

June 1, 2005 CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK By Lewis Segal, Times Staff Writer  
'Belated Premiere'



A century ago, when motion pictures were still merely a sideshow novelty, Russian character dancer Alexander Shirayev proposed using them to preserve the finest choreography and performances of the age.

As the assistant to the great Marius Petipa — who had co-choreographed the definitive version of "Swan Lake" nine years earlier — Shirayev wanted to document the achievements of the company that is now the Kirov Ballet. Its administration turned him down, however, so he spent the rest of his life filming dancers in various outdoor settings, re-creating choreography through animated drawings and even restaging Kirov repertory with tiny puppets, shot frame by frame. Shirayev's long-lost dance films and sense of mission are the focus of "Belated Premiere," an invaluable documentary by Victor Bocharov to be shown June 19 at the UCLA Hammer Museum as part of the sixth annual Dance Camera West film festival. Unfortunately, the festival as a whole pretty much ignores the relationship between film and dance that Shirayev envisioned in favor of dances created not in a dancer's body or the mind of a choreographer but in the editing room. To be sure, there's plenty of filmic energy on view in the 10 programs that begin tonight at REDCAT in Walt Disney Concert Hall and then move to the American Cinematheque's Max Palevsky Theatre at the Aero, the Getty Center, the Hammer and the Aratani/Japan America Theatre plaza before ending on June 25 with open-air screenings in Coldwater Canyon Park. . . In concept, the prevalent mode of direction exploits the prime postmodern tenet that any kind of movement can be construed as dance, and links that tenet to the music-video practice of having a continuous action bounce from one radically different environment to another. But there's nothing new in these ideas or their linkage, and as their implementation has grown increasingly arbitrary, year after year, the festival's selections have become largely irrelevant to contemporary dance, utterly missing or ignoring the creative energies reshaping the art." More than a quarter of a century ago, choreographer Merce Cunningham took another approach by using bursts of noise and talk as accompaniments to his dance-for-camera experiments. In the same way, his new "Views on Camera" (tonight at REDCAT) ignores the current clichés of filming dance by adopting a deceptively fluid, linear style. Set in an unusually bright, clean and airy studio — with a rooftop sequence midway through — the 24-minute film begins conventionally enough with a string of overlapping male solos. But soon Cunningham and filmmaker Charles Atlas are offering partial views of ensemble choreography and arranging shots with a few dancers in medium close-up while others are seen far, far behind them in extreme deep-focus. Although these strategies are impossible to achieve in a theater, Cunningham recently adapted this piece for the stage, and his company will perform it one night after the REDCAT screening, at the Ahmanson Theatre: a chance to see how film choreography can enrich theatrical dancing, rather than the other way around. Besides Cunningham, Lloyd Newson defies the Dance Camera West norm this year by harnessing a compelling choreographic vision to the freedoms that film allows in his dance musical "The Cost of Living" (scheduled on a six-part REDCAT program June 17). A project for his London-based DV8 Physical Theatre, this 34-minute study of relationships conveys Newson's typically mordant view of sexual politics. But among its surprises are scenes featuring a tattooed, hoop-spinning woman in a red bikini — a 21st century incarnation of those irresistible, dangerous female nature-spirits with wings on their backs who haunted 19th century ballets. Just try to possess them .... Perhaps the most inventive sequence in "The Cost of Living" comes after a legless man is brutally taunted. Suddenly, not only does he begin to dance but a corps also appears behind him, exploring the movement vocabulary they'd be using if they too had no legs. Like so many other moments in this film, this one uses dance to depict a character's transfiguration, and it not only conveys a compassionate statement about human resilience but it even makes rolling on the ground look freshly conceived.

Information on schedules and ticket prices can be found at (213) 480-8633 or [www.dancecamerawest.org](http://www.dancecamerawest.org).

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