



The Joffrey + Ballet in the U.S.

October 3 – December 20, 2025

First-ever retrospective showcases The Joffrey Ballet as early role model for dance companies in United States, as the Joffrey marks 70th Anniversary in 2025

CHICAGO, IL, August 6, 2025—*The Joffrey + Ballet in the U.S.*, a large-scale, multi-media exhibition celebrating the rich history of The Joffrey Ballet and its contributions to ballet in the U.S., joins two other exhibitions—including *Scott Burton: Shape Shift* and *Ellen Altfest: Forever*—at Wrightwood 659 on view from October 3 to December 20, 2025.

The Joffrey + Ballet in the U.S. is organized by The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center and curated by Dr. Julia Foulkes with assistance from former company artist Nicole Duffy. *The Joffrey + Ballet in the U.S.* premiered at The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts in Fall 2024, marking the first-ever major retrospective of the company. It draws from the expansive Joffrey

archive acquired by the Jerome Robbins Dance Division in 2017 and is presented at Wrightwood 659 by Alphawood Exhibitions.

As The Joffrey Ballet celebrates its 70th Anniversary season in 2025, the exhibition offers an unparalleled opportunity to delve into the history and legacy of the acclaimed company and Robert Joffrey through a rich selection of archival materials. The exhibition features newly digitized rare film, including the original performance of the groundbreaking ballet *Astarte* (1967) and footage of Anna Sokolow's *Opus 65* (1965); a wide array of Joffrey Ballet costumes, props, pointe shoes, posters, and correspondence spanning the decades; and Robert Joffrey's high school report card where he declares his intention to be a dancer and join a ballet company—instead, he would start one.

About The Joffrey Ballet and its Impact

Born in 1928 in Seattle as Anver Bey Abdullah Jaffa Khan, Robert Joffrey was the son of immigrants from Afghanistan and Italy, his mother Catholic and his father a devout Muslim. Joffrey experienced ill health as a young child. He wore casts on his feet to correct bowed legs and experienced asthma attacks. Ballet was a way to counter his physical ailments and assert his strength and perseverance. It also became a mission. Joffrey's vision for a ballet company started from who he was—from an immigrant family without the typical social or physical stature expected in traditional forms of ballet. His company included a spectrum of bodies and presented a range of dances—from 20th century classics by Vaslav Nijinsky and Kurt Jooss to the topical pieces of his co-founder Gerald Arpino to Frederic Ashton, Twyla Tharp, and William Forsythe's new ballet choreography. Joffrey died in 1988 of AIDS at the age of 59.

The Joffrey Ballet became known across the country for its eclectic repertory, traveling to small towns and major cities across the U.S. and the world. To do so required entrepreneurship in addition to perseverance. The company faced failure numerous times, which prompted searches for new sources of revenue, new homes, and a new role for ballet in the U.S. Moving to Chicago in 1995 with a repertory of works by varied choreographers, dancers with looks and talents beyond idealized stereotypes, and audiences beyond New York, The Joffrey Ballet became a model for dance companies in the U.S. *The Joffrey + Ballet in the U.S.* tells the story of what made the Joffrey a unique force in the world of dance, demonstrating how the company's inner workings and history led to it redefining and constructing the future of ballet in the U.S.

Launching its 70th Anniversary season – and 30th year as a Chicago-based company – this fall, The Joffrey Ballet continues to thrive under The Mary B. Galvin Artistic Director Ashley Wheater MBE and President and CEO Greg Cameron.

About The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts is dedicated to enhancing access to its rich archives of dance, theater, music, and recorded sound—to amplify all voices and support the creative process. As one of The New York Public Library's renowned research centers—and one of the world's largest collections solely focused on the performing arts—the Library's materials are available free of charge, along with a wide range of special programs, including exhibitions, seminars, film screenings and performances. The collection at the Library for the Performing Arts includes upwards of eight million items, notable for their extraordinary range and diversity—from 11th-century music, to 20th-century manuscripts, to contemporary hip-hop dance.

Also on View at Wrightwood 659

Scott Burton: Shape Shift examines the legacy of Scott Burton (1939–1989), an American original whose wide-ranging practice anticipated many of the strategies of today’s art. Hailed as a landmark exhibition when it premiered at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation in St. Louis, MO, *Scott Burton: Shape Shift* is the most comprehensive exhibition of Burton’s work ever mounted in the United States. Featuring works from the 1960s to 80s, the exhibition underscores the breadth of the artist’s vision. By the time of his death at the age of 50 from an AIDS-related illness, Burton had functioned as sculptor, public artist, performance artist, choreographer, art critic, and exhibition curator. The survey spans Burton’s career, featuring nearly 40 sculptures, more than 70 photographs and ephemera, and the only known extant video of the artist’s performance work. In conjunction with *Scott Burton: Shape Shift*, Wrightwood 659 will host several public programs. These include a performative-meditation on Burton’s practice, care, and passing time by artist Gordon Hall, the founder of the Center for Experimental Lectures; and a lecture jointly hosted with the Art Institute of Chicago by David J. Getsy, author of *Queer Behavior: Scott Burton and Performance Art* and preeminent scholar on Burton’s artistic practice. *Scott Burton: Shape Shift* is organized by the Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St. Louis, and curated by Jess Wilcox, independent curator, and Heather A. Smith, Assistant Curator, Pulitzer Arts Foundation. The exhibition is presented at Wrightwood 659 by Alphawood Exhibitions.

Ellen Altfest: Forever is a selection of 15 oil paintings by the American representational painter Ellen Altfest, known for her painstakingly labor-intensive canvases and her observation of things in the world often overlooked in art. From roughly tactile rocks, tangled branches, and tree bark to the smoothness of houseplants, fabric, and men’s skin—she condenses everyday essences into expressions of absolute clarity and intensity. Her paintings are characterized by surprising pairings of subjects, unorthodox cropping, and, perhaps most notably, scrupulously rendered naturally occurring textures and intricate surface features. Working directly from observation without photographic sources or references, she often spends months—and sometimes more than a year—on a single painting. *Ellen Altfest: Forever* is organized by the Frist Art Museum, Nashville, Tennessee, where it premiered earlier this year, and is curated by Mark Scala, Chief Curator, Frist Art Museum. *Ellen Altfest: Forever* is presented at Wrightwood 659 by Halsted A&A Foundation.

About Wrightwood 659

Wrightwood 659 hosts exhibitions on socially engaged art and architecture, on issues facing LGBTQ+ communities, and on Asian art and architecture. Located at 659 Wrightwood Avenue in Chicago’s Lincoln Park neighborhood in a building transformed by Pritzker Prize winner Tadao Ando, Wrightwood 659 encourages visitors to engage with pressing issues of our time in an intimate and beautiful space. For additional information, please visit wrightwood659.org.

Hours of Operation and Tickets

Wrightwood 659 is open Thursdays 12 noon-7 pm; Fridays 12 noon-7 pm; Saturdays 10 am-5 pm. Tickets for the trio of exhibitions opening October 3 go on sale Thursday, September 4. Admission is \$20 and is available online only at <https://tickets.wrightwood659.org/events>. Please note, admission is by advance ticket only. Walk-ups are not permitted.

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