

music



Jhung leading a class at his Ailey Intensive in February

## Finis Jhung

Music for ballet

BY BETSY FARBER

**F**inis Jhung's career as a professional dancer began in 1960 in the Broadway and national companies of *Flower Drum Song*. The Korean-Scottish-English Hawaii native then went on to dance with San Francisco Ballet and the Joffrey Ballet, found his own company, Chamber Ballet USA, and teach his unique classical ballet style to professionals and amateurs all over the world. Now, at age 80, his teaching has gone full circle back to the basics, primarily focusing on what he calls his "adult babies"—absolute and advanced adult beginners—at The Ailey Extension in New York City.

When choosing music for beginners, Jhung takes a thoughtful approach. "Beginners need beautiful slow adagios," he says, "which adult beginners find relaxing and meditative, so they have time to think about what they are doing." He goes on to admit, "I stopped using live pianists for these adult-beginner classes because most pianists cannot sustain four-minute-long adagios, and they cannot match the fullness of orchestrated music."

This observation inspired his collaboration with composer Scott Killian, who has composed several albums with Jhung. The digital orchestrations they crafted together support the work Jhung teaches in class—emphasizing the correct posture, placement and traveling across the floor with linking steps, simple pirouettes and simple jumps. Jhung finds these important principles of ballet easier to teach when students are accompanied by the right music.

"Practice the correct mechanics of movement," Jhung says. "That, to me, is ballet technique. Like following a good recipe when you cook, if you follow it to the letter, you are a great cook!" **DT**



Artist: Scott Killian and Finis Jhung  
Album: *New Ballet Music 11—Illuminations*

**Song: Track 2**

"I like this track for pliés, which are very slow and controlled and are initiated by the feet instead of the knees (so the muscles of the feet are engaged and ready to push the body up into a balance, turn or jump). The music is thoughtful and beautiful and helps the student concentrate on working their muscles."



Artist: Scott Killian and Finis Jhung  
Album: *Special Places—New Ballet Music 10*

**Song: Track 16, Adagio in 3/4**

"I like this for pirouette practice. This track is quietly beautiful, and deliberate. This combination leads the students through each step of the preparation into the turn."



Artist: Scott Killian and Finis Jhung  
Album: *Ballet Music 7—From the Heart*

**Song: Track 23**

"This track is brightly orchestrated and energizes the dancers for little jumps."



Artist: Michael Roberts  
Album: *Dancing Fingers*

"For teachers who prefer piano music, this album is a nice alternative to a live pianist. Michael has played for my classes over the years, and he's fantastic."



Artist: Steven Mitchell  
Album: *Piano Music for Ballet Class, Solo Class, Solo Class*

"This is another fabulous pianist who has played for my classes. Roberts and Mitchell are the best pianists!"

Photo by Stephen von der Laan/LA, courtesy of Jhung