**New Dance Theatre (1949-1955, Toronto, Canada)**

**Summary**

Originally called the Neo Dance Theatre, the New Dance Theatre (NDT) was a modern dance performance group that was based in Toronto from 1949 to 1955. The group also operated a school offering modern, ballet, and folk dance classes taught by Ivy Krehm, Cynthia Barrett, Nancy Lima Dent, and Betty Oliphant. The company presented modern dance choreographic works that were socially and politically aware. The group disbanded after Nancy Lima Dent’s departure in 1955.

**Contribution to Dance and Modernism**

Initially called the Neo Dance Theatre, the New Dance Theatre (NDT) was a modern dance performance group that formed in 1949 in Toronto and supported by the United Jewish People’s Order (UJPO). The company’s school offered folk dances taught by Ivy Krehm, modern dance classes taught by Cynthia Barrett and Nancy Lima Dent, and ballet technique taught by Betty Oliphant (founder of Canada’s National Ballet School). Both the company and school were committed socially progressive and inclusive ideals that welcomed office and factory workers as well as housewives and students to participate in the creation of work that used dance to respond to topical social and political issues.

After Barrett left the group in 1949, Nancy Lima Dent emerged as the new director. Inspired by José Limón, Martha Graham, Charles Weidman, Pearl Primus, Lima Dent decided to pursue a distinctly modernist aesthetic to express her leftist politics and her interest in topical social issues. One choreographic work with an anti-war sentiment was *Credo* (1951), which is set at the beginning of the Second World War and includes a call to fight fascism. The second section explores the looming threat of the Cold War in the early 1950s, and urges the youth of the day to realize that have the ability to embrace peace rather than conflict.

For *Heroes of Our Time* (1952), Lima Dent collaborated with Marcel Chojnacki and Laya Lieberman, two of her students. The work critiqued of the influence that violence in comic books potentially had on children. Performed as part of the Fourth Canadian Ballet Festival in Toronto, the work was a response to the growing debate over the effects of violent imagery on children – a debate that had even reached the parliamentary level.

Samantha Mehra

**Archives**

Nancy Lima Dent Archives, Dance Collection Danse Archives, Toronto.

**Selected Choreographic Works**

*Song of David* (Cynthia Barrett, 1949)

*That We May Live* (Nancy Lima Dent with Alec Rubin, 1950)

*Credo* (Nancy Lima Dent, 1951)

*Heroes of Our Time* (Nancy Lima Dent with Marcel Chojnacki and Laya Lieberman, 1952)

*Indian Women’s Lament* (Nancy Lima Dent,1955)

**References and Further Reading**

Dance Collection Danse Online Exhibition, Nancy Lima Dent, <http://www.dcd.ca/exhibitions/limadent/index.html>

Clifford Collier, “Nancy Lima Dent,” in *The Encyclopedia of Theatre Dance in Canada*, Toronto: Dance Collection Danse Press/es, 2000. 147-149.

**Photo Credits (digital photographs attached to email)**

Courtesy of Dance Collection Danse Archives *– Toronto, Ontario, Canada*

1. *Heroes of Our Time* (1952), featured: Rosalyn Kolen, Tom Lima, Marcel Chojnacki and Laya Liberman – Courtesy of Dance Collection Danse Archives
2. *Heroes of Our Time* (1952), featured: Ida Abrams, Ernst Krehm – Courtesy of Dance Collection Danse Archives
3. *Lysistrata* (1953), group of dancers in studio – Courtesy of Dance Collection Danse Archives
4. *Lysistrata* (1953), the Spartan women portrayed by Rosaly Kolen, Hope Chris and Bertha Bockner – Courtesy of Dance Collection Danse Archives
5. Students of the New Dance Theatre’s modern dance class, 1949-1950 season. Photo by Helene Wasser – Courtesy of Dance Collection Danse Archives