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Swan Lake

Set to Tchaikovsky's glorious score, this Romantic tale of love and forgiveness is often considered the world's most beloved ballet. With breathtaking choreography, lavish costumes and visually spectacular sets evoking a lakeside Renaissance court, ABT's production "glides to the forefront of stagings all over the world. The fabled lake of the swans has risen into view, inspiring awe for its mystery and magic."

—The Wall Street Journal



Sponsored by The Rosh Foundation.

Orchestra seats begin
at **\$40** per ticket
Call 212.362.6000

Gillian Murphy and Ethan Stiefel in *Swan Lake*. Photo by Fabrizio Ferri.
Right inset: Julie Kent and Marcelo Gomes in *Swan Lake*. Photo by Hideaki Seto.

American Ballet Theatre: 2010 Spring Season Brochure – Swan Lake

The entire brochure for the American Ballet Theatre, not just this *Swan Lake* spread, is aesthetically pleasing – the brochure is pleasant to look at, the photos are engaging and the way elements are arranged on the page creates interest. I would not revise this spread in any way except to perhaps set the Wall Street Journal credit one point size smaller.

The composition effectively utilizes the primary design principles of unity, variety, hierarchy, and proportion. The composition displays unity, all the parts of the composition are organized so that they work together. The level of variety in the composition creates visual interest: there is one large photograph on the left balanced with smaller elements on the right. These seemingly diverse elements combine to support the message of *Swan Lake*, the ballet. The parts of the composition have a hierarchy, they are given proper importance in relation to other parts. For example, we notice the photograph on the left first, then the heading 'Swan Lake'; then the subordinate parts – the Wall Street

Journal Review, the small photograph and the ticket information box. We notice the credits last because of their small font size. Size relationships between elements are appropriate. The relationships between the outer dimensions of the design work in harmony with the inner divisions. The right side division is more explicit than that on the left, due to the alignment of the text and dance troupe picture. The division on the left is in the same dimension as the right, but not as obvious – the line of the ballerina's back forms the boundary. The composition displays asymmetrical balance. One large element on the left is balanced by three smaller elements on the right. Color is balanced as well, the white type and gold heading on the right page are balanced with the white and gold costumes of the dancers on the left page.

The supporting principles of design – rhythm, scale, repetition, and proximity – work effectively in the composition. The one supporting principle that is dominant in the composition is rhythm, the composition has a natural flow. The path of movement begins on the left page where we see the ballerina dancer looking down at her dead lover. Our eye pauses for a moment before her outstretched arm guides our eye toward the heading 'Swan Lake' on the right page, then our eye is drawn down to the picture with the dance troupe. The line formed by the dancers, an 'arrow', leads the eye down to the gold box with ticket information. The male ballet dancer's outstretched arm on the left page guides our eye back to the two dancers in the water. We sense scale because of the figures in the photos. Scale creates a visual hierarchy, the larger dancers on the left page are more dominant than the smaller dancers in the photograph on the right page. There is repetition of elements in the composition - squares and rectangles formed by text and boxes, their size is varied, but a pattern is not formed. Proximity; the parts of the composition are positioned in relation to each other so that they create visual interest. This is accomplished by indenting the text from the heading and allowing the borders of the ticket information box and photograph of the troupe to touch.

The composition uses the design elements of shape, space, line, size, color, texture, and typography effectively. The shapes are both geometric and organic, but organic shapes dominate. The organic shapes support the theme of *Swan Lake*, love. Negative space is used in the composition, it forms a circular shape in the center of the composition which works with the positive space to help guide the eye around the composition. The type of line used in the composition is edge; it is created by the dancers' arms and bodies. The physical size of the composition is appropriate for a spread in a brochure – it is 11" x 9". Color and visual texture are used effectively in the composition. The somber mood is conveyed through the background colors of dark blue and black – colors of death – the visual texture of rain drops in the water helps to heighten the mood. The composition also has physical texture, the brochure is printed on heavy, glossy paper. Typography is used as shape, it helps to draw the eye through the composition. Both serif and sans serif type is used effectively. The serif type enhances the message, especially the dropped first letter 'S' of the review, giving an Old World feel to the composition (which is fitting since *Swan Lake* is a ballet score written years ago by Tchaikovsky). But the sans serif type gives a modern feel for a modern performance. Sans serif fonts are normally reserved for online documents, but it is a good choice here because the text is white on a black background. As mentioned earlier, the only revision I would make would be to set the Wall Street Journal credit one point smaller.

Website



<http://abt.org/>

The American Ballet Theater website is not as aesthetically pleasing as it could be. In my opinion, this home page is in need of a major revision with careful thought given to all of the principles of composition.

The composition does not utilize the primary design principles of unity, variety, hierarchy, and proportion effectively. The composition does not display unity; rather than the parts of the composition working together, they appear to be placed wherever they would fit, in a bulletin board style. The only part of the layout that is consistent with standards is the banner and adjacent menu bar. But the menu bar is too thin and gets lost; I would suggest making it wider. The page is missing a search function; it would be advisable to add one. The level of variety in the composition is not appropriate to creating visual interest; there is a lot of variety, but it creates a cluttered appearance. The diverse elements do not work together to form a message. A suggested revision to cut down on the clutter would be to do away with the grid lines and organize the major points into coherent sections.

The parts of the composition are not given proper emphasis in relation to other parts; for example, the "Welcome to ABT" box is small and barely noticed. I think this message needs a more prominent

position – perhaps in the banner. The viewer's eye is not drawn to the most important parts first, before it is drawn to subordinate parts. The composition has two competing dominant parts – *Swan Lake* and the Spring Season. To me, there is a conflict in eye movement; first my eye goes to the *Swan Lake* photo, then to the *Brahms-Haydn Variations* photo. At this point my eye gets confused, the line of the dancers arms bring me up to the text for Spring 2010 season, but their legs also draw my eye down to the box to sign up for ABT news. As a result, my eye shifts back and forth. Unless I force myself out of this pattern, I will not see the other information boxes on the page. Proportion; the size relationships between parts of the composition are not appropriate as the boxes of information and photos are not in proportion to one another. The relationships between the outer dimensions of the design do not work in harmony with the inner divisions and alignments. The banner which creates the outer boundary spans almost the entire width of the screen, but the body of the page only spans half of the screen. Consequently, the inner division is cut into halves. The inner divisions and alignments do not work in harmony either, the elements in the body form three columns, but each column is a unique width. My revision suggestions would be to either center the body of the page making the banner the same width. Then change the background color on each side of the page to a coordinating color; or, use the entire width of the page. It would also be beneficial to create three proportional columns for the composition elements. In addition, the page layout is not appropriate; it is designed as portrait rather than as landscape. A suggested revision would be to arrange page elements across the page rather than down so that all important elements are above "the fold". The composition is asymmetrically unbalanced – it is heavier to the right.

The supporting principles of design (repetition, proximity, scale, and rhythm) do not work effectively in the composition. Repetition and proximity are the dominating principles in the composition, but not in a good way. There is repetition of the text elements, but their size is fairly consistent; they do not form a pattern. The parts of the composition are not positioned so that visual interest is created; instead, they are positioned equally apart. The viewer gets a sense of scale because of the people in the photos. But, the photographs do not create a visual hierarchy. Although the overall *Swan Lake* picture is much larger than the *Brahms-Haydn Variations* photo, the principle dancers in both photos are the same size. A suggested revision would be to enlarge the dancers in the photograph which accompanies the dominant message. The composition does not have rhythm; it does not have a natural flow or movement. Although the path of eye movement starts out well – the faded line of dancers flows into the two principle dancers in the *Swan Lake* photo – it stops there. The flow is broken by the border around the *Swan Lake* photo and the intensity of the *Brahms-Haydn Variation* photo. Next, the eye jumps to the *Brahms-Haydn Variation* photograph and gets stuck darting back and forth between the signup box, the *Brahms-Haydn Variations* dancers and the 2010 spring season order information. A suggested revision would be to change the relationship of these two photos, or perhaps use other photographs that work together better.

The composition does not use the design elements of (shape, space, line, size, color, texture, and typography) effectively. The shapes of the compositional elements are geometric. They do not support the organic message of dance and music. A suggested revision would be to use more organic typefaces and illustrations to create a mood fitting for the ballet. Positive and negative space do not work together

in the composition. Negative space is not used effectively; its only purpose is to separate the text into boxes. Elements appear cluttered. A suggestion for revision would be to use lots more white space to separate out and emphasize the important elements. Edge is the type of line used in the composition; mainly in the form of borders to separate messages and columns. The physical size of the page, at least on my browsers (Firefox and IE), is too big; all the pertinent information does not fit above “the fold”. If the page were reworked into a landscape orientation, more of the important information would be accessible without scrolling. Color is used in the composition to create emphasis of elements. But I find the color palette boring. The color of the banner fades away compared to the rest of the composition. A suggestion would be to brighten the khaki color in the banner as well as the gold tones in the composition. Another suggestion would be to use color in the background instead of white, perhaps a pale shade of blue. The composition does not have texture, neither visual nor tactile; it is very flat. The type is used as shape in the composition; in the form of boxes that do not enhance the message. The type seems to be shouting because so much of it is in capital letters and underlined. A suggested revision would be to create the messages as mapped graphics rather than text hyperlinks. Also, the type is primarily bold sans serif font. A revision to vary the type sizes, forms and color would increase interest and readability. The 70th Anniversary logo is done in a 1940’s typeface, and looks like it is still in the forties. The white around the logo looks sloppy – either it needs to be made into a real border or eliminated. Sans Serif type, which is most appropriate for online readability, was used consistently. But too consistently, it would be more interesting if a serif type were used as well, but sparingly, for titles of ballets, for example.