

# Carry on...

THE CHARLES WEIDMAN NEWSLETTER

Volume 8, Number 1  
Spring 1994

## HUMPHREY-WEIDMAN GALA

### FINALLY A REALITY

For years we have wanted to offer a program of dances created by Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman during their collaborative period.

**HUMPHREY-WEIDMAN GALA:** Dances from **Their Years Together** will take place on Sunday May 1st, 5:00 in the afternoon, at the Sylvia and Danny Kaye Playhouse at Hunter College.

Beginning with Doris and Charles' first concert together in 1928 and continuing through 1945, the dances presented will celebrate an important era in American dance: **Submerged Cathedral** (Weidman, 1928), **Life of the Bee** (Humphrey, 1929), **The Shakers** and **Two Ecstatic Themes** (Humphrey, 1931), **Variations and Conclusion** (Humphrey, 1935), **On My Mother's Side** and **David and Goliath** (Weidman 1939, 1945, respectively). **Two Ecstatic Themes** was reconstructed by Ernestine Stodelle for Carla Maxwell and Nina Watt. **Submerged Cathedral** and **David and Goliath** have been re-created by Peter Hamilton especially for this concert. Leslie Rotman of the Dance Notation Bureau, recorded **David and Goliath** in labanotation as Mr. Hamilton taught it to the Purchase Dance Corps.

In conjunction with the gala performance, the Hunter College Dance Department will offer a Weidman workshop for the community. Dancers from the State University of New York at Purchase, New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, and The University of the Arts

(Philadelphia) will perform the group works. Carla Maxwell, Craig Gabrian, and Douglas Nielsen will perform the solos.

### GALA TICKETS

\$40.00 -- INCLUDES RECEPTION

\$28.00; \$20.00;

Student tickets, \$10.00 with I.D.

Purchase tickets directly from the Sylvia and Danny Kaye Playhouse Box Office:

**by phone/charge:** call 212-772-4448

**by mail:** send check/money order to:  
Ticket Orders  
The Sylvia and Danny Kaye Playhouse  
695 Park Avenue  
New York, New York 10021  
(include \$3.00 handling charge)

**in person:** go to the box office at 68th Street between Park & Lexington Avenues

See you May 1st!

\* \* \*

Many thanks to those who have contributed to the Gala thus far! (list complete as of 2/25/94 . . . and yes, we do still need help!!!)

The Donnet Fund  
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**LETITIA IDE,  
1909-1993**

**IN MEMORIAM**

Time has been busy, this past year or two, decimating the surviving members of the original Humphrey-Weidman Dance Group.

First, Kenneth Bostock, who, in retirement, returned to his native Vancouver; then Eleanor King, who pioneered modern dance in the North- and Southwest; next, our stay-at-home diligent secretary, Louise Allen; and most recently (Aug. '93) Letitia Ide, luminary of the Humphrey-Weidman concert dance group (1930-37), later of the Jose Limon dance group (1946-48) and, "mitten indrinnen", of Broadway musicals, etc.

Daughter of a Midwest matriarch land-owner and an Eastcoast musician (composer & teacher), Letitia, after being introduced to dance at school in Chicago, came to New York to become a grand-daughter of Isadora. The Duncan studio, in the late 20's was located in the wonderful cultural center, 9 East 59th Street off Grand Army Plaza, with its rickety elevator, narrow stairs and scores of ardent young devotees of

The Arts. Doris and Charles, newly released from years of voluntary servitude to Miss Ruth and Ted, and fired, like Martha, to create a modern American dance, had their studio in the same building -- presumably on the same floor. Rumor hath it that Letitia shuttled conscientiously from Duncan to Humphrey-Weidman to fulfill her obligations and realize her ambition.

Abandoning Isadora for less lyrical postures, Letitia moved, with Doris and Charles, to the 18th Street studio. (Domiciled nearby, she succumbed to the charms of Victor and became Mrs. Ratner.) From this time dates the intense development of her career. Aside from the works Doris and Charles were producing for concerts and tours, there were the Broadway engagements. And as if this were not enough, Letitia found time to take part in small group-offshoots of the heavy schedule at the studio. Among these divertimenti were works by Eleanor King (notably, the ambitious, anti-Fascist *Icaro*), Jose, John Glenn and Jack Cole. Some of these pieces were composed for the Little Group, those by Jack Cole for *Dance Intime* at the Rainbow Room and elsewhere.

Not herself a path-breaker, like any of her mentors, Letitia's combination of physical beauty, devotion and training marked her out as an ideal instrument for others. Whether on Broadway, where she appeared, after her featured debut in *Lysistrata* -- could George Jean Nathan have failed to appreciate her as the reincarnation of Venus on the half-shell? -- in *As Thousands Cheer*, *Life Begins at 8:40* and *Americana*, or in Doris' *Day on Earth* and *Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias*, Letitia brought to life a succession of demanding, varied roles for women dancers in the line of Pavlova, Danilova and Ulanova.

Those of us who attended the September 16, 1993 memorial for Tish at St. Marks Bouwerie, had the great pleasure of making the acquaintance of her equally remarkable domestic achievements. Her half-sister, her son and daughter, two grand-

daughters and four great-grandchildren (one in swaddling clothes), her companion from Sussex, England and a passel of neighbors from Hastings joined with her contemporaries, Pauline Koner, Doris' son Humphrey Woodford and Martha Hill in tribute to her memory. Excerpts from her father's music, videos of Tish "down on the farm" and in performance, anecdotes of neighborliness, excellent live performances of son Tim's vocal ensemble, a feast of fingerfood and drinks -- all reminded us of Letitia's social grace.

The slim file of clippings at the Library of Performing Arts merely suggest her remarkable professional achievement. Walter Terry, in the defunct Herald-Tribune spoke movingly of her and adds, in just appreciation " . . . if she is not a star [i.e. a choreographer-dancer] she is nevertheless one of the most important and valuable dancers of our day."

We, who worked with her and knew her, however slightly, mourn her loss and cherish her memory.

Ave atque vale!

Thomas McNally  
(then, Malcolm Harper)

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## IN MEMORIAM

In addition to Letitia Ide the dance world has lost many of its great figures this past year. We note with sorrow the passing of: John Butler, Gary DeLoatch, Agnes DeMille, Louis Falco, Christopher Gillis, Hanya Holm, Alwin Nikolais, Rudolph Nureyev, Gret Palucca, Louise Soelberg.

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## STREET NAMING

We have applied to the City of New York to name one of the streets where Doris and Charles maintained a studio in their honor. The streets being considered are 59th Street, 16th Street, 18th Street, and 29th Street.

You can help us with this undertaking by contacting the public officials involved in the street

naming process. If you do not have the time to write your own letter, you can send the enclosed inserts (each in individual envelopes) to the appropriate councilmembers.

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## WEIDMAN ACTIVITIES

Weidman choreography continues to be performed throughout the country by professional ensembles as well as colleges and universities.

### Bargain Counter

-- Henry Street Settlement's Centennial; performed by Carol Mezzacappa & Craig Gabrian in Concert

-- University of Nebraska at Omaha, Moving Company; staged/directed by Carol Mezzacappa

### Brahms Waltzes

-- University of Nebraska at Omaha, Moving Company; staged/directed by Carol Mezzacappa

-- New Dance Studio, Rye, NY

### David & Goliath

-- The Purchase Dance Corps; re-created by Peter Hamilton

### Lynchtown

-- The New Dance Group Gala; Deborah Carr Theater Dance Ensemble

-- Wesleyan University

-- Fieldston Dance Company; directed by Carol Mezzacappa

### New Dance (Men's Dance)

-- Chamber Dance Company of The University of Washington at Seattle; directed by Janet Towner

### Traditions

-- Chamber Dance Company of The University of Washington at Seattle; directed by J. Towner

If you are involved in reconstructing and/or performing Weidman works, and would like to be listed in our newsletter, please contact us.

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## WEIDMAN CLASSES

Classes in Weidman technique have been taking root since the spring of 1993. The Dance Center at the 92nd Street Y presented a week-long Weidman workshop last April as part of the Harkness Workshop Series for Professional Dancers. This was a wonderful opportunity for the Charles Weidman Dance Foundation to bring Charles' work back to life. Charles had a long-standing association with the 92nd Street Y's Dance Center throughout his career, both as a teacher and performer. Joan Finkelstein, the Dance Center's director, felt it important to offer professional dancers a foundation in the roots of modern dance, so they can build upon its rich heritage. The workshop, which included different aspects of the Weidman technique, studies, and principles, was taught by Peter Hamilton.

Building upon the resurging interest in Weidman technique, the Charles Weidman Dance Foundation has instituted on-going classes in Weidman technique in New York City. The classes meet on Saturdays from 2:00-4:00 at 890 Broadway, Studio 5-2 and are taught by Peter Hamilton. Mr. Hamilton, who danced with the Humphrey-Weidman Company from 1940 - 1945, and then with Charles' company, has been challenging our students with the demands of the Weidman technique as he entices their bodies with phrases from the repertory.

### WEIDMAN TECHNIQUE CLASSES

taught by Peter Hamilton

Saturdays, 2:00-4:00  
890 Broadway, Studio 5-2

\$15.00 single class  
\$50.00 -- 5 class card

## REMINISCENCES :

### A DIFFERENT GLIMPSE OF CHARLES

from Joanne Edelmann

On tour in California in the early 70's after a long tech rehearsal, Charles was rehearsing his solo piece on Lincoln. The lights went up too soon and caught Charles -- rear end to audience -- squatting down -- lifting his jacket -- groping for his chair. He turned to the crew and said "That's unconscious humor." He good naturedly explained that once the audience saw this groping figure they would begin to laugh and not be able to concentrate on the piece. Rather than get angry at the tech crew, Charles gave them a lesson about humor!

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## SUMMER WORKSHOPS

Several summer workshops will be taught in different parts of the country by Humphrey-Weidman dancers. Saida Gerrard will be back at the Aspen Music Festival; Nona Schurman will teach a 5-week course at the Ohio State University during June and July; and Ernestine Stodelle will teach for the Doris Humphrey Society in Oak Park, Illinois from August 1 - 7.

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## CARRYING ON THE TRADITIONS

by Janet Towner

What a thrill to see Charles' Traditions and Men's Dance from New Dance performed by The Chamber Dance Company of the University of Washington last February (1993) and to feel the excitement and appreciation of these works in the audience. Charles' works were the highlight of the evening . . . an evening which included five works by

Isadora Duncan, *Escargot* by Louis Falco and *Dance for Seven* by Zvi Gotheiner . . . all performed admirably by the professional dancers who form this company.

The reconstruction of *Traditions* was a great challenge for me since, of course I had never danced in it myself and it had been over 20 years since I had learned the piece as a stand-in as Charles was remounting it for his company at the Expression of Two Arts Theatre in the early 1970's. With the dance notes I had from that time, I began the process of reconstructing the piece.

The success of this reconstruction involved a collaboration with many people: Miriam Cooper, Hannah Wiley, artistic director of The Chamber Dance Company, Michael Cava, the musical director who played the score, and the dancers, Mark Kane, Rip Parker, and Alan Pietsch (also Jim Lepore who danced in *Men's Dance*). Miriam supplied me with the musical score, a photograph of Charles, Jose and Bill Matons in the original costumes, as well as all sorts of valuable information about the feel and intent of the piece which she gathered from people who had seen *Traditions* in the 30's. Her consistent support and encouragement during the process was invaluable.

From the outset, all those involved with this project were of one mind in our desire to recapture the vitality we saw in the brief, but exciting film clips of Charles, Jose and George Bockman performing *Traditions* in Ann Barzel's 30's film. With that end in mind, we worked together very closely and harmoniously in the reconstruction process. The dancers were wonderful, and I cannot praise them enough, both in what they gave of themselves in rehearsals and in their performance of Charles' pieces.

I feel so fortunate to have had this opportunity and ideal situation to reconstruct Charles' works. I wish that Charles could have had the resources, support and funding which I did. He did not, when I knew him;

yet, he "carried on" and if he had not done so, neither *Traditions* or *Men's Dance* (or *New Dance*, for that matter) would be here today.

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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.

# Fall And Recovery

For Shela Xoregos

by Libby Brahms

Shela Xoregos\* took her barefoot dancers everywhere  
Even at Ghirardelli Square, on the concrete

they jumped, twirled, fell to the ground  
bounced back as on a featherbed

as Charles Weidman intended  
in the manner of Doris Humphrey  
who smiled from her grave

Young Xoregos, keeper of history, jumped ever higher

bent legs under like a child over a skip rope  
Pony tail bounced, black eyes snapped

face ablaze  
Fourth of July firecrackers

She landed on her seat on the ground  
and spun like a top

Sixteen Brahms Waltzes

Dancers grouped and re-grouped with each nuance  
mood change

Women, short skirts twirling over flesh leotards  
Men, black tights, white cummerbunds, alongside them

No back drop for the female star  
challenge  
flirt with hitchhiker's thumb

Innocence, an MGM comedy  
Hope, a V sign on outstretched fingers

Dancers stopped marched to footlights  
stood and "looked"

up down out any way they chose  
for reasons of their own

Finale: Crescendo and Crash

Fall—Recovery  
the arc between

Lift—slide out  
roll over—rise up

the drama of a deep breath

\*Xoregos Dance Company performed Brahms Waltzes, Opus 39, during the early 70s in the Bay Area.

Thanks to Shela Xoregos for sharing this lovely poem with us. Libby Brahms is a South Bay Area poet who has been a modern dance devotee and student for many years.

Dear Weidman fans,

Thanks to your support throughout the years, we have been able to foster myriad Weidman activities, among them the video documentary, **Charles Weidman: On His Own**, the wonderful concert **Roots: Foundations of American Dance**, and the tribute **Weidman Celebration**. These endeavors helped us promote Charles' legacy as we simultaneously heralded the beginnings of American modern dance.

This year we are thrilled to be producing a one-of-a-kind concert, **Humphrey-Weidman Gala: Dances From Their Years Together**. The gala will take place Sunday, May 1st, 5:00 in the afternoon, as part of the inaugural season of the Sylvia and Danny Kaye Playhouse. As was mentioned in our lead article, this gala concert will bring to life a major period in American modern dance -- the collaborative years of Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman. With close to 50 dancers performing as part of this gala, we aim to capture the vitality, versatility, and genius of both artists, as we also bring these exciting dances to a new generation of dancers.

Aside from the Humphrey-Weidman gala, we are in the process of compiling information for an annotated chronology of Weidman works and will soon begin work on an oral history project. The establishment of on-going classes in Weidman technique has become a reality this year, and we also continue to foster the performance of Weidman works.

Our ambitious undertakings, of course, require a great deal of time, energy, and funding. We are thankful to the individuals and foundations who have already generously supported the gala concert. With so many embers on the fire, however, additional funding is necessary to bring our myriad goals to fruition. Won't you please join us in keeping one of the 20th century's most important dance figures in the limelight? Any contribution you can offer is greatly appreciated and most welcome. All contributions are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

We look forward to hearing from you and seeing you at the Humphrey-Weidman Gala concert! Together we can . . .

Carry On!

*Carol Mezzacappa*  
Carol Mezzacappa, President

Our updated contributors' list will appear in the gala concert printed program.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
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Cut coupon & return with order to:  
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