

# **A Snapshot View: Dance Education in America**

**An exhibit in partial support of the  
DANCE EDUCATION IN AMERICA PROJECT**

**National Dance Association and National Museum of Dance  
Saratoga Springs, NY**

**Kacy E. Crabtree, MFA, MAAA  
Project Director and Curator  
Lees-McRae College, Banner Elk, NC**

**June 2007 – May 2008**

## Initial Concept

The *Dance Education in America* project began in 2005. As a regular visitor to the National Museum of Dance, I noticed that dance education was not featured at the Museum aside from specific genres of dance such as ballet, modern, tap and jazz. At the time, I was the state and district relations unit director for the National Dance Association (NDA), and one of my responsibilities was to secure and build partnerships. Since networking and forming partnerships is a strong interest of mine, targeting collaboration between the Museum and NDA for this particular project seemed enticing.

After a year of research, meetings, and negotiations, we moved forward with a primary goal of planting seeds for dance education to become a regular exhibit and program offering at the National Museum of Dance. On behalf of the National Museum of Dance and the National Dance Association, thank you for sharing in what I hope will be the beginning of a significant relationship and evolving partnership.

## The Exhibit

Since this is the first dance education exhibit showcased in the Museum, I thought it was important to offer a snapshot overview of how dance education has evolved in America. I appreciate details; therefore, becoming comfortable with providing a meaningful overview presented quite a challenge. This, combined with discrepancies among primary data, created many levels of “excitement” and frustration.

The initial production plan called for 20 full panels. Then, the limited space allocated for the exhibit and the inability to get the rights to all materials needed by deadlines necessitated a reduction to 12 panels. Unfortunately, it is not possible to capture all aspects of dance education during this first phase. Omitting information does not mean that it was viewed as insignificant or unimportant. All unused information has been placed in appropriate files for future exhibits. Ideally, other panels can be developed and added to further extend the exhibit in the future.

As you enter the exhibit, I invite you to review the list of contributors on the entrance wall to you left. Without the dedication, assistance and collaborative work of these individuals and organizations, *The Dance Education in America* exhibit would not be possible.

## Perspectives on Dance and Education

When examining the history of cultures around the world, it is clear that dance was and is viewed as a viable means of learning, among other purposes. For centuries, dance has been used to teach life skills, including social etiquette, discipline and values; to support spiritual communication and worship; to preserve and transmit traditions, celebrate life passages, and close generational gaps.

Differing views on religion, education and dance have impacted the evolution of dance education in America from the beginning. Dance, an integral part of the sacred and cultural life of Native Americans, quickly became supplanted by Eurocentric religion and philosophy. While New England Protestants eschewed dance as the work of Satan, plantation settlers of the southern colonies embraced dance as integral to a complete education and development of social skills. Although forbidden to play musical instruments, black slaves continued the dances they knew and cherished from Africa.

The 19th Century generated unique perspectives on the way dance and education intertwined and where dance education took root in America. American government leaders supported the concept of dance training for military soldiers. French and German educators and philosophers influenced ways for educating children through movement. Social and folk dance dominated social engagements. Literary writers conveyed the power of education in making a person a “whole individual.” Interestingly, dance and movement were viewed as a catalyst for health, learning, and human existence. Native Americans fought to preserve their culture and in essence, their dance. Simultaneously, visionary educators came forth to build colleges, universities, and public schools. And, the United States witnessed the birth of modern dance that initially reconnected to Greek culture and philosophies then to the orient during the first 40 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century before finally integrating into American life.

I am continually amazed at the scope and depth of the dance education field. Even though dance education, from multiple perspectives, has existed for thousands of years, its existence dawned in America about 115 years ago. Aside from enjoying the research process, I welcomed the comments and suggestions from colleagues while considering ways to begin this exhibit. I asked this question “What situations support the beginning of dance education in America?” I received responses that led me in a variety of directions. My subsequent research led me to decisions that shaped this exhibit.

Panel One is historically incomplete; it represents only the beginning. Throughout my research I examined the words and wisdom of Aristotle, Michel Montaigne, Fredrich Froëbel, George Washington, Chief Seattle, and Mary Lyon. Combining their words and contributions with an understanding of global dance education underpinned my perspective of dance education America.

## Global Dance Education

Early on as indicated in Panel Two, European dance masters created the foundation for how some dance forms eventually gained global status. Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, developments in dance training contributed to the evolution of ballet and to the study and performance of social dance forms. Although there are many great ballet masters worth studying, only a few are highlighted in this exhibit.

The great French ballet master Pierre Beauchamps (1631-1705) is recognized for codifying the five positions that are still used in ballet classes today. King Louis XIV (1643-1715) supported dance performance and education during his reign. Known as the Sun King, he founded the French Royal Academy of Music and Dance, which merged in 1672. Louis XIV is a prime example of the power that leadership, advocacy, and funding have in supporting dance in society and in dance education.

From the first documented ballet, *Ballet Comique de la Reine*, performed in Paris in 1581, we learn ways that dancing, production and theory come together. We learn about the performer and audience relationship, the spatial dynamics in dance, and the use of costumes and sets for dance performance, as well as communicating and supporting the meaning of dances.

August Bournonville (1805-1870), father of the Danish ballet style, defied traditional practices of ballet to create his own unique style that is studied today by many aspiring dancers, choreographers, and educators worldwide.

François Delsarte (1811-1871), a French teacher of acting and voice, formulated principles of aesthetics and developed a system for analyzing human expression. His work with artists and performers encouraged the concept of engaging the whole body to communicate and express ideas. Delsarte's theory is found in the early developments of 20<sup>th</sup> Century creative and modern dance.

We cannot leave Global Dance Education without acknowledging Rudolf Laban (1879-1953). Laban was an Austro-Hungarian dancer, choreographer, and theorist who developed the discipline of dance and movement analysis, known as choreology. Laban impacted the field of dance education through his belief that dance should be accessible to all. His ideas helped to form the basis of movement education, dance therapy, time and motion study, effort-shape and analysis, and a dance notation system known worldwide as Labanotation. Laban's work laid the foundation for European modern dance. Regrettably, Laban is not featured in this first exhibit due to challenges in obtaining rights to photographs and documented materials by the print date. Plans are underway to include Laban in the exhibit before the *Dance Education in America Project* tours other cities.

Plans are underway now to enhance the ballet education section of this exhibit.

## **Isadora Duncan**

Reflected in panel three, we are reminded that the principles of modern dance underpin the philosophies of dance education in America. It is common knowledge that we revere Isadora Duncan (1878-1927) as the “Mother of Modern Dance.” She planted the seeds for pedagogical methods used in the study of creative movement, modern dance and improvisation today! She understood the needs and interests of young people. Of equal importance, she had a vision of how dance would evolve into the dance of the future. She appreciated ballet and social dance and she explored the realms of the creative process and the freedom of using the human body to convey intellectual concepts. Isadora’s technique demonstrates creative use of locomotor and non-locomotor movements. Her beliefs that dance should be free, expressive and creative is an integral part of the dance education curriculum used today. Be certain to review the “Dawn of Modern Dance” exhibit at this Museum. You will learn more about the life of Isadora Duncan and see beautiful portraits, costumes, and artifacts associated with her.

## **Pioneers of Dance Education**

At the turn of the twentieth century, America faced changes in religious, social, political, and educational values. While Isadora Duncan challenged people with her new way of dancing, her philosophies permeated the walls of college and university dance and physical education classrooms. She inspired early works of dance education pioneers Gertrude Colby, Bird Larson and Margaret H'Doubler as indicated in panel four. Dance education protégés of these three women include Ruth Murray, Mary O'Donnell, and Martha Hill, as well as other noted dance educators. During the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century many physical educators began to learn about and teach natural and rhythmic dance; they found the teaching of these pioneers inspiring. Dance performances at colleges and universities evolved during the 1930's and modern dance became the core of many of the dance programs in women's physical education.

Educators in general were challenged to stay current with the rapidly evolving art of teaching in America. In the early 1900s, Teachers College of Columbia University emerged as the place for studying methods for teaching the whole child. Training in natural and rhythmic dance became an integral part of the educational curriculum. There, over the next three decades, many dancers, teachers, and choreographers contributed to the growing field of dance education including Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Alma Hawkins, Pearl Primus, Katherine Dunham, Ann Duggan, Joe Nash, Charles Williams, and Donald McKayle.

**Margaret H'Doubler**  
(1889-1982)

At the turn of the 20th Century, professionals in the field of physical education placed more focus on developing practical educational programs for young women. It was not uncommon to see physical and health educators teaching movement and dance classes – rhythmic exercises and natural dance.

Margaret H'Doubler, noted in panel five, is revered as the “Mother of Dance Education.” Inspired through her academic work at Teachers College of Columbia University were Bird Larson and Gertrude Colby, H'Doubler left New York in 1917 and returned to her employment at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. There she developed a dance curriculum focused on dance as both an art and science. Her technique was grounded in kinesiology, anatomy, and physics. H'Doubler's curriculum, including a student dance club, Orchesis, provided a model framework for other college and university dance programs. In 1926, H'Doubler started the nation's first dance major designed to prepare future dance educators. The program was part of the physical education department and attracted many aspiring dance educators. H'Doubler's work strongly impacted how dance education evolved in the American educational system.

**Martha Hill**  
(1900-1995)

While Margaret H'Doubler influenced the development of dance education programs within the physical education curriculum, Martha Hill, noted in panel six, developed and perpetuated the concept of dance as an art form through her extraordinary leadership. She focused on structuring educational programs and curriculums in higher education and providing opportunities for dancers, choreographers, and dance students to cross-fertilize the sub-disciplines of dance education.

Miss Hill created forums for presenting dance as an integrated art form. She provided education and training for college and university dance teachers and administrators who, in turn, shared this knowledge with their students. Miss Hill founded and directed dance programs at New York University, Bennington College, Connecticut College, and Julliard. These educational institutions trained some of the most renowned dancers, choreographers, and educators who later became leaders in the field of dance education.

Additionally, Martha Hill is credited for laying the foundation for what is now known as the American Dance Festival. Martha Hill's legacy reaches to all corners of the dance world.

## **Dance Festivals**

Over the years, dance festivals became a summer haven for dancers, choreographers and educators, providing a wide range of opportunities for study, enrichment, creative endeavors, and employment. Festivals remain catalysts for strengthening and perpetuating the dance profession.

Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in Becket, MA became the first formal dance festival in America. Established in 1933 by Ted Shawn, legendary dancer, teacher, choreographer, and administrator, Jacob's Pillow presented a wide-range of dance performance and education from all over the world. The festival maintains extensive archives, provides research fellowships, and offers a wide range of internship opportunities in support of dance performance and education.

In 1934, Martha Hill along with Mary Jo Shelly developed and coordinated the Bennington School of the Dance, a summer festival at Bennington College in Vermont. This summer festival provided a home to early modern dancers, teachers, and choreographers from the U.S. and abroad. The Bennington School of the Dance was continued each year until World War II with one festival held at Mills College in 1939. The festival resumed as the NYU-Connecticut College School of Dance in 1948 in New London, CT and became the American Dance Festival. The Festival moved its home in 1976 to Durham, NC on the campus of Duke University. ADF continues its mission of encouraging and supporting the creation and presentation of new modern dance work by established and emerging choreographers, as well as, providing a summer teacher enrichment program for dance educators.

Dance Festivals provide learning opportunities for many modern dancers, choreographers and educators, past and present, including Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Hanya Holm, Charles Weidman, Anna Sokolow, José Limón, Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, Pina Bausch, Alwin Nikolais, Twyla Tharp, Arthur Mitchell, Lar Lubovich, Bill T. Jones, and Mark Morris. (Panels Seven and Eight)

## **National Organizations Supporting Dance Education**

Many viable national and international organizations support dance education initiatives. Each has its own mission and purpose to keep dance and dance education part of our educational systems.

In 1932, the preliminary work began for the formation of the National Dance Association as part of the organization that later became the American Alliance for Health and Physical Education. This was the first organization developed in the U.S. to address needs of the dance education field. Through much advocacy work, the "D" was added to the Alliance structure in 1974 to form the American Alliance for

Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and DANCE. The National Dance Association (NDA) developed the National Standards for Dance Education (NSDE) in conjunction with a project of the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations in 1994. This project focused primarily on the development of voluntary national standards for arts education (dance, music, visual arts, and theatre). Because of this effort, the NSDE with corresponding Achievement Standards are used throughout the U.S. and is the basis for required state benchmarks for K-12 public and private schools. Additionally, the NSDE support professional preparation in college/university arts education and physical education programs. These standards serve as a curricular framework for assuring quality dance education experiences. To recognize deserving dance professionals and educators, NDA established the first award in dance – the Heritage Award. In the 1980s, NDA established the Dance Scholar/Artist Lecture award to honor researchers and dance artists for excellence in their field of work. In 2001, NDA formed the honor society for dance students – Nu Delta Alpha – a current model of H'Doubler's Orchesis. 2007 marks the 75th Anniversary of the National Dance Association.

Throughout the years, many organizations have branched off from NDA. Some of these organizations have state chapters and others are focused on national programs. NDA supports the work of organizations and agencies dedicated to dance education initiatives. Organizations include American Dance Guild, American Dance Therapy Association, Sacred Dance Guild, Congress on Research in Dance, Dance and the Child International, and the National Dance Education Organization. Some of the agencies include Americans for the Arts, Arts Education Partnership, Kennedy Center for Arts Education Network, Lincoln Center, National Endowment for the Arts, and the President's Council on the Arts and Humanities. (Panels Nine and Ten)

### **Bridging the Cultural Gap through Dance Education**

Diverse peoples and art forms are part of the dynamics of a global society. Cultural issues are abundant within in our educational systems. Poverty, discrimination, and social challenges affect young people. The arts, including dance, can transform people and societies in dire situations. Where there is conflict or a sense of isolation, dance and the other arts disciplines can provide an opportunity to emotionally and physically connect and communicate ideas. Perceived as a universal language, dance allows people to meet and interact on a common ground. Students learn to appreciate and understand historical perspectives, embrace cultural differences, and foster a deeper respect for all individuals and cultural traditions. (Panels Eleven and Twelve)

## **Arts Advocacy and the Future of Dance Education**

If you enjoy and appreciate dance – SPEAK UP for what you believe. SPEAK UP to keep the arts an integral part of society and education. SPEAK UP and educate people about the value of dance and related arts to the intellectual and social development of young people and communities as a whole. SPEAK UP and make the National Standards for Arts Education and state benchmarks the foundation for every school's curriculum and students' daily interactions.

Arts Advocacy involves building political, community, and funding support for the arts and arts education. Communicate with legislators and other policymakers today. Get involved in local, state, and national arts and education agencies. Let your voice be heard. Dance and arts educators, administrators, leaders, parents, and students of dance must make arts advocacy a routine effort to foster education of the whole child by giving children meaningful, rewarding and healthful ways to learn.

The future of dance and the other arts disciplines lies in each American classroom with educators, administrators, parents, and community leaders at the helm. There is an array of political and educational initiatives already on the agenda of policymakers. These initiatives can positively or negatively impact dance education. We are faced with policy and funding conflicts related to addressing the Healthy Children's and No Child Left Behind Acts, as well as higher standards for educators and assessment issues that seem to overshadow dance education concerns. Dance Education is an interdisciplinary art form that provides opportunities for students to connect in meaningful ways to personal and academic excellence, creativity, and integrated learning.

What will you do to foster dance education as a vital part of the public and private schools, colleges and universities, and your community?

## Bibliography

- Anderson, Jack (1992). *Ballet and Modern: A Concise History*. New Jersey: Princeton Books
- Bruce, T., Findlay, A., Read, J. and Scarborough, M. (eds.) (1995) *Recurring Themes in Education*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- De Montaigne, Michel. "The Education of Children," quoted in Rice, Emmet, Hutchinson, John and Lee, Mabel (1958). *A Brief History of Physical Education*. New York: Ronald Press Company.
- Fithian, Philip (1974). *Journal and Letters*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Froëbel, F. (1826) *On the Education of Man (Die Menschenerziehung)*, Keilhau/Leipzig: Wienbrach.
- Frame, Donald M. (editor) (1963), *Montaigne's Essays and Selected Writings*, New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Hawkins, Alma M. (1982). *Modern Dance in Higher Education*. Congress on Research in Dance.
- Kilpatrick, W. H. (1916) *Froebel's Kindergarden Principles Critically Examined*, New York: Macmillan.
- Kraus, Richard; Hilsendager, Sarah Chapman; Dixon, Brenda (1991). *History of the Dance in Art and Education*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Lawler, Lillian B. (1964). *The Dance in Ancient Greece*. Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.
- Lloyd, Marcia Lou (1986). *Dance Education in American Schools: 1925-1935*. unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Utah.
- Richard K. (1976-1989). *The Papers of General Nathanael Green*. 5 Vols. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.
- Sparshott, Francis (1988). *Off the Ground: First Steps to a Philosophical Consideration of the Dance*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Sparshott, Francis (1995). *A Measured Pace: Toward a Philosophical Understanding of the Arts of Dance*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Watt, Roberta Fry, editor (1934). *Four Wagons West*. Oregon: Binsford & Mort  
Originally published in the Seattle Sunday Star, Oct. 29 1887. (Authentic text of Chief Seattle's Treaty Oration, 1854)

