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American Masters
American Ballet Theatre: A History

Premieres nationwide Friday, May 15 at 9 p.m. on PBS (check local listings)
in honor of the company’s 75th anniversary

Production Biographies

Ric Burns
Director
Director Ric Burns has been creating historical documentaries for public television for over 20 years. He began his career co-writing and producing the celebrated PBS series The Civil War (1990) with his brother Ken and Geoffrey C. Ward, and has since directed over 30 hours of award-winning films. Among his body of work are 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); Ansel Adams (2002), a co-production of Steeplechase Films and Sierra Club Productions; We Shall Remain: Tecumseh’s Vision (2009), part two of a five-part history on Native Americans; and Into the Deep: America, Whaling and the World (2010). In 2006, Burns released both Eugene O’Neill and American Masters — Andy Warhol: A Documentary. 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. He is perhaps best known for his eight-episode, 17-and-a-half-hour series New York: A Documentary Film, which premiered

In 2012, Burns released *Death and the Civil War*, which was broadcast nationally on PBS and was nominated for an Outstanding Documentary or Nonfiction Special Emmy Award. Based on the best-selling book *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* by acclaimed historian Drew Gilpin Faust, President of Harvard University, this film examines how the unprecedented death toll and carnage of the war challenged American cultural attitudes about death and fundamentally transformed federal government policies towards soldiers and citizens alike. In 2014, Netflix acquired Burns’ film *Enquiring Minds*, which tells the strange and wonderful story of Generoso Pope, Jr., the maverick and mastermind behind the *National Enquirer* and America’s obsession with gossip and the cult of celebrity.

2015 will see the release of three of Burns’ films: *American Masters — American Ballet Theatre: A History*, which chronicles the rich history and legacy of America’s only national ballet company; *Debt of Honor*, which examines how the American government and society have regarded disabled veterans throughout history, beginning in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War through today’s continuing conflicts in the Middle East; and *The Pilgrims* which will bring to life the story of the men and women of the *Mayflower*, uncovering the forces, circumstances, personalities and events that converged to propel their crossing to the New World.

Burns was educated at Columbia University and Cambridge University. He lives in New York City with his wife and two sons.

**Bonnie Lafave**  
*Producer*

Bonnie Lafave joined Steeplechase Films as a producer in 2006. She began her career as a journalist with CTV News in Canada, and then moved to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, where she worked as a producer with the CBC’s flagship national programs *Midday*, *The National* and *The Journal*. In 1997, she was invited to participate in the prestigious Nieman Fellowship program at Harvard University. In 1999, she joined *The Leonard Lopate Show*, New York Public Radio’s Peabody Award-winning interview program, where she created and continues to produce “Please Explain,” a weekly segment which seeks to uncover the facts and principles behind complex issues across a variety of topics, including history, politics and science. During her time at Steeplechase she has contributed to several films including *Andy Warhol* (2006), *We Shall Remain: Tecumseh’s Vision* (2009), *Into the Deep: America, Whaling and the World* (2010), *Death and the Civil War* (2012) and *Enquiring Minds* (2014). She is a producer on upcoming productions *American Masters — American Ballet Theatre: A History*, *Debt of Honor: Disabled Veterans in American History* and *The Pilgrims*, all slated for broadcast in 2015.
Katie O’Rourke
Producer
Katie O’Rourke is a producer and editor whose work focuses on historical and cultural issues. She joined Steeplechase Films in 2010 and has contributed to several films including *Into the Deep: America, Whaling and the World* (2010), *Death and the Civil War* (2012) and *American Masters — American Ballet Theatre: A History* (2015). In 2013, she worked with HBO’s *The Loving Story* director Nancy Buirski on her film *American Masters — Tanaquil Le Clercq: Afternoon of a Faun*, a biography of the celebrated but tragic life of ballerina Tanaquil Le Clercq. Her credits also include a short film on the history of Latin American immigration to New York, made for El Museo del Barrio and the New-York Historical Society. She is currently producing *No Le Digas a Nadie* (*Don’t Tell Anyone*), which tells the story of undocumented immigrant Angy Rivera. The film will air on PBS in 2015 and received support from The Fledgling Fund and Latino Public Broadcasting.

Buddy Squires, ASC
Cinematographer

Dustin O’Halloran
Composer
Dustin O’Halloran is a critically acclaimed pianist and composer. He first received widespread recognition for his work on Sofia Coppola’s Academy Award-winning film *Marie Antoinette*

**Brian Keane**
*Composer*

Brian Keane is an Emmy Award-winning composer and Grammy Award-winning producer. He has scored over 100 documentaries and films, which together have garnered five Academy Award nominations and one win, nine Peabody Awards and 16 Emmy Awards. His most notable credits include hit BBC America television drama *Copper*, as well as 26 episodes of public television’s renowned series *American Experience*. He is a long-time collaborator of Ric Burns, having scored 17 of his films including all eight episodes of the *New York* series. As a producer, he is best known for his ground-breaking ethnic recordings, especially those of Middle Eastern musician Omar Faruk Tekbilek and Irish musician Joanie Madden. He has produced 37 Billboard charting albums, five of which reached No. 1 on the charts, as well as 20 Top 10 songs.

**Mikaela Shwer**
*Editor*

Mikaela Shwer is an award-winning editor and filmmaker with a passion for bringing important stories to life. Her work was recognized early in her career when she won the “Emerging Editor” award with the short film *100 Mountains* for the Adobe Real Ideas Studio student program at the 2008 Cannes Film Festival. Since then, Mikaela has worked on numerous films for HBO, Sundance Channel and PBS, including the Peabody Award-winning series *Brick City* and critically acclaimed independent films *Call Me Kuchu* and *Like the Water*. In 2012, Mikaela joined Steeplechase Films, working with award-winning filmmaker Ric Burns, helping to bring vibrant documentaries to the screen. She is also currently directing her first feature documentary film, *No Le Digas a Nadie (Don’t Tell Anyone)*, to be released in 2015.

**Michael Kantor**
*American Masters Series Executive Producer*

For more than two decades, award-winning filmmaker Michael Kantor has created outstanding arts programs for television. He joined *American Masters* as the series’ executive producer April 30, 2014.

His most recent PBS documentary series, *Superheroes: A Never-Ending Battle*, hosted by Liev Schreiber, premiered in fall 2013 and was nominated for an Emmy Award. Random
House published the companion book. In January 2013, Kantor’s Peabody Award-winning, 90-minute film, *Broadway Musicals: A Jewish Legacy*, aired as part of the *Great Performances* series on PBS. Narrated by Joel Grey, it included performances by Matthew Broderick, Kelli O’Hara, David Hyde Pierce, Marc Shaiman and many other Broadway talents. In 2012, Kantor produced *The Thomashefskys: Music and Memories of a Life in the Yiddish Theater* with Michael Tilson Thomas, which aired on PBS and was nominated for a Primetime Emmy. Kantor served as executive producer of the 90-minute special *Give Me the Banjo*, hosted by Steve Martin, and created *Make 'Em Laugh: The Funny Business of America*, the critically acclaimed six-part documentary series, hosted by Billy Crystal, that debuted in January 2009. His script for episode four, *When I'm Bad, I'm Better: The Groundbreakers*, co-authored with Laurence Maslon, was nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award. His landmark six-part series *Broadway: The American Musical* was hosted by Julie Andrews and honored with the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Nonfiction Series in 2005. That same year, he created three hours of DVD extras for 20th Century Fox’s 40th anniversary release of *The Sound of Music*.

Kantor wrote, directed and produced the award-winning profile *American Masters: Quincy Jones: In the Pocket*. With Stephen Ives, he co-directed *Cornerstone: An Interstate Adventure* for HBO, and produced *The West* (Executive Producer Ken Burns). His 20 years of work in documentaries include projects as varied as *EGG: the arts show*, *Coney Island*, *The Donner Party*, *Margaret Sanger* and Ric Burns’ *New York* series. As a writer, Kantor created *Lullaby of Broadway: Opening Night on 42nd Street*, co-authored the companion books to *Broadway* (Bulfinch) and *Make 'Em Laugh* (Grand Central Publishing) and has published numerous essays and articles. He is president of Almo Inc., a company that distributes The American Film Theatre series, which includes Edward Albee’s *A Delicate Balance* (starring Katharine Hepburn), Eugene O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh* (Lee Marvin) and Chekhov’s *Three Sisters* (Laurence Olivier) among its titles. Kantor has served as a Tony nominator and teaches documentary filmmaking at the School for Visual Arts in New York City.

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