
Carry on...

The CHARLES WEIDMAN Newsletter

Volume 6, Number 1 Spring 1993

President's Report

Early last year, Board members held a memorial for Louise Allen by looking at her remarkably thorough scrap books. Although they are partly personal, they gave us vital images of the early Humphrey-Weidman Company, the Denishawn School and Eleanor King's company. It was an appropriate farewell to a very important member of our group.

The major event of the year was **Redivivio: Experiences in Reconstruction** (see article below). The Weidman dances continue to be performed. **Lynchtown** was performed by the SUNY Purchase students in New York and elsewhere (see article on page 2). Janet Towner reconstructed **Traditions** and the **Men's Dance** from **New Dance** at the University of Washington / Seattle and Deborah Carr continues to perform Weidman repertoire.

The hard economic times have re-taught us an old method of survival - barter! Johannes Holub made a beautiful video tape of a Janet Towner class in payment for his wife's tuition.

In February of this year, the Foundation elected a new president, Carol Mezzacappa, who has administrative skills along with many others, and is energetic and enthusiastic. I have enjoyed my tenure as president and I now look forward to working under Carol's leadership. Other officers elected are Joan Hostetter, Vice-President; JoAnn Luehring, Treasurer; and as Co-Secretaries, Margaret O'Sullivan and Tom McNally.

Miriam Raphael Cooper

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Dances And Discussion At Dia Arts Center

Redivivio, Experiences in Reconstruction on May 10, 1992 at the Dia Arts Center in Manhattan consisted of five reconstructed dances followed by

a panel discussion. The dances and dancers were **The Mazurkas** by José Limón (1958, excerpt reconstructed by Sarah Stackhouse, performed by Roxanne D'Orleans Juste, Paul Dennis), Ted Shawn's **Brother Sun and Sister Moon** (circa 1933, Stuart Hodes, danced by Mr. Hodes), **Day on Earth**, Doris Humphrey by Letitia Coburn (1947, excerpt, dancers: Phyllis Grant, Paul Dennis), **Moon Dances** by Eleanor King (1944, by Annabelle Gamson performed by Sue Bernard), and Charles Weidman's **Lynchtown** (1936 by Carol; Mezzacappa, performed by Kara Vernarec, Gayle Gibbons, Theodore Thomas, Raymond Sullivan, Krisha Marcano, Matthew Mohr, Margaret Godwin, Juliet Harvey, Laurie Hershberger, Rosalynde LeBlanc, Cynthia Schilb, Graham Smith, Tamara Tossey and Kevin VerEecke).

We thank the José Limón Company, the Juilliard School and SUNY Purchase for providing the dancers.

In addition to the reconstructors, the panel included Ray Cook, Jack Anderson, and Peter Hamilton and was moderated by Maria Grandy. Important theoretical and practical ideas came out in the discussion. Amazing problems can and do occur in the process of recreating dances. Some were funny in the re-telling, but did reveal the complexity of keeping dances alive and there were passionate opposing views about the value of doing so.

The program was videotaped; the discussion transcribed and both are available at the Dance Collection of the New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

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Conference at Rutgers University Flickers

Dance Reconstructed, a conference held at Rutgers University last October 16 and 17, had panels and individuals presenting various aspects of reconstruction. Of particular interest to us was the

presentation by A. William Smith of **Flickers: A Fifty Year Old Flicker of the Weidman Tradition**. The illustrated lecture recounted the process of preparation for teaching **Flickers** from Labanotation. This reconstructor researched the material with the rarely seen thoroughness it deserves. By studying old photos, descriptions, reviews and videotapes, Dr. Smith unearthed a wealth of details and their transformations from the premiere to the present. The image of the evolution of the piece over fifty years is startling, but this effort will give future reconstructors vital information for making artistic decisions.

Dr. Smith is a dance historian and teaches at California State University at Long Beach. This year, Pendragon Press is bringing out his book on renaissance dance.

Lynchtown in Taiwan

Last July, Carol Mezzacappa directed **Lynchtown** with a combined cast of SUNY Purchase and Taiwanese dance students from the National Institute of the Arts at the Taipei International Festival of Dance Academies in Taiwan. Nations represented were Japan, Taiwan, England, Bali, Korea, India and the United States. In her words:

"I had been working with SUNY Purchase dancers on **Lynchtown** since February 1991. They performed it in April 1991 at Purchase, Holland and Manhattan in subsequent months.

"The five Taiwanese students learned **Lynchtown** from Labanotation, videotape and from my faxed notes. After my arrival, during five intensive days of rehearsal, the fifteen dancers in the cast became an ensemble in every sense of the word. The ten American dancers' verve and aggressive physicality influenced the size of the Taiwanese's movements, while the Taiwanese's inner strength and intensity, pushed the Americans to approach their movements from another perspective.

"Remarkably, both Purchase and the NIA students receive similar training, drawing upon the professionals in their areas, and both conferring a BFA upon graduation.

"The Weidman Master Classes I taught were attended by professional dancers, college dance majors and high school dancers. Both participants and observers experienced the joy of movement, physicality and humanity of the Humphrey-Weidman approach." * * *



Lynchtown in Taiwan, 1992

Workshops

Board plans that the Charles Weidman Dance Foundation sponsor an annual workshop has now become a reality. A two week course was taught by Janet Towner (*June 15-26*) last year at the Dance Theater Workshop studio in Manhattan. Teachers of dance and students who took the course expressed genuine enthusiasm and achieved a grasp of the technique. Excerpts from Weidman's *Easter Oratorio* were given. Janet remembered Charles's special phrases for illuminating a movement which were often amusing. Against elegant strains of Bach, Charles might say, "Don't step on the sheep turd!" Again, the Board thanks the Harkness Foundations for Dance for enabling us to give several scholarships.

Looking to the future, we are happy to announce that Weidman classes will be offered in the Harkness Workshop Series for Professional Dancers. The one week course will be taught by Peter Hamilton, with Carol Mezzacappa assisting him. Mr. Hamilton was a luminary in the Humphrey-Weidman Company and is a renowned choreographer. He often took over the classes in Weidman's 29th Street studio in the early 1970's, while Charles taught on his college tours. This will be an exciting week - April 19-23 from 11 am to 1 pm each day. The cost is \$50.00 and classes will be held at the 92nd Street Y in Manhattan.

To register, call 212-415-5552.

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Chronology Fund

Thank you to the contributors to the fund to prepare a chronology of Charles Weidman dances. We are in the process of beginning the work now. To contribute to that fund, or to our work in general, please send your checks in the envelope provided in this newsletter. Our plans include presenting a concert of Humphrey and Weidman works next year.

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Mia's Medea

It came to our attention, through a reader of this newsletter, that Charles choreographed a dance for

the great ballerina, Mia Slavenska in the early fifties. As her company was on tour, it was performed in South America, and only once in the states, at Jacob's Pillow. It was a solo for Miss Slavenska to Ravel music. Charles also designed the costume, which was bright red, with huge draped sleeves, which embodied Medea's qualities of witchcraft, death and passion. If anyone saw that performance, or has materials relating to it, we would very much appreciate any information or photographs. Miss Slavenska now lives in Southern California

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Weidman What-Nots

Charles Weidman T-shirts, the wonderful set of post cards with six different photographs of Weidman (from Denishawn days on), and the videotape documentary, *Charles Weidman -- On His Own*, are still available. T-shirts are \$15.50, videotapes are \$55.00 and the set of post cards is \$5.50, all including postage. Send your check or money order, and which item(s) you wish, in the envelope provided.

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Charles Weidman often signed his letters "Carry on..." We appropriate his valiant and optimistic slogan as we carry on his legacy.

■ Assisted by Dance Theater Workshop ■