

The Cutting Edge

A Publication of the Ice Theatre of New York, Inc.

Volume 4 Number 1

Summer 1992

Ice Theatre to Participate in Sky Rink Summer School Program

Plie Power Workshops to be taught as part of skating/ dance educational program.

Joint venture also includes Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance and Sports Training Institute

News Flash...

Roland Betts, Tom Bernstein, and David Tewksbury of Chelsea Piers Management have announced that Chelsea Piers, L.P. has been awarded the bid for the Chelsea Piers in New York City.

The planned public recreation and entertainment complex will include a new and greatly expanded Sky Rink, which will provide Ice Theatre of New York with a superb home base.

(full story on page 3)

The summer of 1992 will usher in a new era in skating instruction at New York's Sky Rink, and Ice Theatre of New York is pleased to be a part of this groundbreaking program. From June 22 through August 28, Ice Theatre will join with the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance, the Sports Training Institute, and the Sky Rink professional staff in creating New York's first intensive skating instruction program designed to integrate skating technique with dance and strength classes.

This unique program will include on-ice sessions for freestyle, patch, dance, and Ice Theatre's Plié Power Workshop. Intensive off-ice work will focus on the entire spectrum of skills necessary for excellence in skating performance — aerobic conditioning and body sculpting classes taught by certified trainers from the Sports Training Institute: dance classes taught by members of the Martha Graham Dance Company; ballet classes taught by Sky Rink's Bill Woehrle, who recently served as ballet coach to the stars of the successful film The Cutting Edge: and theatrical movement classes by new Ice Theatre member Irina Scobeleva, Director of the Moscow Sports Theatre. The program will also include low, intermediate, and high USFSA figure, freestyle, dance, and pair testing conducted twice during the summer school session, as well as weekly performances by school skaters chosen by the professional staff, special appearances by guest artists, and Ice Theatre performances each month of the session.

The program is adaptable to the needs of the individual skater, with patch/freestyle sessions available in a variety of configurations from weekly to full season, as well as daily rates. Off-ice and Ice Theatre classes are offered by the hour or half-hour.

Ice Theatre views this program as an exciting step forward in the development of artistic skating performance as a dynamic part of New York's cultural life and looks forward to working with Sky Rink in developing the next generation of skaters who will continue to explore the limitless opportunities presented by ice performance.

1992 EVENTS

APRIL 1992

28 Performance at Martha Graham Benefit

Sky Rink, New York, NY

MAY 1992

6 Halloween Committee Meeting

New York, NY

20 Plié Power Workshop

Rye, NY

20-23 Ice Theatre Presentation at

PSGA/CFSA Convention

Ottawa, Canada

31 Walk For Life (Benefit for GMHC)

JUNE 1992

5, 6 Plié Power Workshop

Philadelphia, PA

9 Rehearsal Fund Benefit

(Cocktail Reception/Screening of Belita film

Suspense; Dick Button, Chairman)

New York, NY

12-13 Plié Power Workshop

Skating Club of Boston, Boston, MA

SUMMER 1992

6/7-11 Choreography by Bill Whitener, Artistic Director, Ballet Jazz de Montreal (Commissioned by New York State

Council for the Arts)

6/22-8/28 Sky Rink Summer School Program Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays

12:45 - 1:45 P.M.

Sky Rink, New York, NY (includes workshop by Debbie Brown, choreographer, Le Cirque du Soleil; and and theatrical movement classes by new Ice Theatre member Irina Scobeleva, Director of the Moscow Sports

Theatre)

 Residency, Sun Valley, Idaho (Gia Guddat, Gary Beacom)

Residency, Lake Placid, New York (Cecily Morrow)

 Plié Power Class Mondays, Wednesdays

Hickory Hill Figure Skating Club, Katonah, NY

7/24 Plié Power Workshop

Skating Club of Maine, Kennebunk, ME

8/7 Plié Power Workshop

Grundy Skating Center, Bristol, PA

SEPTEMBER 1992

17 Opening of Bell Ice Amphitheatre

(Glace Comedies). Montreal, Canada

OCTOBER 1992

10 Ice Time '92 (An Evening of Artistic Skating,

hosted by Dick Button; produced by Greater Expectations -- Matt Herson, benefit for Hospicare

Lynah Skating Rink, Cornell University Ithaca, NY (call 212-505-7838 for more info.)

28 Annual Halloween Skating Benefit/Party

The Rink at Rockefeller Plaza

New York, NY

29,30 1992 Home Base Performances

Sky Rink, New York, NY

Message from the Artistic Director

As we left the rink in Burlington, Vermont the large audience slowly drained from the parking lot. The omnipresent light snow was falling and just outside the door two little girls were playing, directing each other in a dance that looked suspiciously like back crossovers. When they saw us they stopped and whispered together for a moment. Then the older of the two called to us, "We loved the show!" We told them we were glad they'd enjoyed it. Then, moving closer, the child shook snow from her long hair and continued, "You know what? We have a skating group, too. It's just the two of us. But guess what it's called — The Unicorns!" I thought that was a perfect name for an enterprise involving impossibilities of almost mythic magnitude. "On Sunday we're going skating, and guess what? We're going to do a show for our parents." United in the camaraderie common to performers the world over, we wished them luck and headed to our van.

As I look back on this busy season, I will always remember that afternoon as a high point. In that moment I felt the reward for all our hard work and considerable expense of spirit. The program they'd seen had inspired these children to see skating performance as a beautiful and a worthwhile thing. In twenty years they might be skating for audiences as we do now. In twenty years, when the dust from a crumbling National Endowment for the Arts has cleared, when arts groups have struggled through this dry season of no money and high costs, when this nation has digested the greasy question of whether it needs art, perhaps then this young generation will reaffirm the value of the beauty we strive to share now. Maybe their imaginations will be fired as ours are by the image of freedom in a skater defying gravity, by the sweep and thrill of ice movement, by the finesse required to master this impossibly slippery element in a season of drought.

I am sure that farmers are grateful to produce seeds for next year's crop. In a world of MTV, MBA's, megahits, infomercials and Pat Buchanans, I am very glad to have met these two children. The Unicorns. Watch for them.

Focus on the Future

Expanded Sky Rink to Be Built on Hudson River Waterfront

Facility to also include waterfront park, marina, film production studios

On June 17, 1992, Roland Betts, Tom Bernstein, and David Tewksbury, Chairman, President, and Executive Vice President, respectively, of Chelsea Piers Management, announced that Chelsea Piers, L.P. has been awarded the bid for the Chelsea Piers, located at the Hudson River waterfront between 17th and 23rd Street in New York City.

Chelsea Piers Management plans to develop a major public recreation and entertainment complex that will bring new life and activity to the Chelsea waterfront. Most importantly, this complex will be the home of a new and greatly expanded Sky Rink, replacing the current facility on 33rd Street. The new Sky Rink, which will be built on the second level of Pier 61, will be a two-rink facility that will be able to meet the increasing demand for recreational, instructional, and artistic performance skating, as well as hockey. The facility will bring New York into the



At the announcement of the acceptance of Chelsea Piers, L.P.'s proposal for development of the Hudson waterfront between 17th and 23rd Streets. (I. to r.) David Tewksbury, Manhattan Borough President Ruth W. Messenger, Roland Betts, Tom Bernstein.



(l. to r.) Jirina Ribbens, Palmer Baker, Dick Button, Roland Betts

ranks of major skating centers in the U.S, allowing a much wider variety of public events such as ice carnivals, Ice Theatre of New York performances, hockey tournaments, and skating competitions to be presented in New York. The facility will be unique in that skaters will be able to enjoy panoramic Hudson River views as well a brandnew, state-of-the-art skating facility.

The rink at the east end of the pier will have stadium seating accommodating 1500-1800 spectators, with locker room facilities underneath the seating. Skater services, such as skate rental, first aid, a skate shop, the skating school, a large viewing platform, and four additional locker room facilities, as well as a snack bar, will be located in the central area between the two planned rinks. At the westernmost end of the pier, a large heated area for public use is planned. The upstairs level of this area will include a viewing platform. This large area, as well as the open-air deck just west, will provide expansive views of the Hudson River from the George Washington Bridge to the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, and the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge.

Public access to Sky Rink will be via entrances at 21st and 22nd Streets. These entrances will lead pedestrians, cars, and taxis to a well-lit street that runs along the south side of the pier's lower level. An elevator will bring visitors to the second level and the rink facility.

Ice Theatre enthusiastically supports this project, not only as a superb home for its own rehearsals, training programs, and performances, but also for what it brings to the performing arts and general cultural life of the New York City metropolitan area.

Company Activities

A Magical New York Evening

- Edward Z. Epstein

The film, produced more than four decades ago, won a timeless response from the 1992 audience: bursts of "Bravo!"'s and applause for the skating sequences; rapt attention during the dramatic scenes. The movie: Suspense. The star: Belita. The occasion: an evening to benefit the Rehearsal Fund for Ice Theatre of New York.



front: Moira North, Rob McBrien. Rear: Dick Button, Belita, original poster from Suspense. (Photo: Roy Blakey)

Belita flew in from London especially for the event, which took place on June 9, 1992. The setting was appropriate: the sumptuous New York apartment of skating legend Dick Button, with the genial Button himself as one of the evening's hosts. Over one hundred people (at one hundred dollars per ticket) were on hand to offer the dynamic Belita an exciting reception.

Decades ahead of her time in brilliantly combining figure skating and ballet, Belita was a unique and distinctive performer. She occupies a special niche in the history of skating. "It's rare that people with real talent and ability win recognition from their peers," remarked Hollywood wit Dorothy Parker, who observed: "Usually the most acknowledged 'talents' are simply geniuses at self-promotion.

This was an evening to celebrate the <u>real</u> thing.



(I. to r.) Belita, Bob Turk, Aja Zanova, Michael Booker. (Photo: Roy Blakey)

Cocktails and a buffet dinner were followed by introductory comments by Ice Theatre founder and director Moira North and myself. Guests settled down for the movie. At intermission, Belita was greeted with an ovation. She deftly participated in a question-and-answer session (the star looks forward to launching a lecture tour in the near future).

She explained how she'd worked closely with the film's composer, Daniele Amfitheatrof, and with other skaters in the company to achieve a remarkably high

level of performance from all concerned. "The company of skaters was marvelous. I want to make a special point of that!" she exclaimed. "We inspired each other to do our best."

Belita revealed the story behind the memorable scene in which she split-jumps through a hoop of "knives." It <u>wasn't</u> trick photography. "They weren't knives, of course, but they might as well have been," she noted. "The 'blades' were fashioned of <u>hard</u> rubber, pointed and dangerous and sheathed with aluminum that had enough of an edge to draw blood if you ran your finger over it!"

The stunt was perilous. "The hoop <u>wasn't</u> the prop I'd been prepared for. I'd been training to jump <u>over</u> a line of 'knives,' a <u>high</u> jump. At the last minute the producers switched it and suddenly I had to do a long jump!"

She did it on the first take. Tickets had been sold for the day's shooting (which required an audience). "The producers, the King Brothers, wanted a second take," recalls Belita. But she was emphatic: "I did it only once."

Countless skaters over the years have been inspired by Belita's performances, many on hand for the evening's festivities. Guests included Jo Jo Starbuck and Ken Shelley, former three-time U.S. Pair Champions, two time Olympians, and World Bronze Medalists; Aja Zanova, former World Champion; Sonya Klopfer Dunfield, former American Champion; former British Champion Patricia Dodd; Tamara Moskvina, coach of the current Olympic Pair champions; choreographer/skater Nathan Birch; Sally Brayley Bliss, Trustee of Antony Tudor Ballets Trust; Bill Whitener, former Twyla Tharp dancer and Artistic Director for Ballet Jazz de Montreal; Michael Seibert, former U.S. Dance Champion and Assistant Choreographer for the Brian Boitano-Katarina Witt shows: Ruth Kossi, former featured skater in Belita's London Ice Extravaganzas; William J. Candee III, Chairman of Ice Theatre of New York; Ice Theatre Vice Chairman R. Palmer Baker, Jr. (Belita's host during her New York stay); Ice Theatre Artistic Director Rob McBrien; Joe Marshall, former professional figure skater and current Assistant Manager of the Ballet Shop at Lincoln Center; public relations executive Susie Arons; former New York Rangers star Pat Hickey and his wife Debbie Paige Hickey, former skater with the John Curry Company; Michael Booker, President of Ice Capades (Belita initially starred in Ice Capades for founding producer John Harris); and Bob Turk, innovative long-time choreographer for Ice Capades, who was recently named the show's producer.

All present confirmed a happy fact: it had indeed been a magical New York evening.

(Edward Z. Epstein, author of sixteen books, is currently at work on a biography of Jennifer Jones for Michael Korda at Simon & Schuster.

Profiles

Future prospects and the vision for a revitalized Sky Rink have recently brightened considerably since Pat Jennings' appointment as general manager.

With a B.A. in English and Dramatic Arts and an M.A. in Theater from Southeastern Louisiana University, followed

Pat Jennings

by ten years of theater work in New York and various administrative/management positions,

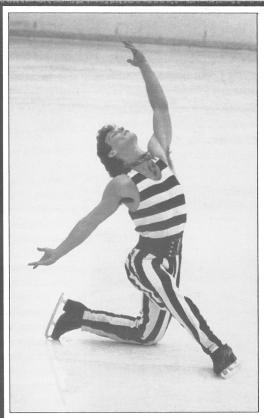
Pat is uniquely qualified to develop Sky Rink into a premier venue for figure and recreational skating, as well as hockey.

"To be successful, Sky Rink needs a balance among our figure skating instruction and clubs, hockey, and Ice Theatre. All must participate in a spirit of working together for the good of the rink. Ice Theatre contributes its artistic expertise; the Skating Club of New York provides a sense of history in its role as the second oldest club in New York. But none of our other activities overrides the importance of our bread-and-butter business, the public skating sessions."

When Pat took over, her first priority was to create a sense of Sky Rink's history, where it is now, and where it's heading: to promote skating as part of New York's cultural life. Now the rink is decorated with club, competition, and hockey photos, as well as a wide variety of both Sky Rink and general skating memorabilia. New revenues have been generated from lounge party rentals, self-managing the snack bar, and the vending machines. "A pleasant place to have coffee and socialize is very important for those who spend a great deal of time here," she says. "It's particularly important for parents, who make a tremendous investment of time developing their children's skating talents", she says. Promotions designed to provide outreach into the business community, such as a lunchtime skating package for people employed at local businesses, and Fall 1992 schedule changes to make public skating more accessible to business people, promise to further Pat's vision of the rink as a vital part of New York life. Additional performance events such as Ice Theatre shows, the recent Martha Graham Dance Company Benefit, and the Grand Central Partnership's second annual First Night event also serve to promote the rink to those who don't know of its existence — and understandably wouldn't expect to find an ice rink on the sixteenth floor of an office building!

Events planned for this summer include a gala Carnival on June 4th and 5th. A performance featuring 1988 Olympian Debi Thomas as well as the Skating Club of New York highlighted the carnival, and even the hockey program was involved. An expanded summer educational program will include participation by Ice Theatre of New York, the Martha Graham Dance Company, and Sports Training Institute, Inc. *Art on Ice*, a joint program with The Professional Performing Arts School, a public school in the Clinton section of New York City, is being developed by Ted Kelton, Sky Rink's new figure skating director. Artistic aspects of skating will be explored as part of a skating major, to be offered at the school for the first time.

Clearly, exciting times are ahead at Sky Rink. We encourage all who live near or plan to visit New York in the near future to visit. Sky Rink is located at 450 West 33rd Street in New York City at the corner of 10th Avenue (telephone: 212-695-6555).



Shaun McGill at Ice Theatre of New York's **Performance** '87, Sky Rink, New York City

We are saddened by the loss of Shaun McGill. who died on March 23, 1992. Shaun was a leading light in the artistic skating world, having appeared with the John Curry Company, Torvill & Dean's World Tour, The Next Ice Age, and in Ice Theatre's Performance 87 and Andorra 1990. His performance as Carabosse in WGBH's production of The Sleeping Beauty, choreographed by Lar Lubovitch, ranks him among the great dramatic skaters of his time. Shaun's unique light quickness, his strong and daring style, made him a true artist on ice and a favorite with audiences. His shy warmth, sly humor, and fiery commitment will be missed by all who knew and loved him. Memorial donations may be sent to the AIDS Committee of Toronto, Box 55, Station F, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2L4, Attn: Richard Cadieaux.

North by Northwest: Director's Report

On this page Frank Nowosad writes about the "welcome reawakening of the modernist sensibility" practiced by the 1936 Olympic pair champions, Maxi Herber and Ernst Baier. In the Winter 1991-92 issue of **The Cutting Edge**, Edward Z. Epstein looked back at "Fire and Ice: The Magic of Belita." Belita, like Herber and Baier, whose work we can also see on film, has now also come into our sights as one of the modernists in skating.

On the evening of June 9th, Ice Theatre had the privilege and pleasure not only of presenting a screening of *Suspense*, a film noir which was the highlight of Belita's film career, but also a personal appearance by Belita herself. This event, which celebrated and marked the establishment of Ice Theatre's Rehearsal Fund, took place at the home of Dick Button, through his generosity, with approximately one hundred supporters in attendance. It was a tribute to Belita and to the aims of Ice Theatre which the Rehearsal Fund supports.

The Belita Benefit is the first of a series planned for the coming year to educate ourselves, our students, and our audiences about the great ice performances and performers of the past. John Curry once said that unlike skaters, "Dancers have a tradition, and generations of knowledge and work behind them...at least the supportive background is there for them to lean on if they want to do so." Although we may not refer to it often, it is apparent to me that skaters also have such a tradition. Part of this tradition was documented in the work of many of Ice Theatre's guests at the Belita Benefit — among them, Bob Turk (former choreographer and now producer of Ice Capades), Michael Booker (President of Ice Capades), performers, world champions; and coaches such as Aja Zanova, Ruth Kossi, Jo Jo Starbuck and Ken Shelley, Sonya Dunfield, Michael Seibert, Tamara Moskvina, Roy Blakey, and of course, our host, Dick Button.

I am looking forward to the series of events, with their focus on the history and traditions of skating, that Ice Theatre is planning for the coming year.

- Moira North



(I. to r.) Ken Shelley, Belita, Jo Jo Starbuck. (Photo: Roy Blakey)

The Moderns

by Frank Nowosad

(Reprinted from the B.C. Thin Ice)

Twentieth Century art is characterized by a unique self-consciousness. If a modern painting could speak, it might shout down to the perpetually observing, murmuring public, "Look, I'm just paint on canvas. Nothing more!"

At no other time in history have we been made so aware of the fundamental nature of an art form, be it painting music, architecture, literature, or dance. "Form follows function," the architect Louis Sullivan dictated at the beginning of this century, and artists in all disciplines have been fascinated with the implications of this dictum for close to a hundred years.

So what about skating — that strange procedure of putting a slender runner of steel against a slippery surface? Are we "modernists"?

I recently saw a film of the 1936 Olympic pair champions Maxi Herber and Ernst Baier and was struck by how removed their skating was from the lifting, throwing, and jumping we know as the pair skating of today. For Herber and Baier, a lift (and a very modest one by current standards) served as a transition between movement phrases or as an accent to a music idea. A jump, done with immaculate unison, was offered not as a stunning trick but as a consequence of a sequence of flowing edges. Jumps and lifts appeared like slight ripples in the inevitable current of movement.

Ernst Baier was a strong single skater; he was fifth in the men's Olympic event in 1932 and second in 1936. At the height of his amateur successes, he was already in his late 20's and a practicing architect. Maxi Herber was a remarkably beautiful teenager with a gift for moving. She was also in love with Baier — in all senses, malleable — the perfect student and partner.

It was Baier's aim to create a routine that emphasized pure skating, highlighting the unique movement that evolves when a body is set in motion on ice. To my mind, the sequences that I saw on the film approached the sublime. As the footage was shot outdoors on a powerfully sunny day, the shadows were as entrancing as the handsome couple who dipped and bobbed in white space.

Baier's speculations on skating were in sympathy with much that was then happening in the art world. The Second World War put a stop to all that. Afterwards, as the pieces were being picked up and reassembled, skating lost touch with the avant-garde. The focus became the purely athletic or with enthusiastic replications of the second flourishings of the romantic ballet.

In the past several decades there has been a welcome reawakening of the modernist sensibility practiced by Herber and Baier. We see it in the film footage that remains of the ethereal Janet Lynn and the much-acclaimed and much-seen Bolero of Jane Torvill and Christopher Dean. (Curiously, Torvill and Dean, ice dancers, are closer to Herber and Baier than any contemporary pair can hope to be).

Still more recently, Gary Beacom's plays with balance/imbalance have reopened the modernists' case, and Ann Schelter's Annie's Edges is providing the essential vocabulary. It's been a sixty-year slumber.



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