

***LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER***  
**September 1, 2002, 8:00 p.m. on PBS**  
**Lincoln Center Theater**  
**CONTACT**

Creative inspiration can come from most unexpected sources.

Take Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" for example. It was on a train ride to Boston that much of the work took shape in the composer's head. He later wrote: "It was on the train, with its steely rhythms, its rattley-bang that is so often stimulating to a composer (I frequently hear music in the very heart of noise) that I suddenly heard-even saw on paper-the complete construction of the Rhapsody from beginning to end."

Or the case of Sergei Rachmaninoff. The failure of his First Symphony to capture critical and audience approval plunged the composer into a deep and dark depression. Finally he was persuaded to seek the help of an early exponent of psychiatry, a certain Dr. Dahl. In his memoirs Rachmaninoff wrote: "I heard repeated, day after day, the same hypnotic formula, as I lay half asleep in an armchair in Dr. Dahl's consulting room. 'You will start to compose a concerto-You will work with the greatest of ease-The composition will be of excellent quality' .....Although it may seem impossible to believe, the treatment really helped me." Before another year had passed, Rachmaninoff had completed his Second Piano Concerto, perhaps his most universally beloved work.

Enter Susan Stroman, the American theater's most imaginative and innovative choreographer. Visiting an after-hours dance club in New York City's Lower Manhattan, Stroman was struck by a scene almost hallucinatory in nature. All the dancers were clad in the compulsory black, except for one beautiful young woman in a yellow dress. She would go silently to the dance floor at the beginning of every new song and nod or shake her head in response to the various men who approached her hoping to dance with her. Stroman later recalled: "Out of the crowd came this girl in a yellow dress. She'd step forward, choose someone to dance with and then she'd disappear. I became obsessed watching her. I thought, 'this girl is going to change someone's life-tonight.'"

As it turned out, the life that was changed was Stroman's, who earlier had won Broadway's Tony Awards for her choreography for "Crazy for You" and the long-running revival of "Show Boat." The image of the girl in the yellow dress stayed with her hauntingly. Some months later André Bishop, the Artistic Director of Lincoln Center Theater, phoned her with an invitation to create a new work for the theater. She in turn went to her friend, playwright John Weidman, and suggested that they collaborate on the proposed project. Weidman's credentials include authorship of the books for Stephen Sondheim's "Pacific Overtures" and "Assassins" and together Weidman and Stroman had worked on

the 1996 Broadway musical “big.” Of Weidman Stroman commented: “John has a contemporary wit about him, and he loves dance. Not all writers love dance.”

When Stroman told Weidman about the girl in the yellow dress, he responded immediately. “We really connected over that image,” said Weidman. When I was a kid, we really hoped dancing would be a prelude to something else—a date, necking, something. The notion that this woman was using dance both to make contact, and at the same time to limit and control how far that contact would go, seemed remarkable to me.” Thus was born the dance-play “Contact,” which opened in October, 1999 at Lincoln Center’s intimate Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater to ecstatic reviews. So incendiary was this new theater concept that “Contact” soon transferred to Lincoln Center’s larger Broadway house, the Vivian Beaumont Theater. The final New York performance of “Contact” will take place on Sunday evening, September 1, and our Live From Lincoln Center cameras and microphones will be there to transmit the historic occasion directly into your own homes.

“Contact” consists of three sections, each of them dealing with varieties of human connection and disconnection. The first of them takes as its jumping-off point the famous 1767 painting by Fragonard of a girl on a swing. Titled “Swinging,” this section becomes an erotic idyll, set to the recording of Rodgers’ and Hart’s “My Heart Stood Still” by the great jazz violinist, Stephane Grappelli.

The second piece is called “Did You Move?” and takes place in New York in the 1950s. A “mob” leader and his wife are dining in an Italian Restaurant. Whenever the husband leaves the table to replenish his food supply from the buffet spread, the wife leaps and gyrates through the restaurant in imitation of a great ballerina—ultimately winding up in the arms of the headwaiter. All this is set dizzily to music by Tchaikovsky, Bizet and Grieg.

The final section, “Contact,” deals with a disillusioned advertising huckster who is intent on suicide. In an underground swing-dance club he is surrounded by wildly jitterbugging couples. In their midst appears suddenly a yellow-dressed siren who selects her dancing partners, goes into ecstasies on the dance floor, and then calmly moves off. The advertising guy longs to be with her, but he can’t dance. The sound track to all this is a melange of recordings, ranging from the Golden Age of Swing music to doo-wop to rock-and roll, culminating in the classic Benny Goodman recording of “Sing, Sing, Sing.” Stroman and Weidman also drew part of their inspiration for this story from the Ambrose Bierce tale, “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge.” In discussing “Contact,” André Bishop remarked that the process that produced the dance-play reminded him of the lyric from Sondheim’s “Sunday in the Park With George”: ‘Look, I made a hat/Where there never was a hat.’” “Look, we made a show/Where there never was a show.”

“Contact” on Live From Lincoln Center promises to be one of the most unusual offerings since this Award-winning series began on PBS in 1976. Again a

reminder: Sunday evening, September 1--the evening before Labor Day. And as usual I suggest you contact your local PBS outlet for the exact time and date of the telecast in your area. See you then!