Baryshnikov, Mikhail (1948-) Encyclopedia Article

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Baryshnikov, Mikhail (1948—)

One of the greatest ballet dancers of the twentieth century, Baryshnikov overcame initial expectations that his stocky build, short height, and boyish demeanor precluded him from performing the romantic roles in ballets like *Giselle* and *Sleeping Beauty.* After leaving the Soviet Union in 1973, however, Baryshnikov joined the American Ballet Theater (ABT) and became its most celebrated performer. Throughout his career, Baryshnikov has striven to explore new choreography. One major achievement was the collaboration with choreographer Tywla Tharp, who created for him, among other works, the incredibly popular *Push Comes to Shove.* He left ABT to work with the great Russian-born choreographer George Balanchine at the New York City Ballet. Baryshnikov soon returned to ABT as its artistic director where he eliminated its over-reliance on internationally famous guest soloists, developed new repertory, and sought to promote soloists and lead dancers already a part of ABT. His charisma, spectacular dancing, and tempestuous love life contributed greatly to the popularity of ballet in the United States.

Mikhail Baryshnikov

Further Reading:

Joan Accocella. "The Soloist." *New Yorker.* January 19, 1998.