

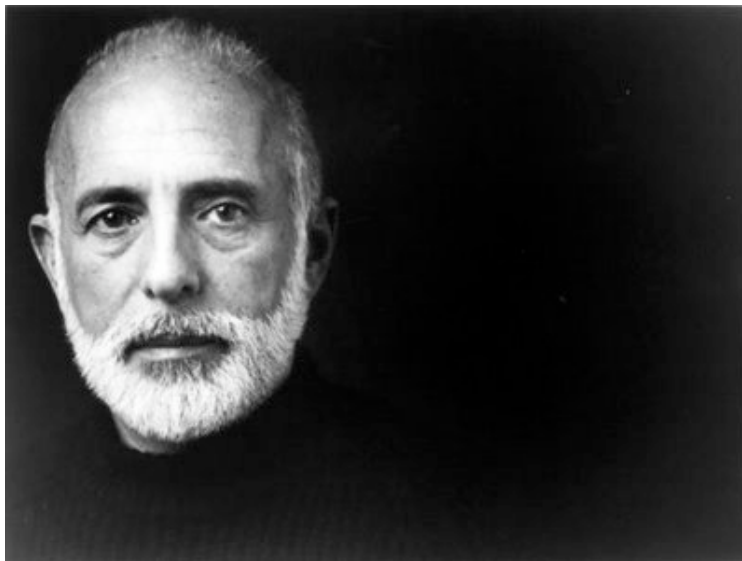


PICTURE QUEUED.

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Dance performances and film festivals are rife throughout southern California, but only one event combines the two. The Dance Camera West 8th Annual Dance Media Film Festival will take place June 5 to June 21 at venues throughout greater Los Angeles. Acclaimed as one of the world's foremost celebrations of dance on film, Dance Camera West (DCW) brings together dancers, filmmakers and other artists to explore, in the words of the festival's press materials, "the intersection of cinematography and choreography." As festival founder-director Lynette Kessler explains, "Dance is an art form that is universally understood and celebrated; it can break down the barriers that oftentimes separate (southern California's) culturally diverse communities." These communities include the LGBT presence. Mindful of the longstanding contributions of gay and lesbian artists to dance, DCW's 2009 festival will spotlight several significant gay dancer-choreographers. First up is the legendary Jerome Robbins, who transformed the possibilities of the Broadway musical with such mid-20th century triumphs as *On the Town*, *The King and I*, *Gypsy*, *West Side Story* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. He extended his artistry from the New York stage to Hollywood with several of their film adaptations.



AMERICAN MASTERS Jerome Robbins: Something to Dance About is a feature-length documentary exploring the man's life and achievements. It will be shown as part of DCW on June 13 at the Hammer Museum. Admission is free and no reservations are necessary but seating is on a strictly first come, first served basis. The film aired nationally in February on PBS, but Kessler persuaded local affiliate KCET to postpone any additional southern California broadcasts of it until after the festival. Through vintage interviews of Robbins, contemporary interviews with many who knew him (including gay faves Chita Rivera, Stephen

Sondheim and Rita Moreno), and archival footage of the famed choreographer at work, many previously-hidden facts about Robbins come to light. Among them is Robbins' tortured struggle with his sexuality. His one-time fiancée, Rose Tobias Shaw, reveals Robbins "had relationships with men and women all his life," and recalls the night closeted actor Montgomery Clift showed up drunk on their doorstep. Shaw quickly realized Clift was Robbins' ex-boyfriend. *AMERICAN MASTERS Jerome Robbins: Something to Dance About* is a fascinating film about an extraordinary, if often conflicted, man. On June 21, DCW will present "Contemporary Sacred: Indigenous Dance Artists in Contemporary Culture" at the Atrium National Center. Two documentaries will be shown that depict First Nation and Native American — and openly gay — dancer-choreographers Byron Chief-Moon and Jock Soto.



I had the privilege of screening the film about Soto, *Water Flowing Together* (the title is an English translation of the artist's Navajo clan name), in advance. Raised on a remote reservation in northern Arizona, Soto displayed an early interest in and talent for dance. He was only 16 when George Balanchine selected him to join the New York City Ballet. Once in New York, Soto not only defined himself as a modern ballet dancer and a gay man but also helped define Balanchine's company. The documentary introduces viewers to Soto shortly before his retirement from dance in 2005 at the age of 40. After 24 years with the New York City Ballet, the damage caused by years of physical injuries has caught up with Soto. He wrestles with his fears as he discerns what else he will do with his life, as well as with an impending reunion with his Navajo family for the first time since he left the reservation for New York. Directed, produced, photographed and edited (whew!) by Gwendolen Cates, *Water Flowing Together* shouldn't be missed. In fact, there is little to nothing about Dance Camera West 2009 that doesn't warrant our LGBT community's support and participation. For additional screening and ticket information, please visit Dance Camera West's official website. Article by Rev. Chris Carpenter, resident film critic of *Movie Dearest* and the *Orange County* and *Long Beach Blade*.