

when the student becomes the master



Steven Caras *photograph by David White*
styled by Cynthia Altoriso
backdrop by Charles Broderson
Suit and tie by David Hart
Boots by Wolverine, 1000 Mile

Steven Caras has taken his own inventive path as a dancer, teacher, photographer, ballet master, author, philanthropist, and motivational speaker.

Having followed the long and multifaceted career of Steven Caras, I, among many, have witnessed the emergence and evolution of a brilliant master gardener, not an inappropriate metaphor given the enduring inspiration of his mentor, the legendary George Balanchine, who often referred to his choreographic process as cultivating a garden.

Balachine also prided himself as being an expert chef, frequently stimulating his dancers' imagination with clever references to food imagery. Yet underneath the wit, he fervently tended his garden of exquisite dancers – hothouse flowers in his words. In the process of streamlining a classical art form, Balachine produced a bountiful menu of masterworks for his one of a kind dancers, all with the intention of gratifying the insatiable appetites of his ever-growing audience.

Steven Caras has taken his own inventive path as a dancer, photographer, teacher, ballet master, author, critic, master of ceremonies, philanthropist, and motivational speaker. Ironically, considering his astounding experience and related credentials, the one role Caras would be best-suited for, but has yet to take on, would be that of a ballet company's artistic director. After all, he pursued an arduous and challenging apprenticeship under Balachine and long after before emerging himself as his own master gardener and versatile chef, satisfying the artistic hunger for HIS students, colleagues and audiences. Yet what is especially extraordinary about his story is that Steven Caras has become the influential leader he is today by responding at an early age to an inner urge that grew self-nurtured in all but a barren landscape.

As a young boy in a largely arts-free setting in suburban New Jersey, Caras struggled with a hunger for artistic emancipation that went unsated until he first saw ballet on television – an experience that simultaneously planted and germinated the seeds of his future. With only his mother's loving support and despite relentless bullying and branding as a “sissy,” fifteen year-old Steven courageously ventured into New York to pursue his passion. Against all odds, he landed a full scholarship to the School of American Ballet and within a stunningly short period of time, was personally invited by George Balachine to join his world-famous New York City Ballet. Life would never be the same for this high school senior from New Jersey who Balachine would affectionately refer to as “the Greek boy.”

After fourteen years performing Balachine and Jerome Robbins ballets around the globe, Steven was shocked one fateful day to learn that he'd lost his favorite role to a newcomer in the troupe. Facing the cold truth that he was no exception to the fact that the shelf life of a dancer was limited, he felt for the sake of sanity,

a hobby was in order. Always fascinated with the great dance artists who surrounded him, Caras' preferred location when not performing himself was in the wings, devouring the artistry his colleagues continued to inspire at close range. Soon he found himself in the wings, still in awe, but with camera in hand and on the threshold of cultivating his longtime interest in photography. Fortuitously, Mr. Balachine recognized his Greek boy's special photographic talent and immediately began to mentor him, scrutinizing and critiquing his images while offering invaluable insight and encouragement. Not long after, Caras embarked on a meteoric second career, soon to be recognized as one of the consummate dance photographers of the 20th century.

As a result of his innate visual gift nurtured by extensive involvement in a golden age of dance history, Caras captured lasting impressions of some of the most intimate and iconic moments of late 20th and early 21st century dance. His Last Bow, George Balachine's final curtain call with the New York City Ballet, deemed by many the quintessential ballet moment, is universally renowned as among the most iconic dance images of all time.

To view a Steven Caras photograph is to relive the dynamic essence of the moment in the present, no matter how long ago that moment was recorded. His body of work – more than 120,000 photographs – is today considered one of the dance world's most valuable and historically significant archives.

With the death of Balachine in 1983, Caras resigned as a dancer and devoted his full time to photographing a panoply of international dancers, ballet companies and related events. In studying dance so scrupulously through his microscopic lens and over so many years, his comprehension of classical ballet deepened immeasurably. Having accumulated this added wealth of information, he was determined to pass it on to the current generation of dancers. To his delight, he discovered that the institutions he worked with were as hungry for his balletic insights as they were for his photographs. Without abandoning his camera, he would now take on the role of ballet master with several companies including Ballet Florida and Miami City Ballet, imparting his first-hand knowledge through teaching and rehearsing the Balachine and Robbins repertoire. By late 2003, having long recognized the importance of hands-on experience in comprehending all pieces of the non-profit puzzle, Steven Caras eagerly accepted Miami City Ballet's invitation to serve as director of development for their entire northern, tri-county operation. West Palm's Kravis Center for the Performing Arts, impressed that an expert of such pedigree lived and worked within reach, soon engaged him as a regular guest lecturer, paving the way to the



next career in his perpetual development.

Today, Steven Caras is unsurprisingly respected as one of the major forces in the promotion and support of the arts in South Florida and beyond. He is a much-in-demand lecturer and keynote speaker, galvanizing people of all ages as he fulfills the artistic hunger of current arts lovers while tending to the cultivation of audiences to come. Equally critical to Caras' mission, he draws upon his own life experience in encouraging young people to wholeheartedly believe that they too must pursue what they are genuinely passionate about in order to succeed.

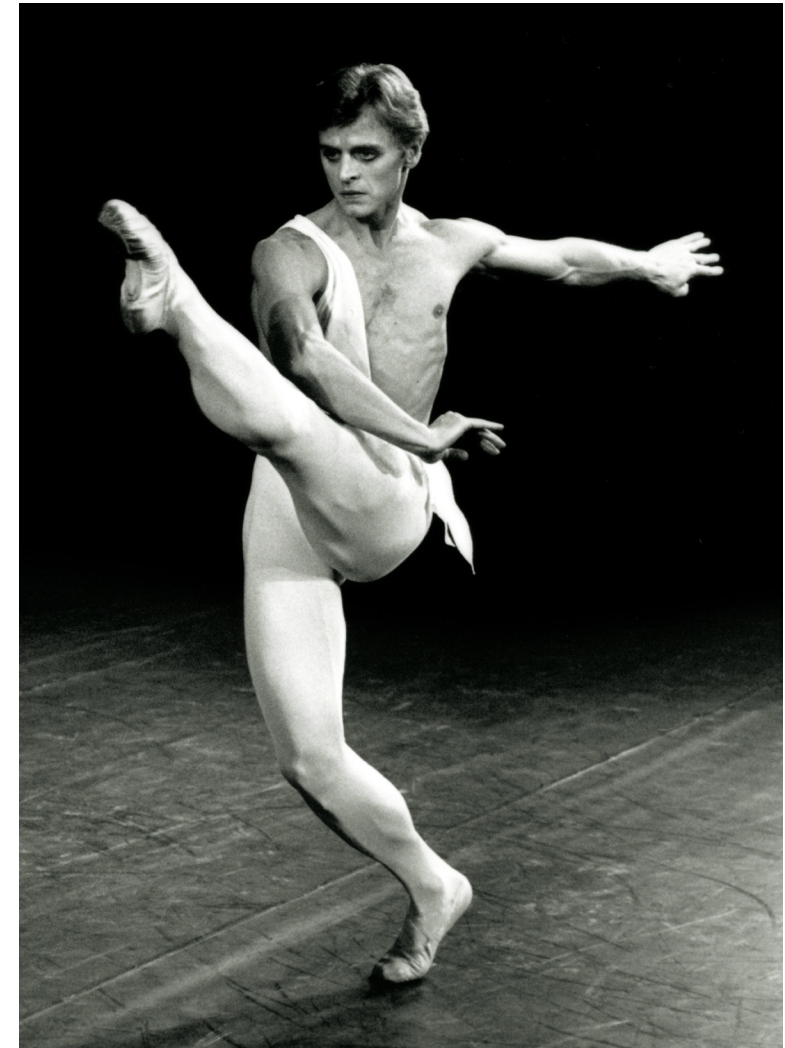
Presently airing on public television stations across the nation, the compelling Emmy-winning PBS documentary *Steven Caras: See Them Dance*, chronicles Caras' life accomplishments with a special emphasis on the enduring impact of his photographic work. To that end, he is in the process of identifying a major public or private institution eager to provide permanent access to his comprehensive collection. Caras is certain that under professional curatorial management, the archive finally will be available for use by members of a vast international audience who have long-awaited the opportunity to avail themselves of the rich educational and research benefits of this priceless body of work.



About the Author: Andrew Wentink is a graduate of Middlebury College and Columbia University. He began his professional career as Manuscript Archivist at the Dance Division of the Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center. A cultural historian, archivist, writer, and filmmaker, he recently left his position as Curator of Special Collections & Archives at Middlebury College where he taught classes in American Studies, Film & Media Culture, and Dance, to pursue a freelance career in research, writing and teaching.



Caras' photograph Last Bow, George Balachine's final curtain call with the New York City Ballet, deemed by many as the quintessential ballet moment.



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1. *Jerome Robbins' Glass Pieces*,
Simone Schumacher & Jeppe Mydtskov,
New York City Ballet, 1988

2. *Apollo*, Mikhail Baryshnikov
Paris, 1979

3. *Last Bow*, George Balachine
with New York City Ballet,
July 4, 1982

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