

The New Criterion

Dance

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Misha: impossible

by [Laura Jacobs](#)

On Mikhail Baryshnikov & White Oak Dance Project at BAM

The picture that sized up Mikhail Baryshnikov for his new audience in the West was an Avedon shot that ran in *Vogue* in October 1974, four months after the dancer defected. He flew straight up from the page, arms outstretched, chest bare, sky behind him—huge. He flew out of the lap of *Vogue* and into light. The move could have been the trick of a diver or a gymnast, but the body was pure ballet—that immaculate musculature, the privilege in space, those toes. Baryshnikov had chubby cheeks, which was a shock, and big, round, sad, silent-movie eyes, a blue that sighed the word “persecution.” And it turned out he was small, about five feet six inches. So his round cheeks and round muscles and round-as-a-compass pirouettes and *tours en l’air* made him seem cherubic, a kind of opulent ballet angel. We knew he came from the Kirov, but with his blazing perfection he could just as easily have dropp ...

Laura Jacobs's *Landscape with Moving Figures* is available from Dance & Movement Press.

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