

A Celebration of the Life of Geraldine Stephenson 1925 - 2017

Funeral Elegy by Dick McCaw



Tuesday January 16th 2018

Let's begin with thanks. Thanks to a woman who has touched all our lives. While Geraldine asked that I remember her professional life in this service I am not sure you want me to name each of her 163 television credits, or the 200 or so theatre productions on which she worked. How would you classify her 28 consecutive Johann Strauss galas that were performed to packed audiences at the Royal Festival Hall and Fairfield Halls, Croydon between Christmas and New Year up until 2004? Mandy, her indefatigable assistant, will bear me out that no two galas were ever the same. So that adds another 28 credits to her already immense tally of stage credits. All this to say that within the span of ten minutes all I can do is give an impression of a career that spanned six decades.

Geraldine was born in Hull, birthplace of Marion North, principal of The Laban Centre, and of Maureen Lipman with whom she worked regularly. After attending Newlands Girls School she studied physiotherapy and physical education at Bedford College of Physical Education, where the regime was strict and convent like. I shall let her describe what happened next:

a shining light was switched on in college in the form of Joan Goodrich who taught Central European Dancing. It was different, new and based on the ideas of Rudolf Laban of whom few people had heard. I was very excited by

it all and lived for those classes which lit little beacons along the tough route of PT. One of those propelled my room-mate (Joan English) and me to attend a winter dance course at Sheffield (New Year, 1946).

This was the FIRST HAPPENING. An explosion of dynamic and extraordinary movement hit me like a hurricane. Never had I experienced anything like it. There were some hundred participants, teachers, housewives, psychologists, actors, dancers ... Joan English and me. The variety of movement expression, the meaningful nature of movement and the way one was so involved in the texture of movement were unforgettable.

All this was new experience for me. I was spellbound by [Lisa Ullman's] voice and by the way that she extracted so much meaning from the simplest movement. This totally changed me and my perception of dance. It told me in my heart and body that what I wanted to do was MOVEMENT based on Laban's ideas. Just how I was to do this or earn a living by it was a mystery.

She persuaded her father – who ran a building firm in Hull (they built the university) – to pay for the first year's fees at the Art of Movement Studio that Lisa Ullmann was about to open in Manchester for Laban. Amongst the first sixteen students were Valerie Preston Dunlop and Warren Lamb.

Paying for her second year of study was more of a problem, so she persuaded Laban and Lisa (neither of whom liked morning), to let her take morning warm-ups and to play piano during classes. She must have been quite adept musically, since 'Listen and Move' records published Thirteen Pieces of Music for Children and Five Group Dances by 'Geraldine Stephenson the well known composer, choreographer, solo dancer and teacher of the art of movement'. The following year she would join Laban teaching at Esmée Church's Northern Theatre School in Bradford. It was on the dreary train back from Bradford that she, complaining of exhaustion, was advised by Laban to create her own solo recital of dance pieces. On July 14th 1950 she gave her first recital, and to commemorate the event, Laban gave her a signed copy of his newly-published book, *The Mastery of Movement on the Stage*, it read 'To Gerry from Laban at her first dance-recital'.

A year later and she was appointed Movement Director of the York Mystery Plays as part of the 1951 Festival of Britain.

I loved every minute of this great enterprise with the mixture of professional and amateur actors. It was so varied, challenging and dynamic. I knew that THIS was what I had been looking for.

Then there was her first taste of Television, what she describes as 'an avant-garde eight minute number called *The Dream*, for which I had written the music and also created strange sounds.' She continues, 'Some forty years later I came across a dance critic's comments on it.'

One would not perhaps like to see such

a thing too often nor for too long; but, as it stood, it was a very interesting and quite enjoyable piece of entertainment, and a solid paving stone in the path of teleball.

Apart from my terror on the day the performance taught me much about the hazards and discipline of TV and the exceptional concentration it requires.

And that is how the 1950s were spent. Recitals with her friend and accompanist John Dalby throughout England (and even Paris), early television work, and religious pageants of various sorts in cathedrals ancient and modern.

When The Studio moved from Manchester to just outside Addlestone in Surrey, Geraldine realised that her days of teaching there were numbered.

This was what Laban and Lisa had longed for, the countryside peace and quiet, and green trees surrounding the Studio practice rooms. As soon as I saw Addlestone, I knew that it was not for me. I lasted there for just one year. Manchester, Bradford, York had given me a taste for different adventures, I was bursting to get into London, bed-sit land and city life!

She ends her autobiographical sketch with a snapshot of her future work:

Being in London, life gained a new dimension. Many strands of movement and experience came together - from Regent's Park Open Air Theatre to Girl Guide Pageants; from The History of Rochester Cathedral to Toad of Toad Hall; from The Duchess of Malfi to the Johann Strauss Galas; from Shakespeare to Tom Stoppard, and when colour television arrived and presented its first drama Vanity Fair, I was asked to choreograph the Ball scenes. The Director was David Giles, a former student from Bradford! Through him and this production I was launched into choreographing countless television dramas with countless different directors.

Amongst these directors was Jane Howell (*The Winter's Tale* (1982), *Henry VI* Parts 1 – 3 and *Richard III* (1983)) and John Glenister (*The Franklin's Tale* (1969), *Catherine of Aragon* (1970), *Casanova* (1971), *Emma* (1972)). In addition, she choreographed dance and movement for

some of the BBC's landmark costume dramas like *War and Peace* (1972), and classic series like *The Pallisers* (1974), *The House of Elliot* (1991 – 1993) and *Poldark* (1995). Her film credits include Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* (1975) and *Notting Hill* (1999).

The list of her works could go on, but I shall offer three snapshots to offer a flavour of Geraldine's way of working.

When Geraldine would say, 'go to where your students are'. To explain she referred to a rehearsal for the History of Rochester Cathedral. It was on a cold February Sunday in an unheated canteen – the volunteer performers were huddled in a corner, in their coats, mittens and hats. No question of asking them to shed their layers and warm up. Instead she went over and asked them to imagine swinging a tiny hammer, which they all grudgingly swung. And then the hammer got bigger as did the swings, and as the swing got larger, so scarves and then hats and finally coats were shed. Soon they were all enthusiastically building Rochester Cathedral and the rehearsal was underway.

Fast forward to 1975 when, much to her surprise, Geraldine was chosen by Stanley Kubrick to work on his film *Barry Lyndon*. The big set piece was a dance in a dewy meadow. The performers were exhausted so Geraldine gave them a break. Kubrick was astonished – 'I say when the performers break.' 'No, replied Geraldine. 'They are working for me, they are tired and they need a break.' Geraldine commanded such love and loyalty because she went to where the artists were. She knew our needs and possibilities, and got so much more out of us as a result.

Jump to October 2003 when Geraldine is being given an honorary PhD from De Montfort University. Nothing prepared me for her announcement that we were to get to our feet and follow the steps of an Apache war dance. Some thousand students, parents and even the be-gowned and bonneted academics all entered into dance with joy and enthusiasm. As the Vice Principal said afterwards, 'Degree ceremonies would never be the same.' She was a motivator, in the sense that she knew how to get people to move.

To end with thanks. To my tireless co-executor Rosie without whom this funeral wouldn't have happened, to Brian Loftus who has spent so much time contacted friends and colleagues of Geraldine, and to you all for being here.

"An explosion of dynamic and extraordinary movement hit me like a hurricane". This is how Geraldine Stephenson recently described her first experience of Laban training to me. She went on to emphasise that the subsequent teaching she had from Laban and his colleagues was "the influence on my work".

Although now celebrating and looking back on an amazing career in choreography for theatre, opera, TV and film, Geraldine did not set out to be a choreographer: "I had no notion of it". Her early background was war-time England in the 1930s and 1940s. Born in Hull, Yorkshire, she was taken to dancing class as a child to overcome

Geraldine Stephenson - Choreographer: Laban's Influence on her work

Dr Janet Goodridge

(Dr Janet Goodridge, former Principal Lecturer at Middlesex University, pays tribute to Geraldine Stephenson on her 80th birthday).

shyness. But she says she was too frightened to enjoy the experience!

She continued into her more confident teens, though described her dancing at that stage as “very stiff”. On leaving school in 1943, she was encouraged to join the *Armed Forces*, but instead went to *Bedford Physical Training College*. This marked the beginning of Laban’s influence, since something called *Central European Dancing* was on the timetable - relatively little known in England at that time. She described it as “the liberating of one’s movement, with its emphasis on centrally generated body movement - so different from the ballet - full body use of the floor, bare feet, wide-ranging spatial directions, and the totally new experience of improvisation, partner and group work.”

Geraldine has written of her experience three years later when she attended a week’s course led by Laban himself: “The variety of movement expression, the meaningful nature of movement and the way one was so involved in the texture of movement ... it totally changed me and my perception of dance”. Group work again impressed: “How wonderful to be part of a group that could shrink or expand, heave up and down; all of us breathing as one creature, to be in the centre ... on the periphery ... break away ... and interweave. (*Laban Guild Magazine* 1998, Vol. 17, No. 4). Her enthusiasm led her on to the new, *avant-garde Manchester Studio* staffed by Laban with Lisa Ullmann, Sylvia Bodmer and other colleagues, which was “throbbing with vitality and invention”.

By 1948, Geraldine had begun some teaching at the *Studio* when Laban became seriously ill - an emergency! She took over his classes at *Bradford’s Northern Theatre School* and after he recovered she continued teaching in the mornings, with the opportunity to observe his work later in the day. She recalls how Laban’s emphasis on movement variety and contrast impressed her. For instance, in what he referred to as “high”, “medium” and “deep” characteristics. She gave an example: “A group of 10 or 12 actors as peasants - hoppy, jumpy, earthy - ‘deep’ dancers, exited into the wings and immediately re-entered, transformed, as aristocratic courtiers - ‘high’ dancers, heads lifted, elegant hand gestures”. As in her own training, she also recalls Laban’s emphasis on working expressively, systematically: “with the motion factors - time, weight, space, flow” which, together with the group and spatial work (shapes, patterns, directions), she has found to be an unfailing choreographic resource.

Around 1949, a heavy teaching schedule was proving exhausting, draining. Geraldine mentioned this to Laban, hoping for a reduced schedule. But his unexpected, characteristically wise recommendation was: “Gerry, make for yourself a solo dance recital”. So of course she did. A creative change was even better than a rest, and a new phase in her life began. The recital, first performed in 1950 at the *Studio*, later developed into small-scale tours for a number of years, adding new dances. It was pioneering, independent work.

Despite her recital debut, Geraldine still had not considered choreography as a career until the following year when Laban offered her work on her first theatre show. This was for *Medieval Mystery Plays* in the ruins of *St. Mary’s Abbey, York*, a Festival of Britain production.



The performers were professional actors, *Bradford’s Theatre School* students, townfolk and school children. It was an opportunity to put Laban’s advocacy of dance for everyone into practice.

For this assignment, Geraldine was asked to design three sequences, including Lucifer’s fall from heaven: a backwards, sideways, staggering progress down a long curving flight of stairs to hell - with dialogue! It was typical of actors’ problems which she later became famous for solving. Laban’s unique teaching about rhythm was particularly useful at such times, designing dance to co-ordinate with speech, combining metrical steps with the free rhythm of words. Geraldine discovered she was also expected to direct numerous crowd scenes with 250 people, such as: *Raising of Lazarus*, *Entry into Jerusalem*, *Last Judgment* - no less! She was “really flummoxed” and sought Laban’s advice. She still remembers his reply: “That is easy. Cut the group into two sets of 100, from each of these make three groups of 30, put the two spare tens together, halve the remaining 50 and you have nine groups. Plan it all with your Bradford students and have one or two lead each group”. Perhaps “easy” for Laban, he was speaking from his considerable experience with large-scale opera, theatre and movement-choir performance in Germany, of a kind unusual in England. However, it all worked well for Geraldine, and she says she has adopted this procedure ever since, when faced with devising movement for a large group.

She found she loved the whole experience and realised choreography was what she wanted to do. She moved to

London and was much in demand for her skill in using the effective group-work techniques and other Laban movement material. Work assignments in masques and pageants of all kinds followed, as well as dance in hundreds of plays for theatre, television, films and opera.

Geraldine can provide many examples of Laban's influence on her work. She spoke of how she particularly values his training in movement observation, for use in rehearsals and at other times. She made an unusual application of this when asked to choreograph Taverner's Opera *Therèse* at the Royal Opera House. Seated behind the composer at his first full piano play-through - a most challenging score, with few obvious clues for the choreographer - Geraldine said what really helped her was observing the tall Taverner's back-view as he played. She saw all the shades of meaning and expression she needed as a basis for her work conveyed in his back and shoulders: clear effort phrasing which she could use.

Whether designing dance for opera or plays, Geraldine told me she learnt from Laban always to consider the dramatic context first. Then to design dance to underscore the dramatic action, characterisation and relationships; taking particular care with what Laban called 'characters' supposed "inner attitudes of mind" and resultant effort phrasing. Although Geraldine studied historical dance with other teachers, Laban's approach to period style, again via study of inner attitudes and effort qualities, was once more a prime influence. With an actor and a musician, she devised and toured two *Dance/Music/Poetry Through the Ages* programmes. Also, for many years, she devised, choreographed and directed the popular London and touring performances of the *Johann Strauss Dancers Company*, in period style, with orchestra.

As Geraldine discovered in her early training, Laban not only aimed to extend students' movement vocabulary - spatially, dynamically - from exaggerated gesture through to tiny shadow movements and stillness, but also to provide performance experience in a wide variety of dramatic, lyrical, grotesque, rhythmic-dynamic, comic, tragic, everyday, or even ritualistic performance themes. This breadth of movement expression and thematic range has certainly been mirrored in her own work.

There are hundreds of examples. For instance, a dramatic, violent



'University Student'

dance scene of servants' mockery of their mistress in Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (BBC TV); an easy-going, rhythmic Irish dance in a sunny field in *Barry Lyndon*, the Warner Bros film; an extended comic, swinging "Keep Fit" routine for *The Two Ronnies* (BBC TV); lyrical waltzing in *All's Well That Ends Well* for the *Royal Shakespeare Company*; a ritualised entry for the court in *The Duchess of Malfi*; and a mysterious, grotesque dance of tempters in Havel's *Temptation*, (both for the National Theatre). She has choreographed numerous festive ball and other dance scenes with characters' interplay, such as in *War and Peace* and *Vanity Fair* (BBC TV), and a flowing forest-glade *Farandole* in *As You Like It* (also BBC TV). In contrast to all these and many others, an example of complete stillness at the end of a BBC TV series of Shakespeare's History

plays. After the warfare with just 20 minutes to the end of filming, the Director made a surprise request for "a pile of bodies", a final tableau to include a hysterically mad Queen Margaret and her dead son. This with a large group of actors and to be held for three minutes. How did Geraldine achieve this? "Through improvisation" - an important feature of Laban training, long before it became standard student fare and also seen in performance work. She says she gave the actors an experience of quiet, sustained movement, "almost like a ritual" as, one by one, from a distance, they gradually moved in and attached themselves, in utter silence, to the slowly forming group. All held position and then the camera work began.



'Le Miroir du Couturier'

Geraldine's words, and I hope the few other comments which I have been able to include, serve to indicate at least something of Laban's influence on her work. But I consider this is truly seen at its most obvious when she is rehearsing, working with performers, drawing effective, expressive movement from them. More than five decades of a life in dance, swiftly responding to the needs of the moment, and always sustained by her Laban training: "I owe it all to Laban".

Note: Revised from material first presented in the USA at a *Society for Dance History Scholars* conference, and from an article first published in *The Dancing Times*, September 2003.

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Remembering Geraldine

by Simon Horrill

My first meeting with Geraldine was at a birthday celebration for the mother of my teacher, Brian Loftus. I was dancing in a kilt in a living room, accompanied by someone reciting Edith Sitwell's poem *Scottish Rhapsody*. That chance encounter proved to be the starting point of a long friendship and working relationship.

Whilst working on an opera, a fellow dancer suggested I ring Geraldine as she was still looking for one boy for the next Strauss tour she was directing. Our previous encounter proved to be the first check of my credentials, and after she'd spoken to Brian, I was hired.

In a church hall in Pimlico I started my first day of waltzing that continued for 14 years. Geraldine was tall (always in trousers for rehearsals), slender and with her short cropped white hair, had a mischievous elfin-like quality. Her hands fascinated me; they were constantly on the go, the movement giving a sense of the style she wanted, the way the steps should rise and fall, or portraying a rhythm she could hear that we weren't understanding. As a dancer who had worked mainly in ballet companies my first learning point was that we did not work with mirrors. No constantly monitoring yourself here - just trusting Geraldine that you were delivering what she wanted. And what she wanted wasn't just perfect steps in a perfect pattern but personalities, characters and interaction. For her it was important that we were representing real people in a specific time. I loved being allowed to try things out, suggest ideas and feel you were contributing to the creative process. Geraldine would say it was vital to give the audience the chance to escape and be transported somewhere else and to forget everyday life.

For one tour, she had explained to me she wanted to create a piece based on impressionist painting. We had studied her art books looking at figures softened by defused light and that uncertainty of where they were coming from or going to, allowing you to create your own story. Geraldine wanted to recreate that "caught in a moment" impression . . . **You** try getting dancers to stop in between positions , it's counterintuitive from all those years of being drilled to hit exactly the correct shape on the right beat. Half opening an umbrella, not quite making the handshakes. We had to trust in her that we didn't look like untrained dancers, and it took some time but the result was sheer magic . . . As an impressionist painting, it worked and the hard work under Geraldine's brilliant guidance made it look effortless.

I remember being asked to help recreate some moments from the film *Singing in the Rain* for any audience members who wanted to come prior to a screening at the Festival Hall. Geraldine wasn't sure that many people would turn up but she was wrong - people were fascinated. I think we ended up on tables at one point so people could see what we were demonstrating. People with brollies, macs and even some in tap shoes crowded together laughing and enjoying the collective experience that Geraldine's enthusiasm and encouragement gave. At the screening, when the iconic rain sequence started, a group intake of breath of recognition of steps attempted earlier then spontaneous applause at Gene Kelly's brilliance which had been heightened through Geraldine's infectious learning experience.

Geraldine saw past the dancer and tapped into your other interests and provided opportunities to develop in other ways .We would laugh, annoy each other but most of all we had a shared love of communication through movement.

Geraldine Stephenson *Gordon Curl*

- from the depth of hell to the pinnacle of academic achievement -

My first memory of Geraldine was during the evening's fading light in the ruins of St Mary's Abbey in York, where - under the auspices of the York Festival of the Arts in 1951 - Geraldine Stephenson was rehearsing the dramatic satanic fall of Lucifer from Heaven to Hell - from the Abbey's ruined heights down its crumbling stairways to the very depth of Hell. It was breath-taking, awe-inspiring, nerve-wracking and very hazardous - but superbly choreographed - with controlled free-fall movement. (I had travelled as a Carnegie College student from Leeds to witness this York Mystery Play spectacle - and to this day have never forgotten Geraldine's skill and artistry). Small wonder that the event was reported as 'the most widely applauded event in the country, with over 26,000 people witnessing the Plays'.

From that time onward I have followed Geraldine's career fastidiously - from live-theatre to period costumed television - from the Concert Hall with dazzling dance

displays at Johann Strauss Gala Festivals to mass choreographed Kaleidoscopia in the Royal Albert Hall - from vivid Lecture-demonstrations to highly informed personal tutorials. Geraldine was for me a friend, a counsellor - an idol!

But there was one event which remains deeply embedded in my memory; it was the occasion of Geraldine's Conferment of a Doctorate at De Montfort University. The ceremony was a *tour de force* - describable only as '*Pure Gold, Pure Magic*'. (See Guild Magazine Vol.23 No.1 Spring 2004, edited version below).

Pure Gold! Pure Magic!

Geraldine Stephenson - bedecked in a full length crimson gown, satin-trimmed hood and broad-brimmed black velvet bonnet - resumed her seat at the conclusion of her 'address' to the tumultuous applause of a capacity crowd in the resplendent Great Hall of Bedford Corn Exchange on 23 October 2003. The atmosphere was euphoric as the Pro-Vice Chancellor of De Montfort University finally rose

to his feet in his scarlet and gold regalia - and declared:
'Graduation Ceremonies will never be the same again!'

Geraldine at a stroke had shattered the time-honoured conventions of academic protocol by transforming this sedate ceremonial gathering of mortar-boarded graduands and distinguished guests - into a howling, stamping, lunging, tomahawk-brandishing horde of tribal warriors! And she did it so sublimely - with consummate skill. It happened thus:

In her lavish academic attire Geraldine was invited to rise and address this august assembly; she did so with supreme calm, dignity and assurance - her velvet bonneted head held high. Behind her was a blaze of vivid scarlet and gold - a phalanx of richly-robed University dignitaries: Pro-Vice Chancellors, Governors, Fellows and Faculty Presenters. Immediately to her right were the symbols of high office: gold and silver Maces - the Royal Charter. It was a dazzling sight of academic splendour, prestige and power.

The University Orator stepped forward, doffed his cap to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and proceeded to chart Geraldine's star-studded career. Not only had she masterminded spectacular masques and pageants but 'for half a century had been the expert in advising the worlds of TV, theatre, film and opera'. Geraldine stood motionless, expressionless - as if disowning the accolades cascading upon her. With another doff of his cap, the Orator concluded his eulogistic Citation to a roar of applause.

There followed the ritual draping of a satin-trimmed hood over Geraldine's shoulders. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, again doffed his cap, shook her hand, congratulated her and conferred on her the title of *Honorary Doctor of Arts of De Montfort University* - he then handed her a parchment scroll of Conferment. Turning to the congregation he announced: 'Our Guest Speaker Ms Geraldine Stephenson, will now address the assembly'. The atmosphere was hushed; what could Dr Stephenson possibly say which would do justice such an honour?

Geraldine moved gracefully to the amplified lectern and proceeded to pay tribute to those who had inspired her at Bedford, Manchester, to Janet Goodridge, Lisa Ullmann and Rudolf Laban, and many others. She spoke nostalgically of memorable days - not least: choreographing large-scale events in the Royal Festival Hall, the Royal Albert Hall, the York Mystery Plays, Television, Film and Opera. These were jewelled moments in her life.

But this biographical sketch was short-lived, for abruptly Geraldine tossed aside her velvet bonnet, leapt to the forefront of the stage and - to the astonishment of everyone, not least the scarlet-robed dignitaries - she was magically transformed into

a Shaman, her academic gown metamorphosed into the mantle of a doctor of black arts. She bent forward - her eyes piercing the distance as if in a trance - her arms stretched forward over the assembled 'tribes' - commanding them to repeat after her a deadly ritual. They obeyed as if hypnotised, echoing her rhythmic foot-stomping: - left, left - right, right - left, left-right; the thunderous sound of a thousand feet (including those of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professors and Presenters) shook the Corn Exchange and echoed far beyond. It was pure magic!

But the resounding footwork was only the beginning - there was much more to come! Our witch-doctor lurched forward, followed dutifully by her disciples - including the elders - and as the young warriors flung themselves towards her, their vividly coloured flying hoods cast a sea of blue and gold over the auditorium; it was a warning sign of deadly deeds to come! And come they did for our high-priestess slowly raised her right arm - clutching a tomahawk - and the horde of submissive subjects *en masse* brandished their tomahawks too - in obedience. And then - oh so swiftly - she wielded her weapon, swinging it mercilessly downwards uttering a heart-rending cry. Her warriors complied ecstatically (including the elders behind her); the whole assembly erupted with blood-curdling cries!

...Then a moment of silence ... the ritual was complete!

Geraldine stood tall again and quietly reminded us of the extensive research required to choreograph this authentic tribal ritual; and then, donning her velvet bonnet and smoothing her satin-trimmed hood, she calmly resumed her seat - but not before she had reminded us that we had participated splendidly in the hunting ritual of North American Indian tribe. We had been magnificent Mohicans'. Small wonder, then, that the Vice-Chancellor, in admiration, announced to the assembly that 'Graduation Ceremonies would never be the same again'.

Hundreds of war-primed graduands then processed to the stage to receive their coveted degrees - passing before Geraldine on their way. Finally, the mace-bearing officials shouldered the University's precious symbols - leading the scarlet and gold retinue to the triumphant sounds of the great organ - with Geraldine stepping (oh so gracefully) down the aisle. Few could have imagined that moments ago she had magically transfigured this majestic assembly into a war-mongering howling mob of North West American warriors. But truth must out and our Guild President Geraldine Stephenson had demonstrated her incomparable ability to enthrall - in movement and dance - to both the uninitiated and to the sophisticated hierarchy of academia.



Photo by Judith Chapman

In the Bones

Anna Carlisle

Addlestone: The Art of Movement Studio 1965. The study of Laban's work on the three-year training course supported by the Ministry of Education was demanding and intensive, often a twelve hour day. And homework. And Labanotation, Music, Art, Anatomy, English Literature, Educational Psychology and Gardening. It was a unique experience - all absorbing - and carrying a gamut of emotions from highs to lows. There was also exhaustion, physical and mental. And aching muscles. We ate, lived and dreamt Laban. Not much time to explore the nightlife of Addlestone.

Then Geraldine arrived, a link to the outside world. She blew in with the glamour of film and television and the rare qualities of her sparkling personality. She was a demanding teacher and her material was challenging but she had a unique lightness of touch which lifted the spirits and brought air inside the room. She was an inspiring facilitator of creativity. The ebb and flow of her classes were seamless. She knew exactly when to change the dynamics, what was needed, and she had a kind of delicate objectivity which created a sense of freedom to learn. We loved her sessions; we wanted more.

Geraldine's association with and commitment to Laban and Lisa Ullmann continued until her recent death. She joined the Guild in 1947 and despite her busy career,

choreographed Guild events, taught courses and attended annual AGM Conference Days in her role as President. She was a founding member of the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund in 1986, took the Chair and was President until Christmas Eve, 2017. She was instrumental in securing the health and status of the Fund and would have been happy to know it is functioning and flourishing today.

During her early retirement years she raised the idea that the profile of Laban's work needed to be promoted more in the professional arena. Geraldine hosted meetings for the planning of a training course for a group of young professional practitioners with a Laban background. It was to be run over 2 years. Geraldine's maxim headlined the course: Laban's work only took meaningful hold if it was deep in the body - IN THE BONES. The Phoenix Course went ahead in 2006 with first generation Laban teachers. Geraldine was by then unwell and uncertain of her memory but she was determined to contribute. As she began class, 60 years of experience took hold. Anxiety dropped like a Cloak; she was on form, the sparkle and the lightness of touch intact and delightful. Inevitably, we wanted more.

In memory of her inspiration and in honour of her lifelong contribution to our lives.



Official photo from De Montfort University

Remembering Geraldine

Susi and Sam Thornton

Gerry touched everyone's hearts and sense of creativity and drama. Her light touch coaxed you to move, to dance to find the inner character you needed to be.

As a student at the Art of movement Studio, I and others loved it when it was Gerry's weekly classes. She inspired us, fired us up. We delighted in watching her move in so many different ways and with such an expressive manner. We were fascinated by the way she told us of her studies with Laban and how he saw in her the talents for movement/drama/choric work and inspiring others.

Sam and I will never forget our experiences in Kaleidoscopia Viva - a huge piece of work which Geraldine organised for the Laban Guild. Her ideas and collaboration with librettist, composer John Dalby and assistant David Henshaw would already have been in place to share with the Guild Council, where Sam was serving, and where the decision was made to have two performances at the Albert Hall. Geraldine worked tirelessly. Groups to interpret 'the story' were set up in all parts of the country, each one with a leader. Gerry travelled up and down the country meeting up with the groups. Our Yorkshire contingent was led by Joan Tomlinson. In our group we had the theme of corruption and with Joan explored and experimented to find our way of working and created our dance. Sam was a blowfly, I was a dragonflower some were slugs (very

hot costumes!) Gerry came and watched what we were doing...most probably made some suggestions. She also taught us the steps for the Grand Finale. We had a big get together for the northern contingents at IM Marsh when we all shared our dances and did the Grand finale together. I expect southern regions did the same.

It had been enthralling to watch as she managed the large numbers, everyone knowing their place, knowing what to do. She told us that she talked with Laban about large group dance when she was designing the Pageant for the Girl Guides and from these discussions she learnt that if you know what 10 people are doing you can work with 100, 1000!. It was absolutely amazing when we turned up at the Albert Hall and found that the Grand finale worked like clockwork although it was the first time the **whole** group of dancers had met.

Later when Sam and I moved back South, Gerry welcomed a friendship, gave warmth and support especially to L.in.C and we were honoured in 1979 for her to lead the movement choir for us on our 'maiden voyage' of courses which would go on for 30 years. She often visited us at Avery hill and at Eastbourne to enjoy the festive atmosphere.

We were so proud when we saw her name in the credits of shows and tv. I remember her sharing one of the dances from her Chekov play showing on the West end stage. She had created this for the actors and actresses, ensuring that each one of them (and us in our version of it)

danced it in the manner of the character that was being played. We were able later to watch this show and see exactly what she had facilitated with them. It had not been easy as in those days actors were not dancers but her 'magic' worked with them.

We know Gerry has not been 'in the world' for some time and we hope that now it is a happy release for her. She will join all the dancers in the sky and will get them going! This Circle awaits us all!



Aerial view of large group of dancers showing group formations at *Kaleidoscopia Viva*, (Stephenson, 1970) at the Royal Albert Hall (Ref. no. ACC22_2015/36/52/1). From the Geraldine Stephenson Archive, University of Surrey, © Ian Stamp, 1970.

Alysoun Tomkins and voices of the 1968-71 cohort

I am writing this on behalf of the Laban Art of Movement cohort 1968-71 and include many of the reflections that my peers made on hearing of Geraldine's passing.

There are few teachers whom one remembers as being inspirational and Geraldine Stephenson was one such teacher. Many comments contain the same themes: that she was energetic, professional, talented and a visionary. All of us confessed to watching the credits at the end of BBC historical dramas to see if Geraldine had done the choreography and of course she often had.

We were lucky enough to be part of the Kaleidoscopia Viva performance at the Royal Albert Hall in 1970 and it is perhaps the memory of that which is most vivid. Geraldine worked with many groups around the country choreographing sections of the final piece. Laban students were 'machines' and also danced in the colourful finale. We did all come together for a weekend at Bretton Hall but I believe we only had one morning to rehearse it at the performance venue.

*Putting it together was an operational masterpiece
I remember her energy and the fun at Bretton Hall, being 'sprayed' into our unitards!...How on earth did she cope with us all and put together such amazing choreography for the Albert Hall?*

... Yes she had great energy and vision. I still don't know how we didn't get lost in the corridors of the Albert Hall.

...I loved her passion and commitment,

It was not just her talent as a teacher and choreographer that colleagues remembered. It was her personal qualities.

One commented that she:

*...took her responsibilities for 18 year olds carefully
She was lovely with it. caring. When one student was unwell she showed great sympathy and concern.*

She also recognised other talents in her students as one of them recalls:

I have fond memories of her and one in particular is of making curtains for her Addlestone flat. Why she asked me I cannot remember but I do recall sewing the many, many, yards of material for a large picture window.

Twenty five years later I joined the LUTSF committee – Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund set up in memory of Lisa Ullmann who was Director of the Studio when we attended. Geraldine was Chairperson at that time and was passionate about the fund and worked tirelessly to maintain it.

The fund is open to applicants from the diverse world of dance and Geraldine was particularly interested in young people working specifically in theatres or dance companies as that was where she spent much of her working life as a choreographer.



Dancers as part of the *Kaleidoscopia Viva* event (Stephenson, 1970) at the Royal Albert Hall (Ref. no. ACC22_2015/36/52/3). From the Geraldine Stephenson Archive, University of Surrey, © Ian Stamp, 1970.

Henry Metcalfe

I first met Geraldine (or Gerry as we all knew her then) in the autumn of 1961. It was part of my audition to become a student at the Art of Movement Studio in Addlestone. Lisa Ullmann (whose apartments always seemed to smell of apples) was considering if I would be suitable for a future career as a dancer/actor and so I attended one of Geraldine's (always looked forward to) Dance-Drama classes. She must have put in a good word to Lisa, because even when my local authority turned me down for a grant...the Studio gave me a free scholarship.

At the end of my training, Geraldine contacted Gerard and Tonya Bagley of the British Dance-Drama Theatre as it was known then and arranged for me to audition for them. I was successful and stayed for three years.

After my time with the Dance-Drama Theatre was over, I became an Assistant Lecturer at Trent Park College of Education and after a year, I was invited to interview for the post of Lecturer at the Art of Movement Studio - again Geraldine was on the selection panel.

After six years the Studio closed and transferred to Goldsmith's University, so I returned to the theatre and worked on the Johann Strauss Gala for Raymond Gubbay - Geraldine joined as Choreographer on my second tour - It seemed happily, that our paths were set to cross forever - which they did, through several television productions and Dance projects.

Geraldine always reminded me of a young Vera Lynn. As Liz my ex-wife and great friend recalls "Geraldine liked fun. She would like to bring a chuckle to you all"

And so I remember her with a smile, a chuckle and her deep hearty laugh.

"Laughter is the music of Heaven and if I sit quietly I can hear her laughter now."

B J Lewis

When I was a PE student at I M Marsh Lorn Primrose, our dance lecturer, told us about the legendary (even then) Geraldine Stephenson who was using Laban's principles for her work in theatre, film and television. Since then I have regularly scanned programme credits for her name, and often found it! Little did I know I would come to work closely with her and, in 1996, take over from her as chair of the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund.

As reported elsewhere Geraldine was one of the founders of the Fund in 1987 and its first Chairman. She gathered around her a talented and representative committee from the world of dance and movement and together they worked tirelessly to raise money, encourage applicants for scholarships, select winners and support them. Working with Geraldine was fun! Meetings were enjoyable and

informative. Through her many contacts in dance she ensured that the Fund's guiding principle of supporting people from all forms of dance and movement, and also movement related professions, was carried out. So many scholarship winners reported their experience as 'life changing'. It is interesting to scan the list of all scholarship winners and see names of many people who have had long and distinguished careers in Dance.

When Geraldine retired as chairman she was elected President and continued in that role until her death. As President she was such a knowledgeable advisor to the committee and a wonderful figurehead. She would travel by train to the depths of Surrey whenever we held fund raising events in our garden and there she would grace the occasion with her humour and vitality. It is to her great credit that the fund, established in 1987, has survived and that, by 2017, 534 scholarships had been awarded and the total amount given was £263,000.



Photo by Pam Anderton

Geraldine at a LUTSF Tylosand fund raising event

Judith Chapman

Geraldine was a wonderful teacher, lively, full of ideas and able to bring together the seemingly impossibly varied contributions of a large class into a dance which one felt thrilled to be a part of. I first met her in this teaching capacity as a very young teacher when her theme was William Harvey's discovery of the circulation of blood in the human body when, using our experience of "effort" we flowed, were pumped or squeezed through imagined blood vessels helped by a powerful group conveying the strong movements of the heart and sometimes we even formed blood clots. The day was memorable.



Photo by Pam Anderton

Geraldine at the 50 years in theatre celebration with John Dalby, Simon Horrill and other friends from the theatrical world

Having attended many such courses over the years, in the early 1990s I was to meet Geraldine when I was invited to join the LUTSF Committee. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss applications to the Fund. We met in Geraldine's flat, ate a delicious lunch, laughed a lot and had some serious debate. Discussion was lively, sometimes almost heated but always good tempered and disputes were resolved. The strength of Geraldine's commitment to LUTSF, undoubtedly fuelled by her memories of the achievements of Lisa Ullmann, was obvious. I learned that it was Geraldine together with Ellinor Hinks and Athalie Knowles who were instrumental in establishing "a 'living memorial' to Ullmann. They were inspired by the fact that, no matter how far she had to travel, Lisa always responded to requests for her to lead courses and classes both in this country and abroad." Meetings were fun, driven by Geraldine's dedication to helping others, especially young dancers, to take and make the most of every opportunity. This continued when she retired as Chair of the Fund and became its President. She attended meetings and events regularly, always offering suggestions and comments, always positive, always fun. Sometimes she travelled from north London to our home near Farnham, in her role as President of LUTSF welcoming visitors to a fund-raising event and encouraging everyone present to donate generously - and of course they did!

Geraldine was thrilled when a celebration was held to mark her 50 years in the theatre. This was organised jointly by LUTSF and the Laban Guild and attended by many people from the theatre world as well as members of these two organisations.

Another event, which celebrated Geraldine's extraordinary achievements in movement and dance, was the award of an honorary doctorate by de Montfort University. The presentation of the award and Geraldine's response on stage were memorable. The audience was spellbound by this lady who not only talked about her art but also

demonstrated, moving across the platform to illustrate the things she was saying. She was a performer and one who was able to turn part of a degree ceremony into a theatrical performance. There was much applause and great appreciation of her contribution.

It was a huge privilege to get to know Geraldine over the years and gradually to become aware of the range of her work and to realise the sheer number of lives she must have touched during her work in movement, choreography, theatre and television. At this sad time of her death, it is good to know that in 2012 she donated her archives to the National Resource Centre for Dance at the University of Surrey so that a legacy of her many achievements is safe.

Carol Wallman

Like so many other people in the dance world, I was extremely saddened to hear the news of Geraldine's passing. As a young student at the Art of Movement Studio, Geraldine was one of my tutors. She taught Historical Dance and rhythm and choreographed for us the *Masque of St Teilo* which we subsequently performed at Llandaff Cathedral, with Geoffrey Sutherland in the lead role. Geraldine's teaching was vivacious and captivating - as students we eagerly looked forward to her lectures, aware that she had a window on the wider world of theatrical dance; we hoped some of it would rub off. She was a great influence on my understanding of integrated performance arts and my own teaching.

Later, for a short time, I served with her on the Committee of the Laban Guild. Her knowledge, vast experience in the field, practical common sense, gentility and sensitivity were invaluable in discussion and decision making; I am privileged to have known her.



**Photos from
Geraldine's
collection given
to the Guild in
2005**