transferred to song in 1904 as “He Done Me Wrong” by Hughie Cannon, and later in the 1920s by Joe “King” Oliver and Fate Marable.25 In 1930 John Huston produced a play called *Frankie and Johnny*, similar to the story of the Kansas City event.26 The origin of the song and story, however, are of little consequence to the ballet’s production. The multiple ways that it was heard around the country made it a recognizable song, which was important to its success.

Where Moross first heard the tale of *Frankie and Johnny* and which of its many versions he heard is unknown. In an interview with Paul Snook for WRVR radio, New York, Moross described his interest in popular music, an interest that would form a foundation for his compositions:

…all my life I heard popular music. I heard folk music. It was the kind of thing we sang when I was a child and even while I was going to Juilliard I was working at jobs, in jazz bands. I worked in theatre pits. Popular music was around me and it always seemed absolutely right to use it.27

Moross was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, by Russian-Jewish immigrant parents. He graduated high school early, and completed a degree from New York University at age eighteen. During his final year at NYU, he also held a conducting fellowship at Juilliard. In the early 1930s, Moross was an active member of Copland’s Young Composer’s Group. He was also an active advocate of music by Charles Ives, Henry Cowell, and George Antheil, performing their works throughout the city. In fact, Moross was the first pianist to play Charles Ives’s First Piano Sonata in 1933.28 Also among his repertoire was Antheil’s Second Piano Sonata (“The Airplane”), and works by nineteenth-century American composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk. Two of Moross’s

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25 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
early orchestral works, *Paeans* and *Biguine* were published in Cowell’s New Music Orchestra Series in 1933 and 1935, respectively. In 1937 Moross met George Gershwin, who invited him to be vocal coach and pianist for the touring production of *Porgy and Bess*. Bernard Herrmann, another advocate of the music of Ives and who later became a well-known film composer, was close friends with Moross. Moross’s contact with such musicians was bound to have impact on the musical style of his compositions; he mentions that Ives, Cowell, and Copland encouraged him to include “real popular music” in his style. He further experimented with the different styles of Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Webern. The exposure to various styles eventually led Moross to discover his own; all which he says culminated in the score for *Frankie and Johnny*.

*Frankie and Johnny* was the second ballet that Moross created for Ruth Page. The first, *An American Pattern*, was composed for the Chicago Opera Ballet in 1936. Page invited Moross to do another ballet for the Chicago Opera Ballet, for which he created *Frankie and Johnny*. The ballet in the end was not realized under the Chicago Opera Ballet, however, but under the auspices of the WPA, which is discussed in Chapter 3.

Moross’s *Frankie and Johnny* is clearly inspired by the folksong of the same name. The plot follows a similar outline to other tales of Frankie and Johnny: Frankie and Johnny are lovers, but Johnny runs off with another prostitute (Nelly Bly in Moross’s story). Frankie discovers his indiscretion, and in a fit of jealous rage, Frankie shoots Johnny. In Moross’s story, however, Frankie does not march to the scaffold or end up in the electric chair, but lives to mourn her loss. Moross’s book was written with the aid of librettist Michael Blankfort. To aid in the telling of the story, Moross includes parts for three Salvation Army girls, the “Saving Susie,” who stand in the corner of the stage playing a tambourine, bass drum, and cymbals, the hallmarks of a traditional Salvation Army Band, while narrating the story.

For comparison, the closest version to Moross’s *Frankie and Johnny* that I have found thus far is located in Carl Sandburg’s *The American Songbag*. The following is the

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29 Turner, 662.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
transcription published in *The American Songbag*, with the first verse shown with the melody.

![Music notation](image_url)

Figure 1, transcription from *The American Songbag*[^34]

2 Johnny’s mother told him, and she was mighty wise,
Don’t spend Frankie’s money on that parlor Ann Eliz;
You’re Frankie’s man, and you’re doin’ her wrong, so wrong.

3 *Frankie and Johnny* went walking, Johnny in his bra’ new suit,
“O good Lawd,” says Frankie, “Don’t my Johnny look cute?”
He was her man but he done her wrong, so wrong.

4 Frankie went down to the corner, to buy a glass of beer;
She says to the fat bartender, “Has my lovin’est man been here?
He was my man but he’s done me wrong, so wrong.

5 Frankie went down to the pawn shop, she bought herself a little forty-four
She aimed it at the ceiling, shot a big hole in the floor;
“Where is my man, he’s doin’ me wrong, so wrong?”

6 Frankie went back to the hotel, she didn’t go there for fun,
‘Cause under her long red kimono she toted a forty-four gun.
He was her man but he done her wrong, so wrong.

7 Frankie went down to the hotel, looked in the window so high,
There she saw her lovin’ Johnny a-lovin’ up Alice Bly;
He was her man but he done her wrong, so wrong.

8 Frankie went down to the hotel, she rang that hotel bell,
“Stand back all you floozies or I’ll blow you all to hell,
I want my man, he’sdoin’ me wrong, so wrong.”

9 Frankie threw back her kimono, she took out her forty-four,

[^34]: Sandburg, 75.
Root-a-toot-toot, three times she shot, right through that hardwood floor,
She shot her man, ‘cause he done her wrong, so wrong.

10 Johnny grabbed off his Stetson, “O good Lawd, Frankie, don’t shoot,”
      But Frankie put her finger on the trigger, and the gun went roota-toot-toot,
He was her man but she shot him down.

11 Johnny saw Frankie a comin’, down the backstairs he did scoot
      Frankie had the little gun out, let him have it rooty-de-toot;
For he was her man, but she shot him down.

12 Johnny he mounted the staircase, cried, “O Frankie don’t shoot!”
      Three times she pulled the forty-four gun a rooty-toot-toot-toot-toot,
She nailed the man what threw her down.

13 “Roll be over easy, roll me over slow,
      Roll be over easy, boys, ‘cause my wounds they hurt me so,
I was her man, and I done her wrong, so wrong.”

14 “Oh my baby, kiss me once before I go.
      Turn me over on my right side, doctor, where de bullet hurt me so.
I was her man but I done her wrong, so wrong.”

15 Johnny he was a gambler, he gambled for the gain.
      The very last words he ever said were, “High-low Jack and the game.”
He was her man but he done her wrong, so wrong.

16 Bring out your long black coffin, bring out your funeral clo’es;
      Bring back Johnny’s mother; to the churchyard Johnny goes.
He was her man but he done her wrong, so wrong.

17 Frankie went to his coffin, she looked down on his face.
      She said, “O Lawd, have mercy on me, I wish I could take his place,
He was my man, and I done him wrong, so wrong.”

18 Oh bring on your rubber-tired hearse, bring on your rubber-tired hacks,
      They’re takin’ Johnny to the buryin’ goun’ an’ they won’t bring a bit of him back;
He was her man but he done her wrong, so wrong.

19 Frankie stood on the corner to watch the funeral go by;
      “Bring back my poor dead Johnny to me,” to the undertaker she did say,
“He was my man, but he done me wrong, so wrong.”

20 Frankie heard a rumbling away down in the ground,
      Maybe it was little Johnny where she had shot him down.
He was her man and she done him wrong, so wrong.
21 Frankie went to Mrs. Halcomb, she fell down on her knees,
   She said, “Mrs. Halcomb, forgive me, forgive me, if you please,
   For I’ve killed my man what done me wrong, so wrong.”

22 “Forgive you, Frankie darling, forgive you I never can.
   Forgive you, Frankie darling, for killing your only man,
   Oh he was your man tho’ he done you wrong, so wrong.”

23 Frankie said to the warden, “What are they goin’ to do?”
   The warden he said to Frankie, “It’s the electric chair for you,
   You shot your man tho’ he done you wrong, so wrong.”

24 The sheriff came around in the morning, said it was all for the best,
   He said her lover Johnny was nothin’ but a doggone pest.
   He was her man but he done her wrong, so wrong.

25 The judge said to the jury,” It’s as plain as plain can be;
   This woman shot her lover, it’s murder in the second degree,
   He was her man tho’ he done her wrong, so wrong.”

26 Now it was not murder in the second degree, and was not murder in the third,
   The woman simply dropped her man, like a hunter drops a bird.
   He was her man but he done her wrong, so wrong.

27 “Oh bring a thousand policemen, bring ’em around today,
   Oh lock me in that dungeon, and throw the keys away,
   I shot my man, ’cause he done me wrong, so wrong.”

28 “Yes, put me in that dungeon, oh put me in that cell,
   Put me where the northeast wind blows from the southeast corner of hell.
   I shot my man, ’cause he done me wrong, so wrong.”

29 Frankie mounted to the scaffold as calm as a girl can be,
   And turning her eyes to heaven, she said, “Good Lord, I am coming to Thee.
   He was my man, but he done me wrong, so wrong.”

The Moross/Blankfort libretto is a condensed version of the previous example,
and at times, Moross’s tune is quite similar to Sandburg’s “standard” tune: both are
pentatonic. Moross deviates from Sandburg’s tune on the word “were,” with the note
lowered a half-step. The lowering of this note suggests a minor pentatonic scale,
evocative of a blues sound. The “standard” tune only appears in the “Introduction” and
“One Step,” framing the ballet. The remaining interjections of the “Saving Susies” are of Moross’s creation, though they stay true to the character of the “standard” tune.

Moross’s “Saving Susies” libretto breaks up the story into eight sections: an “Introduction,” “Stomp,” “Blues,” “Rag I,” “Rag II,” “Tune,” “Fox-Trot,” and “One Step.” The titles of the movements in the program were listed as “Bawdy House Stomp,” “Frankie and Johnny Blues,” “Beer Parlor Rag,” “Bartender’s Rag,” “Frankie Tune,” “Fox-Trot Murder,” and “Funeral Party One-Step.”35 The score utilizes the former titles, indicating that the more descriptive titles may have been added only after the work was completed.

The “Introduction” is played to an empty stage, much like an overture, and foreshadows that the ensuing story of Frankie and Johnny will be a tragic one.36 Two motives help set the tragic tone. The first is an alternation of two stacked chords. They both contain an augmented triad and a cluster containing C-sharp, D, and D-sharp, which is enharmonically spelled in the second chord.

The short chord progression is followed by a six-note motive in the trombones, the beginning of Moross’s Frankie tune.

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35 Score of Moross’s Frankie and Johnny: A Suite for Orchestra, courtesy Susanna Moross-Tarjan.
The motive is the incomplete phrase of the first line of *Frankie and Johnny*, “Frankie and Johnny were lovers,” missing the two quarter notes where “lov-ers” would be. It is interrupted by the chord progression from the opening lines. The two motives alternate, rhythmically accelerating, and each time the trombone motive returns, more and more instruments are added until the entire orchestra plays the six-note motive in unison at fff. This time, the phrase is complete with the two quarter notes where “lov-ers” would be. The chord progression returns one more time, before the three “Saving Susies” walk onto the stage to sing the opening stanza.

![Figure 4, mm 36-44, opening stanza of Moross/Blankford libretto](image)

The sections following “Introduction” are derived from popular styles of music or dance, noted by their titles. The first, “Stomp,” presents stark contrast from the “Introduction.” Meant to accompany the opening saloon/street scene, “Stomp” has a lively tempo and swinging rhythm, with the cellos and bass strongly marking the beat. The melody is tossed around instrument groups, creating an energetic accompaniment to the animation from the various characters which include three business men, barflies, a
policeman, and Frankie and Johnny. Towards the end of the section, narration by the three “Saving Susies” returns.

![Musical notation](image)

Figure 5, “Stomp,” mm 131-139

The “Blues” accompanies a duet between Frankie and Johnny. The stage has cleared except for the two lovers. The slow tempo and swinging rhythm are reminiscent of the blues. The section is wave-like, giving the idea of a conversation and each character is teasing the other. Phrases have a slow, steady crescendo, then quickly decrescendo. The “Saving Susies” are noticeably absent during the section.

“Rag I,” brings the street scene back to life, in a “moderate, bright” tempo, with syncopated rhythms typical of ragtime music. In this scene, Johnny meets with Nelly Bly, and the townspeople try to hide their indiscretion from Frankie. Frankie is on stage, trying to see around the townspeople, to get a good look at what is happening behind them. Unbeknownst to her, it is Johnny and Nellie Bly. The “Saving Susies” return to narrate the story.
Realizing that Frankie is at the saloon, Johnny and Nellie Bly sneak up to her room, while the “Saving Susies” sing “He was her man, But he done her wrong.” The blinds close in Nelly Bly’s window, and the focus turns to Frankie talking to the bartender in the saloon.

“Rag II” is much slower than “Rag I” and is marked “with easy rhythm,” but has the same syncopated feel. It accompanies the conversation between the Bartender and Frankie. The Bartender, wobbling back and forth, teases Frankie as to whether or not he knows where Johnny is, and at the same time, is trying to win Frankie for himself. The “Saving Susies” hint at the beginning of the section that the Bartender will give in and tell Frankie where Johnny is, singing the phrases “I ain’t gonna tell you no fable,” and “I ain’t gonna tell you no lie.” Finally the Bartender gives in to Frankie’s pleas, and the stanza is sung in its entirety.
Section 6, entitled “Tune,” is completely dedicated to the pantomime of Frankie, who is enraged that Johnny has been unfaithful with Nelly Bly. Distraught, Frankie runs up and down the parlor house stairs. Throwing her hands upon her pain-stricken face, Frankie slowly works herself into a frenzy, her body whirling around the stage as her hands move down her body to her stomach as if she about to be sick. The accompanying music, marked “sustained,” begins in the low instruments, playing long, sustained notes. The low instruments begin a rhythmic acceleration, into eighth note passages, and the woodwinds and upper strings are added. Together the upper woodwinds and strings ascend, with the rhythms speeding up to triplets, and finally sixteenth notes. At the climax, the upper woodwinds and upper strings play accented dotted quarter notes in unison before a series of descending sixteenth notes are treated to a molto retard, signaling the end of Frankie’s downward spiral. The section then ends with a return of the chord progression from the “Introduction,” heavily reinforced by timpani, trombones, cello and bass. A return of the tragic chord progression from the “Introduction,” signals the tragic event that is to come.

In “Fox Trot,” The “Saving Susies” almost immediately begin singing, commenting on what Frankie is doing. The first “Susie,” sings “Frankie went back to the
crib,” followed by the alto, “This time it wasn’t for fun,” and then soprano 1, “‘Cause under her old red kimona she toted a forty-four gun.” They sing in parallel motion as Frankie crawls up the fire escape to peek in Nelly Bly’s window. The action on the stage coincides with the “Saving Susies” at this point, instead of the narration foretelling or commenting on the action.

Figure 8, “Fox-Trot” mm. 618-633
After Frankie pulls out her forty-four and shoots Johnny “root-a-toot-toot,” Johnny falls out of Nelly Bly’s door, and tumbles down the stairs, head over feet, landing feet up at the bottom. The “Saving Susies” finish the section singing Johnny’s line “Roll me over easy, Roll me over slow, Roll me on my right side ‘cause my left side hurts me so.”

The “One Step” has a slow, steady beat in the basses, signifying a funeral march. The “Saving Susies” sing the following verse:
The street comes back to life, though solemn in mood. Pallbearers bring Johnny’s coffin, and mourning widows with oversized black headdresses and veils walk onto the stage. Frankie and Nelly Bly lean over Johnny’s coffin, crying. Frankie gets up and runs over the lamppost, trying to hang herself. The “Saving Susies” sing the opening stanza of the song, as a recap to the story: “Frankie and Johnny were lovers, Oh Lord, and how they could love, They swore they’d be true to each other, True as the stars up above.” But Moross’s libretto does not end there. At the end of the ballet, as Frankie is left alone holding a wreath of lilies over Johnny’s coffin, the “Saving Susies” walk over and stand behind her. They sing their last verse, before chugging a beer.
Moross’s score enjoyed its own recognition in the reviews of *Frankie and Johnny*. Dempster MacMurphy called the score “amusing and engaging”\(^{37}\) John Martin called it “bold and brilliant.”\(^{38}\) While the success of the score was important to the overall success of the ballet, the most important aspect of the musical score was Moross’s integration of the folksong, which emphasized the folklore characteristics that early American choreographers valued in their ballets. Not only is Moross’s score a representation of one of the trends in American music in the 1930s, but it shows how music and dance in America could work together to create a unique American idiom.

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CHAPTER 2

ENCOURAGING AMERICANA: FRANKIE AND JOHNNY’S PREMIERE, CHICAGO, 1938

Frankie and Johnny was an instant success in 1938 Chicago. The audiences, most likely familiar with the folksong, were able to identify with the characters and its sordid, humorous depiction of the current reality. This chapter will explore the cultural milieu leading up to and surrounding the production of Frankie and Johnny in 1938 Chicago, discuss the production itself, and examine how it was received and explore why its reception in 1938 is important in American ballet’s development.

Chicago’s central location contributed to its early development as a city. It served as a port on Lake Michigan and an important stop on the railroad. Trade from the Great Middle Valley went straight through Chicago, and by 1890 it became the second manufacturing center of the country. The city became known for the variety of its trades; grain, lumber, livestock and meatpacking, iron and steel, printing and publishing, musical instruments, and ready-to-wear garments. Its multiple trades were matched by the number of immigrant groups; Germans, Irish, Scandinavians, Norwegians, Danes, Italians, Eastern Europeans, to name a few. Each of these groups strived to maintain their heritage, creating societies like the Order of Harugari, which was founded to preserve German culture and to spread the German language. World War I slowed immigration, but with many Anglo-Americans off to war, cheap labor was hard to come by, and employers were forced to hire black laborers. 50,000 Southern blacks settled in Chicago between 1916 and 1919, in what became known as the Great Migration. Several musicians came as part of the migration, and a black entertainment district was born. Known as “The Stroll,” the section of State Street from 31st Street to 39th Street

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40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 23.
43 Ibid.
became the Jazz Capital of the world.\textsuperscript{44} Chicago had become an eclectic mix of tastes, smells, and sounds.

Early twentieth-century Chicago was probably most notorious for its “seamier side of life.” A 1904 journalist, Lincoln Steffens, commented that Chicago was:

\begin{quote}
first in violence, deepest in dirt; loud, lawless, unlovely, ill-smelling, new; an over-grown gawk of a village, the teeming tough among cities. Criminally it was wide-open; commercially it was brazen; and socially it was thoughtless and raw.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

Located at the intersection of Cermak and Michigan Avenue on the South Side, The Levee was home to more than two hundred brothels, saloons, dance halls, pawn shops, and gambling joints.\textsuperscript{46} What The Loop represented in wealth, The Levee represented in degradation. Between 1890 and 1915, commonly referred to as the “Progressive Era,” writers and critics, dubbed “muckrakers,” exploited the impropriety of Chicago; Upton Sinclair’s \textit{The Jungle} discusses the unseemliness of the meatpacking district, and William T. Stead’s \textit{If Christ Came to Chicago} discusses with disdain the distasteful side of Chicago.\textsuperscript{47} Despite Prohibition (1920-1933), fifteen Chicago city breweries operated at capacity in 1924.\textsuperscript{48} City politics were run by gangsters such as “Big Jim” Colosimo, the O’Banions, and Al Capone, who used money to pay off officials to ignore their delinquencies.

The Levee and similar unseemliness aside, Chicago was also a booming cultural center. By 1920 Chicago was enjoying a successful economy, and had become one of the great centers of mass production in the country. It produced more than 17\% of the nation’s steel and one-third of all radios produced in America.\textsuperscript{49} The prosperity was outwardly evident. Car ownership more than quadrupled between 1920 and 1929.\textsuperscript{50} The Loop, located on the eastern side of Chicago between the Chicago River and Lake Michigan, housed the 97-acre Merchandise Mart, the largest commercial building in the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[44] Ibid., 170.
\item[46] Spinney, 149.
\item[47] Upton Sinclair, \textit{The Jungle}, (Chicago, 1906) and William T. Stead, \textit{If Christ Came to Chicago! A Plea for the Union of All who Love in the Service of All who Suffer} (Chicago, 1894).
\item[48] Spinney, 174.
\item[49] Ibid.
\item[50] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
world, and the world’s largest hotel, the Stevens Hotel, at 3,000 rooms.\(^{51}\) It also housed the impressive Wrigley building, Tribune Tower, and Palmolive building.

Chicago also had a flourishing art scene. It was home to the “First Chicago School,” architects John Wellborn Root, Charles Atwood, Dankmar Adler, and Louis Sullivan, who were famous for Chicago’s early skyscrapers. The “Prairie School” of architecture included Frank Lloyd Wright, Barry Byrne, and George Washington Maher. The black entertainment district housed the Dreamland Café, the Royal Gardens Café (renamed Lincoln Gardens), the Sunset (renamed New Grand Terrace), the Savoy, and the Plantation Café.\(^{52}\) Louis Armstrong, Joe “King” Oliver, and Jelly Roll Morton frequented these places. For classical music, there was Ravinia Park. Built in 1904 in Highland Park, it was known as the “summer opera capital,” and in 1936 became the summer residence for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.\(^{53}\) Chicago was also home to composer John Alden Carpenter, who was responsible for the ballets *Krazy Kat* (1921) and *Skyscrapers* (1926). It also hosted Ruth Crawford, who studied at Chicago’s American Conservatory from 1921-1929, and African-American Florence B. Price, who had her first symphony in E Minor premiered by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1933.\(^{54}\) Educational institutes included the American Conservatory of Music, Northwestern School of Music, DePaul University, and the University of Chicago. In 1927 Adolph Bolm, previously a member of Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes*, directed the Chicago Allied Arts, Inc., in partnership with Carpenter in order to develop dance, as well as music in Chicago.

However, after the stock market crash in 1929, Chicago, along with most other major cities, was devastated. Foreclosures jumped from 3,100 in 1929 to 15,200 in 1933.\(^{55}\) By 1932, the unemployment level was at forty percent.\(^{56}\) Shanty towns, homes constructed of cardboard and scrap lumber, were everywhere. In parks and other large areas, Hoovervilles, neighborhoods of shacks and tents named for President Hoover,

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 175.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 170.


\(^{55}\) Spinney, 192.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 193.
sprang up. By 1931, 1,500 Chicagoans slept on the lower level of the Michigan Avenue bridge.\(^57\)

Just four months after his election, on March 31, 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt enacted the First Relief Act. The Civilian Conservation Corps was designed to create industrial and constructional jobs for unemployed youths.\(^58\) November 9, 1933 brought the Civil Works Administration, which created 4 million jobs for building roads, schools and playgrounds across America;\(^59\) but industrial and construction jobs were really of no assistance to artists. For them it meant finding a new profession, doing vaudeville or variety shows, or moving to Hollywood for a chance in film. Most failed.

The first government aid specifically for artists was the Actors’ Equity in December of 1933, which provided 450 jobs in New York for vaudeville and marionette acts.\(^60\) It was not until two years later that aid on a national scope was available to artists, musicians, actors, and writers. On April 8, 1935, Congress set up the Works Progress Administration (WPA). There were two important goals behind the creation of the WPA:

1. employ workers at jobs in keeping with their skills and ability.
2. Make reasonably sure that work assignments are given only to workers who are competent to perform them.\(^61\)

In other words, it was meant to provide jobs that catered to a person’s original vocation, and that whoever was assigned to each project was truly a professional. The Four Arts Program, also known as Federal Project No. 1 or Federal One, was designed for artists, musicians, writers, and actors. It designated 27 million dollars to be divided equally among the arts—writing, painting, music, and theatre. The Four Projects were designated the Federal Writer’s Project (FWP), the Federal Arts Project (FAP), the Federal Music Project (FMP), and the Federal Theatre Project (FTP). These projects were not only seen as relief for artists, but as a way to develop American art and art education. The potential audiences for the projects were small towns and communities who would be interested in

\(^{57}\) Ibid, 192.
\(^{58}\) Ibid.
\(^{59}\) Ibid.
plays, concerts, and art exhibits at affordable prices, as many small towns had little or no opportunity to see art or to hear concerts.  

In 1936 provisions were made to create a Federal Dance Project. Originally, dance was under the direction of the Theatre Project, headed nationally by Hallie Flanagan. In New York, however, dancers were dissatisfied that dance was not considered its own entity. Helen Tamiris, a leading figure in the development of American modern dance, advocated the need for a separate project solely for dancers. On January 16, 1936, her wish was granted by Hallie Flanagan and Harry Hopkins, and an independent dance project was formed. New York was the only city to house an independent dance project, which was actually terminated in October of 1937 because of budget cuts. It was absorbed back into the theatre project, and dance units were formed and could put on independent productions.

Dance productions followed the same provisions as the Theatre Project. The theatre was based on the belief that work should be provided for theatre workers, not only actors, and that they were professional workers. The overall aim of the Federal Theatre was to set up theatres which had possibilities of growing into social institutions on the communities in which they are located and thus to provide possible future employment for at least some of those who now present an immediate and acute problem to the government…and to lay the foundation for the development of a truly creative theatre in the United States with outstanding producing centers in each of those regions which have common interests as a result of geography, language origins, history, tradition, custom, occupations of the people.

The WPA operated with regional centers at the top, and administration moving down through the states, districts and counties. Such division allowed for more local artistic endeavors, and because it was not regulated on the national level (other than funding), a movement to create a single conception of American art did not exist. The

62 Flanagan, 19.
64 Ibid.
65 Flanagan, 45.
66 Ibid., 23. Reprint from a plan for the organization of Regional Theatres in the US. E.C. Mabie WPA Federal Theatre Records, Washington, DC.
67 Howard, 109.
encouragement to use relief for artists in order to advance American art was seen as a culmination of the different regions’ endeavors.

The WPA brought 40,000 jobs to the city of Chicago. Construction projects included the seventeen-mile Outer Drive (later Lakeshore Drive), the landscaping of Lincoln Park, the State Street Subway, and additions to the Chicago Midway Airport. Along with housing its own division of the FTP, Chicago also served as the regional center of the Midwest, as a supply center, a retraining ground, and a place where plays could be written, designs created, and equipment built for smaller units.68 The administration of Chicago’s Theatre Project included: Robert McKeague, manager for all arts, E. Kendell Davis, administrative executive of the theatre project, Russell Spindler, personnel director, and George Kondolf, dance director.69 Kondolf intended to build dance as a theatre form, not as a revue; his goal was to raise standards and to achieve productions that rivaled the rest of the country. The way to achieve this goal was to produce “Chicago as Chicago.”70 This, of course, supported fully the aims of the WPA, with projects that utilized the locale and contributed to the montage of what would make up American art. Under Kondolf’s direction, Chicago’s FTP produced a revue, O Say Can You Sing, which ran from December 1936 through August 1937.71 The work included vaudeville, dance, music, and circus acts. It was meant as a song-and-dance show, for the people, and it managed to continue running for nine months. Kondolf left, however, in 1937 to take over New York City’s Theatre Project. Harry Minturn was appointed to replace him. The administrative exchange did not, however, slow down the vigor of a dance unit, and five months later an independent dance production was produced.

The first production of Chicago’s dance unit, billed as “Ballet Fedre,” opened on January 27, 1938, under the direction of Berta Ochsner, Grace and Kurt Graff, and Katherine Dunham. The program included Two Cautionary Tales and Mudsummer Triptych by Ochsner, Renaissance and Viennese Trilogy by the Graffs, and L’Ag’Ya by

68 Flanagan, 131.
69 Ibid., 135.
70 Ibid., 141.
71 Ibid., 138.
Dunham. The production ran for three weeks, closing on February 19. After Ballet Fedre’s premiere season, budget cuts required that productions of the FTP could consist only of five percent of non-relief employees, down from the previous ten percent. Neither of the Graffs were on relief, and therefore they were let go, as well as Dunham, whose troupe of African-American dancers had left to rehearse *Mikado*. Berta Ochsner quit soon after, and Ruth Page and Bentley Stone, at the time directors for the Chicago Opera Ballet, were hired to direct a second production.

Page had long been involved in Chicago’s dance scene, though intermittently. Born in Indianapolis, her father was a doctor, and her mother, a musician who had studied in Germany. Page began her dance studies at a local studio run by Anna Stanton. In 1914, Pavlova’s company toured through Indianapolis and arrangements were made for Page to meet her and dance for her. The encounter led to Pavlova’s invitation for Page to study with her company in Chicago, followed by a trip to New York to meet Adolph Bolm, then a member of Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes*. The trip began her long series of intermittent returns to Chicago. Her Chicago engagements included premiere danseuse of Bolm and Carpenter’s Chicago Allied Arts, the ballet mistress of the Ravinia Opera Company, which occupied her summers from 1926 to 1931, the premiere danseuse of the Chicago Grand Opera, and director of her own company, the Ruth Page Ballets which was created in 1936. In 1937 she went on a solo tour to Scandinavia, and served as artistic director of the second production of the Chicago FTP Dance Unit the same year. These engagements were interspersed with tours with Bolm’s *Ballet Intime* as the leading ballerina (1917), Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes* (1925), performances in Irving Berlin’s second *Music Box Revue*, studies with Enrico Cecchetti, a famous ballet technician in London, and tours throughout South America and Japan.

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74 Robbins, 35.
76 Ibid., 27.
77 Ibid., 89.
78 Ibid.
Despite her classical training, Page’s own works tended to be more varied, using jazz and other influences on her choreography, as well as on her music choices. The first ballet she choreographed was *The Flapper and the Quarterback* in 1925, for the Allied Arts, to music by Clarence Loomis, a fellow Indianapolisian. The *Flapper and the Quarterback* was indicative of what was to come with Page’s choreography: original, contemporary, and American. In 1931 Page commissioned her first score (instead of using already composed music to suit her needs) from Marcel Delannoy, *Cinderella*. Her taste for the exotic showed through *La Guiablesse*, which she created for the 1933 World’s Fair “Century of Progress” in Chicago. *La Guiablesse*, composed by African-American William Grant Still, was based on a legend of Martinique and, according to John Martin, it used “a free technical style with strong anthropological orientation.” Later the same year Page heard Aaron Copland’s *Music for the Theatre* in Washington, DC, inspiring her to commission him to write a ballet. Copland’s *Hear ye! Hear Ye!* was performed by the Chicago Opera Ballet in 1934. *An American Pattern*, Moross’s first commission from Page, was created for the Chicago Opera in 1936, and later revived in 1938, on the same bill as her next original work, *Frankie and Johnny*.

Little has been written about Bentley Stone, Page’s partner and co-director for the Theatre Project. In 1934, Page saw Bentley Stone dance for the first time, and she placed him as the premier danseur in the company she was forming for the Chicago Opera. Stone, born in Plankton, South Dakota, had had his dance training through Broadway musicals and was the partner of Margaret Severn before he became the soloist with the Chicago Civic Opera (1930-32) and in 1933, the principal dancer of the Chicago Grand Opera Ballet. In 1937 Stone co-choreographed *An American Pattern*, as well as *Frankie and Johnny* in 1938.

The second production of the Chicago Dance Unit, now called the “Federal Ballet,” premiered at the Great Northern Theater on June 19, 1938. Along with *Frankie and Johnny*, the program included two political works: the show opened with Page’s *An American Pattern*...
American Pattern, revived from 1936, second came Behind this Mask, by the Graffs. An American Pattern tells the tragic story of an American woman, struggling against the “standardization of organized society.” She seeks escape from the mundane through a gigolo, a banker, a mystic, and a militant idealist. In the end, she must succumb to the pattern of conventionality. Behind this Mask, with music by David Sheinfeld, was a political work. The program note read: “whether the mask of ruling power is held by the monarch or the Inciter, the problem of a discontented people is still unsolved.” The plot moves from showing the “boredom of a king and queen with social duties,” to the rise of the Inciter who rallied the people against the king and queen, to ending with the assassination of the Inciter. In stark contrast, Frankie and Johnny closed the show with its bawdy satire. The seriousness of the other two ballets on the program, politically charged and reflective of the current social state of women in An American Pattern and views on the involvement of government in Behind this Mask were completely opposite to the comedic commentary on the current social reality found in Frankie and Johnny, making Frankie and Johnny stand out even more.

Page’s choreography for Frankie and Johnny follows suit with Moross’s score, using popular dance steps, instead of danse d’école. In fact, much of the choreography is pantomime. The dance steps are mostly found in the street scenes. During the “Introduction,” the stage is empty until the “Saving Susies” enter to sing. At the sound of the “Bawdy House Stomp,” The stage comes alive, with the action centered on the saloon. Three business men leap across the stage, Johnny enters doing tours en l’airs. The barflies dance a Charleston, in which Johnny joins in. A policeman strolls through, while gentlemen go in and out of the parlor house.

For the “Frankie and Johnny Blues,” the pas de deux between Frankie and Johnny is a pantomime, with the characters moving about the stage. The dance begins on the staircase, where Frankie wraps her leg around Johnny, beginning a dance of sensual dips. At the end of the section, Frankie retreats to her home, and Johnny is left alone on the stage.

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85 Program note from 1938 program, copy courtesy of Susanna Moross-Tarjan.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
In the next section, “Beer Parlor Rag,” the stage comes alive again, couples stroll by, one couple wraps themselves around the lamppost. Johnny and Nellie Bly meet, and when Frankie emerges from the parlor house, the crowd surrounds Johnny and Nelly Bly in a line dance, with kicks and the Charleston, to hide them from Frankie.

The “Bartender’s Rag” and “Frankie Tune” are also pantomimes. The bartender in the “Bartender’s Rag” swaggers back forth, with low, long strides, as he is trying to flirt with Frankie. Once she finds out that her beloved Johnny is with Nelly Bly, Frankie’s dance in “Frankie Tune,” turns into movements that are meant to express her surprise and distress; her movements are in small jerks, her hands move from her face down her body as her legs turn inward and outward. In a decisive act, Frankie runs to her apartment and the scene ends.

After Frankie shoots Johnny in her fit of rage, he tumbles down the stairs ending legs up at the bottom in “Fox Trot Murder,” and the “Funeral Party One Step” begins. Johnny’s coffin is carried in by tap-dancing pallbearers. Johnny is picked up and placed in the coffin with his legs straight up. As Frankie tries to lower his legs, his torso rises, as rigor mortis has set in. Movements from those on stage are slow, matching the funeral march of the music. Frankie runs to the lamppost to hang herself, but is saved by Nelly Bly, and they embrace, holding a wreath of lilies over Johnny’s coffin. The ballet ends with the “Saving Susies” standing over the coffin, chugging a pint of beer.

Some reviews following were ecstatic; others were less than amused. Dempster MacMurphy of the Chicago Daily Times called it “one of the best things Mr. Roosevelt has done.” His entire article sings praises, calling it “a swell show,” “amusing and intelligent,” and the fact that it did not need a synopsis made it understandable to the “average working stiff.” Herman Devries of the Chicago American called it an “extraordinary spectacle, bringing before the public dozens of talented youths and maidens…for the ridiculously low price of eighty-five cents for the best seat in the Great Northern Theater.” Paul Schofield titled his review “Federal Theater Scores in Three

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89 Dempster MacMurphy “Frankie and Johnny: feather for Mr. Roosevelt” Chicago Daily Times (28 June 1938).
90 Ibid.

He went on to say that Frankie and Johnny was “by far the most successful of the trilogy…helped by Jerome Moross’ lively score” and that “full houses seem thoroughly to enjoy [it].”

Cecil Smith placed the production “among the best achievements of the Federal Theatre…it shows the hallmark of intelligence and taste.”

Those who opposed it included Janet Gunn of the Harold-Examiner, who called it “travesty in the name of art,” proclaiming that burlesque has moved to the Great Northern Theatre. What we’ve heard to be classified as classy “art” among strip-tease dancers and their like has been dolled up under the guise of smart, satirical sophistication and presented in a torrid version of the bar-room classic of ‘Frankie and Johnny.’

Claudia Cassidy considered Frankie and Johnny a “Bawdy and Disappointing Ballet,” and questioned its “sense of humor and its design.”

Despite its vocal opposition, there must have been a solid core of supporters. The initially indefinite commitment to the production turned into a six-week run, six-nights a week; the longest run ever achieved by a single ballet company in Chicago to date. A total of 13,662 people saw the production, which closed only so that Page and Stone could leave to tour.

Frankie and Johnny’s success in Chicago was due to its familiarity with the audiences. Audience members were able to identify with it not only because of its well-known storyline, but because it was a serio-comedy, a humorous depiction of the folksong as well as the current social conditions. It provided humor within the four walls of the theatre, an escape from the Depression.

But Frankie and Johnny’s success is important in the timeline of the development of American ballet. Its success placed it among other Americana ballets that had proven themselves notice, particularly the ballets of Kirstein’s Ballet Caravan. It lacked the

93 Ibid.
94 Cecil Smith, “Frankie and Johnny Ballet a Wow with Audience,” Chicago Tribune (June 20, 1938).
96 Claudia Cassidy, “‘Frankie and Johnny’ Bawdy and Disappointing Ballet; Gradova Plays at Ravinia July 23” Chicago Journal of Commerce (3 July 1938).
98 Ibid.
sophistication of classical ballet, but brought character, vaudeville, tap, and modern to the ballet stage, foretelling what could become the defining point of American style: a culmination of dance styles, a melting pot of sorts.

Whether or not *Frankie and Johnny* would remain in the repertoire and continue to exemplify an emerging American ballet style, would be tested during its revival in 1945, in World-War II New York City, and in the repertoire of an established company, the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. The next chapter will discuss how *Frankie and Johnny* was received in the different atmosphere of New York, and look at how the accepted style of American ballet and musical values had changed since 1938.
Between 1938 and 1945 the Western World went from one catastrophe to another. Though there was hope of recovery from the Depression, on September 1, 1939, Adolf Hitler invaded Poland; World War II had begun. On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and declared war on the United States and Great Britain the following day. In what could be seen as an economic preparation for America’s inevitable entrance into the war, funds were pulled from Federal One Projects in June of 1938, and the projects were released to run under state jurisdictions.99

Luckily, the Federal One Projects were not the only outlets for development in American art. Numerous artists and artistic endeavors managed to survive the Depression without direct government relief. Most notably are the Broadway musicals of New York. An amalgamation of extravaganzas, revues, vaudeville acts, and acts such as the Ziegfried Follies, the Broadway musical was well on its way to becoming a recognizable genre of American music and theatre in the 1940s.

Dance became an important aspect in the Broadway musical. First of all, the incorporation of “serious” choreography enhanced the genre, and music theatre played an important role in the dissimilation of dance. For example, while he simultaneously directed the ballet for the Metropolitan Opera, Balanchine choreographed *On Your Toes*, by Rodgers and Hart, in 1936. *On Your Toes* contained the ballet “Slaughter on Tenth Avenue.” The importance of Balanchine’s involvement in *On Your Toes* is twofold: first, Balanchine replaced the notion that dance in musical theatre was nothing more than “a couple of showy soloists backed by a line of high-kicking show girls”100 with genuine choreography, and second, “Slaughter on Tenth Avenue” was the first ballet seen in a musical which functioned as an essential part of the plot, not just an interlude.101 A few years later, Agnes de Mille choreographed Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* in 1943, following the success of her *Rodeo* in 1942. *Oklahoma!* contained the celebrated

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99 Flanagan, 334.
101 Ibid.
ballet dream sequence, which, like “Slaughter on Tenth Avenue,” was an essential part of the plot. Another example is Leonard Bernstein’s *On the Town* (1944), which contained Jerome Robbins’s ballet *Fancy Free*. The inclusion of serious choreography in Broadway musicals provided another opportunity for the development of an American style of dance. Broadway reached a wide range of people, especially when musicals were adapted for Hollywood films. The diffusion of dance through Broadway and film provided new opportunity for public exposure.

Broadway was not the only outlet for dance in New York. Two major ballet companies from entirely different backgrounds called New York home; Ballet Theatre was founded by American Richard Pleasant from the remnants of Alexandre Mordkin’s company, and Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo was a sequel to Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes*. Both companies managed to continue in their inherited traditions, though they both felt pressure to perform American works, which before the 1940s, were still considered to be Americana in spirit. The number of Americana works was comparable between the two companies.

Ballet Theatre debuted at Center Theatre, New York’s Rockefeller Center on January 11, 1940. Lucia Chase, who had been the financial backer of Mordkin’s Company, wanted to continue her support for ballet after the company’s demise in 1939. She enlisted Pleasant to pick up the pieces to form a new company. A large company, Ballet Theatre had twenty-six principals, fifteen soloists, fifty-six corps-de-ballet, a fourteen-member African-American group, a nineteen-member Spanish group, eleven choreographers, three orchestra conductors, and used the music of eighteen composers, both living and dead. Its repertoire was divided into three “wings:” the “Classical wing,” composed of the Russians Michel Fokine, Adolph Bolm, Alexandre Mordkin, and Bronislava Nijinska, the “English wing,” composed of Englishmen Anton Dolin, Andree Howard, and Anthony Tudor, and the “American wing,” composed of Eugene Loring and Agnes de Mille.

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103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid., 149.
Works such as Fokine’s *Les Sylphides*, *Swan Lake*, and *Giselle* were the backbone of Pleasant’s Ballet Theatre, but the repertoire also included American works such as a revival of Littlefield’s *Barn Dance*, a revival of Loring’s *Billy the Kid*, and a new work, *The Great American Goof* (1940), music by Henry Brant, de Mille’s *Black Ritual* (1940), music by Milhaud, and *Three Virgins and a Devil* (1941), music by Respighi. Pleasant resigned at the end of the season, and ballet impresario Sol Hurok took over the company in November of 1941. Only three more ballets were created by Americans and produced by Ballet Theatre: de Mille’s *Tally-Ho!* (1944) to music by Gluck, and Robbins’s *Fancy Free* (1945), to music by Leonard Bernstein, and *Interplay* (1945), to music by Morton Gould.

By 1945 the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, in one form or another, had been in the United States for twelve years, the longest residence of any foreign company. The Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, Serge Denham’s premier ballet company had developed from quite a long history. The original, *Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo*, was Diaghilev’s company, when it was granted by the Prince of Monaco to perform at the annual spring season Monte Carlo Opera. After Diaghilev’s untimely death, René Blum took over the unexpired contract in 1932, and invited Colonel W. de Basil to partner. Eventually rifts formed between de Basil and Blum, and Blum left to form Les Ballets de Monte Carlo in 1935. De Basil formed a company, Colonel W. de Basil’s Ballet Russe, with Leonide Massine as resident choreographer. Blum’s company continued the tradition of residence in Monte Carlo, while De Basil’s company continued touring North and South America. Eventually rifts formed between de Basil and Massine. Massine had long wanted to become the artistic director, but de Basil did not want any competition for his position within the company, and he refused. Massine left in 1938 to form his own company with Russian banker Sergei Denham as general director. World Art, Inc., who had backed the formation of Massine’s new company, bought Blum’s Les Ballets de Monte Carlo, made Blum co-director and Massine maitre de ballet. The new company, Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo was contracted to perform five weeks in Monte Carlo.

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106 Ibid., 152.
107 Anderson 10.
108 Anderson, 10.
109 Anderson, 10.
110 Anderson, 15.
Carlo, April 5 to May 15, 1938.111 Between May 1938 and August of 1939, the company enjoyed a tour of London, a company premiere in New York, as well as a tour throughout America. They were set to return to London from America for a performance on September 4, but it was canceled when Hitler’s forces invaded Poland and World War II began.112 The Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo was stranded in America.

Denham’s Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo continued in a neo-Russian mode. Though a copyright ruling between de Basil and Massine (de Basil won) did not permit Massine to restage works produced while he was with de Basil’s company, Massine created two new symphonic ballets, a genre in which he was known for, Seventh Symphony, to music by Beethoven, and Rouge et Noir, to music by Shostakovich.113 The company did make a few attempts at Americana, including Massine’s The New Yorker and Saratoga. Neither was successful. Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo’s first successful attempt at Americana did not occur until 1942, with Agnes de Mille’s Rodeo. However, even after the success of Rodeo, it would be another three years before Ballet Russe performed another work of Americana, Frankie and Johnny in 1945.

Frankie and Johnny had not been seen since its appearance at the Great Northern Theatre in Chicago in 1938. After the abolishment of the Federal Theatre Project in 1939, Page and Stone set out as the Page-Stone Ballet, or sometimes as the Page-Stone Chicago Opera Ballet, in the Federal Theatre Project pattern of producing Americana works.114 In 1941, Stone was called to war, and Page continued touring as a soloist.

Without a company, Page’s larger works were not being performed. In 1940 Kirstein contacted Page about staging Frankie and Johnny for a tour in South America, that would also include contributions from the Catherine Littlefield Company, Willam Christensen’s San Francisco Ballet, Pleasant’s Ballet Theatre, and Kirstein’s own Ballet Caravan.115 The endeavor was never realized, and Kirstein’s troupe made the trip alone. A second opportunity came when Blanche Witherspoon, managing director of a new company, Ballet International, contacted Page in 1944 to stage Frankie and Johnny.116

111 Anderson, 15.
112 Anderson, 34.
113 Reynolds, 126.
114 Martin, Ruth Page: An Intimate Biography, 94.
115 Ibid, 90.
116 Ibid., 106.
Ballet International was a recently formed company in New York created by George de Cuervas, husband of the granddaughter of John D. Rockefeller, Sr. The venture never happened. The Chicago Ballet Company owned the rights to Page’s material and owned the costumes and scenery.\textsuperscript{117} Willing to let Ballet International use them, The Chicago Ballet Company allowed the production of costumes and scenery to begin in Chicago; however, de Cuervas did not find this acceptable, wanting everything to be produced in New York. Negotiations continued, but production rights could not be agreed upon, and after much correspondence, Witherspoon informed Page that \textit{Frankie and Johnny} would not be included on the Ballet International’s program.\textsuperscript{118} It was probably for the best, as Ballet International, unable to compete with Ballet Theatre and Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, closed after one year.

Thomas Hart Fisher, Page’s husband, was insistent on her behalf, however, approaching impresarios of larger companies to produce her works. In late 1944, Page took a film of the 1938 production of \textit{Frankie and Johnny} to Denham, the current director of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. Immediately following, Fisher sent copies of the 1938 Chicago reviews as well as drafts of contracts to Denham.\textsuperscript{119} After negotiations the contracts were finally signed, and Page was scheduled to join Ballet Russe’s tour in San Francisco in order to begin rehearsing \textit{Frankie and Johnny}.\textsuperscript{120}

\textit{Frankie and Johnny} opened for a “sneak preview” in Kansas City on January 7, 1945. Page and Stone, who was able to get away from his Topeka post, played the leads. The next stop would be New York, where \textit{Frankie and Johnny} was scheduled to open on February 28; but almost as soon as they arrived in New York to start rehearsing, trouble followed. First of all, the rehearsal pianist Rachel Chapman refused to play the score on more than one occasion, and Balanchine had to step in to play.\textsuperscript{121} Secondly, rampant censorship was affecting plays throughout the city, especially Broadway. The censorship fiasco that affected \textit{Frankie and Johnny} was over Dorothy and Howard Baker’s play, \textit{Trio}, a story of a young girl who is enslaved by a French woman professor, and after a

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 108.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 111.
time, the young girl is set free by her love for a young man.\textsuperscript{122} The play had opened in Philadelphia, and New York reported on the shock value of the lesbianism, so by the time it settled in New York at the privately owned Belasco Theatre on Broadway, it had gotten all of the publicity it needed. Curiosity brought customers, and \textit{Trio} played for two months, before Commissioner Paul Moss refused to renew the Belasco’s license unless it closed. \textit{Trio} closed of course, sending New York’s theatre into a censorship brawl. Playwright Elmer Rice and Director Webster resigned from the Board of Mayor LaGuardia’s “pet project” the city-owned New York City Center of Drama and Music.\textsuperscript{123} Ironically enough, the City Center, a publicly owned building, is where \textit{Frankie and Johnny} was scheduled to open only four days after \textit{Trio} closed.

\textit{Frankie and Johnny} may well be considered more sexually devious. The plot follows a love triangle that ends in murder. In the saloon scenes, there are two lesbians who croon over each other, although unless one knew they were supposed to be lesbians, they really only looked like they were having an intimate conversation.\textsuperscript{124} Every time a gentleman went into a room at the parlor house, the shades were drawn, implying what was going on in that room. The \textit{pas de deux} between Frankie and Johnny was quite suggestive, their bodies close together with Frankie’s legs constantly wrapping around Johnny. Denham, not wanting to make a stir, asked Page to self-censor the choreography during rehearsals, to tone down its frankness. Page agreed to make some changes, but only with enough rehearsal time; this, of course, could not happen on such short notice with other ballets already on the rehearsal schedule.\textsuperscript{125} Up until the curtain’s rise on Wednesday, February 28, Denham begged Page to make changes.\textsuperscript{126}

Page complied, but the changes were detrimental to the performance. Not only did they cause confusion among the dancers, but the line of the ballet was interrupted.\textsuperscript{127} Critics noticed. In John Martin’s review the following day, he states, “its choreography happens to be its weakest element…there is a general absence of sustained choreographic

\textsuperscript{122} “Broadway Censor,” \textit{Time Magazine}, (March 1945)
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{124} Videotape.
\textsuperscript{125} Martin, 111.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
line.”\textsuperscript{128} Martin did have praise for the music, the set, and the costumes, however, and he did say that the “Bartender’s Rag,” the “Fox Trot Murder,” and the “Funeral Party One-Step” are “very good indeed.”\textsuperscript{129} Edwin Denby said that with the censorship, \textit{Frankie and Johnny} was “no bawdier than Nedick’s orange drink.”\textsuperscript{130} Page and Stone were scheduled to return for the second performance, but at the last minute they backed out. With Denham begging for them to make even more changes, Page felt that they had compromised her choreography, and refused to dance. Ruthana Boris and Frederic Franklin, who were scheduled to play the roles of Frankie and Johnny following Page and Stone, took the stage early, on the second night. Martin reviewed that performance as well, saying that the choreographic line had “assumed clarity and continuity…Miss Boris dances Frankie with dramatic force and more variety…and manages at the same time to project a pungent comment on the character and the milieu.”\textsuperscript{131}

Martin liked \textit{Frankie and Johnny}, deeming it “the best ballet of the season.”\textsuperscript{132} He continued to comment that \textit{Frankie and Johnny} was “Racy, humorous, flavorsome and full of comment, it [succeeded] in breaking away admirably from the set formulas into which ballet composition tends more and more to fall.”\textsuperscript{133} Others did not find \textit{Frankie and Johnny} as enjoyable. Robert Coleman of the New York Daily Mirror titled his review, “’Frankie and Johnny’ An Empty Ballet.”\textsuperscript{134} Edwin Denby especially did not agree with Martin. In a review on March 4, Denby states, “…Frankie and Johnny is muddled as a dance composition. The dancers step, jerk and posture repeatedly, but no dances emerge, no effect of rhythm or of mounting vitality.”\textsuperscript{135} He goes on to say that “it should have been clear on the road, first, that it doesn’t represent ballet Americana and second, that the piece makes the Monte Carlo dancers look foolish, since it doesn’t give them a chance to dance.”\textsuperscript{136} Denby thought that \textit{Frankie and Johnny} had fallen short of

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Denby, 108.
\textsuperscript{132} John Martin, “‘The Dance: Annual Award,’” \textit{New York Times} (5 August 1945), 44.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Robert Coleman, “‘Frankie and Johnny’ An Empty Ballet,” \textit{New York Daily Mirror} (1 March 1945).
\textsuperscript{135} Denby, 107.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
the more current Americana ballets, *Rodeo* and *Fancy Free*, as they had raised the standard of expectations for an Americana ballet.

The question is, then, what had changed in American ballet since *Frankie and Johnny*’s conception in 1938 to cause Denby to discredit it and say that it fell short? *Frankie and Johnny* fit the bill as an important Americana ballet in 1938, why not 1945? By 1945 an American style had emerged, one that did not require Americana in order to distinguish itself. According to George Amberg, there were two schools of style in American ballet; the first, is the trend of *new classicism*, as manifested in the works of George Balanchine, and second, is the direction of the dramatic narrative, used by Tudor, de Mille, and Robbins, where expression can be amplified by other media—speech, song, music, and pantomime, that is integrated with the dance proper.137 Neither *Rodeo* nor *Fancy Free* use other media, but fall into the second category of dramatic narrative. While they are both subjects of Americana, they also contain elements of the American style; they are spontaneous, eloquent, frank, and informal.138 Two of de Mille’s other works, *Tally-Ho!* and *Three Virgins and a Devil* are not set in America, nor do they have American plot, but Amberg says “they are as unmistakably indigenous as *Rodeo*.”139 The American style was no longer dependent upon American subject matter, but the character and spirit of the execution, and the treatment of the theme.

*Frankie and Johnny* represented the rawness of the initial Americana works. In the seven years between its premiere and revival, ballet in America had begun to take a refined shape, especially in New York. Amberg suggests that the war had an impact on the development of American ballet, because the United States was isolated from the rest of the world and therefore reduced to its own sources and resources.140 Companies such as the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo were stranded in America, forced to satisfy demanding audiences. At the same time audiences were subject to what was being performed by such companies as the Ballet Russe and the Ballet Theatre. These two companies, along with Balanchine and American choreographers de Mille and Robbins,
were essential factors in the development of American ballet past the rawness of 1930s Americana.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

Frankie and Johnny remained in the repertoire of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo for several seasons. Reviews of its return to New York’s City Center stage focused on the dancer’s performances, especially Ruthana Boris and Frederic Franklin, who returned as Frankie and Johnny, and Pauline Goddard and Nikita Talin, who returned as the lusty Nellie Bly and bartender. Walter Terry’s review in 1946 mentions the numerous audience gaffaws, and that “the humor which underlies the rough and tumble ardor of the principals serves to translate the rather violent balletic lovemaking into hilarious satire.” It seems as though the naughtiness of Frankie and Johnny was finally put to the side, and the satire that Page and Moross intended, could be recognized.

Frankie and Johnny was revived by Les Ballets Américains, Cincinnati Ballet Company, Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, and the Dance Theatre of Harlem. Most notably, the 1950 revival was part of a collaborative effort between Page, Stone, and José Limón, a company called Les Ballets Américains. Les Ballets Américains was scheduled to appear for a three-week run at Paris’s Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, beginning on May 8. An important note is that the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées is the same stage in which Diaghilev’s early works appeared, most notably Le Sacre du Printemps. Repertoire of the tour included Page’s Scrapbook, Frankie and Johnny, Billy Sunday, and The Bells, as well as Limon’s works. Interestingly enough, the production caused “boos,” “catcalls” and “hisses” from the audience members, especially from those in the balcony, and local papers described it as “unprecedented.” But based upon information, specifically a letter from the maitre de ballet of the Opéra-Comique, Jean-Jacques Etchevéry, it was discovered that the riot had all been planned, as retaliation to the picketing by American dancers in 1948 in New York, at the arrival of the Paris Opera Ballet, under the direction of Serge Lifar. The upset in New York was aimed at Lifar, for his supposed collaboration with the Nazis during the war. He was cleared, in Paris at least, of the

142 Turner, 679.
144 “Mephisto’s Musings,” Musical America (June 1950), 13.
The remaining performances of Les Ballets Américains were virtually without interruption.

The Dance Theatre of Harlem’s revival of Frankie and Johnny was in 1981. Staged by Frederic Franklin, it appeared at Covent Garden, London, with Balanchine’s Bugaku and Allegro Brillante. Mary Clarke called Frankie and Johnny “dated,” but that it is “an early example of Ruth Page’s pioneering choice of subject matter for American ballet.” By 1981, the revival of Frankie and Johnny was seen as a revival of history, not necessarily as a revival of a ballet that needed to return to the repertoire.

Page’s endeavor to create original American works continued past Frankie and Johnny. She choreographed Guns and Castanets, a sort-of modern-day Carmen, for the third and final production of the Federal Theatre Project Dance Unit of Chicago in 1939. Music was modeled on Bizet’s Carmen and orchestrated by Moross. Her artistic creativity continued in Billy Sunday (1946) and The Bells (1947), where poetry is recited during the performance. Page continued to create new, original works throughout the 1970s, however, many of her works do not remain in today’s repertoire. Her legacy lies in her importance in the initial movement to find a uniquely American style of ballet.

After Frankie and Johnny, Moross composed two more ballets, both for Page: Guns and Castanets and The Last Judgement (1953). The latter, an updated story of Adam and Eve that absolves woman of original sin, was never produced. Moross’s later stage works included the musicals The Golden Apple (1954), which won the 1954 Drama Critics Award, and Gentlemen, Be Seated! (1956). Moross is probably most known for his film scores, such as, The Big Country (1958), which earned him an Academy Award Nomination, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1960), and The Cardinal (1963).

An important part of American ballet’s history is the existence of the musical scores, independent of the dancing. Many ballet scores exist nowadays as suites, for example, Copland actually organized his ballets into shorter suites, for concert performance. A perfect example is Rodeo, whose concert suite is made of four

145 Martin, “The Dance.”
147 Reynolds, 133.
148 Turner, 686.
149 Ibid., 708-14.
movements: “Buckaroo Holiday,” “Corral Nocturne,” “Piano Interlude and Saturday Night Waltz,” and “Hoe-Down.” In Moross’s score, he indicates how the work should be performed in a concert setting, when the percussion parts, the tambourine, bass drum, and triangle of the “Saving Susies,” should be played by the percussionists. The “Introduction” is expanded, but otherwise, the score for the ballet suite remains the same as the ballet. The score has been recorded at least four times.\(^{150}\)

There was one other performance opportunity for Moross’s score of *Frankie and Johnny*. It seems that Jerome Robbins contacted Moross at one time, to use his score of *Frankie and Johnny* for a production of Robbins’s own.\(^{151}\) However, the collaboration between Robbins and Moross never occurred, as Page held all rights to performances of *Frankie and Johnny*, including the music, and it could only be performed with her own choreography.\(^{152}\)

Using America’s heritage for inspiration became the model for ballets in the 1930s. The familiarity of the traditional subjects, both in terms of story or music, could reach out to and be understood by average, American audiences in contrast to the foreign tales and sometimes abstract performances by foreign ballet companies. The survival of *Frankie and Johnny* from this tradition, along with the tracking of its reception at different points in time, provides yet another tool for the evaluation of the developments of both the American style in ballet as well as the significant musical values in its history.

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\(^{151}\) Copy of Western Union telegram dated November 6, 1944, from Jerome Robbins Care Century Artists Limited to Jerome Moross. Courtesy of Susanna Moross-Tarjan.

\(^{152}\) Susanna Moross-Tarjan, Moross’s daughter, currently own the rights to the music.
APPENDIX A

CAST LIST FOR 1938 PRODUCTION

Choreography by Ruth Page and Bentley Stone
Music by Jerome Moross
Book by Michael Blankford and Jerome Moross
Costumes by Paul DuPont
Set by Clive Rickabaugh

Frankie..................Ruth Page
Johnny..................Bentley Stone
Nellie Bly..................Ann Devine
Bartender..................Sean Marino

Saving Susies...............Velma Replogle, Vera Pollitt, Frances Oliver
Barroom Girls...............Ursula Dessey, Mary Gehr, Prudence Goodspeed,
                            Aunnie Huelsman, Betsy Ross, Rosemary Shawn
Barflies....................David Ahdar, Harry Burns, Frank Callender, Edwin Gibson,
                            Stephen Haddon, Carl Harms, Kenneth MacKenzie,
                            Richard Reed.

153 Federal Theatre Program Note, copy courtesy Susanna Moross-Tarjan.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lindsey Boone Atkinson is a native of Bartlesville, OK. She graduated from the University of Arkansas in 2004 with a Bachelor of Music in flute performance, *summa cum laude*. Boone graduated in 2007 from The Florida State University with a Master of Music in historical musicology. She currently resides in Tallahassee, Florida with her husband Sean and dog Taz.