



THE TOUCH OF CLASS

The education of a ballet dancer begins with a leap of faith ö and never ends
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By Toni Bentley

The New York State Theater at Lincoln Center, where the New York City Ballet lives, doesnât have any windows. Few theaters do, and what windows there are are relegated to the farthestmost offices, where business, paper work, ticket sales and other financial matters take place. The personnel who work there need sunlight and some vision of the real world from which they come and to which they go daily; it is altogether appropriate for their line of work.

But we dancers see no daylight at all once we enter the theater. Who else (but other performers in other theaters) spend all their working hours in a place that has no sunlight? The only other structure where there is a misrepresentation of natural light is a church, where light is framed, colored and restructured by stained glass.

And so we dancers are hidden. More important, we hide. We hide from the sights of human frailty and faultiness that proliferate on New York streets, and from the conventionality of days dependent on the weather, rush hours and time itself. We have work to do.

Why do we live (and we do, in every sense of the word, from sleeping, eating and washing ourselves and our clothes to experiencing the full gamut of emotions) in this fluorescent-lit fortress? Why is the clock only an arbitrary guide by which we know where to be when? Why is there only one tiny, camouflaged entrance and exit passage into a building that could easily contain one thousand Upper West Side apartments? Why is the door open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, with a police guard at attention? Why do people stare when one passes through that doorway? And why do we dancers enter proudly with dark glasses in the morning and leave twelve hours later and five pounds thinner? Why do we choose--and we have chosen and choose again each dayö-to be so cloistered? Why do we not strike when given the chance? Why do we so smugly give up what many people (who might look in the windows if they existed) think they want from life? Why do those few who choose to leave to pursue their thoughts always return?

It is not for money and it is not for personal fame. Our individual work as dancers is transient, irretrievable, unrepeatable and unpossessed. We do not think of what we want--we know. We enter the theater each day with the apparent blindness that is the