

Jerome Robbins began his journey as a dancer in the Ballet Theatre Company, which would later be renamed the American Ballet Theatre. The company produced classical ballets, but also encouraged innovative work. When the company faced financial problems and had to bring in new management, Jerome grew weary of only performing in pieces that told stories of the past. Thus, *Fancy Free* was born.

Premiered in April of 1944, *Fancy Free* was a revolutionary ballet that focused on telling the story of the modern men and women in New York. The three main characters were created specifically for himself and two of his close friends. A big focus of his was to properly convey the characters so that the audience had a clear understanding of them. It was a new idea, telling the stories of the present day, but he was not alone in this movement. Other choreographers, such as Agnes De Mille and Antony Tudor, were also producing these kinds of works. Though his dancers were performing difficult choreography, it was important to him that they still seemed like real people. His rehearsals tended to run longer than most simply because he wanted to perfect the “attitudes” conveyed in the piece.

Eventually, *Fancy Free* became the basis of the musical *On the Town*, thus launching his career in musical theatre. Some of his most notable works on Broadway were *West Side Story*, *Fiddler On the Roof*, and *The Pajama Game*. When working on *West Side Story*, in order to facilitate the hostility between the on-stage gangs, they were not permitted to associate with each other off-stage. This goes hand-in-hand with the idea that he wanted the characters to be as realistic as possible.

Having compelling characters that can dance ballet while conveying a gang-member is a major part of Jerome Robbin’s legacy. In fact, this legacy fed into the expectation of the American dancer to be versatile.