

KINO LORBER

Afternoon of a Faun Tanaquil le Clercq

(US, 2013, TRT 91mins)



Directed by Nancy Buirski

Produced by Nancy Buirski and Ric Burns

Produced by Augusta Films in association with Steeplechase films.
Co-Produced by American Masters.

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KEY CREDITS

WRITER / DIRECTOR

Nancy Buirski

PRODUCED BY

Nancy Buirski

Ric Burns

EDITOR

Damian Rodriguez

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Rick Rodgers

PROJECT ADVISOR

Martin Scorsese

SPECIAL CONSULTANT

Barbara Horgan

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Derek Britt

Krysanne Katsoolis

Susan Lacy

PRODUCERS

Paola Freccero

Bonnie Lafave

Alysa Nahmias

WITH

Randy Bourscheidt

Jacques D'Amboise

Barbara Horgan

Pat McBride Lousada

Arthur Mitchell

Voice of Tanaquil Le Clercq

Marianne Bower

Voice of Jerome Robbins

Michael Stuhlbarg

FEATURING

Black and White Photographs by Jerome Robbins

Special Archival Footage by Jerome Robbins and by Martha Swope

Tanaquil Le Clercq's voice recorded by Barbara Newman in an interview for her book "*Striking a Balance.*"

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SYNOPSIS

Of all the great ballerinas, Tanaquil Le Clercq may have been the most transcendent. With a body unlike any before hers, she mesmerized viewers and choreographers alike. With her elongated, race-horse physique, she became the new prototype for the great George Balanchine.

Because of her extraordinary movement and unique personality on stage, she became a muse to two of the greatest choreographers in dance, George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins. She eventually married Balanchine and Robbins created his famous version of *Afternoon of a Faun* for her.

She had love, fame, adoration, and was the foremost dancer of her day until it suddenly all stopped. At the age of 27, she was struck down by polio and paralyzed. She never danced again. The ballet world has been haunted by her story ever since.

Critically acclaimed Peabody and Emmy-award winner *The Loving Story* (HBO) Director-Producer Nancy Buirski brings to the screen for the first time the magnificent and tragic story of Tanaquil Le Clercq. With a soul-stirring soundtrack and exquisite visuals, this is a story of how one woman so passionately influenced an entire art form and two of its most prolific and renowned creators. She was the nexus of inspiration, beauty, and invention, suddenly turned into a statistic. *AFTERNOON OF A FAUN: TANAQUIL LE CLERCQ* is a frighteningly real, amazingly candid portrait of an artist. Rarely has a film revealed such a dramatic experience on such an intimate scale.

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TANAQUIL LE CLERCQ

Born in Paris in 1929, Tanaquil was the daughter of a French intellectual and a society matron from St. Louis. When Tanny was 3, they moved to New York where Jacques Le Clercq taught romance languages. Tanny began ballet training in New York at age 5, studying with Mikhail Mordkin. She eventually transitioned to the School of American Ballet, which George Balanchine had founded in 1934. Balanchine discovered Tanny as a student there, and at the tender age of 15, he cast her as Choleric in *The Four Temperaments* along with the great prima ballerinas in his company, then called Ballet Society. Before long she was dancing solo roles as a member of Ballet Society, never having danced in the corps de ballet. Some of Balanchine's most memorable ballets were choreographed on Tanny; notably *Symphony in C*, *La Valse*, *Concerto Barocco* and *Western Symphony*. She was the original Dew Drop in *The Nutcracker*.

Jerome Robbins was also fascinated with Tanny; famously attributing his enchantment with her unique style of dancing with his decision to join the New York City Ballet and work under Balanchine as both a dancer and choreographer. It was there he created his radical version of *Afternoon of a Faun* on Tanny. His fascination with Tanny intensified, and the emerging theater and ballet choreographer was heartbroken when she decided to marry George Balanchine in 1952.

The 50s was a notable time in the culture of New York City. Creative voices were flocking to the city following the end of the war and audiences were seeking out new art forms. But it was also a time fraught by a polio epidemic impacting young and old. Communities were gripped by real and imagined fears as the disease floated over cities, town and country like a cloud. No one was immune, not even the supremely gifted.

In the fall of 1956, The New York City Ballet travelled to Europe on tour. In preparation, dancers were inoculated with the Salk vaccine, which had proven successful in historic trials on children just years before. Sadly, Tanny chose not to take the shot. During the company's stay on Copenhagen, Tanny collapsed. She was rushed to the hospital and placed in an iron lung, not expected to live. She'd been stricken with polio and severely paralyzed. She would never walk or dance again.

Tanny spent six months in a Danish Hospital renowned for its work on Infantile Paralysis. Balanchine took a leave from New York City Ballet to help with her treatment, and Robbins wrote her passionate letters. Six months later, Tanny was moved to Warm Springs, GA to the country's pre-imminent treatment center. George Balanchine continued to nurse her, creating movements to help her regain control of her muscles. Jerome Robbins visited her and took the most enduring photographs of her to date.

But eventually, both men had to accept what Tanny already knew. She would never dance again. And she would never inspire them. George Balanchine divorced Tanny in 1969. Jerome Robbins went on to work on stage and in film.

Tanny bravely survived on her own until she died at age 71. During that time she taught at Arthur Mitchell's Dance Theatre of Harlem, though she primarily lived a private life attending the ballet on occasion. Although Tanny's career was cut short, she will always be remembered in the ballets that were created for her – *Western Symphony*, *La Valse*, *Metamorphosis*, and the eponymous *Afternoon of a Faun*.

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TANAQUIL LE CLERCQ (CONTINUED)

Her life after dance is the story of universal hope and of a strong woman emboldened by inner strength and love of life. Dancers learn to live in the moment; they know their careers will not last long. Tanny's resiliency is a product of her life as a dancer and the enduring power of the human spirit.

DIRECTORS STATEMENT

AFTERNOON OF A FAUN illuminates the exceptional qualities of Tanny in life and in dance. It portrays her artistic triumph and her personal tragedy. Through her own words and through the people who knew and loved her, our film captures her love of dance, her unique personality full of humor, candor and passion, and her position as the inspiration and love of arguably the two leading 20th century choreographers working in America.

The subject of artist and muse has fascinated me since my own days as a painter and later a photographer. The poignancy of this ephemeral relationship enchants me; indeed an early inspiration for this documentary was the 1944 film *Portrait of Jenny*, a film whose score directly influenced my own. The Debussy music in the 1944 David O' Selznick film, especially the piece *Afternoon of a Faun*, captured the haunting, romantic and elusive relationship between the painter, played by Joseph Cotton, and his young muse, played by Jennifer Jones. The first time I saw footage of Tanaquil Le Clercq dancing was in Robbins' haunting ballet set to the same music; the mystical, eroticism of that music underscoring her dance impressed me as it had in the 1946 film. Even as a child I'd felt the pain of the artist as he yearns for the muse he cannot have; the same quality seems ever present in the men who appear to want to possess Tanny. Jacques D'Amboise tells us that Balanchine needed the unattainable; it is painfully ironic that even as Balanchine ultimately "processes" Tanny as his wife, her role as his inspiration will become elusive.

The possibility of treating Tanny's intensely dramatic story as poetry was highly attractive to me as the painter as well as the filmmaker. A ballet dancer tries to ascend weightlessly into air, only to be brought back by the earth's gravitational pull. It is the poetry of dance itself, and what could be more symbolic of the art form than a transcendental dancer pulled back to earth forever. It is what all dancers fear and face as they age out of their professions - so much sooner than most. It is a form of death greeting them prematurely. Balanchine created *La Valse* for Tanaquil Le Clercq - death comes to her, it embraces her and she falls to the ground, dead. It was the metaphor of dance as he had come to know it. Our film has tried to capture this poetry in mood, music and stirring dance.

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THE MAKING OF AFTERNOON OF A FAUN: TANAQUIL LE CLERCQ

Having seen a short segment on Tanny Le Clercq in the documentary on Jerome Robbins called *Something to Dance About*, I immediately committed to portraying the life of this extraordinary dancer, woman and survivor. Robert Weiss, Director of the North Carolina Ballet and a former NYCB dancer, introduced me to Barbara Horgan, Balanchine's long-time assistant and Managing Director of the George Balanchine Trust, who quickly offered support. In the fall of 2011, Ric Burns and Steeplechase Films offered production assistance and research began in earnest.

This film could not have been made without the full corporation of the George Balanchine Trust headed by Ellen Sorrin as well as the Jerome Robbins Foundation led by Christopher Pennington. We would not have progressed as quickly and as successfully without the able research team at Steeplechase, notable Katie O'Rourke, and eventually, post production assistance by Cactus 3 (Krysanne Katsoolis). With remarkable footage and photographs in hand, some shot by Jerome Robbins, I began editing with Damian Rodriguez (Public Speaking). Martin Scorsese served as project and creative advisor and inspired us with his notes. America Masters came on as co-producers.

Other remarkable footage and photographs were offered by Martha Swope, the acclaimed ballet photographer. But it was not her ballet photographs that make the lasting impression, but the home movies she made of Tanny traveling in Europe in her wheelchair. They form indelible moments in our film.

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DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Nancy Buirski

Buirski is the Director, Producer and Writer of *Afternoon of a Faun: Tanaquil Le Clercq* that had its World Premiere at the 51st New York Film Festival. She is the Director, Producer and Writer of the Emmy Award-winning *The Loving Story* (2011) that appeared on HBO in February 2012. The film was a recipient of a coveted Peabody Award as well as a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. It had its festival premiere at the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, followed by Tribeca, Silverdocs, Hamptons and Palm Springs and many other film festivals in the U.S. and abroad. It was included in the shortlist for the 2011 Academy Awards and was selected for Sundance's Film Forward, the U.S. State Department's American Film Showcase, and has screened at the White House. It has won numerous other awards including the American Historical Association's 2012 John E. O'Connor Award, the Gabriel Award and the NAMIC Vision Award.

Buirski is a Producer of *Harlem Woodstock* (Director Alex Gibney), *Althea* (Director Rex Miller) and Consulting Producer of *Private Violence* (Director Cynthia Hill), premiering at Sundance in January. She is producing a narrative version of the Lovings' story in association with Colin Firth and Ged Doherty and is in development on *The Donner Party* with Ric Burns for HBO Original Programming. Buirski will next direct *Endangered*, a live-action and animated narrative based on Eliot Schrefer's award-winning book.

As Curator and Producer, Buirski founded and was the Director of the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival for 10 years. She produced five collections of Full Frame shorts with Docurama and a library collection of feature-length documentaries, *The Katrina Experience*. She was Executive Producer of TED's Pangea Day Film Content. Prior to her work in film, Buirski was the Foreign Picture Editor at *The New York Times*, garnering the paper its first Pulitzer Prize in photography. Her photo book *Earth Angels: Migrant Children in American* was published by Pomegranate Press. Prints from the collection were exhibited at the Smithsonian and traveled throughout the U.S.

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ADDITIONAL CREW BIOGRAPHIES

Ric Burns – Producer. Ric Burns is an internationally recognized documentary filmmaker and writer, best known for his eight-part, seventeen and a half hour series, *New York: A Documentary Film*, which premiered nationally on PBS to wide public and critical acclaim when broadcast in November 1999, September 2001, and September 2003. Burns has been writing, directing and producing historical documentaries for nearly 20 years, since his collaboration on the celebrated PBS series *The Civil War*, (1990), which he produced with his brother Ken and co-wrote with Geoffrey C. Ward. Since founding Steeplechase Films in 1989, he has directed some of the most distinguished programs in the award-winning public television series, *American Experience*, including *Coney Island* (1991), *The Donner Party* (1992), *The Way West* (1995), and *Ansel Adams* (2002), a co-production of Steeplechase Films and Sierra Club Productions.

In 2006, Burns released both *Eugene O’Neill* and *Andy Warhol* to critical acclaim. The two films garnered 2006-2007 Primetime and News and Documentary Emmy Awards for outstanding writing for non-fiction programming; *Andy Warhol* also received a 2006 Peabody Broadcasting Award. In 2009, Mr. Burns completed *We Shall Remain: Tecumseh’s Vision*, part two of a five-part history of Native America, followed by the Emmy nominated documentary *Into the Deep: America, Whaling & the World* in 2010, both of which aired nationally as part of WGBH Boston’s *American Experience*.

Mr. Burns most recently finished *Death and the Civil War*, a film based on the best-selling book *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* by acclaimed historian and Harvard president Drew Gilpin Faust.

Damian Rodriguez – Editor. Damian Rodriguez was born and raised in Austin, TX. He started working in recording studios in high school and graduated from University of Texas studying sound and film.

Moving to New York City in 2000 he began picture editing and has since worked on such important documentaries as HBO’s *Public Speaking* with Fran Lebowitz and *American Masters’ No Direction Home: Bob Dylan* both directed by Martin Scorsese. He was recently the picture editor on *The Making of the Album Viva Duets* with Tony Bennett.

Rick Rodgers – Director of Photography. Rodgers is director and cinematographer of three feature films: *Sweets* (Kevin Corrigan, Catherine Kellner and Sarita Choudhury), *Adam Shaw* (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Josh Hamilton and Juliet Rylance), and *Ossining* (Christian Camargo, Bobby Cannavale and Arjun Gupta) all in post production. He is currently director and cinematographer of two feature documentaries *The Third Act of Marian Seldes* and *The Trials of Constance Baker Motley*.

His short doc *Crash&Burn* world premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival (Other festivals include LA Shorts, Sedona, Williamstown and Woodstock). After graduating from the Rhode Island School of Design he worked as a graphic designer in London and New York. As an actor he is best known for playing *Robson* for 5 seasons on the critically acclaimed HBO series *OZ*.

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ADDITIONAL CREW BIOGRAPHIES (CONTINUED)

Barbara Horgan – Consultant Barbara Horgan began working at New York City Ballet in 1953, becoming George Balanchine’s personal assistant in 1962, a position she held until his death in 1983. From 1953 to 1982, she was instrumental in bringing Balanchine’s work to film and television, including numerous programs for The Bell Telephone Hour, Dance in America, and Live from Lincoln Center.

Ms. Horgan is Chairman of the Board of Directors of the George Balanchine Foundation, which was incorporated as a not-for-profit organization soon after his death to further Balanchine’s work and aesthetic through concentrated research, lectures and videos, publications, and ballet reconstructions. Ms. Horgan is also the Founding Trustee and Managing Director of the George Balanchine Trust, founded in 1987 to administer the licensing of his works throughout the world.