

Patrick Bissell, Dancer, Is Dead; A Principal With Ballet Theater

By JENNIFER DUNNING

Patrick Bissell, a leading principal dancer with American Ballet Theater, was found dead yesterday morning in his apartment in Hoboken, N.J. He was 30 years old.

The cause of death was not yet known pending the outcome of an autopsy, according to a spokesman for Ballet Theater yesterday. The Hudson County Medical Examiner's office declined to discuss the cause of death, and a spokesman for the Hoboken Police Department said the cause of death was undetermined.

Mr. Bissell was found by his fiancée, Amy Rose, a Ballet Theater soloist.

"Patrick Bissell was without a doubt one of the brightest lights in American Ballet Theater's history, or, for that matter, in the entire ballet world," Mikhail Baryshnikov, the artistic director of Ballet Theater, said yesterday. "I saw Patrick just before Christmas, and we discussed his plans for the season. He looked forward to performing with the company during the upcoming tour. Besides his brilliant technique, Patrick also possessed an artistry that touched us all.

"This tragedy leaves a tremendous void in the dance world and in our lives. We shall all miss him very, very much."

An American-Style Prince

Mr. Bissell was imbued with a seemingly natural classical elegance and presence. A tall and ruggedly handsome dancer, he was known as a gifted partner and technician and was frequently described as an American-style ballet prince.

"Already, he carries his tall frame with beautiful sweep and classical style," Anna Kisselgoff, The New York Times's chief dance critic, wrote in 1978 when Mr. Bissell, still a member of the corps de ballet, danced Solor, the male lead, in Natalia Makarova's production of "La Bayadère."

Mr. Bissell was known for his big, buoyant jumps and easy turns, and for the passion and conviction of his acting. His dancing had a distinctive quality of heroism and grandness of scale. But Mr. Bissell was also an uneven and unpredictable performer, though that quality gave his dancing an extra sense of spontaneity and excitement.

Born in Corpus Christi, Tex., Mr. Bissell began training in ballet and jazz dance at the age of 10 in Toledo, Ohio. At 15, he left home to study at ballet academies around the nation, including the National Academy of Dance in Champaign, Ill., and at the North Carolina School of the Arts.

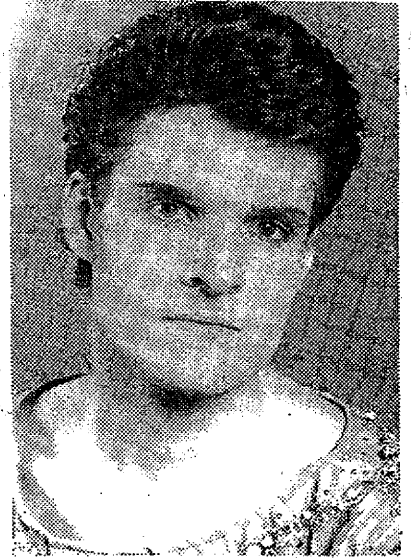
Encouraged by Kirstein

He then came to New York to study ballet as a scholarship student at the School of American Ballet, where he was encouraged by Lincoln Kirstein and Stanley Williams, one of Mr. Bissell's teachers.

Mr. Bissell joined Ballet Theater in 1977 as a corps dancer, after a brief stint at the Boston Ballet, but he soon began dancing such lead roles as Solor and as the Prince in Mr. Baryshnikov's production of "The Nutcracker." He was promoted to soloist at Ballet Theater in 1978 and to principal dancer in 1979.

His repertory of lead roles was extremely wide and varied and included Don José in Roland Petit's "Carmen," Franz in "Coppélia," Basil and Espada in "Don Quixote," Albrecht in "Giselle," Romeo in "Romeo and Juliet," Prince Siegfried in "Swan Lake," James in "La Sylphide," Prince Desire in Sir Kenneth MacMillan's "Sleeping Beauty" and lead roles in George Balanchine's "Stravinsky Violin Concerto," "Symphonie Concertante" and "Theme and Variations." He created the role of the Prince in Mr. Baryshnikov's production of "Cinderella."

For much of his career, however, Mr.



Martha Swope

Patrick Bissell

Bissell was plagued with injuries, and there were reports of drug and alcohol problems. He was dismissed from Ballet Theater in 1980 and 1981 on the grounds of chronic lateness and missed rehearsals. He was arrested in 1981 in Bloomington, Ind., and charged with public intoxication, disorderly conduct and pushing a policeman, for which he received a suspended sentence.

'Dance Is So Consuming'

In interviews, he expressed a clear sense of what he wanted from dance and what he wanted to bring to it, but he was also something of a troubled perfectionist.

"Dance is so consuming physically and mentally," he said in 1978. "There was a point in my life when I wanted to raise hell. I don't have the energy or ambition for that anymore. But I do have much more freedom than most people my age. When I got my own apartment with my own possessions around me I wanted to work hard. To work was the greatest joy."

Mr. Bissell was divorced from Jolinda Menendez, a former principal dancer with Ballet Theater.

He is survived by his parents, Donald and Pat, of Fort Smith, Ark.; a twin brother, William, also of Fort Smith; his brother Donald, of Stuart, Fla., and two sisters, Susan Erwin and Barbara Dumesil, both of San Diego.