MHDF
MARTHA HILL DANCE FUND NEWSLETTER SPRING 2023 ISSUE 16

Martha Hill (1900-1995)
Educator, administrator, artistic director,
and visionary for dance as a performing art.

MARTHA HILL DANCE FUND LIMITED WAS ESTABLISHED TO HONOR, PERPETUATE, AND REWARD MARTHA HILL'S COMMITMENT TO DANCE EDUCATION AND PERFORMANCE INTERNATIONALLY.

GALA 2023

Photo: Steven Speliotis/Reiko Yanagi

Vernon Scott, Board President

On February 27th, 2023, at long last, we were able to gather again in person for the Martha Hill Dance Fund Gala, and what a grand time it was!

Keeping to our past format we gathered in the bar area for drinks and passed hors d'oeuvres, excited greetings, and gossip. The room buzzed with happy exclamations as people were able to greet each other in person after this long break. Bold face names from the world of dance populated the room.

Once seated at our tables to enjoy a festive meal, the ceremonies began. After opening remarks by Gala Chair, Megan Williams, our emcee for the evening, Danni Gee, Director of Programing at The Joyce Theater, led with an expert touch with videos of the honorees supplied by Daniel Madoff.

Honored first with a Mid-Career Award was Deborah Damast. Deborah obtained her BFA in Dance from SUNY Purchase and her MA in Dance Education from New York University. She is Program Director and Associate Professor of Dance Education at NYU Steinhardt where in addition to leadership and teaching, she is Artistic Director of concerts, Kaleidoscope Dancers, and the Uganda study abroad program. She serves on the boards of Dance Education in Practice, Peridance Company and as an advisor to Misty Copeland's BE BOLD program. Her choreography has been shown at over 100 venues in NYC, nationally and internationally. Ms. Damast is a recipient of the NDEO Outstanding Educator award (Higher Ed) and the Dance Teacher Magazine Award. Deborah spoke of how she is deeply inspired by the work and legacy of Martha Hill and spoke to the joy and fulfillment in teaching young students this powerful art form. Ms. Damast was presented by Joan Finkelstein, Executive Director of The Harkness Foundation for Dance.

Photo: Steven Speliotis/Reiko Yanagi

Deborah Damast, Mid-Career Honoree

Next up was Diana Byer, one of two Lifetime Achievement Awardees. Diana, who was a student at Juilliard, studied with Anthony Tudor while there. She is the founder and Artistic Director Emerita of New York Theatre Ballet and Director of New York Theatre Ballet School. She is a répétiteur for The Antony Tudor Trust, Director of Education for the Dance Notation Bureau, on the Board of Directors of the Clive and Valerie Barnes Foundation, an Education Ambassador for The New York Pops, and served on the Dance Portal Advisory Board of The Children's Museum of Manhattan and the Bessie Awards Selection Committee. Ms. Byer was presented by Linda Murray, Curator of The Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Photo: Steven Speliotis/Reiko Yanagi

Diana Byer, Lifetime Award Honoree

Choreographer Dianne McIntyre, who shared the Lifetime Achievement Award, is a graduate of Ohio State University, a Guggenheim Fellow, a Doris Duke Artist Awardee, and a three-time "Bessie" Award winner. Her five-decade career encompasses Broadway, television and film, and projects for her own company, Sounds in Motion. She had a longtime collaboration with the late playwright and poet Ntozake Shange, creator of *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf*. Ms. McIntyre choreographed the 1998 film *Beloved*, based on the novel by Toni Morrison. She related how thrilled she was that Martha Hill knew of her work. Ms. McIntyre was presented by Cheryl Banks-Smith, Professor of Dance at Pasadena City College. Her close friend and colleague Aziza followed the presentation of the award with a heartfelt tribute to Ms. McIntyre.

Photo: Steven Speliotis/Reiko Yanagi

Dianne McIntyre, Lifetime Award Honoree

Our fearless and creative President of the Board, Vernon Scott delighted the gathering with his rendition of *Soul* by Barbara Simmons that spoke to the feelings of the moment. After a few final remarks by Rebecca Stenn, who is stepping down from the Board, another Martha Hill Dance Fund Gala was concluded. We all look forward to our next gathering.

Photo: Steven Speliotis/Reiko Yanagi

Rebecca Stenn

Interview with MHDF Board Member Barrie Raffel

By Elizabeth Gerring Radke
May 2023

Photo: Shane Killen

Barrie Raffel 2023

Tell us a bit about your beginnings as a dancer and your path to Juilliard

get stale if I stayed another year in school and I should just get out and go for it. And so I did.

Life as a dancer in NYC post Juilliard

The day after I graduated, my roommate Megan Williams got a call about an audition. Megan was still in school but passed the information on to me. The audition was for Rachel Harms who had gone to NYU Tisch and had a company of 6 women at the time. There were 100 women at the audition. We were down to the last few dancers and her co-choreographer, Miriam Ellner, called me over to say something privately. I thought I was about to be cut but instead she said "you live in my building." We had a good laugh and I got the job.

I was also dancing with Mark Haim and taking classes with Risa Steinberg, ballet with the Corvinos, Richard Thomas and Daniel Levin. I was supporting myself with dance jobs and a lot of teaching. One of the things about my teacher in LA is that he gave me classes to teach which gave me some experience to build on. I started getting dance teaching jobs in NYC, mostly teaching adults modern jazz. I learned how to teach from

I grew up in Los Angeles. As a kid I was a mover; I jumped off of everything, climbed up onto everything. My parents at some point had to figure out what to do with all my energy. Through the Girl Scouts I started ice skating and my parents had no idea that it would lead to becoming a competitive skater, getting up at 4 AM and taking me to practice all the time. I liked it because it channeled all that movement but around the age of 14 my parents said to me: either you want to get really serious about skating, quit school, etc, or it's time to move on - try a dance class...they gave me the choice.

I didn't want to quit school, I was a very social person and wanted to be with my friends. I didn't want to give that up, so I went to a dance class with Valentina Oumansky at the Ruth St Denis Theater. It was a funky space where Ruth had a studio with a little theater downstairs and an apartment upstairs. Valentina taught modern dance with a theatrical emphasis. While it was hard to leave skating, I didn't enjoy the competitive aspect and I hated being cold all the time, so I immediately felt better suited to dance. There was an interesting cast of characters at the studio and I got to join her company. We had a lot of performances at the space and community outreach performances as well. As a 14/15 year old I was already getting to perform so much which was really fun and by 16 when someone asked me if I thought I was going to pursue dance as a career, I was completely certain that I was.

My parents were not directly involved in the arts but were arts appreciators. My mom took me to modern dance concerts at Royce Hall all the time and when I saw companies such as Twyla Tharp, I knew there was nothing else I'd rather do than dance. Around the time I started driving I ended up taking classes at a different studio called Morrow-Landis. I went to Jr High and High School with Paula Abdul. We were good friends and we danced together in school classes and talent show performances. She was incredible and had been studying for years with Dean Barlow and then started taking classes with Joe Tremaine. At one point she invited me to a Joe Tremaine class which would be my first real jazz class . We arrived early and while we were waiting there was another class before it, it was taught by this man who was moving in ways that really resonated with me, and he was teaching a room full of the most amazing dancers I had ever seen in my life. It was jaw dropping. I had no idea what they were doing but whatever it was I had to try it and I knew immediately it was what I needed to be doing. It was this modern-jazz class, ie: modern class done to popular music utilizing many different techniques, Graham, Limón, Robbins... That is where I mostly stayed until college and this teacher had gone to Juilliard and suggested I audition for it.

Life at Juilliard

all my teachers. Eventually I started taking Jennifer Muller classes at Peridance. I was a big class taker.

During my work with Rachel I learned so much about dancing in a company and discovered how much I enjoyed the collaborative process. Those were awesome years. At some point, Rachel moved to LA, and then I worked with a variety of different choreographers such as Hilary Easton, Stephanie Skura, Mark Haim, Ron Brown, and David Rousseve. Each time I worked with a different company I learned new skills and what interested me the most as a dancer was shifting bit by bit. I also did some commercial work, dancing on the TV series *Fame* for a season and a commercial that Louis Falco choreographed and some music videos as well.

I kept working with Stephanie and Hilary and eventually David Parker. I tried choreographing a little but it was never really my thing. I also kept auditioning for larger companies that had a lot of work. It was ridiculous; I would get down to the last two or three dancers for every single job but not get them. Regardless, the work that I did was incredibly satisfying and I loved each of the choreographers I had the opportunity to work with. People kept saying to me I should just choreograph myself, but I liked being part of the process and felt best as a collaborator, not the one in charge.

Transitioning to motherhood and post performance dance life

Something that I haven't mentioned until now is that while I was doing all of this (rehearsing, auditioning, performing) I was really sick. I was about 100 pounds, I was eating nonstop and weight was still coming off of me. I felt horrible and I kept going to doctors who thought I was an anorexic dancer. I had no energy and could barely function, even getting through class was really tough. Eventually I started taking yoga classes from Susan Braham who danced with Stephen Petronio and that helped a bit as I could ration my energy better before heading into rehearsals. It turned out that I had amoebas that went undiagnosed and I was sick for many years. This went on for quite some time until I figured out what it was and could treat it, however, it didn't get all the way better. At this point I was married, we wanted to have a child and I realized if I wanted to get pregnant I had to stop dancing and keep some energy for myself.

I had my son at 38. I wanted to raise him myself so I stopped dancing and was teaching less but continued to study and train in Yoga, including a variety of teacher training programs. I felt I was gaining a deeper understanding of different forms of somatic work and went deeper into that direction. On top of this, my son had mild Cerebral Palsy. I took him to lots of different kinds

I had really no idea what the college dance experience would be. One of the things I think a lot about when I work with student dancers as a college advisor is how incredibly lucky I was to have parents who really supported what I wanted. Yes, they did question my choices, but they were ok with my decisions. For my Juilliard audition I choreographed my own solo. I had no idea what to do and I didn't know anything about choreographing. I felt very much out of my depth at the audition as I had never taken a ballet class before but I just copied whatever they did. It felt very strange performing the solo alone in the room with all the teachers sitting behind the table. I didn't know it at the time but they were all whispering about me because I looked like Terry Weksler who was a member of the Daniel Lewis Company.

Miss Hill

She called me up to her office; she said "you're in but please work on your ballet this summer, dear" which I tried to do but I didn't know where to take ballet in LA and the place I found was not great training so really it was through the Corvinos at Juilliard that I feel I learned how to approach ballet. My experience at Juilliard was pretty darn great. A lot may have gone over my head, and I didn't have as much exposure to dance as some of the dancers there. I was not particularly sophisticated in that I hadn't gone to all the well-known summer programs but I felt that every day I learned so much from all the teachers. Ballet became something that I absolutely loved. The whole experience just opened up my world. Learning from all the other students, each day I got to dance and loved that.

Living in NYC was a bit of a shock my first year. I lived in the same apartment I'm living in now. This was pre-dorm. There were four of us in the apartment. I couldn't believe you could step out of your apartment and find someone starving outside your building. Growing up in the suburbs was so different. My first year was a big adjustment and I was often homesick but I loved school and made good friends.

Was there a specific technique, style, teacher or company that you were drawn to?

I loved all the Graham classes - Ethel Winter and I really clicked. She was very special to me and was so lovely and gentle. As a style I enjoyed and connected more with Limón and I also really of movement classes and he fell in love with ballroom dancing when it was offered at his school through the program called Dancing Classrooms. It changed his physicality so much. I continue to be amazed by what dance can do; the whole brain, the whole body responding. It's one of the many reasons I find myself shifting more toward dance classes again.

How do you see yourself in the dance community now?

I have always continued to go to dance performances and have stayed connected to friends in the dance world. I still love it and if I could be dancing again, I totally would. I take some classes and I'm intrigued by the way people keep working and our ideas of technique keep evolving. I'm moved by our particular community and how generous our generation can be to young dancers who are just coming up.

While my son was in high school I got my certificate in College Counseling from UCLA with a mind to work specifically with dancers through the college application process. This brought me right back into the dance community; I started working with dancers in high school to help them figure out what programs fit them best and how to research what each offers. One of my favorite parts is coaching them through their prescreen and audition materials.

When I started, dancers could live in NYC more cheaply, eat for less money, rents were lower and dance classes more affordable. I even took classes for free at certain studios if I had a work/study deal. Certainly there were times when money was low but it was easier to live on very little, and I had just enough. I think it's harder for dancers now in the city, but like many of us did, they work out ways to have other work that interests them that works in concert with their dance lives. I've noticed that as I work with dancers, some families have more emphasis on a "back-up plan" versus working to add to the plan with complimentary work that keeps them financially independent.

Given how the arts are a huge part of our economy, I keep hoping to help dancers find ways to make this career more and more viable. I find that even while dancers struggle financially at times, how many dancers do you know who wish they hadn't gone into dance at all? The skills gained and the discipline required are transferable in so many ways to so many things.

loved all the Taylor work that I learned from Ruby Shang. I loved anything that was athletic with big movement and lots of jumps. I found that I worked even harder in the Corvino classes as I wanted to understand everything more clearly. The fact that they were so nice and so patient was even more motivating for me. Coming from a commercial background but being more attracted to classic modern dance, I was open to seeing what was out there. It was suggested to me that I graduate a year early and I didn't really know why but Ethel said that she felt I would

If I had a mission for my work with students, it would include the idea that your college dance career and career after college are NOT the end of the story. We don't stop learning or using all the skills we've gained. The other thing I hear a lot is so much emphasis on hard work and sacrifice, forgetting completely about the joy and what one gains. It's true that life in NYC for artists is challenging but I know I would not have given up that life for anything. It still fills my heart to see dancers who are excited and fulfilled by the life they have chosen.

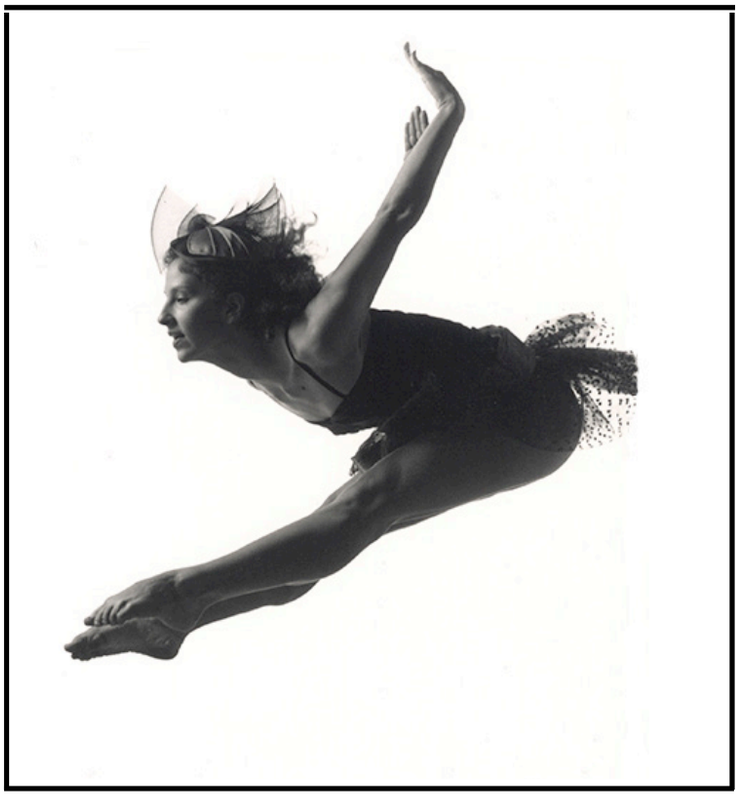
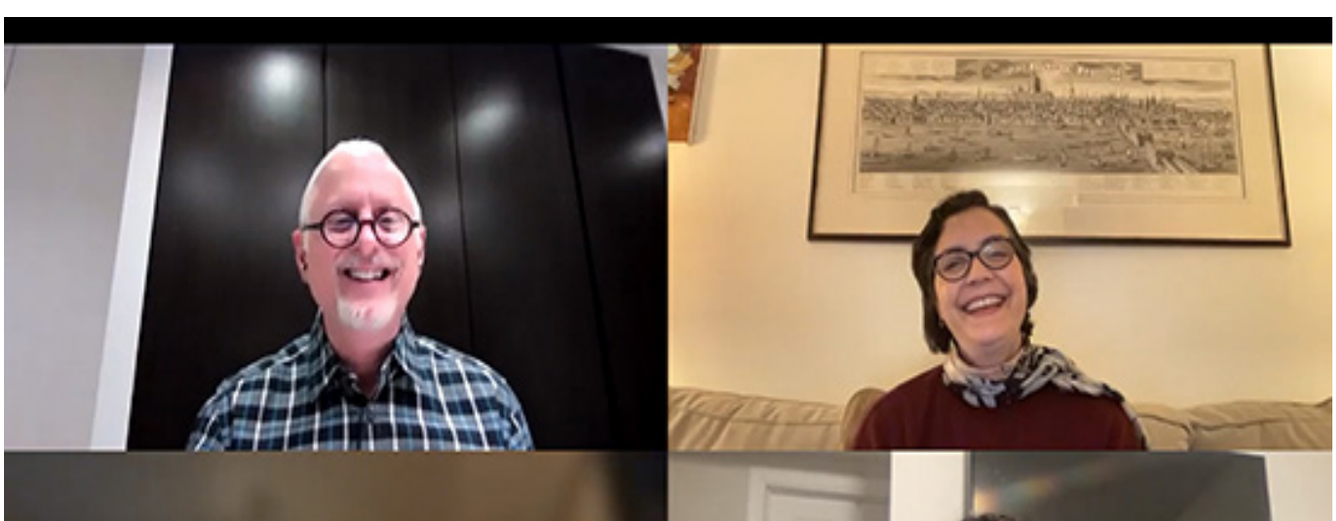
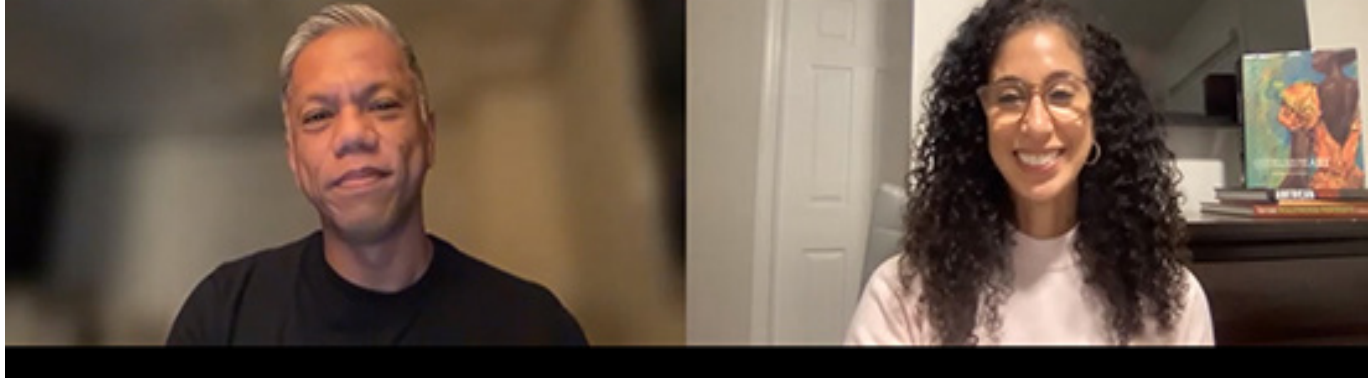


Photo: Lois Greenfield

Barrie Raffel in Rachel Harms' *Blue Foxes*, circa 1987

Zoom Panel 2022
The Evolution of Miss Hill's Legacy





Clockwise from left to right, Allen Maniker, Elizabeth McPherson, Gerald Casel and Alicia Graf Mack

On November 28th, 2022, the Martha Hill Dance Fund held a virtual event entitled *The Evolution of Miss Hill's Legacy*. This was an opportunity to explore how the innovations of Miss Hill had evolved over time and how they are viewed by dance educators of today. The event was conceived by Allen Maniker and Rebecca Lazier, MHDF Board members. It was moderated by Allen Maniker and entailed a lively discussion amongst a panel of distinguished dance educators that included:

Gerald Casel, Chair of Dance, Rutgers University, Mason Gross School of the Arts, New Jersey.

Alicia Graf Mack, Director of the Juilliard School Dance Division, New York.

Elizabeth McPherson, Director of Dance, Montclair State University, New Jersey.

The discussion was based around concepts that Miss Hill brought to dance education and how they are seen today. These included:

1. She brought Dance into equal conversation/value with other art forms in higher education. Moved it out of physical education and into the family of the other arts.

2. She brought more rigorous training to modern dancers, making ballet training a part of the curriculum from which the dancer could move to other genres.

3. She instilled the idea that the dancer should be versatile and conversant in more than one technique.

4. She advanced the idea that the knowledge and understanding of the history of dance by the dancer was important.

5. She recognized the importance for the dancer to be exposed to composition and classic forms. She understood it as a necessity for the survival of the form to develop new choreographers.

6. She understood the importance of performance. It was not enough to simply train but that this must include performance.

Amongst the points brought out is that young dancers today have much more agency in how their curriculum and courses are shaped. Courses of study today have much more awareness of diversity, equity and inclusion and offer a much broader range of types and styles of dance being studied. History is still an important component of dance education however it is more inclusive of the entire scope of the dance world and in some cases has been reconfigured entirely to meet today's viewpoint. Composition as well remains an important component of dance education.

Discussion was lively and a true exchange of ideas amongst these distinguished panelists who seemed fascinated to learn of each other's programs and the approaches being taken. All acknowledged a debt to Miss Hill's innovations as well as work yet to be done. A very worthwhile presentation that honored Miss Hill's ideas of innovation in dance education.

Please note that due to fund-raising efforts for the documentary no awards were given in 2010 and in 2013 only the young professional award was given. In 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2023 no Young Professional Award was given, instead ten students were invited to attend the Gala. In lieu of awards in 2020, COVID -19 Relief Grants were given to 23 young dancers and choreographers.

Lifetime Achievement Award 2023 Diana Byer and Dianne McIntyre, 2021 Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, 2019 Carolyn Adams, Stuart Hodes, Betty Jones, 2018 Sylvia Waters, 2017 Norton Owen and Alice Teirstein, 2016 Ann Hutchinson Guest and Deborah Jowitt, 2015 Murray Louis and Carla Maxwell, 2014 Mary Hinkson and Martha Myers, 2012 Gemze De Lappe and Yuriko Kikuchi, 2011 Daniel Lewis, 2009 Beverly Blossom, 2008 Ethel Winter, 2007 Pearl Lang, 2006 Mary Anthony, 2005 Ruth Grauert, 2004 Donald McKayle and Doris Rudko, 2003 Francis Mason, 2002 Doris Hering and May O'Donnell, 2001 Alfredo Corvino

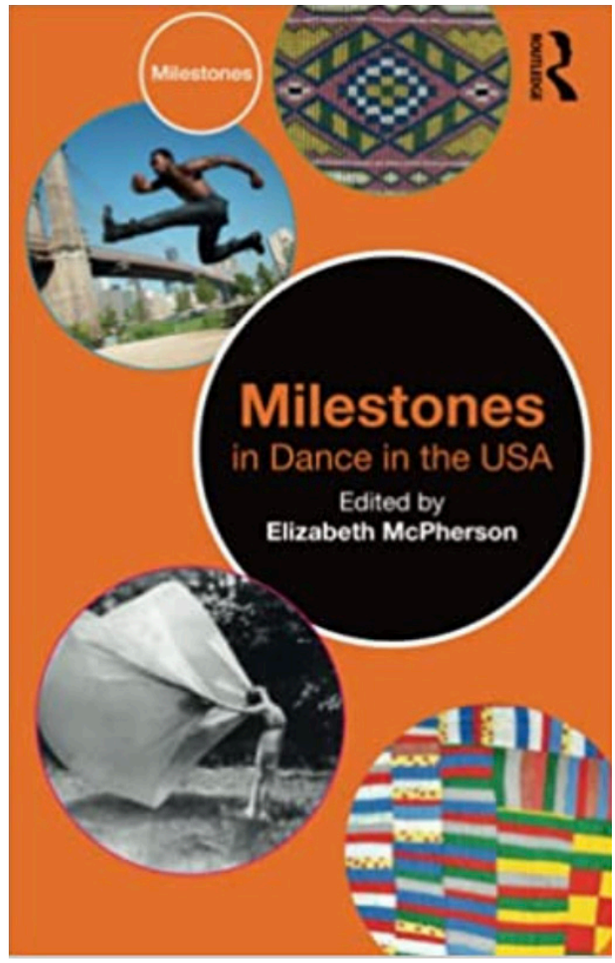
Mid-Career Award 2023 Deborah Damast, 2021 Heidi Latsky, 2019 Seán Curran, Nigel Campbell and Chanel DaSilva, 2018 Jessica Lang and David Leventhal, 2017 Robert Garland and Denise Roberts Hurlin, 2016 Fredrick Earl Mosley, 2015 Mark DeGarmo, 2014 John-Mario Sevilla, 2012 Dian Dong & H.T. Chen, 2009 Virginia Johnson, 2008 Janet Panetta, 2007 David Dorfman, 2006 Doug Elkins
Young professional Award 2016 Eric Parra, 2015 Jacoby Pruitt, 2014 Danielle Robin Reinstein, 2013 Christian Griggs-Drane, 2012 Lissa Nicole Smith, 2011 Patricia Carby, 2009 Jacqueline Green, 2008 Lilli-Anne Tai, 2007 Levi Marsman, 2006 Katie Dorn, 2005 Christopher Vo, 2004 Molly Mae MacGregor
Special Citation 2016 Reed Hansen **Special Citation 2015** Dance Notation Bureau **Special Citation 2009** Hortense Zera
Student Choice Award 2012 Kazuko Hirabayashi **Carl Wolz Award** 2003 Mira Kim

OUT NOW

Milestones
in Dance in the America

Edited by Elisabeth McPherson

Congratulations to Elizabeth McPherson (Board member) on the Ruth Lovell Murray book award from NDEO!



Embracing dramatic similarities, glaring disjunctions, and striking innovations, this book explores the history and context of dance on the land we know today as the United States of America. Designed for weekly use in dance history courses, it traces dance in the USA as it broke traditional forms, crossed genres, provoked social and political change, and drove cultural exchange and collision. The authors of the ten chapters put a particular focus on those whose voices have been silenced, unacknowledged, and/or uncredited – exploring racial prejudice and injustice, intersectional feminism, protest movements, and economic conditions, as well as demonstrating how socio-political issues and movements affect and are affected by dance. In looking at concert dance, vernacular dance, ritual dance, and the convergence of these forms, the chapters acknowledge the richness of dance in today's USA and the strong foundations on which it stands. (www.routledge.com)

For the official announcement of the NDEO award, please go to https://www.ndeo.org/Membership/Awards/Ruth-Lovell-Murray-Book-Award

BRIEF NEWS

PATRICIA CARBY (Young Professional Honoree 2011)
Patricia has decided to go back to school to pursue an MFA degree.

SEÁN CURAN (Mid-Career Honoree 2019)

Seán just choreographed two - 1 act operas for Opera Lafayette at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, and El Teatro del Barrio in NYC. He also choreographed productions of *Tosca*, *Cosi Fan Tutti* and *Susannah* at Opera Theater of St Louis. In July he is traveling to Ireland to teach and perform a solo at Dancer from the Dance Festival in Dublin. Seán Curran Company will perform Céilí with Darrah Carr Dance at Jacob's Pillow on July 19 and 20. Céilí returns to the Irish Arts Center in NYC for a return engagement December 14 to 17. His big life news is that he is stepping down as Chair at NYU Tisch Dance after leading the department for the past 9 years.

DIAN DONG (Mid-Career Honoree 2012)
Dian was recently appointed Artistic Director of Chen Dance Center. Since the passing of Hsueh-Tung (H.T.) Chen, her life partner and husband of 47 years, Dian led the company in performances and citywide educational programs. In the Fall of 2023 H.T. Chen & Dancers will be touring TN, MS, and schools in NJ and NYC.

ALEX HASKINS (Covid Relief Grantee)
Alex joined the London based Hofesh Schehter Company in 2022. He loves the work and enjoys the touring. One unexpected invitation to perform came from Reunion, a tiny island of the coast of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. According to Alex "it is paradise" and the company was invited for a return engagement.

CHARLES E. SCHELAND (Covid Relief Grantee)
In the fall Charles will be starting his third season as a dancer with Carolyn Dorfman Dance and his second year as Horton Faculty at The Ailey School. He will also be returning to Jacob's Pillow as Artist Faculty for the Contemporary Program for the third time. And, he has been working with Site-Specific Dances for various projects including some teaching residencies and live performances over the last year.

LUCY BARRER-TOZZI (Covid Relief Grantee)
NW Dance Project offered Lucy a contract for the upcoming year. She accepted and is moving to Portland. She looks forward meeting and working with lots of amazing people. For a review of company's Summer Dance Platform performances and some beautiful photos of Lucy, please go to https://www.orartswatch.org/review-nw-dance-projects-stravinsky/

HEIDI LATSKY (Mid-Career Honoree 2022)
Heidi's company goes to Yale to perform their work D.I.S.P.L.A.Y.E.D in June as part of the International Festival of Arts and Ideas. They will then perform in NYC at the New Victory in July.

Over the intense COVID years, she created 12 short films that are now being submitted to film festivals. Some of the films have received honorable mentions, which has been very exciting.

A few years ago, she developed with her team an education program titled *Dancing Ourselves*. They have been implementing it over the last few years and are now introducing it to more schools. The primary goal of the program is to teach tolerance, openness, and compassion for oneself and others, all through dance.

A personal highlight, she performed for the first time in four years at Westbeth as part of *Westfest* last month. It was a challenging task but she is very happy she did it.

DANIEL LEWIS (Lifetime Achievement Honoree 2011)
Danny did his annual performances of *A Life in Dance* for 800 children at the Little Haiti Cultural Complex. In conjunction with these performances, he gave master classes for professional dancers in the community. He also did a lecture on Anna Sokolow with Jim May online: you can see it at https://vimeo.com/538369998.

The most important event took place in both Miami and New York with the Limón Company and Dance Now Miami, a company he worked with and has staged works of his own over the years. This event comprised joint performances of *The Waldstein Sonata*, a piece which José started in 1971, and Danny was commissioned to complete in 1975 by Martha Hill and Peter Mennin for the Juilliard students. Dancers from both companies took part in the performances in Miami, and then again in May at the Marian Anderson Theater in New York. The last performance was very special and a very touching evening for him. That night, onstage, he signed over the rights to this work to the Limón Foundation, in a presentation with the present Artistic Director Dante Puleio. A few graduates from Juilliard who were in the original cast came to the performance, which brought things full circle! Limón's last work is now home.

MOLLY MAE MACGREGOR (Young Professional Honoree 2004)
Molly and her family are still in Reno, and she is still at her health studio, Hug Pilates & Wellness. Her primary focus is on women's health, especially the prenatal/postpartum and peri/postmenopausal years. She is now a referral partner for the Diabetes and Endocrine Center of Nevada and is enjoying collaborating with various health professionals in the area. She hopes to continue impacting people's health for the better through mindful movement and integrative nutrition for many years to come.

NORTON OWEN (Lifetime Achievement Honoree 2017)
Norton is on his 48th season at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, continuing to create exhibitions and oversee all the work of the Pillow Archives - now encompassing more than 10,000 videos among countless other treasures. He devotes a lot of attention to their online engagement, and anyone interested can go to danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org and sign up for the newsletter to receive updates from him each month.

Meanwhile, Norton participated in three performance events over the past year. Last June at the Guggenheim, he created the role of Grandfather in a new collaboration between Isaac Mizrahi, John Heginbotham, and Nico Muhly, entitled *Third Bird*. This was a sort of sequel to the Guggenheim's perennial Mizrahi/Heginbotham production of *Peter and the Wolf*, which he also joined as Grandfather in December. He'll appear in both works again when they return to the Guggenheim in December 2023. In addition, he appeared in Yve Laris Cohen's *Studio/Theater: Preservation* at The Museum of Modern Art from October through December 2022, a series of performance events that accompanied an exhibition of remnants from the Pillow's Doris Duke Theatre.

COMMUNITY NEWS

From Denise Roberts Hurlin (Mid-Career Honoree 2017)

Poster design: Jenny Garcia

Fire Island Dance Festival makes its annual return July 14-16th. The picturesque, three-performance weekend features established and emerging choreographers and companies. This years lineup includes Parsons Dance, New York City Ballet principal Taylor Stanley, choreography by Ray Mercer, Jonathan Lee, Paul McGill, and many more! A hassle-free day trip package is available. For $350, it includes round-trip luxury transportation from New York City or Teaneck, NJ, a delicious champagne luncheon and a ticket to the 5 pm performance on Sunday, July 16. It is the perfect opportunity to escape the fast pace of the city for a beautiful day on Fire Island. Not only will you get to experience beautiful performances, you will also be providing healthy meals, medication and emergency support to those in need. These tickets are limited. With any questions please contact Abigail Richards at richards@broadwaycares.org. The link for the website is https://dradance.org/pre-event/fire-island-dance-festival-2023/

In Memoriam – H.T. Chen (1947 - 2022)

Compiled by Elizabeth McPherson

Photo: John Lee

H.T.Chen

On Sunday, June 12, 2022, Hsueh-Tung Chen passed away at the age of 74. H.T. was a loving husband, father and well-known NYC based choreographer. He received the Mid-Career Award from the Martha Hill Dance Fund (MHDF) in 2012 along with his wife Dian Dong. H.T. also appears in the film *Miss Hill Making Dance Matter* that was produced by MHDF. He was a stalwart supporter of our organization and always attended every yearly Gala. He was a friend to so many of us who are part of this community.

H.T. was born in Shanghai, China to Chiang and Hsian Yuan Ming Chen and raised in Taipei, Taiwan with his 5 siblings. Early on interested in drawing and painting, his family thought he might pursue a career in architecture, but that was not to be. H.T. studied Chinese classical dance as well as the use of movement-based practices in Chinese Opera at the College of Chinese Culture in Taiwan before moving to New York City to study modern dance. In 1976 he graduated from the Juilliard School, and in 1978 he received an MA in Dance Education from NYU.

At Juilliard, he met his wife, muse and collaborator, Dian Dong. Martha Hill, the director of the Juilliard Dance Division, insisted that Dian be H.T.'s translator – although they spoke different dialects – and this began many years of working side by side as "partners in crime" as Dian once joked. After graduating from Juilliard, H.T. choreographed and performed at the La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club along with other work. Martha Hill had encouraged H.T. to use his gifts to support the Chinese-American community, and following this advice as well as their own passions, H.T. and Dian established H.T. Chen & Dancers in 1978, the Arts Gate Center school in 1980, and the Mulberry St. Theater in 1988. These collectively became Chen Dance Center, a vibrant cultural community on Mulberry Street that supports the interests of the Chinatown community, the NYC dance community, and all who are looking for quality dance performance and arts education. Neil Genzlinger of *The New York Times* describes the center as "a cultural anchor in New York's Chinatown." After a devastating fire in 2020, plans for restoring the building are underway; classes and rehearsals have been relocated.

Chen features Chinese-American narratives with a hybrid concert dance aesthetic. The company fosters community outreach and educational programs. Chen's *Apple Dreams* (2007), about the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, advanced from destruction to rebirth amidst the USA's climate of fear that fueled xenophobia. An intergenerational, multiethnic group of community members, including babies and toddlers, joined Chen's company for the piece; during a powerful moment cast members lay on their backs peacefully, but also as if they fell from a height, in the Winter Garden of NYC's World Financial Center." (145-46).

Laura Molzan of Broadway World wrote of H.T.'s recent work *South of Gold Mountain*, that it "shed a light on the untold stories of immigrants that are far more common than foreign, and that light shone brilliantly." H.T. spent three years on research in the development of this work, particularly focusing on Chinese-American immigrants who settled in the pre-Civil Rights southern USA, some of whom worked on cotton plantations. Jennifer Dunning of *The New York Times* spoke more broadly of his work: "Mr. Chen has long been one of New York dance's most persuasive storytellers, addressing issues of acculturation well before they become fashionable in dance." He received numerous awards and recognition for his work, including a BESSIE Special Citation and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Organization of Chinese Americans.

In addition to choreography, H.T. was an advocate for the performing arts - serving on numerous arts panels, such as the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. His passion for dance knew no bounds and was infectious to all who engaged with him. He emphatically believed in the transformative power of the arts to lift the human spirit, and he stood by that belief in his work as a choreographer and educator. His company conducted extensive educational programming and outreach in communities nationwide as well as internationally. In 2021, the Company developed a K-12 curriculum called TRACING FOOTSTEPS – *Into the Heart of Chinatown* for the NYC Department of Education. On a personal level, Dian describes that "H.T. was passionate about gardening, coin collecting and befriending every dog in sight. He possessed a childlike

As a choreographer, H.T. created contemporary dances influenced by his background in both Western and Eastern dance traditions. Many of his works had a social justice or social awareness component as well as traditional or personal themes. Dian is quoted in *The New York Times* describing the importance of H.T.'s work: "Because H.T. Chen focused much of his creations on the stories of Chinese in the Americas, these works are important for enabling students to understand the contributions of Chinese in the building of America… When guided to look deeper into the culture, students begin to view Asians not as the 'alien other' but as their friends, neighbors and colleagues." Scholar Hannah Kosstrin writes of H.T.'s work in the book *Milestones in Dance in the USA*: "With H.T. Chen and Dancers (f.1978), wonder and approach to life which led him to see beauty and art in everything and everyone he crossed paths with. He planted seeds of art wherever he was so that the arts will continue to thrive in the next generations."

H.T. is survived by his wife Dian, two daughters Yeeli and Evelyn, three siblings, as well as numerous nieces & nephews, friends & family. H.T. and Dian's daughters Yeeli and Evelyn continue the family tradition in the arts with professions in arts administration and dance/theater performance. H.T. Chen & Dancers continues Chen's lifework with a current offering of an interactive lecture-demonstration titled *Eight Strokes & The Moving Word*, which explores the connection between calligraphy and dance as well as the Chinese-American experience, past and present.

In Memoriam - Stuart Hodes (1924 - 2023)

Compiled by Elisabeth McPherson

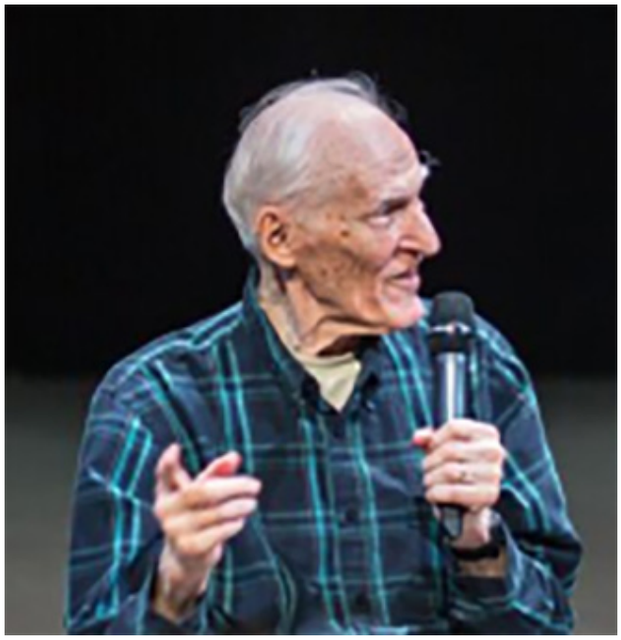


Photo: Tequila Minsky

Stuart Hodes

Stuart Hodes passed away on March 15, 2023 at the age of 98. He received the Martha Hill Dance Fund Lifetime Achievement Award in 2019. Despite at first being ambivalent about the award, he then switched gears to give one of the most enthusiastic, touching and humorous acceptance speeches of record. In the video shown that evening, he summed up his over six-decade career in dance: tremendously engaging story of his life with particular focus on his relationship with Graham. Through Stuart, we see Graham in all her glorious genius and human foibles. About her (at the MHDF Gala), he laughingly said "Working with Martha was a trip." In his book, he describes working with Graham as, "life in the eye of the storm, at the epicenter of an earthquake." After just having flown B-17's in combat missions, this thrill and excitement of Grahams' mercurial personality and working method drew him in. He wrote, "Having flown and fought as a 19 year old, I could live with nothing else." He continued "To become the object of her interest was intoxicating, a challenge I was powerless to resist, yet it took me a while to realize that I was stuck with her and with dancing for the rest of my life." He became known in the company for standing up to Graham, but was somehow able to ride through these encounters. As an example, he related during his MHDF award acceptance speech, that after being in the company for a month and a half, he was speaking with Graham during a rehearsal break and said, "Martha, I've realized something – you are not a saint.' She said, 'Congratulations.'" It was perhaps his ability to speak with her directly and freely that made him an effective and consistent dance partner in her later years of performing.

"Dancing was very exciting, so it was an adventure, and that's why I stuck with it."

Stuart Hodes Gescheidt was born in NYC on November 27, 1924 to Jacob and Kate Gescheidt. He had an older sister and younger brother, and the family lived in Queens and Brooklyn. Stuart enrolled in Brooklyn College after graduating from Brooklyn Tech High School, but his college career was cut short when he was drafted. He served as an aviator flying B-17's with the Army Air Corps in World War II. He describes how he was absolutely enthralled with flying -- that the plane became an extension of his body. In a PBS program, he said, "You felt the whole country was up there with you."

After his discharge and while also having re-enrolled at Brooklyn College, he began taking classes at the Martha Graham Dance Studio with no real thought to becoming a dancer. But, after participating in a company tour in 1946 followed by some professional work at the Ziegfeld Theater, he committed to dance. In a PBS interview late in his life, he described how dancing and flying were ways of getting to the same state for him, using every particle of himself -- a kind of magic, that "takes everything you've got." At the MHDF awards Gala he said, "Dancing is like flying, but you do not need an airplane."

With the Graham Company, he danced major roles in such works as *Night Journey, Canticle for Innocent Comedians*, *Theatre for a Voyage*, *Deaths and Entrances*, *Diversion of Angels*, and *Appalachian Spring*. Of his portrayal of the Bridegroom in *Appalachian Spring*, critic John Martin of *The New York Times* wrote that Stuart brought a "touching quality of awkward tenderness to the role." In a more recent description of Stuart regarding the same role in the film of *Appalachian Spring*, Brian Seibert characterized Stuart's performance as "spirited, eager, trustworthy."

Stuart wrote numerous articles, and his autobiographical *On Stage with Martha Graham*, is a

As Graham was not paying dancers for rehearsals in those early decades of the company, Stuart took all sorts of dance jobs in addition to his work with the Graham Company. Highlights included: Broadway – *Paint Your Wagon*, *Once Upon a Mattress*, *The Most Happy Fella* and *The King and I*; Television – The Milton Berle Show and the Esther Williams *AquaSpectacle*; and Film – *Annie Get Your Gun*. These experiences contributed to a highly varied career that would give him a solid and diverse foundation as a choreographer and educator.

Stuart made his debut as a choreographer at the 92nd Street Y in 1951 and continued choreographing for decades including a duet with Alice Teirstein titled *I Thought You Were Dead* that was named one of the ten best dances of 1996 by *Ballet Review*. Jennifer Dunning of *The New York Times* reviewed the performance writing, "One high point was 'I Thought You Were Dead,' created and performed by Stuart Hodes and Alice Teirstein to Strauss waltz music, a hilarious, touching, and perceptive duet for two aging lovers who are ready for anything at this stage of their lives."

Hodes worked extensively as a teacher and arts administrator, including positions at NYC's High School of Performing Arts, the New School, the Borough of Manhattan Community College, and New York University (where he served as Head of Dance from 1972-1982). He was the director at The Kitchen -- an experimental arts presenter, and helped bring that organization into fiscal stability. He also served as executive director of the Dance Notation Bureau. He worked for the New York State Council for the Arts and was a panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts.

Hodes married fellow Graham dancer Linda Margolies in 1953 and they had two children: Catherine and Martha. They divorced in 1965, and Stuart married Elizabeth Wullen in 1966. He is survived by Elizabeth, Catherine, Martha and two grandchildren.

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Photographer unknown.
Photograph courtesy of Martha Gra

Stuart Hodes in Martha Graham's
Appalachian Spring

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