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| Dent, Nancy Lima (1919-2013) |
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| Nancy Lima Dent helped to establish modern dance in Toronto. She initially studied with Rita Warne and Boris Volkoff, and later was a student of modern dance luminaries Doris Humphrey, José Limon, Martha Graham, Charles Weidman, Pearl Primus and Katherine Dunham. Starting in 1946, Dent worked as a performer and choreographer with the Toronto-based Neo Dance Theatre (renamed the New Dance Theatre in 1949). In 1960, Dent established her own dance company, the Nancy Lima Dent Dance Theatre. The company received positive critical reviews for their performances in prominent Toronto theatres including Hart House Theatre and the Centre Stage Theatre. Dent participated in three Canadian Ballet Festivals and she helped to found the Festival Evening of Modern Dance Festival in 1960. The festivals were well attended and critics noted that Dent’s choreography was especially engaging. In general, her choreographies highlighted personal expression, drew upon several modern dance techniques, and grappled with the political and ethical questions of her day. Dent was also a highly appreciated dance teacher who taught in various Ontarian cities for diverse types of students. She presented dance on television, and while recovering from an injury, she served as an effective administrator in various industries. |
| Summary  Nancy Lima Dent helped to establish modern dance in Toronto. She initially studied with Rita Warne and Boris Volkoff, and later was a student of modern dance luminaries Doris Humphrey, José Limon, Martha Graham, Charles Weidman, Pearl Primus and Katherine Dunham. Starting in 1946, Dent worked as a performer and choreographer with the Toronto-based Neo Dance Theatre (renamed the New Dance Theatre in 1949). In 1960, Dent established her own dance company, the Nancy Lima Dent Dance Theatre. The company received positive critical reviews for their performances in prominent Toronto theatres including Hart House Theatre and the Centre Stage Theatre. Dent participated in three Canadian Ballet Festivals and she helped to found the Festival Evening of Modern Dance Festival in 1960. The festivals were well attended and critics noted that Dent’s choreography was especially engaging. In general, her choreographies highlighted personal expression, drew upon several modern dance techniques, and grappled with the political and ethical questions of her day. Dent was also a highly appreciated dance teacher who taught in various Ontarian cities for diverse types of students. She presented dance on television, and while recovering from an injury, she served as an effective administrator in various industries. Training As a child, Nancy Lima Dent wanted to study dance; however, her father viewed dance as being immodest and did not allow her to pursue dance studies. In 1940, the federal government declared Italian citizens residing in Canada to be enemies of the state and Dent’s father was detained and sent to an internment camp in Petawawa from 1941 to 1943. Although Mr. Dent’s internment destabilized the Dent family, Nancy found the freedom to begin her ballet studies with Rita Warne and Boris Volkoff. When Mr. Dent retuned to Toronto, he still disapproved of dance and Nancy chose to move out of her parents’ home in order to pursue her dance career.    A lifelong learner, with an impressive collection of art books, Dent pursued an education that put her at the forefront of modern dance in Toronto while supplementing her dance training with courses in mime, and costume and set design. Additionally, around 1946, Dent travelled to New York City, where she took classes with Pearl Primus, Katherine Dunham and Martha Graham. In 1957, she completed a summer program at the Connecticut College School of Dance, where she studied under Doris Humphrey. Contributions to the Field and to Modernism Dent believed that modern dance enabled individuals to express their emotions through free-form movement. Despite her emphasis on individual expression, Dent also encouraged professional dancers to study ballet, Graham, and other formal techniques.  Many of Dent’s thirty-five choreographies reflect upon social issues such as technology, violence and social deviance. Dent’s ethical reflections did not draw upon specific religious dogma. For example, her first choreography, *Set Your Clock to U235* (1946) reflected upon the social impact of atomic weaponry. Similarly, *Heroes of Our Time*, choreographed with Laya Lieberman and Marcel Chojnacki in 1952 and described by one critic as ‘forceful’ and ‘exciting’, examined the influence of violent comic books on youth. Dent and Chojnacki’s restaging of Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* (1953) was a lighthearted reflection on the impact of war on communities.  File: 1\_DentHeroesOfOurTime.tiff  Figure 1 Photograph of dancers in *Heroes of our Time*.  Source: Photographer unknown. Image from [www.dcd.ca](http://www.dcd.ca).  \*\*\*The author would also like to include the following available at Dance Collection Dance in Toronto. dcd.ca  Audio Recording, oral history with Dent interviewed by Lawrence Adams held at Dance Collection Danse archive.  Video Recording, *Heroes of our Time*, 1983. Available at the Dance Collection Danse archive.  Dent’s choreographies also incorporated other modern art forms. In 1962, Dr. Myron Schaeffer of the University of Toronto created electronic music to accompany Dent’s *the children who wait in the dusk*. The dance recounted a history of human existence from the formation to the destruction of the universe and the performance incorporated poetry written by Canadian poets Irving Layton, Pauline Johnson, and Richard Diespecker. Although the choreography received mixed reviews, it was an impressive display of interdisciplinary and conceptual dance.  Dent taught dance in numerous educational programs such as those offered by YM-YWHA (1949-1950), Sudbury and Garson Ontario (1955-1957), Manitou-Wabing Camp Fine Arts (1959), University Settlement (1969-1970) and Warden Woods Centre (1970-1971). She was a talented teacher and she offered courses accessible to students with various learning and financial abilities. List of Works: *Set Your Clock At U235* (1946)  *Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child* (1947)  *Chee Lai* (1947)  *Late Date* (1948)  *Awakening of Man* (1948)  *_clearThe Story of Moses* (1948)  *Experiment On A Theme* (co-choreographed with Jack Medhurst)(1949)  _clear*Dark Cry* (1949)  *That We May Live* (co-choreographed with Alec Rubin) (1950)  *Tsung Ko Sun Ho* (1951)  *Salud* (1951)  *Oh Fickle Love* (1951)  *_clearCredo* (1951)  *Heroes of Our Time* (co-choreographed with Laya Lieberman and Marcel Chojnacki) (1952)  *Lysistrata* (co-choreographed with Marcel Chojnacki) (1953)  *Indian Woman's Lament* (1955)  *The Magic Cup* (1959)  *_clearOnce Upon A Time* (1959)  *Ritual* (1959)  *_clearBewitched* (1959)  *Games* (1959)  *_clearConcerto Grosso* (1959)  *_clearBedlam at Midnight* (1959)  *_clearThe Many Faces of Man* (1959)  *Glory Glory Halleluja* (1960)  *Will No One Hear* (1960)  _clear*The Planets, the Void, Man* (1960)  *Orbit* (1960)  *The Land* (1961)  *Caligula*, choreographed sections of the play (1961)  *Sea Maiden*  (1962)  *Swallow* (1962)  *Lullabye* (1962)  *Goofy* (1962)  *"the children who wait in the dusk"* (1962)  *JB*, choreographed sections of the play (1962)  The Cantata *Oifn Fidle* (*The Fiddle*), choreographed sections (1974) Websites: Bowring, A. (2005) ‘Nancy Lima Dent: A Woman Ahead of Her Time’ *Dance Collection Danse*. <http://www.dcd.ca/exhibitions/limadent/>. Archival Collections: Dance Collection Danse, Toronto, Canada, *Nancy Lima Dent Collection.* |
| Further reading:  (Collier) |