



# Mary Talmi

Pittsfield, MA

If life's "third age" is a time for self-fulfillment, Mary Talmi has hit the jackpot. She finds herself back where she began, where the core of who she became took shape: Albany Berkshire Ballet (ABB). She is again in the company, in both senses of the word, of ABB's founder and artistic director Madeline Cantarella Culpo. She now sits in the company's associate artistic director chair, rather than on the floor as a nine year old in the Cantarella School of Dance learning from her teacher. Today they are colleagues.

What Mary has found in this return is freedom and focus. Her children are grown, her husband Akiva carries on with their arts management and promotion business; now is her time. Not to dance - though she majored in dance at Julliard - but to envision bodies moving through space. "Choreography is the thing that makes me who I am. The thing that makes me happy, fulfilled, brings peace of mind."

It's all about the beauty of dance, and reinforcing ABB's place in Pittsfield's cultural landscape. Mary's mission is to push the boundaries with new choreography and restaged classics. She has already teased Berkshire residents with partial performances of her "Rockwell in Our Time," a 40-minute contemporary take on Norman Rockwell's "Four Freedoms." "Want" debuted at the Rockwell Museum, and "Speech" at Williams College; the full dance will premiere this fall. Working with Williams' students on "Speech" invigorated her. Discussions with 20 year olds about climate change, equality, and justice challenged the values of the Rockwell era, and reminded Talmi to be open to new thoughts.

Art can make a difference in a child's life at any age. That's why 15 years ago Mary founded Rock On!, a summer experience in Pittsfield for students who sing or play an instrument. Music and performance are paramount, but behind the scenes are lessons in cooperation and commitment. Put a child on stage with a guitar, or in a dance studio in a leotard, and the experience can last a lifetime. Look at Mary.

**Photography:** Igor Greenwald

**Words:** Kathy Zdeb